BASIC GOODS AND RIGHTS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

AN URBAN PERSPECTIVE

Marta Galceran-Vercher (ed.)

BASIC GOODS AND RIGHTS IN TIMES OF CRISIS
AN URBAN PERSPECTIVE

Marta Galceran-Vercher (ed.)

CIDOB

BARCELONA
CENTRE FOR
INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS

50 years

GLOBAL**CITIES**

Ajuntament de **Barcelona**

CONTENTS

CIDOB REPORT
10- 2023

INTRODUCTION:
AN URBAN PERSPECTIVE TO BASIC GOODS AND RIGHTS

The war in Ukraine, the persistent disruptions in the global supply chain and the increase in the cost of living as a result of the inflationary economic context have aggravated the difficulties of access to basic goods and rights such as energy, food, drinking water, health, housing or digital connectivity. This has accentuated the inequalities and vulnerability of a large part of the world population, manifesting itself in a particularly evident way in cities. This CIDOB Report analyzes the causes, impact and responses that are emerging to address the current global crisis of access to basic goods and rights from an urban perspective.

Marta Galceran-Vercher

Research Fellow,
Global Cities Programme,
CIDOB

We live in complex times shaped by the concatenation and confluence of multiple and interrelated crises that interact and reinforce one another. Words like "polycrisis" and "permacrisis" have become established dictionary entries, part of an emergency glossary for describing this new era of uncertainty in which a series of destabilising events coexist, including the unfinished post-pandemic recovery, the war in Ukraine –and the ensuing food and energy crises, rising inflation or tightening debt–, eroded democratic systems and the climate emergency.

This convergence of crises, alongside tepid global economic prospects, is proving devastating for large swathes of the world's population, who face sharp declines in well-being, equity and access to basic goods and rights such as food, water, housing and energy, among others. Decades of progress and development appear to have come to a halt, or even gone into reverse. For the first time, the global Human Development Index (HDI), calculated annually by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to measure life expectancy,

education levels and per capita income in different countries, has regressed for two consecutive years. The prospects thus seem bleak for the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This is the context in which this *CIDOB Report* sets out to analyse the causes of the current global crisis in access to basic goods and rights, as well as its impacts and the responses to it. The approach is eminently urban, as cities are both home to most of the world's population and the places where worsening inequalities and vulnerabilities are manifesting themselves most starkly. While local governments do not always bear ultimate responsibility for ensuring basic goods and rights, they are the most likely to face the economic and social consequences of any shortfalls (Satterthwaite, 2013: 13). To address a challenge of this magnitude, many cities are pursuing innovative initiatives to ensure continuity of local public services in order to safeguard people's lives and livelihoods (Saiz and de la Varga, 2022: 2).

IN THIS NEW ERA OF UNCERTAINTY, A SERIES OF DESTABILIZING EVENTS COEXIST: THE UNFINISHED POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY, THE WAR IN UKRAINE, FOOD AND ENERGY CRISES, INFLATION, DEBT, THE ERODED DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS, AND THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY.

Before introducing the structure of this publication, it is worth clarifying some of the terminology used, since the category "basic goods and rights" can, confusingly, include different interpretations and scopes. "Basic goods" are here understood as those goods and services that are essential to satisfying the most basic human needs and, as such, are central to human progress (Reinert, 2018) [1]. Nutritious food, clean water, sanitation, health and education services, housing, electricity and human security services are usually included in this category.

However, human progress is linked not only to access to certain goods, but also to the realisation of certain basic rights, such as the right to a life free from violence, the right to digital connectivity, the right to information, the right to work or the right to political participation, among others. "Basic rights" are, thus, those that must be guaranteed as a necessary condition for other rights to be enjoyed (Shue, 1996).

---

1. As Reinert (2018) notes, the term «basic goods» often includes both basic goods and services, since in most cases it is difficult to separate the two. To give an example: providing health services requires goods such as vaccines; while providing food requires services such as transport.

Finally, it is worth noting the close relationship between the concepts of "basic goods" and "basic rights". It could even be argued that basic goods *are* essentially basic rights, in the sense that the rights are fulfilled via the provision of the goods (Reinert, 2020). To put it another way, it may be difficult (or even impossible) to exercise basic rights in a situation of severe deprivation of subsistence goods and services.

Structure of the publication

This volume contains nine chapters, ordered by theme, with each addressing a good or right that is fundamental for "sustainable development"[2]. The first four chapters analyse access to traditional basic goods that are also considered to be subsistence rights: food, energy, housing and health. Then follow two contributions focusing on goods that have recently acquired more relevance: access to information and digital connectivity. Finally, the provision of global public goods is addressed, such as peace, local democracy and humanitarian protection.

The publication begins with a chapter on energy, in which Víctor Burguete examines the causes of the global decline in universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services. The author reflects on increasing energy inequality, and presents some of the main policies promoted by both central and local governments to mitigate energy shortages and rising prices.

In the second chapter, Ana García Juanatey highlights the global trend, since 2014, of deteriorating food security. This is attributed to factors that are both structural (the growing impact of climate change on agricultural systems) and cyclical (higher food prices due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine). The author argues that hunger in urban areas has particular characteristics and examines various measures taken by cities to improve their inhabitants' food security. These measures focus primarily on shortening supply chains and reconnecting food systems with their surroundings.

By the same token, access to adequate housing is an essential component of achieving a decent standard of living and is intrinsically linked to the

2. According to the first historical definition of the term, formulated by the World Commission on Environment and Development (Bruntland Commission) in 1987, «sustainable develop-ment» is «development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs».

enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights. However, in her contribution to this *CIDOB Report*, Lorena Zárate argues that the right to housing is currently under threat. We are facing a global housing crisis that can be explained, among other factors, by the processes of privatisation, gentrification and touristification taking place in the world's major cities. In this setting, communities and local and regional governments play a key role in promoting transformative agendas based on "the right to the city", to the commons and to care.

Health is another key element of sustainable development, and with cities expected to house two-thirds of the world's population by 2050, the question of how to make urban spaces into healthier environments is now of paramount importance. This is the central concern of Rafael Vilasanjuan's chapter, where he examines the new conditioning factors affecting the health of people living in cities. Among other things, he analyses chronic illnesses induced by environmental, climate and lifestyle factors. In this context, the author argues that urban geography remains the best option for advancing the well-being of the majority of the planet's population.

"BASIC GOODS" ARE THOSE GOODS AND SERVICES THAT ARE ESSENTIAL TO SATISFYING THE MOST BASIC HUMAN NEEDS AND, AS SUCH, ARE CENTRAL TO HUMAN PROGRESS. "BASIC RIGHTS" ARE THOSE THAT MUST BE GUARANTEED AS A NECESSARY CONDITION FOR OTHER RIGHTS TO BE ENJOYED.

Moving on to chapters that deal with new rights, Marta Galceran-Vercher argues that digital connectivity is not a luxury, but a key part of sustainable development. Today, many fundamental aspects of our societies (work, education, etc.) depend on access to the internet, which has become essential to living standards in a similar way to access to water and energy. However, the global digital transition is uneven. The author analyses the various emerging dimensions of the digital divide, as well as some city-led initiatives to reverse them.

For her part, Carme Colomina explains that we are also experiencing a pandemic of disinformation. This is not a minor issue, since information is an essential public good and a right that acts as a multiplier of other rights: the more knowledge is available about societies and how they are governed, the better democratic systems are able to function. In the chapter dedicated to this essential good, the author defends the importance of local journalism and grassroots information as the accountability mechanism that is closest to citizens and essential to reducing government corruption and encouraging political participation.

Democracy is being eroded around the world. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) quantifies this, stating that half of the world's democratic governments are in decline while authoritarian regimes are increasingly repressive. This global deterioration of democracy is also affecting the local level, reversing some of the decentralisation processes that have taken place in recent decades. This is the diagnosis made by Agustí Fernández de Losada in his contribution, where he states that in recent years the decentralisation agenda has been displaced by the localisation processes that resulted from the 2030 Agenda. Faced with the rise of anti-democratic authoritarianism in many countries, hopes exist that local power can act as a means of resistance, democratic control and coordination of the opposition.

Peace, the central promise of the UN Charter, is one of the most difficult global public goods to preserve. The latest edition of the Global Peace Index of the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) reveals that the average level of global peace has declined for the 14th consecutive year. And when peace breaks down, urban areas can easily become theatres of war and destruction. Eschewing this pessimism, Pol Bargués provides a rereading of cities as the architects of "sustainable peace". This is a positive peace based on the promotion of emancipatory municipal projects and the provision of public services that seek to improve coexistence between generations, peoples and cultures.

Finally, one of the consequences of an increasingly peaceless world, with more prolonged, complex and serious crises, is the growing need to provide humanitarian protection to people fleeing conflict and war. In the last chapter of this *CIDOB Report*, Francesco Pasetti argues that the international protection system is undergoing an endemic crisis, and identifies three structural limitations that the system must face in Spain: access to protection, material reception capacity (number of places, budget, personnel), and the issues with the design of the pathway through the reception system. The author argues that it is at the local level where reception and the right to asylum are realised, and presents some municipal initiatives to improve the international protection system.

References

Reinert, Kenneth A. *No Small Hope: Towards the Universal Provision of Basic Goods*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Reinert, Kenneth A. "Development Ethics Reconsidered: Basic Goods are Basic Rights". *Global Perspectives*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2020).

Saiz, Emilia y de la Varga, Octavi. "Prólogo", in: LSE, CGLU, Metrópolis *Servicios públicos locales en tiempos de crisis: ¿Cómo adaptar los modelos de gobernanza? La gobernanza de las emergencias en las ciudades y regiones.* Informe de políticas, no. 5 (2022).

Satterthwaite, David. "Introducción", en: CGLU. *El acceso a los servicios básicos y el proceso de urbanización mundial. Tercer Informe Mundial de Ciudades y Gobiernos Locales Unidos sobre la Descentralización y la Democracia Local (GOLD III).* (2013) (on line) https://issuu.com/uclgcglu/docs/re_gold_iii_esp

Shue, Henry. *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence, and U.S. Foreign Policy.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

THE IMPACT OF RECENT CRISIS ON ENERGY ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

The energy crisis and pandemic set back the goal of universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services to a degree that is unparalleled in recent decades. Policies implemented by states have mitigated the impact on consumers, but have not prevented the consequent rise in energy inequality. This is particularly notable in the rural–urban divide. Cities have a key role to play in driving housing renovation and energy efficiency.

Víctor Burguete
Senior Research Fellow, CIDOB

The COVID-19 pandemic and the energy crisis have reversed some of the progress made in universal energy access and worsened global energy poverty. For the first time in decades, the number of people without access to electricity increase in 2022, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where 80% of these people are located. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that nearly 75 million people who recently gained access to electricity are likely to become unable to pay for it, while 100 million people now using clean cooking methods are likely to revert to traditional biomass (e.g. wood, charcoal or animal waste). These are setbacks to two indicators (SDG 7.1) measuring universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services, that are part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations by 2030. Other indicators addressing energy access challenges are SDG 7.2 on access to renewable energy and 7.3 on improving energy efficiency.

In Europe, like most developed countries, decades of reliable supply meant energy access issues tend to be measured solely in terms of affordability. Thus, most definitions of energy poverty refer to the difficulties households face meeting their basic energy needs due to insufficient income,

high energy prices and the poor energy efficiency of housing. The supply of electricity, natural gas and home air conditioning tend to figure among these needs, but transport-related expenses are often excluded, along with the difficulties businesses and SMEs face in accessing energy.

2022: Energy shortages, rising prices and reduced ability to pay

The lower supply of Russian natural gas to Europe and rising global energy prices laid bare the urgent need to avoid energy rationing and ensure affordable access to energy. European countries, especially those most dependent on imported Russian natural gas, took aggressive measures to secure supplies from elsewhere, mainly liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the United States, Norway, Qatar and Australia. This European hoarding of LNG transported by ship, coupled with Russia's inability to redirect its exports through pipelines, led to worldwide natural gas shortages, rising global prices and energy shortages in less developed countries that were unable to compete on price to attract supplies. In emerging countries like Pakistan there were even cases of energy companies reneging on long-term supply contracts in order to seek more lucrative markets.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE, AT FIRST, RESULTED IN WORLDWIDE NATURAL GAS SHORTAGES, RISING GLOBAL PRICES, AND ENERGY SHORTAGES IN LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES THAT WERE UNABLE TO COMPETE ON PRICE TO ATTRACT SUPPLIES.

The energy price rises occurred in the midst of the third-sharpest economic slowdown in 50 years and the third-fastest rise in inflation since the 1980s. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), this resulted in negative real wage growth at global level for the first time this century, which translated into a sharp loss of purchasing power and greater difficulty paying for energy inputs. This loss was particularly pronounced for middle-class and low-income households, which spend a higher proportion of their disposable income on essential goods and services. These items also underwent higher price increases than other non-essential goods.

Globally, households spend about 7% of their income on energy, with half of that going on heating. But this figure masks the greater weight of advanced economies to this average, as well as other inequalities. In the most developed countries, households in the bottom 20% income bracket consume just a third of the energy of the richest households (the 20% with the highest incomes), while in emerging and developing

economies the poorest households consume up to nine times less energy than the richest households, despite spending a much higher proportion of their income paying for it. These differences, estimated in the World Energy Outlook (2022), might be much higher if transport energy consumption (e.g. petrol) were included. Specifically, single-parent families, the unemployed, pensioners, families with dependent children and families with lower education levels suffer higher incidences of energy poverty, as do households in rural and semi-urban areas.

As well as income, part of the explanation for these differences is that lower income households tend to live in less energy-efficient buildings that require higher energy consumption to maintain the same level of comfort. In emerging countries, lower income households also tend to use lower quality and more polluting fuels at home (e.g. charcoal or liquefied petroleum gas), which are also more likely to experience greater price volatility. Finally, it should be noted that energy consumption and deprivation differ greatly from place to place. In developed countries, the demand for heating is eight times higher than for cooling, with only 700 cooling degree days (CDDs) on average.[1] Emerging countries, on the other hand, experience 2,150 CDDs per year and yet only 30% of households have access to air conditioning. In India, only 11% of households have access to air conditioning and in Africa only 7%, according to IEA data.

As if these impacts were not enough, the economic crisis and inflation have caused investment in electrification to slow down, especially in less developed countries whose currencies depreciated sharply. The alternative solution of promoting self-consumption in homes has thus been undermined by the cost of solar panels rising between 30% and 40% since 2020. This has made it particularly difficult to improve access to energy in rural areas.

The role of the state

The impact of the energy crisis on households and businesses has differed widely according to states' financial capacity. The think tank Bruegel estimates that, from the start of the energy crisis in September 2021 to January 2023, European countries allocated €758 billion to protecting consumers from rising energy costs. According to their

---

1. CDD is a measure of how warm a given location is by comparing the temperature to a standard base temperature. The IEA calculates the CDD using a base temperature of 18 °C and incorporates the impact of humidity.

calculations, the EU has allocated €646 billion, 40% of that (€265 billion) from Germany, which has spent 7.4% of its GDP (€3,180 per inhabitant) to shield its economy from the energy impact. By comparison, EU countries on average spent "only" 3.5% of GDP (€1,161 per inhabitant) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. European government support to households and businesses to mitigate the energy crisis
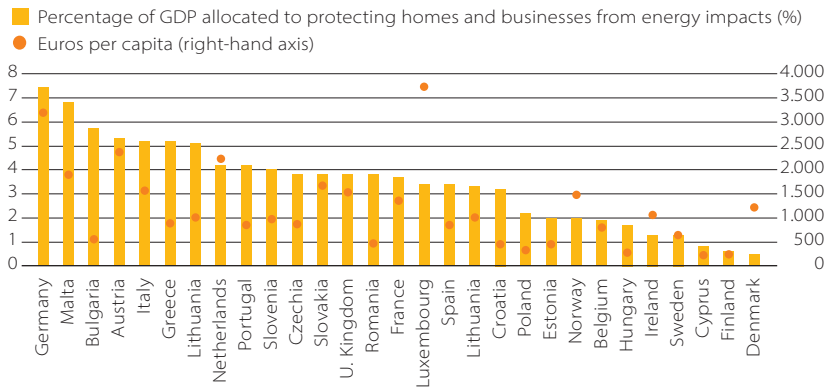
Source: Bruegel (2023)

It is thus very important to distinguish between the impact and changes in the wholesale energy price and the retail price paid by consumers, since the theoretical price of electricity differs from the price actually paid after taking into account taxes, tolls and discounts and other types of subsidies. It is also worth noting that most of the measures adopted by European governments have been of a generic nature (e.g. reductions to VAT and specific taxes) with only 18% taking into account household income levels.

In general, emerging countries have had less fiscal capacity to intervene in the market. Perhaps because of this reduced fiscal space, the measures adopted have focused more on households (note in Figure 2 how the orange bar, which shows the price increase, is smaller for buildings, e.g. housing, than other sectors of the economy). Among these interventions are caps on tariff increases and subsidies on bills for low-income households.

Another protective measure most countries applied is the use of legislation and regulated tariffs that particularly protect vulnerable households. In Spain these interventions included the Tariff of Last Resort (TUR, in Spanish) to pay for natural gas and the Voluntary Price for the Small Consumer (PVPC, in Spanish) for electricity; however, paradoxically, in this crisis the PVPC has performed

worse than free market tariffs. In the event of supply cuts, households and small businesses in cities would be the last consumers to be affected by restrictions on energy services – due to the impossibility of distinguishing the destination of supply– along with basic services such as hospitals.

Figure 2. End-user natural gas prices by economic sector in Asia
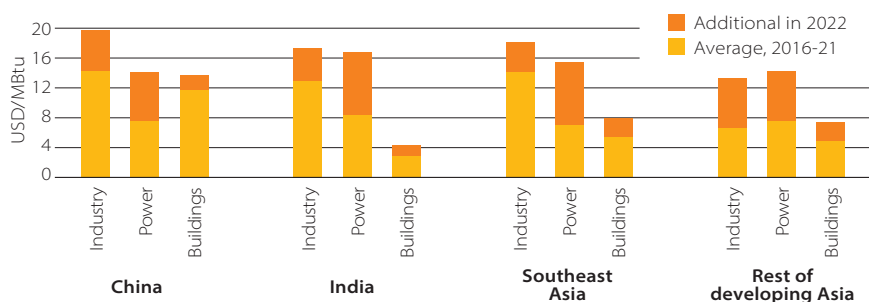
Note: US Dollar (USD) per million British thermal units (MBtu)
Source: World Energy Outlook (2022)

Finally, it is also worth highlighting that most governments worked to reduce energy demand. In Europe, energy demand contracted dramatically due to favourable weather and demand destruction, above all in the energy-intensive industrial sector. On the other hand, fossil fuel energy production was reactivated and investments in renewables and energy efficiency increased, with the aim of improving the ability to cope with similar crises in the future.

The urban dimension

Around the world, large differences exist between access in rural and urban areas to affordable, reliable and modern energy services (SDG 7.1). Since 2016 electricity access in urban areas has virtually stagnated at around 97% of the population (compared to 83% in rural areas), although this ratio drops to 78% for urban areas in Sub-Saharan Africa, according to the latest available data. Although urban electrification is only increasing by 0.2% per year (compared to 1.1% in rural areas), rapid urbanisation means that in absolute terms more people are gaining access to electricity in urban areas than rural. At the present rate, the target of universal energy access by 2030 in the SDGs is unlikely to be achieved. According to the IEA, fewer than half of the countries will reach this target on time. On the other hand, poor access to electricity limits households' ability to improve their living conditions, access quality public services (e.g. healthcare) and lift

themselves out of poverty. At the urban level, this contributes to 14% of the global population still lacking access to clean cooking methods.

Regarding the impact of the crisis in Europe, households in rural areas have seen their bills increase more than households in semi-urban and urban areas, as rural households spend more on heating and on private transport due to their greater mobility needs and the shortage of alternatives. After the interventions at different levels of the state are taken into account, the impacts can vary greatly depending on what measures are applied in each territory. In the case of Spain, a report by the Basque Centre for Climate Change shows that households in rural areas and municipalities with under 10,000 inhabitants have benefited most from the measures adopted, particularly when fuels policies are included, as inhabitants of rural areas tend to use cars more.

LARGE DIFFERENCES EXIST BETWEEN ACCESS IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS TO AFFORDABLE, RELIABLE AND MODERN ENERGY SERVICES. DURING THIS CRISIS, CITIES TOOK MEASURES LIKE IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF PUBLIC LIGHTING, INCENTIVISING PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND INFORMING ABOUT ENERGY SAVING MEASURES.

Cities also had a crucial role to play in reducing energy consumption by driving housing renovation and improving energy efficiency. During this crisis, cities took measures like adjusting the temperatures of public buildings, improving the efficiency of public lighting, incentivising public transport and informing about energy saving measures. The impact of these will be more visible over the medium term, as three out of four buildings in Europe have low energy efficiency ratings and air conditioning in residential buildings accounts for over half of urban natural gas consumption. Fortunately, in the end, it has not been necessary to activate municipal emergency plans for blackouts, which may include meeting points and evacuation procedures, warming centres in major public spaces and capping energy consumption in buildings and urban settings.

The energy crisis and the pandemic have set back the goal of achieving universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services to a degree that is unparalleled in recent decades. State policies have been instrumental in mitigating the impact on consumers, but the financial effort involved is not sustainable over time. Clearly, affordability and a just energy transition are vital to preventing a negative social backlash that could hinder climate ambition.

THE DETERIORATION OF GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY

This chapter analyses the deterioration of the global food security situation in recent years and its specific impact on cities. It highlights the need to implement urgent measures to ensure access to food for vulnerable people in urban areas. In a context characterised by climate and geopolitical instability, there is a need to reflect on the increasing risks to urban food systems.

Ana García Juanatey

Professor at CEI International Affairs and Executive Director of the Master's in Sustainable Development (UB)

Over the past two years, a combination of factors – including the increasing effects of climate change on agricultural systems, the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine – have created a perfect storm that has triggered a rapid rise in food prices, pushing millions of city dwellers into poverty and hunger. As a result, the trend of worsening global food security observed since 2014 is being consolidated, which affects both rural and urban areas, where the poorest are particularly vulnerable to food price rises. Against this backdrop, states and cities alike must urgently put in place measures both to ensure access to food for the most vulnerable and to improve their resilience to food system disruptions.

A worrying picture: the causes of worsening global food security

The first decade of the 21st century saw a notable overall improvement in global food security. But since 2014 this trend has been reversed, with more and more people suffering from moderate and

severe malnutrition each year. In 2021 the situation worsened considerably when, according to a report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, around 2.3 billion people (almost 30% of the world's population) were moderately or severely food insecure, nearly 10% higher than 2019.

The reasons for this deterioration are complex and involve several factors, some of which are structural, while others are conjunctural. The main structural problem currently affecting the functioning of food systems is probably the global environmental change our planet is undergoing, a consequence of highly complex phenomena such as climate change, the disruption to phosphorous and nitrogen cycles and biodiversity loss (Rockström et al., 2020). The impacts of climate change on food systems are already tangible and particularly affect food-insecure countries. For example, a series of climate catastrophes over the course of 2022 worsened the already-fragile food situation in countries such as India and Pakistan. In India, a severe drought in spring 2022 caused reduced harvests, worsening the food security of millions of people. In Pakistan, the floods that affected a third of the country's territory pushed the number of people going hungry up by almost 1.5 million.

DESPITE THE GENERAL IMPROVEMENT IN WORLD FOOD SECURITY IN THE FIRST DECADE OF THE 21ST CENTURY, SINCE 2014 THERE HAS BEEN A CLEAR REVERSAL OF THIS TREND, BOTH IN RURAL AND URBAN CONTEXTS.

Since 2020, two further crises have broken out that are profoundly affecting global food security: the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The economic repercussions of the pandemic, and of the measures taken to deal with it, have increased food prices (FAO, 2022), raising the cost of accessing a healthy diet around the world. The war in Ukraine has also added to the upward trend in food prices that was already discernible by the end of 2021, above all by provoking temporary restrictions on grain supply and the rise in international energy prices. This is reflected in the prices of crucial inputs, such as fuel for both food production and transportation, and inorganic fertilisers, which are mainly produced using natural gas.

As a result, global food prices have soared, reaching their highest point in a decade in the first half of 2022, pushing millions of people into poverty and hunger. According to the FAO Food Price Index, in 2022 the price of maize rose by 47% and wheat by 42%, compared to the previous year. These increases affect individuals and households in very different ways, and heavily impact people who spend a higher percentage of their salary on

food. Indeed, by the end of 2022 the FAO and the World Food Programme (WFP) were already warning that the acute food insecurity generated by these price hikes would worsen substantially over the course of 2023 in at least 19 countries, the most worrying cases being Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen.

The urban dimension of food security

This crisis of rising food prices has a strong urban dimension, as it affects city dwellers' chances of accessing available food. According to the definition coined at the 1996 World Food Summit, a situation of food security requires sufficient food of appropriate quality to be *available*, and for this food to be *accessible* to the entire population at all times. In urban settings, which are often characterised by the abundance and variety of food, availability is less of a problem than access – some of the population cannot afford to buy sufficient quantities of adequate, healthy and nutritious food, mainly because of price.

GLOBAL CITIES NOW SOURCE FOOD FROM FAR AWAY, USING COMPLEX SUPPLY CHAINS THAT ARE AS FAST AND ECONOMICALLY EFFICIENT AS THEY ARE VULNERABLE TO DISRUPTION, AS BOTH THE PANDEMIC AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE HAVE SHOWN.

Thus, while the FAO reports that most of the world's hungry are found in the rural areas of the poorest countries, urban hunger is also a widespread phenomenon with several specific features connected to the realities of urban life. For example, many poor urban households rely on insecure and low-paid jobs in the informal sector, leaving them more vulnerable to economic shocks (Ruel et al., 2017). With mothers and primary caregivers more likely to work outside the home for longer hours, children in cities are exposed to specific risks that, combined with the lack of family and institutional care networks, can affect the quality of childcare and child nutrition (ibid.).

With most of the world's population living in cities, awareness has grown of the importance of addressing food security in urban contexts, in terms of both economic and physical access to food (Sonnino, 2016). In relation to economic access, rising food prices can leave the urban poor helpless, as they depend entirely upon the market for their food, whose costs often take up a large share (50–75%) of their income.

In terms of physical access, meanwhile, concern has grown over recent years about cities' dependence on imported food. Historically, food systems have

always had a strong local component, as food supply tended to depend on the availability of land around urban centres. Today, however, with the widespread use of fossil fuels at all stages of food production, distribution and consumption, these systems have become increasingly disconnected from regional biophysical conditions. To give just one example of this import dependency, the amount of food transported to cities has increased up to tenfold over the last 30 years (Rosenzweig et al., 2018). Global cities now source food from far away, using complex supply chains that are as fast and economically efficient as they are vulnerable to disruption, as both the pandemic and the war in Ukraine have shown.

CITIES ARE CURRENTLY RETHINKING THEIR FOOD SECURITY AND IMPLEMENTING CONCRETE MEASURES THAT ABOVE ALL AIM TO SHORTEN SUPPLY CHAINS AND RECONNECT FOOD SYSTEMS WITH THEIR SURROUNDINGS.

The disruptions caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the Black Sea region have triggered food insecurity problems in a number of cities, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. At least 12% of the world's food calories are exported through the Black Sea, including sunflower oil, maize and other crops like wheat (Harvey, 2022). In fact, 40% of the wheat that passes through the area is destined for the Middle East and Africa, regions whose large cities are heavily dependent on wheat imports. The consequent rise in bread prices in cities like Cairo in 2022 raised fears of a repeat of the riots of 2010 (Butler, 2022). Both the pandemic and the war in Ukraine have therefore highlighted the vulnerabilities of global commodity supply chains, as well as the need for major cities to rethink their dependence on such a fragile global system.

Cities' responses: measures to alleviate food insecurity and build urban resilience

In response to this reality, and in the wider context of climate change, cities are currently rethinking their food security and implementing concrete measures that above all aim to shorten supply chains and reconnect food systems with their surroundings. According to "The Future We Don't Want"(2018), a report by the C40 network of large cities committed to fighting climate change, cities can increase their resilience and food security by, among other things, increasing food production in the city, providing space and infrastructure for local producers to sell their products, using their public food procurement capacity to support these regional supply networks, and taking action to reduce food waste. There is also much that cities can do to improve nutrition for vulnerable groups, like children. UNICEF gives the examples of vouchers and cash transfers to families and school

feeding programmes as effective measures that cities can implement, while recommending that these social protection measures ensure children's access to healthy, nutritious and varied diets.

However, there are limits to what cities can do to face these challenges, as the need for food imports often far exceeds the capacity of their territory or surroundings to provide food. What is more, when it comes to supporting their inhabitants in situations of food insecurity, it is states that often have the greatest capacity to respond. Indeed, academic evidence (Tarasuk, 2017) and the FAO (2022) agree on the importance of state social protection policies, in particular direct cash transfers to guarantee a minimum living income, in order to protect vulnerable populations in emergency situations. International aid, which must reach both urban and rural environments, remains critical in order to support countries in particularly vulnerable situations, such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen.

References

Butler, Sarah. "Egypt fixes price of bread as Ukraine war hits wheat supply". *The Guardian* (21 March 2022)

Harvey, Fiona. "Ukraine war piles pressure on global food system already in crisis". *The Guardian* (9 March 2022)

Rockström, J.; Edenhofer, O.; Gaertner, J.; DeClerck, F. "Planet-proofing the global food system". *Nature Food*, vol. 1, n.º. 1 (2020) p. 3-5.

Ruel, Marie T.; Garrett, James. L. y Sivan, Yosef. "Food security and nutrition: Growing cities, new challenges". *IFPRI book chapters*, 2017, p. 24-33.

Sonnino, Roberta. "The new geography of food security: exploring the potential of urban food strategies". *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 182, no.2 (2016), p. 190-200.

Tarasuk, Valerie. *Implications of a basic income guarantee for household food insecurity*. Thunder Bay: Northern Policy Institute, 2017.

WHERE ARE WE GOING TO LIVE?
THE MANUFACTURED HOUSING AND HABITAT GLOBAL CRISIS

When treated as a commodity that allows accumulation and speculation, housing generates social inequality, economic concentration and environmental destruction. If respected and guaranteed as a human right, adequate housing can contribute to more just, democratic and sustainable societies and territories. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, local and regional communities and governments have a key role to play in advancing transformative agendas based on the right to the city, to the commons and to care.

Lorena
Zárate
Global Platform
for the Right
to the City

The right to housing is under attack. Acquiring and maintaining a decent place to live in peace and dignity has become practically impossible for most people. A kind of «perfect storm» seems to be preventing fairer distribution of the housing stock, affecting billions of people around the world. Over the last four decades, the sustained loss of public housing, the lack of regulation of the private rental market, the mass construction of luxury apartments and the limitations of housing improvement programmes and self-built[1] working class neighbourhoods have had devastating social and environmental effects. Growing numbers of men, women, adolescents and children living on the streets; working families and young people who cannot afford adequate housing; tenants under constant threat of eviction; people living in marginal areas that lack services – all are visible signs of a planet-wide housing crisis.

---

1. Around half of the urban settlements in the Global South have been built by their inhabitants. They tend to be grouped under the generic and derogatory name of informal and irregular settlements, but organisations and networks like the Habitat International Coalition (HIC) have described them as processes of the social production and management of habitat. For more information see www.hic-net.org.

Privatisation, gentrification and touristification have become keywords for understanding the urban dynamics that today affect large, medium-sized and small cities in all regions. For some time now, various experts (Rolnik, 2021) have described a process of the financialisation of housing – whereby housing has become a financial asset in the hands of large transnational companies. "People without homes and homes without people" is the slogan that sums up the nonsense of an increasingly concentrated and speculative real estate market, in which the state is largely complicit and fearful of regaining its role as regulator and guarantor of fundamental rights. Exclusive new neighbourhoods and large complexes of so-called low-income housing in productive and conservation areas grow and then empty out, for the lack adequate infrastructure and opportunities. At the same time, collective and cooperative options are invisibilized, do not receive the support they need, and are in turn stigmatised and even criminalised. The right to housing is being confused with the right to property, to devastating effects: the social fabric is polarised and torn apart; cities are segmented and segregated; and the environment is neglected and becomes artificial.

THE SUSTAINED LOSS OF PUBLIC HOUSING, THE LACK OF REGULATION OF THE PRIVATE RENTAL MARKET, THE MASS CONSTRUCTION OF LUXURY APARTMENTS AND THE LIMITATIONS OF HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMMES HAVE HAD DEVASTATING SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS.

Exchange value is prioritised over use value. Rather than spaces that are essential to life, homes are treated as commodities. In economic, political and cultural terms, accumulation and profit are placed above redistribution and people's well-being. Over recent decades, land, housing and rental prices have grown exponentially, while people's real incomes have stagnated or even fallen. Applying an intersectional perspective highlights those who are inevitably most affected by this spiral of dispossession, exploitation, discrimination and marginalisation: women, young people, children and the elderly; racialised groups and ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples and migrants; people with disabilities; and people of diverse sexual and gender identities, among others.

Coordinated, networked local action to guarantee rights and dignity of people

In face of the inertia and backwards steps at national level, various cities and regions are providing reasons for hope and presenting alternatives. One example, at the United Nations headquarters in New York in July 2018, was when a group of mayors publicly stated their commitment to implement

measures that would help realise the right to housing and the right to the city. A decade had passed since the brutal economic and financial crisis unleashed by mortgage and real estate speculation by large banks and construction companies, which affected millions of people in both the Global North and South. In the Declaration over 40 local and regional governments state their willingness to promote urban planning that combines adequate housing with inclusive, sustainable and high-quality neighbourhoods, as well as tools for public–private and public–community collaboration. At the same time, the municipalities demand more powers to regulate the real estate market and access more funds to improve public housing stock.

IN FACE OF THE INERTIA AND BACKWARDS STEPS AT NATIONAL LEVEL, VARIOUS CITIES AND REGIONS ARE PROVIDING REASONS FOR HOPE AND PRESENTING ALTERNATIVES.

Since then, activists, professionals and public officials from cities such as Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Montevideo, New York, Paris and Vienna, to mention just a few, have participated in numerous spaces of mutual learning and exchange that have already had interesting repercussions on municipal and regional policies and initiatives. Taking advantage of and even expanding the range of their mandates, various local and metropolitan governments have been experimenting with a series of measures to guarantee social welfare and promote greater environmental responsibility. Regulatory, financial, administrative and management innovations are enabling them to advance in key areas such as municipal housing provision, rent control, regulation of tourist apartments, eviction prevention, land use planning and building codes, including the transfer of land for cooperative and other non-profit projects.

As a framework, the right to housing provides fundamental keys for decoding the limitations of current trends and for guiding transformative public policies that advance greater equity and socio-spatial justice. As recognised in international instruments and constitutions and laws around the world, the right to adequate housing is expressed in seven interrelated dimensions: 1) security of tenure; 2) availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; 3) affordability; 4) habitability; 5) accessibility; 6) location; and 7) cultural adequacy. The table at the end of this chapter gives greater detail on its scope and implications for the concerted action of various public, social and private actors.

The right to the city complements this approach, providing a territorial vision that gives material form to the interdependence of all human rights (civil, political, economic, social and cultural), and links them to collective well-being, environmental responsibility and the deepening of democratic

decision-making practices. The eight components combine both principles and strategies: 1) non-discrimination; 2) gender equity; 3) inclusive citizenship (detached from nationality and legal status); 4) strengthened political participation; 5) the social functions of property and the collectively defined public–community interest; 6) equity in the use of safe, high-quality public spaces and services; 7) diverse and inclusive economies (including the informal economy and the social and solidarity economy); and 8) fairer and more balanced urban–rural linkages.

A DECOLONIAL FEMINIST APPROACH HELPS US FOCUS ON CARE AND COLLECTIVE CONSIDERATIONS THAT INCLUDE HOUSING AMONG THE COMMON GOODS THAT WE MUST PROTECT AND STRENGTHEN.

The crisis as an opportunity: what we've learned and what comes next

The multifaceted global crisis provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the growing inequalities that affect our societies and cities, highlighting the priority and urgent issues. Access to adequate housing and basic services became a crucial means of protection against the spread of the disease, and for millions of people around the world a terrible line drawn between life and death. The home became a place of study and work, which highlighted the injustices of the digital divide, while the substantially increased burden of care, borne mostly by women, led to a loss of income and autonomy. Meanwhile, a large number of essential workers in the health, food, energy and other sectors, many of them migrants or members of racialised groups, risked their health by living in overcrowded conditions in areas far from employment centres with poor public transport links.

Once again, local governments and communities were the first to respond, albeit often without adequate resources and, in many cases, facing reluctant and even authoritarian national administrations. According to a study by the London School of Economics (LSE), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and Metropolis (LSE *et al.*, 2020), 64% of the measures taken over the first months were at subnational level, including 43% at city level or below. Even with limited budgets, various local and regional actors took swift and in many cases bold steps to address the emergency. By mobilising a broad network of in-kind support and decommodifying access to essential goods and services, they sought to guarantee housing, water, food, electricity and internet access. Public housing rent moratoriums, rate freezes and food banks were combined with pop-up clinics and remote medical attention. The reuse of buildings, land and public spaces became a critical tool. Empty homes and hotel rooms, conference centres and other community facilities were

adapted to provide shelter for homeless people, women and children who were victims of domestic violence and healthcare workers requiring isolation.

While insufficient and temporary, these emergency measures broadened the horizon of what was possible and showed the way forward for urgent transformations in the medium and long term. Cities know that any effective strategy to deal with the housing crisis will require simultaneous care measures to be combined for three separate groups that together represent the majority of the population: the unhoused; people in inadequate housing; and people at risk of losing their home. A decolonial feminist approach (including redistributive justice, memory and reparation mechanisms for indigenous peoples) helps us focus on care and collective considerations that include housing among the common goods[2] that we must protect and strengthen. Housing is at the heart of the great environmental, economic, health and social crisis of our time. The right to housing and the right to the city must therefore be at the centre of the transformations we continue to promote.

References

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - CESCR. *General Comment No. 4: The Right to Adequate Housing*. Geneva: United Nations, 1991.

Global Platform for the Right to the City (2022). "(Global) Commons Policy Paper". *UCLG Town Halls*, 2022 (online) https://decidim-uclg.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/decidim/attachment/file/4289/TH_PP_GlobalCommons.pdf

LSE, CGLU and Metrópolis. "Monitores del COVID-19 relevantes para la gobernanza urbana y regional. Iniciativa 'La gobernanza de las emergencias en las ciudades y las regiones'". *Nota Analítica*, no. 1 (June 2020) (online) https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/egi_report_es.pdf

UCLG, KNOW. "04 Commoning. Pathways to urban and territorial equality: Addressing inequalities through local transformation strategies". *GOLD VI Report* (2022) (online). https://www.goldvi.uclg.org/en/commoning

Rolnik, R. *La guerra de los lugares. La colonización de la tierra y la vivienda en la época de las finanzas globales*. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires y Santiago de Chile: Editorial El Colectivo y LOM Ediciones, 2021 [2017, original edition]

---

2. Several networks of local governments and civil society have been exploring the notion of the commons as a strategy to address socio-spatial inequalities, the environmental crisis and the democratic deficit in a comprehensive and territorialized manner. The most relevant of these debates and proposals are included in UCLG, KNOW (2022) and Global Platform for the Right to the City (2022).

Table 1. The right to housing as a framework for fairer public policies

Components of the right to adequate housing (CESCR, 1991)	Trends that increase inequality	Public policy recommendations
Legal security of tenure: public or private rental, cooperative, lease, private property, collective property, emergency housing, ownership, use and enjoyment, etc.	Options limited to individual/family private property. Suppressing or criminalising collective and other forms of tenure.	Diversification and support for shared and cooperative tenure alternatives, including collective ownership, land trusts and rental housing. Administrative and legal mechanisms for conflict resolution and eviction prevention.
Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure: permanent access to natural and common resources, drinking water, energy for cooking, heating and lighting, sanitation, means of food storage, waste disposal, drainage and emergency services.	Predominant use of polluting materials controlled by a few companies (cement and steel, etc.). Insufficient, poor quality, inadequately priced services.	Regain and promote local materials and techniques, including popular and indigenous knowledge. Public–community and social and solidarity economy options to provide adequate and affordable materials and services.
Affordability: personal or household spending on housing should not compromise or impede the attainment and satisfaction of other basic needs.	Expenses to access and maintain housing (rent, mortgages, etc.) exceed 30% of disposable income. Insufficient options for people in situations of exclusion and marginalisation (mothers of household, women victims of domestic violence, people living on the street, victims of disasters and conflicts, unemployed persons and those working in the informal economy, etc.).	Financial schemes that combine credit, savings and subsidies according to the needs and capacities of the beneficiaries, including collective options. Adequate regulation of land prices, rents and mortgages.
Habitability: adequate space for inhabitants; protection from cold, damp, heat, rain, wind and other risks to health; structural hazards; physical security.	Reduced and homogenised new housing prototypes. Lack of support for maintaining and renovating existing and/or abandoned housing.	Diversification of housing designs according to the needs of the inhabitants. Maintenance and renovation programmes with social participation.
Accessibility: priority attention to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups: the elderly, children, people with disabilities and terminal illness, those who are HIV positive or suffer from mental illness, victims of disasters, etc.	Care programmes for marginalised and vulnerable people are scarce and insufficient.	Co-design and implementation of ad hoc programmes that prioritise and incorporate the opinions and proposals of marginalised and vulnerable persons and groups.

Components of the right to adequate housing (CESCR, 1991)	Trends that increase inequality	Public policy recommendations
Location: access to employment options, healthcare services, child care, schools and other social services; not in polluted locations or near sources of pollution.	Large-scale new housing construction programmes in areas far from services, facilities, employment, and education and recreation options.	Mapping and making use of vacant land, housing and facilities, including vacant public land, hotels and offices in well-located and serviced areas. Housing and neighbourhood improvement programmes that advance the right to the city and environmental justice.
Cultural adequacy: the way housing is built and the use of materials and policies must enable the expression of cultural identity and diversity; ensure modern technological services without sacrificing cultural dimensions.	Housing designs and housing options that do not respect existing bioclimatic and cultural diversity.	Diversification of housing designs adapted to biocultural realities in different regions with community participation.

Source: Compiled by the author using components of the right to adequate housing (CESCR, 1991).

GEOGRAPHY OF URBAN HEALTH

Concern for ensuring good health in cities is nothing new. However, the diseases taking most years off our lives today (from cancer to cardiovascular accidents) are very unlike those of a century ago, and oblige us to consider the health impacts of environmental, climate and lifestyle factors. We must place health and wellbeing at the heart of urban development and reclaim urban geography as the best option for advancing the wellbeing of most of the planet's population.

Rafael Vilasanjuan

Policy and Global Development Director, Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal)

While it may seem recent, the dilemma of how to ensure good levels of health in cities is nothing new. It is merely an evolution of the logic that in the mid-19th century led Ildefons Cerdà to ask how the city could be made into a healthier space. Focussed on the local level, his idea was to achieve a human urbanism that would provide well-being and promote greater equality. Studying the living conditions of people within a walled city led him to seek answers to the three main problems with the ancient city of Barcelona: density, mobility and mortality. During the years of unbridled industrialisation, a sense of urgency derived from the fact that workers' life expectancy barely reached 30 years. Epidemics raged, as infectious diseases like tuberculosis, cholera, typhoid and dysentery spread along narrow streets in dense cities. The concern in those days was not the health of the planet – the world was not yet globalised, or at least was not perceived as such. But, like today, changes to the environment of urban life were required, including wider streets in which air could circulate and interior green spaces for it to regenerate. In combination they

could help prevent the spread of infectious diseases, creating healthy spaces in the midst of industrial expansion.

Today's need for a cleaner climate is the same, except the same strategy no longer suffices. In terms of disease we have come a long way. The shadow of the worst pandemic for a hundred years still causes anguish because of its impact in terms of closed cities, confinement and restrictions, but the landscape has changed. Developed countries have undergone an epidemiological transition. We now live much longer lives and, COVID-19 apart, infectious diseases, like those that decimated populations in the past via epidemics and plagues are now less of a threat than chronic diseases like cancer, heart and respiratory failure and diabetes, many of which are induced by environmental and climate factors, as well as by lifestyle habits including mobility and diet.

WE NOW LIVE MUCH LONGER LIVES AND, COVID-19 APART, INFECTIOUS DISEASES ARE NOW LESS OF A THREAT THAN CHRONIC DISEASES, MANY OF WHICH ARE INDUCED BY ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE FACTORS, AS WELL AS BY LIFESTYLE HABITS INCLUDING MOBILITY AND DIET.

By 2050, the United Nations have projected that two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities. In less than a decade, cities will be home to almost a third of the world's jobs and account for over half of consumer spending (MGI, 2016). More than a dozen cities will have populations in excess of 20 million. This rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation is straining the determinants of health in many people's lives. Traffic, factories and construction poison the air, water supplies can be polluted, substandard housing is harmful to health, and even the food supply and quality – especially processed food – can be compromised as a result of mass concentrations of people. In lower income countries, especially in Africa, this urban sprawl will generate even more inequity. Nearly a billion people live in slums, created as mass reception areas without urban planning or adequate health provisions (Khan, 2023). The United Nations projects that 60% of these urban dwellers are under the age of 18, meaning that many inhabitants of these slums, which often arose as a result of rural–urban migration, will fall victim to the infectious diseases with the highest mortality rates, such as pneumonia and diarrhoea, and which particularly affect children under the age of five, whose immune systems have yet to fully develop.

But the phenomenon is not limited to countries with lower economic capacity, and while logically the greatest vulnerability is always found at the extremes, the race to lead the ranking of healthiest cities has also become a concern for political decision-makers in countries with more advanced

economies. Leading cities, those that produce the best living and working conditions, cannot ignore factors that impact health like smoke, caused in part by traffic, but also by supply, production and construction, and which causes or worsens respiratory diseases like asthma, cardiovascular disease and cancer. Others, such as noise, impact anxiety, stress and insomnia and can hinder children's cognitive development.

How to build a healthy city

Studies by the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal) estimate that good transport and urban mobility planning could prevent at least 20% of premature deaths in cities in developed countries. The question is therefore how to build a healthy city. Collaboration between the planning, transport, environment and health sectors is essential to address the challenges of urbanisation. We must put health and wellbeing at the heart of urban development and the problems we face, such as high levels of air pollution and noise, the effects of global warming, the shortage of green spaces and sedentary behaviour. But we must also work on changing people's behaviours, interests and habits, accustomed as they are to a model of urban life that generates health risks and reduces longevity and quality of life. It is difficult to cross the line between acceptance and rejection without information campaigns, inclusive decision-making processes and, above all, clear action plans that, while making clear that the changes are not minor, can be adequately defined in the time needed to tackle the transition.

THE RACE TO LEAD THE RANKING OF HEALTHIEST CITIES HAS BECOME A CONCERN FOR POLITICAL DECISION-MAKERS. LEADING CITIES, THOSE THAT PRODUCE THE BEST LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS, CANNOT IGNORE FACTORS THAT IMPACT HEALTH.

Part of this work involves public building and urban planning initiatives. The city of the future must be green. Green spaces, including urban parks, gardens, tree-lined streets and forests, provide multiple health benefits to adults, including stress reduction, longer life, and better general and mental health. Among children, they are linked to improved attention spans and emotional and behavioural development. The relationship between good health and blue spaces like fountains, lakes, rivers and seas remains a relatively new field of research. Being associated with increased levels of physical activity they could be beneficial for mental health, especially for stress reduction and self-perceived well-being. Climate change has created a need for urban design to prioritise the prevention of rising temperatures in cities by improving building insulation, reducing emissions from heating

and cooling systems in homes and offices, and incorporating more heat-absorbing urban materials, including increased vegetation.

As well as regulation and public policies to adapt standards to private enterprise, promoting mobility is another significant factor. According to a report by IS Global, sedentary lifestyles are a global public health problem, comprising the fourth greatest risk factor for mortality worldwide and the cause of one in four cases of breast and colon cancer. Cities should be designed to encourage physical activity through active transport, using urban design to facilitate walking and cycling. Half of all car journeys in cities are under 5 km – a distance that can be covered by active transport, which would result in significant public health benefits due to increased physical activity and reduced levels of air and noise pollution. There is a social and not just individual need to raise levels of physical activity, and this must be integrated into city design. For this to be equitable, it is estimated that 25% of total space must be allocated to connected green and blue areas distributed throughout the municipality.

The absence of a single global government means that addressing climate change requires international agreements to be reached; but cities already have governments that can regulate and plan. Time is limited but the potential impact is enormous, both in terms of lives saved and years of higher quality of life, as well as saving resources for health systems. The race to build healthier environments will define many cities' futures. The best-prepared cities will also be the most competitive, attract the most knowledge and generate the most added value. Living in a city does not have to be detrimental to health, quite the contrary. For those who trust the science, sufficient evidence already exists on the abyss towards which we are heading and the impact on our lives of continuing with trends and habits that belong in other ages without facing up to the major changes our urban environment requires. For those still unconvinced about the dangers, suffice to visit any hospital and see how the diseases that cut short our lives these days, from cancer to cardiovascular accidents, have much more to do with environmental factors than the illnesses killing people just a century ago. Here, urban geography can claim to be the best means of advancing the well-being of the majority of the world's people.

References

Khan, Amina. "Cities of missed opportunities: improving the lives of people in poverty". *ODI blog* (2023).

MGI-McKinsey Global Institute. *Urban world: the global consumers to watch*. McKinsey Global Institute, 2016.

DIGITAL DIVIDES IN THE AGE OF HYPERCONNECTIVITY

We live in a digitally hyperconnected world. Yet, a third of people remain without internet access. In the age of hyperconnectivity, combatting the multiple digital divides (in access, affordability and digital skills) has become a priority for all sustainable development strategies. Cities have proven to be highly active, dynamic and effective actors in the fight against digital inequalities, launching a diverse range of initiatives, including municipal broadband networks and programmes to improve citizens' digital literacy.

Marta Galceran-Vercher

Research Fellow, Global Cities Programme, CIDOB

CIDOB REPORT
10- 2023

In April 2021, Kazakhstan's national chess champion Dinara Saduakassova had to withdraw from an international tournament because of poor internet connection. This may seem somewhat trivial, but poor digital connectivity means for millions of people around the world missing out on more than just the chance to win chess matches. They may be denied access to particular jobs, to education and health services, and to administrative procedures and citizen participation. In fact, if we have learned anything from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that digital connectivity is not a luxury: it is a basic need, on a par with electricity and decent housing, and is therefore essential to personal, social, economic and political development.

Today, many fundamental parts of our societies depend on access to the internet. The United Nations and its main agencies have repeatedly warned in numerous reports that access to connectivity and digital infrastructure directly impacts education, equity, innovation and economic growth. These findings have also permeated global policy frameworks like the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (2015), the New Urban Agenda (2016), the Connect 2030 Agenda for Global Telecommunication/ICT Development (2018)

35

and the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation (2020), among others. All categorise connectivity and digital inclusion as essential factors for achieving sustainable development.

Meanwhile, we live in an ever-more digitally hyperconnected world. According to estimates by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) the number of internet users has increased fivefold in the last 15 years: in 2007 only 20% of the world's population was digitally connected, today the figure is 66%. However, accelerated digitalisation should not be confused with digital inclusion: at a time when we need the internet for almost everything, one-third of the world's population (2.7 billion people) still lack access to this basic good, especially in Africa (60%). To make things worse, in the age of hyperconnectivity the cost of being disconnected is rising, which is why tackling the multiple digital divides has become a priority for all sustainable development strategies.

IN THE AGE OF HYPERCONNECTIVITY, ONE-THIRD OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION STILL LACK ACCESS TO INTERNET. AT A TIME WHEN WE NEED DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY FOR ALMOST EVERYTHING, THE COST OF BEING DISCONNECTED IS RISING.

The multiple dimensions of the digital divide

Discussing digital divides means recognising the unequal ability of individuals, communities and countries to access and use information and communication technologies (ICTs). Often, these inequalities are presented in a "binary way" (Kende and Jain, 2015) with those who are connected separated from those who would like to be connected, but who for various reasons are not. In reality, digital divides contain multiple nuances and dimensions, ranging from purely material aspects related to physical access to the infrastructure and devices that make digital connectivity possible, to other elements of a more psychosocial nature linked to socio-economic, skills and even cultural barriers.

The first barrier is accessibility. This includes access to broadband infrastructure and service of sufficient speed and quality to use the internet, as well access to the necessary digital devices like computers, tablets and mobiles. This "digital infrastructure divide" has a very strong geospatial dimension, which is particularly evident in rural areas. ITU (2020) estimates that globally around 72% of households in urban areas have internet at home, almost twice the figure for rural areas (37%). As Figure 1 shows, while in developed countries the urban–rural gap is relatively small, in developing countries the percentage of households with internet access is more than twice as high in urban areas as rural.

Figure 1. Percentage of households with internet access in 2019
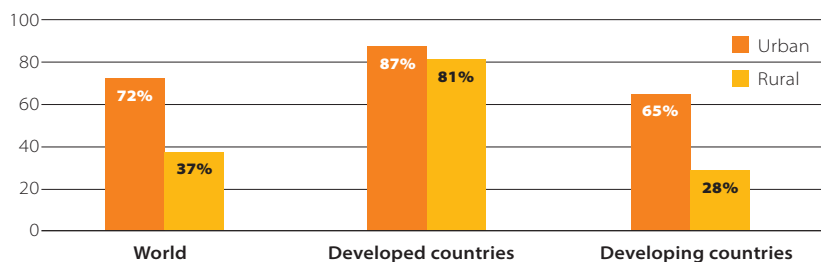
Source: Compiled by the author using data from ITU (2020).

This gap is due both to the cost and complexity of providing digital services in more remote locations, and to the political failure to prioritise telecommunications infrastructure investment and upgrades in rural areas. But the digital divide extends beyond the urban–rural disparity; it also manifests itself within well-connected cities, particularly in low-income areas and districts with higher concentrations of disadvantaged people. For example, in New York as many as 500,000 households lack a stable connection, while in Chicago the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that 20% of students were without broadband. But this digital divide is particularly deep in informal settlements in or adjacent to large urban areas, which often suffer from a chronic lack of investment in infrastructure and services, including digital services. This lack of access to adequate telecommunications services, already critical for most slums prior to the pandemic, exacerbates the multiple vulnerabilities of their inhabitants (Boza-Kiss et al., 2021).

A second major barrier, this time socio-economic, is the cost of connectivity. In short, the ability to afford broadband services and devices. To address the affordability problem, in 2020 the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, co-led by ITU and UNESCO, established an affordability threshold: basic broadband services in developing countries should cost less than 2% of gross monthly per capita income. The bad news is that to date this threshold is being exceeded in all regions of the world except Europe. In fact, the global average is more than double (4.2%), rising to around 11.5% in Africa (ITU, 2020). As the last section of this chapter will show, many cities are confronting this reality with major projects to ensure that socio-economic conditions are no longer a barrier to internet access for the most disadvantaged groups in society.

Finally, as well as the capacity to pay for internet access, any discussion of affordability should include the ability to devote the time and resources

necessary to acquire digital literacy skills (UN-HABITAT, 2022). This leads us to the third barrier: digital illiteracy. According to data from the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), four out of ten adults in the European Union lack basic digital skills, a similar level to the ITU's global figures. The lack of digital skills is also much more pronounced among traditionally disadvantaged groups (women and girls, older people, indigenous communities, the rural poor, people with disabilities, etc.).

Digital connectivity: an essential local public service

DIGITAL DIVIDES CONTAIN MULTIPLE NUANCES AND DIMENSIONS, RANGING FROM PURELY MATERIAL ASPECTS (PHYSICAL ACCESS TO THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEVICES), TO OTHER ELEMENTS OF A MORE PSYCHOSOCIAL NATURE LINKED TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC, SKILLS AND EVEN CULTURAL BARRIERS.

Tackling the digital divide requires action and collaboration between different actors. Although national governments have an essential role to play in building large-scale digital infrastructure and creating regulatory frameworks for private operators, cities are also proving to be highly active, dynamic and effective players in the fight against digital inequalities. The range of actions that can be driven from the local level is broad and diverse. A recent UN-Habitat (2022) report set out some of the most common local-level solutions, ranging from the construction of municipally owned broadband networks to the establishment of various partnerships with the private sector and interventions aimed at increasing digital literacy and improving the accessibility of digital services. Below, several examples are considered.

For starters, achieving full digital inclusion requires cities to first understand and identify where digital divides exist, both geographically and demographically. Local Digital Divide Observatories, such as those put in place by the cities of Bordeaux, Ghent and Barcelona, can play a key role here, providing the data to make targeted interventions in the areas most in need. As a result of this, Barcelona discovered that around 8,000 households (8% of the city) lacked internet access, and some people did not have the necessary skills to carry out online procedures, make video calls or send emails. In this context, the city promoted the "Connecting Barcelona" programme to provide quality internet access to 400 vulnerable households in the Trinitat Nova neighbourhood, one of the city's most vulnerable.

In a similar vein, during the pandemic many local governments put in place

temporary measures to ensure children from disadvantaged families had the internet access needed to continue their schooling online. Washington, D.C. and Chicago, for example, offered free and low-cost service to families who could not afford to pay for broadband and provided the devices needed to connect. As in many other fields, the pandemic made us all more aware of our vulnerabilities and the importance of reducing digital divides. Hence, many of the temporary measures launched in 2020–2021 have gone on to become permanent programmes.

Meanwhile, more and more cities are driving the construction of municipal broadband networks, usually via some form of collaboration with the private sector. This is the case in Stockholm (Stokab), Amsterdam (Citynet) and Singapore (NetLink Trust), as well as others. It is often presented as a solution that can bring coverage to the most under-served areas of the city and provide an affordable connectivity option for low-income residents struggling with high prices and slow internet speeds. It is worth noting that, despite their growing popularity, such initiatives have often faced significant resistance. For example, Toronto's ConnectTO project, which was announced in 2021, had to lower expectations only a year later due to pressure from large telecommunications operators.

CITIES ARE PROMOTING IMPORTANT INITIATIVES TO TACKLE DIGITAL DIVIDES, SUCH AS THE CONSTRUCTION OF MUNICIPALLY OWNED BROADBAND NETWORKS, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF VARIOUS PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR OR INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT INCREASING DIGITAL LITERACY.

But addressing digital divides does not always require large outlays on new digital infrastructure. In fact, it can often be more effective to build on and improve existing community spaces. This is well illustrated by many cities' use of their public library systems to improve their citizens' digital access and skills. Johannesburg, for example, uses public facilities of this type to provide free Wi-Fi and digital skills training courses, whether in basic computing or more advanced programming. One of the most interesting aspects of the city's initiatives is the capacity it has shown to accompany them with specific programmes developed in collaboration with NGOs in order to bring these resources to the communities in the city most at risk of digital exclusion (Mbambo et al., 2022).

Finally, as well as working to bridge the digital divide within their cities, some local governments are also helping to do so in the rest of the world. Barcelona is one example. In collaboration with other levels of government, it has worked on hosting GIGA, a joint ITU and UNICEF initiative that aims

to connect all the world's schools to the internet by 2030. No mean feat, as only half of the world's schools currently have adequate digital connections, most of which are in developed countries. GIGA's potential to contribute to improving global education is thus immense. And, as pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, achieving global sustainable development goals in the era of hyperconnectivity will depend to a significant degree on cities applying a local and global perspective and working to close all gaps, including digital.

References

Boza-Kiss, Benigna; Pachauri, Shonali; y Zimm, Caroline. "Deprivations and Inequities in Cities Viewed Through a Pandemic Lens". *Front. Sustain. Cities,* vol. 3 (March 2021)

Kende, Michael y Jain, K. "The digital divide is not binary". *Internet Society* (January 2015) (on line) https://www.internetsociety.org/blog/2015/01/the-digital-divide-is-not-binary/

Mbambo, Michael; Velile Jiyane, Glenrose y Zungo, Nkosingiphile Mbusozayo. "The use of electronic learning centres in public libraries in the city of Johannesburg, South Africa". *Library Hi Tech News*, no. 1 (February 2022), p. 8-12

INFORMATION: PUBLIC GOOD, INSTRUMENT OF DEMOCRACY AND WEAPON

Information is a public good. The more knowledge is available about societies and how they are governed, the better democratic systems can function. However, the digitisation of the public realm and the overabundance of content have disrupted the democratic conversation. Information disorder threatens fundamental freedoms, including the rights to freedom of thought, to hold opinions without interference, to privacy and to political participation. Information empowers, but its manipulation has further exacerbated social and political polarisation.

Carme Colomina

Senior Research Fellow, CIDOB

Information is both a right in itself and a multiplier of other rights. In 1991 only 12 countries in the world had laws guaranteeing citizens' access to government information; by 2009 the number had risen to 40, and by 2019 it was up to 126. UNESCO recognises free access to information as an indispensable tool for democratic participation, as it helps promote government accountability and transparency and enables a more robust and informed public debate. Access to information also forms an integral part of freedom of expression, promoting the rule of law and building trust. Information is therefore a public good. But the advent of digital communication has altered the flow of information, changing our individual relationships with the production and consumption of content and, in turn, affecting democratic processes.

In the "Age of Information" (Castells, 1996) and hyperconnectivity, the overabundance of content has plunged us into what Stephen Sloman and Philipe Fernbach (2017) call a "knowledge illusion". The internet has multiplied our information possibilities, but we lack the

tools to discern the veracity of so many often contradictory messages. When information circulates untethered to reality, truth is in crisis. Belief in factuality is lost (Byung-Chul Han, 2022: 71).

We are living through an information revolution bringing changes at global scale that have transformed our immediate surroundings and daily lives. The digitisation of information, along with innovation, access to multimedia content and the rise of the internet as a free and easily accessible distribution channel have undermined the standing of journalism. The role the traditional media played as intermediary with a monopoly on interpreting reality has been replaced by algorithmic intermediation that determines the relevance of content based on categories that have little to do with quality information and genuine public interest. Social media, with its bubble of filters and microtargeted political information, did the rest.

INFORMATION IS BOTH A RIGHT IN ITSELF AND A MULTIPLIER OF OTHER RIGHTS. FREE ACCESS TO INFORMATION IS AN INDISPENSABLE TOOL FOR DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION, AND AN INTEGRAL PART OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION.

Our everyday reality is being influenced by personalised information flows that reinforce preconceived ideas. Today's public sphere is as global as it is fragmented into wholly separate universes of information. Economic globalisation and the deterritorialisation of the internet have triggered social and cultural processes with distinctly local impacts, just as local media is going through a problematic transition to digitalisation. Journalists –"the custodians of the public sphere", as Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa calls them–, are experiencing their own crisis around information access, management and monetisation, as they face the pressure of immediacy and the fierce competition for users' attention.

Local information

The Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2021 confirmed the correlation between a sense of attachment or belonging to a community and high readership of local news, as well as the high levels of trust across much of Europe in local and regional news. In overall numbers, however, local news consumption is low across the continent and much local media output is threatened by digitalisation and the economic difficulties brought about by the crisis in the business model. The same is true of public media, which is meant to operate without political or commercial influence, but which is also subject to market competition and political and economic pressures.

As the Nieman Report says, "when local journalism declines, so does government transparency and civic engagement". In short, "less local news means less democracy". As Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (2015: 1) confirms, local media are an important part of collective representation, having traditionally "helped people imagine themselves as part of a community, connected in part through their shared local news medium, bound together by more than geographic proximity or politically defined administrative boundaries". When done properly, local journalism can be the accountability mechanism that is closest to citizens. According to Nielsen's research in several European countries, it helps reduce government corruption and encourages public participation in local politics. In the United States, various studies show how the crises and closures taking place in local media have contributed to the electoral polarisation that now reflects the partisan clash that shapes the political game in Washington (Darr, 2008).

THERE IS A CORRELATION BETWEEN A SENSE OF ATTACHMENT OR BELONGING TO A COMMUNITY AND HIGH READERSHIP OF LOCAL NEWS, AS WELL AS THE HIGH LEVELS OF TRUST ACROSS MUCH OF EUROPE IN LOCAL AND REGIONAL NEWS.

A decade of economic and financial crisis and the dramatic rise of digitalisation and its impact on traditional business models have brought about a devastating collapse of the local press in the United States. In 2006, US newspapers sold over $49 billion of advertising, still employed over 74,000 people and reached some 52 million readers across the country on a weekly basis. By 2017, advertising revenues had fallen to just $16.5 billion (down 66%), newspaper staff had shrunk by 47% to just over 39,000 workers, and weekday circulation had fallen below 31 million.

Added to this weakened position a process of polarisation has been holding back the press in general. A study by the organisation More in Common found in 2019 that "the more news people consumed, the larger their Perception Gap". Among people who said they read the news "most of the time" the perception of reality was almost three times more distorted than among those who said they read the news "only now and then", suggesting that media coverage in the US was fuelling misperceptions.

Democracy is a regime of opinion; a conflict between interpretations; a conversation between voters and politicians (Innerarity and Colomina, 2020). But for this to hold, shared narratives and information are necessary preconditions of democratic public discourse. Democracy depends on citizens' ability to make informed decisions. But "polarized media doesn't emphasize commonalities, it weaponizes differences" (Klein, 2020: 149),

and social media has contributed to destroying our shared reality, the locus of democracy (Ressa, 2023: 18). Digitalisation has increased citizens' vulnerability to hate speech and misinformation, enhancing the ability of state and non-state actors to undermine the right to free and fair elections and the right to freedom of expression.

"In a world flooded with irrelevant information, clarity is power" – so begins Yuval Noah Harari's *21 lessons for the 21st century* (2018). But the process of digitalisation has altered the very concept of power to the advantage of the large technology platforms. They artificially push content that provokes reactions from users, reaping economic benefits by selling users' attention to advertisers. Information –and content in general–, has become the ultimate expression of a product to be exploited, regardless of its quality or veracity.

THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION AND THE INTERNET ARE IMPORTANT AS A KEY SPACE FOR CONTENT DISTRIBUTION AND INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE SOCIALISATION; BUT EQUALLY IMPORTANT IS THE ABILITY TO ACCESS QUALITY INFORMATION AND TRUSTWORTHY CONTENT.

A public good should not, by definition, be hostage to rivalry and speculation. But the digitisation of the public conversation on privately owned social networks and the manipulation of truth viralised via the superabundance of content available on the web are accelerating things in the opposite direction. This raises questions about the right to information and the internet as a key space for content distribution and individual and collective socialisation, but it also impacts the ability to access quality information and trustworthy content.

The UN's Special Rapporteur on the Internet, Frank La Rue, has acknowledged that the process of digitalisation has paradoxical implications for citizens' rights. Rather than creating a new human right to the internet, La Rue is in favour of building on existing human rights, like freedom of expression and freedom of association, in relation to internet use. But he also recognises that internet access is fast becoming an indispensable economic and social enabler in a hyper-connected world. A lack of access to the internet makes it increasingly difficult to take full advantage of existing human rights – whether that be freedom of expression, political rights, or social and economic freedoms. Hence our paradoxical current situation. The internet has "become a key means by which individuals can exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression", according to La Rue. Social networks provide platforms for citizen mobilisation and creating collective

awareness; but they are also multiplier spaces for an "information disorder" made up of disinformation, falsehoods, decontextualisation, biased leaks, orchestrated campaigns and censorship. This overabundance of content set loose amid the blurred lines between information and opinion, the essential and the anecdotal, has profoundly undermined the spaces for democratic discussion.

References

Castells, Manuel. *La era de la información. Economía, sociedad y cultura*, vol. 1. CDMX: Siglo xxi editores, 1996.

Darr, Joshua P.; Hitt, Matthew P. y Dunaway Johanna L. "Newspaper Closures Polarize Voting Behavior". *Journal of Communication*, vol. 68, no. 6 (November 2008), p. 1007-1028.

Han, Byung-Chul. *Infocracia*. Barcelona: Penguin Random House, 2022.

Harari, Yuval Noah. *21 lecciones para el siglo XXI*. Barcelona: Penguin Random House, 2018.

Innerarity, Daniel y Colomina, Carme. "La verdad en las democracias algorítmicas". *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, no. 124 (April 2020), p. 11-23.

Klein, Ezra. *Why We're Polarized*. London: Profile Books Ltd., 2020.

Nielsen, Rasmus Kleis (coord.). "Local journalism. The decline of newspapers and the rise of digital media". *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*, University of Oxford, 2015.

Ressa, Maria. *Cómo luchar contra un dictador*. Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2023.

Sloman, Steven A. y Fernbach, Philip. *The knowledge illusion: Why we never think alone*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2017.

RETRACING THE ROAD PATH TO LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Local democracy has advanced considerably along with the decentralisation processes that have developed around the world over the last decades. However, in recent years the decentralisation agenda has lost momentum, being displaced by the rise of solutionism and the localisation processes that emerged from the 2030 Agenda. With populist anti-democratic authoritarianism on the rise in various countries, local power can play a crucial role as a means of resistance, democratic control and coordination of the opposition.

Agustí Fernández de Losada

Senior Research Fellow
and Director
of the Global Cities
Programme at CIDOB

I n 2008, Bertrand Delanoë, then mayor of Paris and president of the organization United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), wrote in the preface to the first Global Report on *Decentralization and local democracy in the world (*GOLD I Report*)* that "the world is undergoing a quiet democratic revolution … local democracy is gaining momentum all over the world: from the African savanna villages, the highlands of Latin America to the *barangay* in the Philippines" (UCLG, 2008: 9) . Fifteen years on, events in countries like Turkey, Hungary, El Salvador and Tunisia, mean that Carolina Cosse, current UCLG president and mayor of Montevideo, would be hard pressed to speak of "advances" and "consolidation" and would likely have to use the word "regression".

Democracy, decentralisation and local autonomy

Accepting, as we do, the close link between decentralisation and democracy, we may state that local democracy has advanced considerably alongside the decentralisation processes taking place across the world in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (OECD, 2019).

Decentralisation, understood as a way of organising the state, and linked to efforts to bring the exercise of political power closer to citizens, has evolved around the world in both developed and developing countries, and even in more centralist and Jacobin settings (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Forms of Democracy and Decentralisation 1970–2016.
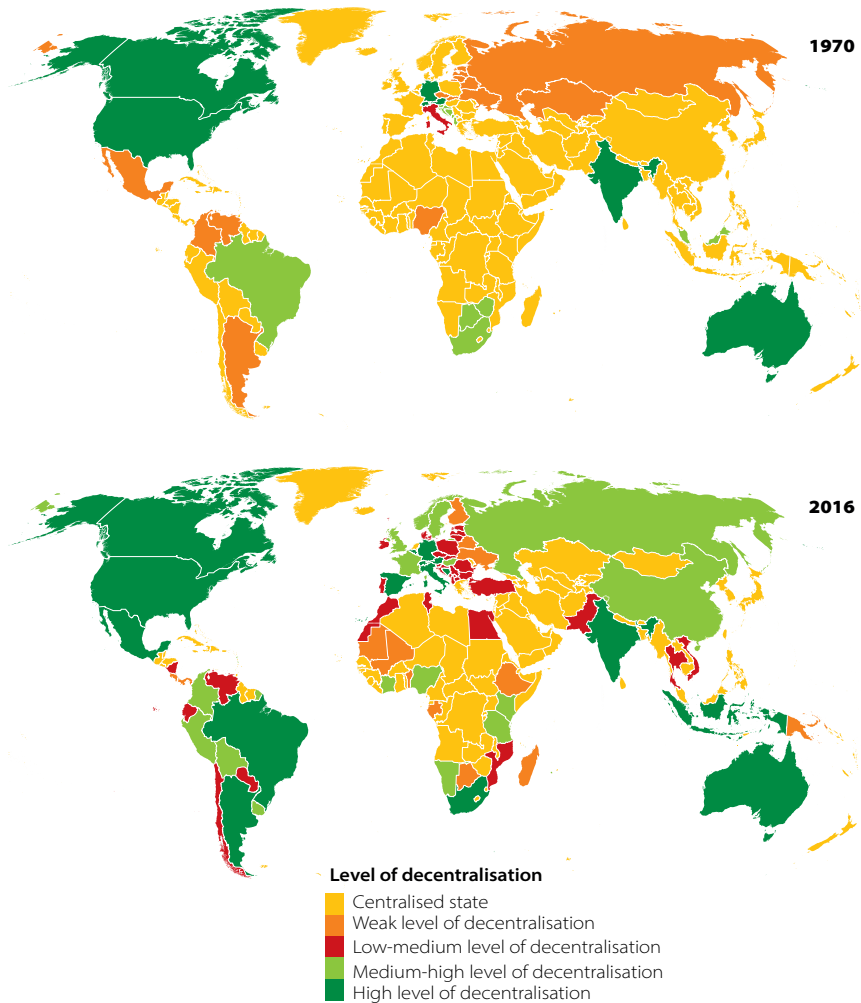
Source: UCLG (2017)

These advances can be linked to the growing consensus since the end of the 1980s on the fundamental role local governments play in processes of democratisation and sustainable development.[1] This consensus has been aided by the political and financial support provided by key multilateral operators, including United Nations agencies like UN-Habitat, the Council of Europe and the European Union itself, which has for years funded significant support programmes for local democratic governance.

In 1985 the member states of the Council of Europe adopted the European Charter of Local Self-Government,[2] among the most vital regulatory milestones related to decentralisation in the international sphere. The signatory countries agreed to safeguard the autonomy of local governments by guaranteeing their political, administrative and financial independence. The Charter, incorporated into the legal system of the 47 member states of the pan-European organisation and implemented in varying ways, expresses the conviction that the degree of autonomy local authorities enjoy can be considered the cornerstone of a true democracy.

DEBATES OVER FISCAL DECENTRALISATION, AUTONOMY AND FUNDING, AND EVEN OVER THE STATE MODEL AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF COMPETENCES, HAVE GIVEN WAY TO COLLABORATIVE LOGICS BASED ON CO-RESPONSIBILITY AND SHARED MANAGEMENT OF THE COMMONS, AS WELL AS DIRECT DEMOCRACY.

With these initiatives, global recognition for decentralisation has been more common in political declarations than normative measures. Yet, it has been on the political agenda. In 1996, the Istanbul Declaration adopted in the framework of the Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) set out the need to advance decentralisation processes through democratic local authorities. Then, in 1999 the Governing Council of UN-Habitat drove the creation of the United Nations Advisory Committee of Local Authorities (UNACLA), among whose greatest achievements was to push through the Guidelines on decentralization and strengthening of local authorities approved in 2007. The guidelines may lack binding character, but they remain the only international framework

---

1. This vision was reaffirmed at the United Nations conferences on environment and development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) and human settlements (Istanbul, 1996), the Millennium Summit (2000) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002).

2. European Charter of Local Self-Government. Strasbourg, 15th October 1985.

on the subject and they recognise political decentralisation as an essential component of democratisation.

Some of the leading international development cooperation actors have also supported the commitment to decentralisation and local democracy. The European Union, a key example, has for years linked support for decentralisation and local governance to its founding commitment to assist democratisation processes on a global scale. It has done this by setting the political agenda[3] and by bringing resources to the table via programmes based in specific geographical areas, such as URBAL, MED-URBS and Asia-URBS, and thematic programmes like the series of support instruments for local authorities.[4]

The rise of solutionism and direct democracy

However, in recent years the decentralisation agenda has lost some momentum and has been relegated to the background by the rise of the localisation and subsidiarity processes that emerged from the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. These processes have been the subject of academic analysis (Barber, 2013; Katz & Nowak, 2017) and are financially supported by major operators, particularly US philanthropic institutions. The pragmatic aspect of local governments is recognised – their capacity to solve the problems that most concern citizens. The focus is on their capacity to innovate and on the solutions they bring to the main challenges facing societies, whether that be climate change, the digital transition or the various expressions of inequality.

In the debates around local democracy, institutional and representative issues have become less prominent, while participatory structures and facilitating coordination with the range of actors operating in society have gained importance. Debates over fiscal decentralisation, autonomy and

---

3. See: Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee and Committee of the Regions "Local Authorities: Actors for Development", COM(2008) 626 final; and Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes", COM(2013) 280 final.

4. The first regulation to support decentralised cooperation was adopted in 1998 (Council Regulation (EC) No 1659/98 of 17 July 1998 on decentralised cooperation) and amended in 2004. Subsequently, from 2006 to 2020, the Commission promoted various versions of the thematic programme in support of non-state actors and local authorities.

funding, and even over the state model and the distribution of competences, have given way to collaborative logics based on co-responsibility and shared management of the commons, as well as direct democracy. In some settings this has helped advance processes to strengthen democracy and empower local societies, including highly innovative experiments such as those in Barcelona, Bogotá and Guangzhou.

Reclaiming the decentralisation agenda in order to hold back authoritarianism

Contradictory as it may seem, given the progress described above, in recent years populist and nationalist anti-democratic authoritarianism have been gaining ground in a range of places across the globe. The list of leaders challenging democratic institutions is growing, from the recently deposed Trump in the United States and Bolsonaro in Brazil to incumbents Putin in Russia, Modi in India, Orbán in Hungary, Erdoğan in Turkey, Bukele in El Salvador and Saied in Tunisia, to give just a few notable examples. Using strong, personality-based leadership styles, they focus on solving the supposedly "real" problems people face, arguing that efficiency should prevail over democracy. They concentrate and centralise power, weaken the various forms of democratic control and restrict all types of opposition.

LOCAL POWER OFTEN SERVES AS A MEANS OF RESISTANCE, DEMOCRATIC CONTROL AND COORDINATION OF THE OPPOSITION. WITH POLITICAL ALTERNATIVES THAT QUESTION DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS ON THE RISE, THERE IS AN URGENT NEED TO REVIVE THE DECENTRALISATION AGENDA.

In this context, local power often serves as a means of resistance, democratic control and coordination of the opposition. We saw this in the United States during the Trump administration, and we see it today in countries like Turkey and Hungary, where the mayors of major cities use democratic, liberal values and cosmopolitanism to oppose the central power and its authoritarian mindset. This explains why more and more authoritarian leaders are embarking on processes that aim to recentralise power, dismantle local democracy or simply remove local governments.

The federal structures of the United States and Brazil helped preserve democratic institutions during the Trump and Bolsonaro eras. In Hungary, the European Union serves as a buffer against Orbán's attempts to financially choke the government of the capital city, Budapest. In Turkey, Erdoğan

has judicialised his clash with the mayor of Istanbul, Ekhrem İmamoğlu, while the metropolitan government's importance has served to temper the president's attacks. But in countries like Tunisia and El Salvador weak institutional structures cannot hold back the president's attacks on local democracy (Fernández de Losada, 2023). In Tunisia Kais Saied abolished by decree all the country's municipal councils and now governs the municipalities through regional governors he has appointed. In El Salvador, Nayib Bukele is pushing through a reform that aims to abolish 80% of the country's municipalities and to control local power with an iron fist.

Using international pressure to counteract these dynamics is not easy, as the principle of non-interference in the affairs of a sovereign country is a major limitation. However, marginalising the decentralisation agenda in debates over democratic governance does not help either. Ensuring high-quality policies and solutions are promoted from the local level is crucial. But ensuring that power and competences are distributed in a manner that helps promote such solutions is, if possible, even more vital to guaranteeing democracy. Failure to do so weakens control mechanisms and effective local government. With political alternatives that question democratic institutions on the rise, there is an urgent need to revive the decentralisation agenda. Giving up could have irreparable consequences.

References

Barber, Benjamin. *If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities*. Yale University Press, 2013.

Fernández de Losada, Agustí. "La democracia local, una piedra en el zapato de los líderes autoritarios". *Público* (30 March 2023).

Katz, Bruce. & Novack, Jeremy. *The New Localism: How Cities Can Thrive in the Age of Populism*. Brookings Institution Press, 2018.

OCDE. "Making Decentralisation Work". *A handbook for policy-makers*. OCDE (2019)

UCLG. "Co-creating the Urban Future". *Fourth Report of the Global Observatory on Local Democracy and Decentralization – GOLD III* (2017).

UCLG. "Decentralization and Local Democracy in the World". *First Global Report of United Cities and Local Governments – GOLD I* (2008), p. 9.

CITIES FOR PEACE

Although cities can be settings for war and destruction, this chapter reflects on how they can also become major actors in the promotion of peace. Cities have to manage economic, environmental and social conflicts on a day-to-day basis, and through self-management, they pioneer public services, mobility, affordable housing, integration projects, social assistance and poverty reduction, while working to improve coexistence between generations, peoples and cultures. Cities also respond to global crises by deploying diplomacy, operating in networks and mobilising resources.

Pol Bargués
Senior Research Fellow, CIDOB

History will recall Ukrainian cities Mariupol and Bakhmut as sites of war and destruction; like Aleppo, devastated in the Syrian war, and Moscow, Stalingrad and Berlin in the battles during the Second World War. They are moonlit, ghost cities reduced to rubble, massacred, with survivors in hiding and infantry advancing inch by inch. Other cities like Sarajevo, Leningrad, Ceuta and Troy are remembered for withstanding prolonged brutal sieges. Yet, cities are also the settings for peace and hope.

Addams and the ideals of urban peace

Early in the 20th century, US philosopher Jane Addams published *Newer Ideals for Peace (2007[1907])*. She formulated the new ideals while observing citizen activism and cooperation in cosmopolitan Chicago's most populous and poorest neighbourhoods, which also hosted the most immigrants. America's most dispossessed people, she found, combined the compassion and empathy needed to develop community values with a cosmopolitan sensitivity when it came to respecting and understanding the individuality

of new arrivals from across the Atlantic. At the same time, she noted that even if immigrants shed numerous habits acquired over generations, they also strove to understand one another and make connections in a new world. Addams' (2017[2012]) contribution went beyond the ideals of peace – she also participated in the city's evolution. She co-founded Chicago's Hull House, which used innovative educational techniques, art and social work programmes to help migrants and the needy to integrate; she also fought alongside the US suffragette movement and led pacifist discussions during the First World War.

URBAN SPACES HAVE HAD A SECONDARY ROLE IN PEACE STUDIES, WHICH TENDS TO PLACE STATES CENTRE STAGE. IT IS AS IF WAR AND PEACE HAPPEN "IN" CITIES, BUT NOT "FROM" OR "BECAUSE OF" CITIES.

A far cry from the eternal, static and abstract peace based on a treaty between sovereigns imagined by philosophers since Immanuel Kant, Addams perceived an active, dynamic peace amidst the bustle of the city that was full of compassion and kindness, nourished by the people's mobilisation, cooperation and activity. She believed that cities' dynamism and "generous experiments" meant they were "cradles of liberty" and "centers of radicalism" in which people find space for their interests, welcome others, form relationships, innovate and successfully overcome conflict. "These various peoples who are gathered together in the immigrant quarters of a cosmopolitan city worship goodness for its own value", Addams observed (2007: 11). She believed that their goodness was not only valuable for governing the community, but could potentially serve as an inspiration to all: "their hopes and dreams are a prophecy of the future development in city government, in charity, in education, so their daily lives are a forecast of coming international relations"). They were, according to Addams, the "humble harbingers of the Newer Ideals of Peace" (ibid., 12-13).

Despite winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931, Addams' contributions, relating peace ideals to the evolution of cities, have largely gone unnoticed. In all likelihood, this is because peace is too abstract and general for urban studies, and cities are too concrete and individual for peace studies. Urban studies have traditionally focused on planning the development of cities and their infrastructure to achieve order, wellbeing and growth; while more critical studies have focused on the tensions generated by the uniformity and rationality of large-scale urban renewal, in which the context is ignored and some people face exclusion and marginalisation. But the debate is rarely framed in terms of conflict and peace. The peace generated in cities – from ideas and

inhabitants' interactions and self-organisation as they seek to foster social harmony and imagine new futures – has been of little relevance historically (for an exception, see Jacobs, 1961). Similarly, urban spaces have had a secondary role in peace studies, which tends to place states and peace negotiations conducted by political leaders centre stage. Even in "bottom-up" peace processes – with civil society at the centre – urban spaces remain far from the focus of analysis. It is as if war and peace happen "in" cities, but not "from" or "because of" cities.

Cities as architects of sustainable peace

This focus has changed over recent years. The background has moved to the foreground as is the leading actor. Because cities have to manage economic and social conflicts on a day-to-day basis, and because self-management means they are pioneers in public services, mobility, affordable housing, integration projects, cultural exchange, social assistance and poverty reduction. Because cities are resilient and enable highly diverse people to coexist. Annika Björkdahl (2013) has studied cities' importance to peace-building processes in conflict zones. Belfast, Mostar, Nicosia and Sarajevo, Björkdahl notes, are all cities that endured bouts of extreme violence and whose ethno-nationalist divisions persisted following the implementation of national peace projects and state-centric governance models, which reproduced the logic of walls and segregation. Nevertheless, concrete peace practices are also emerging in these cities. People have managed to reconcile themselves with the past, to trust, empathise and reconnect, to share neighbourhoods and common spaces, and to build interdependencies that bridge war's fiercest divisions. Peace processes should empower urban dynamics to achieve greater national stability, Björkdahl believes, and help peace take root over generations.

Cities are not just microcosms striving to manage conflicts and working to adapt to the effects of global crises. Their emancipatory projects are also linked to the idea of sustainable peace at global level, as the New Urban Agenda of the United Nations (Habitat III) pointed out in 2016. With the number of people living in cities expected to double by 2050, the agenda provides inspiration for the planning, design, financing, development and governance of cities to ensure that they can contribute to sustainable development and peace in plural societies.

Marta Galceran-Vercher (2023) has analysed how cities' diplomacy and mobilisation of resources are fundamental tools when responding to crises and emergency situations. The solidarity aid received by Ukraine

shows as much. As well as the symbolic displays of municipal solidarity and diplomacy, European cities have contributed a range of resources, both tangible (material donations like electrical generators and transformers, fire trucks and trams) and intangible (such as the transfer of knowledge and best practices) and have taken in hundreds of thousands of refugees. Increasingly, international platforms and partnerships like Mayors for Peace and Peace Messenger Cities that use the power of "city diplomacy" to promote peace, security and development in conflict zones are gaining momentum (Musch et al., 2008).

CITIES SEEK ALTERNATIVE, DECENTRALISED, PRAGMATIC SOLUTIONS. BEING FURTHER FROM THE CENTRES OF POWER, CITIES DO NOT FOLLOW MILITARY, CENTRALISING AND BUREAUCRATIC LOGICS; NOR DO THEY HAVE BORDERS TO PATROL, OR NATIONAL IDENTITIES OR SECURITY TO PROTECT.

Shows of solidarity of this kind also take place between states. Their greater capacity, resources and competences mean they can be much more pivotal. There have also been infamous episodes of violence and human rights violations perpetrated *in* cities and *by* municipal governments and neighbours. But cities' capacity to facilitate coexistence should not be underestimated, and nor should the unique potential of municipal solidarity in international relations.

Being further from the centres of power, cities do not follow military, centralising and bureaucratic logics; nor do they have borders to patrol, or national identities or security to protect. Quite the contrary, cities seek alternative, decentralised, pragmatic solutions that can integrate and work towards day-to-day satisfaction and improve coexistence between generations, peoples and cultures. Perpetually growing, bursting with challenges and trends, teeming with neighbours, migrants and passers-by, cities innovate and inspire. As Addams said (2007[1907]), progress requires "human dynamic character", and it was in the dynamism of cities that she glimpsed the new ideals for peace and progress.

References

Addams, Jane. *Newer Ideals of Peace*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007 [1907].

Addams, Jane. *Twenty Years at Hull House: With Autobiographical Notes and Sixty-Three Illustrations*. Pantianos Classics, 2017 [1912].

Björkdahl, Annika. "Urban Peacebuilding". *Peacebuilding, vol.* 1, no. 2 (2013), p. 207-221

Galceran-Vercher, Marta. "Multilateralismo urbano en tiempos de guerra: ¿de la solidaridad simbólica a la solidaridad pragmática?" *CIDOB Opinion*, no. 748 (2023)

Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House, 1961.

Musch, Arne, Chris van der Valk, Alexandra Sizoo, Kian Tajbakhsh. *City Diplomacy: The Role of Local governments in Conflict Prevention, Peace-Building, Post-Conflict Reconstruction*. The Hague, VNG International, 2008.

THE URBAN DIMENSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION CRISIS:
THE CASE OF BARCELONA

The successive world humanitarian crises of the last decade have laid bare the shortcomings of asylum and reception systems with dramatic consequences for people in need of international protection. This is a crisis whose impact is eminently local, since it is in the municipal space that reception takes place and the right to asylum is realised. This chapter analyses the limits of the international protection system in the Spanish context and sets out some of the responses of municipal actors, focusing on the case of Barcelona.

Francesco Pasetti

Research Fellow in Migration, CIDOB

International protection is suffering an endemic crisis. The international humanitarian emergencies of the past decade have laid bare the limits of asylum and reception systems, as well as their dramatic consequences for applicants and beneficiaries of international protection (ABIPs). In the public and political discourse of the European Union (EU), the international protection crisis has been treated as a supranational and national governance issue. But its impact has been eminently local. After all, it is in the municipal space that reception takes place and the right to asylum is realised. More specifically, it is in the urban space, where most refugees reside (Muggah y Abdenur, 2018). In what follows, I will address this crisis in the Spanish context, indicating some of the limits of its international protection system, and reflecting on their impact at local level and on the responses provided by municipal actors, with particular focus on the case of Barcelona.

The structural limits of the international protection system

For someone fleeing their country, international protection entitles people to rights in their host country, as it guarantees legal and administrative recognition and allows access to

the host country's system of rights and services (e.g., housing; medical, legal and linguistic assistance; economic benefits; training and language courses; and access to the labour market).[1] In Spain, this right is not always realised. In part, this is due to the magnitude of the migration challenges the country has faced over the years, from the refugee crisis of 2015 to the recent humanitarian emergency in Ukraine. But it is also attributable to the limitations of the international protection system (Güell Torrent *et al.*, 2022).

The first such limitation is the issue of accessing the protection, both in terms of procedures and decisions. In recent years, especially at times of increased applications, the limited capacity of the Asylum and Refugee Office (OAR) and the growth of the black market for appointments have made international protection procedures almost inaccessible. According to the Spanish Commission for Refugees (CEAR, in Spanish), in 2022, the average waiting time to submit an asylum application was seven months. This is by no means exceptional, with the trend relatively stable since 2017. The granting of protection is another area that affects access. Spain issues the third-highest proportion of negative decisions in the EU, with six out of ten applications for international protection rejected (59.5%), according to Ministry of the Interior data. This restrictive approach, relative to EU counterparts, has been constant over recent years. Those waiting to submit their asylum applications and those who receive negative decisions suffer similar issues: lack of legal protection due to administrative irregularity and inability to use the services and benefits of the reception system (the first group because they must formalise their application in order to acquire access; the second because a negative decision means they exit the system).

> THE INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION CRISIS HAS BEEN TREATED AS A SUPRANATIONAL AND NATIONAL GOVERNANCE ISSUE. BUT ITS IMPACT HAS BEEN EMINENTLY LOCAL. IT IS IN THE MUNICIPAL SPACE THAT RECEPTION TAKES PLACE AND THE RIGHT TO ASYLUM IS REALISED.

---

1. This protection begins when the application is submitted. The scope and duration of the benefits vary, depending on the applicant's financial resources and the type of protection granted. In the EU, four forms of international protection are distinguished: refugee status, subsidiary protection, humanitarian protection and temporary protection. Added to these is the status of asylum seeker which, once granted, guarantees legal protection and access to rights and services, albeit to a lesser degree.

The second limitation of the international protection system is one of capacity – in terms of places, budget, staff and competencies. Capacity has been increased over recent years, but in fits and starts – building out from emergency situations is one issue, but above all there has been a failure to adequately adjust to real demand. This is a qualitative limitation, as it is detrimental to the ability to provide services adapted to the needs of ABIPs, as observed in the case of LGTBI persons (Güell, 2020). But it is also a problem of quantitative nature and scope: budget shortages, and the lack of places, staff and specific structures prevent ABIPs from exercising the rights to which they are entitled by law. According to the CASASIL survey carried out in 2019 in Catalonia, one in four applicants has found themselves living in a street situation at some time since arriving in Spain. This alarming reality has also been denounced by the Ombudsman. Today, the gap between formal and substantive access to rights is also emerging in the case of Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection, especially when it comes to accessing housing and the labour market (ECRE, 2023).

The third limitation concerns the design of the pathway within the reception system. The transition to the second phase is among the most critical points, with the expected degree of autonomy difficult to achieve in practice. This problem affects the pathway's underlying logic, which envisages that after 18 months inside the system (24 months for vulnerable profiles), the person will have acquired a job, a home, a certain command of the language and will be able to face the subsequent stages of integration in full independence. This is often at odds with the reality ABIPs encounter, with high unemployment rates, precarious contracts and unaffordable rent reducing the chances of achieving effective autonomy (Garcés-Mascareñas and Pasetti, 2019). For many people, the end of the pathway is thus socio-economic exclusion. The recent restricting of the second phase to users who obtain international protection[2] increases this risk for people who remain in the first phase, awaiting a decision. There is as yet no empirical evidence on the impact of this regulatory change, but it is reasonable to assume that losing access to the set of services and tools meant to promote autonomy in the second phase will increase the difficulties these people face when attempting to integrate after leaving the system.

---

2. Instructions 6/2020 and 1/2021 fundamentally change the Spanish international protection system, ending its exceptional position as the only country in Europe that did not distinguish between the statuses of applicant for and beneficiary of international protection.

These issues with the international protection system have impact at the local level, where the process of integrating ABIPs takes shape. Administrative irregularity, the obstacles hindering the chance of benefitting from the rights and services of the reception system and the risks of social exclusion continue to pose crucial challenges to municipal governments.

Local responses to the international protection crisis: the case of Barcelona

Local administrations' exclusion from the institutional framework of the international protection system and the failure to recognise their competences in the field of asylum have led them to react in a range of ways. First and foremost by supporting each other and modifying the resources available for social services, as in the case of applicants living in street situations, who in various cities have been taken in by the services for the unhoused. In Barcelona, this has been coordinated within the Care Service for Immigrants, Emigrants and Refugees (SAIER). Founded in 1989, SAIER has exponentially expanded the care provided to applicants since the 2015 refugee crises, specially from 2017-2018 onwards (from 811 people in 2014 to 8,387 in 2020), adapting its institutional architecture and range of services accordingly (SAIER, 2021).

The second response has been the development of genuine "urban asylum policies", in other words specific municipal reception programmes that complement those of the national system, and are aimed at people who are waiting to enter, who have been unable to enter, or have already left (Bazurli y Kaufmann, 2022). This trend has been particularly notable in large cities. For example, in Barcelona's asylum policies began with the launch of the Barcelona City of Refuge programme, which was established in 2015 as an emergency plan to prepare the city to welcome and assist refugees and then settled as a permanent system for the reception and integration of ABIPs. Another example created in 2015 is the Nausica programme, which aims to assist vulnerable applicants. The range of actions was diversified over the following years, with the collaboration of civil society organisations.

Finally, in parallel, broader coordinated action has taken place involving local and civil society actors, within the framework of migration-related city networks (Lacroix , 2022) . These networks play an increasingly important role in global migration governance. Thus far, the main initiative in Spain has been led by the Cities of Refuge network. Barcelona City Council was the driving force and key player in the process of developing the network,

which emerged in antithesis to national and European asylum policies, and sought to counteract them and overcome their failures. In March 2016, for example, in reaction to the failure of European resettlement mechanisms, the city government reached a pre-agreement with the municipality of Athens to resettle 100 people in Barcelona. The network grew rapidly both domestically and beyond national borders, with 50 Spanish municipalities joining after the launch in August 2015 and other European municipalities following over subsequent months and years (e.g. Paris and Lampedusa).

However, the impact of these actions has inevitably been limited by the local actors' "residual" position in Spain's international protection governance model. The lack of competencies restricts the scope of their action and limits access to funding channels and budgetary resources. Moreover, acting in parallel and on the margins of the national system causes a lack of coordination and wastes resources.

ADMINISTRATIVE IRREGULARITY, THE OBSTACLES HINDERING THE CHANCE OF BENEFITTING FROM THE RIGHTS AND SERVICES OF THE RECEPTION SYSTEM AND THE RISKS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION CONTINUE TO POSE CRUCIAL CHALLENGES TO MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS.

To solve the problems with international protection in Spain municipal actors must be involved in the national system's framework of planning and cooperation. This would enable multiple synergies to be developed between municipalities – taking advantage of existing ad hoc programmes and horizontal networks – as well as with the various actors and levels in the public administration, in order to ensure that their actions are both complementary and aligned. This should help effectively channel the solidarity and potential of civil society and other private actors.

The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine presented both a new challenge and an opportunity to experiment with novel governance solutions. These include progress on the agreement over decentralised cooperation with the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), which includes 11 autonomous communities and the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP). Another example is the plan for hosting refugees from Ukraine, developed by FEMP working alongside the Spanish government. It is hoped that these examples are also the first steps towards a genuine multilevel international protection governance model.

References

Bazurli, Raffaele and Kaufmann, David. "Insurgent Asylum Policies in European Cities: A Multi-Level Governance Perspective". *Urban Affairs Review*, vol. 59, no. 4 (May 2022).

ECRE-European Council on Refugees and Exiles. "Measures in response to the arrival of displaced people fleeing the war in Ukraine". *Information Sheet* (31 March 2023).

Garcés-Mascareñas, Blanca and Pasetti, Francesco. "¿A más solicitudes de asilo igual recepción? El sistema de acogida en España desde 2015". *Anuario CIDOB de la Inmigración 2019* (November 2019), p. 114-126.

Güell Torrent, Berta; Jiménez-García, Juan Ramón and Pasetti, Francesco. "Informe nacional para España NIEM 2022: sobre el sistema de acogida e integración para solicitantes y beneficiarios de protección internacional". *NIEM National Report 2022*. Barcelona: CIDOB, 2022.

Güell, Berta. "¿Es España realmente LGTBI-friendly con las personas refugiadas? Las deficiencias del sistema de asilo español para el colectivo LGTBI". *Notes Internacionals CIDOB*, no. 233 (June 2020).

Lacroix, Thomas. "Migration-related city networks: a global overview". *Local Government Studies*, vol. 48, no. 6 (2022).

Muggah, Robert and Abdenur, Adriana Erthal. "Refugees and the City. The twenty-first-century Front Line". World Refugee Council Research Paper, num. 2 (July 2018). Centre for International Governance Innovation.

SAIER -Servicio de Atención a Inmigrantes, Emigrantes y Refugiados. *Memòria del Servei d'Atenció a Immigrants, Emigrants i Refugiats (SAIER) i programa Nausica*. Barcelona City Council, 2021.

CIDOB

BARCELONA
CENTRE FOR
INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS

50 years

We live in complex times shaped by the concatenation and confluence of multiple and interrelated destabilizing events, including the unfinished postpandemic recovery, the war in Ukraine –and the ensuing food and energy crises, rising inflation or tightening debt–, eroded democratic systems, and the climate emergency.

This convergence and prolongation of crises, alongside tepid global economic prospects, is proving devastating for large swathes of the world's population, who face sharp limitations in their access to basic goods and rights such as food, water, housing, energy, information and digital connectivity, local democracy, peace and humanitarian protection.

This is the context in which this *CIDOB Report* sets out to analyse the causes of the current global crisis in access to basic goods and rights, as well as its impacts and the responses to it. The approach is eminently urban, as cities are both home to most of the world's population and the places where worsening inequalities and vulnerabilities are manifesting themselves most starkly.

GLOBAL**CITIES**

Ajuntament de
Barcelona