

2024 GHRP Annual Conference

CONCEPT NOTE WORKSHOP 1

Human Rights in the Digital Age: Balancing AI, Technology, and Governance in Smart Cities

Tuesday 5 November 2024, 11:00 – 12 :30,

Maison de la Paix (Pétale 5), *Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2E, Geneva*

TOPIC

As digital technologies and AI increasingly shape the infrastructure and governance of urban settings and impact people's lives in cities, safeguarding human rights becomes a central challenge. Without proper regulation, the widespread use of AI and other technologies risks infringing on fundamental rights and exacerbating inequality and discrimination.

Various multilateral initiatives seek to regulate AI. The **UN Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on AI** released its final report outlining "a blueprint for addressing AI-related risks and sharing its transformative potential globally." At the Summit of the Future world leaders adopted the Pact for the Future that includes a **Global Digital Compact** for global cooperation to harness the potential of digital technology and close digital divides. UN-Habitat, through Resolution HSP/HA.2/Res.1, has been tasked with developing International Guidelines on People-Centered Smart Cities. The objective is to ensure that the use of these technologies in urban infrastructure and governance ensures their sustainability, inclusivity and respect for human rights. The **Council of Europe** adopted in 2024 an international instrument on the development, design and application of AI systems.

In the meantime in Geneva:

The recently adopted **UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Local Government and Human Rights** ([A/HRC/RES/57/12](#)) emphasizes the crucial role that local governments play in embedding human rights in the regulation of digital infrastructure and AI use in urban contexts. The **International Telecommunication Union (ITU)** contributes to sustainable smart city development by setting standards and promoting global collaboration. Its '[Guide for smart and sustainable city leaders](#)' sets out a strategy for sustainable local digital transformation. Local authorities play a crucial role in smart city development and thus bear the responsibility to ensure that technologies are deployed in ways that protect citizens' rights.

This workshop will explore the intersection of human rights protection with AI use and innovation, focusing on regulatory frameworks and ethical considerations required to ensure that smart city technologies are people-centered and guided by human rights protection. It will focus in particular on international regulations, exploring how the ITU standards and the UN Human Rights Council resolutions complement each other in shaping the governance of digital technologies and guaranteeing that it goes hand in hand with respect for human rights.

The workshop will gather policymakers from both international and local levels to explore the critical roles of various stakeholders—including local and regional governments, the international community, and civil society—in shaping law-making processes that ensure digitalization and AI usage align with human rights protection. The discussion aims to bridge the gap between innovation and regulation, ensuring that human rights are prioritized in the technological evolution of smart cities.

WORKSHOP MODALITY AND KICK-OFF SPEAKERS

The workshop will begin with kick-off speakers, each presenting for 3-5 minutes, offering key insights on the topic. Following these brief presentations, the floor will be open for all participants to contribute their perspectives, fostering a dynamic and inclusive discussion

- **Jovan Kurbalija** – Head of the Geneva Internet Platform
- **Sharon Weinblum** – Counselor - Delegate General of Wallonia-Brussels, Permanent Mission of Belgium to the UN in Geneva
- **Woohyun Kang** – Second Secretary, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the UN in Geneva
- **Olivier Alais** – Program Coordinator for Technology and Human Rights, International Telecommunications Union (ITU)
- **Tim Engelhardt** – Human Rights Officer, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

MODERATOR

- **Kamelia Kemileva** – Co-Director of the Global Cities Hub

PARTNERS

Global Cities Hub, Geneva Internet Platform