

Starting Espoo's Journey as a Human Rights City

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Designing for Services

TEAM 3

Leo Ash

Ina Bergli Henriksen

Joni Lappalainen

Yuchen Tang



About this work

This work was completed as part of a Master's course titled Design for Services at Aalto University. As part of this course, masters' students in design collaborated with the City of Espoo on a variety of issues as identified by city departments.

The work for this report took place between September 2nd to October 17th, 2025.

We are sincerely grateful to our partners for having entrusted us with this important topic and for their diligent support, and to our course supervisors for all their mentoring and coaching.

Report co-authors:

Leo Ash (leo.ash@aalto.fi)

Ina Bergli Henriksen (berglihenriksen@proton.me)

Joni Lappalainen (jonipetterilappalainen@gmail.com)

Yuchen Tang (tang.yuchen@yahoo.com)

Espoo City Partners:

Espoo Mayor's Office

Course Supervisors:

Nuria Solsona

Martina Čaić

Anna Viljakainen



Executive Summary

This report details a 7-week project collaboration between Aalto University Masters of Design students and the City of Espoo's Mayor's Office to investigate what it could mean for Espoo to become a Human Rights City, a designation amongst an international group of cities committed to upholding human rights, and offer the city concrete next steps to do so.

Using service design methods, we sought to understand the current dynamics of the city to understand how becoming a Human Rights City might impact Espoo, and the dynamics of how Espoo might become such a city. As part of our research, we interviewed city staff, local residents, hosted a city council discussion and facilitated a workshop with local resident representatives.

Our fieldwork and research culminated in five insights that informed our ultimately deliverables; the experience of human rights as a mosaic; the importance of establishing shared understanding; the need to concretize human rights to daily life in the city; the need for engaging and accessible participatory channels, and that implementing human rights locally can be politically contentious. Based on these insights we have proposed four design outputs intended to aid Espoo with concrete next steps towards becoming a Human Rights City, through establishing shared understanding across residents, city staff, and councillors of the relevance of human rights.

All three actors interact with each other and help feed into both a bottoms-up and top-down approach to Human Rights Cities that promotes the realization of rights. Therefore, we proposed a card deck to help concretize the relevance of rights to everyday life as a tool for communication, a roadmap targeted at City staff to help understand the potential of Human Rights Cities as a tool to leverage for their work, a workshop template to collect stories of human rights experiences to help bridge divides on the relevance of human rights, and a dashboard concept from the literature as a tool to scale understanding of human rights work across the city.

Only through a common understanding and unified action, do we believe Espoo can have the best outcome on its journey as a Human Rights Cities.

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Resident Stories: Bibek's Job Hunt

Bibek Rao's family has been in Finland for more than 20 years. He himself just graduated recently from Metropolia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki with good grades. Despite several months into the job hunt and having applied to no fewer than a couple dozen job openings, each time with a polished cover letter and CV, he has received no responses. He knows the job market is difficult at this moment, and as a new graduate, it could be even more difficult. Still, it somehow seems some of his Finnish classmates have it easier, even though they came from the same school and had the same experiences.

Bibek's experience is not unique. What is not visible to him is how employers in Finland make hiring decisions. In a study released in 2024 by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment focusing on second-generation immigrants between ages 24-28, despite the same job qualifications, jobseekers with foreign names receive 1.4-3.6 times lower callbacks versus native Finns (Ahmad, 2025). Applicants with English sounding names required 1.4 times the number of applications as native-Finns to achieve the same response rate, rising to 1.9 and 2.5 times for Russian and Somali ethnic backgrounds respectively (ibid.). While the trend has improved over time, the differences remain large. Somali applicants, for example, needed 3.9 times as many applications as native-Finns in 2016. On the whole, immigrants in Finland are more likely to face underemployment and unemployment compared to native Finns, with worse outcomes especially for first-generation immigrants (Nichols & Virsinger, 2021). This becomes a relevant issue when considering foreign-backgrounds make up one-fifth to one-fourth of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area population.

Bibek's story shows that while Finland is a highly advanced and developed country, the discussion around human rights nevertheless remains relevant today.

Introduction & Project brief

Espoo is exploring the possibility of establishing itself as a Human Rights City and joining the Human Rights Cities Network (HRCN). We have been working with the City of Espoo's Mayor's Office to conduct a service design research project on this topic. The broader brief for this project has been to: **1) define and clarify what it could mean to be a human rights city for Espoo, and 2) offer concrete next steps.**

To answer these objectives we have conducted research on based on four research questions:

What does 'human rights' mean at the city level?

How do city officials and the city council understand human rights at the moment?
How do they see human rights relating to their work and what kind of practices and communication is already adopted at the city level to address human rights issues?

What is the Human Rights Cities Network, and what is the value in joining it?

What does it mean for Espoo to become a Human Rights City? How could joining the network help to develop the city and how do we ensure that the development reflects the needs of the citizens?

What roles might different actors play in joining the Human Rights Cities Network?

What kind of implications will joining the network bring to each stakeholder and how could all actors organize around the common objective of joining the Human Rights Cities Network?

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What are Human Rights Cities? A Brief

Overview

A 'human rights city' (or 'HRC', used interchangeably from here on) refers to cities that have committed to upholding international human rights standards, and have implemented measures to ensure delivery towards human rights issues becomes embedded into the workings of the city. Local authorities, community and local actors work together to deliver on rights issues the local government is responsible for and influences (Vainio et al. Abo Academy University, 2022; FRA - Framework Reinforcing Rights Locally, 2021).

The 'localization of rights' to the city level represents a growing awareness of the role cities and other forms of local governments play in protecting and upholding human rights. While national bodies adhere and oblige to international human rights laws, local authorities are often the actual providers of service and are the closest to issues encountered by citizens (Vainio et al. Abo Academy University, 2022). Increasingly, local authorities are also adopting non-legally binding declarations on good local governance, proactively enhancing the city's role towards respecting - not violating, protecting - prevent violations, and fulfilling - proactive work, human rights (ibid.).

Being a human rights city can provide enhanced mandate and leverage to act via more institutionalized structures and a commitment to uphold the city as a human rights city. Importantly, an aim of a human rights city is also to embed a culture of human rights into the daily life of the city, where citizens understand the rights they hold and local authorities and actors understand the duties they bear. Experiences from other Human Rights Cities show improvements to the quality of local policy-making; strengthening the autonomy of the local government vis-à-vis the national government; and adds to the profile of the city as a just city (Davis et al., 2017).

Internationally, the Human Rights Cities Network is a worldwide network of 100+ human rights cities, of which, a dozen human rights cities are located in Europe. Prominent examples include Utrecht (Netherlands), Barcelona (Spain), York (UK), and

Vienna (Austria). In Europe, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) supports European HRCs with guiding frameworks and toolkits and can be viewed as a guiding body.

It is important to note that becoming a Human Rights City is not a formally accredited process with established criteria. Cities can choose approaches to work on human rights as befitting their context. However, Human Rights Cities generally follow several key characteristics.

1. Public commitment to uphold human rights standards

The City, as a local authority, formally declares to commit to upholding human rights declarations and standards. The declaration is typically by the political leadership of the city, and grants the initiative to being a human rights city sustainability. (Vainio et al. Abo Academy University, 2022). While the Fundamental Rights Agency have recommended committing to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, European cities have also adopted other relevant declarations including the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City, Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2. Establish Institutional Structures

Establish institutional structures, such as designated offices, teams or persons to look after and coordinate human rights issues. A designated outlet gives a channel to human rights issues work (ibid.). Other structures can include representatives from elected officials, citizen participatory bodies, and ombudsmen offices (FRA - Framework Reinforcing Rights Locally, 2021).

3. Work in Rights Issues Areas

Cities can choose to work in rights areas both internally and externally. Internally, cities can focus on reviews of existing policies, strategies, program areas and laws for alignment to human rights or include elements of capacity building towards mainstreaming rights (Raoul Wallenberg Institute, n.d.).

Externally, cities can work to target rights issue areas in the city, including engaging with affected residents, collaborating and capacity building with local partners, and engagement and coordination with other orders of government (Raoul Wallenberg Institute, n.d.; FRA - Framework Reinforcing Rights Locally, 2021, Dragicevic & Porter - Maytree, Canada, 2020).

Cities can likewise choose to mainstream human rights as a common practice in city operations, or adopt a 'sectoral' approach targeting priority areas (Vainio et al. Abo Academy University, 2022).

4. Monitoring & Metrics

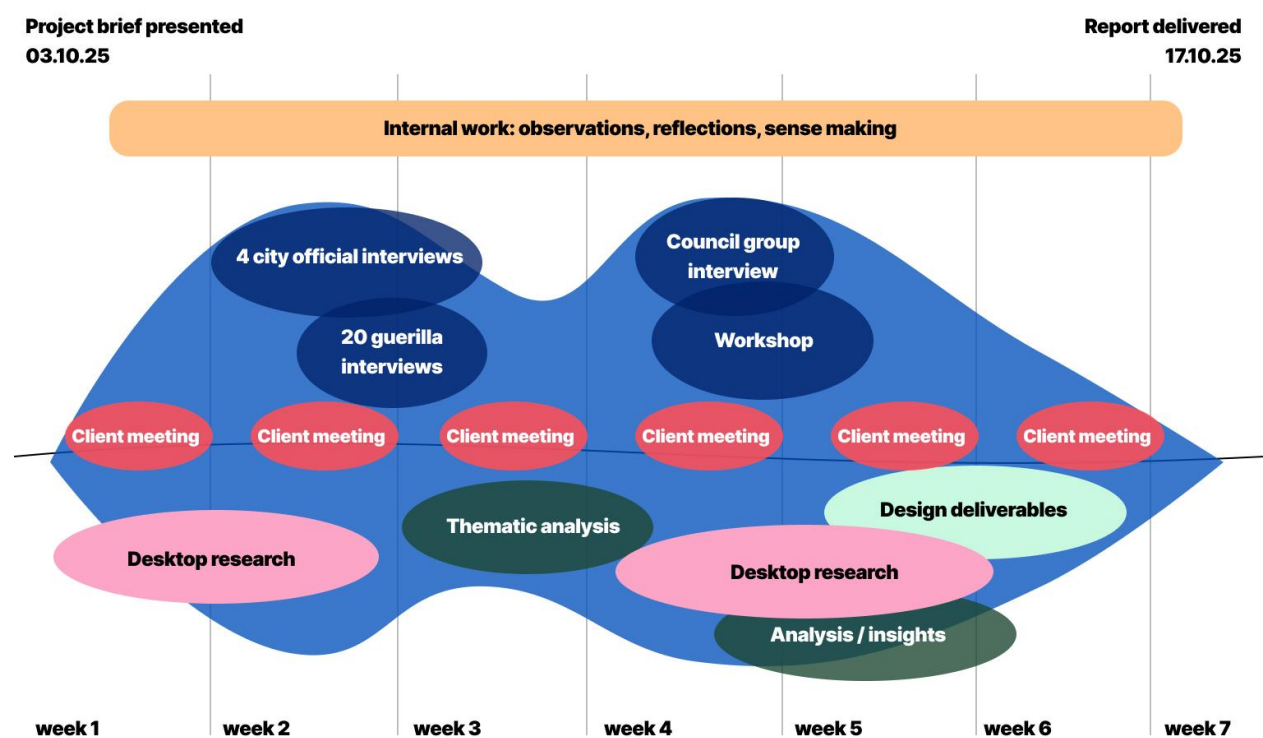
Establish indicators to monitor and report on progress of human rights work in the city. Indicator reports further communicate and make transparent the initiatives of the city to citizens and grants the initiatives accountability.



Methodology

The project is part of the course Designing for Services and the methods used therefore reflect the field of service design, applying a human-centered approach. We wanted to understand and design for the human experience of living in Espoo as well as the experience of working for the city within the "speculative" context of becoming a Human Rights City. With this project we are attempting to understand the topic (Human Rights Cities), the context (Espoo) and how the two combine, but within a limited time frame. Our research and findings therefore can act as a starting point for talking about HRC, meaning that our conclusions and solutions should be considered as recommendations. Our contribution is a starting point for further research and discussion.

Figure 1. Timeline of project



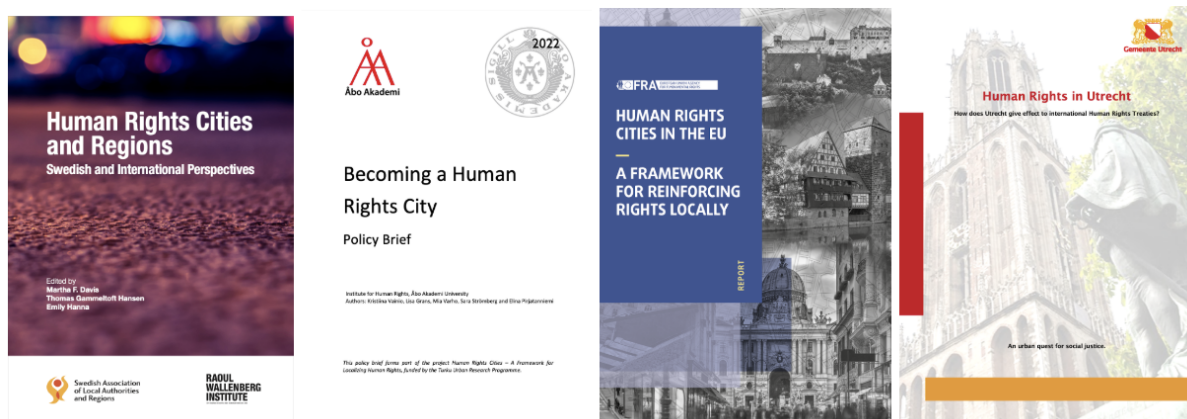
Data collection

We combined qualitative research methods with extensive desktop research, aiming to combine the abstract level with the concrete to form an understanding of where Espoo

should focus their work with Human Rights. We kept coming back to these sources throughout the entire process.

The first phase of the data collection included four semi-structured digital interviews with city officials from different departments and guerilla interviews with 20 residents in different Espoo areas. Questions centered on current Human Rights understanding, current practices and the most pressing issues in Espoo. The longer interviews were recorded and transcribed while notes and voice recorded observations resulted from the guerilla interviews.

Image 1. Human Rights Cities related reports



Analysis

For analyzing the findings from the initial phase we used a combination of thematic analysis and open coding, in which every interview is transcribed and read through while making notes on post-its of any interesting topic, quote and word. After each person have read through the post-its are combined and key themes are identified through discussion. After conducting the same process with all interviews the post-its were combined to inform how the themes:

in disadvantaged positions from the start of life. Racism, economics, loneliness, safety, human trafficking, mental health and shadow societies were other issues mentioned.

Current practices

“We are doing a lot” - a quote from the interview that we agree with. Espoo has many existing good practices and many individual people working hard to make Espoo an equal and good place to live. Espoo story, collaboration with organizations, resourcing, collecting data and encouraging to speak up are some of the measures. However, as one interviewee points out, these are hard to coordinate and oversee.

In Phase 2 we hosted a group interview with city council members representing 7 different political parties (center party not present), where topics of Human Rights, issues in Espoo, networks and representation were discussed. Later we hosted a workshop with a diverse resident group investigating how Human Rights are understood and contextualized by people in their diverse everyday context. The workshop design will be explained later in the “Human Rights Card Deck” section.

Figure 2. Participants in research

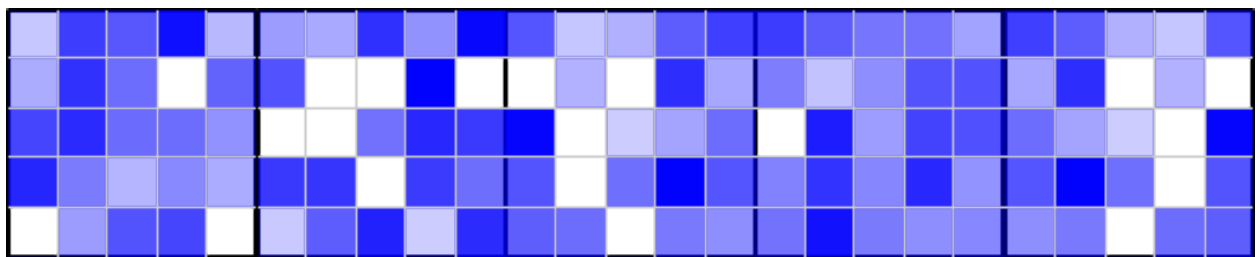


Insights and data

Insight 1: Human Rights as a Mosaic

It can be difficult to understand why human rights should feel relevant in the 21st century, especially in a location like Finland which has the reputation of the world's happiest country. While rights are not explicitly and outrightly violated, the experience of the same right can be nuanced and subtle, and differs by people, across issues and across time, forming a mosaic of experiences.

This diversity of experiences makes hearing diverse viewpoints critical to understanding the experience of rights in the city. The differing representation of stories in the mainstream contributes to the visibility and invisibility of issues within rights or rights themselves, which can contribute to discrepancies in a shared understanding of how the right is experienced in daily life.



As an example, Changes to Finnish legislation in 2025 mandates foreign workers that have become unemployed have up to 6 months to obtain employment before their right to residence is removed. The average unemployment period is 70 weeks in May 2025 (Yle, 2025). We first heard this story from James (pseudonym), who attended one of our workshops as he felt there were no outlets to speak to on the changes affecting foreign workers in Finland. Despite the impacts this legislation had on foreign workers, he sees no political engagement on their part and no political representation in the City. A composite of his story is made below with a representative persona who is subject to this rule.

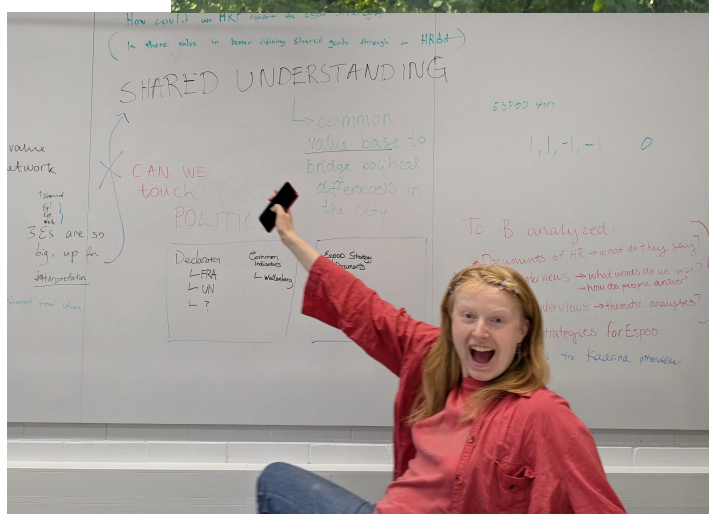
"We work a lot with immigrant organizations, and from their side, a lot of questions arise about what rights they have and whether they are welcome at all.

The political climate is somewhat tense. Also, knowing some government statements, the racism discussion is very strong. We still have political figures who think

that people of certain colors or from certain places don't have the right to be here or don't have the right to act like anyone else here...

But if we forget certain groups whose situation is not good, a shadow society begins to form. That leads to major challenges"

- City Staff



Resident Stories: James in Espoo

James Hunt is from the United States and has obtained his Master's degree at a Finnish university. Since graduating, he has been working in Espoo for over three years. When his company downsized, he found out the new unemployment regulation applied to him. Unless he could find new employment within six months, he could be forced to leave the country as he is not a EU citizen. He knew the job market was tight, and he's uncertain whether he can find something else within the timeframe. If he has to leave, he wonders what that means for the half a decade he has spent integrating into Finland.

In June 2025, the new job-seeking legislation mandates that non-EU foreign-workers who become unemployed have between three to six months to secure new employment before they lose their right to stay in the country. For those who have lived in Finland for more than two years or are considered 'specialists' if they earn a salary of over €3,827/month, they are granted a six month time window (Legally.fi, 2025). This new legislation does not affect permanent residents or EU citizens.

Controversy surrounding this legislation focuses on the retainment of foreign talent, and the feasibility to secure new employment within the allotted time. Yle reports the average unemployment length in May 2025 was 70 weeks (Yle, 2025). The legislation also increases the risk of labour exploitation of foreign workers to accept poorer wages or working conditions to stay in the country (Yle, 2024).

James is a pseudonym and a composite character representing who could be affected. We first heard this story from a workshop participant, who felt there was no awareness amongst foreign workers of changes affecting them, and no political engagement on their part nor political representation in the City.

Insight 2: The Importance of Establishing Shared Understanding

As we started talking to residents, city staff, and councillors regarding human rights cities, we began to realize the need to establish shared understanding between all three levels, especially as the City of Espoo is only beginning to initiate the conversation on human rights cities.

Existing HRC literature also identifies the usefulness of combining a bottoms-up (resident originated) and top-down (political and city originated) approach towards initiating a human rights city (Vainio et al. Abo Academy University, 2022). The development of a human rights culture helps achieve human rights cities outcomes, but likewise relies on the common understanding of residents of the relevance of rights, and on local authorities of their responsibilities as duty bearers (ibid., FRA - A Guide to Support Local Authorities, 2022).

Figure 3. Gaps, enablers and shared understanding in different levels of Espoo City

	Gaps in shared understanding	Enablers to shared understanding	Areas of Shared Understanding to Build
Residents	(-) Unaware of all the rights, confusion around role of city	(+) Easily concretize rights to daily issues	Communicate how rights are relevant to daily life in the city
City Staff	(-) Unfamiliar with the human rights terminology	(+) Sees work inherently tied to human rights (+) Sees value of HRC as a way to provide mandate and leverage	Communicate what Human Rights Cities involve
Councillors	(-) Mixed support of Human Rights Cities initiative; value is ambiguous to some	(+) General support for human rights initiatives	Show resident stories to show rights are relevant to Espoo today

Residents' view

When speaking to residents, we found it difficult to directly use the term human rights, but asked questions around 'quality of life' as a proxy. In a workshop conducted with residents, city staff and councillors, some participants were surprised at the variety of fundamental rights articles in the EU, while only those that appeared on mainstream media felt familiar. Debates also sprang up amongst resident participants on the roles

the city could play in delivering certain rights, citing the long queues in Finnish Healthcare and rural-urban discrepancies, but also the systematic barriers that make actions difficult. Resident representative groups, including disabilities, inter-cultural groups and healthcare were however immediately able to link fundamental rights articles to the everyday issues they saw in their respective fields, such as employment difficulty for the handicapped, immigrants, and shortfalls in healthcare delivery and governmental performance.

“People aren’t aware of this as a fundamental right. People want it but don’t know its backed-up as a right”

- Workshop participant, referring to EU Fundamental Right Article 41: Right to Good Administration

“[Finland has] constitutionally failed to provide even basic forms of care (referring to difficulty to access healthcare resources)...

Even if Espoo healthcare resources were centralized, there is a significant lack of human resources... [it is difficult to] understand how cities can countervene higher hierarchy”

- Workshop participant, referring to Article 35 - Health Care

City Staff View

When speaking to city staff, city public servants were largely unaware of the idea of human rights cities nor what human rights exactly entailed, however, saw their work as intrinsically related to and supporting human rights. Staff were interviewed from city functions including the built environment, education, and functions related to health and inclusion. Staff were able to easily comment on issues encountered in their job that they saw as related to human rights, including health across resident groups, social and economic inclusion, political tensions and impacts of the built environment. Despite staff being provided with limited information regarding the nature of human rights cities, they all saw the value of a formal structure to strengthen their work and ability to act. City staff, however, stressed the importance that the whole-of-government is onboard, rather than having a human rights responsibility placed on any one department

"But I do see it as very important that if a city can say it is part of a human rights network, it gives a certain image of the city—that it wants to work on these issues."

- City Staff

"Well, I'm not deeply familiar with all the specifics of what the network offers, but in principle it sounds like something that could help us become even better. That human rights, equality, and non-discrimination would be realized more fully. So I do see value in it."

- City Staff

Council View

In a group interview with councillors representing all parties in Espoo, support for a human rights city initiative ranged from the passionate to the ambiguous. Some councillors asked if human rights can even be questioned, while others questioned the value of the Human Rights Cities Network. However, it was strongly indicated that discussions within the larger political scene contained significantly differing views relating to human rights, as indicated by comments that this project was too late to alter the course of the concurrent revisions to the Espoo Story project - Espoo's guiding visioning document.

"This project can not fix the crisis we are having with the Espoo story. Totally wrong timing"

- City Councillor

"Talk of human rights is narrowing in Finland; yet immigrants comprise 1/5 of Espoo"

- City Staff

"[Referring to Human Rights Cities] Does it require money, what do we gain and do we get a badge?"

- City Councilor

"We still have political figures who think that people of certain colors or from certain places don't have the right to be here or don't have the right to act like anyone else here."

- City Staff

We saw the tensions within each stakeholder group regarding human rights cities as presenting challenges and opportunities which shaped our thinking in defining the deliverables. For residents, although fundamental rights can be foreign, residents could easily see the relevance of rights through issues they encounter through the city. Making rights understandable, concrete to daily life, can allow citizens to become engaged in the rights discussion.

For city staff, while unaware of the human rights cities framework, they see having a framework is conducive to giving their existing work leverage and mandate, and therefore value in joining the Human Rights Cities Network. Communicating more clearly to staff the details of human rights cities could therefore yield internal advocates towards the becoming of a human rights city.

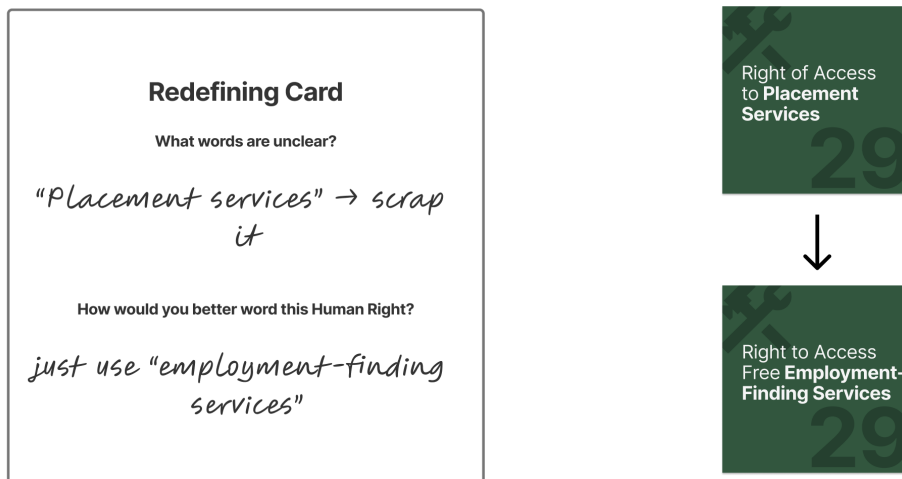
Council remains the political decision-making body of Espoo, and contains both supporters and opponents of the human rights cities initiative. It remains unclear for us how well connected Espoo councilors are to the experiences of its citizens. An interesting observation is that although one-fifth of Espoo residents have a foreign background (Espoo, 2024), and residents of over two-years can run for council, few if any of the current sitting councilors represent an immigrant background. For our study, we did not have time to investigate various communication channels with citizens. Nevertheless, embodying experiences such as stories represent powerful tools for immersion and understanding (Vink & Koskela-Huotari, 2021). Stories of citizen experiences therefore represent opportunity areas for setting a shared understanding of human rights experiences with council members.

Insight 3: Human rights need to be concretized

Residents view human rights through issues they encounter in their daily lives. For residents to effectively engage in the 'rights' discussion, rights must be concretized and translated into understandable and relevant language. Human Rights articles are based on legal language and some terminology causes confusion and prevents efficient conversation on issues. In the workshop, participants discussing Articles 1-5 and 20-26 could easily share stories and connect to daily life, while other Articles demanded more time spent on discussing formulations. When a workshop participant would attempt to translate difficult terminology to group members, we observed that they often used stories to concretize and explain the meaning.

Human Rights can also be misunderstood as something general and abstract, like sustainability or justice - when in reality it provides a concrete list of areas for the city to focus on and this connection to the everyday city experience should be underlined.

Image 2. Materials from the workshop



Observation:

During the workshop one team experiences frustration when translating the rights first to understandable English and then to Finnish, pointing out the difficulty in translating certain words between these two very different languages.

Observation:

One workshop participant believed that people are unaware of systemic failures in place, but shedding light on rights can draw attention to these larger issues.

Insight 4: Human Rights Cities work calls for engaging and accessible participatory channels

A common denominator for the Human Rights Cities incorporating a bottom-up approach are clear participatory channels where the diverse public voices are collected and where residents are empowered to assert their rights. In Espoo such channels exist such as MyEspoo On The Map Survey, but it is unclear how well they engage minorities and if they are empowering residents to collaborate rather than just inform higher level decision making. Workshops, common platforms and other communication channels can provide an outlet for voices and elicit adjacent voices.

The voices of people other than Finns and Swedish-Finnish people are not included in the decision-making. Even though there were candidates (non-Finnish), it was really difficult to get them places in different positions. There is no common language to use if they do not speak Finnish.”

- **City council discussion**

“How do we communicate the pathways for citizens to take initiative?”

- **City council discussion**

“Is there data that is intersectional? Are only those who respond actively (to surveys)? Has this been studied, how can interest in the city's activities be raised? What are the channels?”

- **City council discussion**

“I feel that there's no participatory systems... When things are perceived as bad, only then do people become active.”

- **Resident in Leppävaara**

In Utrecht, a Human Rights Coalition was formed in the initial stages of the project, consisting of a diverse group of people being responsible for arranging events and projects where residents' voices were heard and empowered to participate in the city's work:

“In 2011 and 2012 the Municipality of Utrecht organised a local democracy week on human rights and facilitated civil societies' involvement by providing a modest budget for renting venues, coordinating the organisation and publicity and awarding prizes to the best initiatives organised during the week. Other local events included brainstorming meetings, conferences and human rights cafés where representatives of the local government and civil society periodically meet and exchange views and activities. These events advanced new working relations and led to new joint initiatives, like a children's rights school designed to educate and involve young children in human rights.”

In York a more systematic approach was taken:

“It was decided that a two-stage participatory approach would be employed, first to ask York citizens which five rights they felt were most important, and then to select indicators linked to these rights. A group of students based at CAHR conducted the research to identify the five priority rights 'for York'. They carried out a survey on the streets of York and online and interviewed local NGOs working with disadvantaged minorities. In total, 453 surveys were completed, and six NGOs were interviewed. The five rights selected from a non-exhaustive long list of civil-political and social, economic and cultural rights were education, non-discrimination and equality, health, an adequate standard of living, and housing.” (Davis et al., 2017, p.74).

Bringing people together to have face to face conversations about personal experiences is something that we find to be critical for understanding how experiences of oppression intersect. Letting citizens discuss issues with each other fostered the realization that people face similar discrimination in the same fields of life for different

reasons. As an example we observed a discussion about how second generation Finns and disabled people face discrimination in the job market in the form of having to apply to a disproportionate amount of jobs to receive a callback. These types of intersections work as clear indicators on which sectors require further assessment from a human rights perspective.

"My son, a second generation Finn with a masters degree, had to send over 400 applications before acquiring a job."

- Participant in workshop

"Disabled people face difficulties in finding a jobs even though they might be highly educated or otherwise adept to the jobs they are seeking"

- Participant in workshop

Insight 5: Implementing human rights locally is politically contentious

When discussing these fundamental and highly personal topics we encountered tensions and disagreement. In the city council discussion this tension was obvious. We suspect that the representative nature of the political system could have a part to play in this as well as the fact that politicians received the questions in advance to prepare. When presenting pre-planned arguments about principles and rules the nuanced lived experience is lost.

"It [Human Rights] is something we give to each other. It is a social construct. We can think about it in different ways."

- City council discussion

"Is it beneficial to include neo-Nazis into the conversation? It is as if they had equal opinions in the matter."

- City council discussion

"I don't know if this is a good discussion. We are bound by international human rights or otherwise we'd be like wild animals. There are political parties that want to scrap it. It's cruel. It's not a matter of opinion."

- City council discussion

In the workshop however, the conversations were about concrete stories, which transformed the dynamics and how people were present in conversations. Are Human Rights up for debate? Should all voices be heard? Are some battles more important than others? Which issues are most pressing? These types of questions may arise, but the process of Human Rights Cities should center the conversation on resident stories and concrete experiences to avoid becoming stuck in hypothetical scenarios.

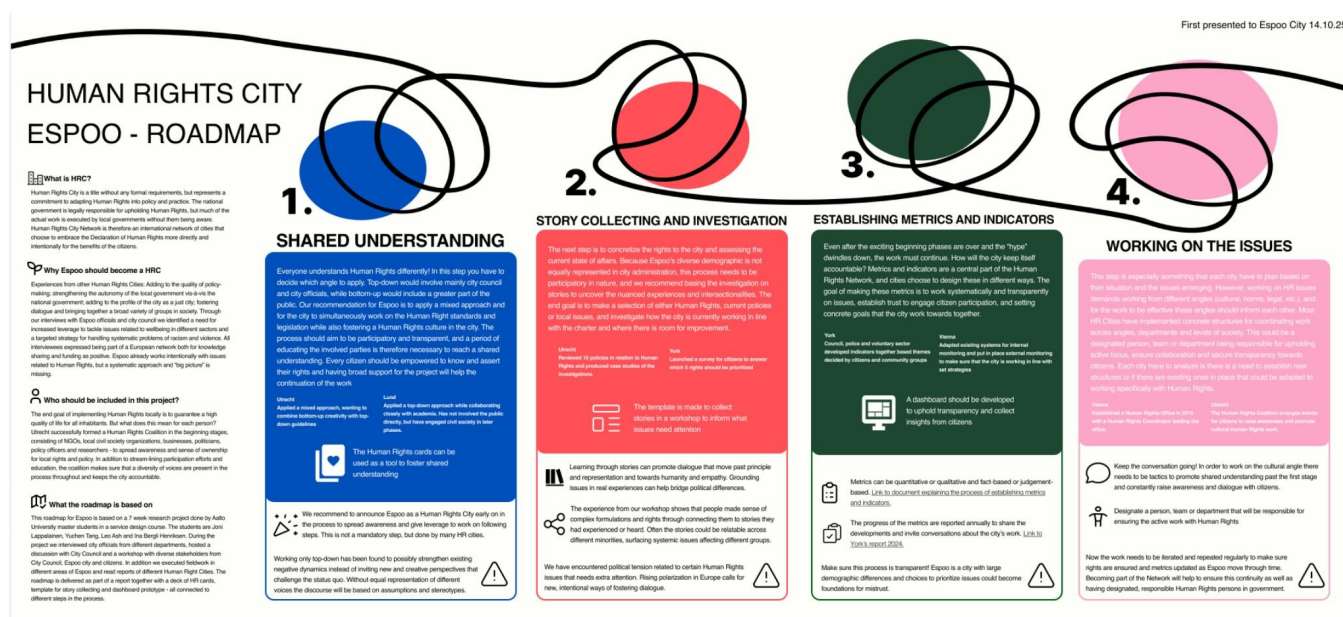
Deliverables

Building on these insights, our team concretized these insights into deliverables for the City of Espoo that support their journey into becoming part of the Human Rights City. Each deliverable serves as a purpose in bridging abstract Human Right principles into a more understandable form. These tools are a roadmap, a deck of cards, a template, and a dashboard.

Roadmap

The roadmap is a visualization of the concrete steps that we identified as central to most Human Rights Cities and how Espoo should attack each of them based on our insights. The roadmap is meant to be used as both an internal tool to have a clear common strategy among the working group, but also an external tool to briefly present what the Human Rights Cities means for other stakeholders. From our project we experienced the complex and challenging aspects of strategizing concrete steps when immersed in the broad ecosystem of stories and experiences, and we therefore hope this map can help guide Espoo navigate this terrain. The following steps are presented in the roadmap:

Image 3. Roadmap



1. Shared Understanding

Everyone understands Human Rights differently. In this step you have to decide which angle to apply. Top-down would involve mainly city council and city officials, while bottom-up would include a greater part of the public. Our recommendation for Espoo is to apply a mixed approach and for the city to simultaneously work on the Human Right standards and legislation while also fostering a Human Rights culture in the city. The process should aim to be participatory and transparent, and a period of educating the involved parties is therefore necessary to reach a shared understanding. Every citizen should be empowered to know and assert their rights and having broad support for the project will help the continuation of the work.

2. Collecting stories and investigating the current state

The next step is to concretize the rights to the city and assess the current state of affairs. Because Espoo's diverse demographic is not equally represented in city administration, this process needs to be participatory in nature, and we recommend basing the investigation on stories to uncover the nuanced experiences and intersectionalities. The end goal is to make a selection of either Human Rights, current policies or local issues, and investigate how the city is currently working in line with the charter and where there is room for improvement.

3. Establishing metrics and indicators

Even after the exciting beginning phases are over and the "hype" dwindles down, the work must continue. How will the city keep itself accountable? Metrics and indicators are a central part of the Human Rights Network, and cities choose to design these in different ways. The goal of making these metrics is to work systematically and transparently on issues, establish trust to engage citizen participation, and set concrete goals that the city works towards together.

4. Working on the issues

This step is especially something that each city has to plan based on their situation and the issues emerging. However, working on HR issues demands working from different angles (cultural, norms, legal, etc.), and for the work to be effective these angles should inform each other. Most HR Cities have implemented concrete structures for coordinating work across angles, departments and levels of society. This could be a designated person, team or department being responsible for upholding active focus,

ensuring collaboration and secure transparency towards citizens. Each city has to analyze if there is a need to establish new structures or if there are existing ones in place that could be adapted to working specifically with Human Rights.

Deck of Human Rights Cards



Background

The final version of the deck of cards is based on the learnings from a workshop we conducted on 23rd of September 2025. Through the workshop, the project tried to answer the question of how we might communicate human rights. The participants consisted of residents, representatives of organizations, city officials, and city council members.

Workshop participants were asked to position themselves at one of four tables based on the following themes; dignity, equality, freedoms, solidarity, citizen rights, and justice. Once seated, participants read through the articles placed before them on the table. The discussions started naturally around the articles, and participants arranged the cards on a scale from visible to invisible. The goal was to reflect on how different articles are present or absent in their lives. Finally, they filled in two types of templates: one for redefining unclear terminology and another one for creating concretized scenarios that helped to communicate the Human Right article. Overall, the workshop successfully prompted meaningful conversations.

How to use the deck?

To facilitate shared understanding, Human Rights are formulated into a deck of cards. Espoo City residents are invited to a facilitated session where the deck of cards is used to start conversations. Each card introduces a Human Rights article in an

understandable form in English and Finnish, supported by visuals. The deck of cards are based on 50 articles in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and they can be used as an entry point for reflection and resident empowerment in Human Rights education.

The deck of Human Rights cards are divided into themes, using Espoo brand colors:

- **Dignity** - Strawberry / Red
- **Equality** - Berry pudding / Pink
- **Freedoms** - Blush / Beige
- **Solidarity** - Pine / Green
- **Citizen Rights** - Midnight / Blue
- **Justice** - Bedrock / Grey

Image 4. A visualization of the Human Rights card deck



Before the workshop, the facilitators (e.g. the Diversity Team in the City of Espoo) call for resident representatives to join the workshop. The goal here is to have a wide take of people from varying backgrounds so that a comprehensive variety of resident

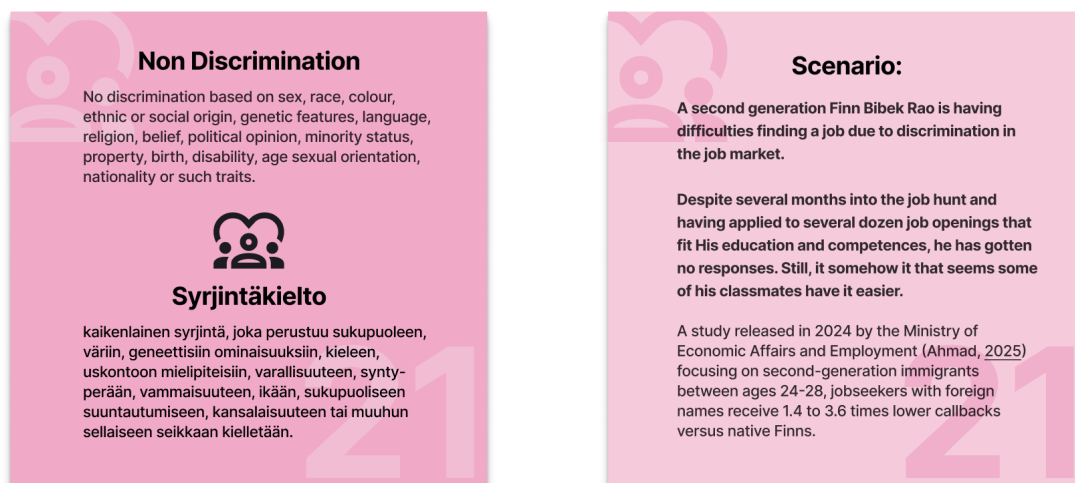
voices are heard. In this step, it is also essential to make sure that there are enough facilitators to support and take notes at each table.

During the workshop, the facilitators guide the conversation to examples from the resident's daily lives. The deck of cards is used as a prompt to start these conversations and the card should encourage participants to recognize how different Human Rights appear, or fail to appear, in their everyday lives. As an outcome, the process gives residents a voice in their experiences within the City of Espoo, but most importantly, gives form on how they understand Human Rights.

Further iteration of the Deck of Human Right Cards

A possible further iteration of the deck of cards could be the addition of a scenario on the backside of each card. These real-life examples would illuminate how each right might manifest through the resident's experiences. The scenario would serve as a further take abstract principles into more understandable form. Adding this level of concrete, it could expand the card deck's potential to be more educational, e.g. younger audiences. To ensure authenticity and inclusivity, the scenarios should be co-created with residents through participatory workshops. This way the scenarios ground on real experiences and emotions rather than relying too much on assumptions and stereotypes.

Image 5. A deck of Human Rights cards with scenarios



Template for Capturing Stories

A story collecting template is used in capturing the insights from the Espoo residents. The template provides a structure for an easy way to document stories into a tangible form, which also highlights the key resident experiences, challenges, and opportunities related to Human Rights. The template is to be used together with the deck of Human Rights cards.

One of the facilitators fills in the template during the session with the participants, while the other one leads the conversations. This is to ensure that the stories captured remain faithful to the participants' own words and perspectives without being influenced too much. The templates are later synthesized by the Diversity Team to identify themes and issues within the City of Espoo.

After the workshop, the Diversity Team has a collection of participant stories and insights, which are shared with different City of Espoo departments and the City Council through meetings. The aim with these stories is to create a bridge between citizen experiences and decision-making processes. At the city level, the Diversity Team can use these stories in guiding different departments in city development. For the City Council, these collected stories offer a tangible perspective in Human Rights to be discussed in a way that moves beyond abstract principles and become more grounded in the real experiences.

Image 6. A template and the card deck for capturing residents' stories

The image displays a 'Story Capturing Template' form and a deck of 'Human Rights Cards'.

Story Capturing Template

Title of the Story <i>Short description of what is being said.</i>	What are they saying? <i>Write down quotes here.</i>	
Who is saying? <i>Write here demographic description.</i>		
Who is involved? <i>E.g. city service providers</i>	What feelings are described? <i>E.g. list different emotions.</i>	What should be changed? <i>E.g. wishes for the future</i>

The 'Human Rights Cards' deck is shown to the right, featuring a card titled 'Freedom of the Arts and Sciences' with the City of Espoo logo.

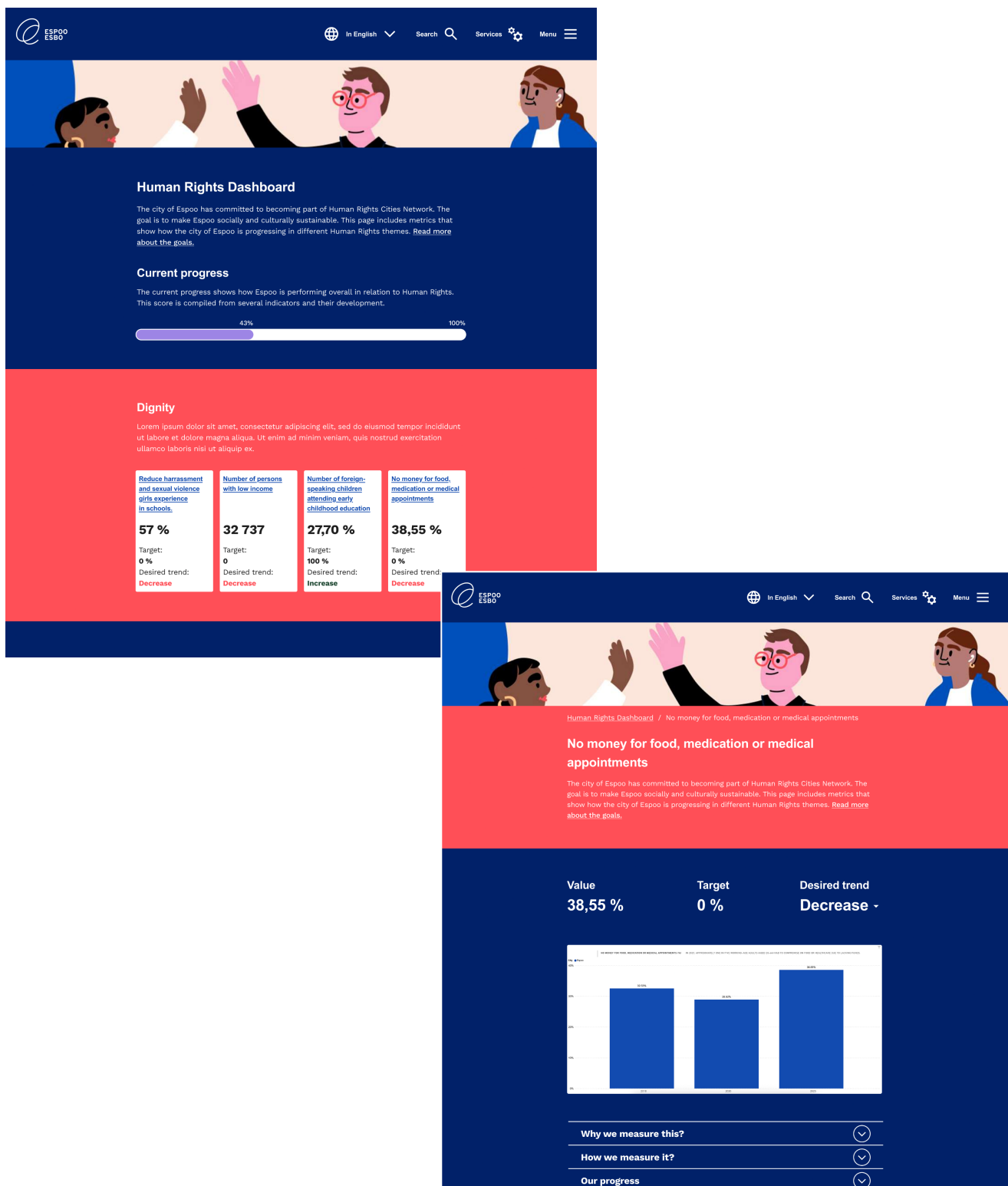
Dashboard

Because the work towards lasting change takes time, it is necessary to maintain commitment to Human Rights. For that reason, it is important to track progress over time and that is where metrics and indicators take a central role. They provide transparency on issues, establish trust, and engage citizen participation. Also, it helps to create concrete goals for the city to work towards together. (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021).

A digital dashboard platform could clearly highlight the issues that the City of Espoo considers most pressing at the time. It also shows accountability in Human Rights matters as the city's progress and key indicators of change are highlighted in real time. Since not all issues can be addressed simultaneously, the dashboard would allow the city to shift focus between different topics as priorities evolve. In addition, developing and maintaining the feedback channel on the dashboard platform would be crucial, because it enables residents to share their experiences, raise concerns, and contribute to the ongoing dialogue on Human Rights within the city of Espoo.

To ensure that the implementation is successful, the City of Espoo could appoint a dedicated person within the Diversity Team to oversee the digital dashboard. This person would be responsible for assembling a cross-department task force to define relevant metrics and indicators that reflect the city's Human Rights commitments and strategies. Also, this person would coordinate the architecture of data sources to ensure that information is accurate and drawn from the right sources.

Image 7. A prototype illustration of a dashboard



Conclusion

Human Rights touch all aspects of our life. From the access to art and science to education and health care, employment, legal assistance, movement, starting a family and even the right to life itself. Rights are embedded into our everyday experience and many are therefore taken for granted. But the same rights we take for granted now at some point seemed unaccomplishable, and may still feel out of reach for some. For this reason we believe that an effort to ensure and improve the implementation of human rights is relevant now and always will be.

Espoo is clearly committed to developing itself to be as good of a home for it's citizens as possible and we also sense a desire to be seen as a pioneer city when it comes to wellbeing and sustainable development. Espoo currently employs numerous programs for ensuring better outcomes for citizens. We still identify a need for better structures through which human rights are assessed in Espoo and we believe that an improvement in this field of thinking could have a large positive impact on the whole of Espoo.

The Human Rights City initiative holds interesting potential in creating a systematic approach to engage with human rights questions. The initiative works towards an increased public commitment to upholding human rights standards and an enhanced mandate for city officials and council members to engage with human rights issues. In addition, the initiative promotes citizen participation in decision making through better education on citizen's rights and through the establishment of new participatory platforms that build trust and agency. (Human Rights Card Deck, Workshop Template and City Dashboard.)

Above all the unified goal of becoming a Human Rights City could amplify a positive momentum to further develop the city of Espoo. We recommend shared understanding as the first step in this journey in which there are a multitude of pathways to take. We hope that this can be a transparent process where residents are empowered to participate and take ownership of their rights in the city.

“Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.”

-Eleanor Roosevelt, “Where do universal human rights begin?”, statement on 27 March 1958 at the presentation of the book “In your hands: a guide for community action” to the UN Commission on Human Rights; sometimes called “The Great Question” speech. Quote from the OHCHR publication Human Rights Indicators, pg.9.



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