

The GOLD VII research process

“Economies of Equality and Care”

The UCLG political leadership is stating that allowing inequalities to continue growing is not an option, embracing the responsibility of creating cities and territories that care.

The GOLD VII process will contribute to this endeavor. As UCLG’s flagship research process, over the next 2 years, GOLD VII will promote action-oriented, multi-stakeholder work to explore how local and regional governments (LRGs) can advance Economies of Equality and Care in their territories.

The GOLD VII process will be open and collaborative, providing space for different types of contributions and discussions between the membership of LRGs and their associations, the different parts of the network and key partners. The output of the process will be the *GOLD VII Multimedia Journal*, where all contributions will be accessible.

1. GOLD VII at a glance

Local governments are at the forefront of redefining care systems, placing the sustainability of life and the planet at the core of their policies to reduce urban and territorial inequalities as part of a broader social transformation. As the level of governance closest to citizens, they are uniquely positioned to foster a paradigm shift that challenges the current economic productive models, prioritizes reproduction and elevates care as a human right.

Care is not just a need or a service; it is a fundamental social value that qualifies how services, assistance and support are provided. LRGs can lead the way in recognizing, redistributing, reducing the burden of, rewarding and representing care work, ensuring that both paid and unpaid care roles are valued and supported. By defeminizing, democratizing and decommodifying care, they can dismantle systemic inequalities and create inclusive systems that prioritize well-being over profit.

As regulators, planners and providers, LRGs are key to ensuring equitable and accessible public services under the lens of care. This includes caring for public workers themselves, who are often on the frontlines of service provision. LRGs also

play a critical role in integrating care into urban and social planning, fostering proximity and solidarity through localized infrastructures.

By recognizing care as a collective responsibility and engaging stakeholders—caregivers, recipients and communities—LRGs can co-create policies that promote justice and sustainability. Their leadership ensures that care is a cornerstone of sustainable development and social transformation, driving forward a collective commitment to a fairer and more equitable world.

Building on the outcomes of the GOLD VI report on Pathways to Urban and Territorial Equality, and particularly its Caring pathway, the GOLD VII process will provide essential insights, tools and frameworks to advance cities and territories that care. Moreover, GOLD VII aims to ultimately bridge the gap between theories and practices of care, and in doing so bringing together LRGs and all other actors involved in the development of caring societies.

1.1 Situating GOLD VII within UCLG’s priorities and instruments

GOLD VII is a crucial tool to link research, advocacy and learning within the UCLG network. As such, GOLD VII directly builds on the UCLG Pact for the Future – the Daejeon Political Declaration, adopted at the UCLG World Congress in 2022. GOLD VII will be linked to the UCLG Caring Systems Facility, the organization’s key instrument to funnel and strengthen the network’s efforts to advance a renewed understanding of care. The direct link with the Facility ensures that contributions to GOLD VII will be able to dialogue with an ecosystem of actors that is broader than the GOLD VII contributors: the ecosystem mobilized by the Facility, which includes more UCLG members, sections and partners.

GOLD VII will be linked with the different processes that UCLG is engaged in, ensuring the live impact of engaging with the GOLD VII process. These include:

- key international advocacy milestones of the international community, like the UN World Social Summit, the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development, the CSW69 / Beijing+30 and the conversations around the post-2030 scenario; and
- UCLG-led milestones and processes, like:
 - the UCLG Culture, Urban Innovation, and Local Democracy awards and conferences;
 - the UCLG Policy Councils, particularly those related to Reclaiming the Commons and Opportunities for All: Redefining Finance and Economies of Equality; and

- UCLG statutory processes like Executive Bureaus, World Councils and the UCLG World Congress.

GOLD VII will reflect the work of UCLG as a network, together with its partners, to forefront agendas of equality, human rights, local sustainable development, local democracy and effective multilevel governance, among others, in their connection with equality and care.

2. The GOLD VII process

The GOLD VII process will be co-produced through a broad multistakeholder dialogue, engaging civil society coalitions, academia, UCLG committees and partners, alongside local and regional governments.

- The GOLD VII process will seek to promote contributions from all regions of the world, giving visibility to experiences of LRGs, and particularly those based on partnerships with local communities and other stakeholders.
- GOLD VII will seek to break away from a hierarchical approach to knowledge production, placing local actors' experiences and perspectives as departure points and actively seeking to engage institutions and populations who often struggle to partake in international research processes.
- Contributions will give visibility of actions, initiatives and projects already underway, and be a lever to promote new discussions linked to the GOLD VII's topic. Contributions will be made available periodically, stay tuned!

The GOLD VII process is divided into three incremental stages, each of which setting the scene for the next ones.

2.1 Stage 1. Care as an aspiration and an inspiration (July 2024 - April 2025)

The first stage of the GOLD VII report is dedicated to the topic of "Care as an aspiration and an inspiration". The aim behind the choice of this central topic is to stimulate a fruitful collective reflection on the existing approaches to care, starting from UCLG's own approach promoted with GOLD VII and finding synergies with other movements and schools of thought. For instance, the feminist municipalist movement, the social and solidarity economy movement, and the work on human rights cities have all inspired compelling understandings of care. Exploring the links that exist between different understandings and agendas around care is fundamental in order to uncover common values and principles that can serve as a foundation to build shared systems of care.

The guiding questions for the first stage will then be: “How can we define ‘care’”? “Why do we need caring cities and territories?”, “Which values and principles underpinning different agendas can be applicable to the caring agenda too?”.

2.2 Stage 2. The necessary infrastructure for caring cities and regions (April 2025 - November 2025)

Stage 2 on “the necessary infrastructure for caring cities and regions” opens up space for a wide range of contributions that convey the idea that there is a diversity of infrastructures, both soft and hard, that if promoted can contribute to more caring cities and regions.

- This includes hard infrastructures, like public spaces of certain characteristics, local buildings and offices like social or health centers, pipe networks for public service delivery, etc.
- It also entails soft infrastructures, including partnerships and institutional instruments, like policies, programs, concrete participatory mechanisms, etc. Importantly, it includes the financial infrastructure that is necessary to implement a care-related approach to local and regional development.

An approach based on infrastructures also places the focus on the agency of LRGs and the different roles and avenues they could take to promote these kinds of necessary infrastructures. In particular, the topic of how LRGs may leverage care to revisit the planning and delivery of local public services should emerge strongly, e.g. to advance the “new essential” public services; to review whether some services need to be expanded; to revisit *how* services are provided and spark debates about participatory service provision, etc. By incorporating soft and hard infrastructures into the discussion on care, GOLD VII will be able to promote an integrated approach to care.

2.3 Stage 3. Resources and reforms necessary to enable LRGs to leverage care in order to transform local public action (November 2025 - June 2026)

Finally, Stage 3 on the “resources and reforms necessary to enable LRGs to leverage care to transform local public action” will allow us to discuss, from the local to the global sphere, at a more macro level, which changes are indispensable for the proposals from stages 1 and 2 to be effectively implemented. This stage will dig deeper into the particularities of some preliminary solutions already identified, which might include:

- the continuation of the renovation of the multilateral system
- the rethinking of the current global financial system, completely inadequate to reach LRGs and their communities' efforts
- the political capital that is necessary to implement initiatives to promote caring cities and regions
- the strengthening of partnerships with different actors
- the overall governance framework within which LRGs operate, which can be a resource or a constraint to promoting caring cities and regions

3. The GOLD VII Strategic Coalition

The GOLD VII Strategic Coalition is composed of a reduced number of key partners and UCLG Ubuntu Advisors. Its main aim is to build a multi stakeholder community around GOLD VII capable of providing strategic orientation to the GOLD VII process that increases its impactfulness and uptake.