

EU-Council of Europe seminar for representatives of national training institutions for judges, prosecutors and lawyers

On 29 February and 1 March 2024, the Council of Europe HELP Programme organised its biennial Seminar of HELP EU Contact Points. The event, themed "Rethinking Human Rights Training in EU Member States," was organised in the framework of the [EU-CoE 'HELP in the EU III' Project](#) and convened HELP representatives of national training institutions for judges, prosecutors and lawyers from EU Member States, and key stakeholders at EU level. Participants engaged in discussions aimed at enhancing human rights training and fostering effective cooperation among all members and partners within the EU.



The event started with welcoming remarks from **Frédéric Dolt**, Head of the Department for the Implementation of Human Rights, Justice and Legal Co-operation Standards of the Council of Europe and **Vesna Batistić Kos**, Ambassador and Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the Council of Europe. Mr Dolt highlighted the remarkable progress achieved by the HELP Programme in recent years, as well as by the HELP in the EU III project in particular. He thanked the EU for being a strategic partner in enhancing human rights education for legal professionals in EU MS, with a firm commitment and trust in the Council of Europe's expertise in this regard; he noted the EU-funded project which have been completed or are currently under implementation under the leadership of HELP, and expressed his hope for a continuation of this partnership.

He also thanked the official partners in the EU-funded projects which are currently under implementation, the Italian and the Spanish Bars, as well as to all other partners in the EU, represented at the event; their openness to collaboration, their commitment and determination are the foundation of HELP's work, for which the Council of Europe is deeply grateful.

Ambassador Vesna Batistić Kos emphasized the critical role of the HELP Programme in ensuring comprehensive training for justice professionals on human rights, a shared value of both the EU and the Council of Europe. She noted the EU Commission's focus on the digitalisation of justice as a key priority, citing the [European Judicial Training report 2023](#). She advocated for judicial training that actively promotes the digital transformation of justice systems and talked about the role HELP can play in assisting professionals dealing with emerging matters.

Ana-Maria Telbis, Head of the Justice and Human Rights Training Division at the Council of Europe, took over and provided an overview of recent developments within the HELP Programme, emphasizing its objective to assist justice professionals in applying human rights standards effectively. She praised the efforts of her team and of all the HELP partners at the national and the European level, as well as beyond, which lead to the HELP e-learning platform hosting today **51 online courses, freely available for legal practitioners** across the Council of Europe and beyond. Moreover, the HELP

platform has currently more than **140.000 users**, with the figure being expected to continue increasing.

The Seminar featured several interventions from the Council of Europe’s Department for the Execution of Judgements of the European Court of Human Rights - **Laura Ielciu-Erel, Lubov Stoytcheva, Polina Roussinova-Kucera, Grigorios Avdikos, Matteo Fiori and Szymon Janczarek**. They highlighted the role of HELP courses in enhancing compliance with European standards at the national level and addressed



specific challenges faced by different countries in complying with European human rights standards. Each of them focused on matters in relation to which violations were found by the European Court of Human Rights in judgments whose implementation is on-going, a process placed under the supervision of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

They emphasized the importance of targeted training initiatives on these matters, which include family law issues (e.g. international child abduction), hate crime and hate speech, gender-based violence and domestic violence, ineffective criminal investigations into allegations concerning vulnerable groups (children, Roma and LGBTI people, people with intellectual and mental disabilities, etc), protection from torture and ill-treatment, unlawful and arbitrary detention in mental health facilities, access to courts and placement in institutions, freedom of expression, conditions of detention and length of proceedings. HELP courses are available on all these matters.

The event also included panels on cooperation with the EU and European partners in boosting human rights training. **Wojciech Postulski**, Team leader on European Judicial Training for the European Commission welcomed the creation and popularity of the [HELP course on Introduction to Human Rights Protection in Europe: Interplay between the ECHR and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#).



He also talked about the status of implementation of the 2021-2024 European Judicial Training Strategy, and about the strategy that will follow it and which is currently in its final stage of development. He emphasized the importance to ensure, in judicial training, a European dimension, cross-border consortiums and training for multipliers; he also underlined that the new strategy will focus on the strategic use of available funding for judicial training.

He concluded by introducing the participants to the [EU Academy](#), an EU-owned online hub containing first-hand knowledge, high quality educational resources and valuable insights, directly produced by the EU institutions. He particularly recommended the training videos on the [Court of Justice of the European Union](#). **Sanja Jovicic**, Project Manager with the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) talked about FRA’s work related to the EU Charter for fundamental rights; she focused on the findings

of the [2023 Fundamental Rights Report](#), the [CharterXchange](#) and FRA's cooperation with different partners, including the Council of Europe, in contributing to effective training for legal professionals. She briefly introduced to the audience the [FRA e-learning platform](#) and [Charterpedia](#), emphasizing as an important tool the [Charter Case Studies – Trainer's Manual](#).

Helena Papa, Senior Legal Advisor for the European Judicial Training Network (EJTN), talked about the activity of the EJTN and the cooperation with HELP. She discussed the seminars and webinars they organise, the [THEMIS competition](#), the [Aiakos Programme](#) and other short and long-term study visits and exchanges (such as the ones with bodies including the European Court of Human Rights, the Court of Justice of the EU, Eurojust and the European Public Prosecutor's Office). She also touched upon the [Judges@Europe Forum](#), organised yearly since 2022 at the Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights from Italy and focusing on using European networks to promote and enhance the dialogue among judges of the European Union. On the basis of the discussions that occurred at this event in 2023, EJTN and the Council of Europe are preparing a HELP judges@europe crash course, focusing on judges upholding the rule of law. The course should be published by the end of 2024.

Nikolaos Koutkias, Chair of the Training Committee of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) talked about the CCBE's activities, and applauded its fruitful collaboration with the Council of Europe and the HELP Programme in particular. He touched upon [CCBE's 2023 Annual Report](#), and mentioned successful events organised together with HELP, such as the launch of [the HELP course on the Environment and Human Rights in October 2023](#). These interventions were followed by **Eva Massa**, International Consultant/Legal Training Designer, which ran a session promoting the training of legal professionals on soft skills; she included a brief workshop and discussed about the importance and necessity to include soft skills elements in trainings made available for judges, prosecutors and lawyers.

Following this enriching presentations and discussions, the first day ended with parallel workshops, where participants were presented with best practices in terms of the use of HELP courses at the national level; they also had the opportunity to share their ideas on re-thinking human rights training, debate on it and start drawing up plans for the future. These workshops were led by four members of the HELP Consultative Board, namely **Gianluca Grasso** (Focal Point (judges) for Italy), **Kornelia Kirilova** (Focal Point (judges) for Bulgaria), **Rocío Ortega Atienza** (Focal Point (judges) for Spain) and **Tomislav Toshkov** (Info Point (lawyers) for Bulgaria).

The second day started with a presentation given by **Oana Girlescu**, EU-CoE 'HELP in the EU III' Project Manager, Council of Europe who talked about the main achievements of HELP's EU-funded projects. She was followed by **Juris Rudevskis** from the Research and Case law Monitoring Units off the Registry of the European Court of Human Rights. He provided an engaging overview of matters discussed at the level of the European Court in relation to EU related instruments and issues, and looked at the recent case law on trafficking in human beings. He also mentioned the [ECHR Knowledge Sharing Platform \(ECHR-KS\)](#),



an incredible tool maintained by the Registry in Strasbourg, which provides case-law knowledge through materials focusing on specific articles of the European Convention, transversal themes and other general information.

Mr Rudevskis paved the way for the final presentations from the event, which focused on the courses developed and updated under the EU-CoE 'HELP in the EU III' Project. The [HELP course on Introduction to Human Rights Protection in Europe - Interplay between the ECHR and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) was introduced by **Raluca Bercea**, Co-author of the course and HELP tutor, Info Point for Romania and Professor at the Faculty of Law, West University of Timisoara (Romania). She also shared her experience as the co-tutor of the course, launched in its tutored format for the first time in Strasbourg, for an international group of judges, prosecutors and lawyers.



Zaruhi Gasparyan, Head of the Co-operation and Capacity Building Unit, Children’s Rights Division of the Council of Europe presented the updated [HELP course on Child-friendly Justice](#). She also spoke about the work of the Council of Europe on child-friendly justice at large and introduced key concepts through the lens of the [Council of Europe Guidelines on Child-Friendly Justice](#).

The star of the event, the [HELP course on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings](#) was introduced by **Petya Nestorova**, Head of Division and Executive Secretary of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. The

new version of this course, which was developed together with Ms Nestorova’s team, was published just a day before the event and will be launched for the first time, in a tutored format, for an international group of judges, prosecutors and lawyers, in late spring 2024.

In the closing remarks, **Ana-Maria Telbis**, the HEAD of the Justice and Human Rights Training Division of the Council of Europe, stressed the need for mutual trust and cooperation between HELP and its partners at national and European levels, reaffirming the commitment to advancing human rights education.

The HELP in the EU Contact Points Seminar exemplified the collective effort towards rethinking human rights training in EU Member States, highlighting the significance of ongoing collaboration and exchange of expertise in promoting human rights awareness and compliance with European standards.