

## **Appendix I to Recommendation (including illustrative examples)**

### **I. Establishment and fundamental characteristics of the Ombudsman institution**

1. Ombudsman institutions should be in place in all member States. The choice of one or more such institutions should be made by each State in the light of its organisation, particularities and needs. These institutions should be directly and easily accessible to everyone in respect of all public services, however provided. Particular attention should be paid to persons who may not be aware of the existence of the Ombudsman institution, who may have difficulties in accessing the Ombudsman institution or who may be in a situation of vulnerability, such as migrants, persons deprived of liberty, persons with disabilities and older persons.

#### **Accessibility and concern for vulnerable groups**

Ombudsman institutions often ensure that they are easily accessible to citizens by allowing complaints to be made in writing or orally and without any formal requirements. Ombudsman institutions provide their services free of charge. Most Ombudsman institutions accept complaints on-line and many use social media. Many Ombudsman institutions use outreach to ensure that individuals who might experience difficulty in complaining can easily do so. Staff of the Irish Ombudsman, for example, regularly visit accommodation centres for asylum seekers and refugees. In Denmark, complaints may be made to the Ombudsman in writing or orally and, in Poland, the Human Rights Commissioner's legislation provides that complaints may be made free of charge and without formality. In the Slovak Republic, citizens have a right to complain to the Defender of Rights in their mother tongues, with the cost of interpretation born by the state.

The legislative mandates of several Ombudsman institutions make particular reference to the Ombudsman's role in protecting the most vulnerable in society. For example, in Hungary, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights is tasked – especially in his or her use of own initiative investigations – with paying special attention to the rights of children, of persons of other nationalities, of the interests of future generations, and of the rights of vulnerable groups. Similarly, in Portugal, the Ombudsman's own initiative power of investigation is granted particularly in order to defend and promote the rights and interests of the most vulnerable citizens in terms of age, race, ethnicity, gender, and disability.

The Ombudsman's special concern with the protection of vulnerable groups is illustrated in practice by the work of the Lithuanian Seimas Ombudsman. In its Annual Report for 2017, it highlighted the key human rights issues in Lithuania as relating to the protection of vulnerable individuals, including: protecting prisoners from inadequate detention facilities; protecting disabled children from social exclusion through institutionalization; and protecting those with mental health issues from arbitrary detention and compulsory treatment.

2. Member States should provide a firm legal basis for the Ombudsman institution, preferably at the constitutional level, and/or in a law which defines the main tasks of such institution, guarantees its independence and provides it with means necessary to accomplish its functions effectively, both at national and international levels, bearing in mind existing standards and recommendations on the Ombudsman institution [, in particular the Principles on the Protection and Promotion of the Ombudsman Institution, (the Venice Principles) adopted by the European

Commission for Democracy through Law of the Council of Europe (Venice Commission) on 15 March 2019].

#### **A legal basis that provides for independence**

Reflecting the second of the Venice Principles, a very common approach to providing a legal basis for the Ombudsman involves including brief provisions in the national constitution and a more detailed framework in subsequent legislation. An example of this approach is shown by the Albanian People's Advocate, whose role is set out in Articles 60 – 63 of the Albanian Constitution. These Articles set out the role of the People's Advocate, the office's independence and powers, and the process for appointment and dismissal. These constitutional provisions are supplemented by the Law on the People's Advocate, which sets out more detailed rules about the organisation and functioning of the office. A broadly similar approach is used in many countries, among others: Armenia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Lithuania, Malta, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and Spain.

3. The process of selection and appointment of the head of the Ombudsman institution should be such as to promote the independence of the institution. Candidates should be of high moral authority and possess recognised competence in the field of the rule of law, democratic governance and human rights. Arrangements should be in place so that the post of the head of the Ombudsman institution does not stay vacant for any significant period of time.

#### **Selection and appointment arrangements that promote independence**

An example of legislative measures related to selection and appointment that are designed to promote independence can be seen in Belgium. The Belgian Federal Ombudsman's legislation stipulates that the Ombudsman is appointed by the House of Representatives, following an open invitation for candidates to apply for the post. In order to be appointed as Ombudsman, a candidate must be a person of irreproachable conduct, hold a degree, and have relevant professional experience. In addition to open recruitment, appointment by the legislature, and suitability for the role of Ombudsman, independence of the office-holder is ensured by providing security of tenure. The Belgian Ombudsman's legislation provides, therefore, that the Ombudsman shall be independent and may not be removed from office for activities he or she has carried out within the bounds of his or her jurisdiction. Similar legislative provisions exist in other jurisdictions, such as in Poland, where the Human Rights Commissioner can only be dismissed on limited grounds, such as becoming incapable to perform his or her duties due to illness.

Another common measure designed to promote the independence of the Ombudsman institution is a requirement to renounce other employment and interests upon appointment. For example, in Hungary, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights' legislation provides that the mandate of Commissioner is incompatible with other office or gainful employment. It also stipulates that, in the four years prior to being elected as Commissioner, an office-holder cannot have held various political or public offices. Legislative measures also frequently seek to minimise the potential for government to neutralise the effectiveness of the Ombudsman institution by leaving the office vacant. In the Czech Republic, for example, the Public Defender of Rights' legislation states that the election of a new Public Defender of Rights should take place before the previous office-holder's term expires and where the office becomes vacant prior to the end of a term, an election must take place within 60 days.

4. Member States should ensure that the Ombudsman institution operates in a conducive environment which allows it to perform its functions independently of any provider of public services over which jurisdiction is held, in an effective manner and in a climate of impartiality, integrity, transparency and fairness.

#### **Ensuring that the ombudsman can perform his or her role independently**

It is not sufficient that an Ombudsman is appointed in an independent manner; he or she must operate in an environment which allows independent action in practice. Legislative provisions often make explicit the Ombudsman's independence and specifically prohibit attempts by others to influence the Ombudsman. In Iceland, for example, the Althing Ombudsman's legislation states that the Ombudsman shall not take instructions from state bodies. Similarly, in Croatia, the Ombudsman's legislation provides that any form of influence on the Ombudsman's work is forbidden and that he or she is to carry out his or her work with independence and autonomy. In Ireland, the Ombudsman's legislation makes provisions which render any attempt by a person to obstruct or hinder the Ombudsman from carrying out his or her mandate equivalent to that person being in contempt of court. It is also common for Ombudsman institutions to be provided with immunity in relation to actions taken in the fulfilment of their functions. In Greece, for example, the Ombudsman's legislation states that he or she may not be prosecuted or subjected to any inquiry for opinions expressed or actions taken in the course of fulfilling his or her duties.

5. Member States should take effective measures to enable the Ombudsman institution to require cooperation of all administrative authorities and other relevant entities, to have unfettered access to all relevant premises, including places of detention, and to all relevant individuals, in order to be able to carry out a credible examination of complaints received or other issues covered by its mandate. The Ombudsman institution should also be able to have access to all pieces of information needed for such examination, subject to possible restrictions stemming from the protection of other rights and legitimate interests, and to guarantee the confidentiality of the data in its possession.

#### **Power to compel cooperation and to investigate effectively**

A common feature of the Ombudsman's legislative mandate is to place a duty on state bodies to cooperate with the Ombudsman and to empower the Ombudsman to compel cooperation. In Finland, for example, the Ombudsman's legislation confers a right on the Ombudsman to secure the assistance of authorities as he or she deems necessary, including the provision of copies of documents and files. In Greece, the Ombudsman's legislation makes it a disciplinary offence for any public official to refuse to cooperate with the Ombudsman during an investigation.

Strong powers of investigation also feature in most jurisdictions. For example, in Norway, the Ombudsman's legislation empowers the Ombudsman to demand information from state bodies and to enter the premises of any body within his or her jurisdiction. Often, powers to access premises relate particularly to places of detention, such as in Austria, where the Austrian Ombudsman Board is empowered to access all places of detention and facilities for disabled people. In the Czech Republic, the Public Defender of Rights is empowered to enter the premises of any state body without prior notice in order to inspect files, interview employees, or meet with detained persons.

6. Member States should provide the Ombudsman institution with adequate, sufficient and sustainable resources to allow it to perform its functions in a fully independent manner. The Ombudsman institution should be able to appoint its own staff and to ensure that they receive adequate training.

#### **Adequate and sufficient funding, resources, and staffing**

It is common for legislative provisions to outline the mechanism through which funds are allocated to the Ombudsman, but less common for these to include explicit provisions in relation to the adequacy and sufficiency of resources. Examples of legislation which refers to the adequacy of resourcing for the Ombudsman include the Armenian constitution, the constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Ombudsman legislation in North Macedonia.

More commonly, provisions are made empowering the Ombudsman to appoint his or her own staff. In Romania, for example, the People's Advocate's legislation makes clear that he or she appoints his or her own staff and determines the structure of the organization. In Malta, the Ombudsman's legislation similarly empowers the Ombudsman to appoint staff, to determine the number of staff appointed, their duties, salaries, and terms and conditions of appointment.

It is rare that specific legislative provisions are made in relation to training, however, an example of this is North Macedonia's Ombudsman legislation which confers a right, and imposes a duty, on the Ombudsman and his or her staff to take part in continuous professional training and improvement, with funds set aside for this purpose.

7. Member States should take all measures necessary to protect the Ombudsman institution against threats and harassment. Any cases of alleged reprisal or intimidation against the Ombudsman institution and its staff, or against individuals who cooperate or seek to cooperate with them, should be promptly and thoroughly investigated and perpetrators should be brought to justice.

#### **Protection of the Ombudsman institution**

Examples of legislative provisions specifically designed to protect the Ombudsman from threats and harassment are not widespread, however, in Armenia and North Macedonia provisions exist which allow the Ombudsman to call upon state protection where required. In Armenia, the Ombudsman and his family are recognized as being under special protection of the state, with state bodies required to assist the Ombudsman to ensure his or her security. Similarly, in North Macedonia, the Ombudsman's legislation confers a right on the Ombudsman to police protection where there are serious threats to his or her safety.

## **II. Main tasks of the Ombudsman institution**

8. Member States should ensure that the mandate given to the Ombudsman institution empowers the latter, in particular:

- a) to provide a rights-holder-friendly non-judicial mechanism for the resolution of disputes between individuals and providers of public services, which may include mediation, and to take action upon complaints received or on its own motion, in order to protect any person or group of persons against maladministration, violation of rights, unfairness, abuse, corruption, or any injustice caused by providers of public services, whether these are public or private;

#### **A rights-holder friendly non-judicial mechanism**

As noted above, the Ombudsman institution is easily accessible when compared with courts, through measures such as receiving oral complaints, a lack of formal requirements when complaining, and the absence of a requirement for legal representation. Another example of the way in which the Ombudsman institution seeks to make sure that it operates in a rights-holder friendly way is shown in Portugal, where the Ombudsman has a dedicated Children, Senior Citizens, and Disabled Persons Unit. This Unit seeks to meet the needs of vulnerable groups and provides three helplines (the Children's Helpline, the Senior Citizens' Helpline, and the Disabled Person's Helpline) through which citizens can seek advice and make complaints. The Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2017 details how the Unit dealt with 4026 calls in the previous year and helped citizens through advice, signposting, mediation, and investigation of complaints. Ombudsman institutions also frequently collaborate with third sector and charity organisations to help citizens secure their rights. The Romanian's People's Advocate's Annual Report, for example, records that cooperation protocols were signed with UNICEF Romania and Save the Children in 2017.

While the Ombudsman's task will often involve investigation of complaints, there are examples of mediation being used to resolve disputes. In the Principality of Monaco, the High Commissioner for the Protection of Rights, Liberties and Mediation places a particular emphasis on a consensual approach to complaints, with the office being a tool for conciliation, support, and dialogue. In its Annual Report for 2017, the High Commissioner explains that the three main outcomes achieved by the office are: support to help a citizen understand their situation where the action complained about is justified; the achievement of an amicable resolution where differences between the parties are bridged and a solution emerges that satisfies all parties; and a formal recommendation when an organisation is asked to change its position. In explaining the office's approach, the High Commissioner refers to listening, understanding, informing, explaining, advising, and breaking deadlocks as being key to its role in improving the relationship between citizens and public bodies.

An important part of being a rights-holder friendly institution is the ability to ensure that those citizens who are unable to complain are, nonetheless, protected and the own-initiative power of investigation is an effective means of achieving this. For example, the Austrian Ombudsman Board's legislation allows the Ombudsman Board not only to investigate where a complaint has been received, but also where there has not been a complaint. The own-initiative power is widespread among Ombudsman institutions and features in many countries, among others: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Spain.

- b) to protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, rule of law and democratic governance, including through proposals to change legislation, litigation or other means;

#### **Promotion and protection of rights and freedoms**

Ombudsman institutions often have a mandate beyond the investigation of complaints, which includes proactive promotion and protection of citizens' rights. In Poland, for example, the Human Rights Commissioner is under a duty to analyse, monitor, and support the equal treatment of all persons and to conduct independent research and make recommendations in relation to discrimination. In Moldova, the People's Advocate's Annual Report for 2017 shows the wide range of ways through which it seeks to promote human rights. This includes informing the public through conferences, roundtables, meetings, forums, contests, exhibitions, producing videos, distributing informative materials, training, and collaboration with the media. In 2017, 174 promotion activities were conducted by the People's Advocate, directly reaching 5800 beneficiaries.

In addition to monitoring, research, and promotion, Ombudsman institutions often have formal powers to recommend changes to the law. In Sweden, for example, the Parliamentary Ombudsman is empowered to make recommendations in relation to shortcomings in legislation. Similarly, in Iceland, the Althing Ombudsman may refer flaws in legislation to the national assembly, a cabinet minister, or local authorities. In some jurisdictions, the Ombudsman is also empowered to refer laws to the courts for a view on their legality. In Bulgaria, for example, the Ombudsman can refer laws to the Constitutional Court where he or she considers that they may violate the rights and freedoms of citizens. In Estonia, the Chancellor of Justice is empowered to review proposals for legislation and may also make recommendations to amend legislation.

The Czech Republic's Public Defender of Rights' Annual Report for 2017 includes a case study which provides an example of a recommendation for legislative change. This related to vulnerable users of social services and a failure by the state to protect them sufficiently from issues such as malnourishment, neglectful care, and their complaints being ignored. The Public Defender of Rights considered that the state had a duty to adopt legislation proactively to protect the rights of these vulnerable people, in accordance with international human rights instruments. Consequently, an amendment to social services legislation was recommended in order to introduce a penalty for unauthorized interference with the privacy, safety, and integrity of those receiving social services.

- c) to make recommendations in order to prevent or remedy any of the conduct described in paragraph 2 (a) and, where appropriate, to propose administrative or legislative reforms aimed at better functioning of providers of public services; in the event that the latter fail to accept or implement those recommendations, member States should ensure that the Ombudsman institution has the right, *inter alia*, to bring a report on the failure to the attention of the competent elected body, usually the Parliament;

#### **Remedying errors and recommending reform**

Ombudsman institutions generally have wide powers to recommend that state bodies remedy particular problems faced by citizens, as well as reform systems to ensure that problems do not recur and administration is improved. In Portugal, for example, the Ombudsman's legislation empowers him or her to make recommendations in order to: address illegal or unfair acts of state bodies; help improve public services; point out shortcomings in legislation; and advise on how legislation should be interpreted. Similarly, in Malta, the Ombudsman's legislation provides that the Ombudsman may make recommendations in a range of situations, including where

he or she is of the opinion that: the matter needs to be referred to an appropriate authority for further consideration; an omission should be rectified; a decision cancelled or varied; a practice on which the decision or action was based should be altered; a law on which a decision or action was based should be reconsidered; reasons should have been given for a decision; or where any other steps should have been taken.

An example of a recommendation being made to improve an administrative system through regulatory change features in the Belgian Federal Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2017. In this case, the Ombudsman identified problems in the administration of a supplementary benefit allowance for disabled people, who were experiencing delays after their cases had been medically reviewed. The result of this was that disabled people had to wait for months for their supplementary allowance, with no entitlement to arrears or interest. Consequently, the Ombudsman recommended to Parliament that the regulations should be amended to ensure payment of the supplementary allowance immediately after a medical review.

Although Ombudsman institutions generally make non-binding recommendations, they usually have powers that are designed to pressure state bodies into accepting and implementing them. In Greece, where an authority refuses to accept a recommendation by the Ombudsman, he or she has the right to make this refusal public, while in the United Kingdom, the Ombudsman's legislation provides that where a public body fails to respond to recommendations by the Ombudsman, a special report may be made to the Parliament.

- d) to cooperate, within its mandate, with local, regional, national and international actors and networks which operate in related or similar fields.

### **Cooperation**

See paragraph 11 (a) – (d) below, where examples of the way in which Ombudsman institutions cooperate are provided.

9. Member States should make it a legal obligation for all addressees of recommendations by the Ombudsman institution to provide a reasoned reply within an appropriate time.

### **Obligation on state bodies to respond to recommendations**

It is common for the Ombudsman to be empowered to stipulate a timescale for response to recommendations and for state bodies to be under a duty to respond to recommendations. In Ireland, for example, the Ombudsman can state, when making a recommendation, the timescale in which a response should be provided. Similarly, in Croatia, state bodies must notify the Ombudsman of the measures undertaken in response to a recommendation within the timescale set by the Ombudsman.

10. Member States should consider giving, or where appropriate strengthening, the competence of the Ombudsman institution to enable it to perform the functions foreseen by the relevant international conventions in the field of human rights, such as the National Preventive Mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the UN

Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and/or the independent mechanism under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Where the Ombudsman institution holds these mandates, it must have access to sufficient resources to develop the capacity to enable it to effectively discharge its functions; this should include having appropriately qualified, skilled and trained staff.

#### **Additional roles under international treaties**

A number of Ombudsman institutions have been designated as the National Protection Mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. This includes, among others: Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia. Some Ombudsman institutions have also been given the role of Independent Mechanism under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, including among others: Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Spain.

### **III. Cooperation and dialogue**

11. Member States should take effective measures to enable the Ombudsman institution, whether at the national, regional or local level, to communicate and cooperate with, in particular :

- a) counterpart institutions, where appropriate through electronic networking and exchange of information and practices, as well as through periodical meetings;

#### **Cooperation with counterpart institutions**

There are numerous examples of Ombudsman institutions cooperating and working together. In Ireland and the United Kingdom, the Ombudsman Association (an umbrella body for complaint handling organisations in these jurisdictions) provides a network allowing Ombudsman staff to meet at regular conferences and interest group meetings. It publishes a regular newsletter and hosts a members' area on its website to share information. The Ombudsman Association provides a forum for cooperation and developing best practice, for example, it has published a Guide to Principles of Good Complaint Handling and a Service Standards Framework for its members. Networks also exist in the Nordic States, in Belgium, in Spain and in other countries with multiple Ombudsman Offices. There is also an Association of Mediterranean Ombudsmen and the Association of Mediators and Ombudsman Institutions of the Francophone countries.

In Portugal, the Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2017 highlights a wide range of activities undertaken in collaboration with other Ombudsman institutions. This includes holding the presidency of the Ibero-American Ombudsman Association and participating in support and development projects. For example, the Ombudsman participated in a twinning project to support the establishment of an ombudsman institution in Turkey, including participation in a series of workshops and seminars on various aspects of the Ombudsman's work and human rights. The Ombudsman also took part in a project to support the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Republic of Azerbaijan, organised by the European Commission, the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Polish Human Rights Commissioner.



- b) actors of the civil society, in particular non-governmental organisations, who should enjoy an easy access to the Ombudsman institution;

#### **Cooperation with civil society**

In some cases, the Ombudsman institution has a specific legislative mandate to cooperate with civil society. In Austria, for example, the Austrian Ombudsman Board is under a duty to cooperate with scientific, academic, and educational institutions and to inform the public of its activities. In Poland, the Human Rights Commissioner's legislation obliges him or her to collaborate with associations, civic movements or other goodwill societies for the protection of the liberties and rights of citizens. The Seimas Ombudsman of Lithuania's Annual Report for 2017 explains how, in practice, they cooperate with civil society, non-government organisations, human rights experts, and other social partners. This not only involves regular meetings and discussions but also active involvement in the process of investigating complaints.

- c) other human rights structures, notably the national human rights institutions and their networks, where appropriate through jointly organised activities;

#### **Cooperation with human rights structures**

In the Slovak Republic, the Public Defender of Rights is required to cooperate with other entities active in the protection of rights and freedoms, such as human rights institutions. Such cooperative approaches are common, for example, in Austria, the Austrian Ombudsman Board's Annual Report for 2017 records its participation in the annual meeting of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) at the Global Alliance of NHRIs and its active collaboration with the European Network of NHRIs, both as an NHRI itself and as the headquarters of the International Ombudsman Institute secretariat. Many Ombudsman Offices are also their country's NHRI.

- d) international and regional organisations which work in related or similar fields, particularly the Council of Europe bodies.

#### **Cooperation with regional and international organisations**

The Austrian Ombudsman Board's Annual Report for 2017 details a range of international cooperation activities undertaken by the Ombudsman Board, including: involving civil society in the self-evaluation process undertaken by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe in relation to human rights and democracy; taking part in a conference on using a human rights approach to the long term care of elderly persons; participating in the European Ombudsman Network and a seminar organised by the network on processing complaints and own initiative investigations; participating in the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights' 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration; along with the Catalan Ombudsman, providing support to the Ombudsman of Poland, who was being threatened with budget cuts and requests for his dismissal; providing a keynote speech at a conference celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Public Defender of Georgia; holding a meeting between the staff of the Austrian Ombudsman Board and the staff of the Ombudswoman for the Czech Republic on problems implementing EU regulations on cross-border family allowances; receiving international delegations, for example, the Ombudsman from the South Korean Gangwon Province and a delegation of students from the legal faculty of the Sorbonne University in Paris.

12. Member States which have established several Ombudsman institutions, such as regional, local and/or specialised ones, should enable appropriate effective co-ordination and cooperation among these institutions, in order to promote synergy and avoid duplication, through ensuring that the legislation on the Ombudsman institutions enables and encourages them to cooperate with each other.

#### **Cooperation between Ombudsman institutions within Member States**

In the United Kingdom, the Parliamentary Ombudsman's legislation allows him or her to investigate complaints jointly with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Health Ombudsman, where a complaint cuts across jurisdictions. In some countries, broader provisions exist in relation to cooperation outside of specific investigations. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, the Ombudsman has a duty to promote cooperation among the Ombudsman institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This includes a duty to: establish a network of liaison officers to disseminate the activities of the Ombudsman; organise regular meetings of the Ombudsman institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina; organise seminars and workshops; and represent the Ombudsman institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina in international fora. The High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation's Annual Report for 2016 highlights how the institution collaborates with counterparts at regional level in practice. This includes: cooperation in the consideration of citizens' complaints; coordination of human rights activities; assistance and sharing of experience between regional commissioners; assisting with the development of legislation on regional commissioners; and holding meetings with regional commissioners.

13. Member States should encourage and sponsor the development of cooperation programmes with the Council of Europe to ensure permanent knowledge-sharing among the Ombudsman institutions, in order to strengthen their contribution to the effective implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights and other relevant instruments.

#### **Strengthening implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights**

Several Ombudsman institutions have a specific legislative mandate to promote human rights and assist in the implementation of international treaties. In Finland, for example, the Ombudsman is tasked with hosting a Human Rights Centre whose role includes: promoting information, education, training and research concerning human rights; to present initiatives and issue statements in order to promote and implement human rights; and to participate in European and international cooperation associated with promoting and implementing human rights. In Portugal meanwhile, the Ombudsman is required to cooperate with similar institutions and with European and international organisations for the support and promotion of citizens' rights.

A number of Ombudsman institutions have recently benefited from the Council of Europe's thematic work providing support to Ombudsman and anti-discrimination institutions. Current or previous beneficiaries of this work include: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, and Ukraine. An example of a project undertaken as part of this work is in Montenegro, where the Ombudsman worked with the Council of Europe to strengthen the office's capacity to apply European human rights standards in its daily work. More generally, Ombudsman

institutions have cooperated closely with the Council of Europe in seeking to strengthen the role of the Ombudsman in human rights protection. For example, the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) – a global association of Ombudsman institutions from more than 100 countries – has worked with the Council of Europe on a number of initiatives, including developing the Venice Principles and the present recommendation. The IOI also helps to develop the work of Ombudsman institutions through the publication Best Practice Papers and by organising training for its members, such as its training for National Protection Mechanisms.