

Abolition of the death penalty



HELP

Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals
Council of Europe



Abolition of the Death Penalty HELP ONLINE COURSE

Duration: 1 hour

Available for free on the CoE HELP e-learning platform

START COURSE 

Council of Europe
Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP)
Programme

2025

HELP is a Council of Europe Programme

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Context and Key Concepts

The HELP course “**Abolition of the Death Penalty**” is a comprehensive training course designed to familiarise lawyers and legal professionals with the fundamental concepts and major legal texts governing the death penalty at the supranational level.

This training addresses the **global abolitionist trajectory** and aims to foster a deep understanding and analysis of why the death penalty constitutes a **violation of the prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment**, as set out in Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The course also explains the pivotal role played by the Council of Europe in the abolition of the death penalty in Europe, as well as its continued contribution to the promotion of universal abolition. A pioneer in this field, it enabled Europe to become a death penalty-free zone since 1997, with the exception of Belarus, a non-member state.

To this day, the Council of Europe continues to implement an abolitionist policy. Its action is part of a broader approach that includes inter alia cooperation with other international organisations, with the aim of **moving towards universal abolition of the death penalty**. This commitment was reaffirmed at the Reykjavik Summit, held on 16–17 May 2023.

The course therefore explores the issue of the death penalty and its abolition by outlining key concepts and main definitions, as well as the history of the abolitionist movement, particularly in Europe with the involvement of the Council of Europe.

It highlights the incompatibility of the death penalty with the prohibition of torture throughout the entire journey of a person sentenced to death, from trial to detention, execution, and even beyond, for the families. It also analyses the Council of Europe’s abolitionist policies, the key actors involved, and their partners. Finally, a summary of essential ideas helps to reinforce the understanding of the topic, followed by a test to assess knowledge acquired, equipping legal professionals and interested readers with the necessary tools.

About the HELP Course

The course was developed in 2025 as part of the project “Death is not justice: abolition of the death penalty in Europe and beyond” by the Council of Europe’s Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law, in cooperation with the [European Programme for Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals \(HELP\) of the Council of Europe](#).

Developed using the [HELP methodology](#), the course is tailored to the **learning needs of legal professionals working in the field of human rights protection**.

Target Audience

This free online course is primarily intended for legal professionals, namely:

- Judges
- Prosecutors
- Lawyers
- Court staff

This does not exclude the participation of other legal professionals or anyone else interested in the subject.

Course outline

The course consists of the following chapters:

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Introductory Section

- Navigation overview
- Course introduction
- For whom?
- By whom?
- Learning objectives
- Module overview

1

Chapter 1: The main concepts

- Definitions
- The road to abolition
- International texts
- The role of the Council of Europe

2

Chapter 2: The death penalty, contrary to the prohibition of torture

- The trial
- Detention
- Execution
- Following execution

3

Chapter 3: Policies for the universal abolition of the death penalty

- The Council of Europe's abolitionist policy
- The bodies developing the Council of Europe's policy
- Partners of the Council of Europe in the abolition of the death penalty

4

Chapter 4: Main conclusions

- The main concepts
- The death penalty, contrary to the prohibition of torture
- Policies for the universal abolition of the death penalty

5

Test your knowledge

- Questions

How to access the online course

The course is freely available in self-learning format on the [Council of Europe HELP e-learning platform](#). The overall length of the online course is approximately 1 hour, and those who complete it in a self-learning format can obtain an electronic '**Statement of Accomplishment**'.

To access the course, you need to have a HELP account. If you haven't created one yet, you can sign up [here](#) - it only takes a few minutes.

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