Parameters for the application and implementation of the Reykjavík Principles for democracy



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Introduction

BACKGROUND

The aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress. As affirmed in the Statute of the Council of Europe in 1949, member states are committed to upholding the shared moral and spiritual values that are the source of individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law. These principles form the basis of all genuine democracy and provide the foundations of the three equally fundamental, inter-dependent and inalienable pillars of human rights, democratic pluralism and the rule of law as enshrined in the Statute and the European Convention on Human Rights.

Through the development of shared standards in the form of treaties and common policy guidelines, the Council of Europe has developed a considerable democratic *acquis* as a truly pan-European organisation uniquely placed for protecting and promoting democracy and democratic security in Europe.

DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING

The aims of the Council of Europe and its rich body of standards are all the more relevant today, as Europe's democratic principles, values and progress are being threatened. In recent years, European democracies have faced fundamental challenges from different angles. They come, in some instances, from politicians that seem increasingly to question established democratic norms. In some cases, governments have themselves chipped away at civil liberties and institutional guardrails, especially as they have sought to deal with pressing crises. Challenges also relate to apparent shifts in public attitudes and a worrying loss of trust in democratic institutions going hand in hand with a rising tide of mis- and disinformation, and the growing threat of foreign interference in national democratic processes. Cutting across these shifts, technological developments and the role of large online platforms and technology corporations have come, in some situations, to undermine democratic accountability and neutral spaces for pluralistic debate; rising economic inequalities are placing democratic systems under increasing strain, and the effects of the climate emergency are challenging traditional democratic decision-making processes. Across its work and activities, the Council of Europe has observed these and a number of other challenges to the proper functioning of European democracies, ranging from the declining quality of elections to citizens' faltering trust in elected representatives, the shrinking of civic space and the use of excessive force against civil society actors, the (mis)use of the judiciary to undermine political opposition, the declining quality of the application of rule of law standards, and the polarisation of the political environment, including through and with hate speech, often targeting women and people at risk of discrimination. Since 2021, the Council of Europe's successive Secretary Generals have called attention to the fact that Europe's democratic environment and democratic institutions are in a mutually reinforcing decline.

In the face of the mounting challenges, there is a deepening realisation about the importance, and the need for commitment to build resilience against polarisation, populism and an authoritarian drift. Urgent, concrete and purposive action is needed to protect and cultivate democratic standards in Europe and to ensure the broader social and economic conditions that make democratic participation possible. If the problems look severe, there is also democratic potential for solutions, and the Council of Europe's member states can lead a bold effort to design such remedies. European governments can help make democracy more vibrant and robust, by stepping up to tackle existential challenges to core freedoms in the region.

At their Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Reykjavík in 2023, member states provided the Organisation with renewed guidance and a new agenda. The resulting Reykjavík Declaration expressed their commitment to reunite around their shared principles and values, to secure and strengthen democracy and good governance at all levels throughout Europe, to protect and promote the three interdependent pillars of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, and to actively prevent and resist democratic backsliding, including in situations of emergency and armed conflict. The Reykjavik Declaration also underlined the need to strengthen the free and open international order based on the Rule of Law, respect for the United Nations Charter, and emphasised that social justice is crucial for democratic stability and security in Europe.

Building on these commitments, member states also adopted the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy defining the foundations of Europe's democratic order. In 2024, the Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM) was set up and tasked with the creation of a framework of Parameters to facilitate the application and implementation of the Reykjavik Principles and other relevant Council of Europe standards to promote, protect and strengthen democracy, a task which amounts, in effect, to the application of the Council of Europe's democratic *acquis*.

The Parameters are an integral part of the New Democratic Pact for Europe, a collective and inclusive strategic process launched by the Council of Europe in 2024 to develop concrete structural solutions and innovative practices aimed at strengthening the foundations of democracy and making it more tangible for everyone, especially young people. With the development of a framework for their use, the Parameters will help support an evidence-based approach within the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

AIM OF THE PARAMETERS

The Parameters are designed as a practical support tool, primarily for member states, aiming to (i) provide guidance for evaluating the state of their democracies, (ii) help them understand gaps and vulnerabilities in their democratic systems, (iii) take actions to enhance the quality of their democracies in accordance with the standards of the Council of Europe (iv) foster collective peer-to-peer dialogue to build resilience thereby facilitating shared learning and informing the development of further tools, standards and cooperative initiatives, where appropriate. Recognising the existence of legitimate differences in how Europe's democracies look and work, the Parameters build on a shared understanding by member States of the core elements and requirements for a society to function as a democracy.

Many member states have made democracy-related commitments at the national, sub-national and international levels. The Parameters provide a detailed and operational framework to help governments measure and unpack the reforms needed. The Parameters provide a unique tool to empower governments to do just this and to help them follow through on their multiple commitments to uphold and fortify democratic norms. They reflect the urgency of the moment at a political level and are also a practical guide for action**.**

THE PARAMETERS

The Parameters are divided into five interlinked pillars that are of equal importance for the functioning and resilience of all genuine democracy: (I) democratic participation, (II) democratic institutions, (III) democratic governance and integrity, (IV) democratic freedoms, inclusion and civil society and (V) democratic future. Each pillar is linked to its corresponding Reykjavík Principle(s) for Democracy. Where democracy is faring unwell in one aspect, it is likely that other aspects will also be suffering. The Parameters are a tool to assess holistically the state of democracy in a particular context.

Each pillar in turn is divided into key areas containing the individual Parameters. For each Parameter, a number of sub-parameters or indicators are provided, on the basis of which an assessment may be carried out. The Parameters provide the user with a set goal, while the indicators show how to attain this goal, in accordance with the standards of the Council of Europe. Together, the Parameters and the indicators form an integral whole. For the assessment of each Parameter, references to relevant key standards and other guidance are provided. The full reference list appears in the appendix.

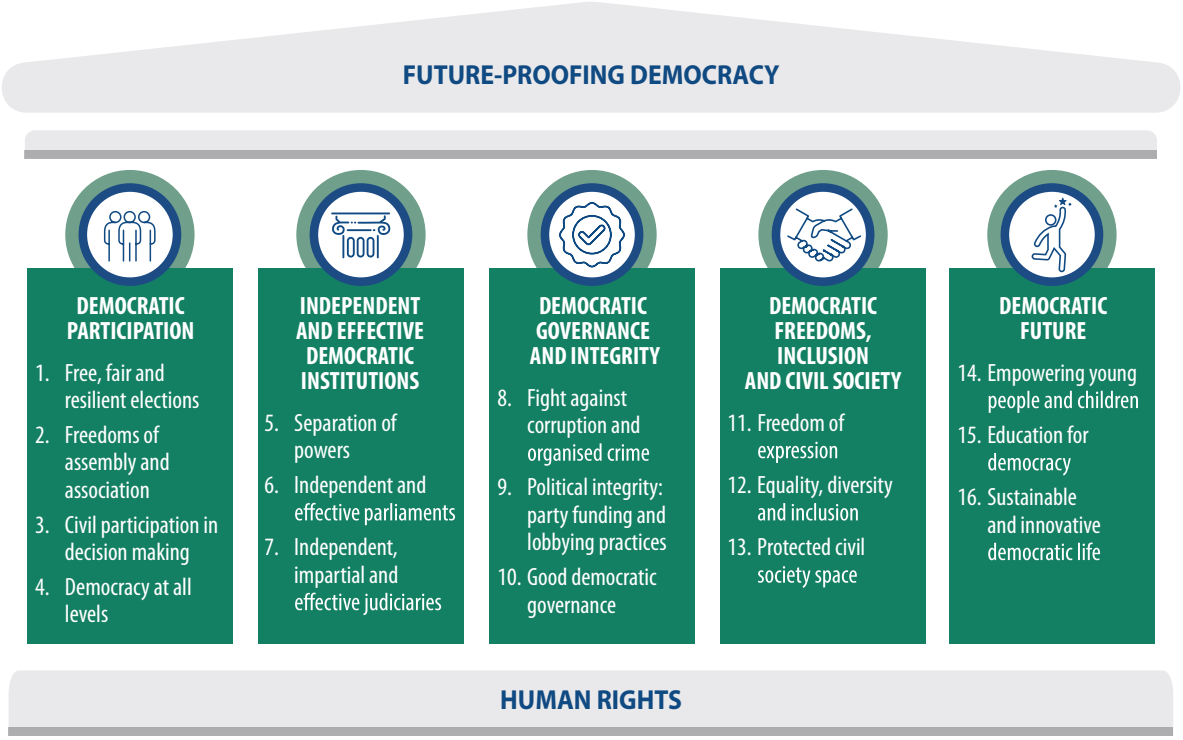


Fig.: Visual representation of the Parameters

The Parameters are addressed to member States as the primary guarantors of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and their protection, and the main guardians of democracy and the rule of law. They are also at the disposal of anyone who wishes to consider the state of their democracy.

The added value of the Parameters is twofold. First, they provide a comprehensive list of democracy requirements drawn from various Council of Europe standards, helping to address current challenges to democracy through forward-looking perspectives. Second, they will be accompanied by an framework for supporting their use. This framework will help member states and other users to apply the Parameters consistently across member States. Bearing in mind the unique characteristics of each state's democratic system, the framework will allow for flexibility, while offering a structured approach to assessments. The outcome of such assessments will foster a shared understanding of the common challenges to democracy among political actors, institutions, organisations, and citizens, and help identify targeted actions to address them.

The Parameters should be interpreted in the light of the relevant Council of Europe standards referred to in this document, and in particular in accordance with the European Convention on Human Rights and the applicable case law of the European Court of Human Rights. This interpretative approach also applies to the understanding of concepts, procedures, and institutional functions referred to in the Parameters, which should be understood in light of the Convention as interpreted by the Court.

As democracy and its threats are constantly evolving, there is accordingly no single resilience strategy that would be valid for all and at all times. Therefore, the Parameters can be revised and updated to ensure that they address current challenges and help meet emerging ones.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The application of all Parameters should be done in line with the principles of the Council of Europe's underlying human rights approach:

- **Participation and inclusion:** with the aim to enable individuals to hold authorities and other duty-bearers accountable and to claim rights. Engagement with civil society is essential in this regard.
- **Equality and non-discrimination:** discrimination should be actively counteracted and people in vulnerable situations should be included and empowered to claim their rights so that no one is left behind. Gender equality and gender mainstreaming are integral to the application of these parameters.

- **Accountability, transparency and access to information:** authorities and other duty-bearers should be enabled to fulfil their responsibilities, and decision-making information should be made available and accessible.

BUILDING RESILIENCE FOR A DEMOCRATIC FUTURE

Through the Parameters, member states can develop and deliver concrete solutions to the problems that beset their democracies. Crucially, the Parameters offer a targeted approach to enhancing democratic resilience. They are crafted as a way of reflecting and disaggregating the concept of resilience to make it operational for member states.

Democratic resilience is the ability of a political system to react to challenges so as to maintain its democratic features. It refers to some degree of resistance against actual or potential risks or threats to democracy, and not simply the continuity of democratic norms. Resilience denotes a democracy's capacity to absorb external and internal stresses and also adapt in ways that enable it more effectively to face emergent crises. Democratic resilience means both resistance against threats and crises, and future-oriented, qualitative reform. There are different stages of resilience, from early prevention to post-crisis recovery of democratic quality. Sustainable and robust resilience is the result of formal institutional guardrails, political-party strategies, organised civil society actions, and the positions adopted by a wider political community. This expansive definition of resilience helps highlight the importance of ensuring that democracies are equipped for future democratic generations.

Governments, political parties, and civic actors today have the opportunity – and the responsibility – to future-proof democracy. This means setting in place the capacities, incentives, and protective rules to cushion democracy in the long term from illiberal challengers, unpredictable technological advances, the ever-deepening impact of the climate emergency, and the risk of youth disaffection with democratic systems' performance. The Parameters, in consequence, include suggestions for enshrining the needs of future generations within current democratic processes.

As the Council of Europe intensifies its support to member states in strengthening their democratic institutions and culture, the Parameters are central to achieving the Organisation's founding goals – advancing democracy, human rights, and the rule of law – while preparing democratic systems for the future.

Pillar 1

Democratic participation

REYKJAVÍK PRINCIPLES

Principle 1: Actively enable and encourage democratic participation at national, regional and local levels through free and fair elections. As appropriate, forms of participatory democracy, including deliberative democracy, may be encouraged.

Principle 2: Hold elections and referenda in accordance with international standards and take all appropriate measures against any interference in electoral systems and processes. Elections are to be grounded in respect for relevant human rights standards, especially freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of association, including for the creation of political parties and associations in accordance with national and international standards.

1. FREE, FAIR AND RESILIENT ELECTIONS

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: **Treaties:** Art. 6(1), 10, 11, 13 and 14 ECHR (ETS No. 5) • Art. 3 Prot. No. 1 ECHR (ETS No. 9) • Art. 1 Prot. No. 12 ECHR (ETS No. 177) • CPIAPPD (ETS No. 108) • Art. 3(2) ECLSG (ETS No. 122) • CPFPL (ETS No. 144) • Art. 4 FCPNM (ETS No. 157) | **Committee of Ministers:** Rec(2003)3 • CM/Rec(2009)1 • CM/Rec(2007)15 • CM/Rec(2017)5 • CM/Rec(2022)12

Other standards: **Committee of Ministers:** Res(62)2 • CM(2022)10-final • CM(2017)50-add2final | **PACE:** Res. 1459 (2005) • Res. 1590 (2007) • Res. 1706 (2010) • Res. 1897 (2012) • Res. 2251 (2019) • Res. 2254 (2019) • Res. 2332 (2020) • Res. 2525 (2024) | **Congress:** Rec. 273 (2009) • Res. 382 (2015) • Res. 472 (2021) • Res. 482 (2022) | **Venice Commission:** CDL-AD(2002)023rev2-cor • CDL-EL(2013)006 • CDL-AD(2022)015 • CDL-AD(2025)003

Further guidance: **European Court of Human Rights:** Guide on Art. 3 Prot. No. 1 ECHR • Guide on Prisoners' rights | **Venice Commission:** CDL-AD(2005)043 • CDL-AD(2006)025 • CDL-PI(2018)006 • CDL-PI(2018)011 • CDL-PI(2019)001 • CDL-PI(2019)004 • CDL-PI(2019)005 • CDL-PI(2019)006 • CDL-PI(2020)020 • CDL-PI(2021)014 • CDL-PI(2022)027 • CDL-PI(2024)005

1.1. Legal framework

The electoral framework ensures free and fair elections, safeguarding electoral rights, legal stability and the integrity of the democratic process.

- Free and fair elections are conducted at regular intervals, in accordance with European and other international standards, notably Article 3 of Protocol No. 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights.
- The preconditions for democratic elections include the respect for human rights such as freedom of expression and the media, freedom of movement within the country, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association for political purposes, including the formation of political parties. Any restrictions that exist are prescribed by law, proportionate, pursue a legitimate interest and are necessary in a democratic society, in accordance with international standards.
- Electoral rules, beyond technical ones, have at least statutory rank and are assessed and adopted in consultation with relevant stakeholders involved in the legislative process and the electoral system which could include all political parties, electoral management bodies, civil society and others, including underrepresented groups.

- The fundamental elements of electoral law are, in principle, not open to amendment less than one year before an election unless changes serve a clear democratic purpose and are based on broad consensus.
- Legal frameworks guarantee timely, accessible and effective means of lodging and resolving electoral complaints and appeals.
- In a state of emergency, elections are held at a time when the entire electoral process can comply with the principles enshrined in the constitution and the electoral framework.

1.2. Universal and equal suffrage

All citizens of voting age have the right to vote and stand for election subject to objective and proportionate conditions.

- Legislation and practical measures ensure that all citizens eligible to vote, encompassing at least those of majority age – including women, minorities, citizens with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups – can register and participate effectively in the electoral process at local, regional and national level. Any restriction on the ability to register to vote and stand for election is clearly defined in law and proportionate to a legitimate aim.
- Where applicable, non-nationals can be authorised to participate in local elections.
- Each voter has, in principle, the same number of votes, and seats are distributed among constituencies in a way that safeguards equal suffrage and ensures that electoral boundaries or methods of allocation do not unreasonably distort representation or discriminate against any group.
- Awareness-raising campaigns and voter-education programmes are conducted and reforms to address structural barriers, as appropriate, are implemented to encourage broad and inclusive participation, and better representation among candidates, of women, persons with disabilities, young people and groups at risk of discrimination.
- Electoral registers or voters' lists are published, permanent, accessible and regularly updated. The personal data are processed in compliance with data protection requirements and are limited to what is relevant and necessary for the specific purposes of voter registration and authentication.
- The registration process of electoral candidates follows an administrative or judicial procedure with clear rules and proportionate requirements to ensure that political parties and independent candidates can register and operate on an equal footing.
- Parties and candidates are treated fairly in terms of impartial and uniform application of laws, conditions for appearing on the ballot, campaign opportunities, media coverage and the funding of parties and campaigns.
- Once elected, individuals are not unduly prevented from effectively assuming office and performing their functions.

1.3. Free, secret and direct suffrage

Voters can freely form and express their opinions and cast their ballots in a secret and direct electoral process.

- Voters are offered a genuine choice at the ballot and they can cast their votes freely, without fear of violence or intimidation.
- Authorities safeguard voters, candidates, and election officials from hate speech, violence, coercion, and intimidation, including from gender-specific risks.
- Registration to vote and voting procedures, facilities and materials are accessible and easy to understand and use, including for persons with disabilities.
- Voting is individual and the secrecy of each ballot is preserved so that the content of the vote cannot be traced back to any voter's identity.
- Votes are counted and recorded accurately and transparently.
- At least one chamber of the national legislature, subnational legislative bodies, if any, and local councils are elected directly.

1.4. Specific rules for referendums

The process and legal effects of referendums are defined by law and their results guide governments' responses.

- The procedure for initiating referendums is clearly defined by law. Where a referendum may be initiated by a section of the electorate, the legal framework specifies who is entitled to collect and sign referendum petitions, the timeline for collecting signatures, and the number of signatures required, which should be proportionate to the size of the electorate.
- A sufficiently high number of signatures ensures that only issues that are likely to attract significant public interest reach a referendum stage, while avoiding overly burdensome requirements.
- When a referendum is convened, it is clearly specified whether its outcome is advisory or binding in nature. For binding referendums, results are respected and changes by non-referendum means are avoided for a reasonable period of time.

1.5. Management and oversight

Election management and oversight are conducted with impartiality, transparency and independence from politically motivated manipulation.

- A permanent, professional, transparent and impartial management body acting with the necessary independence – such as an electoral commission or relevant administrative authority – oversees the application of electoral rules and ensures neutrality.
- Election management bodies maintain and publish up-to-date public information on their activities and decisions, proactively addressing questions about potential irregularities or misconduct.
- National and international election observers are granted extensive access and opportunities to present findings publicly.
- Digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), used throughout the electoral cycle adhere to strict data-protection, accessibility, cybersecurity and confidentiality standards and are subject to independent audit and verification.
- Judicial and administrative bodies handling electoral disputes operate with impartiality and efficiency, offering effective remedies when violations are found.

1.6. Electoral communication and campaigning

Electoral communication and campaigning, both offline and online, adhere to principles of transparency, fairness and integrity.

- Electoral communication and campaigns, both offline and online, are conducted in a manner that guarantees all political parties and independent candidates' opportunities to compete fairly for voter support, promoting a level playing field in the electoral process.
- Safeguards coupled with effective enforcement are in place against misrepresentation and intentional spread of electoral disinformation online, including by foreign authorities, and against manipulation and claims that seek to undermine the integrity of election results without sufficient, credible evidence.
- Electoral laws, regulations, or guidance clearly define requirements for AI-driven campaign tools, including transparency regarding data sources, model usage, and any algorithmic biases.
- Electoral rules enable voters to identify political advertisements and see who sponsored them.
- Platforms, political parties and independent candidates disclose when targeting, including that driven by AI, or content personalisation is employed in the dissemination of political advertisements, ensuring users can understand and verify how such techniques influence campaign messaging.

1.7. Media coverage of electoral campaigns

Media independence and pluralism are protected and fair and balanced electoral coverage free from interference is ensured.

- Public authorities respect the editorial independence of the media and refrain from undue interference or influence in their election coverage.
- Protection measures are in place against attacks, intimidation or other unlawful pressure on the media.

- Self-regulatory frameworks or other measures ensure fair and balanced news and current affairs programmes, especially in the audiovisual media.
- Candidates and parties are treated fairly in paid advertising, broadcasts, and free airtime allocation.

2. FREEDOMS OF ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: **Treaties:** Art. 11 ECHR (ETS No. 5) • Art. 5, 6, 21 and 28 (R)ESC (ETS No. 35 and 163) | **Committee of Ministers:** CM/Rec(2007)14

Other standards: **Committee of Ministers:** Decl(07/12/2011)_2 | **PACE:** Res. 1947 (2013) • Res. 2116 (2016) | **Venice Commission:** CDL-AD(2014)046 • CDL-AD(2019)017rev

Further guidance: **European Court of Human Rights:** Guide on Art. 11 ECHR • Guide on Mass protests | **Venice Commission:** CDL-PI(2014)003 • CDL-PI(2022)029 | **Secretary General:** SG/Inf(2015)30 | **Human Rights Commissioner:** CommHR(2023)2 | **CINGO:** CONF/EXP(2018)2

2.1. Freedom of assembly

Freedom of peaceful assembly, including online, is guaranteed without excessive procedural conditions, and those exercising this right are protected from undue interference.

- Any restrictions are prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society for the pursuit of the legitimate aims set out in Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights.
- In the event of a prior notification requirement, an effective, independent, timely and accessible procedure established by law is available to assembly organisers to challenge any refusal to authorise the exercise of freedom of assembly or to impose conditions to its exercise.
- Participants in peaceful assemblies are not arrested, detained, convicted or punished for their participation in an assembly, unless their conduct would make each of such measures a proportionate response to the need to secure a legitimate aim and would be deemed necessary in a democratic society.
- Dispersal of an assembly is only justified subject to the requirement of proportionality and as a measure of last resort. Peaceful demonstrations are not dispersed solely because of formal irregularities.
- The use of force is allowed to the minimum extent necessary and subject to independent oversight to assess its proportionality, regulation, and organisation.
- Law enforcement officials are held accountable for any unlawful or excessive use of force.
- The media are guaranteed access to public assemblies in order to provide independent reporting on matters of public interest.
- Individuals have the freedom to choose any website, application or other services in order to join, mobilise and participate in online assemblies whether or not they are formally recognised by public authorities.

2.2. Freedom of association

Freedom of association, including online, is guaranteed, with safeguards ensuring the full exercise of associations' rights, access to funding and their transparent operation.

- Any restrictions are prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society for the pursuit of the legitimate aims set out in Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights.
- When the law requires an association to undergo a formal registration process, an effective, independent, timely, and accessible procedure is available to challenge any refusal to register. A judicial procedure is also available to contest any interference with the association's operations, sanctions imposed on it or its members, or its dissolution.
- Sanctions imposed on an association or its members, including dissolution, are foreseeable and proportionate and not applied in an arbitrary or discriminatory manner.
- Associations have the right, in law and in practice, to express their opinions through their objectives and activities and to participate in political and public debate.

- Associations are free to seek, receive and use financial, material and human resources, whether domestic, foreign or international, for the pursuit of their activities, subject only to restrictions that are defined by law, foreseeable and proportionate.
- The allocation of public funding to associations for the pursuit of their objectives is based on objective, neutral and non-discriminatory criteria.
- The rights of both workers' and employers' organisations are effectively protected.

3. CIVIL PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: Treaties: Prot. (No. 1) ECHR (ETS No. 9) • ECLSG (ETS No. 122) • Add. Prot. ECLSG (ETS No. 207) • ECRLPINGO (ETS No. 124) • CPFPL (ETS No. 144) • ECRML (ETS No. 148) • CEFCVCHS (CETS No. 199) • CECAOD (CETS No. 205) | **Committee of Ministers:** CM/Rec(2007)14 • CM/Rec(2018)4 • CM/Rec(2023)6

Other standards: Committee of Ministers: CM(2017)83-final | **PACE:** Res. 800 (1983) • Res. 1744 (2010) • Res. 2397 (2021) • Res. 2437 (2022) • Res. 2552 (2024) | **Congress:** Res. 326 (2011) • Res. 385 (2015) • Res. 480 (2022) • Rec. 492 (2023) | CINGO: CONF/PLE(2009)CODE1 | **ACFC:** TC No. 2 (2008)

Further guidance: CDDG: CDDG(2022)12 • Civil participation in decision-making processes

Policymaking is centred around people's legitimate needs and expectations, and citizens and civil society can effectively participate in decision-making including through deliberative processes as appropriate.

- Authorities ensure the timely sharing of information and broad, effective, inclusive, accessible and meaningful participation by citizens, and civil society, reflecting the diversity of groups and overlapping identities in the different phases of decision-making and in the monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation.
- Participatory, inclusive and agile tools, ranging from dialogue and consultation to various representative deliberative processes, ensure equal access for all segments of population, as well as transparency, proper structure and accountability of mechanisms and processes, and facilitation by trained public officials.
- The outcomes of consultative and deliberative processes are meaningfully considered in policy- and decision-making, with clear and reasoned explanations and opportunities for monitoring provided to citizens, especially when their input is not reflected in the final decisions.
- Regulations and/or policies ensure that such processes are effective, lawful, fair, transparent, inclusive, representative, accountable and auditable.

4. DEMOCRACY AT ALL LEVELS

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: Treaties: ECLSG (ETS No. 122) • EOCTCTCA (ETS No. 106) • Add Prot. EOCTCTCA (ETS No. 159) • Prot. No. 2 EOCTCTCA (ETS No. 169) | **Committee of Ministers:** Rec(2005)1 • CM/Rec(2007)12 • CM/Rec(2009)2 • CM/Rec(2011)11 • CM/Rec(2019)3 • CM/Rec(2022)2 • CM/Rec(2022)10

Other standards: Committee of Ministers: CM(2008)14-add | **Congress:** Res. 293 (2009) • Res. 347 (2012) • Rec. 362 (2014) • Res. 389 (2015) • Rec. 492 (2023) • Res. 499 (2024)

Further guidance: Congress: Reference Framework for Regional Democracy | **CDDG:** CDDG(2023)12 | **Venice Commission:** CDL-PI(2023)001

4.1. Local and regional competences

In line with the principle of local self-government, local and regional authorities are mandated and resourced to manage a significant part of public affairs and consulted on all matters which concern them directly.

- The principle of local self-government is recognised in domestic legislation, ideally through constitutional provisions.

- Local and regional authorities have either full and exclusive, delegated or shared powers, based on subsidiarity, allowing them to manage a significant part of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population. The free exercise of their powers may not be impeded by another, central or regional, authority except as provided for by the law.
- The competences of local and regional authorities are clearly defined, and they have adequate and independent financial and human resources to fulfil their responsibilities and with a wide degree of autonomy.
- Local and regional authorities can take initiatives in fields not specifically excluded from their competences or attributed to another authority.
- Local and regional authorities are consulted insofar as possible, on all matters which concern them directly.
- Any administrative supervision of local or regional authorities, except in the case of delegation of powers, normally aims only at ensuring compliance with the law and with constitutional principles.

4.2. Multi-level governance

Any formal mechanisms for coordination and cooperation between different levels of government adhere to principles of good democratic governance.

- Democratic governance principles include the recognition of electoral mandates at each level, and the promotion of accountability, transparency, fiscal responsibility and better service delivery.
- Such frameworks are flexible and clearly define roles and responsibilities, including those of civil society and citizens if applicable, with transparent decision-making, regular reporting, and oversight mechanisms in place.

Pillar 2

Independent and effective democratic institutions

REYKJAVÍK PRINCIPLES

Principle 3: Maintain and protect independent and effective parliaments and other democratic institutions which determine their own rules and procedures and in which representatives from across the political spectrum can participate. All elected representatives will maintain high ethical standards.

Principle 4: Uphold the separation of powers with appropriate checks and balances between different State institutions, at all levels, to prevent any excessive concentration of power.

Principle 5: Ensure independent, impartial and effective judiciaries. Judges must be independent and impartial in the exercise of their functions, and free from external interference, including from the executive.

5. SEPARATION OF POWERS

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: **Committee of Ministers:** CM(2008)170 • CM/Rec(2023)5

Other standards: **PACE:** Res. 1353 (2003) • Res. 1594 (2007) • Res. 1744 (2010) • Res. 2437 (2022) • Res. 2470 (2022) | **Congress:** Res. 499 (2024) | **Venice Commission:** CDL-AD(2016)007

Further guidance: **Venice Commission:** CDL-AD(2011)003rev • CDL-PI(2020)003 • CDL-PI(2020)005rev • CDL-PI(2020)012 | **Secretary General:** SG/Inf(2020)11 | **CINGO**: CONF/PLE(2013)DEC1

5.1. Checks and balances

The legislative, executive and judicial branches operate independently and without excessive concentration of powers.

- The principle of the separation of powers is enshrined in the constitution and in domestic law and is duly applied in practice at all levels, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for distinct branches of government.
- A system of checks and balances effectively prevents any branch from overpowering the others.
- Any constitutional amendments are adopted in a manner that ensures broad consensus and allow for necessary reforms while preserving constitutional stability, essence and predictability.
- Constitutional courts or equivalent bodies ensure that laws and executive actions comply with the constitutional framework and maintain the balance of powers.

5.2. Parliamentary oversight and control

Parliaments exercise oversight and control over the executive, including its power to legislate, with clearly defined and strictly limited exceptions.

- Executive law-making powers are limited, controlled, and explicitly delegated by parliament.
- Guarantees exist for elected legislative assemblies to effectively fulfil their democratic mandate, without fear of harassment or undue interference from the executive.
- Parliaments subject executive bodies to appropriate scrutiny and investigation and may hold a vote of no confidence against the head of government where and when appropriate.

5.3. Transparency, accountability and oversight of the executive power

Government actions are transparent, accountable, and oversight is ensured.

- Citizens have easy access to user-friendly information for informed participation and oversight.
- Independent institutions, such as Ombudspersons and national human rights institutions, are established and fully operational to monitor government and administrative actions and ensure accountability.
- Government actions conform with the Constitution and other laws and refrain from any misuse of powers or resources that could infringe the principles of separation of powers or erode public trust in democratic institutions or processes. These actions can include, but are not limited to, stifling opposition and media, circumventing term limits, using institutional reforms to erode judicial independence, compromising the neutrality or operation of the administration or improperly transferring power away from the legislature.
- Any enhanced executive powers during emergency situations are clearly defined, temporary and subject to effective oversight by the judiciary and legislature.
- Armed forces are under democratic civilian control, abide by the legal order and are accountable for their actions. The police are accountable to the citizens and subject to efficient external control.

6. INDEPENDENT AND EFFECTIVE PARLIAMENTS

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: **Committee of Ministers:** Rec(2003)3 • CM/Rec(2019)1

Other standards: **PACE:** Res. 1154 (1998) • Res. 1353 (2003) • Res. 1601 (2008) • Res. 2037 (2015) • Res. 2127 (2016) • Res. 1871 (2012) • Res. 2274 (2019) • Res. 2537 (2024) | **Venice Commission:** CDL-AD(2019)015 • CDL-AD(2010)025

Further guidance: **Venice Commission**: CDL-INF(1996)007 • CDL-PI(2023)018 • CDL-PI(2018)004

6.1. Pluralist democratic process

A pluralist political system allows the representation of diverse interests, with law-making and decision-making processes that are transparent and inclusive.

- An inclusive and transparent political process allows for thorough debate and scrutiny of proposed laws, involves the genuine participation of those directly affected by policy and legislative decisions, and ensures that legislation aligns with international human rights standards.
- Positive action measures are in place to promote gender parity and facilitate the participation of young people and underrepresented groups in political and public decision-making.
- Both the parliamentary majority and the opposition respect democratic procedures and avoid practices that curtail deliberation, including the undue use of accelerated legislative procedures or other actions that obstruct parliamentary work.

6.2. Parliamentary ethics and conduct

Integrity frameworks and the regulation of financing ensure effective functioning of parliaments.

- Parliaments and other elected assemblies have transparent rules and procedures for the declaration of interests and the regulation of contacts with third parties.
- Rules deal with any incompatibilities of functions and/or restrictions on accessory activities, as well as possible limitations after the termination of a mandate.
- Rules and procedures prevent the misuse of parliamentary resources for political party campaigning or other purposes.
- Compliance mechanisms, including their monitoring and the provision of sanctions, ensure that elected officials can be held accountable.
- The regulation of the financing of parliament and the remuneration of its members is sufficient to ensure its independent and effective functioning.

6.3. Role of the parliamentary opposition

The role and participation of the parliamentary opposition is regulated, enabled and respected.

- The opposition participates meaningfully in the organisation of legislative work and legislative procedure.
- The opposition contributes meaningfully to the supervision, scrutiny and control of the action and policy of the government.
- Parliaments provide political groups or individuals representing the opposition with the appropriate financial and other means and resources to perform their functions effectively.
- The opposition can discharge its function without fear of harassment or undue interference by the majority or the executive.

6.4. Parliamentary immunity and inviolability

Parliamentary immunity guarantees that members of parliament can fulfil their democratic mandate.

- Clear and predictable rules on parliamentary immunity, including criteria and procedures for lifting such immunity, are prescribed by law and applied; such procedures are transparent and respect the principle of the presumption of innocence.
- Parliamentary immunity is functional and does not place members of parliament above the law but rather provides appropriate guarantees so that they can effectively fulfil their democratic mandate, without fear of harassment or undue interference from the executive or the judiciary.

7. INDEPENDENT, IMPARTIAL AND EFFECTIVE JUDICIARIES

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: **Treaties:** Art. 6 and 7 ECHR (ETS No. 5) • CECPPL (CETS No. 226) | **Committee of Ministers:** Rec(2000)19 • Rec(2000)21• Rec(2005)9 • CM/Rec(2010)3 • CM/Rec(2010)12 • CM/Rec(2012)11

Other standards: **Committee of Ministers:** CM(2016)36-final | **PACE:** Res. 1703 (2010) | **Venice Commission:** CDL-AD(2010)004 • CDL-AD(2010)040 | **CCJE:** Collection of opinions | **CCPE:** Collection of opinions | **CEPEJ:** CEPEJ Guidelines

Further guidance: **European Court of Human Rights:** Guide on Right to a fair trial (civil limb) • Guide on Right to a fair trial (criminal limb) • Guide on No punishment without law | **Venice Commission:** CDL-AD(2007)028 • CDL-PI(2022)023 • CDL-PI(2022)051 • CDL-PI(2025)002 • CDL-PI(2025)003 • Reference texts in the field of the judiciary | **Other:** DAJ/DOC(98)23 • CPGE (2005)05

7.1. Independence and impartiality

Judicial independence and impartiality are guaranteed, allowing every person to have confidence in the justice system.

- Judicial independence and impartiality are constitutionally protected to ensure the right to a fair trial, and decisions are based solely on legal grounds, free from improper influence, in accordance with Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights.
- Judges are bound only by law, which is accessible and foreseeable, ensuring equality of arms, adversarial proceedings and efficient justice.
- Judicial self-governing bodies, such as councils for the judiciary or other judicial self-governing mechanisms, composed in their majority of peer-elected judges with independent decision-making powers, contribute to the upholding of judicial independence.
- The judiciary receives funding adequate to ensure its meaningful functioning free from executive or legislative interference other than through budget accountability procedures.
- The role of the executive and legislative branches in judicial appointments and discipline is well-defined and accompanied by safeguards to ensure judicial independence and impartiality.
- Judges' careers, including appointments, transfers and promotions, are decided independently, based on merit, with transparent and objective criteria, and subject to judicial review.

- Judges' remuneration and benefits are defined by law, based on the importance of their mission and dignity of their office.
- Case allocation follows objective pre-established criteria free from executive or legislative interference in individual cases.
- Judges, whether appointed or elected, enjoy guaranteed tenure until the mandatory retirement age or the end of their term of office. Dismissals occur only in exceptionally serious cases and follow due procedure, strictly limiting any interference with the principle of judicial irremovability.
- Judges' freedom of expression may only be subject to limitations provided these do not jeopardise their independence.

7.2. Accountability

Judicial transparency and disciplinary liability of judges ensure the accountability of the judiciary.

- The judiciary ensures transparency through public hearings, reasoned judgments, and the publication of reports with exceptions defined by law.
- Where they exist, lay members of councils for the judiciary and other judicial self-governing bodies with voting rights ensure a diverse representation of society and contribute to judicial governance.
- Disciplinary processes are defined by law and respect proportionality; decisions are made independently and are subject to judicial review, prohibiting punitive actions by the executive or legislative branches.
- A judge's decision, including the interpretation of the law, assessment of facts or weighing of evidence, must not give rise to disciplinary liability, except in cases of malice, wilful default or serious misconduct.
- Public statements by the executive or legislative branches concerning judicial decisions do not undermine judicial independence, question the legitimacy of the judiciary or erode public confidence in the justice system.

7.3. Prosecutorial objectivity, impartiality and accountability

Prosecutorial objectivity and impartiality are protected, contributing to a fair, impartial and efficient administration of justice

- Public prosecutors act with impartiality and objectivity and operate free from external pressure or interference.
- Public prosecutors are accountable to the public and the executive, though they remain independent from political influence in individual cases.

7.4. Access to justice

The organisation of the justice system allows for practical and effective access to court for all.

- Quality justice is accessible for everyone, without discrimination, and access to a lawyer, information, physical access to court, and, where appropriate, financial assistance are provided.

Pillar 3

Democratic governance and integrity

REYKJAVÍK PRINCIPLE

Principle 6: Pursue a relentless fight against corruption, including through prevention, and by holding accountable those exercising public power, and continue fighting organised crime.

8. FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION AND ORGANISED CRIME

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: Treaties: CrLCC (ETS No. 173) • CiLCC (ETS No. 174) • Add. Prot. CrLCC (ETS No. 191) • CLSSCPC (ETS No. 141) • CECLSSCPCFT (CETS No. 198) | **Committee of Ministers:** Res(97)24 • Rec(2000)10 • Rec(2001)11 • Rec(2003)4 • CM/Rec(2014)7

Other standards: PACE: Res. 1147 (1998) • Res. 1214 (2000) • Res. 1675 (2009) • Res. 1703 (2010) • Res. 1943 (2013)• Res. 1950 (2013) • Res. 2060 (2015) • Res. 2130 (2016) • Res. 2171 (2017) • Res. 2192 (2017) • Res. 2300 (2019) • Res. 2279 (2019) • Res. 2406 (2021) | **Congress:** Res. 316 (2010) • Res. 401 (2016) • Res. 402 (2016) • Rec. 423 (2018)

Further guidance: GRECO: Evaluation reports | **Venice Commission:** CDL-AD(2013)001 | **CCJE:** CCJE(2018)3 | **CCPE:** CCPE(2019)2 | **CINGO:** CONF/EXP(2022)2

8.1. Prevention

Integrity frameworks apply for all public officials to prevent corruption.

- Rules and/or codes of conduct are in place for all public officials, including those entrusted with top executive functions, at the national and sub-national levels. These integrity rules include matters such as conflicts of interest, gifts and other advantages, incompatibilities of functions, accessory activities, post-employment restrictions, and asset declarations for high-ranking officials, and regulate merit-based employment policies and career management.
- Mechanisms to ensure effective compliance, provide advice in problematic situations, and raise awareness are in place, as well as clear reporting channels and policies for the protection of whistleblowers.

8.2. Deterrence

A deterrent legal framework enables relevant authorities to effectively fight corruption and money laundering.

- Risk-based national anti-corruption policies and measures are adopted and reviewed, as necessary, to counter evolving corruption and money-laundering threats.
- National and international corruption and money laundering-related offences are clearly defined and criminalised for both the public and private sectors and subject to effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions.
- Measures to prevent the misuse of legal persons for corruption and/or money-laundering offences take into account the risks identified.
- Measures to seize and confiscate proceeds from corruption offences are provided.
- There is an appropriate balance between immunities that are enjoyed by certain elected officials and parliamentarians for the performance of their functions and the possibility, when necessary, to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate effectively corruption-related offences.

- Specific policies and measures ensure that in the fight against corruption, the possible connections with organised crime and money laundering are taken into account.

8.3. Anti-corruption and anti-money laundering authorities

Anti-corruption and anti-money laundering authorities act with the necessary independence and integrity and can operate without undue influence.

- Those in charge of the prevention, investigation, prosecution and/or adjudication of corruption and money laundering offences enjoy the necessary independence and autonomy appropriate to their functions, can operate without undue influence and cooperate with each other, domestically and internationally.
- Anti-corruption and anti-money laundering authorities are resilient to improper influence and have effective means, appropriate to their functions, for gathering evidence, protecting the people who help authorities in combating corruption and preserving the confidentiality of investigations.
- Anti-corruption and anti-money laundering authorities demonstrate high level of integrity in their behaviour, while supporting and promoting integrity frameworks.
- Anti-corruption and anti-money laundering authorities are accountable to mechanisms established to prevent any abuse of power.
- Competent authorities enforce proper supervision over the application of anti-money laundering preventative measures in relation to politically exposed persons.
- Anti-corruption and anti-money laundering authorities take measures, as appropriate, to ensure their transparency.

9. POLITICAL INTEGRITY: PARTY FUNDING AND LOBBYING PRACTICES

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: **Committee of Ministers:** Rec(2003)4 • CM/Rec(2017)2

Other standards: **PACE:** Rec. 1516 (2001) • Rec. 1908 (2010) • Res. 2170 (2017) • Res. 2390 (2021) • Res. 2406 (2021) | **Congress:** Res. 79 (1999) • Res. 105 (2000) | **Venice Commission:** CDL-AD(2020)032 • CDL-AD(2016)004

Further guidance: **Venice Commission**: CDL-AD(2006)014

9.1. Financing of political parties, campaigns and candidates

Political parties have access to donations and, where applicable, public funding based on objective, fair and reasonable criteria, and the funding is independently monitored.

- Rules on funding of political parties ensure that donations, sponsoring or loans to parties are transparent, avoid conflicts of interest and do not interfere with party activities or their independence.
- Foreign funding is limited, prohibited, or otherwise regulated.
- Rules are in place to govern the funding of electoral campaigns, including donations to individual candidates, ensuring transparency and preventing undue influence.
- Campaign donations and expenditures are published in a timely manner in ways that are easily accessible to the public.
- When public funding is provided to political parties and candidates to elected public office, it is allocated through objective, fair and transparent criteria.

9.2. Lobbying regulation

Lobbying activities, including of consultant lobbyists, in-house lobbyists, and interest organisations, are regulated to ensure transparency.

- Lobbying regulations and frameworks ensure transparency and that information on those activities related to public decision-making is disclosed.
- Exemptions to lobbying regulations are clearly defined and justified.

- Lobbying regulations do not interfere with individuals' rights to express opinions, petition officials, or campaign for political changes.
- Rules on disclosure are proportionate to the importance of the decision-making process and in line with constitutional legal arrangements.

10. GOOD DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: **Committee of Ministers:** Rec(2002)2 • Rec(2003)3 • Rec(2004)15 • CM/Rec(2007)4 • CM/Rec(2007)7 • CM/Rec(2019)6 • CM/Rec(2022)2 • CM/Rec(2023)5

Other standards: **Committee of Ministers:** CM(2020)27-addfinal | **Congress:** Rec. 331 (2012) • Rec. 392 (2016) • Rec. 424 (2018)

Further guidance: **Venice Commission:** CDL-AD(2011)009

10.1. Transparency and accountability

Public institutions and administrations are transparent, accountable and serve the public good.

- Common standards of good democratic governance and financial discipline enhance transparency and accountability in the organisation, functioning and decision-making processes of public institutions and administration.
- Administrations inform the public about their actions and decisions, publish official documents, including budgetary allocations and respect access rights, subject to clear and effective procedures.
- Codes of conduct prevent illegal practices, such as corruption, in the commercial and financial sector including public procurement.
- There are effective remedies against maladministration.
- Standards of conduct for different categories of public officials promote ethical practices in policy and decision-making processes, with attention to environmental considerations.

10.2. Good administration

Public institutions and interventions are designed and implemented to effectively meet clearly set objectives, efficiently allocating and using available resources to respond to citizens' legitimate needs and expectations without discrimination.

- Public authorities act according to the principles of good democratic governance, including transparency, equality, impartiality, proportionality, legal certainty, and they act and perform their duties within a reasonable timeframe.
- Public officials, including elected representatives, judges, civil servants and others with a public function are protected and supported if they are harassed, intimidated or threatened.
- Effective coordination between levels of government ensures the delivery of quality services at all levels.
- Clear procedures, including regular internal and external audits and/or supervision are in place to ensure efficient and effective governance at all levels.
- Leadership positions in public administration and private entities controlled by the public sector are filled through transparent procedures based on skills and professional performance and experience with due consideration of gender parity and without regard to the political affiliation of the candidates.
- Gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting are encouraged amongst public administration and training and resources are provided to this effect.
- Public officials are encouraged to improve their professional skills and performance.

Pillar 4

Democratic freedoms, inclusion and civil society

REYKJAVÍK PRINCIPLES

Principle 7: Ensure the right to freedom of expression, including academic freedom and artistic freedom, to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas, both online and offline. Free, independent, plural and diverse media constitutes one of the cornerstones of a democratic society and journalists and other media workers should be afforded full protection under the law. Disinformation or misinformation posing a threat to democracy and peace will be countered, in a manner compatible with international law including the right to freedom of expression and freedom of opinion.

Principle 9: Reaffirm that civil society is a prerequisite for a functioning democracy and commit to supporting and maintaining a safe and enabling environment in which civil society, as well as human rights defenders, can operate free from hindrance, insecurity and violence.

Principle 10: Ensure full, equal and meaningful participation in political and public life for all, in particular for women and girls, free from violence, fear, harassment, hate speech and hate crime, as well as discrimination based on any ground.

11. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: Treaties: Art. 10 ECHR (ETS No. 5) • FCNM (ETS No. 157) • FCAIHRDRL (CETS No. 225) • FCVCHS (CETS No. 199) | **Committee of Ministers:** Recommendation No. R (96) 10 • Rec(2000)7 • Rec(2000)23 • CM/Rec(2007)2 • CM/Rec(2007)3 • CM/Rec(2011)7 • CM/Rec(2012)1 • CM/Rec(2015)6 • CM/Rec(2016)1 • CM/Rec(2016)2 • CM/Rec(2016)4 • CM/Rec(2018)1 • CM/Rec(2018)2 • CM/Rec(2022)11 • CM/Rec(2022)13 • CM/Rec(2022)4

Other standards: Committee of Ministers: Decl(30/04/2014)2 • Decl(13/02/2019)2 • CM(2024)9-add1 • CM(2024)9-add3 | **PACE:** Res. 553 (1973) • Res. 1636 (2008) • Rec. 1878 (2009) • Rec. 1897 (2010) • Rec. 1950 (2011) • Res. 1877 (2012) • Rec. 1990 (2012) • Res. 1920 (2013) • Res. 1947 (2013) • Res. 2001 (2014) • Res. 2035 (2015) • Res. 2060 (2015) • Res. 2066 (2015) • Rec. 2111 (2017) • Res. 2141 (2017) • Res. 2212 (2018) • Res. 2213 (2018) • Res. 2255 (2019) •Res. 2300 (2019) • Res. 2317 (2020) • Res. 2532 (2024) • Res. 2543 (2024) | **Congress:** Res. 496 (2023) • Res. 374 (2014) | **Venice Commission:** CDL-AD(2008)026 | **Human Rights Commissioner:** CommDH(2019)12

Further guidance: European Court of Human Rights: Guide on Freedom of expression | **Venice Commission:** CDL-PI(2021)001 • CDL-PI(2020)008 | **Secretary General:** SG/Inf(2022)36 | **Other:** DGI(2023)05

11.1. Legal safeguards

Freedom of expression and information is guaranteed, and its exercise protected by the authorities.

- Legal safeguards guarantee freedom of expression offline and online. Guarantees include non-discriminatory access to electronic communication services and access to official documents.
- Any restrictions are prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society for the pursuit of the legitimate aims set out in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.
- Illegal content is clearly defined in law. Proportionate regulatory measures, based on clearly defined legal criteria, are in place to reduce the visibility of or exposure to content that is not illegal but may pose risks, in defined circumstances, particularly to minors. Content that does not meet the threshold for legitimate restrictions is addressed through alternative means, including user empowerment measures.

- Safeguards prevent the misuse of legal actions to prevent, restrict or penalise free expression on matters of public interest and the exercise of rights associated with public participation.
- Restrictions such as blocking or banning of entire online services, domains or websites are only applied as a measure of last resort, subject to strict legal safeguards and effective redress mechanisms. Legal and regulatory frameworks include safeguards against over-blocking and indirect pressure on platforms to restrict content without a clear legal basis.

11.2. Media freedom

The media operates within a framework that ensures its freedom and independence while safeguarding media professionals from political and other undue interference.

- Media are free from undue interference by states or any political, economic, religious, or other groups or individuals. This involves safeguards for the protection of media's editorial independence, transparent and non-discriminatory rules on state funding and advertising where adopted, and journalists' working conditions.
- Media regulatory authorities enjoy the independence and autonomy, powers, and resources appropriate to their functions.
- Journalists and other media actors are not harassed, arrested, detained or imprisoned because of their activities, nor are they subjected to state surveillance for the exercise of their right to freedom of expression.
- The confidentiality of journalistic sources is protected.

11.3. Media pluralism and cultural diversity

Media pluralism and cultural diversity ensure that a variety of voices and opinions are available to the public.

- A regulatory framework, accompanied by effective oversight, ensures open market access, regulates economic competition and limits media ownership concentration and other anti-competitive practices.
- The framework also supports independent and adequately funded public service media and creates an enabling environment for sustainable quality journalism and not-for-profit community media. Additionally, it promotes media content that reflects societal diversity, including gender, ethnic, disability and youth representation, and takes steps to ensure diverse content production and distribution.
- Information on media ownership, including beneficial ownership, is publicly accessible.
- Policies are in place to promote diversity of voices and pluralism in cultural and academic institutions and creative industries, including in the audio-visual sector.
- Policies safeguard the autonomy of artists and cultural workers, as well as academic researchers, protecting them from censorship, pressure, or intimidation.
- Diverse and sustainable cultural policies and institutions promote cultural engagement and provide spaces for democratic participation and public debate.
- The legal and policy frameworks ensure that everyone can access and benefit from cultural heritage and promotes participation in heritage activities, as well as its protection as part of sustainable development, cultural diversity and creativity.

11.4. Safety of journalists

Journalists and others who speak out on issues of public interest are protected from intimidation, threats and violence offline and online.

- An effective legal framework protects journalists, including women journalists and those from minority backgrounds, as well as public watchdogs and others who speak out on issues of public interest. Such framework is backed up by law enforcement and includes redress mechanisms for victims and their families.
- Independent, prompt and effective investigations are conducted for all offences against journalists and those speaking out on issues of public interest, ensuring no impunity.

11.5. Algorithmic decisions and online risks

The use of algorithms and AI systems in managing online content respects human rights and is guided by the principles of transparency, accountability and non-discrimination.

- Effective frameworks address the risks associated with algorithmic decision-making and the use of AI systems in the production, distribution and use of online content. These mechanisms provide for the restriction of access to illegal content and for proportionate measures to mitigate other online risks, such as those to electoral processes, public debate, health, or safety. They also provide timely and effective redress for affected individuals, paying attention to the differentiated impact on women and girls and people at risk of discrimination.
- Measures are in place to mitigate the potential negative effects of disinformation, including proportionate mechanisms to ensure the visibility and promotion of content from reliable sources of information, ensure that processes of algorithmic curation and moderation do not amplify the reach of false or misleading content that poses risks to individuals or society and enhance public awareness of and resilience to disinformation risks.
- A framework provides for platforms to offer clear, understandable, and accessible information about the functioning of algorithms, including their purpose and design, as well as criteria for content moderation, prioritisation or removal. Access to content is not restricted on the basis of political or other viewpoints.
- A framework ensures oversight of algorithmic and "AI processes on platforms separate from stakeholders involved in their design or operation. There are accessible and effective remedies for all alleged violations of human rights.

11.6. Media, information and digital literacy

Media, information and digital literacy initiatives empower individuals of all age groups and with diverse backgrounds to navigate the (digital) media environment responsibly and critically.

- Policies for media, information and digital literacy aim to bridge the digital divide and help people develop the skills to make informed decisions about media use, trust credible news sources, and communicate effectively, including when creating content.
- Additional measures and policies aimed at enhancing digital literacy include improving the transparency and accountability of algorithmic systems, identifying alternative personalisation methods that may align with the public interest and frameworks for the labelling of reliable content.

12. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: Treaties: Art. 14 ECHR (ETS No. 5) • Art. 1 Prot. 12 ECHR (ETS No. 177) • FCNM (ETS No. 157) • ESC (ETS No. 35) • ECSS (ETS No. 48) • ESC(R) (ETS No. 163) • ECRML (ETS No. 148) • CPCVWDW (CETS No. 210) | **Committee of Ministers:** Recommendation No. R (97) 20 • Recommendation No. R (97) 21 • Rec(2003)3 • CM/Rec(2009)6 • CM/Rec(2009)8 • CM/Rec(2010)5 • CM/Rec(2011)14 • CM/Rec(2013)1 • CM/Rec(2015)1 • CM/Rec(2019)1 • CM/Rec(2022)10 • CM/Rec(2022)16 • CM/Rec(2022)20 • CM/Rec(2024)4 • CM/Rec(2025)7

Other standards: Committee of Ministers: CM(2021)37-add1final | **PACE:** Rec. 799 (1977) • Res. 1618 (2008) • Rec. 1676 (2004) • Res. 1706 (2010) • Res. 2024 (2014) • Rec. 2049 (2014) • Res. 2043 (2015) • Res. 2144 (2017) • Res. 2155 (2017) • Res. 2222 (2018) • Res. 2274 (2019) • Res. 2275 (2019) | **Congress:** Res. 470 (2021) | **ECRI:** General policy recommendations

Further guidance: European Court of Human Rights: Guide on Prohibition of discrimination • Guide on Rights of LGBTI persons • Guide on Environment | **Venice Commission:** CDL-PI(2021)002 • CDL-PI(2022)049 | **Other:** CM(2008)30-final

12.1. Prohibition of discrimination, and combatting hate speech and hate crime

Effective protection is ensured against all forms of discrimination, online and offline hate speech and hate crime.

- Adequate legal and institutional frameworks combat intolerance and discrimination and promote equality for all in line with European standards and especially Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, as interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights.
- Effective legislative and other measures such as educational and awareness raising initiatives, supported by victim-centred implementation and support mechanisms for all victims, coordinated across relevant authorities and key actors and levels of governance, prevent and combat online and offline hate speech and hate crime.

12.2. Equal access to and enjoyment of rights

Safeguards ensure equal access to and enjoyment of rights for all individuals and promote their active and safe participation in public and political life.

- Policies promote and mainstream diversity, equality and access to and enjoyment of rights for all, including women, people with disabilities, persons belonging to national minorities, Roma and Travellers[1], migrants and refugees and LGBTI persons. Such policies prevent political narratives that target or vilify them, promote their inclusion and intercultural integration and combat segregation, in particular in schools, at work, and in neighbourhoods.
- Accessible, quick, clear and transparent procedures for legal recognition of gender reassignment are available, the rights of intersex people are ensured and recognition of same-sex couples and their parental rights is in place.
- Adequate legal, policy and institutional frameworks enable the full and effective participation in public life of persons belonging to national minorities, as well as protect and promote regional or minority languages.

12.3. Full, equal and meaningful participation and empowerment of women and girls

Gender-based violence against women and girls as well as sexism are effectively combatted, and gender equality is promoted.

- Comprehensive laws and policies promote gender equality and combat gender-based discrimination and all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, as well as domestic violence, both offline and online. Their implementation and monitoring are supported by adequate financial and human resources, disaggregated data collection, and mechanisms ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable.
- National and/or regional coordinating bodies to prevent and combat gender-based discrimination and violence against women and girls are set up.
- Gender equality or other relevant bodies at all levels have the necessary powers, resources, and competences to implement policies, monitor progress, and work in co-ordination with relevant stakeholders, and support gender-mainstreaming activities.
- Measures are implemented to prevent and combat sexism in both the public and private spheres and to counter the impact of anti-rights movements on gender equality policies and women's participation in political and economic life.
- Policies and measures addressing the unequal distribution of care responsibilities facilitate women's full engagement in public and political life.
- Gender equality and gender mainstreaming policies include an intersectional approach, whereby the interactions between gender and sex and other personal characteristics which result in discrimination, exclusion or violence are addressed.

1. The term "Roma and Travellers" is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/ Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom, and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers.

12.4. Social protection and welfare

Minimum levels of welfare are ensured to promote economic security, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and the participation of everyone.

- Adequate minimum levels of welfare benefits are secured including unemployment, pension, sickness and disability benefits.
- Families, youth, children, and elderly persons as well as persons at risk of discrimination are entitled to adequate and effective social, legal, and economic protection.
- Coordinated measures combat poverty and social exclusion.
- Welfare and employment policies aim at preserving and promoting social cohesion during the transition to a carbon-neutral or green economy, with special attention to those at risk of discrimination.

13. PROTECTED CIVIC SPACE

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: Treaties: ECRLPINGO (ETS No. 124) | **Committee of Ministers:** CM/Rec(2007)14 • CM/Rec(2018)11• CM/Rec(2021)1 • CM/Rec(2024)2

Other standards: PACE: Res. 2531 (2024) • Res. 2095 (2016) | **CINGO:** CONF/EXP(2015)3 CONF/EXP(2021)2 • **Human Rights Commissioner:** CommHR(2023)2

Further guidance: Secretary General: SG/Inf(2023)28 | **Venice Commission:** CDL-PI(2022)029 • CDL-PI(2014)003

Civil society actors and human rights defenders operate in a safe and enabling environment, within frameworks that uphold fundamental freedoms, facilitate participation and ensure protection from undue restrictions or threats.

- An enabling legal, political and fiscal framework for civil society protects inter alia fundamental freedoms of association, assembly and expression, facilitates and supports the establishment and continued operation of civil society actors, civil society organisations and human rights defenders and ensures that they can operate freely, safely and independently, without discrimination in line with international standards.
- Legal frameworks enable for civil society organisations to join associations, federations and confederations, whether national or international, as well as collaborate with other civil society organisations in their countries or elsewhere.
- Independent national human rights institutions and equality bodies are established, are sufficiently resourced, and actively supported to promote and protect human rights defenders.
- Independent investigations into violations of human rights defenders' rights are conducted and perpetrators are held accountable.
- Actions to support, protect and promote civil society are continuously reviewed including through consultations with them.
- Civil society (organisations) and human rights defenders have timely access to relevant documents and information and can effectively participate in policy- and decision-making processes safely, transparently.
- Access to public funding and other necessary resources is provided without discrimination to the extent permitted by available resources, to build the capacity and visibility of civil society's efforts representing diverse groups and issues.
- CSOs receiving funding from sources outside the state are not stigmatised or subjected to other adverse consequences solely on the fact that they receive such funding.

Pillar 5

Democratic future

REYKJAVÍK PRINCIPLE

Principle 8: Invest in a democratic future by ensuring that everyone is able to play their role in democratic processes. Priority will be given to supporting the participation of young persons in democratic life and decision-making processes, including through education about human rights and core democratic values, such as pluralism, inclusion, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability.

14. EMPOWERMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND CHILDREN

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: **Committee of Ministers:** Rec(97)3 • Rec(2004)13 • Rec(2006)1 • Rec(2006)14 • CM/Rec(2010)8 • CM/Rec(2012)2 • CM/Rec(2016)7 • CM/Rec(2017)4 • CM/Rec(2022)6 • CM/Rec(2023)4 • CM/Rec(2023)9

Other standards: **Committee of Ministers:** CM(2023)220-add2 | **PACE:** Rec. 1864 (2009) • Res. 1826 (2011) • Rec. 2015 (2013) • Res. 2414 (2022) | **Congress:** Rec. 128 (2003)

Further guidance: **European Court of Human Rights:** Guide on Rights of the child | **Congress:** Revised European charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life

Young people and children have equal access to and can fully exercise their rights and freedoms and have the right to participate in matters affecting them.

- Children and young people can exercise their right to be heard, and to participate in decision making in all matters affecting them.
- There are frameworks to enable and support the work of independent youth-led and youth-oriented organisations, as well as youth councils. They have a genuine, meaningful and independent role in relevant decision-making and governance processes concerning them.
- Mechanisms and policies ensure that children's rights are effectively implemented and children, including those at risk of discrimination, are protected from all forms of violence, and have access to child-friendly justice.
- Youth work is recognised and supported to enable young people in realising their full potential as autonomous members of society, providing opportunities and empowering them to develop life plans and exercise their democratic citizenship.

15. EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: **Treaties:** Art. 2 Prot. No. 1 ECHR (ETS No. 9) • ECC (ETS No. 18) | **Committee of Ministers:** Recommendation No. R (85) 7 • Rec(2002)12 • Rec(2004)4 • CM/Rec(2010)7 • CM/Rec(2011)6 • CM/Rec(2012)13 • CM/Rec(2019)10 • CM/Rec(2022)1

Other standards: **Committee of Ministers:** CM Resolution (78) 41 | **PACE:** Rec. 963 (1983) • Rec. 1346 (1997) • Rec. 1682 (2004) • Rec. 1849 (2008) • Rec. 1884 (2009) • Res. 2584 (2025) | **Congress:** Res. 332 (2011) • Res. 375 (2014) | **ACFC:** TC No. 1 (2024) | **ECRI:** CRI(2007)6 | **CINGO:** CONF/AG(2024)REC1

Further guidance: **Other:** Reference framework of competences for democratic culture • CM(2008)30-final

Formal, non-formal and informal education prepares learners for life as active citizens in diverse democratic societies.

- Educational institutions and non-formal education providers engage learners on democratic experiences from an early age.
- Education systems integrate competencies necessary for life in a democratic society focusing on democracy and human rights, peace, pluralism, ethics, intercultural dialogue, inclusion, equality, including gender equality, and non-discrimination.
- Quality citizenship education prepares active, participative, and informed citizens.
- Inclusive, plurilingual and intercultural quality language education supports a culture of democracy.
- History education promotes critical thinking, multi-perspective approaches, and an understanding of diverse narratives, helping learners to recognise and resist the misuse of history while fostering democratic values, reconciliation, and mutual understanding.
- Principles of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and research integrity are respected, creating an environment that fosters open inquiry, access to sources, critical thinking and independent research.

16. SUSTAINABLE AND INNOVATIVE DEMOCRATIC LIFE

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDANCE

Key standards: Treaties: SCoE (ETS No. 1) • ECHR (ETS No. 5) • FCAIHRDRL (CETS No. 225) | **Committee of Ministers:** CM/Rec(2017)7 • CM/Rec(2022)20 • CM/Rec(2023)5

Other standards: Committee of Ministers: CM(2008)14-add | **PACE:** Res. 2397 (2021) • Res. 2515 (2023) • Res. 2545 (2024) | **Congress:** Res. 119 (2001) • Res. 288 (2009) • Res. 489 (2022) • Rec. 493 (2023) • Rec. 511 (2024) | **Human Rights Commissioner:** CommHR(2023)15

Further guidance: CDDG: CDDG(2023)13 | **CCJE:** CCJE(2006)OP9 | **CCPE:** CCPE(2022)6

16.1. Sustainability of public policy

Decisions and actions of public institutions focus on the long-term sustainable goals and impacts of their actions rather than on short-term policies.

- Public institutions at all levels actively engage with relevant stakeholders in strategic planning and implementation monitoring including for emergency preparedness and response.
- Public institutions consider the environmental, social, human, financial, cultural and economic impacts of their actions on future generations and towards a just transition.

16.2. Openness to change and innovation

Public institutions foster an environment conducive to change and innovation.

- Public institutions adapt to evolving public needs, and concerns, new challenges, citizen's initiatives and emerging technologies, while maintaining a focus on achieving better results.
- Public institutions are open to piloting new and agile programmes, citizens initiatives, tools, and methodologies, adopting innovative solutions, including digital technologies, while ensuring regular monitoring and evaluation.
- Public institutions actively engage in sharing best practices and knowledge with other public bodies, private actors, and civil society, both nationally and internationally, to promote innovative approaches.
- Public institutions regularly engage with youth so that their ideas, priorities and perspectives are better integrated into policymaking.

16.3. Impact of ai and emergent technologies on democratic processes

Safeguards protect democratic institutions and processes and the rights of individuals in contexts where AI systems and other digital technologies are employed.

- Safeguards ensure that AI systems and emerging technologies are not used to undermine the integrity, independence, or effectiveness of democratic institutions and processes, that they are developed and applied in a manner consistent with international obligations to protect human rights, uphold human dignity, individual autonomy, privacy, and equality, and that they do not cause or perpetuate discrimination or structural bias, including those affecting women.
- Citizens are ensured effective access and equal opportunities to participate in public debate, particularly in environments where AI systems are used, such as content moderation tools or platforms affecting public discourse.
- The development and application of AI systems are subject to adequate transparency and oversight measures aiming to mitigate the risks and specific contexts of their implementation, incentivise algorithms that generate and promote fair, just and equitable outcomes.

16.4. International co-operation for democracy

International co-operation for democracy ensures the protection and promotion of democratic principles and practices through adherence to international law, mutual accountability, and support for democratic governance globally.

- The state actively upholds democratic principles in its actions by complying in good faith with its international commitments, engaging constructively in multilateral forums.
- The state works collaboratively with international organizations to strengthen an international order that is based on the rule of law, respects the United Nations Charter, and safeguards the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states within internationally recognised borders.
- The state fulfils its obligations under international human rights law, participates in peer review mechanisms, and engages in multilateral dialogues to ensure adherence to democratic standards and promote democratic values globally.

Appendix – List of references[2]

TREATIES[3]/CONVENTIONS

ETS No. 1 – Statute of the Council of Europe, London, 1949

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ETS No. 124 – European convention on the recognition of the legal personality of international non-governmental organisations, Strasbourg, 1986 / 1991

ETS No. 128 – Additional protocol to the European social charter, Strasbourg, 1988 / 1992

ETS No. 141 – Convention on laundering, search, seizure and confiscation of the proceeds from crime, Strasbourg, 1990 / 1993

ETS No. 144 – Convention on the participation of foreigners in public life at local level, Strasbourg, 1992 / 1997

ETS No. 148 – European charter for regional or minority languages, Strasbourg, 1992 / 1998

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3. Also consult all relevant case-law guides of the ECtHR.

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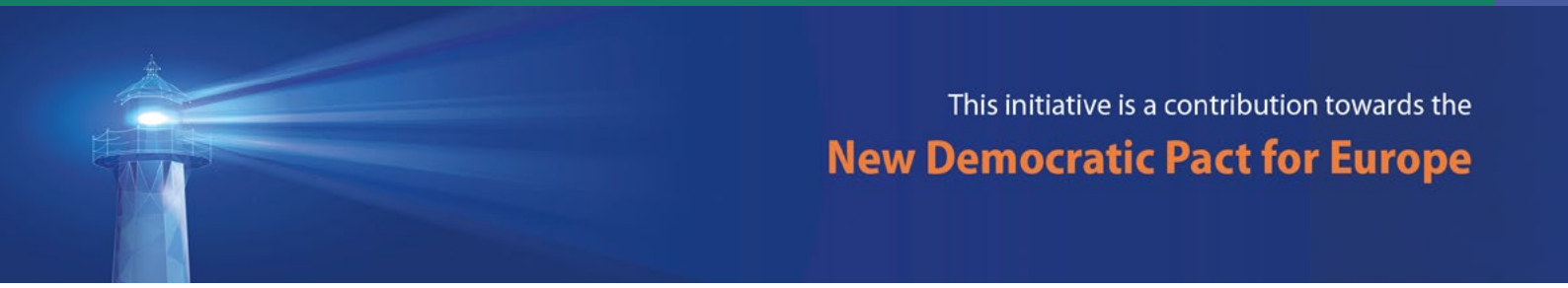
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Within the New Democratic Pact for Europe, the Council of Europe has developed a set of parameters to implement the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy. They consist of a set of criteria and conditions necessary for a healthy democracy and are based on Council of Europe standards.

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