

# Council of Europe HELP online course on The Environment and Human Rights

## Background and aim

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Loss of biodiversity, climate change, extinction of species, pollution and the overall degradation of ecosystems have a profound global **impact on the enjoyment of human rights** and require the widest possible **international cooperation** in order to prevent or remedy this adverse effect.

The protection of the environment and the protection of human rights are **interconnected**: one cannot be achieved without the other, nor at the expense of the other. Life and well-being on our planet are contingent on our collective capacity to **guarantee both human rights** and a **healthy environment** to future generations. A **human rights-based approach** - using human rights laws and mechanisms in the context of environmental impacts - offers an innovative and evolving tool for environmental protection.

A number of **international human rights standards**, including the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter, have successfully been **invoked in environmental issues**.

Furthermore, the **jurisprudence** of the European Court of Human Rights and the case-law of the European Committee of Social rights affirm the undeniable **inter-connections** between environmental protection on the one hand and human rights on the other. For example, the European Court of Human Rights has so far ruled in some **300 environment-related cases**, applying concepts such as the right to life, right to respect for private life or right to property to a wide range of issues including pollution, man-made or natural disasters and access to environmental information.

This **free HELP online course** addresses the **legal frameworks and practical approaches** that will support legal practitioners and others in understanding the connections between human rights and the environment, in particular **how to apply** a human rights-based approach to environmental protection.



This HELP course explores the **State's human rights obligations** in an environmental context; provides practical guidance on how a **human rights-based approach can be applied** to environmental protection; analyses the **greening of human rights** in regional systems; and offers an introduction to **corporate environmental responsibility**.

The topics covered are explored in a practical way, using presentations, interactive screens, knowledge tests and reflective exercises.

**The course was developed in 2021.**

## Target audience

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This free on-line course is primarily addressed to **legal professionals** (judges, prosecutors, lawyers). However civil servants, policy makers, members of civil society, other professionals, and university students dealing with environmental issues and their impact on the enjoyment of fundamental rights will also find this course useful. The course does not require any previous knowledge in the topic.

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**Course outline: 4 Substantive Modules – 6 hours of estimated learning time**

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**Module 0: Introduction**

Welcome message, navigation instructions, course authors and course target group

**Module 1: Key concepts (1.5 hours)**

Definitions

Legal regimes for the protection of the environment

**Module 2: The human rights-based approach to environmental protection (1.5 hours)**

Human rights and the environment – general overview

Legal background of the human rights-based approach

Substantive, participatory and procedural human rights

The right to a clean, healthy and safe environment

**Module 3: Green human rights in regional human rights systems (2 hours)**

Regional human rights systems – an overview

The European system

The Inter-American System

The African System

**Module 4: Environmental degradation and corporate accountability (1 hour)**

The impact of corporate activities on the environment

The concept of Corporate Environmental Accountability

Corporate Environmental Accountability in regional and national litigation

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**Development and implementation of the course**

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The course was published in 2021. It was developed under the Project “Online Platform for Business and Human Rights”, implemented by the HELP programme in cooperation with the [Council of Europe Steering Committee for Human Rights \(CDDH\)](#), funded by the Dutch and German authorities. The views herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official position of Germany or the Netherlands.

In association with this project, this course has been developed alongside the updated [HELP Course on Business and Human Rights](#). These two courses are intended as **complementary resources** that can be taken **together or separately**.

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**Access the free online course**

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The course can be accessed by visiting the HELP e-learning platform at <http://help.elearning.ext.coe.int/>

First you need to open a HELP account if you have not yet done so (2 minutes). Then you can follow this link to directly access the online course: <http://help.elearning.ext.coe.int/course/view.php?id=4237>