

Cross border launch of the HELP course on Key Human Rights Principles in Biomedicine

*Opening speech of Mr Christophe Poirel,
Director of Human Rights, Council of Europe*

I warmly welcome you to the **cross border launch of the Council of Europe HELP course on Key Human Rights Principles in Biomedicine.**

I would like to thank all the participants - judges, prosecutors and lawyers from 12 member States of the European Union and the Council of Europe - for attending this event. I would also like to extend this to those following us online.

The launch of the course is organised under the **EU-CoE joint project ‘Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) in the EU’**. This is a project funded by the EU and implemented by the Council of Europe using its HELP methodology. The EU is the Council of Europe’s natural partner in Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals in EU countries, and we are most grateful for its support.

The Council of Europe is indeed in a unique and privileged position to develop practical human rights courses, given its central role and unique expertise in protecting human rights and the rule of law in Europe.

The **CoE HELP course on key Human Rights Principles in Biomedicine** was developed in 2018, jointly by the Bioethics Unit and the HELP Programme of the Council of Europe and is part of the rich catalogue of courses offered on the HELP e-learning platform.

The evolution of biology and medicine, including new technologies, has produced spectacular advances in the health field. However, these developments also raise ethical issues that affect the individuals and the protection of their rights and dignity.

These ethical and, in many cases, also legal issues include: consent to medical intervention, the right to know one's health data, matters related to medically assisted procreation, recourse to organ or tissue donation and transplantation, etc. All of them are relevant to the protection of human rights as testified by the increasing case law of the ECHR relevant to those issues.

HELP courses ensure that **human rights training in Europe** is of **high quality** and **meets the specific needs** of the legal professions.

While HELP focused at the beginning on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), it gradually moved to cover other instruments like the European Social Charter or Council of Europe Conventions in key areas like data protection or bioethics. Furthermore, with EU support since 2015, we include the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and relevant EU law in the courses specifically developed for EU countries, in key areas that respond to the many serious challenges that Europe is facing. Thus, **HELP courses are unique as they combine the relevant EU and CoE standards and case law, and help judges, prosecutors and lawyers to apply both systems in a practical and effective way.**

In this regard, the course you are going to start covers the relevant standards at European level, especially the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (Oviedo Convention) of the Council of Europe, the European Convention on Human Rights, including the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, as well as related EU law and practice.

HELP courses have a **high quality content** and are **developed with CoE in-house expertise, in this case with the assistance of our knowledgeable colleagues from the Bioethics Unit.**

In this regard, I would like to highlight that the **HELP courses have a feature which is unmatched in any other training material: they are developed within the Council of Europe**, the very institution where standards are developed and that is in charge of monitoring their implementation.

The courses ensure that any legal professional from any corner of the EU receives the same human rights training on European standards, but with the advantage that they can be translated into national languages and complemented with national materials. In this regard, and since you come from various countries, we also count on you to provide tutors with appropriate knowledge of the relevant legislation, case law and practices that could be eventually useful for your colleagues back in your home countries.

The **HELP course launched today is currently available in English but will be also made available in other EU languages like French, German, Italian, Romanian and Spanish**. In addition, the course will be translated into Armenian and Russian. If there is interest from other countries, we can explore together the possibilities to translate it into other languages, trying to also mobilise financial resources from your countries and institutions, particularly considering the dire financial constraints the Council of Europe is undergoing.

The 'international' format in which the course is launched today is a novelty for HELP as well. Whereas HELP courses are usually launched for specific national groups and tutored by national experts, it is the first time that the HELP Programme launches a course in this international or cross-border format, with participants coming from various countries and legal professions.

The fact that **75 participants responded positively to our invitation shows the wide interest in the topic and the need for exchange across professions and countries.**

Your presence here, and interest in the work of the Council of Europe, **will no doubt contribute to an increased impact regarding human rights protection on our continent.**

I want to conclude by wishing you a successful event, with fruitful and engaging discussions. I am sure that your hard work and dedication in completing the course after the launch will result in you all present in this room receiving the Council of Europe certificate and successfully applying the new knowledge and skills learnt in your work.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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