

Thematic Committee Environment and Climate Change, Heritage & Health ECCH&H

Background and links with the priorities of the Conference of INGOs and the Council of Europe

The climate change emergency, the perilous state of biodiversity, the ongoing land consumption through infrastructure and agriculture in Europe and even more the recent COVID-19 pandemic, have highlighted the intrinsic need and link between human health, heritage and nature.

All of these critical topics – environment, climate change heritage and health have inequalities in terms of access and effects embedded in them. Therefore, their governance needs to be founded in sound participatory democratic principles.

Democracy, human rights and the rule of law are deeply applicable and need to be ensured across these important themes in our societies.

The new Thematic Committee ECCH&H is dedicated to bridge the perceived nature-culture divide, improve mutual understanding, gather and disseminate good practice, ensure a check and balance for public institutions, and provide a cross sectoral platform.

This committee seeks an integrated approach, bringing together INGO's from a range of different sectors, addressing the human rights aspect of environment, in context with climate change and health needs a collective overview.

Fundamentally the committee seek to overcome the nature/culture divide that hinders collaboration and progress towards a shared vision, that protect human rights, upholds democracy and the rule of law and promote awareness, and encourage the development of Europe's cultural identity and shared values.

Objective

To ensure the human rights of European citizens are upheld with respects to the impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss and the connection between people and natural and cultural heritage.

Committee's purposes

To collate and contribute to the work achieved under the auspices of all relevant Council of Europe conventions and committees with respect to Environment and Human Rights, referencing the Sustainable Development Goals, climate change commitments and the need for greater connectivity (as exposed through COVID-19) between people and nature, and the need to ensure understanding of and to value our shared European heritage.

The following conventions, and their relevance, would be the priority areas of work for the committee

- **Bern Convention** – to address issues around human rights, justice and transparency of information around climate change, nature and health under whilst considering the conservation of flora and fauna and their natural habitats, and the promotion of international co-operation in this field;
- **Landscape (Florence) Convention** – to address issues around human rights, justice and transparency of information whilst promoting the protection, management and planning of European landscapes and organise European co-operation on landscape issues;
- **Aarhus Convention** to ensure access to information, public participation and access to justice, in governmental decision-making processes in particular in relations to environment, climate change, heritage and health issues;
- **Faro Convention** – to ensure the important aspects of heritage as they relate to human rights and democracy are promoted and strengthen the understanding of heritage and its relationship to communities and society.

Other conventions such as Valetta and Granada will also be referenced.

Through this holistic approach the committee will be seeking the commonalities between these conventions and ongoing intergovernmental work in the Council of Europe that address the 4 pillars Environment, Climate Change, Heritage and Health.

In addition, underpinning all work of the committee, it will be the European Convention on Human Rights and the growing case law pertaining to the view that the environment is a human rights issue.

To fulfil its purpose the committee will:

- To prepare communications to raise awareness and engagement on the importance of the Council of Europe conventions with respect to Environment, Climate Change Heritage and Health to a wide European audience;
- To ensure that decisions taken at all governmental levels, with respects to environment, cultural heritage, climate change and biodiversity follow democratic principles and principles of good governance;
- To gather evidence and best practice on implementation and integration of policy, to support and improve practice in public institutions and civil society

