

WORKING WITH THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY



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COUNCIL OF EUROPE:**
A PRACTICAL GUIDE
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

French edition:
*Travailler avec le Conseil de l'Europe:
un guide pratique pour la société civile*

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Cover and layout:
Documents and Publications Production
Department (SPDP), Council of Europe
This publication has not been copy-edited
by the SPDP Editorial Unit to correct
typographical and grammatical errors.

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Printed at the Council of Europe



www.coe.int/en/web/civil-society

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INTRODUCTION

At its Helsinki Ministerial session in 2019 the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted the decision “A shared responsibility for democratic security in Europe: the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe.”

In response to this decision, the Secretary General made a number of [proposals](#). Their implementation was endorsed at the Hamburg Ministerial session in [May 2021](#).

This handbook is prepared in response to the Secretary General’s call to strengthen the role and meaningful participation of civil society organisations, and national human rights institutions in the Organisation, with the view to increasing its openness and transparency towards civil society.

The aim of the handbook is to provide a non-exhaustive overview of the many ways in which the Council of Europe works with civil society, to provide links to in-depth information and to act as a guide for how civil society can become involved in the work of the Organisation. It gives information on the different forms of access, co-operation, input, participation, and/or partnership that are possible and relevant for NGOs.

It contains a thematic index, with links to websites provided throughout the text. Further information can be found on the main portal: www.coe.int, where there is also the possibility to sign up to [newsletters](#).

The handbook is based on the Council of Europe’s Programme and Budget 2022-2025 with some additional thematic entries for ease of reference, and it will be updated regularly. We welcome feedback.



Council of Europe

Conseil de l'Europe

COUNCIL OF EUROPE WORK

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. All member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law, creating a common European legal space.

The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention. Individuals can bring complaints of human rights violations to the Strasbourg court once all possibilities of appeal have been exhausted in the member state concerned.

The Council of Europe advocates freedom of expression and the media, freedom of assembly, equality, and the protection of minorities. It has launched campaigns on issues such as child protection, online hate speech, and the rights of the Roma¹, Europe's largest minority. The Organisation helps member states fight corruption and terrorism and undertake necessary judicial reforms. Its group of constitutional experts, known as the Venice Commission, offers legal advice to countries throughout the world.

The Council of Europe promotes human rights through international conventions, such as the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and the Convention on Cybercrime. Conventions are prepared and negotiated within the institutional framework with negotiations culminating in a decision by the Committee of Ministers, the Council of Europe's decision-making body. It is then agreed to open the treaty for signature by member states and, if necessary, by other states or organisations who took part in drawing it up. Conventions owe their legal existence to the consent of those member states that sign and ratify them. A full list of conventions, their explanatory reports, the status of signatures and ratifications, declarations and reservations made by states, and notifications issued since 2000, are available on the [website](#) of the Council of Europe Treaty Office.

Another important legal mechanism is the Council of Europe's recommendations on different topics. These are made by the Committee of Ministers, and whilst they are not binding, they set a policy framework agreed by member states. Much of the work of intergovernmental steering committees is devoted to either creating or following up recommendations. Links to relevant recommendations can be found under the entries in this handbook.

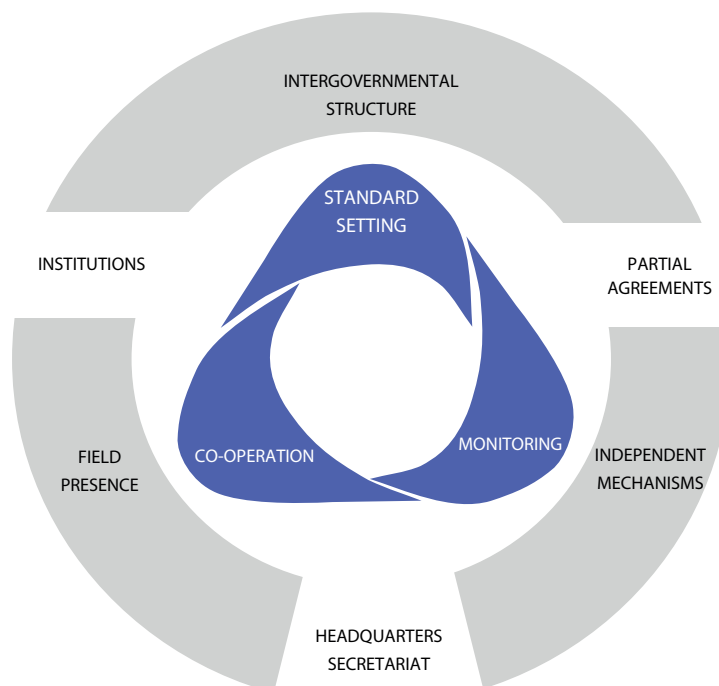
The Council of Europe works in close partnership with the European Union, and co-operates with the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), with partner countries in its neighbourhood and worldwide. For example, the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines and Healthcare, which protects public health through the development of quality standards both for safe medicines and their safe use, and for blood transfusion, organ, cell and tissue transplantation and consumer health issues has agreements with Brazil, China, South Africa and the United States.

In addition to the European Court of Human Rights, the Council of Europe consists of several working institutions.

- ▶ The Secretary General leads and represents the Council of Europe.
- ▶ The Committee of Ministers, made up of member states' foreign ministers and their representatives, acts as the main decision-making body.
- ▶ The Parliamentary Assembly consists of 306 members of parliament from the 46 member states; the Assembly elects the Secretary General, the Human Rights Commissioner and the judges to the European Court of Human Rights; it provides a democratic forum for debate.
- ▶ The Commissioner for Human Rights independently addresses and draws attention to human rights violations.
- ▶ The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy.
- ▶ The Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations represents organised civil society and promotes participatory democracy.

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.

The Organisation’s action is structured around three dimensions constituting a “dynamic triangle” – standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation. These three dimensions are integrated into its functioning and operation and form one of its key strengths and comparative advantages.



Standard-setting includes activities aimed at drawing up and adopting standards – whether legally binding or not – and identifying best practices. These can include conventions, protocols, recommendations, conclusions, guidelines or policy recommendations.

Monitoring and advisory include activities aimed at assessing compliance by states with the above-mentioned standards, whether in pursuance of legal undertakings or on a voluntary basis, or whether following a legal procedure or not; for example, to assess compliance with a convention, recommendation or undertaking.

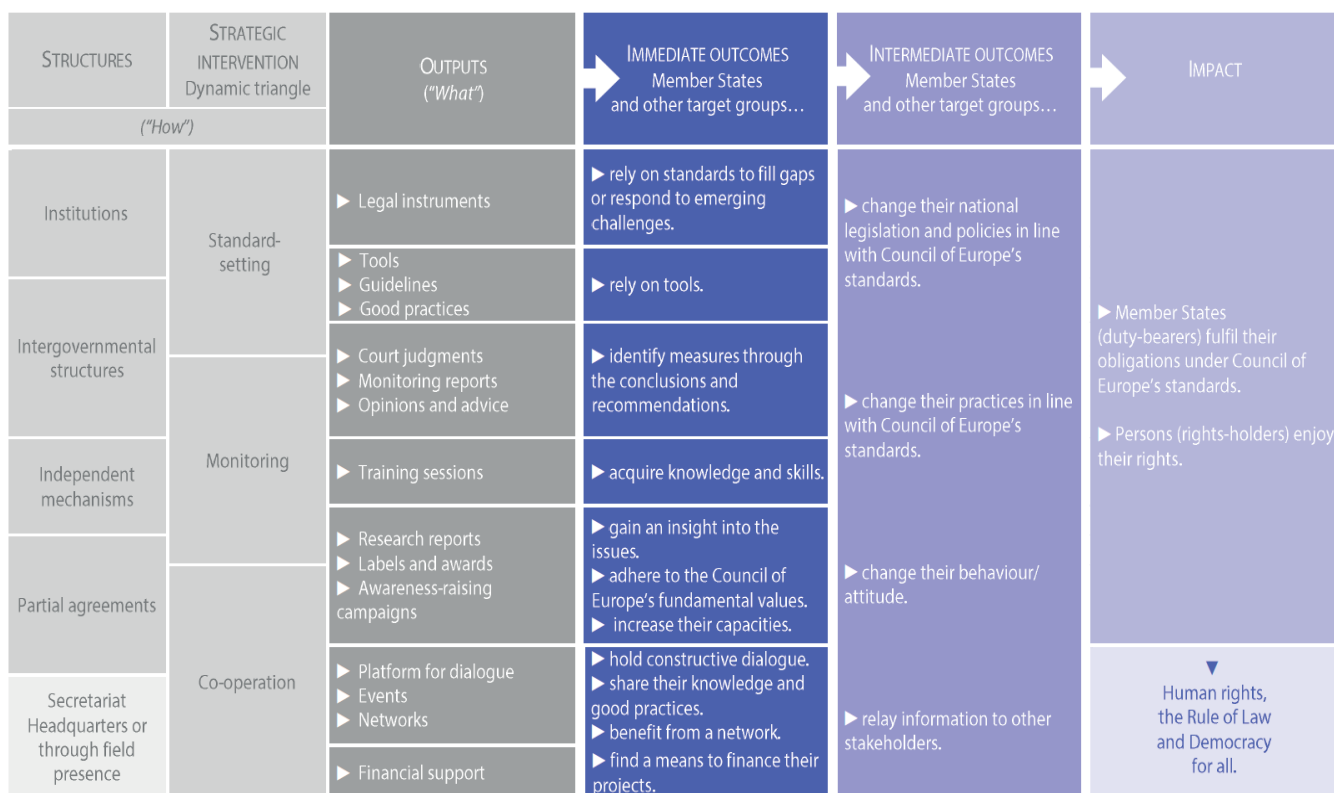
Co-operation includes activities conducted mostly in the field. Co-operation aims at raising awareness about agreed standards and policies, supporting states in reviewing their laws and practice in the light of those standards, and enhancing their capacity; including when the monitoring procedures reveal areas where measures need to be taken to comply with the standards of the Organisation.

Results-Based Management approach

The Council of Europe strives to deliver focused and tangible results, with maximum efficiency and from a clear “value for money” perspective. To this end, it has developed a result-based management (RBM) approach to develop its Programme and Budget 2022-2025 and address the three fundamental questions: why (the Organisation needs to act), what (the Organisation does), and how (what structures and resources are needed).

RBM is a management strategy that explains why an intervention is necessary and describes how it will be implemented, monitored and assessed, including risk management at each stage. It ensures a focus on results, through programmes and projects structured around public policy objectives that target clearly identified problems and challenges, and employs monitoring and evaluation systems. In this way, RBM becomes a tool for tangible change, where each action contributes to a successful outcome.

Figure 1 – Our theory of change: toward Human rights, the Rule of Law and Democracy for all





WHAT ROLE FOR NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION (NGOS) IN THE WORK OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE?

International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) can apply for participatory status with the Council of Europe and once accepted become members of the Conference of INGOs – information on the requirements can be found below.

While INGOs can work with the Council of Europe through the Conference of INGOs, there are also opportunities for local, national and regional NGOs to get involved with the Council of Europe in both formal and informal ways. The contribution of civil society is invaluable, for example, in exchanging information related to human rights monitoring, where NGOs can participate in consultations at national level, propose solutions to rights violations, contribute to the development of standards and provide information throughout the monitoring cycle.

Participatory status with the Council of Europe

Independent NGOs are a vital component of European society, guaranteeing freedom of expression and association, both of which are fundamental to democracy. Recognising their influence, the Council of Europe provides international INGOs with the opportunity to acquire participatory status.

The Council of Europe has had working relations with NGOs since 1952 when it introduced consultative status. In 2003, in recognition of the increasingly active role played by INGOS, the Council of Europe decided to change this to participatory status.

A revision of the guidelines on participatory status was carried out in consultation with the Conference of INGOs in 2015 and in July 2016 the Committee of Ministers [adopted resolution \(2016\)3](#), which sets out the rules for granting participatory status, gives more information on the background of the status, what it represents, the conditions to be met and the possibilities it gives to INGOs to co-operate with the Council of Europe.

More than 300 INGOs currently have participatory status, making them an active part of the Conference of INGOs. In turn, the Conference of INGOs has participatory status in various Council of Europe bodies and participates in numerous intergovernmental committees. For instance, members of the Conference of INGOs

can ask for accreditation to lodge collective complaints under the [additional protocol of the European Social Charter \(ESC\)](#) adopted in 1995. They can also contribute to the European Social Charter's reporting procedure. More information is provided in the relevant sections of the handbook.

NGOs can also become involved in intergovernmental committees so that they can contribute to the policy-making process (article 8 of [CM/Res\(2021\)3](#)). This role is strengthened in the terms of reference for 2022-2025, which asked for all committees to enhance the role of civil society in their work wherever relevant.

If your INGO would like to apply for participatory status, please read the [resolution](#) closely and refer to the section below "How to apply" (these criteria may undergo further changes in the future)

When an INGO is granted participatory status it joins the Conference of INGOs. The Conference represents organised civil society at the Council of Europe and works to promote participatory democracy. It holds two annual plenary sessions and organises events linked to Council of Europe priorities, such as visits to member states, where it focuses on how civic space is protected. Its ensuing report is then sent for comment to the member state concerned and debated in plenary with the member state and NGO representatives invited.

How to apply

Participatory status is for international NGOs that are represented at European level and that have working relations with the Council of Europe. Before submitting an application please check whether your INGO fulfils all the following conditions:

Participatory status may be granted to INGOs:

- ▶ which respect and defend the values and principles of the Council of Europe;
- ▶ which are able, through their work, to support the achievement of closer unity mentioned in Article 1 of the Council of Europe's statute;
- ▶ which are created based on a constitutive act adopted according to democratic principles;
- ▶ which have a democratic structure and governance;
- ▶ which are particularly representative in the field(s) of their competence and the fields of action shared by the Council of Europe;
- ▶ which are represented at European level and which have members in at least five member states of the Council of Europe;
- ▶ which were created and have implemented activities at least two years before the moment of applying for participatory status;
- ▶ which already have working relations with the Council of Europe;
- ▶ which can contribute to and participate actively in Council of Europe deliberations and activities;
- ▶ which can make known the work of the Council of Europe to society.

Applications for participatory status must be submitted on the official form and must be accompanied by the following documents in French or English, and preferably in both official languages of the Council of Europe:

- ▶ completed application form;
- ▶ the INGO's statute;
- ▶ a list of its member organisations;
- ▶ an activity and financial report covering the previous two years;
- ▶ a declaration to the effect that it accepts the principles set out in the preamble and in article 1 of the Council of Europe statute.

Participatory status is granted once a year. If your INGO fulfils all the conditions listed above and would like to apply, please send your completed application form and supporting documents to NGO-Unit@coe.int. The application form and article 1 of the Council of Europe statute are available [here](#).

Conference of INGOs

The [Conference of INGOs](#) includes the over 300 NGOs that have gained participatory status. It engages directly with its members through its thematic work, issue-specific consultations, public events and two annual general assembly sessions. Since 2018 the Conference has marked World NGO Day with public events highlighting the role of NGOs in democratic society.

The Conference engages with member states and with civil society in those member states during the several country visits it carries out each year. It draws the Organisation's attention to civil society concerns by adopting resolutions, communicating with the Secretary General and the Commissioner for Human Rights and informing the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress. It has representatives on intergovernmental steering committees and is a member of the governing body of the North-South Centre. The Conference runs an expert council on NGO Law which provides legal expertise and carries out studies on issues connected to freedom of assembly and association.

The bulk of work on thematic topics is undertaken in committees which are set up for a limited period, normally limited to two years. They provide a focus for discussion and research on issues relevant to the work of the Council of Europe and prepare reports, draft declarations, recommendations and resolutions that are then discussed at the INGO general assembly.

Presidents are elected every three years and can be re-elected once. The president is supported by two vice-presidents and eight elected members of the standing committee.

Through the work of the Conference of INGOs, the Council of Europe ensures civil society has its place in intergovernmental activities and the means to connect with members of parliament and local and regional authorities on challenges facing society. The Conference of INGOs is an important partner to the other Council of Europe institutions.

Expert council on NGO law

The [Expert Council](#) carries out thematic and country studies on specific aspects of NGO legislation and its conformity with international standards, especially the European Convention on Human Rights and recommendation (2007)14 on the legal status of NGOs in Europe.

It was set up in January 2008 by the Conference of INGOs with the aim of creating an enabling environment through examining national NGO legislation and its implementation and providing advice on how to bring national law and practice into line with Council of Europe standards and European good practice.

It is composed of 15 members with expertise in different areas, such as the law, human rights and good practice. Members are appointed by the Conference of INGOs for a three-year term and serve in their personal capacity.

It carries out the following types of work:

- ▶ monitoring the legal and regulatory frameworks affecting NGOs throughout Europe and how those frameworks are implemented, including country visits and thematic consultations;
- ▶ preparing opinions and studies on whether national laws and regulations affecting the status and operation of NGOs are compatible with international standards;
- ▶ producing thematic studies analysing legal, regulatory and policy issues affecting NGOs;
- ▶ providing advice and training and carrying out awareness-raising activities about the standards applicable to the status and operation of NGOs.

Other work includes contributing to Council of Europe inter-governmental standard-setting work and supporting the president of the Conference of the INGOs

The Expert Council prepares opinions and thematic studies either on its own initiative or at the request of the Conference of INGOs, NGOs, national authorities or Council of Europe bodies. Once adopted, these are presented to the Conference of INGOs, which decides on the follow-up required and ensures that they are shared. Make contact with the Expert Council using this [form](#).

STANDARD-SETTING AND MONITORING WORK IN COMMITTEES

Committee work lies at the heart of the Council of Europe. It allows governmental and independent experts to participate directly and is the main tool to develop and monitor policy instruments and legal standards, building a common pan-European legal space.

The **first** type of committee includes steering committees, ad hoc committees and subordinate bodies: for the period 2022 to 2025 there are 26 steering or ad hoc committees and 26 subordinate bodies. Their job is to draw up policy texts and legal standards, such as treaties or recommendations. These committees are made up of representatives from member states who have the highest possible rank in the relevant field. They include relevant international and regional organisations, civil society and other partners in their work. An NGO can request observer status under [these conditions](#) (article 8 of [CM/Res\(2021\)3](#)).

The second type of committee monitors Council of Europe policies and legal texts and ensures these are always up to date. They include:

- ▶ committees representing parties to a given treaty;
- ▶ committees representing all member states which follow a specific resolution (legal text) of the Committee of Ministers;
- ▶ committees composed of independent experts, sitting in their individual capacity (independent monitoring or advisory committees);
- ▶ committees established to manage partial and enlarged agreements, which only include certain member states or non-member states.

These committees involve civil society in their work in different ways, according to their respective rules.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S CO-OPERATION SECTOR AND NGOS

Active participation by civil society in co-operation programmes is essential, both in devising and implementing them and in helping member states and other partners achieve European standards and practice. Civil society is involved in co-operation activities across all sectors. The Council of Europe supports independent monitoring and puts considerable emphasis on fostering dialogue between civil society and authorities to ensure reforms are relevant and transparent. One example is consultative NGO councils that allow civil society to become involved in the design and implementation of national policies. Civil society regularly takes part in Council of Europe activities such as public hearings and training sessions and is involved in different stages of technical co-operation activities, either formally, informally or through direct engagement in project delivery.

The Council of Europe applies a [project management methodology](#) at all levels and stages of its co-operation programmes, bringing human rights norms and processes into project management, avoiding any unintentional harm, imbalance or negative impact in its work and achieving sustainable and high quality outcomes. The human rights approach is guided by four main principles: participation and inclusion, including engagement with civil society; equality and non-discrimination, by including and empowering vulnerable people; accountability to partners, beneficiaries and the public, and transparency and access to information.

Co-operation is usually managed through a country action plan or similar programming documents in accordance with the [guidelines on civil society organisations' participation in Council of Europe's co-operation activities](#). Civil Society is always included in drawing up and carrying out action plans. At project level, civil society participates in steering committee meetings and in the implementation of some project activities. They are the main target group of some projects.



INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNING BODIES

Committee of Ministers

The [Committee of Ministers](#) is the Council of Europe's statutory decision-making body. It is made up of the ministers of foreign affairs from each member state. It meets at ministerial level once a year and at ministers' deputies level (permanent representatives) approximately 30-35 times a year. The deputies are assisted by a bureau, rapporteur groups, thematic co-ordinators and ad hoc working parties. Its role and functions and the conduct of meetings is governed by the statute and rules of procedure. The Committee of Ministers' work includes supervising how member states execute judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

Each year, the president of the Conference of INGOs takes part in an exchange of views with the ministers' deputies and is also invited to various meetings, including the ministerial sessions. The president sometimes attends meetings of rapporteur groups to speak about activities or give input to a Committee of Ministers debate. Representatives of NGOs have been invited to participate in thematic debates organised by the ministers' deputies.

Following decisions taken at the 2019 Committee of Ministers meeting in Helsinki, three rapporteur groups covering issues relating to human rights, democracy and legal co-operation organised a regular informal exchanges of views with civil society on a specific topic.

European Court of Human Rights

The [European Court of Human Rights](#), set up by the European Convention on Human Rights, is the Council of Europe's independent international judicial body. Its principal mission is to ensure that member states observe their commitments to the Convention by examining applications from people who allege there has been a violation of their human rights as protected by the ECHR Convention and delivering a judgment where the application is admissible and well-founded. Many cases come to the Court each year, and the number is growing, proving that its role in protecting and improving the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights is more relevant than ever.

The Court is making continuous efforts speed up the examination of cases and improve its working methods and case management. A new strategy launched in 2021 ensured increasingly focused and efficient processing of cases, while applications continue to be filtered effectively. The strategy aims to prioritise chamber cases so judgments and decisions in high impact cases are delivered quickly and to strengthen the ability to deal with key legal issues of relevance. Almost all other cases, with the exception of Grand Chamber cases, are dealt with as efficiently as possible by the committees.



More information on how to apply can be found [here](#).

There are two other ways in which the Court works with civil society.

Firstly, the Court president can decide to invite anyone concerned with a case who is not the applicant to submit written comments or take part in a hearing. This is called the third-party intervention mechanism ([article 36 of the Convention](#)) and over the years it has allowed several NGOs engaged in defending human rights or interested in a relevant sector of law to submit their arguments to the Court. Third-party interventions by NGOs are fairly common and cover a broad spectrum of issues such as the relationship between religion and state, the rights of minorities, the rights of LGBTI people and abortion rights. NGOs offer a wide range of submissions, from legal points to facts and figures, information on governmental policy, or details on whether there is consensus or divergence of views amongst member states on certain issues. NGO submissions are often referred to in judgments.

Secondly, NGOs can be involved in meetings and seminars. At least once a year, normally in late November or the beginning of December, the Court holds a general meeting with representatives of the main European NGOs specialised in litigation to discuss case law developments and procedural matters. Seminars on specific topics are organised on an ad hoc basis, to which representatives of NGOs with particular expertise in the subject matter are invited. Judges and lawyers travel all over Europe – sometimes, beyond the borders of Europe – to events aimed at sharing the Court's case law and practice with different sectors of civil society, for instance, conferences for journalists on freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

Commissioner for Human Rights

The [Commissioner for Human Rights](#) is an independent and non-judicial institution established in 1999 by the Committee of Ministers. The Commissioner operates under a wide [mandate](#). The rapid reaction capacity is one of the main assets of the institution.

The Commissioner's mission is to promote awareness of and respect for human rights in member states by encouraging reforms and assisting them in implementing Council of Europe human rights standards.

The Commissioner is in constant dialogue with member states and other stakeholders, including national human rights structures, and carries out visits to member states to monitor and evaluate the human rights situation, addressing key problems and giving precise recommendations through country-specific reports. The Commissioner publishes thematic documents on specific questions, can intervene as a third party in European Court of Human Rights' proceedings and can address communications to the Committee of Ministers as part of its role in supervising the execution of Court judgments. The Commissioner also contributes during emerging crises or in post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

Civil society and human rights defenders are key partners for the Commissioner: protecting human rights defenders and promoting an enabling environment for their work lie at the core of the mandate. The Commissioner for Human Rights' specific duty to work on issues related to human rights defenders is highlighted in the [Committee of Ministers declaration on action to improve the protection of human rights defenders and promote their activities of 6 February 2008](#). Throughout the years, commissioners have used various tools in the framework of their mandate with the aim of improving the situation of human rights defenders, assisting them

when they are at risk and promoting their work. A dedicated [page](#) on the Commissioner's website contains information on the institution's work in this area.

The Commissioner's meetings with representatives of civil society and human rights defenders are an integral part of visits to member states. The Commissioner also holds thematic consultations with representatives of civil society and draws upon their expertise while preparing [issue papers](#), [human rights comments](#) and other [publications](#). Contact the Commissioner's office [here](#).

Parliamentary Assembly

The [Parliamentary Assembly](#) acts as the democratic conscience of Europe, promoting the development and implementation of the highest standards of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

It is made up of [delegations](#) from the Council of Europe member states mirroring the distribution of power in their home parliaments and holds four week-long sessions a year. It discusses and adopts recommendations, resolutions and opinions on any theme covered by the Council of Europe, often debating emerging and topical issues. It exercises political oversight over the action of governments and parliaments in promoting Council of Europe standards both in Europe and – increasingly – in neighbouring regions, and monitors how member states are respecting the commitments they made on joining. The Assembly's texts serve as guidelines for national governments, parliaments and political parties both in member states and beyond.

Assembly delegations regularly observe elections in member or partner countries as part of international election observation missions, involving the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, OSCE/ODHIR, the European Parliament and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, assisted by experts from the Venice Commission.

The Assembly can demand action from the Committee of Ministers, with which it holds an ongoing dialogue, and its members have the power to question presidents and prime ministers on any topic. It scrutinises the actions of governments, monitors how far member states are respecting the commitments they made on joining the Organisation, and can investigate particular human rights abuses in a member state if national inquiries are lacking or inadequate. It must also give its green light before any country can join the Council of Europe and has used this power to set conditions on membership, such as ending the death penalty.

The Assembly works with parliamentarians and staff of national parliaments to ensure its key recommendations are better known both in member states and in parliaments enjoying [Partner for Democracy status](#). It interacts closely with the Committee of Ministers, the intergovernmental sector, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the European Court of Human Rights, the Venice Commission and the Council of Europe's independent monitoring mechanisms. It co-operates closely with several regional and international organisations to maximise the impact of its action.

The Assembly supports the European Convention on Human Rights, which it helped to draw up, in particular pressing states to implement the Court's judgments. It also has the power to request opinions from legal experts in the Venice Commission on whether new laws in member states are compatible with the Council of Europe's democratic and human rights standards. The Assembly is electing the Court's judges (article 22 ECHR).

Though it has no power to pass binding laws, the Assembly is in constant dialogue with governments, national parliaments, other international organisations and civil society. In this way, its texts filter down through law and practice to improve the lives of Europeans everywhere. When invited, the Conference of INGOs participates in relevant committee meetings, in particular those of the [Migration, Equality, Social Affairs](#) and [Legal Affairs](#) Committees. The Legal Affairs Committee has appointed a general rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. Just as in national parliaments, NGOs often provide valuable data and information when Assembly reports are being drafted and can be invited to give testimony at parliamentary hearings organised by the committees. They are able to inform and advise Assembly members in person during country visits and sessions in Strasbourg and actively contribute to the organisation of side-events and hearings to raise awareness of particular issues. In particular, national NGOs are often consulted by rapporteurs preparing regular assessments of countries subject to the Assembly's monitoring procedure. The Assembly is a strong defender of civil society and human rights defenders. It has created the [Vaclav Havel Human Rights Prize](#) to honour outstanding work by human rights defenders, and adopted a series of resolutions and recommendations on this topic:

- ▶ Resolution 2382 (2021): [Media freedom, public trust and the people's right to know](#)
- ▶ Resolution 2378 (2021): [Strengthening the role of young people in the prevention and resolution of conflicts](#)
- ▶ Resolution 2362 (2021): [Restrictions on NGO activities in Council of Europe member states](#)



- ▶ Recommendation 2194 (2021): [Restrictions on NGO activities in Council of Europe member states](#)
- ▶ Resolution 2225 (2018): [Protecting human rights defenders in Council of Europe member States](#)
- ▶ Recommendation 2133 (2018): [Protecting human rights defenders in Council of Europe member States](#)
- ▶ Resolution 2226 (2018): [New restrictions on NGOs activities in Council of Europe member States](#)
- ▶ Recommendation 2134 (2018): [New restrictions on NGOs activities in Council of Europe member States](#)

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

The [Congress](#) is a bicameral assembly of local and regional elected representatives including municipal or regional councillors, and mayors or presidents of regional authorities. Its mission is to improve local and regional democracy in Europe, to advance decentralisation and regionalisation processes, and foster transfrontier co-operation between cities and regions. It brings local and regional authorities' perspective of democracy, human rights and rule of law to the Council of Europe and serves as a promoter of the Organisation's values and standards at that level. The Congress co-operates with the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Commissioner for Human Rights, and steering committees.

The [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#) is the international benchmark for local and regional democracy and one of the Congress's main activities is to regularly assess how member states are applying it to their own local and regional democracy, including through monitoring visits. The Congress helps national, local and regional authorities implement changes suggested in its recommendations and offers expertise in several fields such as evaluating the legal and institutional framework or contributing to drafting new laws and policies.

The Congress observes local and regional elections at the invitation of the national authorities concerned. During their observation missions, delegations meet with various local and international NGOs.

It works in close co-operation with the Council of Europe Venice Commission and other international organisations such as the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). It maintains close institutional relations with European partner organisations in areas of common concern, with a co-operation agreement signed in 2018 with the European Union Committee of the Regions that ensures complementarity and avoids duplication. It also has co-operation agreements with the Assembly of European Regions, the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies, and the Association of European Border Regions.

The Congress has always recognised the importance of co-operation between local and regional authorities and NGOs: in 2008 it published a [joint memorandum](#) on this theme with the Conference of INGOs. The revised "[Code of good practice for civil participation in the decision-making process](#)", adopted in parallel by the Congress and the Conference of INGOs in 2019, defines ways to strengthen civil participation and sets out mechanisms for NGO participation while taking into account social and technological changes. A [toolkit](#) to support the code was developed and is in use within different co-operation projects. It includes an inventory of good practices and provides guidelines for local and regional authorities to ensure civil participation in political decision-making processes. The online compendium BePart is a new project developed jointly by the Congress, the Conference of INGOs and the Council of Europe's Division of Elections and Participatory Democracy to offer public authorities and NGOs the opportunity to share best practices on successful implementation of the code.

The Congress offers four types of partnership status for European and international organisations and associations of cities and regions: statutory partner, institutional partner, observer partner and guest observer. Since

2014, the Congress invites one young person from each member state, chosen via a selection process, to participate as a youth delegate in its sessions and committee meetings. Follow these links for more information on [partnership](#) and on the [BePart](#) initiative.

The Congress has adopted the following reports and resolutions to promote civil society participation. It was also the driving force behind the [European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life](#):

- ▶ Resolution 452 (2019): [Revised Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process](#)
- ▶ Resolution 385 (2015): [Fostering active citizenship by building partnerships with civil society](#)
- ▶ Resolution 404 (2016): [Women's political participation and representation at local and regional levels](#)
- ▶ Resolution 386 (2015) : [Bringing down barriers to youth participation: adopting a lingua franca for local and regional authorities and young people](#)
- ▶ Resolution 371 (2014): [Promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities and their participation at local and regional levels](#)
- ▶ Resolution 366 (2014): [Empowering Roma youth through participation : effective policy design at local and regional levels](#)

Secretary General

The Secretary General leads and represents the Organisation. Elected by the Parliamentary Assembly for a five-year term, the Secretary General is responsible for the strategic planning and direction of the Council's work programme and budget. Ms Marija Pejčinović Burić was elected in June 2019.

On 2 June 2020, the Secretary General issued her [proposals](#) on the implementation of [decisions](#) adopted at the ministerial session in Helsinki in May 2019 "A shared responsibility for democratic security in Europe – the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe". The Secretary General's proposals build on existing standards and practice and other relevant discussions, including consultations with national delegations and civil society. They focus on areas where further action was identified as necessary and complement the existing framework of work with civil society. The Secretary General has continued to repeat the message that civil society and NGOs are key partners of the Council of Europe, including in her annual reports of 2020 and 2021, highlighting the way their work complements government and international organisations, especially given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the ensuing emergency measures. This support for the role and diversity of civil society, including human rights defenders and national human rights institutions in member states, is reflected in key priority 11 of the Council of Europe's [strategic framework](#) and was echoed by the [corresponding decision](#) taken at the Hamburg ministerial session on 21 May 2021. At the May 2021 ministerial session the Committee of Ministers reiterated the commitment to strengthening the role and meaningful participation of civil society and national human rights institutions.

The Secretary General's procedure to assist human rights defenders

The Secretary General has set up a [procedure](#) to investigate alleged reprisals against human rights defenders as a consequence of their interaction with the Council of Europe. This is managed by the Secretary General's private office based on the existing mandates within the Organisation. The information provided should include precise elements regarding the persons/entities subject to the alleged reprisals; as to the nature of the alleged incidents (when, where and how they have occurred and by whom). The assessment considers whether the reprisal or risk thereof meets a minimum level of severity, upon which it will warrant consideration. The assessment of this minimum level will depend on the circumstances of the case; there should be a reasonable degree of causality between the interaction or the intention to interact and the alleged reprisal. Any action under the procedure does not interfere with European Court of Human Rights procedures or the activities of the Parliamentary Assembly or the Commissioner for Human Rights.

Patronage

The [Secretary General's patronage](#) is non-material support which may be granted to any non-profit event which has a European dimension and is of clear political importance to the Council of Europe's activities or objectives. A limited number of events are granted patronage each year. No financial undertaking is linked to the granting of patronage, as the Council of Europe has no budgetary resources beyond those which are used to implement its intergovernmental work programme.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Effective ECHR implementation

Execution of ECHR judgments and decisions

The long-term effectiveness of the human rights system relies on the proper and timely execution of judgments made by the European Court of Human Rights at national level. Responsibility for carrying out the Court's judgments lie with the member state concerned, which undertakes to abide by a decision when it becomes part of the European Convention on Human Rights. The task of supervising whether this is done is carried out by the Committee of Ministers, aided by the Department for the Execution of Judgments. Maintaining the system's effectiveness also relies on close co-operation with the relevant bodies and authorities at domestic and international level, and making sure that human rights challenges or gaps are addressed in a timely way.

The work of the Department for the Execution of Judgments includes supporting states through on-going dialogue as to what they need to do to ensure that victims of violations obtain appropriate redress and/or that measures are carried out to prevent similar violations occurring in the future. This can include different forms of targeted support such as advice of a technical and legal nature, including in the form of workshops, round tables, training courses and study visits.

NGOs play an important role in the execution of judgments and they are entitled to share information with the Committee of Ministers under rule 9.1 of the Committee of Ministers' Rules. The procedure for doing so can be found [here](#).

Effectiveness of the ECHR System at national and European level

The European Convention on Human Rights has made an extraordinary contribution to protecting and promoting human rights and the rule of law in Europe and plays a central role in maintaining democratic security and improving good governance. Making sure that it is [effectively implemented at national level](#), especially when it comes to systemic and structural human rights problems, remains the principal challenge. The Council of Europe's legally binding human rights texts, the case law of the Court and the findings of monitoring bodies provide a means to achieve this. Its transversal and multidisciplinary approach includes standard-setting work, through which the Organisation provides guidance in response to challenges posed to human rights in European societies, and targeted co-operation programmes which support domestic authorities in addressing the issues raised by the Court's judgments and by other Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms.

Steering Committee for Human Rights – CDDH

The CDDH carries out intergovernmental work on human rights and advises the Committee of Ministers.

Focus
2022-2025

Inter-state and conflict-related cases brought before the European Court of Human Rights, national measures to prevent and remedy violations, accession of the European Union to the court, human rights and the environment, trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation, human rights in situation of crises, human rights and business, human rights and artificial intelligence

Civil society
involvement

- Participant: Conference of INGOs (CINGO)
- Observers
- Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in their meetings, or through dedicated hearings or written consultations

Creating forums and networks between policy makers, the legal and justice professions and civil society is at the core of co-operation work. Civil society with specific expertise in justice and human rights both benefit and contribute to discussions about the functioning of the justice system and protection of human rights. Civil society may be directly involved as a partner, beneficiary, target group or expert.

NGOs can benefit from the HELP Programme (Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals), which plays a significant role in supporting member states in implementing the Convention and executing the Court's judgments. [HELP human rights online courses](#) are available for free. Skills covered include bioethics, environment, data protection, violence against women, fair trial or reasoning of judgments.

The Council of Europe collaborates closely with individual national human rights institutions (NHRIs) in all areas of activity, ranging from human rights compliant business practices to torture prevention. This is organised according to how they are set up in their national systems and is not limited to Council of Europe member states, but extends beyond, covering neighbourhood countries in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia.

The Council of Europe also works closely with regional NHRI networks, such as the European Network of NHRIs (ENNHRI). ENNHRI was closely involved in work that resulted in the adoption of recommendations on the development and strengthening of effective, pluralist and independent national human rights institutions and strengthening the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe.

NHRIs play an important role in the system of execution of Court judgments carried out by the Committee of Ministers.

The Committee of Ministers has made recommendations, drawn up in close co-operation with civil society. They call on member states to ensure that their national laws and practices comply with clear principles, and to regularly evaluate national measures designed to strengthen the space for civil society. A handbook called [Civil Society and Human Rights](#) explains the three recommendations in detail.

- ▶ Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2018\)11](#) on the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe;
- ▶ Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2019\)6](#) on the development of the Ombudsman institution;
- ▶ Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2021\)1](#) on the development and strengthening of effective, pluralist and independent national human rights institutions.

More information on co-operation in the field of justice and human rights is available [here](#) and you can make contact [here](#).

Human rights education for legal professionals – HELP

Legal professionals who are at the forefront of human rights protection must know the European human rights standards to apply them effectively. This is done through the [HELP online courses](#) that cover a range of human rights topics. The main objective of the courses is to enhance the capacity of judges, lawyers and prosecutors in all Council of Europe member states and beyond to apply European human rights standards in their daily work.

[HELP online courses](#) can be tailored to the different needs of countries, institutions and professionals. Since 2015, other professionals such as court staff, prison or probation officers or health practitioners have become increasingly interested in accessing HELP courses. NGOs can also benefit from any of the 40 HELP courses by either encouraging their staff or beneficiaries to take them or promoting their use. NGOs can assess the completion of HELP courses by requesting their staff or beneficiaries to present self-generated e-certificate upon completion of any given course.

In January 2022 the HELP online platform had more than 90 000 active users.

The Council of Europe [HELP e-learning platform](#) courses are free and open to anyone who creates an account. They offer the highest quality as they have been developed with experts, including lawyers from the European Court of Human Rights. Partners such as the European Judicial Training Network (EJTN), the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), UNHCR and OSCE/ODIHR also contribute.

You can make contact with HELP through the [website](#).

Prevention of Torture and Other Forms of Ill-Treatment (CPT)

The prohibition of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, set out in article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, is an absolute human right from which there can be no derogation. Respect for a person's physical and mental integrity lies at the core of human rights protection and every effort must be made by states to ensure people deprived of their liberty are not ill-treated.

The work to prevent torture and other forms of ill treatment is carried out by [the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment \(CPT\)](#), an independent, non-judicial and proactive control mechanism with a preventive mandate.

The CPT organises visits to places of detention to assess how people deprived of their liberty are treated. These places include prisons, juvenile detention centres, police stations, holding centres for immigration detainees, psychiatric hospitals and social care homes. CPT delegations have unlimited access to places of detention and the right to move inside such places without restriction. They interview people deprived of their liberty in private and communicate freely with anyone who can provide information.

The CPT is a non-judicial body, and is not empowered to take up individual complaints, which are handled by the European Court of Human Rights

Before carrying out a periodic or ad hoc visit to a country, the CPT usually consults various civil society organisations and human rights defenders. During visits, meetings with representatives of international and/or national non-governmental organisations and human rights defenders are an integral part of the programme.

After each visit, the CPT transmits a confidential report which contains the CPT's findings and specific recommendations to the state concerned. The national authorities are requested to provide a response to the issues raised in the report. Visit reports and government responses are published only at the request of the national authorities (on a case-by-case basis or through a so-called "automatic publication procedure").

Individuals and organisations with relevant information concerning the situation of people deprived of their liberty in member states are invited to [inform the CPT](#) through the contact page.

Human Rights in the fields of Biomedicine and Health

Scientific and technological developments are a source of important potential advances for biomedicine and health. However, some of these developments, the way they are applied and the evolution of practices could give rise to infringements of fundamental rights.

The [Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine](#) is the only international legally binding text which specifically addresses human rights protection in the biomedical field, including healthcare. Its principles are further developed in additional protocols focusing on specific issues.

Work focuses on developing legal texts to reinforce existing laws and on producing tools and other material to help implement binding legal principles, following developments emanating from decisions and judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. The Council of Europe maintains partnerships with other intergovernmental organisations working on the issue, such as WHO, OECD, UNESCO and with civil society.

Steering Committee for Human Rights in the fields of Biomedicine and Health – CDBIO	
The CDBIO carries out work on the applications of biology and medicine covered by the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine; conducts intergovernmental work on human rights protection in the fields of biomedicine and health; especially issues raised by the Covid-19 pandemic, taking into account lessons learned from the health crisis; advises and provides expertise to the Committee of Ministers.	
Focus 2022-2025	Equitable access to medical treatment and equipment in situations of scarce resources; promotion of health literacy for people in vulnerable situations; protection and promotion of patients' rights, participation of children in decision making processes on matters relating to their health; artificial intelligence in healthcare; promotion of public dialogue on genomic medicine; genome editing.
Civil society involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Participant: Conference of INGOs (CINGO)– Observers– Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in meetings, or through dedicated hearings or written consultations



Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Media

Freedom of expression and freedom of the media, offline and online, are basic preconditions for a democratic and diverse society. Media play a key role in providing accurate, reliable information to foster people’s understanding and ensure informed participation in public debate. The Council of Europe promotes an enabling environment for freedom of expression, underpinned by legal guarantees for independence and diversity of media and for safety of journalists and others working in the media.

The Media and Internet division works on a range of freedom of expression issues, such as the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists, building a favourable environment for quality journalism, defamation issues, gender equality in the media, and the fight against hate speech. The division issues publications on relevant topics and organises activities, such as conferences, seminars and other events to foster discussions on how to best preserve freedom of expression and information in Europe, also assisting the work of the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI). Its actions are based on the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and other key legal texts such as the [Tromsø Convention on access to official documents](#) and include a combination of standard-setting activities, technical assistance through co-operation programmes and monitoring activities. Input from civil society is particularly important and there are various ways for NGOs to get involved.

Steering Committee on Media and Information Society – CDMSI

The [CDMSI](#) steers the Council of Europe’s work in the fields of freedom of expression, media, digital governance and other information society-related issues and oversees work on personal data protection. It advises the Committee of Ministers and takes part in standard-setting activities on all questions within its area of expertise, including freedom, independence, pluralism and diversity of media; safety of journalists; support for professional journalism, protection and promotion of human rights, with an emphasis on freedom of expression, both online and offline.

Focus 2022-2025	Countering the spread of online mis- and disinformation through fact-checking and platform design; use of digital tools including artificial intelligence for journalism/by journalists; sustainable media financing; strategic lawsuits against public participation; media and information literacy tools to help adult media users understand the digital media environment and navigate their media choices; role of social media and other digital platforms in public debate and the formation of public opinion; safety of journalists; hate speech; defamation in the media
Civil society involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participant: Conference of INGOs (CINGO) – Observers – Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in expert committees, or through dedicated hearings or written consultations

Data Protection

The Council of Europe was the first to create a legally binding text on [data protection](#) when Convention 108 was opened for signature in January 1981. Its principles are valid to this day, but with the immense shift in communication technology new approaches were needed and a modernised version – [Convention 108+](#) – was developed, which lays down principles on respecting individual human rights in respect of personal data processing.

The Conventional Committee of Convention 108 (T-PD) is responsible for interpreting its provisions and ensuring its implementation through multilateral exchange and co-operation. It strives to enable the evolution of data protection and to extend its influence beyond European national or regional borders. The Committee develops recommendations and guiding documents to help states and all concerned stakeholders to implement its principles and to follow and anticipate evolutions in technology and society that might impact on the processing of personal data.

Its focus in 2022-2025 is on promoting more ratifications of the modernised convention; providing guidance on data protection issues related to digital identity, anti-money laundering action, data protection, including the use of biometrics in voting and elections, digital identity in the context of migration and setting up evaluation and follow-up mechanism.

Civil society is a key partner in the work to ensure human rights are respected in the collection and processing of personal data. Committee members, staff and the Council of Europe Data Protection Commissioner regularly take part in events organised by civil society involved in data protection and privacy. Civil society is also an important partner in technical assistance and co-operation activities, especially regarding legal development and awareness raising. Once Convention 108+ comes into force civil society will be included in monitoring activities.

The Convention gives NGOs active on data protection issues the possibility to observe and to contribute following a specific procedure.

Artificial intelligence

“Artificial Intelligence raises important and urgent issues. AI is already with us – changing the information that we receive, the choices that we make, and the ways in which our societies function. In the coming years AI will play an even greater role in the way that governments and public institutions operate, and the way in which citizens interact and participate in the democratic process. It is clear that AI presents both benefits and risks. We need to ensure that AI promotes and protects our standards.”

Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General, Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is currently working on an appropriate legal framework for the development, design and application of **artificial intelligence**, based on its human rights, democracy and rule of law standards and with the capacity to adapt to future innovations. Work is also underway or planned on the applications or impact of digital transformation in areas such as healthcare, journalism, equality and non-discrimination, judicial systems, criminal liability, the rights of the child, education, in prisons and probation services or by other public administrations.

Committee on Artificial Intelligence – CAI	
The CAI works to establish an international negotiation process and to draw up an appropriate legal framework on the development, design, and application of artificial intelligence, based on the Council of Europe’s standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It maintains a transversal approach on artificial intelligence.	
Focus 2022-2025	Developing appropriate legal texts on the development, design, and application of artificial intelligence systems.
Civil society involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participant: Conference of INGOs (CINGO) – Observers – Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in meetings, or through dedicated hearings or written consultations

Equality and Human Dignity

Equality and human dignity are integral to human rights and a fundamental element of democracy. However, women still face violence and discrimination in pervasive and persistent ways. It is imperative for member states to commit to effectively combating violence against women, addressing the root causes of gender inequality and sexism and taking action to counter the increasing backlash against women’s rights.

THE FOUR PILLARS OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence



PREVENTION

PROTECTION

PROSECUTION

CO-ORDINATED POLICIES



Economic, social and health crises, such as seen during the pandemic, negatively affect children's right to protection by putting pressure on social services, prompting a rise in violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, and limiting access to justice, education and other services. The digital environment also creates further risk of violence against women and children.

Against this backdrop, common action is needed, based on Council of Europe's standards and values, that ensures that equality is protected in law and is accepted without question in our day to day lives.

Gender Equality

The Council of Europe bases its action to promote gender equality on a set of conventions and recommendations, on the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and the conclusions of the European Committee of Social Rights (European Social Charter), and on a [strategy](#) agreed amongst all its member states. Its combined approach includes developing standards, following them up and supporting member states through a variety of measures such as policy guidelines, capacity building, peer-to-peer exchange of good practice, and awareness-raising. Gender equality is included in all the policies and activities of the Organisation. The Council of Europe maintains partnerships on this issue with other international and regional organisations (UN bodies, European Union and its specialised agencies, OSCE, OECD) and with civil society.

Gender Equality Commission – GEC	
The GEC steers the Council of Europe's intergovernmental work in the field of gender equality and advises the Committee of Ministers on appropriate action to be taken in its field of competence, taking due account of relevant transversal perspectives.	
Focus 2022-2025	Implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy (2018-2023); place of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women; preventing and combating sexism; artificial intelligence and gender equality; migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women
Civil society involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participant: Conference of INGOs (CINGO) – Observers – Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in meetings, through dedicated hearings or in writing

Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)

Violence against women and domestic violence are a violation of human rights. One in three women in Europe has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15. The form of violence knows no social status, nor geographical borders, is widely spread and highly underreported.

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – known as the [Istanbul Convention](#) – is at the core of action to prevent violence, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators.

It operates under two main pillars: the Group of independent Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) and the Committee of the Parties. GREVIO draws up country reports, evaluating legislative and other measures taken by countries. It can initiate a special inquiry to prevent a serious, massive or persistent pattern of any acts of violence covered by the convention. The Committee of the



Parties adopts recommendations based on GREVIO evaluation reports and follows up on their implementation. Co-operation with other international organisations and regional and international mechanisms on women's rights ensures coherence, efficiency, impact and visibility of results.

GREVIO's aim is that all NGOs active in preventing and combating violence against women can contribute to the evaluation procedure. At the same time, it is aware that NGO resources are limited and although they may be willing to provide input at the early stages of evaluation they may simply not be in a position to do so.

GREVIO strongly encourages NGOs to work through coalitions, networks or platforms, drawing on the experiences gained from NGO participation in other monitoring mechanisms. This remains one of the most viable ways of sharing NGO resources and expertise, of organising the necessary information flow among NGOs and eventually contributing effectively to GREVIO's work. It may also help GREVIO establish an on-going dialogue with civil society, including during country visits. Where appropriate, national human rights institutions or leading NGOs in the countries under evaluation may co-ordinate NGO reporting to GREVIO.

GREVIO is particularly keen to receive information from women's and grassroots organisations on the practical implementation of the convention. NGOs consulted by the authorities or otherwise involved in the drawing-up of a state report can and should also be heard as independent voices.

NGOs can provide GREVIO with information at any time, even before GREVIO decides to examine the situation in a particular country and set a deadline for state reporting. The information should be provided in one of the official languages of the Council of Europe (English or French).

Children's rights

Violence in different forms and settings, lack of access to justice, challenges due to new technology, poverty, social exclusion and discrimination disproportionately affect children. The Council of Europe is committed to ensure the effective protection of children's rights. It adopts a transversal approach around multi-annual strategies aimed at maximising states individual and collective capacity to make the rights of children a reality: the present [strategy](#) runs from 2022 to 2027.

Challenges are addressed through targeted actions. Member states are supported with guidelines and other tools to implement international and Council of Europe standards on children's rights and to protect children from violence through co-operation activities. Partnerships with other international organisations and civil society are developed to ensure coherence, to make the most of synergies and to strengthen the impact of action taken.

Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child – CDENF	
The CDENF guide intergovernmental work in the field of the rights of the child and advises the Committee of Ministers on appropriate action to be taken.	
Focus 2022-2025	Launch and oversee the implementation of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027); prevent and combat violence against children; protect the best interests of the child in parental separation and in care proceedings; promote participation of children in decision making processes on matters relating to their health; support children as defenders of human rights; protect children's personal data and privacy; follow issues on children and artificial intelligence

Civil society involvement

- Participant: Conference of INGOs (CINGO)
- Observers (several European NGOs)
- Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in meetings, dedicated hearings, in writing or through collaboration in child participation activities

Protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (Lanzarote Committee)

The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, also known as [Lanzarote Convention](#), criminalises all kinds of sexual offences against children. It sets out that states in Europe and beyond must adopt specific legislation and take measures to prevent sexual violence, to protect child victims and to prosecute perpetrators.

The [Lanzarote Committee](#) is the body established to monitor whether the convention is being effectively implemented and also identifies [good practices](#), often during capacity-building activities such as study visits and conferences. To date, all Council of Europe member states, as well as Tunisia, have ratified the convention: the most up to date table is available [here](#). Any non-member state can request accession and NGOs can play an important role in encouraging their governments to do so.

To assist it in its work, the committee calls upon [national human rights institutions](#), [civil society](#) and international bodies, and seeks [child participation](#).

International NGOs working on prevention and protection of children from sexual abuse and sexual exploitation can become observers to the Lanzarote Committee. Observers participate in its work, contributing to the preparation of reports, opinions, declarations.

National and local NGOs who are members or co-operate with one of the international NGOs with observer status are encouraged to contact them so that their views and recommendations can be relayed to the committee. Any NGO (national or international) is also invited to contribute, particularly when questionnaires are sent around at the beginning of a new monitoring round.

Information for civil society on how to assist the Lanzarote Committee's work and how to become an observer is available [online](#).

Civil society is an essential element in publicising the European Day for the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse every year on 18 November. Many NGOs all over Europe take the opportunity to raise awareness on sexual violence against children. Their activities are promoted on a dedicated website – [End Child Sex Abuse Day](#). This helps build stronger ties with the Council of Europe in general and the children's rights division in particular.

To support states in implementing children's rights, the Council of Europe offers [technical assistance](#) that focuses on reviewing legislation and policies, on training and on awareness-raising. The children's rights division co-operates with civil society as part of these projects and grassroots NGOs are always invited to contribute on issues such as child-friendly justice, juvenile justice, child sexual exploitation and abuse – including online – and eliminating all forms of violence against children.

Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion

Discrimination is an increasingly frequent human rights violation. Xenophobic rhetoric and hate speech targeting minorities, Roma and Travellers, migrants and others are becoming commonplace in political life and on social media. Building societies free from discrimination and hate is a prerequisite for safeguarding and realising genuine democracy. Common policy responses, based on the Council of Europe's values, are needed to prevent and offset deeper divisions, mistrust and rejection of diversity that are undermining human rights, inclusion and democratic security of European societies.

Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion

Discrimination is a serious and frequent human rights violation across Council of Europe member states. Inequality, reinforced by racism, antisemitism, antigypsism, xenophobia and intolerance, deepens divides and destabilises democracies. Diversity is being presented as a threat instead of a factor of enrichment and prosperity. A systemic approach to all these interrelated phenomena is required to build resilient and inclusive societies.

The Council of Europe [works at different levels of governance](#) and with a wide range of stakeholders to build societies that reject discrimination and promote diversity and inclusion, aiming for a strong balance between monitoring, standard-setting, and co-operation activities.

Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion – CDADI	
The CDADI steers intergovernmental work to promote equality for all and build inclusive societies where diversity is respected, offering effective protection from discrimination and hate. It advises the Committee of Ministers on issues such as preventing and combating hate crime, hate speech and discrimination, fighting antigypsyism and improving the active participation and inclusion of Roma and Travellers in society, safeguarding the rights of persons belonging to national minorities supporting the use of regional or minority languages, and promoting intercultural integration.	
Focus 2022-2025	Combating hate crime; equality for Roma and Traveller women and girls; desegregation and inclusion policies in the field of education; combating discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity; active political participation of national minority youth; regional or national minority language protection; artificial intelligence and equality; equality of rights of intersex persons; intercultural integration of migrants
Civil society involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participant: Conference of INGOs (CINGO) – Observers – Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in meetings, or through dedicated hearings or written consultations

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)

The [European Commission against Racism and Intolerance \(ECRI\)](#) monitors developments in individual member states by drawing up country-specific recommendations in monitoring cycles lasting approximately five years and with general policy recommendations addressed to all states. ECRI engages with national equality bodies to support authorities and civil society in developing a shared agenda for addressing hate speech and discrimination and creating successful inclusion policies.

Racism and intolerance can only be successfully countered if civil society is effectively engaged. ECRI attaches great importance to ensuring that its anti-racism message filters down to the whole of civil society so that all sectors of society are involved in intercultural dialogue based on mutual respect.

Co-operation with NGOs is strengthened through [a working group on civil society relations](#), including information exchange, meetings, and hearings. In the context of its country visits ECRI holds meetings with NGOs to assess the situation as accurately as possible and identify pertinent issues to raise with government representatives. Following publication of country-by-country reports or conclusions information meetings are organised in co-operation with national government and non-government partners. Such methods are employed in a systematic manner, with the aim of building up a network of NGOs working in partnership with ECRI to provide a genuine two-way exchange.

National minorities

The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) evaluate the situation in their respective fields on the basis of periodic reports submitted by countries that are party to their respective treaties and information gathered both during country visits and provided by representatives of national minorities and NGOs. Country-specific opinions and evaluation reports are adopted every five years.

NGOs and minority associations have a [key role](#) in the monitoring mechanism of the framework convention. The advisory committee may seek information from civil society and NGOs and in their turn NGOs can submit information to the advisory committee at any time, and about any country. The most appropriate moment is when a state report has been received and a country visit is being prepared: the status of country monitoring can be seen [here](#). Contributions in English or French are preferable. State authorities are also [encouraged to include NGOs](#) in the drafting process of the state report and to ensure participation of NGOs in follow-up meetings once the opinions are made public.



Regional and minority languages

The [European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages](#) (ECRML) is a treaty designed to protect and promote regional and minority languages as a threatened aspect of Europe's cultural heritage. It is also designed to enable speakers of a regional or minority language to use it in private and public life (education, judiciary, administration, media, cultural life, economic and social life, and transfrontier co-operation). Its overriding purpose is cultural. The charter covers regional and minority languages, non-territorial languages and less-widely used official languages.

[NGOs are key partners](#) in promoting language diversity. Before a country ratifies the charter, NGOs can assist in choosing the provisions to be applied to each regional or minority language. After ratification, their role is to co-operate with national authorities in designing practical measures, implementing the charter provisions and informing the committee of experts of shortcomings. To monitor states' compliance, the committee of experts adopts evaluation reports containing recommendations on how the use of each regional or minority language can be improved. When preparing these reports, the committee organises on-the-spot visits to the countries concerned to consult associations representing regional or minority language speakers and national, regional and local authorities. The secretariat also maintains regular contacts with relevant European organisations and participates in exchanges with a view to obtaining pertinent information to be used in evaluation reports.

Roma and Travellers

The Council of Europe's [Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion](#) (2020-2025) provides the conceptual framework to combat antigypsyism and discrimination against Roma and Travellers and to support real and effective equality and democratic participation, along with access to inclusive quality education and training. Roma and Traveller civil society actively contributes through biannual dialogue meetings set up by the Committee of Ministers in 2015. An International Roma and Traveller Women's Conference is held every two years to promote the human rights and equal dignity of Roma and Traveller women and girls. Representation and active participation of Roma and Travellers in public and political life, in particular women and youth, is fostered through Roma Political Schools.

A Council of Europe dialogue with Roma and Traveller organisations is held bi-annually. The dialogue serves as a forum for Roma and Traveller civil society, the Council of Europe and other stakeholders to improve their knowledge by exchanging experiences and sharing examples of good practices, and to plan future co-operation activities at national and local level. Its agenda is result-oriented and enables Roma and Traveller organisations to bring their concerns and suggestions directly to the attention of the Organisation.

The Council of Europe provides support to standard-setting, monitoring, and co-operation activities at various levels, including peer reviews and thematic exchanges of expertise. It also carries out joint programmes with the European Union, such as INSCHOOL, JUSTROM, ROMACT, and ROMACTED. NGOs contribute to the design and implementation of strategic documents and public policies at local level which target the Roma community.

Intercultural Cities

The [Intercultural Cities programme](#) supports local and regional authorities in designing and implementing inclusive integration policies. The programme is based on an intercultural integration policy model that focuses on enabling communities, organisations and businesses to manage the diversity of people in a way that ensures the equal value of all identities. It is now being implemented by over 140 cities in Europe and beyond, including Australia, Canada, Japan, Israel, Mexico, Morocco and the United States.

At the level of local policies, intercultural integration is a comprehensive approach driven by committed leadership that cuts across political and administrative divides. It implies a strategic engagement to develop institutional capacity that ensures equal rights and opportunities for all, promotes positive intercultural mixing and interaction, and encourages participation and power-sharing. The model helps public authorities to achieve inclusion, equality and prosperity by unlocking the potential of diverse societies while minimising the risks related to human mobility and cultural diversity.

While local authorities are members of the Intercultural Cities network, the development and implementation of local intercultural policies is a participatory process that involves a wide range of NGOs, including migrant-led organisations, along with individual citizens. The Intercultural Cities programme also co-operates with organisations such as the European Network against Racism (ECAR) in the context of specific initiatives and campaigns and promotes anti-rumour methodology, a model to fight stereotypes and prejudice in the city through co-operation between the city, civil society and individual residents.

Sexual orientation and gender identity

The Council of Europe seeks to promote and ensure respect for the human rights of every individual, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people.

The Council of Europe works to combat discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) in twelve thematic fields:

- ▶ security and protection from violence;
- ▶ freedom of association;
- ▶ freedom of expression and assembly;
- ▶ respect for private and family life;
- ▶ employment;
- ▶ health;
- ▶ education;
- ▶ housing;
- ▶ sports;
- ▶ asylum;
- ▶ national human rights structures;
- ▶ multiple discrimination.

The Council of Europe gives technical support and expertise to member states on request through co-operation activities aimed at improving the legal and institutional framework in these thematic areas. This can include implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights; capacity building for institutions such as ministries, municipalities, universities, faith-based and civil society organisations; awareness raising and sharing of good practices and co-operation with other international organisations such as the European Union, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, the European Institute for Gender Equality, UNHCR, the Office of the UN Commissioner on Human Rights, WHO, OECD, and the OSCE.

Civil society is included in all activities. LGBTI human rights INGOs are observers to the European Governmental LGBTI Focal Points Network (EFPN), an intergovernmental network bringing together representatives from national authorities, international organisations and INGOS. ILGA Europe and Transgender Europe are also observers in the working group on SOGIESC equality and contribute to the thematic review of the Committee of Ministers [recommendation](#) on measures to combat discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Council of Europe supports civil society in building capacity, awareness raising and sharing good practices through peer to peer exchanges, research and [publications](#), training on combating hate speech – including in faith-based institutions – and [combating hate crime](#) that involves police authorities or associations. It helps civil society participate in consultations and brings together civil society and national governments if there are problems organising Pride events.

A [compendium on SOGIESC-inclusive legislation and policies is open](#) to contributions, such as legislation (draft or final), national action plans and strategies (general or relating to a field such as education or youth), parliamentary resolutions, best practice compilations, national jurisprudence, toolkits, and guidance documents. Submissions to the [list of LGBTI victim support](#) resources in member states, as well as alerts about new practices, policy measures and legislation negatively affecting LGBTI people are also welcome.

Migrants' rights

The [Council of Europe action plan on protecting vulnerable persons in the context of migration and asylum in Europe \(2021-2025\)](#) provides a framework of measures to address the human rights challenges affecting the most vulnerable migrants and refugees in member states. It works across four pillars: protecting and promoting safeguards to identify and respond to vulnerability; ensuring access to law and justice; fostering democratic participation and inclusion; and enhancing co-operation among relevant authorities. The [Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees](#) coordinates its implementation, which includes activities from the whole Organisation.

Civil society enjoys a fruitful relationship with the Special Representative and gives valuable input in country and thematic work as well through the Conference of INGOs' Committee on Migration.

Secretariat of the Partial Agreement on the Council of Europe Development Bank

The Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) is a multilateral development bank with a social mandate which was established in 1956. Its principal activity consists of granting loans to borrowers in its 42 member countries for economically and socially viable projects that promote social cohesion. Working to strengthen social cohesion through its lending activity, the CEB promotes the values and principles of the Council of Europe. Focusing on vulnerable populations, including refugees, migrants and displaced people, it contributes to reducing social inequalities and building inclusive societies.

Applications for loans or guarantees must receive the Secretary General's opinion that the project is in conformity with the political and social aims of the Council of Europe, which is drafted by the [CEB](#) secretariat. It is then submitted to the CEB's administrative council for approval

The secretariat prepares an annual report on the social effects of completed projects and liaises with other Council of Europe bodies.

The bank's borrowers include governments, local and regional authorities, and public and private financial institutions. NGOs can also borrow, provided their project is approved by a CEB member state. Recent examples include projects for the Roma Education Fund and the Roma Entrepreneurship Development Initiative.

There is no direct civil society participation in the bank's decision-making mechanism. The CEB relies on its borrowers to carry out the required consultations with civil society during project preparation: nevertheless citizens' groups and NGOs occasionally make contact on issues related to implementation of specific projects. Such cases are handled by the bank's competent services on a case-by-case basis.

NGOs working on social matters are eligible to apply for the [CEB Award for Social Cohesion](#). This annual competition was launched in 2020 to acknowledge outstanding contributions to social cohesion across Europe. A €25,000 prize is awarded by an independent jury to a project that addresses pressing social issues in an exemplary way.

Social rights

Protecting social rights and promoting social progress is a priority for the Council of Europe and one of the main tools to build social justice and inclusive societies. This is even more necessary in times of crisis and economic hardship, with the Covid-19 pandemic revealing both strengths and serious weaknesses in a broad range of social rights across Europe.

European Social Charter

One of the Council of Europe's aims is the effective protection of economic and social rights and it achieves this through the [European Social Charter](#), a treaty that guarantees economic and social rights and complements the European Convention on Human Rights.

The [European Committee of Social Rights](#) supervises how the charter is implemented through a reporting procedure and a collective complaints procedure. National and international NGOs can engage with the committee within these two monitoring procedures. They can also play a part in the follow-up procedures. A brochure available in [English](#) and [French](#) explains the process in detail.

Under the reporting procedure, states covered by the charter regularly submit a report on its implementation in law and in practice. These reports are examined by the committee, which decides whether the national situations they describe comply. The decisions adopted by the committee, called "conclusions", are published every year.

The Committee of Ministers follows up conclusions presented by the [Governmental committee](#) of the European Social Charter and the European Code of Social Security, which is composed of representatives of states who are party to the charter and of observers representing European employers' organisations and trade unions. The Committee of Ministers may then address a recommendation to that state asking it to change the situation in law and/or in practice.

The collective complaints procedure was introduced by the [additional protocol providing for a system of collective complaints](#) in 1995 through a procedure that allows certain organisations including INGOs to bring complaints. Collective complaints can only be brought against states that have accepted the complaints procedure.

A complaint is examined by the European Committee of Social Rights which declares it admissible if the formal requirements have been met. The committee then takes a decision on the merits of the complaint, which it transmits to the parties concerned and to the Committee of Ministers. The decision is made public within four months of this transmission. On the basis of this report, the Committee of Ministers adopts a resolution and may recommend that the state concerned takes specific measures to bring the situation in line with the charter. There are a number of [ways](#) that NGOs can get involved.

Under the reporting procedure:

States who are party to the charter are under an obligation to communicate copies of their national reports to trade unions affiliated to the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and to national organisation that are members of Business Europe and of the International Organisation of Employers (OIE).

These organisations and, more generally, trade unions, employers' organisations, NGOs and others may submit comments and information on state reports to the European Committee of Social Rights. The extent to which these comments are taken into account is within the discretion of that committee.

Comments on national reports must be submitted to the secretariat of the European Social Charter before 30 June of the year during which the European Committee of Social Rights examines the national report concerned. This deadline has been set to allow states time to respond to comments if they so wish.

Under the collective complaints procedure:

Only certain organisations can bring collective complaints to the European Committee of Social Rights. These include representative national trade unions and employers organisations and INGOs which have participative status with the Council of Europe and which, at their request, have been included on a [list of international Non-Governmental Organisations \(INGOs\)](#). National NGOs or INGOs that are not on the list can work together with listed INGOs to lodge collective complaints. Information can be found on the website of the [European Social Charter](#) and on the website of the [Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations of the Council of Europe](#).

Civil society (and other) organisations can provide input with regard to collective complaints brought by others. In this case, those organisations should indicate to the European Committee of Social Rights their interest in submitting observations on a pending collective complaint. To do so, they are invited to contact the secretariat of the European Social Charter.

European Committee for Social Cohesion – CCS	
The European Committee for Social Cohesion (CCS) (previously the European Social Cohesion Platform) promotes the Council of Europe's work on social cohesion, in particular by promoting the European Social Charter and its collective complaints procedure.	
Focus 2022-2025	Transition to green economy/platform economy and social cohesion; social cohesion enablers; social security and minimum income; poverty eradication including challenges stemming from migration and global warming; approaches to sustainable development
Civil society involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participants: Conference of INGOs (CINGO); social partners – Observers – Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in meetings, or through dedicated hearings or in writing.

Many civil society organisations are regularly invited and participate in the activities and meetings of the [COE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform on social and economic rights](#). Its main objectives are to work with national and international human right organisations to strengthen knowledge of the European Social Charter and other human rights standards relating to social and economic rights; to ensure that human rights standards are taken into account in the design and implementation of national legislation and to promote a wider acceptance of the revised European Social Charter and the collective complaints procedure.

RULE OF LAW

Rule of law based institutions

Well-functioning legal and democratic institutional structures based on the rule of law are necessary to ensure democratic security in Europe. Independent, impartial and efficient judiciaries are key to inspiring public trust and securing human rights. They guarantee that all individuals are treated equally before the law and that rights and freedoms are enjoyed in practice. Concerted and effective responses to common challenges and threats are required to consolidate a coherent pan-European legal space that reflects Council of Europe standards and findings fully, including in the areas of civil, public and private law and public international law.

The aim of the Council of Europe in this area is to achieve a pan-European legal area in which robust, independent, impartial, transparent and accessible institutions and procedures based on the rule of law exist at all levels.

Democracy through Law (Venice Commission)

The [European Commission for Democracy through Law](#) (the Venice Commission) is the Council of Europe advisory body on constitutional matters. It is composed of independent experts in the field of constitutional and international law and political science. It provides independent country-specific expert advice and draws up general standards. The Venice Commission's country-specific opinions provide the relevant state (parliament, government or independent institutions) with recommendations on how to bring their texts into conformity with international standards. It also provides recommendations on how to make viable institutional or legal choices on the basis of a comparative analysis of the experience of Venice Commission member states. In its recommendations, it puts emphasis on gender equality, especially for electoral rules favouring appropriate representation of women. It also promotes the development of gender equality standards and assists national authorities (administrative authorities, electoral management bodies, constitutional courts) in the due interpretation and application of legal texts by providing technical assistance and advice on elements of comparative law. It also develops standards – through studies, general reports and guidelines – often jointly with other international organisations such as OSCE/ODIHR, in areas where national legislators would benefit from increased and more detailed guidance in devising legal texts in line with international standards. For country-specific advice, the Venice Commission acts upon request.

The types of contact points between civil society and the Venice Commission are threefold:

- ▶ Legislation on NGOs as the subject of opinions of the Venice Commission: The Venice Commission has adopted numerous reports and opinions in a number of individual countries. It also contributes to safeguarding freedom of association in its member states through, for instance, general guidelines on freedom of association and on the funding of associations.
- ▶ NGOs' role in democratic law-making: In its opinions, the Venice Commission systematically recommends consultation with civil society as an essential phase of democratic law-making.
- ▶ NGOs are essential partners in preparing Venice Commission opinions: delegations of the Venice Commission that visit countries as part of the preparation of opinions regularly meet civil society to obtain their views and expertise. Information obtained during these meetings – or even before – helps the Commission's rapporteurs to identify important constitutional and legal issues.

Independence and efficiency of Justice

An efficient, impartial and independent justice system, whose decisions are enforced, is an essential pillar of the rule of law and a precondition for the enjoyment of all fundamental rights and freedoms.

Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights provides that "everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law". This – and key recommendations from the Committee of Ministers – form the basis of Council of Europe support to member



states to address any shortcomings that may exist. This is carried out through the work of three different bodies the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ), the Consultative Council of European Judges (CCJE) and the Consultative Council of European Prosecutors (CCPE)

The European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) advises and supports policy makers and justice professionals by carrying out a data-based in-depth analysis of the day-to-day functioning of judicial systems in Europe, by developing pragmatic and innovative tools for use at national and local level focused on efficiency, quality and cyber-justice, and by supporting the most effective methodologies for judicial data collection, processing and analysis.

Consultative Council of European Judges – CCJE

The **CCJE** is a consultative body composed exclusively of serving judges, unique in this way at European level. This ad hoc committee is tasked with fostering the independence, impartiality and competence of judges by drawing up standards and guidance as regards the status and career of judges and the effective exercise of the judicial profession, bearing in mind the Council of Europe’s standards, the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights and the findings and recommendations of the relevant monitoring mechanisms

Focus 2022-2025	Issues related to the independence, impartiality, and other aspects of a fair trial, competence, nomination, career, ethics, accountability, evaluation or other aspects of career of judges or judicial profession
Civil society involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participant: Conference of INGOs (CINGO) – Observers – Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in meetings, or through dedicated hearings or written consultations

Consultative Council of European Prosecutors – CCPE

The **CCPE** is a consultative body composed exclusively of serving prosecutors (unique in this way at European level), represents the various existing prosecution systems. This ad hoc committee is tasked with fostering the independence, impartiality and competence of prosecutors, by drawing up standards and guidance as regards the status and career of prosecutors and the effective exercise of the prosecutorial profession, bearing in mind the Council of Europe’s legal standards, the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights and the findings and recommendations of the relevant monitoring mechanisms.

Focus 2022-2025	Issues related to the independence, impartiality, competence, nomination, career, ethics, accountability, evaluation or other aspects of careers of prosecutors or the prosecutorial profession.
Civil society involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participant: Conference of INGOs (CINGO) – Observers – Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in meetings, or through dedicated hearings or written consultations



Legal co-operation

Public institutions and services are the foundation of the social contract between individuals and the state. Their accessibility, legitimacy, and effective operation enable structural inequalities and breaches of law to be addressed, provide redress for violations and facilitate peaceful resolution of disputes, hence playing a critical role in sustaining accountability and trust, and contributing to the well-being of individuals and societies. Most people are affected by public and private law decisions at some time in their lives, especially as profound changes in society, economics and technology impact their lives. Common approaches at European level help member states design appropriate legislative and policy solutions and strengthen mutual trust and understanding, leading to better regional and cross-border cooperation in rule of law matters.

Through its intergovernmental work, the Council of Europe develops and promotes agreed common standards, policies and good practices that contribute to reinforcing the common legal space. Solutions are proposed where gaps, operational problems and obstacles to the ratification and implementation of conventions are identified. In addition, co-operation programmes support justice sector reform in member states especially in the areas of judicial, civil and administrative law and practice in line with Council of Europe standards.

European Committee on Legal Co-operation – CDCJ

The [CDCJ](#) oversees the Council of Europe’s work in the field of public and private law and advises the Committee of Ministers.

Focus 2022-2025	Protection of the profession of lawyer; the rights and the best interests of the child in parental separation and in care proceedings; artificial intelligence and administrative law; preventing and resolving disputes related to child relocation ; administrative detention of migrants; child-sensitive procedures in administrative and migration law; rights of people conceived by donor to know their origins; legal aid and representation; access to justice for vulnerable people, mainstreaming gender in public and private law reform processes.
Civil society involvement	- Participant: Conference of INGOs (CINGO) - Observers - Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in meetings, through dedicated hearings in writing.

The Council of Europe develops public international law, international criminal justice and other topical issues by assisting member and observer states and international organisations in areas such as immunities, reservations and declarations to international treaties, implementation of international sanctions and respect for human rights, peaceful settlement of disputes including those of a private character, to which an international organisation is a party.

Committee of Legal Advisers on Public International Law – CAHDI

The [CAHDI](#) examines questions, exchanges views and provides opinions related to public international law.

Focus 2022-2025	Legal opinions at the request of the Committee of Ministers, compilation of national practices from member and non-member states in different fields of public international law
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Action against crime, security and protection of citizens

Effective enjoyment of human rights, democratic stability and secure societies depend on countering all threats to the rule of law. These include terrorism and its financing, organised crime, money laundering, corruption, cybercrime, medicrime, trafficking in human beings and human organs, match fixing, doping, and violence and corruption in sport. It is also important to have well-run prisons and probation services with adequately trained staff in sufficient number and effective execution of penal sanctions. Law enforcement must likewise integrate a human rights-based approach aimed at combating ill-treatment and avoiding impunity.

The aim of the Council of Europe is effective protection of citizens from threats to the rule of law. It pursues a multidisciplinary approach and has developed key standards and legal treaties in areas such as terrorism and its financing, money laundering, cybercrime, corruption, counterfeiting of medical products, trafficking in human beings and in human organs. The focus is on ensuring that existing standards are implemented effectively, including the case law of the European Court of Human Rights; that new challenges are identified and responded to early, and that there is technical co-operation to address problem areas identified by relevant Council of Europe bodies. The Council of Europe has also developed a series of treaties which establish a common basis for co-operation in criminal matters across Europe and, increasingly, beyond.

Crime and terrorism

The fight against crime and terrorism is pursued through the development of standard-setting, providing technical and analytical advice, gathering information, conducting thematic events and advising the Committee of Ministers.

European Committee on Crime Problems – CDPC

The CDPC identifies priority elements for intergovernmental legal co-operation and proposes areas for action on criminal law, procedure, criminology and penology by developing standard setting, providing scientific advice, collecting information and advising the Committee of Ministers.

Focus 2022-2025	Protection of environment through criminal law; protecting victims of crime; criminal liability related to the use of artificial intelligence; protection of witnesses; combating hate crime; fighting smuggling of migrants; prison and probation services; international co-operation in criminal matters.
Civil society involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Participant: Conference of INGOs (CINGO)– Observers– Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in meetings, or through dedicated hearings or written consultations

Council of Europe Committee on Counter-terrorism – CDCT

The CDCT identifies priority issues for intergovernmental legal co-operation and proposes areas for action in the field of counter-terrorism by developing standard setting, providing technical and analytical advice, collecting information and advising the Committee of Ministers.

Focus 2022-2025	Emerging terrorists threats; risk assessment of individuals indicted and convicted for terrorist offences; prevention of radicalisation leading to terrorism; gathering e-evidence in terrorism-related cases; bioterrorism; definition of terrorism
Civil society involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Observers– Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in meetings, or through dedicated hearings or written consultations

Money laundering (MONEYVAL)

The Council of Europe has established two different mechanisms to combat money laundering and terrorist financing that work in close co-operation. The [Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism \(MONEYVAL\)](#) is an independent monitoring body which assesses compliance with the principal international standards to counter money laundering and terrorist



financing. It is an associate member of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). The Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Council of Europe “Warsaw” Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism is responsible for monitoring the provisions of that convention. It deals with areas not covered by MONEYVAL and the FATF.

The aim of MONEYVAL is to ensure that its member states have in place effective systems to counter money laundering and terrorist financing and comply with the relevant international standards in this matter. This includes several requirements on NGOs to prevent terrorism financing. MONEYVAL engages with NGOs on a selective basis in the context of its mutual evaluations to determine the level of terrorism financing risk and mitigating measures in assessed jurisdictions.

Medicrime

Counterfeiting of medicine and medical products has increased worldwide. In recent years, endangering public health, affecting patients and sapping their confidence in the legal marketplace.

Even more profitable than drug trafficking, this new form of crime has an undeniable advantage for criminals: they go largely unpunished or receive only mild sanctions. Even when states take strict measures to regulate the production and distribution of medical products and devices, these measures often prove insufficient, especially when criminal find gaps in legislation, or are able to exploit international networks. This makes fake medicine and medical products a danger to health and to human rights.

The Council of Europe’s response is the [MEDICRIME](#) Convention which criminalises the manufacturing of counterfeit medical products; supplying, offering to supply and trafficking in counterfeit medical products; faking documents; the unauthorised manufacturing or supplying of medicinal products and the marketing of medical devices that do not comply with conformity requirements.

The Council of Europe supports member states in implementing the monitoring recommendations through technical cooperation and assistance.

Civil society can [participate as observers](#) within the MEDICRIME Committee.

Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA)

Trafficking in human beings is a violation of human rights, and the Council of Europe’s [Convention on action against trafficking in human beings](#) is an important step to stamping out this abuse worldwide. It is monitored by the [Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings \(GRETA\)](#) and the Committee of the Parties: on the basis of GRETA’s reports, the Committee of the Parties adopts recommendations addressed to the country concerned. In addition, GRETA can launch an urgent procedure to prevent or limit the scale or number of serious violations. The Council of Europe also assists states in implementing the convention, through targeted co-operation activities.

Civil society is an important source of information for GRETA. The convention provides for co-operation and strategic partnerships with civil society, which can help governments fulfil their obligations. Prior to each country evaluation visit, GRETA seeks information directly from civil society, based on a questionnaire, and NGOs may answer some or all of the questions. NGOs can also decide to provide a joint report. [Guidance for NGOs to report to GRETA](#) has been developed by two INGOs.

During country evaluation visits, GRETA holds meetings with civil society representatives (specialised NGOs, trade unions, research institutes, and so on) and it may also visit shelters for victims of trafficking run by NGOs. Civil society is also active in the implementation of the convention through awareness raising, research, training, detecting victims of trafficking, providing them with accommodation and other assistance, and supporting them through the criminal justice process and to claim compensation. GRETA periodically organises hearings with NGOs. The Committee of the Parties can also invite international NGOs as observers to its meetings.

Cybercrime

The [Budapest Convention](#) is the most relevant international criminal justice agreement on cybercrime and electronic evidence with currently 80 states that are parties or that have signed it or been invited to accede. The Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY) – representing the parties to this treaty – oversees its effective use and implementation and the Cybercrime Programme Office of the Council of Europe (C-PROC) in Romania is supporting countries worldwide through some 400 capacity building activities annually.

Civil society contributed to the preparation of the new second additional protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime between 2017 and 2021 in six rounds of consultations. Co-operation with civil society, data protection organisations and industry organisations is also sought within the framework of capacity building activities.

Combatting Corruption (GRECO)

Corruption poses a continuous threat to the essence and core values of societies and institutions. It undermines justice and the equal treatment of citizens, and endangers good governance and the stability of democratic institutions. The fight against corruption is carried out through the [Group of States against Corruption \(GRECO\)](#) which assists member states in this area.

GRECO takes a multidisciplinary approach. It monitors observance of the Council of Europe's anti-corruption legal texts, including the [Twenty Guiding Principles for the Fight against Corruption](#), the [Criminal Law Convention on Corruption](#) and its additional protocol and the recommendation on common rules against corruption in the [funding of political parties and electoral campaigns](#), along with other legal agreements on whistle-blowers, access to official documents and lobbying.

GRECO's monitoring combines a dynamic process of mutual evaluation and peer pressure, resulting in country-specific evaluation reports which include a detailed analysis and tailor-made recommendations drawn up following an on-site visit and validated by the GRECO plenary. Subsequent impact assessments ("compliance procedures") also validated by the plenary, serve to verify achievements and to push for further progress towards compliance with the recommendations. A high profile is maintained in external relations to secure additional support, coordination and synergy, notably with the United Nations, the OECD, OSCE/ODHIR, International IDEA, and the European Union.

Many NGOs play a role in the fight against corruption. A list of those working with the Council of Europe is available [here](#).

Prisons and Police

Prison conditions are long-standing challenges and continue to require concerted action by member states particular when it comes to over-crowding, the treatment of prisoners in line with international human rights standards, successful rehabilitation and re-socialisation. Excessive use of force by law enforcement agents, discrimination and misconduct continues to be reported. Any suggestion of impunity on the part of the police or other agencies undermines public trust in effective law enforcement and violates human rights.

The European Convention on Human Rights provides the framework for the Council of Europe's action in this field. This is complemented by legal texts adopted by the Committee of Ministers, the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and the findings of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT). The Court and the CPT highlight areas where member states need to act to fulfil the Council of Europe's standards on prisons and probation, and as regards the actions of law enforcement officials.

The Council of Europe has long-standing expertise in the execution of penal sanctions and measures and has developed several key standards and legal texts in this area. The emphasis is placed on good management of prisons, maintaining humane prison conditions by ensuring proper selection and training of staff, by guaranteeing proper living standards, and considering the needs of vulnerable prisoners. Each year the Council of Europe publishes statistics on prisons and probation, as well as managing platforms for exchange of good



practices, promoting the latest Council of Europe standards and organising discussions of new challenges in forums such as annual conferences of directors of prison and probation services.

The Council of Europe provides assistance to prison and probation services, police and other law enforcement bodies in areas identified as needing improvement; offering training, legislative support, policy advice and exchange of good practice. When it comes to the police, the emphasis is on human rights-based policing and on combating ill-treatment and impunity as regards law enforcement structures.

The Council of Europe currently implements projects in many member states with NGOs playing an important role in most, if not the leading role. Co-operation projects on prisons and police encourage authorities to open up their prison systems, their police and probation services to NGOs, getting them involved in the organisation of treatment programmes and activities and allowing them to assist in reintegrating prisoners back into society. For example, NGOs are involved in the system of civil monitoring boards in Turkey and some of the board members are also part of either an NGO or a trade union: they are also invited to meetings of the national preventive mechanism.

European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & Healthcare (EDQM)

Ensuring that good quality medicine and healthcare is available and that access to it is easy is an integral part of public health protection. A challenge for all member states for many years, concerted action on public health was rarely more pressing than in the COVID-19 pandemic to avoid shortages of critical medicines, to support the development of new innovative treatments including vaccines, and to foster co-operation and share knowledge amongst member states' health authorities and healthcare professionals.

The right to the protection of health is covered by the European Social Charter and a wide range of issues relating to health have been dealt with by the European Court on Human Rights.

The European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare (EDQM) contributes to the better protection of public health by developing quality standards for medicines and their safe use. It also provides guidance and standards in the areas of blood transfusion, organ, cell and tissue transplantation, cosmetic products and materials that come into contact with food; staffing five intergovernmental committees and three intergovernmental expert committees which develop ethical, safety and quality standards, provide assistance to member states, monitor practices and provide practical tools to ensure the sustainable provision of safe, high-quality healthcare products.

Quality standards for medicines

The European Pharmacopoeia is a single reference work for the quality of medicines and their components in the 39 states that have signed the [convention](#) covering its work. Its official standards provide a legal and scientific basis for quality control during the development, production and marketing processes. Its purpose of is to promote public health by providing recognised common standards for the quality of medicines and their components, either through documents known as monographs or physical standards known as reference substances. Both taken together are a basis for the safe use of medicines by patients and make it easier to move medicinal products freely in Europe and beyond.

The EDQM co-ordinates a network of Official Medicines Control Laboratories (OMCLs), which independently test the quality of medicinal products for human and veterinary use available on the market. It co-operates with national and international health authorities (including the European Commission, the European Medicines

Agency, the US-FDA and the World Health Organization), manufacturers of raw materials and pharmaceutical products, health and healthcare establishments, professional associations and donors/patient organisations. The EDQM provides opportunities for civil society to be involved in its work while taking into consideration the specific nature of respective activities.

For bodies such as industry trade associations or academia and non-governmental interested parties there are several possibilities to be involved in the work of the European Pharmacopoeia:

- ▶ by becoming an expert: Candidates may apply according to the [terms of reference](#) of the Pharmacopoeia's groups of experts and working parties. Candidates from member states that are part of the Pharmacopoeia submit their applications to the relevant national authority (the list is available on EDQM website) and candidates from non-Pharmacopoeia member states submit to the EDQM (via its Helpdesk). Experts are ultimately appointed by the Pharmacopoeia Commission, its decision-making body;
- ▶ by submitting a new draft or proposing a request for revision: stakeholders are encouraged to submit draft monographs or texts which could provide a starting point for an official public standard;
- ▶ by submitting comments on draft texts which are published in [Pharmeuropa](#), a free online EDQM publication that allows the public to consult draft texts or get more information on general policy matters.

All standards drawn up in the intergovernmental committees go through a consultation process either within drafting groups involving experts representing stakeholders in a given field or through survey-based consultations with interested parties including patient and donor associations. The committee terms of reference are available on the EDQM website and more information is available on the [FreePub EDQM webpage](#).

To contact the EDQM create a [HelpDesk account](#) and [select](#) the topic of interest to access a specific form.

Drugs and Addictions (Pompidou Group)

Drug addiction is a challenge to human rights and public health and brings with it the potential to adversely affect the rule of law in society through illicit trafficking.

The [Pompidou Group](#) is an enlarged partial agreement working on this issue in the Council of Europe to guarantee a fair balance between the demands for public safety and the protection of individual rights. It promotes humane and sustainable drug policies by providing multidisciplinary responses to address problems resulting from use and addictive behaviours. Given the global nature of drug problems, it acts as a bridge between Europe and other world regions.

The Pompidou Group provides a forum for open debate to discuss different approaches to drug policy, offers innovative solutions, and facilitates capacity building across disciplines to enhance knowledge for better informed and evidence-based drug policy choices. It develops guidance and tools for policy makers, managers and practitioners involved in the development of drug policy and its implementation and evaluation. It promotes international co-operation to establish human rights oriented drug policies, thus helping to reduce drug use and the associated negative social and health consequences

The Pompidou Group involves civil society in most of its activities, in particular major non-governmental international platforms such as the International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC), Harm Reduction International, Correlation Network, the EU Civil Society Forum on Drugs, and the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs. At Council of Europe level, its main partner is the INGO Conference, which has permanent observer statute in the Pompidou Group statutory bodies.

Sports Conventions

[Sport](#) is a major component of society, bringing people together based around values such as respect, mutual understanding, compliance with rules and fair play. At its best, it contributes to health and happiness, breaking down barriers and building trust and community spirit. It is an excellent vector for promoting the values and goals of the Council of Europe. Yet, sport faces growing threats and risks that can affect the health and wellbeing of players and spectators, including issues around safety, security and service and acts of violence, racism or other criminal offences. Threats also exist to the integrity of sport, such as the manipulation of sports competitions. The doping of athletes is also a challenge, making sport unfair for participants and spectators.

The Council of Europe contributes through its sports conventions: the [Saint-Denis Convention on an integrated safety, security and service approach at football matches and other sports events](#) which promotes safe, secure

and welcoming sports events for all participants; the [Anti-doping Convention](#) and the [Macolin Convention on the manipulation of sports competitions](#). These conventions are monitored to make sure they are properly implemented; standards are developed to promote Council of Europe values, emphasising issues such as the fight against violence, racism, xenophobia and discrimination, corruption, and digital technologies. Co-operation with the [Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport \(EPAS\)](#) ensures maximum impact.

The Council of Europe co-ordinates appointments by European public authorities to the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) governing bodies. It develops strategic partnerships with sport organisations to embed Council of Europe principles and standards into their policies and operations and sets up platforms for engaging with civil society, such as athletes' and supporters' organisations.. It also works with many key international partners, including the EU, UNESCO, UNOCT, Interpol, FIFA, UEFA, WADA and the IOC.

A number of sport organisations, such as European and international sports federations, athletes organisations or major event organisers, have observer status in the sports convention committees. Consultation with civil society is organised regularly on specific topics, either through direct participation in meetings, through dedicated hearings or in writing.

The Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS)

Lack of attention to sports development or an excessive focus on commercial interests and prestige at the expense of value-based sport for all affects its capacity to deliver benefits such as health, social inclusion and education to individuals and society.

The [Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport \(EPAS\)](#) provides a pan-European platform of intergovernmental sports co-operation, involving both political and technical levels and including the public authorities of its member states, sports organisations and NGOs.

EPAS develops policies and standards to promote more ethical, inclusive and safer sport in member states. EPAS enabled the revision of the European Sports Charter in 2021 and will assist member states and other sports bodies to implement it. EPAS monitors the revised European Sports Charter and other recommendations. It provides technical assistance and capacity building to public authorities and the sports movement. It also supports dialogue and co-operation between governments and sports organisations, at political and technical levels.

EPAS works in close co-operation with the three existing convention committees and the ad hoc European Committee for the World Doping Agency (CAHAMA) on topics covered by the sports conventions and issues of common interest. The partial agreement works with international partners including the EU, UNESCO and the UNODC, the International Partnership Against Corruption in Sport (IPACS) and numerous International and European federations, umbrella organisations and NGOs involved in sport.

EPAS includes a consultative body made up of 29 civil society organisations. Civil society has actively participated in the drafting of the sports conventions and plays an important role in the work of their committees. Sports NGOs can apply for consultative committee membership by [applying](#) to the EPAS secretariat.

EPAS runs thematic projects to help its member states address issues such as discrimination in sport and child protection. This includes joint projects with the European Union such as child safeguarding in sport (CSiS) and its gender equality joint project All In. EPAS is also a partner in projects implemented by other organisations on themes such as migrants and refugees (and their integration through sport), and benchmarking sports governance across national boundaries.

DEMOCRACY

Democratic Governance

Trusted, transparent and accessible democratic institutions at national, regional and local level are paramount for creating democratically secure societies. Democracy and governance reinforce each other and are essential for preventing conflicts, promoting stability, managing crises, facilitating economic and social progress, and creating the conditions conducive to sustainable respect for human rights and the rule of law. Democracy cannot be imposed from the outside: it must be embraced by the domestic political leadership and the electorate and supported and protected by fully functioning democratic institutions.

The aim of the Council of Europe in this area is to ensure democratic governance at all levels promoting the transparency, integrity and accountability that help rebuild trust in democratic institutions.

European Committee on Democracy and Governance – CDDG

The CDDG steers the intergovernmental work in the field of democracy and democratic governance and advise the Committee of Ministers. Its overall aim is to contribute to strengthening democratic institutions, and good governance at all levels of government, with particular emphasis on structural institutional reforms at all levels and enhancing citizens' participation in political decision-making with a view also to strengthen their interaction with and trust in public institutions.

Focus 2022-2025 Principles of good democratic governance; new forms of deliberative and participatory democracy; green public administration; use of artificial intelligence by public administration; multilevel governance; response to emergencies; social services at local level; electronic voting

Civil society involvement

- Participant: Conference of INGOs (CINGO)
- Observers
- Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in meetings, or through dedicated hearings or written consultations

Centre of expertise for good governance

The mission of the [Centre of Expertise for Good Governance](#) is to promote respect for the [12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance](#) by building capacity at all levels and delivering legal and policy advice in line with European standards and best practice. It does this through continuous investment in research and expertise; by creating and developing partnerships and networks with national and international stakeholders; by developing impact-oriented practical tools, and by implementing country-specific programmes.

It has strong links with the Council of Europe intergovernmental [Committee on Democracy and Governance](#) (CDDG), which offers it ready access to high-level government officials with a reservoir of knowledge and expertise in governance reforms. Building on a unique set of European standards and the 12 principles, the centre has a repertoire of 24 capacity-building toolkits designed to reinforce Council of Europe standards and promote best European practice.

Some of the toolkits are likely to be of interest for NGOs, for example the [toolkit on civil participation](#) which was developed with input from the Council of Europe's civil society sector. The centre organises country specific and ad hoc training and capacity building activities which are often open to (and benefit from) the participation of civil society. A specific e-tool on the 12 principles is freely available to all interested participants on the e-learning [HELP platform](#).



Elections and civil participation

The Council of Europe works to ensure there is an adequate regulatory framework for elections and civil participation, building up the necessary capacities of public authorities and civil society to ensure free and fair elections and effective and transparent engagement of citizens in the political decision-making process. The aim is to create effective and sustainable citizen participation, which in turn will legitimise institutions and build trust.

[Electoral cooperation](#) is based on standard-setting, monitoring, and co-operation, guided by Council of Europe recommendations, opinions and other texts.

Co-operation is based on reports from election observation missions and [Venice Commission](#) opinions to help member states resolve shortcomings identified during the electoral process. If a member state or partner institution requests, the Council of Europe can also provide rapid response support before or after elections.

The Council of Europe works closely with electoral management bodies to ensure that election officials at all levels are familiar with international standards and national regulations, so that the integrity and transparency of the electoral process and voters' rights are guaranteed. Special attention is paid to strengthening the capacities of NGOs in charge of domestic observation of elections. There is for example an [e-learning course for domestic observers/NGOs](#) and various handbooks, including [Reporting on Elections. Council of Europe Handbook for Civil Society Organisations](#) and [Using International Standards in elections: Council of Europe Handbook for Civil Society Organisations](#).

Another useful resource is [The Vote Outside of the Box](#) project and its [online course](#), which supports NGOs to develop strategic approaches to raise awareness of electoral processes and to build electoral knowledge amongst young people as potential first-time voters.

The Council of Europe also contributes to awareness raising on the importance of participating in elections both as voters and candidates. It assists election administrations in developing voter education and information campaigns, with special focus on [women](#), [monitoring of media coverage](#), national minorities and other underrepresented groups of voters.

Further publications interesting for NGOs working on electoral matters can be found on [ElecLab](#), an online compendium of electoral data, which produces interactive maps and graphics, such as analysis of the electoral process, trends concerning turnout, and representation of women in national parliaments. ElecLab provides information on the frequency of parliamentary elections and tracks general trends. It also provides direct links to election observation mission reports and recommendations adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress.

The heart of [participatory democracy](#) is that citizens' interests and needs should be the focus of every political decision-making process at all governance levels. Participatory processes allow for exactly that – giving citizens the possibility to take part in decision-making and to provide the impulse for change.

The Council of Europe has different standards, including [guidelines for civil participation in political decision making](#), a [recommendation on the participation of citizens in local and public life](#) and a [code of good practice for civil participation in the decision-making process](#). It organises round table events, expert discussions and public campaigns to raise awareness and knowledge regarding international and European standards, always including NGOs and citizens.

Various tools supporting participatory democracy are available on the [Council of Europe website](#), including a tool to analyse and forecast decision options, a game-based training for citizens and schoolchildren and a toolkit for young girls and women from disadvantaged groups

An online compendium BePART is being prepared to share good practice examples of civil participation Initiatives. Share your own good practice [here](#).

World Forum for Democracy

Initiated in 2012, the [World Forum for Democracy](#) is a platform for dialogue and innovation in democratic governance, which promotes Council of Europe principles across the world. It is a unique platform for political decision-makers and activists to debate solutions to key challenges for democracies worldwide, giving people their rightful place in political decision-making By identifying and analysing experimental initiatives and practices, the Forum highlights and encourages grassroots democratic innovations that strengthen the foundations of democratic societies, thus contributing to the evolution of democracy towards more participatory and inclusive structures and institutions.

The World Forum for Democracy is organised by the Council of Europe in partnership with the French Government, the Region Grand Est, the European Collectivity of Alsace, and the City of Strasbourg. Participation is free of charge and open to the public.

The Conference of the INGOs (CINGO) has a representative on World Forum for Democracy steering group.

Platform for the Safety of Journalists

The [Platform for the safety of journalists](#) is a public space to help compile, process and share information on serious concerns about media freedom and safety of journalists in Council of Europe member states. It aims to improve the protection of journalists, better address threats and violence against media professionals and foster early warning mechanisms and response capacity within the Council of Europe. The platform enables the Council of Europe to be alerted on time and in a more systematic way so that it can take timely and coordinated action when necessary. It helps the Organisation identify trends and propose adequate policy responses in the field of media freedom.

On 4 December 2014, the Council of Europe and the platform's [partner organisations](#) (Reporters Without Borders, the International Federation of journalists, the European Federation of journalists, the Association of European journalists and Article 19) signed a [memorandum of understanding](#).

Today, 14 international NGOs and associations of journalists are partners to the platform. They are allowed to post alerts, subject to their own verification processes and standards. Each contributing partner is responsible for information which it posts. When circumstances allow, the Council of Europe and a member state which is directly referred to in information posted on the platform may post reports on how they have responded.

The platform also highlights the work carried out by the Council of Europe in the field of media freedom, such as texts prepared by the Parliamentary Assembly, standards adopted by the Committee of Ministers and the relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

Democratic Participation

Democracy is more than just a matter of laws and institutions; it needs citizen involvement. The Council of Europe works to create the circumstances for that involvement to grow, focusing on education, communication, global connections and youth, aiming to build societies which understand and support the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Education for Democracy

Europe is experiencing a backsliding of democracy. Many citizens – and some political leaders – resort to seemingly simple solutions to complex issues, encourage distrust in institutions, disregard facts and engage in hate speech against the vulnerable and those who do not share their views. This reflects a lack of knowledge and understanding of how to deal with increasingly complex issues that is amplified by digital technologies.

The Council of Europe is well placed to support policy makers, educators and young people to develop the competences needed to build and maintain genuine democracy thanks to policy initiatives such as the



reference framework of competences for democratic culture, the common European framework of reference for languages and various recommendations by the Committee of Ministers. It works to encourage member states through their education ministries to develop a diverse and participatory model of education that is designed to engage critical thinking in a safe environment; providing a range of standards, tools and practices that can be adapted to local situations. Schools, higher education institutions and universities, specialised agencies, NGOs and young democratic leaders are also involved.

Steering Committee for Education – CDEDU	
The CDEDU oversees action in the field of education and advises the Committee of Ministers. Rooted in the four purposes of education as defined by the Committee of Ministers, the overall aim of the education programme is to support member states in developing their policies, legislation and practice in view of promoting democratic, quality, inclusive and corruption-free education systems, taking into account the Council of Europe Reference Framework for Democratic Culture. The CDEDU focuses on Council of Europe priority areas and covers all levels and strands of education.	
Focus 2022-2025	Plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture; ethics, transparency and integrity in education; digital citizenship education; vocational education; responsibility of public authorities for the teaching and learning of history; European Qualifications Passport for Refugees; right to education in times of emergency
Civil society involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participant: Conference of INGOs (CINGO) – Observers – Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in meetings, through dedicated hearings or in writing.

European Centre for Modern Languages (Graz)

In recent years there has been a marked loss of support for learning foreign languages, leading to a rise in intolerance towards other people and cultures and the languages they speak. The acceptance of minority and migrant languages is also under threat.

The mission of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) is to promote excellence and innovation in language education practice. It works with language professionals to develop research-informed solutions to key challenges in language education. It runs four-year programmes which provide the framework for multilateral development projects, organises in-country capacity building and runs a range of activities for a wider public.

The ECML coordinates the European Day of Languages each year on 26 September, which promotes the continent’s rich linguistic diversity and highlights the many and varied benefits of language learning. It is celebrated by hundreds of thousands of language learners and teachers worldwide.

The ECML plans to directly involve over one thousand language education professionals each year in its face-to-face activities, running several thousand webinars and online activities.

The ECML engages with civil society through its professional network forum which meets annually in Graz, Austria. This forum, which was established in 2010, currently brings together 16 international associations and institutions that share the core values of the Council of Europe and its commitment to plurilingual and intercultural education. Each member has a particular focus within the broad field of language education such as

higher education, informal/non-formal learning or topical subjects and provides a unique platform for INGOs to share expertise and know-how. Members work together on topics of major relevance in language education; most recently [the future of language education in the light of Covid – lessons learned and ways forward](#).

Observatory on History Teaching in Europe (OHTE)

The Observatory on History Teaching in Europe, set up as an enlarged partial agreement in November 2020, has the mission to promote practices of history teaching that strengthen and promote the Council of Europe's values. It builds on the Organisation's decades-long experience in history education, offering new insights into the way that history is taught in member states in the light of recommendations and guidelines in this field. The observatory seeks to achieve this by collecting and making available factual information on the state of history teaching in all participating countries through a series of regular and thematic reports.

The observatory draws on external expertise to realise its mission, so there are several possibilities for NGOs to co-operate. Occasional calls for tender for experts and consortia to support the drafting of thematic and regular reports are published on the [observatory's website](#). There is also the possibility to get involved on a more regular and continuous basis through the co-operation platform which was formally launched in December 2021. Its objective is to bring together networks and organisations who share the observatory's vision that the knowledge, skills, and values that young people acquire through history teaching contribute to the fostering of peace, democracy and respect for human rights. It will enable knowledge to be shared from national, regional, and European experiences through discussion of case studies and exchange of innovative practices. Co-operating organisations may actively engage in the process by organising seminars and other events, and by participating in the drafting of guidelines and documents. Through these activities, NGOs have several opportunities to actively take part in the work and development of the platform and the observatory.

Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre)

The North-South Centre has over 30 years of experience in raising awareness about global interdependence and solidarity based on principles of global education and intercultural dialogue. It provides a platform for constructive dialogue and gathers people from different backgrounds and cultures to learn from each other and together build stronger, more resilient and critically aware societies grounded in human rights, democracy and equity. In doing so, the North-South Centre acts as a window to the South and an instrument of policy towards neighbouring regions.

The North-South Centre develops multilateral, regional, and interregional co-operation projects that include field activities around three main programmatic areas: global education, youth co-operation and female empowerment. The main mechanisms of intervention are advocacy, confidence-building, capacity building and awareness-raising, carried out through four main partners: governments, parliaments, regional and local authorities, and civil society.

The North-South Centre's work to develop [global education](#) started in 1991 with regional seminars. This led to the drafting of the Global Education Charter in 1997. The North-South Centre continues to contribute to global education advocacy and pedagogical support through a number of initiatives at institutional and education levels and manages a [good practice database](#) featuring ground-breaking projects.

Since 2009 the North-South Centre has offered annual [online training courses](#) that cover three different dimensions of global education: human rights, intercultural dialogue, and democratic citizenship. Each course takes place twice a year and lasts for four weeks. This training is designed for formal and non-formal educators, policymakers and media professionals.

The [North-South Prize](#) is awarded each year since 1995 to two candidates who have stood out for their exceptional commitment to promoting North-South solidarity. The candidates, preferably a man and a woman, must have distinguished themselves in the following areas: protection of human rights, defence of pluralist democracy, and raising public awareness on issues of global interdependence and solidarity. Despite the variety of nationalities and fields of action of those that have received the prize since its creation, they all have in common a strong commitment to the promotion of North-South issues.

Civil society is especially relevant to the work of the North-South Centre, which takes its lead from experiences at grassroots level by empowering, supporting, and working hand in hand with NGOs, in particular with women and youth organisations.



The [Youth Co-operation Programme](#) provides training and capacity building for young people and youth organisations and facilitates their participation in decision-making. It is run in close co-operation with various youth led and youth serving organisations, the [Council of Europe youth department](#), the European Commission, the [European Union-Council of Europe youth partnership](#) and other relevant institutions working in the youth field.

The [Women’s Empowerment \(WE\)](#) programme leads awareness raising, capacity building and networking activities to build effective regional co-operation between stakeholders and advances gender equality and women’s rights in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

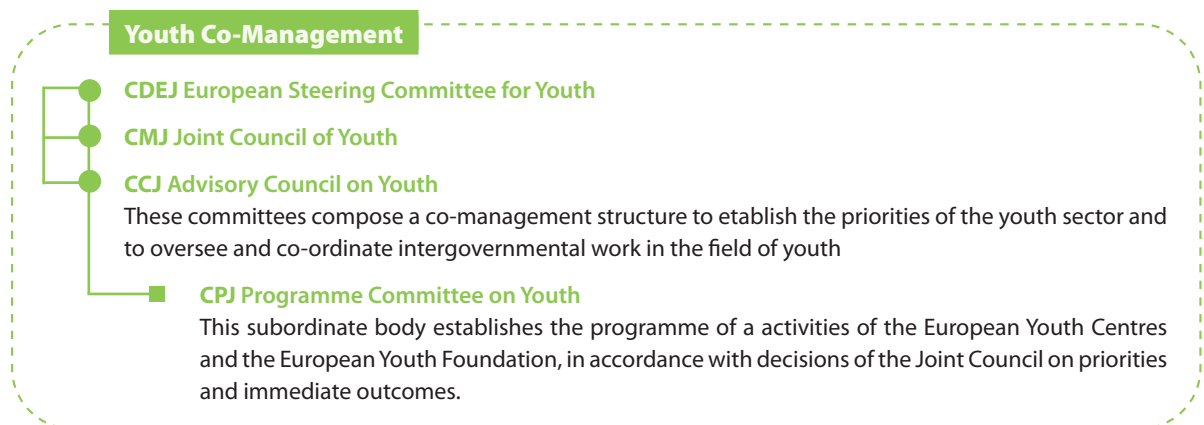
Youth for Democracy

Young people’s lives in contemporary Europe are characterised by multiple complex challenges which affect their access to and enjoyment of human and social rights.

The Council of Europe’s co-management system is an example of good governance practice in participatory democracy and citizen participation. It is a place for common reflection, combining the voice of young Europeans and that of public authorities responsible for youth affairs. This dialogue, in a spirit of mutual understanding and respect, gives legitimacy and relevance to the programme of activities proposed by the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) and meaningfulness to intergovernmental co-operation for responsive and needs-based youth policies. The inclusion of young people in the search for responses to emerging challenges also enables the Council of Europe to benefit from their unique perspective, experience and expectations on issues such as technological development and climate change. Beyond governments and youth organisations, youth work practitioners, educators, researchers, policy experts, and young people from grassroots movements are routinely involved.

Council of Europe action in the youth sector is guided by a comprehensive strategy and run through a co-management structure. Youth issues are included in each Council of Europe action, and youth policy standards are promoted throughout member states and through institutional co-operation between the European Commission and the Council of Europe.

The Organisation also grants a [quality label for youth centres](#), which allows a growing network of youth centres to be associated with the its values and for youth policy standards to reach a broader spectrum of young people.



Joint Council on Youth – CMJ	
The CMJ oversees the Council of Europe’s programme in the youth field and advises the Committee of Ministers. It is the policy-making body of the youth sector, bringing together the members of the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) and the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ).	
Focus 2022-2025	Protecting youth civil society and young people and supporting their participation in democratic processes; Roma youth participation; access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights; climate crisis; youth and anti-racism; rural youth; supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood
Civil society involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participant: Conference of INGOs (CINGO) – Observers – Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in meetings, through dedicated hearings in writing

Through the European Youth Centres (EYCs) in Strasbourg and Budapest, the Council of Europe provides young people with direct access to the Council of Europe and its institutions. They provide quality residential and training infrastructure for youth experts and trainers from the states parties to the European Cultural Convention. Any organisation, association, institution, structure or youth network which respects and defends the Council of Europe’s values can use the EYCs to organise an activity.

The [European Youth Centre Strasbourg \(EYCS\)](#) with its meeting and conference rooms, recreational areas, garden, restaurant area and bedrooms has a capacity of up to 300 people for events and can accommodate up to 90 overnight guests.

The [European Youth Centre in Budapest \(EYCB\)](#) with its meeting and conference rooms, restaurant, bedrooms, garden and recreational area, has a capacity of up to 300 people for events and can accommodate up to 140 overnight guests.

European Youth Foundation

Youth organisations and associations are confronted with reduced funding, resulting in shrinking opportunities for young people’s active involvement in civil society. Thanks to the [European Youth Foundation \(EYF\)](#) financial support is available to encourage co-operation among young people and their meaningful participation in democratic processes.

The EYF provides support to European youth activities through international, national and local youth NGOs, or NGO networks. Each year, approximately 10 000 young people aged between 15 and 30 benefit from EYF-support for activities that promote the priorities of the youth for democracy programme. There are different types of grants: annual work plans, one-off international activities, and local pilot activities. The EYF also offers advice and support to young people to develop and implement these activities. The financial sustainability of international youth NGOs is supported through structural grants. All decisions related to EYF grants are taken by the Programming Committee on Youth (CPJ), composed on an equal footing of representatives of governments and youth NGOs, thus reflecting the unique co-management system.

Culture, Nature and Heritage

Cultural and natural diversity are characteristic elements of sustainable societies and are powerful vectors of democratic participation. By promoting culture, nature and heritage, the Council of Europe contributes to strengthening societies and protecting the environment. It also promotes human rights, including the right to life, to health, to free expression and to creativity.

The Council of Europe has developed a set of conventions in the fields of culture, heritage, nature and landscape: the [European Cultural Convention](#), the [Convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats \(Bern Convention\)](#), the [Landscape Convention](#), the [Faro Convention on the value of cultural heritage for society](#) and the [Convention on offences relating to cultural property](#).

Through the follow-up and monitoring mechanisms of these conventions and co-operation and technical assistance activities, the Organisation helps member states promote access to culture and creative expression, to create respect for the diversity of cultural and natural heritage, and to attune spatial/regional planning with sustainability-driven landscape policies.



This task includes fostering co-operation, capacity building (legislative and technical assistance) and sharing of good practices. There is also close work with the European Union and other stakeholders such as United Nations, UNESCO, the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the European Council of Spatial Planners (ECTP), and the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA).

Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape – CDCPP

The [CDCPP](#) oversees intergovernmental work in the field of culture, heritage and landscape. It advises the Committee of Ministers and provides standards, policies and good practices to sustainably manage cultural, heritage and landscape resources, as a basis for democratic and inclusive societies in a digitally evolving environment, impacted by environmental degradation.

Focus 2022-2025	Integrated culture/nature guidance tool; role and impact of culture, heritage and landscape to address the global crisis; access to archives; culture and democratic participation and inclusion; heritage education, training and climate change; offences relating to cultural property; heritage days; sustainable heritage
Civil society involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participants: Conference of INGOs (CINGO) – Observers: – Consultation with civil society, either through direct participation in meetings, or through dedicated hearings or written consultations

The Faro Convention on the value of cultural heritage for society stresses important aspects of heritage as they relate to human rights and democracy. It promotes a wider understanding of heritage and its relationship to communities and society. By involving everyone in society in the ongoing process of defining and managing cultural heritage, it emphasises the active role civil society can play.

The [European heritage strategy for the 21st century](#) aims to promote a unifying approach to cultural heritage as a resource for democracy. It pursues an interdisciplinary and participatory approach through three components of the strategy – social, territorial and economic; knowledge, and education. [The social component of the strategy](#) is dedicated to the promotion of social participation and good governance and highlights the important role of civil society. It focuses on the relationship between heritage and societies, citizenship and the sharing of democratic values through participatory governance.

The [European Heritage Days](#) – a Council of Europe/European Union joint action since 1999 – are the most widely celebrated participatory annual cultural events in Europe, reaching out and mobilising millions of people under the motto “Europe, a common heritage”. NGOs operating in the field of culture and heritage actively participate in celebrations, encourage people to become active in local heritage and to share cultural experiences at both local and European levels. Civil society can join initiatives, such as the [call for European Heritage Days stories](#) which is a competitive grant award procedure and [young European heritage makers](#) which aims to give a voice to children and young people to interpret their local heritage and share their stories.

Cultural Routes

The [Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes \(EPA\)](#) was established to demonstrate how different countries and cultures of Europe contribute to a shared cultural heritage. The cultural routes help to communicate Council of Europe values at grass-roots level, promoting human rights, cultural democracy, cultural diversity, mutual understanding and exchanges across boundaries. They also contribute to sustainable local development, with positive effects on the attractiveness of territories and employment.

The EPA helps to develop cultural route projects, supports them with a certificate, and carries out regular evaluations of certified routes. They cover a wide range of cultural themes, from art and architecture, landscape and religious heritage, to major figures of European history, music and literature.

The EPA works with European networks responsible for managing the cultural routes, composed of over 3 000 members, including local and regional authorities, museums, cultural institutions, universities and other local stakeholders. It is implemented with the support of the European Institute of Cultural Routes, established in 1998 and funded by the government of Luxembourg.

NGOs are invited to work with the office of the European Cultural Routes in Luxembourg and even become participatory members of the Enlarged Agreement on the European Cultural Routes, the intergovernmental steering body for the organisation.

GRANTS AND RESOURCES

The Council of Europe offers two different kinds of grants: project-related, which is for a specified action, and operational, which normally last no more than twelve consecutive months

The grant must assist in reaching the grantees goals or objectives and must advance the Council of Europe's values or policies.

The [grant award procedure](#) is based on the principles of transparency, non-retroactivity, non-cumulative awards, not-for-profit, co-financing and non-discrimination.

Bodies that have received grants are listed on [the grant portal](#).

The [European Youth Foundation](#) awards grants to non-governmental youth organisations to support international, national or local projects addressing the Council of Europe youth sector's priorities, or a youth organisation itself. Details are covered in the relevant section.

The Roma and Travellers sector [awards grants](#) for Roma and pro-Roma NGOs to run Roma political schools in several member states. The EU/CoE joint programmes "Building capacity at local level for the integration of Roma ([ROMACT](#))" and "Promoting good governance and Roma empowerment at local level ([ROMACTED](#))" feature small grant schemes for local Roma inclusion projects and for local authorities and/or local Roma NGOs.



www.coe.int/en/web/civil-society

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.