



ADVOCATING THROUGH THE EUROPEAN HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM

How to use selected European human rights mechanisms for effective advocacy – guidance and Helvetas experience

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INTRODUCTION

The European Court of Human Rights addressing civil and political rights of individuals is one of the most respected and well-known human rights mechanisms. What many Civil Society Organizations do not know is that there are numerous human rights advocacy avenues within the various European institutions that are available for non-European countries. These mechanisms are powerful and effective as they come with solid legal basis (bilateral treaties). Many times, where United Nations (UN) human rights mechanisms fall short to protect against human rights violations, European human rights mechanisms can provide an alternative opening.

Within Europe human rights mechanisms are dominated by three main institutions: [The Council of Europe](#), [the European Union](#) and the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#). These institutions address human rights through their own monitoring bodies and mechanisms. For an effective regional level advocacy, it is important to understand the basic structures and working of all three institutions.

This paper explores European human rights mechanisms from the perspective and advocacy requirements of development organizations such as Helvetas where by the main focus lies in addressing economic, social, and cultural rights through policy level advocacy.

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THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

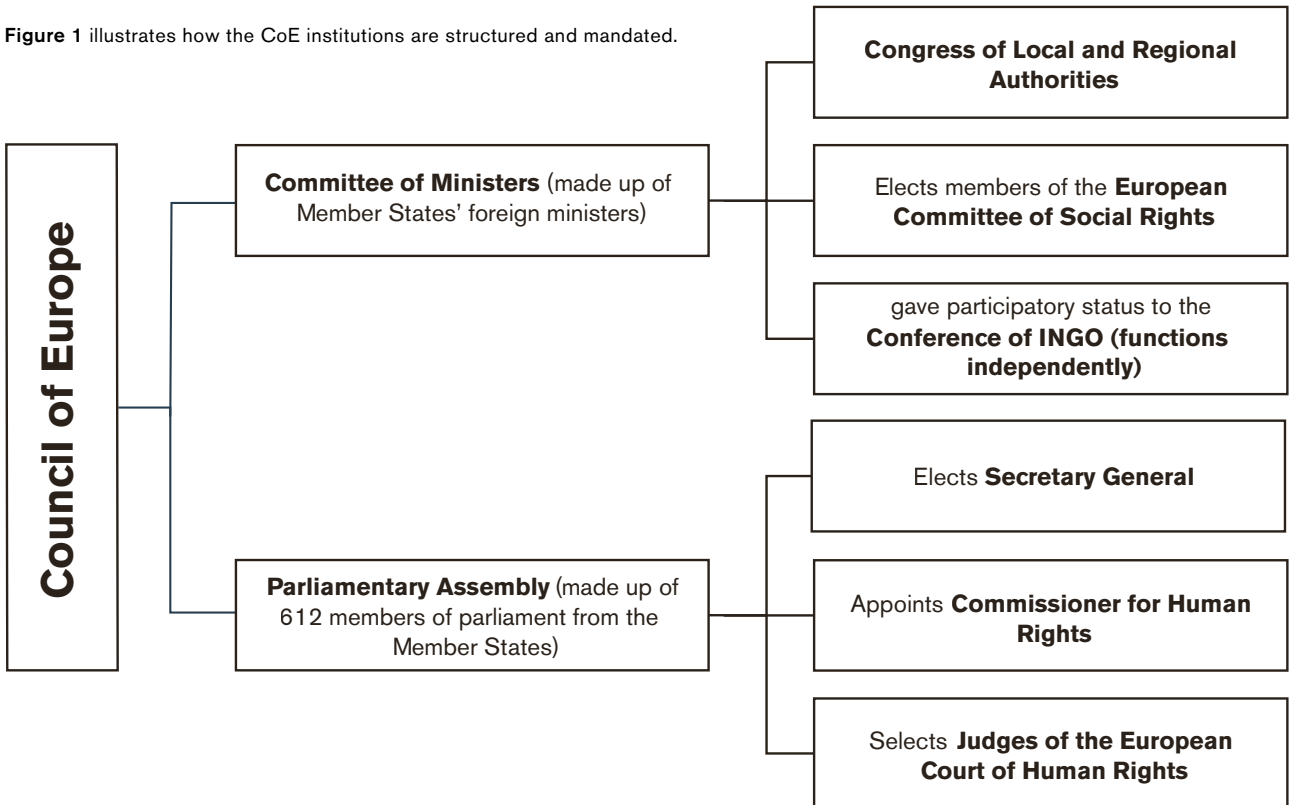
The Council of Europe (CoE) was established through the Treaty of London (1949) as a cultural organization, which eventually grew into a regional entity tasked with protecting human rights. Soon after its establishment, the CoE drafted and adopted the [European Convention on Human Rights of 1953](#). At present, the CoE has 46 Member States (Russia became the first Member State to be excluded due to its invasion of Ukraine on the 16th of March 2022).

The Council of Europe (CoE) addresses human rights through the following bodies:

1. [European Court of Human Rights](#)
2. [European Committee of Social Rights](#)
3. [The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities](#)
4. [The Commissioner for Human Rights](#)
5. [The Conference of International Non-Governmental Organizations](#)

These bodies monitor regional human rights instruments, such as [the European Convention on Human Rights](#), [European Social Charter](#) and the [European Charter of Local Self-Government](#). The European Convention of Human Rights addresses civil and political rights and is monitored by its corresponding mechanism, the European Court of Human Rights. The European Social Charter addresses economic, social, and cultural rights and is monitored by the European Committee of Social Rights. The European Charter for Local Self-Government lays down standards for protecting both the rights of local authorities (duty bearers) and the rights of local citizens (rights holders) to participate in managing public affairs and is an integral part of the working of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. The Commissioner for Human Rights is an independent and impartial institution to promote awareness of and respect for human rights in all [CoE Member States](#). The [Conference of International Non-Governmental Organizations \(INGOs\)](#) enables the voice of civil society to be heard at the CoE for policy dialogue and for an active contribution to decision-making processes of the CoE institutions.

Figure 1 illustrates how the CoE institutions are structured and mandated.



As seen in the chart, the CoE works through its two main organs – the [Committee of Ministers](#) and the [Parliamentary Assembly](#). The Parliamentary Assembly elects the Secretary General, Commissioner of Human Rights, and the judges of the European Court of Human Rights. The Committee of Ministers elects the members of the European Committee of Social Rights. The Independent Conference of INGOs and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities foster consultation and dialogue with the Committee of Ministers in their respective mandates.

THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is legally enforceable through the [European Court of Human Rights](#) (ECtHR). All CoE Member States must ratify the ECHR and subject themselves to the jurisdiction of the ECtHR. **A striking feature of the ECtHR is that the Member States are obliged to secure and guarantee the fundamental rights covered in the ECHR not only to their own nationals but also to all persons within their jurisdiction.**

The ECtHR is based in Strasbourg, France, and consists of 46 judges from 46 members of the CoE. The Court's judges sit in their individual capacity and do not represent their state. In dealing with applications (cases), they are assisted by the Registry, consisting of lawyers from all Member States.

The ECtHR has jurisdiction to decide over “complaints” submitted by individuals and states concerning violations of the ECHR. Individual complaints can be lodged by any person, group of persons or NGOs, whilst inter-state complaints can be brought by one state against another state under the violation of the ECHR. No prior state approval is required to file a complaint at the ECtHR. However, the individual or legal entity must be located within the jurisdiction of a state party to the ECHR or, in the alternative, must fall within the jurisdiction of a state party to the ECHR because of that state's extraterritorial acts. All the decisions of ECtHR are binding.

All complaints to the ECtHR must meet following admissibility criteria:

1. Complaints must allege the violation of rights enshrined in ECHR only.

2. All domestic remedies must have been exhausted.
3. Complaints must be made within four months from the date of the final domestic judicial decision.
4. Complaints must be against a [state party to the European Convention on Human Rights](#).
5. Applicants must show that he/she has suffered a significant disadvantage.

ADVOCACY ENTRY POINTS FOR DEVELOPMENT NGOS WITH THE ECTHR

The EctHR engages with the civil society in numerous ways.

- The President of the ECtHR can decide to invite anyone concerned with a case who is not the applicant to submit written comments or to take part in a hearing. This is known as the “third-party intervention” mechanism. Third-party interventions can cover a wide range of issues, such as legal points to facts and figures, information on governmental policies, or details on whether there is consensus or divergence of views amongst Member States on certain issues or not.
- NGOs can be involved in meetings and seminars of the ECtHR. At least once a year, normally in late November or the beginning of December, the ECtHR holds a general meeting with representatives of the main European Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to discuss case law developments and procedural matters. Seminars on specific topics are organised on an ad hoc basis, to which representatives of CSOs with expertise in the subject matter are invited.
- NGOs are also important actors for the implementation of ECtHR decisions. Whilst giving its judgments on individual cases, the ECtHR also directs states to make law and policy changes in their national domestic frameworks. This is an important entry point for country level advocacy within Europe.

To consider: The mechanism of ECtHR is available only to its Member States. This is why it is relevant only for Helvetas country offices based in Europe. As per 2022, these are: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Germany, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Switzerland, and Ukraine.

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

The European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) is an important CoE mechanism and monitors the implementation of the European Social Charter (ESC). It consists of 15 independent, impartial members who are elected by the CoE's Committee of Ministers for six years with the possibility of a one-time renewal. The ECSR has two main monitoring mechanisms: the [Reporting System](#) and the [Collective Complaint Procedure](#).

Reporting system

Each year, state parties to the ESC submit a National Report describing how they are implementing specific provisions of the ESC. The ESC provisions are divided into four thematic groups:

1. Employment, training, and equal opportunities
2. Health, social security, and social protection
3. Labour rights
4. Children, families, and migrants

States can report on one thematic group each year. The ECSR evaluates National Reports and publishes its 'Conclusions' on each reporting state. After the 'Conclusions' of the ECSR, the Committee of Ministers adopts 'Resolutions' and issues 'Recommendations' to the states asking them to conform their activities to the ESC. Since the Committee of Ministers comprises government representatives from all CoE Member States, this practice forms a kind of 'enforcement' of the ECSR's decisions on reporting.

Collective Complaint Procedure

Under this mechanism, the ECSR can hear collective complaints made by several types of organizations (including INGOs) against states that have accepted this procedure under the additional protocol of the ESC. Complaints made under this procedure may only raise questions regarding non-compliance of a state's law or practice with one of the provisions of the ESC. Complaints may be lodged without domestic remedies having been exhausted and without the claimant organisation necessarily being a victim of the relevant violation (meaning that NGOs can file a complaint in the name of someone else). If a complaint is considered admissible by the ECSR, it adopts a decision on the merit of complaint. This decision establishes whether a

state's law and/or practice complies with one or more provisions of the ESC. The decision is forwarded by the ECSR to the parties and, in view of its follow-up, to the Committee of Ministers. The Committee of Ministers may adopt a resolution supported by the majority of those voting. The resolution takes account of the respondent state's declared intention to take appropriate measures to bring the situation into conformity. The decisions of the ECSR must be respected by the states concerned. However, they are not enforceable in the domestic legal system.

ADVOCACY ENTRY POINTS FOR DEVELOPMENT NGOS WITH THE ECSR:

- Under the Reporting system of ECSR, CSOs may submit comments and information on State Reports to the ECSR. Comments on National Reports must be submitted to the Secretariat of the European Social Charter before the 30th of June of the year during which the European Committee of Social Rights examines the National Report concerned. This is an important entry point for advocacy on specific issues related to economic, social, and cultural rights for OSCE member countries.
- Under the Collective Complaint Procedure, CSOs can provide inputs on collective complaint made by others. For this, CSOs must indicate to the ECSR their interest in submitting observations on a pending complaint procedure. However, it is necessary to have a consultative status with the CoE mechanisms and only violations under the European Social Charter could be brought to attention.

To consider: For more details on CSOs engagement with the ECSR, see <https://rm.coe.int/prems-125919-ingos-engagement-ecsr-web-en/168098fcc1>

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

The [Congress of Local and Regional Authorities](#) (the Congress) of the Council of Europe is a political assembly made up of 636 members who hold elective office (they may be regional or municipal councilors, mayors, or presidents of regional authorities) representing over 200,000 authorities in 46 European States. It is made up of two chambers – the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions. It holds its plenary sessions twice a year in Strasbourg where its permanent Secretariat is located.

The Congress brings local and regional authorities' perspective of democracy, human rights, and rule of law to the CoE. It 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. The Congress' role is also to promote local and regional democracy, improve local and regional governance and strengthen authorities' self-government. It advises the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE on all aspects of the development and implementation of local and regional policies.

ADVOCACY ENTRY POINT FOR DEVELOPMENT NGOS THROUGH THE CONGRESS:

The Congress has always recognised the importance of co-operation between local and regional authorities and NGOs. For this, the Congress and the Conference of INGOs have jointly adopted the "[Code of good practice for civil participation in the decision-making process](#)" in 2019. Through which it 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 is in use within different cooperation 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.

To consider: The Code of Good Practice is a relevant and effective tool for NGOs – from a local to an international level – in their dialogue with parliaments, governments, and public authorities. It aims to be an interactive and action-oriented instrument, so that NGOs and public authorities across Europe can effectively utilize it.

Helvetas Albania has gathered valuable experience in working with the Congress.



Teuta Haxhi is a trainer of City Councils Trainings in Albania.
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Country: Albania

“Advocacy is done best when ‘technical solutions’ are strengthened through international frameworks and mechanisms.”

Valbona Karakaçi

Senior Governance and Policy/Advocacy Advisor

In the framework of our [project](#) we were to provide technical support to a local governance association – Association of Albanian Municipalities. Their role was to do advocacy and capacity building of their own members and we were to give them technical support on the same. However, as the members of the association were split along political and party lines, working on common objectives was difficult. We tried to provide technical support, such as updating the association’s statutes for balancing the power structure, but it was difficult. So, we used the intervention through the framework of Council of Europe (CoE)’s Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to show them how members belonging to different parties have to engage in a constructive dialogue process.

What was your motivation?

Our motivation was to bring political legitimacy and an international framework to our ‘technical’ intervention. It was also to show how an international framework can be useful for addressing issues on a local level, especially when they are politically sensitive.

What experience did you gain in engaging with the CoE mechanisms?

When ‘technical’ interventions fail to bring different political parties together, then using CoE mechanisms can be an effective mechanism for bringing parties into a dialogue. Once a dialogue is initiated under the international framework, it also becomes easier to offer ‘technical’ solutions for the problem. In that sense, the role of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities complemented our intervention.

What was the role of Helvetas? Was it a driving force or a facilitator?

Helvetas Albania was both a facilitator and a provider of technical support. It was a facilitator in the sense that it managed to bring in the CoE mechanism which then helped to facilitate the technical support.

What was the outcome of your efforts?

Since we knew that bringing a sustainable solution to the deadlock in the association was not possible, we came up with a solution that would at least postpone the split in the association. This was then taken over by the donors’ group who provided funding support to the association under the local governance project on condition that the members work in a non-partisan manner.

What did you learn from this experience? Any future recommendations?

Advocacy can be very effective when ‘technical’ solutions are strengthened through international frameworks and mechanisms. When dealing with political hurdles and sensitive issues, first try to create a dialogue based on international frameworks (in this case the CoE framework). Once the involved stakeholders are able and ready to engage in a dialogue, provide your ‘technical’ solution.

COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The [Commissioner for Human Rights](#)¹ (Commissioner) is an independent and impartial non-judicial institution established in 1999 by CoE to promote awareness of and respect for human rights within the jurisdiction of CoE Member States. The Commissioner is mandated to foster the effective observance of human rights and assist Member States in the implementation of CoE human rights standards; to promote education and awareness of human rights in CoE Member States; identify possible shortcomings in the national law and practice concerning human rights; to facilitate the activities of national ombudsperson institutions and other human rights structures; to provide advice and information regarding the protection of human rights across the region.

The Commissioner co-operates with a broad range of international and national institutions as well as human rights monitoring mechanisms that include the United Nations, the European Union, and the OSCE. The Office of the Commissioner also cooperates closely with leading human rights NGOs, universities, and think tanks.

The Commissioner carries out its work through country visits where she/he holds dialogue with the national authorities and civil society and conducts thematic reporting and awareness raising activities. While the Commissioner may receive information related to specific violations, the office is not a judicial body and thus cannot make any decisions with respect to such allegations.

¹ Not to confuse with the [European Commissioner](#) which is the head of European Commission under the EU mechanism.

ADVOCACY ENTRY POINTS FOR DEVELOPMENT NGOS WITH THE COMMISSIONER:

- The commissioner engages with civil society to carry out its work. The country visits and thematic reporting is well documented on the CoE website. This can be used as evidence for advocacy dialogue within the specific contexts.
- 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.

To consider: Do not confuse the [Commissioner under the CoE](#) and the [Commissioners of the European Union](#). These are two separate mandates working under the two separate systems of the regional mechanisms in Europe.

THE CONFERENCE OF INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

The [Conference of International Non-Governmental Organizations](#) (The Conference of INGOs) is a body of CoE consisting of more than 300 INGOs who enjoy participatory status with the CoE organs – the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. The Conference of INGOs meets in Strasbourg twice a year normally during the ordinary sessions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

ADVOCACY ENTRY POINTS FOR DEVELOPMENT NGOS THROUGH THE CONFERENCE OF INGOs:

- The Conference of INGOs is an important body and entry point for all main CoE mechanisms. Through the participatory status, the Conference of INGOs brings civil society perspective in the work of CoE organs especially on policy level dialogues.

To consider: Participatory status can be acquired through application available on the [CoE website](#).

THE EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union (EU) is a separate entity compared to the CoE. The main idea behind the establishment of the EU is to have a regional economic and political alliance for a single European market. It was established in 1993 through the Treaty of Maastricht and is made up of 27 European Member States. Over the years, the EU has extended its role to help poor regions develop infrastructure and technologies to compete in a global economy.

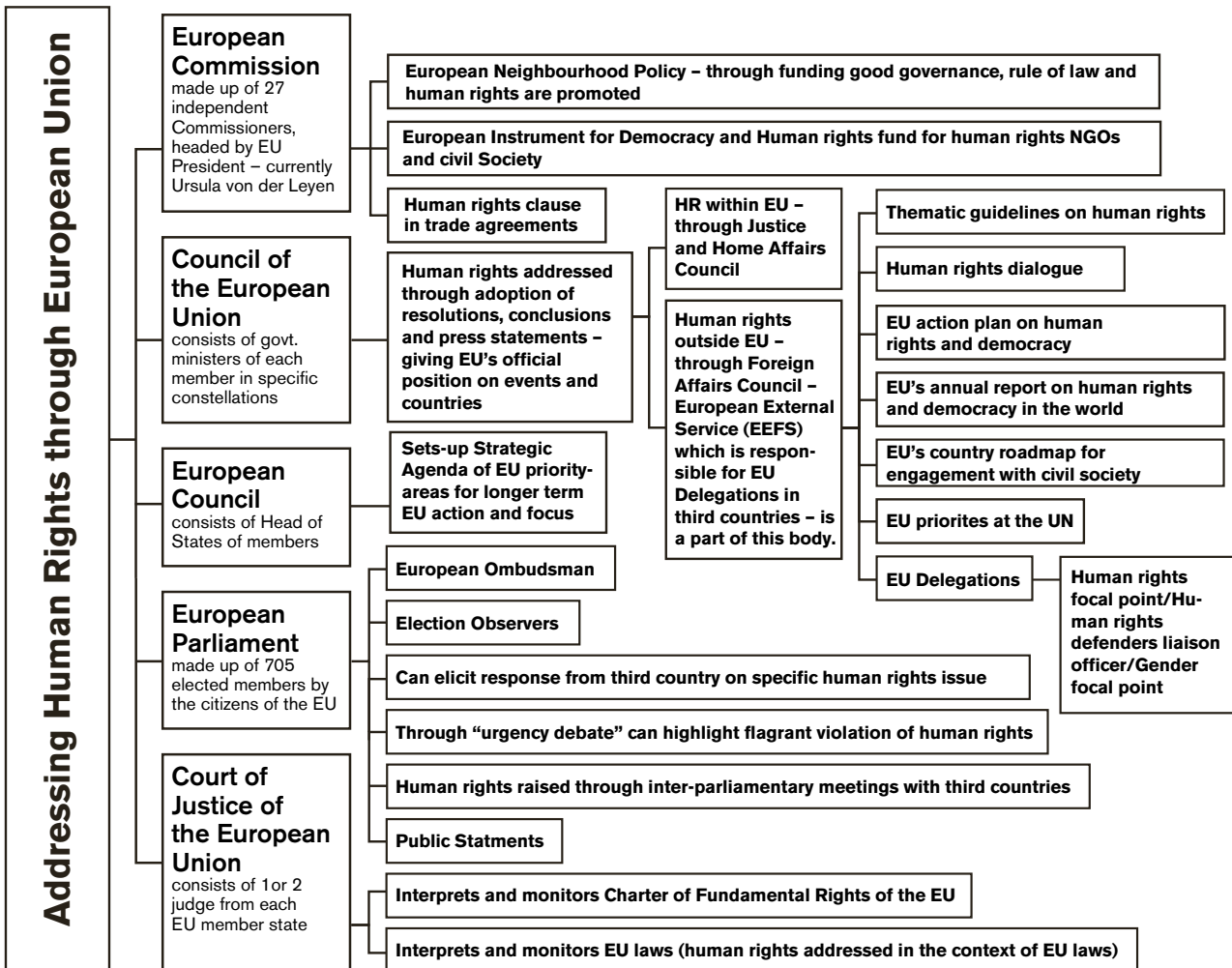
Through the adoption of the Charter of the Fundamental Rights (EU Charter) in the year 2000, human rights became an integral part of the EU's work. Under the Charter, EU members are committed to uphold civil,

political and economic rights of their citizens and in all EU laws. In addition to their commitment on the EU Charter, all EU Member States are required to be signatories to the CoE's European Convention on Human Rights. The EU Charter is legally binding and is enforceable at the Court of Justice of the European Union² (EU Court) based in Luxemburg.

Addressing and promoting human rights is an integral part of the EU in all its internal and external affairs. Since the purpose of this paper is to focus on those mechanisms that are relevant for the advocacy work of Helvetas and its strategic partners, it explores advocacy entry points in the context of the EU's external affairs which can be used to address human rights issues even from outside of the EU jurisdictions.

² Not to confuse with the European Court of Human Rights. The Court of Justice of the EU and the European Court of Human Rights are two distinct systems.

Figure 2 illustrates all relevant EU institutions with their hierarchies and the relevant entry points in the EU's external affairs that are available to Helvetas country programmes and projects and their strategic partners.



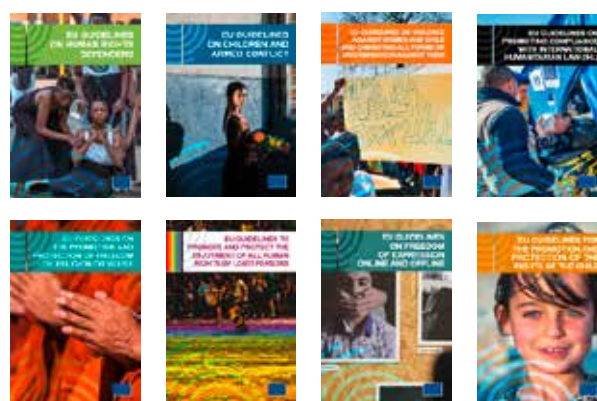
1. Human rights clause in bilateral trade agreements: All of the EU's bilateral agreements consist of a "Human Rights Clause" (HRC) that enables one party to take appropriate measures in case of serious breaches by the other party. This enables the EU not only to suspend trade commitments in case of serious human rights violations but also gives a solid regulatory base for opening the path to dialogue and cooperation on human rights issue.

ADVOCACY ENTRY POINTS:

- The human rights clause in bilateral trade agreement provides a framework for opening political dialogue between the EU and the country of engagement. The aim of the HRC is to create an incentive for improving respect for and protection of human rights rather than imposing sanctions or other stricter measures.

To consider: The HRC opens the way to political dialogue, consultations, and a range of cooperation measures in the field of human rights and democracy for EU. It also provides more legitimacy for the other mechanisms of the EU such as EU's Human Rights Dialogue (see no. 3 below). See EU's official Briefing on this: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/637975/EPRS_BRI\(2019\)637975_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/637975/EPRS_BRI(2019)637975_EN.pdf)

2. EU's thematic guidelines on human rights: The EU Foreign Ministers have developed guidelines regarding numerous human rights themes which are of particular concern to the EU. These Guidelines offer direction and concrete tools for coherent action to EU and Member States actors when promoting the particular human rights theme. The current themes under this are the following: children and armed conflict, human rights defenders, violence against women and girls, compliance with international humanitarian law, torture, freedom of religion and belief, LGBTI rights, death penalty, freedom of expression online and offline, rights of child, non-discrimination in external action and safe drinking water and sanitation.



ADVOCACY ENTRY POINTS:

- The EU thematic guidelines are a political signal from the EU ministerial level to the EU members and foreign missions. They are the pragmatic and practical tools for understanding the EU's position on a specific thematic. They also represent opportunities for CSOs to hold EU Delegations and member embassies accountable and encourage their implementation.

To consider: The EU thematic guideline on water and sanitation (a Hellvetas's topic) gives an entry point for a policy dialogue with EU missions in countries. Each of the thematic guidelines can be used as entry point for dialogue with the EU.



3. Human rights dialogues: EU human rights dialogue is an important instrument through which the EU conducts regular and intensive exchanges on human rights challenges with individual countries with whom it has bilateral agreements. By raising concrete concerns and asking specific questions on human rights issues and individual cases, the EU aims at reaching a continuous improvement of the protection of human rights in a particular country.

ADVOCACY ENTRY POINTS:

- Engagement with civil society is an integral part of the EU human rights dialogue. Prior to the planned dialogue, the EU holds consultations with the civil society partners to keep themselves abreast with the specific domestic issues and cases.
- Conducting civil society seminars prior to the dialogue – for which EU funding is available – can serve as a powerful tool to engage in the process of human rights dialogue. As per the EU human rights dialogue guidelines³, concrete recommendations stemming from the civil society seminars are discussed with the co-chairs of the dialogue and their delegations in the margins/ during a dedicated session of the human rights dialogues.

To consider: At present, the EU holds Human rights dialogue with 60 non-EU countries⁴. Helvetas Laos has gathered good experience in engaging with the EU's human rights dialogue.

³ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/human_rights_dialogue_guidelines.pdf – page 7

⁴ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/human_rights_dialogue_guidelines.pdf

4. EU action plan on human rights and democracy: the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy is a list of actions that the EU intends to implement with the aim of ensuring that human rights and democracy are promoted in its external action. The 2022–2024 action plan of the EU sets out five following areas of action:

1. Protecting and empowering individuals
2. Building resilient, inclusive, and democratic societies
3. Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy
4. New technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges
5. Delivering by working together

ADVOCACY ENTRY POINTS:

- The EU considers civil society as one of the integral parts for implementation of the action plan. The action plan provides for practical and concrete actions to be taken by the EU Delegations. At various stages of the action plan, civil society is invited to give input for future actions.

To consider: The 2020–2024 EU Action Plan can be accessed here: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu_action_plan_on_human_rights_and_democracy_2020-2024.pdf



Workshop conducted in Laos to strengthen the capacity of the National Assembly and the Provincial People Assembly members to exercise their roles and responsibilities and build capacity to support staff to effectively assist the committee members of the National Assembly in the constituency and the members of the local people's assembly.
© Helvetas Laos



Field activity in Laos – leveraging citizens' initiative to increase social cohesion by engaging in learning and knowledge sharing.
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Country: Lao PDR

“The EU and other donors should encourage civil society to pool forces for advocacy and should foster regional and international networks”.

Bong Munsayaphom

(Deputy Country Director Helvetas Laos)

The EU Delegation in Lao PDR organizes a civil society consultation prior to its official Human Rights Dialogue (Dialogue) with the national government. INGOs, national and local CSOs are present during these consultations. The main idea is to discuss findings and experiences from the field so that they can feed into the dialogue. Helvetas participated in the consultations for the EU-Lao Human Rights Dialogue 2022. The structure of the overall Dialogue for 2022 was to *address the implementation of the recommendations given to the Lao government in the context of the previous Universal Periodic Review (UPR Review)*. That also meant that the thematic issues were limited, and the nature of the dialogue did not allow to address specific human rights issues.

What was your motivation?

We have several EU funded projects, including gender-based violence, women’s voices, justice now and working with the National Assembly. Helvetas promotes alliance building as a key element for resilience building as civil society can gain an effective voice through building alliances, networks, and multi-stakeholder initiatives on a national, regional and international level. We could share our field experiences and findings from the reports of our EU funded projects through the Dialogue.

What was the outcome of your efforts?

I learned a lot from the EU and other donors dialogue mechanisms with the Lao Government, not only from the annual dialogue and the consultation but also from observations and interactions with them and with CSOs during sector working meetings and workshops as well as during joint monitoring and follow-up visits to projects.

How did you follow up?

There was no official follow-up from the EU delegation after the civil society consultations. And after the actual EU-Lao Government Dialogue, the recommendations from the EU to the government were rather broad and focused mainly on the government’s engagement with the UN Human Rights Mechanisms.

What did you learn from this experience?

The EU and other donors should continue to engage with the government – notably through the human rights and governance dialogue to be held on an annual basis. Topics can range from civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights to fundamental freedoms and the rights of women and children, as well as ethnic and vulnerable groups. The dialogue should also be linked to the pending recommendations of the UN Treaty Bodies and the UPR Review in addition to the preparation for the next UPR in 2025.

Any future recommendations?

The EU finance support to Laos through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and the Civil Society Organizations-Local Authorities (CSO-LA) must be increased. These are two significant tools for supporting civil society activities and CSO capacity-building initiatives.

At the same time, the modalities of engagement with civil society are a key consideration. Core funding as opposed to project funding enables CSOs to pursue their proper strategic direction and adapt to fast-changing circumstances. Civil society actors also call upon the EU to explore new ways to better engage with other types of civil society beyond the ‘classic’ NGOs – such as civic movements, social enterprises, and other human rights groups. The EU and other donors should encourage civil society to pool forces for advocacy and should foster regional and international networks.

5. EU's annual report on human rights and democracy: The EU's annual report on human rights and democracy provides the EU's engagement and actions to promote and protect human rights across the world. There are specific thematic issues with country-specific examples for getting an update on the EU's engagement in a specific country and thematic.

ADVOCACY ENTRY POINTS:

- The EU's Annual Report on human rights and democracy is the first point of information on the EU's action on specific thematic and country. Under its country reports, all EU actions within a specific country are summarized for the previous year. Similarly, in its thematic reporting, all of the EU's actions on specific thematic are summarized.
- Specific information from these reports can be used for starting advocacy dialogue with the EU missions in specific countries.
- They also provide the EU delegation's position on human rights in specific countries.

To consider: All EU Annual and country report on human rights can be accessed here https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-annual-reports-human-rights-and-democracy_en

6. EU delegations: The EU delegations have a key role in developing and implementing the human rights and democracy strategies for each country. For this, they prepare human rights dialogues, engage with human rights defenders and civil society, and identifying priorities for EU financial assistance.

ADVOCACY ENTRY POINTS:

- In non-EU countries, the EU delegations are the first point of contact for local NGOs.
- EU delegations play a key role in policy shaping as they have the leadership in drafting the human rights and country strategies for the country of their presence. Being connected with the EU delegation and feeding information from the ground can have a significant impact for the future direction of EU's policy of specific country.

To consider: List of EU delegations is available at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-world-0_en

7. EU Country Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations envisages the elaboration of Roadmaps at country level. Conceived as a joint initiative between the European Union and Member States, they aim to strengthen the strategic engagement with civil society. The purpose of the Roadmaps is to develop a common strategic framework for the engagement of EU Delegations and Member States with civil society at country level, with a view to improving the impact, predictability and visibility of EU actions.

Roadmaps are also intended to improve the consistency of EU cooperation vis-à-vis civil society, across sectors and instruments, and to progressively promote better coordination within EU Delegations, Member States, and other relevant actors. They will target countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Pacific and the Neighbourhood region.

The drafting of Roadmaps is very much a joint responsibility between EU Delegations and Member States. If warranted a Member State may even take the lead. Non-EU donors with substantial civil society engagement could also be involved where relevant and feasible.

Dialogue and consultation with local civil society is seen as a key aspect of developing and not least implementing the roadmap. For consultations with local civil society, it will be necessary to embrace a wide range of actors with different roles and mandates. The basic principle is that each country is specific and approach to consultations and dialogue should respect that.

Where feasible, it is also strongly advisable to consult with national and local authorities not least in view of the important role they have in defining, respecting and facilitating the legal, regulatory and institutional framework for civil society. International NGOs with a strong presence in the country are also relevant partners to associate in the process.

ADVOCACY ENTRY POINTS:

- The EU civil society consultations which inform the road maps are safe spaces and strategic opportunities to raise awareness about evolving threats and risks to Civil society enabling environment and the [right to freedom of assembly and of association](#) in each country context.

To consider: preparatory coordination and consensus among and between civil society actors, local and international on their joint priorities to more strategically and effectively leverage the EU consultation processes and ensure civil society concerns are integrated into the country civil society roadmap. <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/public-governance-civilsociety/wiki/eu-country-roadmaps-engagement-civil-society-introduction>

8. Human rights focal point: Every EU delegation has a human rights 'focal point' who is in charge for coordination on human rights and CSOs on the specific thematic issues of human rights, democracy, civil society, and gender equality. They are the main drivers of the implementation and mainstreaming of the EU policies, programmes, and financing instruments in these thematic areas.

ADVOCACY ENTRY POINTS:

- Human rights focal points or head of the political section of the EU delegation are the first point of contact available for the CSOs to engage with the EU. In some of the EU delegation's websites, their names and contacts are available. Where it is not available, CSOs can get in touch with the Head of political section of the EU delegation as the contact point for advocacy.

To consider: List of EU delegations is available at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-world-0_en

THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe](#) (OSCE) is the main forum for addressing peace, security and human rights in Europe and Central Asia. It is the world's largest security oriented intergovernmental organization and works towards resolving conflicts. It was established through the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 to foster multi-lateral dialogue between East and West European countries after the Cold War. At present, OSCE has [57 participating States](#), which are mainly from Europe, along with the US, Canada, and some Asian countries. It is now a major forum for discussing and taking action on vital issues of peace, security and human rights in Europe and Central Asia.

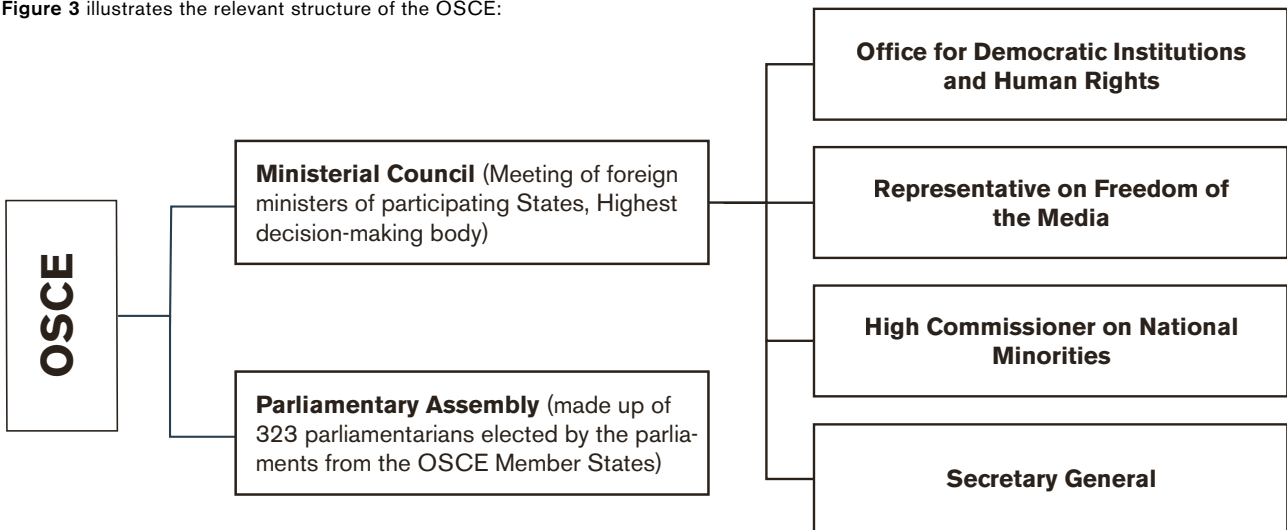
Within its mandate, OSCE addresses a wide range of security-related concerns that includes arms control, confidence and security-building measures, human rights, national minorities, democratisation, policing strategies, counterterrorism, economic and environmental activities. All 57 participating states enjoy equal status and decisions are taken by consensus on a politically but not legally binding basis.

OSCE works through its three main bodies. First, the [Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights](#) (ODIHR) which sends observers to monitor elections

in OSCE countries. Second, the [Representative on Freedom of the Media](#) who monitors issues such as media regulation, journalist safety and internet freedom. Third, the [High Commissioner on National Minorities](#) which monitors short and long-term causes of ethnic tensions and conflict. In addition, there are 15 field operations, such as the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine and in other Western Balkan and former Soviet republics. The OSCE Secretariat provides administrative support to all these three organs. The top officials of these bodies are appointed by the foreign ministers of participating states in the Ministerial Council by consensus, for a three-year term, renewable once. The [OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly](#) has 323 members who are appointed or elected by national parliaments. The assembly has no decision-making powers over OSCE executive institutions, but it acts as a forum for inter-parliamentary dialogue and can adopt resolutions and recommendations.

OSCE has an [observer status](#) with the UN and is considered a regional partner of the UN in maintaining international peace and security according to [chapter VIII of the UN Charter](#). OSCE field operations cooperate closely with the UN agencies and missions. The ODIHR provides participating states with advice and assistance and supports individuals and civil society with targeted training and education. It covers a broad spectrum of issues, ranging from the fundamental freedoms of religion or belief, movement, assembly, and association, to reporting on the use of death penalty, monitoring trials, and preventing torture and other forms of ill-treatment.

Figure 3 illustrates the relevant structure of the OSCE:



ADVOCACY ENTRY POINTS AT THE OSCE:

- Since the work of OSCE is to engage states on peace building and de-escalation of conflicts – political work – it has kept CSOs engagement only in a limited role. However, during the Swiss chairmanship of OSCE in 2014, efforts were made to enhance the dialogue with the civil society in OSCE regions with OSCE institutions. OSCE Parallel Civil society events on the eve of OSCE Ministerial Council Meetings are an entry point for CSOs. For this, engaging through the OSCE-wide NGO network Civil Solidarity Platform is important.⁵

To consider: NGO Network Civil Society Solidarity Platform is an important entry point. Check <https://www.civicsolidarity.org/>

⁵ <https://ifsh.de/file-CORE/documents/yearbook/english/15/CernyGoetschel-en.pdf>

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The regional human rights mechanisms in Europe are specific as they are intended to serve highly developed countries. Consequently, many human rights issues that are important for Helvetas and its strategic partners, such as the right to water and sanitation, the right to food and housing and safe civic space, are not adequately reflected in Europe's human rights context. Yet, the EU does address all types of human rights through its external actions. The EU's thematic priority on water and sanitation is one such example. EU Delegations worldwide are bound to follow the EU's commitment on human rights and seek dialogue and partnerships with countries in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. This is an obvious entry point for civil society advocacy that still needs to be explored. This paper shows how Civil Society can use various entry points within EU mechanism for effective advocacy and policy dialogue. Systematic, coordinated advocacy with which both the UN and the EU can yield significant impact on issues such as land rights, water and sanitation, or safe civic space.

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GLOSSARY

EU Charter	Charter of the Fundamental Rights
Civil society Organizations	Civil society Organizations
CoE	Council of Europe
EU Court	Court of Justice of the European Union
ECSR	European Committee for Social Rights
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
ESC	European Social Charter
EU	European Union
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
The Commissioner	The Commissioner for Human Rights
The Conference of INGOs	The Conference of International Non-Governmental Organizations

USEFUL RESOURCES

EU Delegations unwrapped – a practical guide for CSO engagements with EUDs, CONCORD, available at <https://concordeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/EUDHandbook-English-2.pdf>

Working with the Council of Europe: A practical guide for Civil Society, available at <https://rm.coe.int/work-with-coe-guide-english-2022/1680a66592>

The role of regional human rights mechanisms, available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2010/410206/EXPO-DROI_ET\(2010\)410206_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2010/410206/EXPO-DROI_ET(2010)410206_EN.pdf)

The European Human Rights system, available at https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/European_Human_Rights_System1.html



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Alliance 2015

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