

# Strategic Plan 2022-2025

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European Network of  
National Human Rights Institutions

## **About**

ENNHRI's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 is the foundation of the network's activities for this period. It focuses on where ENNHRI can best empower European National Human Rights Institutions to protect and promote human rights and the rule of law, while supporting them to be strong and independent. By connecting NHRIs with each other and key human rights partners, a vibrant network can be created which acts in solidarity for human rights. The plan was adopted by all members in December 2021 and resulted from a process led by ENNHRI's Board.

## **Title**

ENNHRI Strategic Plan 2022-2025

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# Table of contents

Introduction	5	About ENNHRI	6
The context	8	The change	10
The ambition	12	Core objectives	13
The approach	14	The implementation	20
The learning	23		

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### ENNHRI Board (2019-2022)

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Human Rights Ombudsman Slovenia ▪ National Human Rights Institution in Finland and Human Rights Centre and the Parliamentary Ombudsman ▪ Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission ▪ Office of Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia ▪ Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina ▪ Ombudswoman of the Republic of Croatia ▪ People's Advocate of Albania ▪ Portuguese Ombudsman ▪ Slovak National Centre for Human Rights

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# Introduction

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are needed more than ever. The respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law is under pressure across Europe. NHRIs can be at the forefront of countering this trend. Yet they face pressures in fulfilling their mandate and, despite international standards, lack sufficient recognition and influence at the domestic and regional levels.

This Strategic Plan 2022-2025 sets out the ambitions, goals and objectives for strengthening, supporting and connecting European NHRIs, united in the European Network of NHRIs (ENNHRI).

In doing so, it will help create strong and independent NHRIs that work in their own national contexts and together at European level to ensure the universal and effective enjoyment of human rights across the continent. It will help ensure that these critical components of the human rights architecture are recognised, valued and trusted partners of regional human rights mechanisms. Finally, it will make them part of an empowered network which acts in solidarity in defence of human rights.

Working across 10 strategic priorities, ENNHRI and its members will work together for more and stronger NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles, more effective promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law, and a stronger and more sustainable network.

To make these ambitions a reality, ENNHRI will work with intergovernmental organisations, civil society organisations (in particular their European networks), and networks of other national bodies.

ENNHRI would like to express its sincere thanks to all those who contributed to the conception of this Strategic Plan during an intensive 10-month consultative process. This was led by the ENNHRI Board and supported by an Advisory Group of members, consultants and various strategic partners, all of whom provided invaluable contributions.



# About ENNHRI

ENNHRI is the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions. It brings together over 45 institutions across Europe to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights in the region. The network provides a platform for collaboration, exchange, and solidarity in addressing human rights challenges and a common voice for NHRIs at the European level.

NHRIs are state-mandated bodies, independent of government, with a broad mandate to promote and protect human rights. Critically positioned between the state and civil society, given the uniqueness of their mandate, they enjoy privileged access to both state actors and international human rights mechanisms. Their independence from government is regularly checked through the accreditation process, so that their human rights voice is powerful and reputable.

ENNHRI is a network owned by its members, who lead both on the strategic objectives and on the implementation of activities. Its aim is to enhance the strength and capacities of NHRIs to be as impactful as possible on human rights. It does so by connecting NHRIs to each other to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and practices, as well as by connecting NHRIs to regional human rights mechanisms.



Built on the values of cooperation, participation, independence and solidarity, ENNHRI is member-led. Through working and core groups, members who are experts on priority human rights issues come together to share knowledge, create synergies which push forward the regional human rights agenda, and ultimately strengthen their work domestically. In 2021, ENNHRI's Working Groups covered asylum and migration, economic, social and cultural rights, legal, business and human rights, communications, and the rights of persons with disabilities.

In addition, ENNHRI members convene on themes such as the rule of law, civil society space and human rights defenders, climate change, artificial intelligence and rights of older persons. The impacts of COVID-19 on human rights and the work of NHRIs is mainstreamed throughout ENNHRI's thematic work. The ENNHRI Hub aims to enable contacts among members and the exchange of knowledge and information. ENNHRI statements and submissions on critical human rights issues are coordinated throughout the network, as are third party interventions before the European Court of Human Rights.



# The context

Human rights and the rule of law in Europe are backsliding amidst increasing restrictions on civic space, rising inequalities, and weakening social protection in many European states.

NHRIs have had to cope with insufficient or inadequate resources, and many operate in challenging environments. Some have seen attempts to undermine their independence.

As documented in ENNHRI's rule of law reports, human rights defenders have come under attack. **This is particularly the case for those assisting refugees and migrants, those working on LGBTQ issues, and women human rights defenders.** Freedom of expression, of peaceful assembly, and of association are being restricted. Journalists continue to be harassed, attacked, and killed.

The **climate crisis** has emerged to be among the greatest human rights challenges of our time, exacerbating inequalities, deepening precarity, and threatening lives, health and livelihoods. While European states have acknowledged their obligation to engage in climate action, their commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions have been inadequate to fulfil climate goals, placing an onus on the human rights framework to achieve climate justice.

Independent NHRIs - both individually and uniting in a network - have a critical role to play in making Europe better for all.





Similarly, the **COVID-19 pandemic** has exacerbated socio-economic inequalities, with its impact on human rights and the rule of law harmful and multifaceted. Public health measures taken by governments have curtailed rights and freedoms. While many of them have been legitimate, others have been disproportionate. This has raised fears that the measures will continue to have damaging consequences for human rights and the rule of law even after the pandemic is over.

Governments have relied heavily on artificial intelligence systems, including digital surveillance technologies, to monitor the spread of COVID-19. **Reliance on the analysis of mass population datasets has given rise to concerns about the role of artificial intelligence in perpetuating discrimination.** These concerns build on existing fears about the use of artificial intelligence in policing and the criminal justice system, which risks perpetuating historical bias in policing practice. Extensive data collection has also raised concerns for being excessively intrusive, with a potential harmful impact on minority groups.

**Minorities** have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. They have suffered higher fatality rates, often due to poorer health and more limited access to medical care. The economic downturn caused by lockdown measures resulted in the immediate loss of many informal or otherwise precarious jobs. Similarly, the impact of the pandemic on the human rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants has been severe. In some cases, this has led to further entrapment and inadequate conditions at borders or detention centres, increasing the risk of contagion. The outcome of ongoing policy negotiations in Europe will have a direct impact on the promotion and protection of the human rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants across the continent.

While the **overall deterioration in human rights** has highlighted the indispensability of NHRIs in promoting human rights and the rule of law, they have had to navigate an increasingly hostile environment, marked by a rise in populism, right-wing extremism, and the politicisation of budget cuts. The economic crisis, exacerbated by the pandemic, has impacted not just on the realisation of human rights, but also the instruments and mechanisms set up for their implementation and monitoring. In order to be sustainable and effective, the post-COVID recovery must be based on human rights and guided by the Sustainable Development Goals.

Given their unique position in the national and international human rights architecture, the weight their voice carries, the breadth of their mandates, and their organisational credibility, independent NHRIs - both individually and uniting in a network - have a critical role to play in making Europe better for all.

# The change



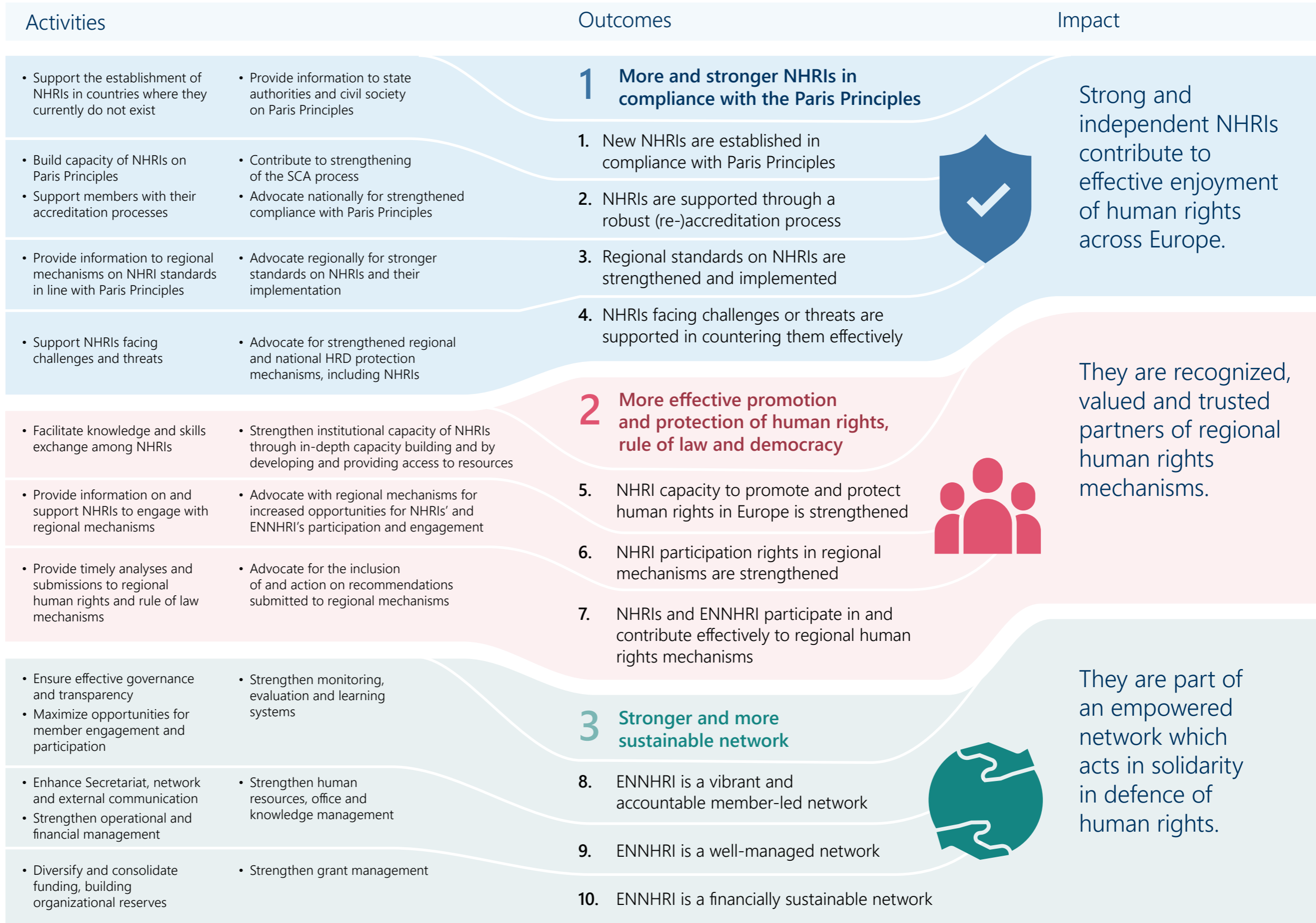
**The context:** Respect for human rights and the rule of law is challenged across Europe. NHRIs, a critical component of the human rights architecture, face multiple pressures in fulfilling their mandate and do not yet have sufficient recognition and influence at the domestic and regional levels.

## Key Partners

- GANHRI and regional NHRI networks
- Civil society organizations and individual human rights defenders
- National governments and parliaments
- European Union, Council of Europe, OSCE, UN

## Inputs

- Member engagement
- Member expertise
- Secretariat capacity
- Funding
- Relationships
- Partnerships
- Learning
- Creativity
- Resilience



# The ambition

If we support NHRIs to become Paris Principles-compliant and stronger, this will result in more effective NHRI actions on human rights nationally, regionally and globally, and we will have contributed to improving respect for human rights and the rule of law in Europe.



## Vision

The universal and effective enjoyment of human rights throughout Europe



## Mission

Promote and protect human rights through strengthening, supporting and connecting European NHRIs



## Values

Respect of international human rights standards; Transparency; Cooperation; Accountability; Participation; Non-discrimination and Respect for Diversity; Independence; Solidarity

# Core objectives

## More and stronger NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles

1

1. New NHRIs are established in compliance with Paris Principles
2. NHRIs are supported through a robust (re-)accreditation process
3. Regional standards on NHRIs are strengthened and implemented
4. NHRIs facing challenges or threats are supported in countering them effectively

## More effective promotion and protection of human rights, rule of law and democracy

2

5. NHRI capacity to promote and protect human rights in Europe is strengthened
6. NHRI participation rights in regional mechanisms are strengthened
7. NHRIs and ENNHRI participate in and contribute effectively to regional human rights mechanisms

## Stronger and more sustainable network

3

8. ENNHRI is a vibrant and accountable member-led network
9. ENNHRI is a well-managed network
10. ENNHRI is a financially sustainable network

# The approach

ENNHRI aims to fulfil its mission by achieving three core objectives. To empower strong and independent NHRIs to contribute to the universal and effective enjoyment of human rights across Europe, ENNHRI will support the establishment and strengthening of NHRIs in line with the Paris Principles and advocate for an enabling environment in which they can maximise their impact.

ENNHRI will also facilitate the capacity building of and connect NHRIs so they are best placed to promote and protect human rights and the rule of law in Europe. At the same time, it will strengthen the network to increase its effectiveness and efficiency.





## More and stronger NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles

Strong, effective and independent NHRIs are at the heart of ENNHRI and its work. ENNHRI will provide technical assistance to NHRIs in their efforts to comply with the Paris Principles, contribute to strengthening the standards on NHRIs at the regional and global level, and support the establishment of NHRIs where they currently do not exist.

### 1 New NHRIs are established in compliance with the Paris Principles

Acting as a centre of expertise on NHRI mandates and the Paris Principles, ENNHRI will work with stakeholders at the state, regional and global levels to support the establishment of NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles in those European states where they currently do not exist. The Secretariat will provide expert advice and tailored support from a regional comparative perspective, while members will provide insights and examples of how the Paris Principles have been applied in similar national contexts.

### 2 NHRIs are supported through a robust (re-)accreditation process

ENNHRI will contribute to further development of the interpretation of the Paris Principles, in collaboration with relevant partners. It will continue to fulfil its formal role as European member and observer of the Subcommittee on Accreditation, as well as support members undergoing the accreditation process. The Secretariat will provide technical assistance to members undergoing (re-)accreditation, while members, drawing from their national perspectives, will provide peer support through the Accreditation Support Group.

### **3 Regional standards on NHRIs are strengthened and implemented**

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ENNHRI will provide expertise to the Council of Europe, the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to contribute to the advancement of regional standards on NHRIs and the implementation of the Council of Europe Recommendation on developing and strengthening NHRIs. The Secretariat will ensure continuity in the engagement with the European regulatory process and advocate for the current level of interpretation of the Paris Principles and regional standards to be advanced and implemented.

### **4 NHRIs facing challenges or threats are supported in countering them effectively**

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ENNHRI will provide support to NHRIs when their effectiveness and independence come under threat, usually due to government action. This includes monitoring the wider context of the enabling space for NHRIs and human rights defenders, advocating for its strengthening, and providing public statements and interventions where appropriate. The Secretariat will also coordinate joint responses with other actors. Members will provide peer support through sharing of their experiences and strategies they have used to manage similar situations and will consider actions they can take to support their peers in solidarity.



## More effective promotion and protection of human rights, rule of law and democracy

As a human rights organization working to ensure the effective realisation of all human rights, ENNHRI will enhance its rights-based approach and support NHRIs to be changemakers in the implementation of human rights, which are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated.

ENNHRI will strengthen the capacity of NHRIs to protect and promote human rights and the rule of law in Europe, and address emerging human rights issues. It will contribute effectively to the work of regional human rights mechanisms. Challenges to human rights being many and critical, ENNHRI will tackle significant structural human rights issues, laying the ground for NHRIs in turn to address them effectively, capitalising on synergies, exchange of learning and solidarity within this human rights community.

### **5** — **NHRI capacity to address key human rights issues in Europe is strengthened**

ENNHRI will build the capacity of NHRIs to engage with specific human rights issues through member-led peer exchanges, working and core groups, and ad hoc taskforces, as well as flagship events such as the NHRI Academy. This will place ENNHRI members in the best possible position to address the most pressing human rights issues at any time. Members will act as experts and a source of knowledge, taking the lead through working groups or informal exchanges. The Secretariat will support the coordination of this effort by ensuring that resources are available for exchanges, information sharing, and data collection; and by coordinating advocacy and connecting with regional actors. Moreover, ENNHRI will strengthen the capacity of NHRIs to take action on emerging human rights issues and effective human rights communication, also through the creation of resources in key areas.



## **6 NHRI participation rights in regional mechanisms are strengthened**

ENNHRI will advocate with regional human rights mechanisms to ensure that the access of NHRIs to these fora is institutionalised and their right to participation in them protected. Taking advantage of its independence and credibility, ENNHRI will seek to strengthen NHRI access to regional mechanisms by increasing their recognition and the understanding of the importance of their role. The Secretariat will coordinate and ensure the consistency of ENNHRI's representation while members will provide expertise, share their national perspectives, and follow-up on ENNHRI's regional engagement at the domestic level. ENNHRI will also contribute to strengthening NHRI participation rights in UN bodies, through close working with GANHRI and other regional NHRI networks.

## **7 NHRIs and ENNHRI participate in and contribute effectively to regional human rights mechanisms**

Critical to the realisation of human rights and the safeguarding of the rule of law in Europe is the effectiveness of regional human rights mechanisms. ENNHRI will engage with the regional human rights mechanisms to influence human rights standards, legislation, policy and their promotion and implementation. It will provide information, analyses and recommendations, as well as technical expertise, within capacity and priorities. In close collaboration with GANHRI, ENNHRI will also contribute to global human rights mechanisms.



# 3

## Stronger and more sustainable network

A well-run and sustainable regional network of NHRIs is an integral component of effective human rights architecture. ENNHRI will strengthen members' leadership and ownership of the network, and enhance their shared understanding of organisational sustainability. To ensure its sustainability, ENNHRI will invest in increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of organisational systems.

### 8 ENNHRI is a vibrant and accountable member-led network

ENNHRI is a network of and for its members. The Secretariat will develop appropriate systems and tools to enable members to learn from one another, exchange practices and work together. Gender mainstreaming will be enhanced across the network. Member involvement in organisational performance monitoring, evaluation and learning will be strengthened. Organisational risks will be regularly assessed and mitigation measures implemented to ensure that ENNHRI's operations are safe. Governance bodies will become more transparent, accountable and effective, able to preserve the network's vibrant character.

### 9 ENNHRI is a well-managed network

Internal and external communications will be strengthened by promoting concerted communications initiatives between NHRIs, supported by the Secretariat. ENNHRI's organisational capacity will be aligned with the requirements for the effective implementation of this Strategic Plan. Operational and financial management will be strengthened further. Secretariat capacities will be enhanced through sound human resources management and professional development. Knowledge management systems will be strengthened for the benefit of all members.

### 10 ENNHRI is a financially sustainable network

Each individual member's contribution is valued be it in-kind support for collective initiatives, direct financial contribution in the form of membership fees or a contribution to the Solidarity Fund. Efforts will be made to consolidate and diversify the funding of the network, whilst building necessary reserves. Strengthened grant management will create synergies in collaboration with members and partners, strengthening ENNHRI's impact.

# The implementation

Successful implementation of ENNHRI's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 will hinge on the effective interaction of organisational strengthening, member engagement, collaborative partnerships and effective communication in fulfilment of ENNHRI's values, including accountability, transparency and participation.

The Strategic Plan will be delivered through an implementation plan and annual operational plans which will prioritise activities, assign roles and responsibilities and specify the means necessary for the achievement of its objectives, with the aim of utilising ENNHRI's resources in ways which members deem most efficient, effective and impactful.

**Organisational strengthening** will encompass consolidating ENNHRI at the level of governance, the network and the Secretariat. Capacity building of the organisation relates both to the member capacity to participate in the work of the network, as well as the Secretariat staff capacity to service it.

In terms of governance, **ENNHRI's statutes will be reviewed to align them with the current needs of the network** and enable expedient, participative and effective decision-making. Policies and processes will be established as necessary, while the existing ones will be implemented to ensure that the expertise within the network is better harnessed, and the quality of output is maintained. The Secretariat and members will both share the responsibility for quality assurance. The recommendations of a gender audit will be implemented. Knowledge management across the network will be strengthened by improving systems and tools to make the knowledge more accessible to and transparent for members, and to empower them to use it in furtherance of ENNHRI's objectives.

**Member engagement and network participation** creates a forum for cooperation between NHRIs, with members benefiting more from increased inputs by all. It will be critical to securing sufficient resources so that ENNHRI can implement the Strategic Plan with success and impact which would not be possible without members' commitment, participation and investment of expertise, time and resources. An updated action plan will be developed based on the recommendations of a member engagement and network participation audit with the aim also to improve the awareness of what being a member of ENNHRI entails. Tools will strengthen member ownership of the network and enhance their leadership so that their input is in line with ENNHRI's rules, procedures and values, in particular transparency, cooperation, accountability, participation and solidarity.

**ENNHRI's ways of working will be diversified** to draw greater efficiencies from a combination of formal and informal cooperation, striking an optimal balance between the two, and enhancing the capacity of the network to react more swiftly to emerging issues. The diversity of the network in terms of NHRI positions, approaches to learning, and resources, will be harnessed for the benefit of the network.

ENNHRI's **communication strategy** will improve communications within the network, within the Secretariat and externally. ENNHRI will leverage its brand identity and its online presence to support joint initiatives and actions, and strengthen its visibility, reputation and the impact of its messages. Critical in this regard will be the multiplier effect derived from network synergies that will amplify ENNHRI's messages at the national and European level.

To be able to sustain the level of work necessary for the **successful implementation of this Strategic Plan**, the Secretariat will need to be strengthened, including by increasing its human and financial resources. The fundraising strategy will look at setting clear targets, diversifying the sources of funding, and increasing the level of self-generated funds, leading to an increase in organisational reserves. Organisational policies in the areas of financial and human resources will be implemented and reviewed for effectiveness with relevant processes and procedures put in place. Staff policies and professional development plans will be implemented for staff wellbeing and dignity at work. Effective planning and integration of work will be ensured throughout the Secretariat.

Successful implementation of the Strategic Plan will not be possible without **collaborative and interconnected partnerships** at the national, European and global level. ENNHRI's partners comprise intergovernmental organisations, civil society organisations, in particular their European and national networks, as well as networks of other national bodies. Intergovernmental partners include the Council of Europe, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, as well as the United Nations, in particular the regional offices of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Development Programme. Moreover, ENNHRI enjoys a special relationship with GANHRI both as a joint member and a constituent regional network. These partnerships are essential for impactful collaboration, pooling of resources, amplifying messages and, overall, identifying solutions to shared challenges.



# The learning

ENNHRI is strongly committed to organisational learning, which it sees as a critical precondition for the successful delivery of the Strategic Plan. Its implementation will be monitored based on the indicators in its results framework. The indicators will measure both the impact and the progress towards the achievement of the Strategic Plan. They will be monitored and reported upon regularly, based on an annual members' survey and interviews with partners. The indicators will be developed jointly by the governance bodies and the Secretariat, and they will also be jointly monitored.

Moreover, ENNHRI will strengthen its monitoring and evaluation systems to enable better learning across the network and meaningful participation of members, drawing lessons learned from its annual Result-Oriented Monitoring (ROM). ENNHRI will enhance the connections between monitoring, evaluation, and learning, by linking monitoring and evaluation to organizational processes, and ensuring that the data is used effectively by both the members and the Secretariat.



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