ENNHRI European Network of National Human Rights Institutions

Operational Plan 2025

Adopted, 28 October 2024

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Introduction

As 2025 is the final year of ENNHRI's current Strategic Plan, it provides an opportunity for the network to finalise some of the initiatives of this strategic cycle; to take stock of results achieved; to learn lessons from challenges faced; and to reevaluate ENNHRI's priorities in a fast-changing and increasingly hostile environment for human rights, democracy and rule of law.

NHRIs across Europe must navigate increasingly divided societies, where narratives against human rights are becoming more mainstream. The rise of populism and far rights politics has heightened rhetoric against migration and other groups in a vulnerable situation, while attacks against human rights defenders, media actors and civic space continue. The fear (or ongoing reality) of armed conflict has resulted in a securitisation of policies and budgets. This more challenging context is exacerbated by the still insufficient resources provided to NHRIs across the region, often despite the increased mandates. Increased capacity is needed for new functions and topics, including on AI and the environment.

Developments across Europe also provide opportunities for ENNHRI to develop and adapt its work: new mandates at the European Union institutions and the Council of Europe create possibilities for enhanced partnerships and strengthened participation in regional mechanisms. Also, regional policy and legislative developments have created space for NHRIs to have broader impacts on human rights across their national jurisdictions.

ENNHRI's current Strategic Plan provides a sound framework to respond to these developments while focussing on its core mission to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights, through strengthening, connecting and supporting NHRIs. This work will continue in 2025. ENNHRI will also invest in a participative strategic planning process to take account of the fundamental contextual changes in its environment, so that its prioritised actions have the best chance of having positive impacts on NHRIs, their resilience, and their work on human rights across Europe.

Core Objective 1: More and stronger NHRIs in compliance with the UN Paris Principles

ENNHRI's first core objective is a prerequisite to achieving all other objectives. Our network can only be as strong as our membership; and strong independent NHRIs, in line with the Paris Principles, are more effective in promoting and protecting human rights. As in other years of this Strategic Plan, we work towards this objective through supporting the establishment and accreditation of European NHRIs, as well as contributing to the (strengthening of) the accreditation process, and the implementation of NHRI standards. Particularly given the worsening environment in which NHRIs operate, ENNHRI also prioritises support to NHRIs under threat and protection mechanisms for all human rights defenders.

ENNHRI will provide ongoing support and advocacy towards **NHRI establishment** in the remaining European states where an NHRI is not yet in place. ENNHRI Secretariat will also provide tailored support to all European NHRIs undergoing **accreditation review** in 2025, and support follow-up to SCA recommendations, with priority support to B-status institutions, or those seeking accreditation for the first time. The new SCA Alternate member for the European region will be inducted, and ENNHRI will continue to participate in the SCA sessions and retreats, contributing to the strengthening of the accreditation process.

ENNHRI will develop the work of its **Expert Group on NHRI Standards** to facilitate members' participation in all developments relating to NHRI standards, as well as peer exchange and support to members for compliance with the UN Paris Principles. Throughout 2025, the Expert Group will also support meaningful participation of European NHRIs in the GANHRI review of the General Observations on the Paris Principles. It will also consider the frequent threats faced by NHRIs in Europe, including in crisis or conflict situations, and develop work to prepare for the most effective approach to prevention and support.

In 2025, ENNHRI will disseminate its awareness-raising **materials for national actors on the NHRI mandate and standards**. The materials developed in 2024, through inputs from across the membership, are intended to strengthen NHRIs through greater understanding and respect on the national level of the NHRI mandate and standards.

ENNHRI will also develop the coordination of the **European Contact Group on NHRIs**, made up of all European partners working in support of NHRIs. This will facilitate prompt and multi-layered action to support NHRIs under threat, and also provide a platform for efficient coordination and

exchange between NHRI partners. [This group will also provide a sounding board for stakeholder consultation in strategic planning.]

ENNHRI will continue its **engagement with the European Union (EU)** and the **Council of Europe** in relation to NHRI standards, in order to support the implementation of the UN Paris Principles and Council of Europe Recommendation on NHRIs, and take these into account in regional developments. ENNHRI will build upon its proposal for a standalone European Commission (EC) Recommendation on NHRIs, bringing together the disparate preexisting EC recommendations in relation to NHRIs, such as in its Rule of Law Reports and Strategy on the implementation of the Charter on Fundamental Rights.

In 2025, ENNHRI will enhance its work on the implementation of the **Council of Europe Recommendation** on NHRIs, using its Baseline Study to focus resources where most needed to support the establishment, accreditation and strengthening of NHRIs across Europe. Through engagement with the Council of Europe, ENNHRI will prepare for the Committee of Ministers 2026 review of the Recommendation's implementation across Europe.

ENNHRI will also work towards building **stronger regional and national protection mechanisms for HRDs, including NHRIs**, strengthening our support for civic space across Europe. This will include ENNHRI's participation in developments at both the EU and Council of Europe on safeguarding civil society space and protecting human rights defenders.

Core Objective 2: More effective promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and rule of law

ENNHRI's second Core Objective recognises the ultimate goal of European NHRIs individually and collectively: to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights across Europe. Given NHRIs' broad mandate, unique functions, and lack of direct peers in-country, ENNHRI facilitates tailored capacity building for NHRIs and peer exchange. In addition, ENNHRI connects NHRIs to the regional human rights mechanisms, through enhanced participation rights, and coordinating a common voice for all European NHRIs to impact on regional developments.

Our flagship **NHRI Academy**, co-organised by ENNHRI and OSCE-ODIHR, will provide a week-long residential training for senior staff of NHRIs, focused on the NHRI mandate in relation to protection of human rights defenders. The membership data collection on human rights

defenders and civic space, will build on ENNHRI's 2024 workshop and report on the topic, and will be used to update ENNHRI's HRDs web resource.

ENNHRI's **Leadership Forum** will bring together the heads of NHRIs to strategise on the most impactful approach to our network's future work in a changing European context. Based on situational analysis, NHRI Leaders will develop a theory of change and core objectives to maintain ENNHRI's relevance and effectiveness in the next strategic period. Heads of NHRIs will also exchange on key and emerging human rights challenges and thematic areas to develop ENNHRI priorities and positioning in the coming years.

ENNHRI's **Working Groups** will continue to meet and exchange on their thematic and functional areas of expertise. The Working Groups[1] will also input to ENNHRI's Strategic Planning process, as well the ongoing review of the Working Group Policy, with a view to the efficient and effective facilitation of these central structures of the network. Working Group Chairs will also meet on a quarterly basis to support synergies across ENNHRI's thematic work.

In 2025, ENNHRI will maintain its priorities for NHRI capacity-building of NHRIs and regional engagement. This will help to ensure broader and more meaningful impacts of the actions taken in these areas in 2024. First, in relation to **Artificial intelligence**, ENNHRI will build on its data collection, capacity building, regional engagement and resource development through disseminating its web resource and engaging in the implementation of the new EU Artificial Intelligence Act and the Council of Europe Convention on AI, Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of Law.

ENNHRI's work on **Securitisation and Human Rights** in 2024 has produced extensive data on NHRI responses, which will be collated in 2025 to provide accessible information to all members on various aspects of this developing reality across Europe. Further, the outcomes of 2024 consultation on the role of NHRIs in situations of armed conflict will be consolidated in an updated scoping paper, which could feed into the work on both securitisation and NHRI standards.

Following several commitments from across the **Council of Europe** on enhancing the meaningful participation of NHRIs, ENNHRI will build upon its engagement to clarify opportunities for value-add in Council of Europe processes. In particular, ENNHRI will focus on the implementation of the

[1] ENNHRI has currently nine working groups, on: asylum and migration; artificial intelligence; business and human rights; climate; communications; CRPD; ESR; legal; and human rights of older persons.

European Court of Human Rights' judgments, follow-up to the Secretary General's Roadmap and its ongoing participation as an observer to CDDH (Steering Committee on Human Rights).

ENNHRI will continue its close engagement and cooperation with the **European Union** institutions, including FRA, and facilitate inputs on the implementation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, including the mid-term review of the Charter Strategy. Given the network's membership spanning EU, Enlargement, and Eastern Partnership states, and beyond, ENNHRI will support initiatives for EU internal/external coherence in relation to NHRIs.

We will continue to provide ENNHRI's **annual rule of law and human rights reporting**, including both country-specific and regional recommendations. In 2025, the report will focus on NHRIs, as well as Human Rights Defenders and civic space. Information will also be included on justice systems, including implementation of regional court judgments, and media freedom. The rule of law database will provide searchable access to the rich information provided by our members.

ENNHRI's contributions to regional mechanisms will continue across thematic priorities and Working Groups' initiatives. On the national level, some members will be supported to implement learnings from network activities through **small grants**. All members will benefit from these activities, as outcomes will be fed back into the network for broad and multiplied results.

Core objective 3: Stronger and more sustainable Network

ENNHRI is a membership organisation, and we can only achieve our goals through a strong participative network. Our third Core Objective therefore focuses on delivering transparent and robust governance, accessible information, coherent communications and effective management. In a context where funding is increasingly scarce for human rights work across Europe, ENNHRI also works to achieve the financial sustainability of the network. These actions will boost trust in the network, so that ENNHRI can better achieve its mission.

In 2025, ENNHRI will facilitate a participative **strategic planning** process. This will include thorough internal and external context analyses, informed by member and stakeholder consultations. The heads of NHRIs will be paramount to the development of a theory of change and core objectives, and all Working Groups will be consulted. ENNHRI's membership will have time throughout the year to input to a first draft Strategic Plan, and key partners will be involved in the consultation process.

The General Assembly, Board, and Finance Committee will continue to meet and ensure robust **governance** for the network. Following elections in October 2024, new mandates will begin for

the Board and Finance Committee in March 2025, for which a full induction process will take place. ENNHRI will also nominate an individual from the region to become GANHRI Secretary (Deputy Chairperson). ENNHRI will continue to contribute to GANHRI's governance and review of each network's roles and responsibilities.

ENNHRI will further develop **membership policies** in 2025, including new Rules of Procedure for the Board. In addition, the Board will develop a process to review the 'active steps' taken by Associate and Non-voting members to reach A status accreditation within a reasonable time. The review of ENNHRI's Working Group policy will continue, taking into account membership and operational requirements identified in the strategic planning process.

In 2025, ENNHRI will implement an updated data and knowledge management plan to enhance accessibility of information. Our **communication channels** will be further developed for greater visibility, and allow for more targeted communication initiatives in coordination with members. The ENNHRI Hub will be developed to optimise a user-friendly and efficient approach. The Communications Working Group will continue to multiply the visibility of ENNHRI's and its members' work.

ENNHRI will continue to review the outcomes of our work through the **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning** framework. We will develop its management processes across operational, financial and human resources. A comprehensive professional development programme will be developed, and financial monitoring tools will be enhanced. The gender action plan will be implemented across all network activities.

ENNHRI's Business Plan will be implemented and applied to prioritise fundraising initiatives for our core work. As two EU multiannual grants will be coming to an end, a new **fundraising strategy** will be developed in line with the strategic planning process.

Annex: Key activities by Strategic Priority

Core Objective One: More and stronger NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles

1. New NHRIs are established in compliance with the UN Paris Principles
Tailored support for NHRI Establishment, in line with Action Plan.
Engagement with European states without an NHRI, including in cooperation with partners.
2. NHRIs are supported through a robust (re-)accreditation process
Tailored support to members undergoing (re)accreditation.
Participating at SCA Retreats and Sessions.
Development of materials for strengthening the SCA process, through Expert Group on Standards.
Follow-up to SCA Recommendations, in close cooperation with relevant NHRI.
Development of ENNHRI inputs on the General Observations Review, through Expert Group on Standards.
3. Regional standards on NHRIs are strengthened and implemented
Regional and state-specific actions to implement the Council of Europe Recommendation on NHRIs.
Engagement with European Union actors on a Recommendation on NHRIs.
Dissemination of materials for raising national actors' awareness of NHRI mandate and standards.
4. NHRIs facing challenges or threats are supported in countering them effectively
Tailored and timely support to NHRIs under threat.
Development of actions to address common threats against European NHRIs.
Coordination of Contact Group of regional partners to support NHRIs.
Advocacy on stronger regional HRDs protection mechanisms (including NHRIs), in cooperation with CSOs.

Core Objective Two: Enhance the promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and rule of law

5. NHRI capacity to promote and protect human rights in Europe is strengthened
NHRI Academy, in cooperation with ODIHR.
Leadership Forum on ENNHRI's strategic outlook and thematic priorities.
Working Group meetings and peer exchange, with reference to thematic priorities.
Development of web resource on NHRI responses to securitisation and human rights, and updates to web resource on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs).
Small grants to support member activities at national level.
6. NHRI participation rights in regional mechanisms are strengthened and broadened
Engagement with Council of Europe to implement NHRI commitments in Reykjavik Declaration, Secretary General Roadmap and Committee of Ministers' Recommendation.
Engagement with European Union on NHRIs' role in EU processes.
Development of ENNHRI initiatives to support the execution of European Courts' judgments.
Information sessions for members on opportunities for regional engagement, and impacts of actions.
7. NHRIs and ENNHRI contribute effectively to regional mechanisms
Annual common reporting on human rights and rule of law, and related submissions (such as on execution of ECtHR judgments; EU Charter implementation and strategy; and human rights defenders / civic space).
Facilitation and dissemination of ENNHRI common positions on human rights, democracy and rule of law, including Third-Party Interventions before the European Court of Human Rights.
Facilitation and representation of ENNHRI at EU and Council of Europe procedures, prioritising Artificial Intelligence, and securitisation and human rights

Core Objective Three: Strong and Sustainable Network

8. ENNHRI is a vibrant and accountable network led by its members
Development of new Rules of Procedure for the Board, and induction for new mandates of Board, Chair, and Finance Committee.
Participative strategic planning process, including member meetings and stakeholder consultation.
Further review of ENNHRI Working Group policy, in line with strategic planning.
Development of a process to review active steps taken by members to reach A status accreditation.
Implementation of the gender action plan.
Participation in GANHRI governance and development.
9. ENNHRI is a well-managed network
Optimisation of ENNHRI Hub and updates to ENNHRI website.
Development of ENNHRI communication channels, and coordination with members.
Implementation of data and knowledge management plan, and accessibility of ENNHRI outputs.
Professional development programme for Secretariat staff.
Further development of new financial processes.
10. ENNHRI is a financially sustainable network
Funding applications in line with Strategic and Business Plans.
Enhancing relations with existing and potential donors.
Development of a new Business Plan, in line with the strategic planning process.

Co-funded by
the European Union