ENNHRI European Network of National Human Rights Institutions

Operational Plan 2026

Adopted – 19 November 2025

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Introduction

Following a long and participative process to develop a new Strategic Plan, 2026 is the first year of ENNHRI's new strategic framework. This provides ENNHRI with an opportunity to respond to the more challenging operating context, within the specific mandate and pathway set out by its members. While the final draft of the new Strategic Plan will not be adopted until 19 November 2025, on the occasion of ENNHRI's General Assembly meeting, some clear principles arise from the drafting process to provide direction for ENNHRI's work in 2026.

First, it is clear that 2026 will be a transitional year, allowing for the development of new structures and tools to give life to the new Strategic Plan, including through an Implementation Plan, Business Plan, a new approach to prioritisation, and a comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and learning framework against which to test results.

Secondly, ENNHRI's members have chosen enhanced continuity for much of ENNHRI's work. Members have highlighted the importance of receiving support for NHRI accreditation and when NHRIs come under threat, as well as the strengthening of NHRIs through the accreditation process and complementary regional standards. In addition, Working Groups, the Expert Group on Standards and flagship events, such as the NHRI Academy and Leadership Forum, will continue to support peer exchange, solidarity and learning. Engagement with regional human rights mechanisms will also be strengthened, building partnerships and facilitating NHRIs' individual and collective actions to reinforce the European human rights framework.

Thirdly, the draft Strategic Plan introduces or elevates particular areas of work, such as: a focus on NHRI resilience, as well as NHRI strengthening; recognising the support for civic space and Human Rights Defenders as a freestanding Strategic Priority; underlining the interdependent work on human rights, democracy and rule of law; and a greater use of technology to further strengthen ENNHRI's member participation, governance and management structures.

Finally, while ENNHRI is still awaiting decisions on some grant applications, ENNHRI members have identified the importance of diverse and sustainable funding, including through self-generated funds to build the stability of the network.

Strategic Outcome 1: Strong and resilient NHRIs comply with the UN Paris Principles

ENNHRI's draft Strategic Plan notes that: '*[b]y supporting the accreditation process, contributing to the development of complementary regional instruments, and providing timely assistance to institutions under threat, we help strengthen the ability of NHRIs to withstand challenges and adjust to changing circumstances while continuing to achieve their mandates. In this way, we contribute to a robust, credible and effective NHRI community that is better equipped to uphold human rights, the rule of law and democracy across Europe*.'

In 2026, ENNHRI will continue, enhance and develop its work to achieve strong and resilient NHRIs as set out under each of the following Strategic Priorities.

Strategic Priority 1.1: Support NHRI accreditation in line with the UN Paris Principles

ENNHRI will invest more capacity to supporting members throughout the NHRI accreditation process, from navigating the SCA process to following up on recommendations, through Secretariat and member expertise. In the few European states where a NHRI doesn't exist in law, ENNHRI will support its establishment. ENNHRI will also fulfil its roles and responsibilities in relation to the SCA, both participating as European member and observer, and also inputting to initiatives to strengthen the SCA process.

ENNHRI's Expert Group on NHRI Standards will be developed to provide peer support and member exchange across this Strategic Outcome. In 2026, it will facilitate member participation in the review of SCA General Observations, as well as providing peer support to members on accreditation. The Board will embark on its first review of active steps to reach compliance with the UN Paris Principles, as set out in article 6.5 of ENNHRI Statutes with a view to providing further support to non-A status members.

Strategic Priority 1.2: Strengthen the ability of NHRIs to respond to common and future challenges

ENNHRI will continue to engage with both Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union (EU) to reinforce the support provided to NHRIs to be strong and resilient. ENNHRI will feed in to the CoE Committee of Ministers' review of the implementation of its Recommendation 21/1 on NHRIs, including through its observer status at the CoE's Steering Committee on Human Rights. We will advocate for an EU European Commission Recommendation on NHRIs to help achieve more coherent, consistent and comprehensive awareness and support for NHRIs.

Given the increasingly challenging and unpredictable operating environment for NHRIs across Europe, ENNHRI will collect data on members' needs and practices in relation to crisis, preparedness and resilience. Following review, and exchange at a meeting of the Expert Group on Standards, ENNHRI will develop a short report on its findings and next steps to build NHRI resilience. In addition, ENNHRI will host a Leadership Forum for the Heads of NHRIs to exchange on the most challenging aspects of leading an NHRI, and on effective practices to address common challenges. We will also begin development of an NHRI database.

Strategic Priority 1.3: Provide tailored support to NHRIs under threat

At least one in four of ENNHRI's members faced threats in 2025, and the European landscape is becoming increasingly politicised and polarised. ENNHRI will provide prompt and tailored support to NHRIs under threat, including through Board and peer support. When agreed by the NHRI under threat, ENNHRI will activate the Contact Group for Support to NHRIs, highlighting to regional and international partners the support required.

Strategic Outcome 2: NHRIs strengthen awareness and implementation of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

ENNHRI's draft Strategic Plan notes that: '[*b*]*y enhancing NHRI functions, strengthening engagement with regional mechanisms, and safeguarding civic space, we build the capacities, connections, and protections that enable NHRIs to promote positive narratives and address disinformation, hold governments to account, and contribute to a more effective realisation of human rights, democracy and rule of law*.'

In 2026, the first year of the new Strategic Plan, ENNHRI will continue its NHRI strengthening activities, and also develop new areas of work.

Strategic Priority 2.1: Strengthen NHRI functions to address key human rights challenges

ENNHRI will work to strengthen NHRI functions through peer exchange, tailored training and its Small Grants Programme. It is proposed that our annual NHRI Academy, co-hosted with OSCE/ODIHR, will focus on NHRI resilience. ENNHRI's Working Groups will continue to meet and exchange on key human rights challenges and developments at regional level. The Small Grants Programme will have an emphasis on peer exchange and learning, which will broaden the impacts.

ENNHRI's cooperation with regional partners, including the Contact Group for NHRI Support, will help ensure a coherent programme of capacity building across Europe. Data collected on both multiple mandates and NHRI work on disinformation will be reviewed to support activities in 2027.

Strategic Priority 2.2: Facilitate NHRI contribution to the effectiveness of regional and international human rights mechanisms

ENNHRI's central contribution to regional and international mechanisms will be its annual Rule of Law report, which will focus on the enabling environment for NHRIs, civil society and Human Rights Defenders. It will also cover NHRI actions to support democracy. In addition, ENNHRI will provide submissions, statements and third party interventions, when collective NHRI action could have an impact on key regional human rights developments.

Following the adoption of the new Strategic Plan, ENNHRI will develop a new engagement strategy, recognising the importance of partnerships and alliances. Already in 2026, ENNHRI will engage with the Council of Europe, through a high-level conference on the Democracy Pact, a meeting with the European Court of Human Rights, participation at CDDH and relevant drafting groups, as well as a meeting with the Network of Execution Coordinators. ENNHRI will continue to monitor the 'new conversation' on the Convention system, and respond when required to help protect the system.

Engagement with the EU will focus on follow-up to new strategies touching on the work of NHRIs, including the mid-term review of the Charter Strategy, and the Democracy Shield. We will input to the European Commission's annual review of the EU Charter. ENNHRI will continue to support NHRIs' role in EU enlargement, and input to consultations on the new EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy. We will engage in the ongoing negotiations on the EU's Multi-annual Financial Framework to safeguard investment in EU values.

Strategic Priority 2.3: Enhance NHRI support for an enabling environment for human rights defenders and civil society

As a new Strategic Priority, ENNHRI will develop activities in support of an enabling environment for civil society and Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), drawing on our data collection and peer exchange in 2024 and 2025, and in consultation with members. The work will include a focus on building NHRI capacity to address challenges for civic space, including as part of the national protection mechanism for HRDs, as well as advocacy for regional protection mechanisms for HRDs.

ENNHRI will engage with the EU Civil Society Strategy and HRD Guidelines, as well as the Council of Europe Democracy Pact, to ensure complementary and reinforcing actions in support of civic space.

Strategic Outcome 3: ENNHRI thrives, in solidarity, as a sustainable and future-proof network

ENNHRI's draft Strategic Plan notes that: '*[b]y strengthening governance, enhancing communication, participation, and collaboration, and investing in the operational capacity of the Secretariat, we will ensure that ENNHRI remains a resilient, adaptive, and high-performing network. These measures will enable us to respond effectively to emerging challenges, capitalise on new opportunities, and continue delivering value to our members.*

Given that the Strategic Plan is adopted at end 2025, ENNHRI will work in 2026 to build a solid framework to support participative and impactful implementation.

Strategic Priority 3.1: Enhance NHRI cooperation

ENNHRI will review its tools and structures to support member cooperation and participation in the network. This will include a review of the ENNHRI Hub, online databases and resources, member newsletters, membership policies, Leader induction and the accessibility of resources. We will seek new approaches to efficient collaboration, including through digital tools and technology, to strengthen channels for communication across the network.

ENNHRI will also support NHRI cooperation beyond Europe, through our statutory governance roles at GANHRI and cooperation with other NHRI networks. ENNHRI has elected members to serve on GANHRI's Bureau, including GANHRI Secretary, as well as its Finance Committee, Working Groups and SCA. ENNHRI Secretariat will continue to coordinate with other NHRI networks' management, and support members' participation in GANHRI or cross-regional initiatives, including the TriPartite Partnership with OHCHR and UNDP.

Strategic Priority 3.2: Enhance network governance

ENNHRI invests in strong governance in line with our values of participation, transparency and accountability. The General Assembly, Board and Finance Committee will continue to meet regularly to provide strategic guidance and oversight. Following the adoption of ENNHRI's new Strategic Plan, ENNHRI's governance bodies will feed into and adopt associated frameworks to support its impactful implementation, including an Implementation Plan, a Business Plan, an

updated Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Framework, strategic and financial Risk Registers, a gender audit and a system for periodic prioritisation.

In addition, following the adoption of an updated Working Group Policy, ENNHRI's Working Groups will formally report to the Board and General Assembly. Each ENNHRI Working Group will work on the implementation of the updated policy, including new Terms of Reference to align with the new Strategic Plan and be adopted by the General Assembly. We will note areas where further Guidance is required, with a view to developing a companion Working Group Guidance. The Working Group Chairs will also meet to build synergies.

Strategic Priority 3.3: Enhance operational effectiveness and resources of the network

ENNHRI will also invest in capacity and systems at the Secretariat to ensure operational effectiveness and efficiency to facilitate the work of the network and its day-to-day management. Operational, financial and grant management will be carefully aligned to the Operational and Strategic Plans, with quarterly reporting, review and learning. Staffing will be reviewed to ensure it responds to the new Strategic Plan, and includes effective staff management and professional development.

Network, office and data management will be developed through the scoping of digitalisation, also taking into account internal and external communications. ENNHRI's web and social media will be updated and reviewed to increase network and NHRI visibility. Our communications strategy will be reviewed, in consultation with the Communications Working Group, to align with the new Strategic Plan.

Given the uncertain funding situation during 2026, targeted fundraising will prioritise diverse and self-generated funds to enhance sustainability. Progress and extent of ambition for this Operational Plan will be reviewed on a quarterly basis, to take account of funding realised during the year.

Annex: Key activities by Strategic Outcome

Strategic Outcome 1: Strong and resilient NHRIs comply with the UN Paris Principles

Key Activity	Responsibility
Strategic Priority 1.1: Support NHRI accreditation in line with the UN Paris Principles	
Support NHRIs through the accreditation process	Expert Group on Standards, Secretariat
Support to the establishment of NHRIs	Expert Group on Standards, Board, Secretariat
Participation in SCA sessions	SCA Member and Secretariat Observer
Support follow-up to SCA recommendations	Expert Group on Standards, Secretariat
Review and support steps to reach A status	Board, Secretariat
Strategic Priority 1.2: Strengthen the ability of NHRIs to respond to common and future challenges	
Review of Implementation of CoE Recommendation on NHRIs	Members, Secretariat
Work towards an EC Recommendation on NHRIs	Expert Group on Standards, Board, Secretariat
Data collection and review regarding NHRI resilience	Members, Expert Group on Standards (meeting in-person), Secretariat
Begin development of NHRI database	Secretariat
Leadership Forum	NHRI Leaders, Board, Secretariat
Strategic Priority 1.3: Provide tailored support to NHRIs under threat	
Tailored support to NHRIs under threat	Board, Secretariat
Liaison with Contact Group for Support to NHRIs	Secretariat
Planning for future work on visibility and ranking of support	Secretariat

Strategic Outcome 2: NHRIs strengthen awareness and implementation of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

Key Activity	Responsibility
Strategic Priority 2.1: Strengthen NHRI functions to address key human rights challenges	
NHRI Academy, in cooperation with OSCE/ODIHR	Member participants, Secretariat
Working Group meetings and peer exchange	Working Group Chairs and Members, Secretariat
Small Grants Programme, including peer exchange	Members participating, Board, Finance Committee, Secretariat
Collection of data: mandates, and disinformation	Members, Secretariat
Meeting of Contact Group on support to NHRIs	Secretariat
Strategic Priority 2.2: Facilitate NHRI contribution to the effectiveness of regional and international human rights mechanisms	
ENNHRI Rule of Law Reports 2026	Members, Secretariat
Ad hoc submissions, statements and interventions to regional level mechanisms	Working Groups, Board, GA, Secretariat
Development of new engagement strategy	Members, Board, Secretariat
Council of Europe – conference on Democracy Pact, meeting with Court and meeting with Network of Execution Coordinators	Members, Board, Secretariat
EU – engagement on Charter Strategy, Democracy Shield, new mandates for NHRIs, enlargement processes and MFF	Members, Board, Secretariat
Strategic Priority 2.3: Enhance NHRI support for an enabling environment for human rights defenders and civil society	
Collect and review data to develop new work	Members, Secretariat
Engagement on EU civil society strategy and CoE Democracy Pact	Members, Board, Secretariat

Strategic Outcome 3: ENNHRI thrives, in solidarity, as a sustainable and future-proof network

Key Activities	Responsibility
Strategic Priority 3.1: Enhance NHRI cooperation	
Review and develop tools for network cooperation	Secretariat
Participate in GANHRI governance	GANHRI office holders, Secretariat
GANHRI cooperation	Chair, GANHRI Secretary, Board, Secretariat
Strategic Priority 3.2: Enhance network governance	
Governance meetings and processes, including reporting to members	GA, Board, Finance Committee, Working Group Chairs, Secretariat
Development of Implementation Plan, Business Plan and approach to prioritization for new Strategic Plan	General Assembly, Board, Secretariat
Develop new monitoring, evaluation and learning framework, and risk registers, for new Strategic Plan	Board, Secretariat
Implement new Working Group policy	Working Groups, Board, GA and Secretariat
Develop scoping to update gender action plan	Secretariat
Strategic Priority 3.3: Enhance operational effectiveness and resources of the network	
Operational, financial and grant management	Secretariat
Human resources management and development	Secretariat
Data management, including scoping of digitalisation	Secretariat
Review Communications Strategy, and updates to website, social media and online databases	Communications Working Group, Secretariat
Secure more diverse and sustainable funding	Board, Finance Committee, Fundraising Group, Secretariat

Co-funded by the European Union