



Contribution by Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to the 2026 Rule of Law Report - European Commission

Rule of law and human rights

The ‘rule of law’ is a concept at the heart of the United Nations’ mission. It refers to a principle of governance which is consistent with international human rights standards ([S/2004/616](#)). There is no rule of law within societies if human rights are not protected and human rights cannot be protected in societies without a strong rule of law. This interlinkage is reiterated by the UN Secretary-General in his [New Vision for the Rule of Law](#):

“Human rights and the rule of law are mutually reinforcing – the advancement of the rule of law is essential for the protection of all human rights, and human rights are central to the rule of law.”

Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), also known as UN Human Rights Office, is the main human rights entity of the UN to protect and promote all human rights for everyone everywhere. The High Commissioner for Human Rights leads OHCHR. He is the principal human rights official of the United Nations.

OHCHR is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote and protect the enjoyment and full realization, by all people, of all human rights. As part of its mandate, OHCHR works to mainstream human rights to strengthen the rule of law ([Management Plan 2024 - 2027](#)).

Established in 2009, OHCHR Regional Office for Europe (ROE) aims to advance the protection and promotion of human rights in the European Union and its Member States. ROE works to mainstream international human rights standards to strengthen the rule of law in the EU by engaging in and contributing to the European Commission’s Rule of Law Report. ROE furthermore promotes the UN human rights mechanisms and processes by giving their work visibility at the regional level.

OHCHR’s contribution

The current submission consists of a compilation of findings and recommendations contained in reports of UN human rights monitoring mechanisms including treaty-based mechanism (international human rights treaties), and Charter-based mechanism (special procedures and the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council). It further draws on statements and reports by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the High Commissioner’s office (see diagram on the next page).

In line with the scope of the European Commission’s Rule of Law Report, this contribution covers 27 Member States of the European Union and four candidate States, namely, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

UN human rights monitoring mechanisms

The below human rights bodies review the following nine core United Nations human rights treaties:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
- International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

Treaty-based mechanism

Treaty monitoring bodies

- Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)
- Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESRC)
- Human Rights Committee (CCPR)
- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- Committee Against Torture (CAT)
- Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW)
- Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT)
- Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED)

UN Charter-based mechanism

UN Human Rights Council

A subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly and the main intergovernmental body in the UN responsible for human rights.

Special Procedures

Independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective.

Universal Periodic Review

State-led mechanism that conducts a peer review of the human rights situation of each UN Member State

Human Rights Council-mandated Investigative Bodies

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provides expertise and support to all of the different human rights bodies.

Human rights and rule of law (4 pillars of Rule of Law Report)

Pillar 1: Justice System

There is no true respect for the rule of law without a judicial power guaranteeing compliance therewith. Judges guarantee compliance with laws and with it the reality of democratic coexistence. The duty to promote equality among all persons, especially to ensure that everyone has the right to access justice on an equal basis with others, rests with the judiciary. Guaranteeing access to justice is indispensable to democratic governance and the rule of law, as well as to combating inequality and exclusion.

Respecting the rule of law through fostering the separation of powers and the independence of justice ensures protection of human rights. The judiciary is the ultimate guarantors of human rights. However, at the same time, judges, prosecutors and lawyers are subject to attacks and violations of their rights, including threats, intimidation, external interference in conducting their professional activities, arbitrary detention, prosecution, and killings. These attacks threaten the impartiality and independence of the judiciary and the legal profession and in turn, deter their role as guarantors of human rights and the rule of law.

For more info:

- [Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary](#)
- [Human rights in the administration of justice: a manual on human rights for judges, prosecutors and lawyers](#)
- [International principles and guidelines on access to justice for persons with disabilities](#)
- [General Recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice \(CEDAW/C/GC/33\)](#)
- [Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers](#)

Pillar 3: Media Freedom

Free, independent, plural and diverse media are a core component of the right to freedom of expression, a cornerstone of democratic societies and plays an essential role in strengthening the rule of law. Journalists and the media are crucial to ensure transparency and accountability for public and governmental authorities.

For more info:

- [OHCHR and the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity](#)
- [Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression](#)
- [General comment No.34 on Article 19: Freedoms of opinion and expression \(CCPR/C/GC/34\)](#)

Pillar 2: Anti-corruption

Corruption has a destructive effect on State institutions and it undermines the functioning and legitimacy of institutions and processes, the rule of law and ultimately the State itself. In particular, corruption effects on the capacity of States to respect, protect and fulfil human rights particularly of those persons and groups in situation of vulnerability and marginalization.

Corruption pose a major challenge to many societies as they divert public revenues and cripple public budgets that should provide healthcare, housing, education, and other essential services, they undermine States' ability to meet their minimum core obligations and their pre-existing legal obligations to maximize all available resources to respect, protect and fulfil human rights.

For more info:

- [Corruption and human rights | OHCHR](#)
- [OHCHR Key messages on the negative impact of corruption in the enjoyment of human rights](#)

Pillar 4: Checks and Balances

Civic space is the environment that enables civil society to play a role in the political, economic and social life of our societies. In particular, civic space allows individuals and groups to contribute to policy-making that affects their lives, including by: (1) accessing information; (2) engaging in dialogue; (3) expressing dissent or disagreement, and (4) joining together to express their views. An open and pluralistic civic space that guarantees freedom of expression and opinion as well as freedom of assembly and association, is a prerequisite for making development and peace sustainable.

For more info:

- [OHCHR and protecting and expanding civic space](#)
- [Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders](#)
- [The Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#)



Greece: Inside the contribution

- **Period of contribution: January – December 2025**
- **Contents of contribution and additional information:**
 - The special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council sent a communication letter to Greece ([GRC 1/2025](#)) dated 20 February 2025 on the suspension of the license to practice law of Ms. Electra-Leda Koutra following the suspension allegedly connected to or in retribution for her work and engagement in human rights.
 - The special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council sent a communication letter to Greece ([GRC 2/2025](#)) dated 16 September 2025 on public statements by government officials targeting human rights organisations working in the field of migration and recently introduced restrictions on the right to seek asylum. [A response](#) was received (24 November 2025).
- **Summary of information which could be of particular relevance to the Rule of Law report:**
 - Under pillar 4 on checks and balances, relevant findings and recommendations (independent authorities – NHRIs and the enabling framework for civil society) were issued by UN human rights mechanisms.
- **Forthcoming relevant information (January – May 2026):**
 - The UN Committee against Torture will consider the State Party report from Greece ([CAT/C/GRC/8](#)) in a future session ([date to be confirmed](#)).
- **Resources:**
 - Rule of Law in Europe | [OHCHR](#)
 - Country page on [Greece](#)
 - [Universal Human Rights Index \(UHRI\)](#) allows you to explore over 230.000 observations and recommendations made by the international human rights protection system (treaty bodies, special procedures and the Universal Periodic Review).

Pillar IV: Checks and Balances

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Independent authorities – national human rights institutions (NHRIs)

The special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council sent a letter of allegation ([GRC 1/2025](#)) to Greece concerning the suspension of the license to practice law of Ms. Electra-Leda Koutra following the suspension allegedly connected to or in retribution for her work and engagement in human rights:

- On 4 November 2024, the Supreme Court President and the Prosecutor of the Supreme Court issued a joint announcement to judicial and prosecutorial officials regarding the application of the established case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) on individual complaints by detainees regarding their detention conditions in Greece. It stated that, in view of the fact that at the beginning of the year 2025, 1,287 individual appeals of detainees in Greek Penitentiaries or Greek Police Detention Centres were to be heard before the ECtHR.
- Ms. Koutra represents more than half of the prisoners with ECtHR applications pending judgment. The information suggests that the 2015 disciplinary action was brought in order to interfere with her work as a lawyer in ECtHR cases. Ms. Koutra informed the ECtHR about the disciplinary punishment through a letter because she had, and still has, deadlines for ongoing proceedings that were to expire within the period that her license to practice law was suspended.
- [The special procedures mandate-holders] are concerned that the suspension of the license of Ms. Koutra may be connected to or in retribution for her work and engagement in human rights, more specifically because of her handling of a large number of human rights cases and the consequence these cases could have on Greece. [They] are concerned that this suspension may serve as a precursor to the threat of disbarment and acts of intimidation against Ms. Koutra. If confirmed, these facts would be in breach of the guarantees to which lawyers are entitled in order to perform their professional functions without any threat, intimidation, harassment or interference, and without suffering, or being threatened with, prosecution or any administrative or disciplinary sanctions for actions undertaken in accordance with professional duties and ethical standards. [They] are deeply concerned about the protracted duration of the disciplinary proceedings against Ms. Koutra, as it has significantly impacted on her ability to carry out her professional duties.
- Additionally, [the special procedures mandate-holders] are concerned about information that reports a hostile attitude in the court room, which could amount to violation of the guarantee of a fair hearing. The facts here suggest that she was deprived of the rights recognized by principle 27 of the Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, which include the right for lawyers to have a fair, expeditious hearing before an impartial disciplinary committee.

The enabling framework for civil society – measures regarding the framework for civil society organisations and human rights defenders

The special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council sent a communication letter to Greece ([GRC 2/2025](#)) dated 16 September 2025 concerning public statements by government officials targeting human rights organisations working in the field of migration and recently introduced restrictions on the right to seek asylum:

- On 21 August 2025, media articles appeared in Greece reporting that the Minister of Migration and Asylum of Greece, Mr. Thanos Plevris, intends to establish a working group to revise the conditions for acceding to or remaining on the Ministry's registry for NGOs working in the field of migration and asylum. The reports, based on unnamed sources, indicated that under the measures being prepared by the Minister, NGOs could be removed from the registry if they oppose the government's migration policy, bring legal challenges against decisions of State bodies in the field of asylum, or misuse funds.
- [The special procedures mandate-holders notes that they] fear that the statements by Mr. Plevris amount to an attack on the legitimate work of these organisations in defence of the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, and to be designed to intimidate them and delegitimise their human rights work in the eyes of the public. [Their] fears in this sense are compounded by the repeated denigration of the work of people acting in defence of the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Greece, including lawyers, as raised in previous communications addressed to [Greece] on the matter and the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders following her official country visit to Greece. The allegations, if proven to be true, would confirm concerns expressed in these communications and the Special Rapporteur's report as to the necessity and proportionality of the NGO Registry of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, and its potential to be used to restrict, sanction and halt the work of human rights organisations in the country.