



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](#)



Latvia: Inside the contribution

- **Period of contribution: January – December 2025**
- **Contents of contribution and additional information:**
 - The UN Human Rights Committee adopted its concluding observation on Latvia ([CCPR/C/LVA/CO/4](#)) on 14 July 2025 and the report was published on 3 September 2025.
 - The special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council sent a communication letter to Latvia ([LVA 1/2025](#)) dated 7 November 2025 on observations concerning the decision of the Parliament (Saeima) on 31 October 2025 to withdraw from the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (hereafter the Istanbul Convention) and the consequent refusal to sign the bill on 3 November 2025 by the President of the Republic.
 - The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a [press release](#) “UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk gravely alarmed by steps to withdraw from anti-personnel mine ban convention” on 2 July 2025.
- **Summary of information which could be of particular relevance to the Rule of Law report:**
 - Under pillar 1 on justice system, relevant findings and recommendations (independence – appointment and selection of judges) were issued by UN human rights mechanisms.
 - Under pillar 2 on Anti- corruption, relevant findings and recommendations (the institutional framework capacity to fight against corruption) were issued by UN human rights mechanisms.
 - Under pillar 3 on media freedom, relevant findings and recommendations (framework for journalists' protection, transparency and access to documents) were issued by UN human rights mechanisms.
 - Under pillar 4 on checks and balances, relevant findings and recommendations (independent authorities - NHRIs) were issued by UN human rights mechanisms.
- **Forthcoming relevant information (January – May 2026):**
 - The Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review will review Latvia at its 4th cycle, [52nd session](#) (4 - 15 May 2026).
 - The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will consider the State Party report from Latvia ([CRPD/C/LVA/2-3](#)) in a future session ([date to be confirmed](#)).
- **Resources:**
 - Rule of Law in Europe | [OHCHR](#)
 - Country page on [Latvia](#)
 - [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 I: 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:

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- [Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers](#)

Independence – appointment and selection of judges

The UN Human Rights Committee welcomes efforts to improve the administration of justice and notes that judicial independence in the State Party is generally respected. However, it is concerned about reports of politicization and corruption within the judiciary, and about the risk of political influence in the process of appointment to the Supreme Court (arts. 2 and 14). ([CCPR/C/LVA/CO/4](#), para. 31)

The State Party should take all measures necessary, in law and in practice, to safeguard the independence and impartiality of the judiciary, and guarantee that judges and their staff can operate without any pressure or interference from the legislative and executive branches. In this regard, it should ensure that the procedures for the selection, appointment, promotion and removal of judges, including the appointment of Supreme Court judges, are transparent and impartial and comply with the Covenant and international standards such as the Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary. ([CCPR/C/LVA/CO/4](#), para. 32)

Pillar II: 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](#)

The institutional framework capacity to fight against corruption

Acknowledging the measures adopted to combat corruption, including the large number of corruption investigations and the development of the Corruption Prevention and Combating Action Plan 2023–2025, the UN Human Rights Committee is nevertheless concerned by reports that corruption persists, especially in the public sector. The Committee is further concerned about the significant overlap among the mandates of existing anti-corruption bodies in the State Party, and that the launch of the interest representation register and declaration systems under the Law of Transparency of Interest Representation (the law on lobbying) has been postponed from 2025 to 2028 (arts. 2 and 25). ([CCPR/C/LVA/CO/4](#), para. 9)

The State Party should increase its efforts to prevent and eradicate corruption at all levels, including in government and in the judiciary. It should redouble its efforts to investigate all allegations of corruption promptly, thoroughly, independently and impartially and ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted and, if convicted, punished with penalties commensurate with the gravity of the offence and that victims are provided with adequate reparation. The State Party should also:

- (a) Continue the consolidation of the anti-corruption activities in the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau to avoid duplication in and fragmentation of the national anti-corruption framework
- (b) Expedite the operationalization of the interest representation register and declaration systems. ([CCPR/C/LVA/CO/4](#), para. 10)

Pillar III: 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 \(CCPR/C/GC/34\)](#)

Framework for journalists' protection, transparency and access to documents

The UN Human Rights Committee is concerned about legislative and policy changes, such as amendments to the Electronic Mass Media Law, in 2022, and to the National Security Concept, in 2023, which reportedly limit non-Latvian language content in public media. The Committee is further concerned that as of 1 January 2026, public media will be restricted to Latvian and languages belonging to the European cultural space, which in practice may exclude the Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian languages. The Committee has also received reports of inadequate responses to a worrying increase in online harassment and intimidation of journalists, such as the 2012 assault on journalist Leonīds Jākobsons, whose case was closed due to the inability to identify the perpetrators (art. 19). ([CCPR/C/LVA/CO/4](#), para. 43)

The State Party should take all measures necessary to guarantee that everyone can exercise the right to freedom of expression, in accordance with article 19 of the Covenant and the Committee's general comment No. 34 (2011) on the freedoms of opinion and expression. In particular, the State Party should:

(a) Reconsider the restrictions introduced into the Electronic Mass Media Law and the National Security Concept

(b) Expand efforts to increase the public availability of information and programming, in the media and online, in non-Latvian languages.

(c) Prevent and combat all acts of harassment and intimidation against journalists and guarantee the effective protection of journalists, ensure that all allegations of harassment and intimidation are investigated, that perpetrators are brought to justice and appropriately punished and that victims receive appropriate reparations. ([CCPR/C/LVA/CO/4](#), para. 44)

Pillar IV: 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.

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Independent authorities - independence, resources, capacity and powers of national human rights institutions (NHRIs)

The UN Human Rights Committee welcomes the re-accreditation with A status of the Office of the Ombudsman. While the Committee takes note of the efforts made to strengthen the institution, including through legislative amendments to the Ombudsman Law, it is concerned that certain recommendations made by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, for example regarding the need to strengthen the functional immunity of the Ombudsman, have not been addressed. The Committee notes with concern that although the State Party has designated the Office of the Ombudsman as the national preventive mechanism, it has not established a structurally independent unit within the institution equipped with its own staff and budget (art. 2). ([CCPR/C/LVA/CO/4](#), para. 7)

The State Party should continue to ensure that the Office of the Ombudsman complies fully with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles) and is able to carry out its mandates effectively and independently. The State Party should also:

(a) Promptly implement the recommendations of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, including by providing functional immunity for the Ombudsman, establishing limits on the Ombudsman's terms of office, and providing for an independent and objective dismissal process

(b) Ensure that the national preventive mechanism operates independently and is provided with its own financial and human resources. ([CCPR/C/LVA/CO/4](#), para. 8)

Others – participation in public affairs

The UN Human Rights Committee is concerned about the underrepresentation of women in political life, including at the local level, and by the fact that most political parties have not adopted targeted measures to promote the participation of women in electoral processes. The Committee notes that some polling stations are reportedly not accessible to persons with disabilities. The State Party further informed the Committee that pursuant to the Constitution, only citizens can participate in elections at any level in Latvia, and that acquiring citizenship is the sole mechanism for affording individuals the right to vote. ([CCPR/C/LVA/CO/4](#), para. 45)

In accordance with article 25 of the Covenant and the Committee's general comment No. 25 (1996) on participation in public affairs and the right to vote, the State Party should ensure the full enjoyment of the right to participate in public affairs, including by women and persons with disabilities. It should also take measures to promote participation in public affairs by long-term residents who are not citizens, including by considering the possibility of allowing them to take part in municipal elections. ([CCPR/C/LVA/CO/4](#), para. 46)