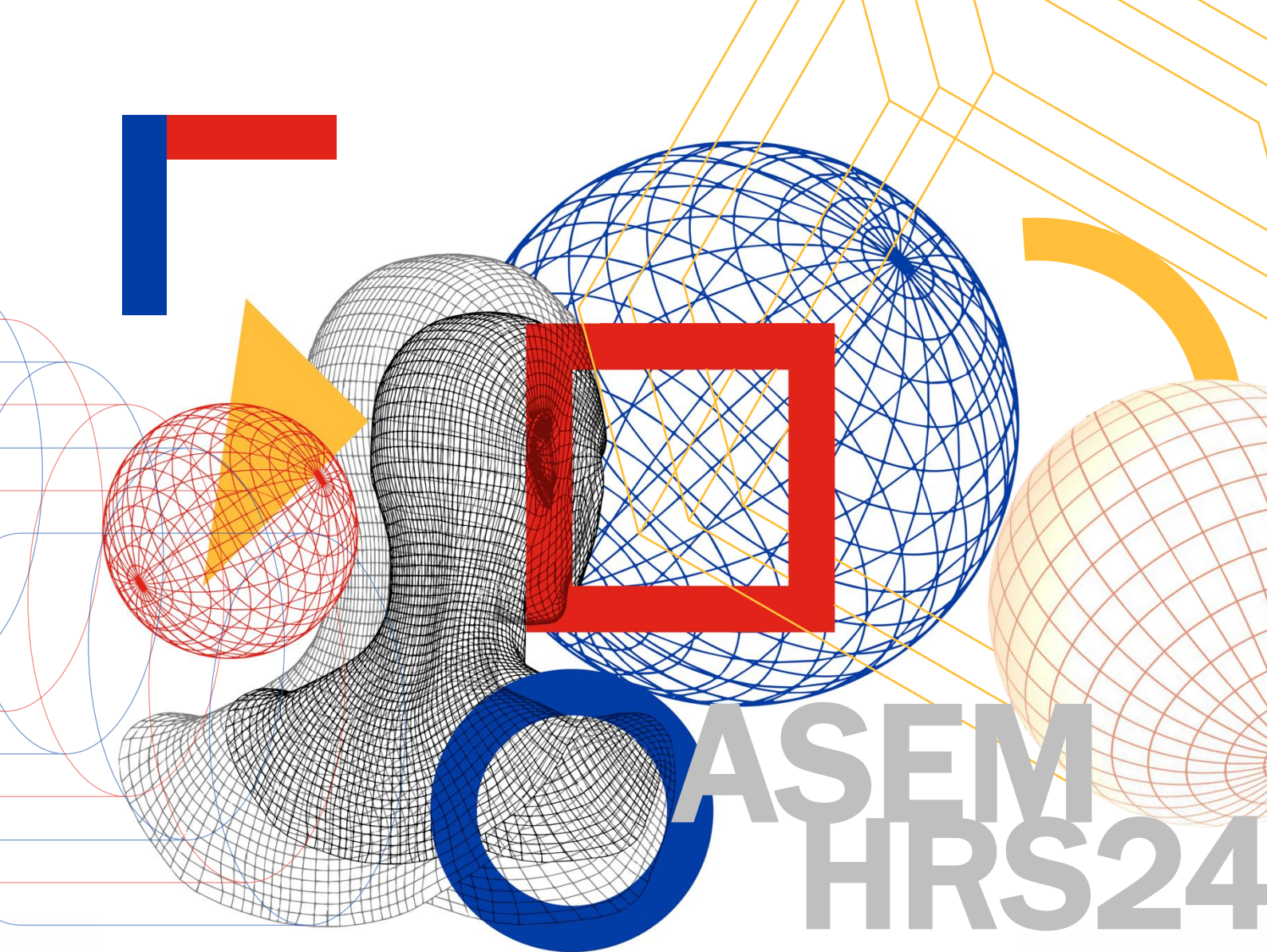




BACKGROUND PAPER



ASIA-EUROPE AND THE FUTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS: BRIDGE-BUILDING FOR SHARED PATHWAYS

Vitit Muntarbhorn¹ and Domenico Zipoli²

¹Lead Rapporteur

²Co-Rapporteur

The 24th Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights (ASEMHRS24) 12–14 October 2026 | Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

ORGANISER & HOST



CO-FUNDED BY



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Vitit Muntarbhorn (lead rapporteur for ASEF conference) and Domenico Zipoli (co-rapporteur) (for ASEF conference: Dissemination version Sep-Oct 2026)

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Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AICHR	ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights
AO	Advisory Opinion
APF	Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEANAPOL	ASEAN Chiefs of Police
ASEF	Asia-Europe Foundation
ASEM	Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)
BAU	Business as Usual
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BTR	Biennial Transparency Reports
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
COP	Conference of the Parties
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CT	Country Team
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
ENNHRI	European Network of NHRIs
ESC	Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
EU	European Union
FRA	Fundamental Rights Agency (EU)
FRA EFRIS	EU Fundamental Rights Information System
GA	General Assembly
GANHRI	Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GP	Guiding Principles (on Business and Human Rights)
GST	Global Stocktake

HURIDOCs	Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IMPACT	IMPACT Open Source Software
ITLOS	International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea
LRG	Local and Regional Governments
LT-LEDS	Long-term Low Emission Development Strategies
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreements
MOPAN	Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network
NAP	National Action Plans (on Business and Human Rights)
NbS	Nature-based Solutions
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
NHRIs	National Human Rights Institutions
NMIRFs	National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up
NRTD	National Recommendations Tracking Database
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
OPCAT	Optional Protocol (Convention against Torture)
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PC	Pacific Community
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
RBP	Responsible Business Practice
Res	Resolution
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SC	Security Council
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEANF	Southeast Asia National Human Rights Institutions Forum
SIMORE Plus	Sistema de Monitoreo de Recomendaciones en Derechos Humanos
SLAPP	Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation
SPC RRRT	Pacific Community's Regional Rights Resource Team
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TOR	Terms of Reference
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UEFA EURO	Union of European Football Associations - European Championship
UID4U	Unity in Diversity for Universality
UN	United Nations
UNECE	UN Economic Commission for Europe
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGP	UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHRC	UN Human Rights Council
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
Uwazi	Name of open-source software
V, vs	versus



ASIA-EUROPE AND THE FUTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS: BRIDGE-BUILDING FOR SHARED PATHWAYS

BACKGROUND PAPER

Vitit Muntarbhorn and **Domenico Zipoli**

Abstract

The 24th Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights is co-organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, with financial support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, and in partnership with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, and the European Union.

The 24th Seminar is co-hosted by the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia.

Disclaimer: The contents of this document are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the organisers of the 24th Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights,

This is the background paper for the forthcoming Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights in Mongolia, supported by the Asia-Europe Foundation. Its theme is 'The Future of Human Rights – from Local to Global'. The paper bears in mind the current dilemmas facing multilateralism while identifying windows of opportunity for constructive change. It adopts a three-lens perspective: global, regional and national. The global lens looks at possibilities of repositioning the international human rights protection system under the current UN80 Initiative and related reforms. It welcomes changes to enable the UN to be more effective, coherent and accessible. This is followed by an examination of regional systems in Europe and Asia, including lessons

learned in enabling access to justice and remedies in various forms. The final section reviews developments at the national level, including on follow-up action after the Vienna World Conference in 1993 and cross-cutting innovations under the new UN initiative titled 'Global Alliance for Human Rights'. In conclusion, it offers various recommendations for the future, including on transformative processes, laws/policies/practices, and cooperation between the two regions.

1. Introduction

The 24th Informal Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Seminar on Human Rights welcomes a variety of stakeholders from across Asia and Europe to examine how human rights systems or frameworks can adapt to contemporary challenges while opening windows of opportunity to the future, as bridge-building for shared pathways, targeting three levels of catalytic action: global, regional and national. Hosted in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia – in October 2026, an ideal venue given its position between the two regions - the Seminar continues nearly three decades of open, inclusive dialogue under the ASEM Human Rights Seminar series. This year's theme - THE FUTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS – FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL – invites a very timely reflection on the current state of affairs with a critically insightful eye and future-ready lens.

Its premise is anchored on the following prospects:

- Increased awareness and shared understanding of challenges and opportunities shaping the future of human rights protection across local, regional, and global levels.
- Identification of gaps, priorities, and forward-looking recommendations for action across government, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), civil society, academia, and international organisations.
- Strengthened collaboration and networks among ASEM partners to support ongoing cooperation, knowledge-sharing, and joint action across Asia and Europe.

2. The World in Transformation

"A soul knows a soul": Saami wisdom

*"Dimana ada kemauan, di situ ada jalan (Where there is a will, there is a way)":
East Asian wisdom.*

The world is at a pivotal juncture. The term '**polycrisis**' encapsulates the tempestuous winds reverberating across the globe and in the Asia-Europe regions. Multiple wars, fractured multilateralism, energy disruption, climate-related degradation, catastrophic natural disasters, shrinking civic space, huge displacements, non-democratic governance, development regression, rapacious technological imbalances, throttled aid, fragmented trade and finance, extensive indebtedness, and other bottlenecks. The polycrisis also includes declining public trust in democratic institutions and political leaders; the perception, especially among some young people, that 'they are all the same' risks deepening disengagement and apathy. All these maladies impact on the lives and well-being of billions of people, testing the global-local systems to the seams. The protection of human rights (or the lack of it) is a fragile soul in this panorama of **precarity**.

Yet, therein lies also an opportunity, perhaps a '**poly-opportunity**' to reform, realign, revitalise and reposition. Fortuitously and intuitively, Asia and Europe are at the crossroads where hand in hand, empathy, dexterity and creativity with a will can sway the regions and the world to navigate the winds of change, to enable transformative change anchored on a sense of humanity with a way to **posterity**.

In this endeavour, there are age-old wisdoms which still inspire constructive actions. There are key insights from Asia. 'Ahimsa' or non-violence can be traced back to the foundational texts such as the Mahabharata, resonating spiritually through the centuries to Mahatma Gandhi.ⁱ Zakat, a key principle of Islam, preaches that the rich must hand over annually a part of their resources to the poor, paralleling the universal call to 'Love thy Neighbour', with a sharing and caring community.ⁱⁱ Around 250 BC, Emperor Asoka who brought Buddhism into Southeast Asia issued various edicts to protect humanity in times of war and also advocated for humane treatment of animals.ⁱⁱⁱ Interestingly, in Mongolian history, governance under Genghis Khan whose territory stretched far and wide depended on Statecraft embedding freedom of religion across the lands as the relationship between the ruler and the ruled.^{iv}

More recently, gender-related advocacy was motivated inspiringly by this maxim from China: 'Women hold up half the sky'.^v In the meantime, there is an exhortation from a Japanese proverb – 'Fall seven times, stand up eight' (nana korobi yaoki) - which invites resilience.^{vi} Nearby, a Korean saying invites partnerships by voicing that 'two heads are better than one' (baekjijangdo matdeulmyeon natda).^{vii}

Along the Mediterranean and interlinking with Asia, the caution uttered by Homer's epic poem, The Odyssey – 'Of all creatures that breathe and move upon the earth, nothing is bred that is weaker than man.' – sounded/sounds the call for a humane shelter in the human journey across time, race and space.^{viii}

In essence, European contributions to human rights are best understood as a progression rather than a single origin story. The Icelandic Alþingi, founded in 930, represents an early tradition of government through assembly and law. Magna Carta, sealed in England in 1215, established the enduring principle that the monarch was subject to law and later became a reference point for due process and protection against arbitrary power, despite its initially narrow social reach. The English Bill of Rights of 1689 constrained royal power by requiring parliamentary authority for measures such as suspending laws and raising revenue, while protecting free elections and parliamentary speech. The French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 placed liberty, legal equality, national sovereignty and safeguards against arbitrary punishment at the centre of the political order. What matters then is that the two regions, Asia and Europe, with long histories valuing life and the dignity of humanity, respectful of Nature, in that common ecosystem, can and should be the propellers of interchange and of hope. Stocktaking of the situation should be done to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the human rights protection system through a multilevel lens - to

identify lessons learned and good practices, and to impel preferred steps to the future: global, regional and national.

3. Global

'WE THE PEOPLES': United Nations (UN) Charter

3.1. Asian Gateway

It was only after the Second World War that there emerged a comprehensive formulation of human rights standards and related monitoring mechanisms in the form of UN-related human rights treaties/Conventions and UN Charter-based mechanisms. ^{ix}It was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which began the momentum for this process. Together with European and other members of the drafting Committee, various Asians contributed to its drafting process. ^xTo their credit, a step-by-step approach was advocated, gradually progressing from a foundational Declaration to binding international treaties on human rights. They also invoked reflections and practices linked with values from the Asian region. In this sense, the stronger foundation is co-authorship across regions: universal standards emerged through negotiation among different intellectual, political and cultural experiences, and their legitimacy continues to depend on that openness.

Today, there are 9 core international human rights treaties, coupled with Protocols, and related monitoring Committees, in addition to various mechanisms under the UN Charter. ^{xi}There are other international instruments which have impact on the realisation of human rights, not necessarily in the form of treaties but in the form of declarations, global policies and plans. The latter's soft law approach can be seen from the adoption of the UN General Assembly (GA) Resolution on the Right to Development in the 1980s^{xii}, the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights ('Vienna Programme of Action')^{xiii}, the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015-30: Agenda 2030,^{xiv} and the more recent UN GA Declaration on the Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment^{xv}. They are accompanied by the gamut of commitments through global conferencing, such as the 2024 UN Summit of the Future resulting in the Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations.^{xvi}

The range of hard and soft law instruments is important, precisely because participation and commitment from Asian countries vary substantially in this regard. The only treaty to which all Asian countries are parties is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). There is near universal membership of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The record varies in relation to the other hard law instruments. For instance, some countries are still hesitant to ratify the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), precisely because political rights such as freedom of expression and peaceful assembly have an affinity with democratic governance, a delicate issue in some national settings. Ratification of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) is also mixed across Asia: many States are parties, while several have not ratified it and acceptance of its Optional Protocol remains limited. Conversely, the Asian region is not only the most populous region globally but also it houses the biggest democracies with a predominance of various religions. On a salutary note, they all participate in the Universal Periodic Review under the UN Charter-based mechanisms and the record has been concrete on many fronts. Some countries are also opening up more to the work of the UN Special Procedures, such as UN Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups.

Especially since the World Conference on Human Rights, Asian countries have followed up the Vienna Programme of Action constructively by setting up human rights commissions (as discussed in the regional and national sections below). The debate on values has also been moderated by the convergent tone and substance of that Programme of Action; 'while the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.'^{xvii} In this spirit, Asia can look forward to helping elevate international standards,

especially with some of the precepts and practices voiced earlier such as Ahimsa, while reinforcing those national practices compliant with international standards and addressing progressively those practices which diverge therefrom.

On a welcome note, all Asian countries have taken on board the SDGs more readily than some of the human rights treaties, and this has led to national and regional development plans, actions and assessments, at times covering human rights. While all 17 Goals have bearing on human rights, Goal 16 is closely related thereto and the later sections of this background paper or study will delve into the record of implementation via this soft law instrument. Countries have also participated by sending in Voluntary National Reviews under the monitoring process – to the high-level panel housed under the UN Economic and Social Council, with gentle monitoring of a generalised kind.

Given that environmental issues and climate change are very much at the top of the global, regional and national agendas interlinked with human survival, it is encouraging to note that most Asian countries are parties to the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA) or treaties, such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the more recent Paris Agreement, aiming to cap global warming at no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius of the pre-industrial phase.^{xviii} As will be seen below, the climate change question has become an exponential issue both regionally and nationally and it is interwoven with human rights. Asian countries have participated well in the various Conferences of the Parties (COPs) concerning climate change, with their submission of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). These contributions target their climate change-related ambitions, at least in regard to decarbonisation and related mitigation, on the one hand, and adaptation planning and action, on the other hand. This phenomenon is thus an innovative entry point for a human rights-based approach, anchored on non-discrimination. Measures are also needed to tackle vulnerabilities affecting various groups and communities, including gender, age, ethnicity, displacements and disabilities, while not forgetting loss and damage.

Importantly, partly because of the threat to their existence, such as sea level rise, submersion and related displacements, Asian countries, complementing Pacific countries, have been very active to propel judicial advisory opinions at the global level via the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the issue of climate change and the various obligations binding on States with implications for other stakeholders, such as the business sector and displaced populations. The ITLOS AO lays down the obligation to reduce greenhouse gases impacting on the oceans.^{xix} The ICJ AO reminds States of their obligations under the multilateral environmental treaties and advances the position that there is also customary law on the issue, imposing on States the obligation to take action and to cooperate.^{xx} If there is damage, there should be redress, and access to remedies should cover a variety of measures responsive to the affected parties.

3.2. European Gateway

Viewed from a European perspective, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 itself also resists a Eurocentric account. René Cassin of France played a prominent drafting role, but he worked alongside Peng-chun Chang of China, Charles Malik of Lebanon, Hansa Mehta of India and others. The resulting text was neither a European export nor the expression of one philosophical tradition.^{xxi}

At regional level, the European Convention on Human Rights of 1950 made certain rights in the Universal Declaration legally binding, while the European Social Charter of 1961 developed a complementary framework for social and economic rights.^{xxii} These instruments did not complete the project. Their evolution through protocols, interpretation, monitoring and domestic implementation shows that protection is built over time and can also regress.

Europe also sought to connect UN standards with regional adjudication and domestic law. The relationship is two-way: universal standards reshaped European law, while European practice sometimes informed wider interpretation.^{xxiii} Regional protection is strongest when it reinforces rather than narrows or substitutes for the universal framework.

European participation in the work of the UN Human Rights Mechanisms is broad, but not complete. All European UN Member States take part in the Universal Periodic Review, and the European Union's accession to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities showed that a regional integration organisation can itself assume human rights treaty obligations. Yet no EU Member State has ratified the Migrant Workers Convention; adherence to optional protocols and individual communications procedures also varies. Formal acceptance is not the same as compliance: migration and asylum policy, structural discrimination, compliance with applicable extraterritorial human rights obligations, pressure on civic space and weaknesses in the rule of law continue to test implementation.^{xxiv} The relevant measure is therefore not treaty count, but whether international scrutiny leads to changes in law and practice and to effective remedies.

The Vienna framework encouraged the establishment and strengthening of national human rights institutions. Across Europe, these form part of a wider institutional landscape that includes ombuds institutions, equality bodies and national preventive mechanisms. They connect UN recommendations with regional oversight and domestic implementation, although their mandates, independence, resources, as well as NHRIs' compliance with the Paris Principles remain uneven.^{xxv} The SDGs have similarly been incorporated into EU and national planning, supported by Voluntary National Reviews and the EU's own voluntary review.^{xxvi} Europe's experience suggests that soft law is most useful when linked to binding obligations, public budgets and measurable follow-up. Without that connection, Goal 16 can remain a policy aspiration rather than a route to accountability.

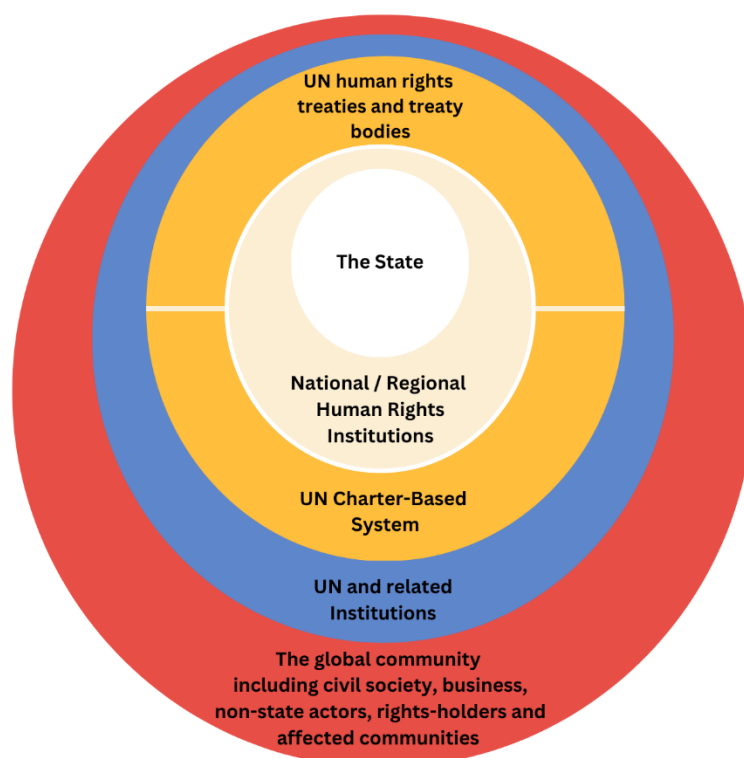
Environmental protection offers a clear example of interaction between levels. The 1998 UNECE Aarhus Convention links environmental protection with human rights through access to information, public participation and access to justice. In *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen v. Switzerland*, the European Court of Human Rights held that Article 8 encompasses effective protection from serious adverse effects of climate change and found Switzerland's mitigation framework inadequate.^{xxvii} These are valuable European contributions, but they must be set against Europe's substantial historical emissions and wider consumption footprint. The Pacific-led ITLOS and ICJ advisory opinions make the larger point: European leadership should be judged by implementation, including faster mitigation, support for adaptation and loss and damage, and reparation where breaches of international obligations by European States, including failures to regulate businesses under their jurisdiction, cause harm beyond the region.^{xxviii}

3.3. Global Human Rights System

At this juncture, it is essential to turn to the specific human rights system of the hard law kind to assess the current situation, proposals for reform, and possible vistas for improvement. It should be noted that the term 'international human rights protection framework' or 'international human rights (protection) system' is understood to mean primarily the human rights architecture interlinked with the UN, set up by States. This human rights protection system can be seen as a circle with two halves: today, one half consists of the nine core international human rights treaties and their Optional Protocols, while the other half is the UN Charter-based mechanisms under the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) whose major components are the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the UN Special Procedures.

Yet, that architecture or system should not be seen as 'silo-ised'. It is interconnected with other actors and stakeholders, found in the other circles as part of a dynamic whole. The various circles exert an elastic push-and-pull on the operations of the system set up by the UN. That connectivity is found in the diagram attached, pictorialised by concentric circles.

Diagram 1: International Human Rights Protection System: Concentric Circles



Source: authors, August 2026.

In essence, there are five concentric circles; the first circle recognises the primary role of the State in protecting human rights. However, State action requires accountability especially as there might be a protection gap or deficit. The second circle is the presence of independent and effective national and regional human rights institutions (where they exist) as a counterweight for State-related action. Where there are courts of a binding nature, there is the value added of judicial enforcement in the quest for redress.

The specific UN human rights protection system is found in the third circle, complementing the first and second circles and helping to fill in gaps. As mentioned, it has two halves in the form of the 9 human rights treaties, on the one hand, and the UN Charter-based mechanisms, on the other hand. The fourth concentric circle is the total UN system, especially including the UN General Assembly (UNGA), UN Security Council (UNSC) and related bodies, such as the ICJ, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), other UN agencies, for example, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and UN Country Team (UNCT), with this circle having conditional access to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other channels of redress. The specialised agencies such as the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization, together with the other bodies related to the UN in dealing with development, trade and finance, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization should not be forgotten, as their actions also impact on human rights. The invitation is that they should integrate into their actions a human rights-based approach. The fifth concentric circle comprises the rest of the global community premised on the whole of society approach, especially civil society and non-State actors, including non-governmental organisations, the business sector, the increasingly important digitalisation industry, and other communities.

The concentric circles' approach is a more open portal, because it is based on checks and balances and is not disingenuous about power relations and the need to prevent and mitigate power-related aberrations, especially when one of the circles is dysfunctional. For example, the most egregious human rights violations which are tantamount to international crimes such as genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity depend much on the cross elasticity between the circles. Where the first and second circles are unable to

act effectively and the third circle is only able to intercede in a limited manner, there is further leverage by activating the fourth circle represented by UNGA, UNSC, UNCT, and possibly the ICC, even if access to the latter is subject to many hurdles.^{xxix} Surrounding those circles is the fifth circle, representing the ‘whole of the global community’ approach, as a voice of concern and advocate of justice, potentially and actually to leverage for the protection of rights and related redress.

For another reason, the fifth concentric circle is relevant; it counterbalances the fact that most of the UN organs noted – UNHRC, UNGA, UNSC and UNCT in the fourth circle, and partly in the third circle, comprise State-related or executive-related members, or UN staff, with limited space for other stakeholders such as civil society. Ironically, there is no UN organ which represents ‘THE PEOPLES’ directly per the foundational words of the UN Charter; there is no UN People’s Council or Assembly to act as a conduit for the peoples at large where their rights are encroached upon. On a futuristic note, the world has entered a phase beyond ‘THE PEOPLES’ with a conundrum concerning emerging technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Who is to be responsible when AI commits key violations, especially if AI systems are self-automated or self-triggering; where is the redress and which circle can press for a remedy?

There is thus a need to maximise the leverages available in the connectivity between the five concentric circles, especially in a ruptured globe with dwindling resources. There is also a pivotal call to alert ourselves to the future – in a world intermixing between sentient humans and non-sentient non-humans of a robotic kind, clouded by the air of uncertainty or unpredictability. The current situation facing the system under the third and fourth circles is dire, especially with wrenching UN-related financial cuts, systemic downsizing, and major reduction of staff and programmes internationally. Yet, this is also a window of opportunity to de-bureaucratise, deconcentrate, decentralise and desensitise. In other words, rationalisation, harmonisation, cost effectiveness, and institutional/operational efficiency, are now the agenda of the day (although hardly new!). Practical and inclusive access by rights-holders and civil society, including from the field, should also guide the repositioning process.

This background paper thus proposes now to concentrate on the third and fourth concentric circles which are undergoing reassessment based on various proposals. The lead comes from the UN Secretary-General in the form of the ‘UN80’ initiative as below, coupled with a recent UN GA resolution on review of mandates, as well as recommendations for reform of the UN human rights treaty monitoring system related to the nine core UN human rights treaties and their Protocols. The impact is on both the third and fourth circles, with the latter being of a broader, organisational nature. This is complemented by the earlier commitment of UN 2.0, a promise from the UN and the OHCHR to become more modern, efficient and future-ready, especially through digitalisation.

3.4. Repositioning through a Protection Lens

‘UN80’ places this question within a system-wide effort to make the United Nations more effective and financially sustainable. Its mandate-review workstream has the greatest immediate relevance for the human rights architecture. General Assembly resolution 80/251 of 31 March 2026 establishes principles for the full mandate life cycle: creation, implementation and review. It calls for clearer objectives, implementation road maps, review clauses, better information on financial implications and more focused reporting. It also asks Member States to review the stock and periodicity of mandates and to consider their renewal, adaptation, merger, replacement or retirement^{xxx}. These are potentially useful disciplines. Mandates that are unclear, inadequately costed or disconnected from an implementation lead can create work that is difficult to deliver and even harder to evaluate. Better design can therefore serve protection rather than simply administration.

The UN80 initiative also encompasses structural and operational reforms, including proposed institutional mergers, a New Humanitarian Compact to simplify coordination and integrate supply chains and shared services, stronger system-wide data infrastructure, and a review of environmental governance.^{xxxi} These

reforms are taking place against severe financial pressure: UN80 background material projected a reduction of nearly 25 per cent in the UN system's overall resource base between 2024 and 2026.^{xxxii}

This is work in progress and is not yet finished. There will be much impact on the bodies mentioned under the fourth concentric circle, such as UNCT. Incidentally, OHCHR's annual report records that, at the end of 2025, approximately half of its staff were based at headquarters and half in the field.^{xxxiii} This typifies the fact that UN bodies need to decentralise to ensure that the majority of their staff are based at the field level rather than in headquarters. The move towards a stronger regional presence is not new. Previous OHCHR efforts to relocate staff and functions from Geneva to regional hubs encountered difficulties in securing the necessary General Assembly approvals. MOPAN's 2026 assessment reports that the regionalisation plan was approved in December 2025 and that staff deployments were underway.^{xxxiv} On a positive note, some UN agencies have set an example by moving their Asia section to a developing country, e.g. UNHCR has relocated its Asia section to Bangkok. OHCHR is also working in that direction, while there is already a regional office in Bangkok covering some ten countries.^{xxxv} This raises the question of how OHCHR can strengthen field-level protection while retaining the headquarters capacity required to support universal human rights mechanisms.

Turning now to the main subject of discussion concerning the 'international human rights (protection) system', embodied in the core international human rights treaties and the UN Charter-based mechanisms highlighted in the two halves of the third concentric circle, its added value lies in setting common standards and engaging States in continuing processes of scrutiny, dialogue and follow-up. Through the treaty bodies, the Universal Periodic Review and the Special Procedures, implementation of human rights can be examined over time and in relation to national circumstances, with contributions from States, NHRIs, civil society and other stakeholders. Under those treaties that provide for such procedures, and where States have accepted them, individuals or groups may also submit communications alleging violations by a State party and seek findings and, where appropriate, recommendations for remedy. The conclusions and recommendations emerging from these mechanisms differ in their legal basis, form and institutional authority, but together provide an important framework for interpreting standards, identifying implementation gaps and guiding changes in law, policy and practice. They are not, as a general rule, equivalent to binding judicial decisions, but their value lies in sustained international scrutiny and their capacity to inform domestic implementation and accountability, including through guarantees of non-repetition of violations.

On the other hand, important parts of the international human rights protection system have historically remained relatively centralised. Treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review conduct most of their formal review and dialogue in Geneva, requiring States and other stakeholders to engage with mechanisms based at headquarters. This does not apply in the same way across the system. Special Procedures have long complemented their thematic work with country visits, allowing mandate holders to engage directly with governments, national institutions, civil society and affected communities.^{xxxvi} The Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture is also structurally different: under OPCAT, preventive visits to places of deprivation of liberty form part of its core mandate. That visiting function has itself been severely affected by the UN's financial constraints.^{xxxvii}

The treaty body system has nevertheless begun to experiment with greater regional engagement. Committees have held sessions and other forms of structured engagement outside Geneva, including in the Pacific, with the aim of making participation more accessible to States and stakeholders facing considerable geographic and resource constraints. Such^{xxxviii} regional engagement can bring the international mechanisms closer to the national and local level, facilitate participation by NHRIs, civil society and other actors that may not be able to travel to Geneva, and expose the Committees themselves more directly to national experience, implementation challenges and good practices. In this respect, it complements the field-based dimension that already exists within parts of the Special Procedures system.

Current reform discussions therefore focus on how to combine centralised international scrutiny with greater proximity to implementation. Proposals include stronger coordination across treaty bodies, more predictable review cycles, selected regional dialogues and greater use of digital tools to support implementation and

follow-up. These issues, including regionalisation and digital tracking, are considered in greater detail in the following section.

3.5. Treaty Body Strengthening

Treaty body strengthening forms a specific strand of the current reform landscape. The treaty bodies are independent expert committees established under the core international human rights treaties, with mandates grounded in the legal obligations accepted by States parties; they are neither subsidiary machinery of the Human Rights Council nor ordinary Secretariat mandates that can be renewed or retired through a generic mandate review. Reform must therefore improve the exercise of treaty-based functions, including State review, individual communications, urgent actions, inquiries and authoritative interpretation, while preserving the independence, expertise and legal specificity of each committee.

The case for change is nevertheless strong. New treaties, ratifications and procedures have expanded a system designed largely in the 1960s, without commensurate resources. Late reports, backlogs, divergent working methods and uncertain calendars reduce both accessibility and impact. Information can be outdated by the time a dialogue occurs; States and stakeholders repeatedly assemble overlapping material; and victims may wait years for decisions. The liquidity crisis has intensified these weaknesses, but did not create them. A protection-oriented response must address the design of the system rather than let temporary cash constraints determine the future of treaty supervision.

General Assembly resolution 68/268 introduced a capacity-based meeting-time formula and encouraged coordination, accessibility and harmonisation.^{xxxix} The 2020 review identified further needs, and in 2022 the treaty body Chairs agreed on a predictable eight-year cycle for State reviews, closer alignment of working methods and a digital uplift. Resolution 79/165 of December 2024 encouraged clearer reporting schedules and further use of digital technologies, but did not endorse or resource the full package proposed by the Chairs.^x This left a gap between political support for predictability and the means to deliver it.

OHCHR's working paper of 29 May 2026 is the latest attempt to bridge that gap.^{xii} It proposes a coordinated schedule for State reviews to give practical effect to the predictable eight-year cycle. This would be supported by decentralised and clustered dialogues, an integrated multilingual reporting platform and a transparent online platform for treaty body elections. These measures could be introduced without amending the treaties, but require political support, careful design and predictable resources. Their value lies in connecting changes often discussed separately. The test is not whether each component saves time, but whether the package produces more timely, independent and accessible protection.

3.6. Regionalisation and Decentralised Dialogue

OHCHR's most structurally significant proposal is to convene some dialogues through regional or field presences. A State could engage with a smaller delegation of experts from the relevant treaty bodies at regional level; shorter Geneva plenaries would retain responsibility for adopting concluding observations and other functions requiring collegial deliberation. A dialogue would remain part of the predictable universal cycle, be webcast and accessible, and could use a cross-committee or clustered format.

This is not simply relocation and should not, however, be understood as a proposal to relocate the treaty body system or to create a separate regional review mechanism.^{xlii} Regionalisation is better understood as the proximity and implementation layer of a universal system: the legal standards and authority of the committees remain unchanged, while dialogue and follow-up move closer to rights-holders and the institutions responsible for implementation. The Geneva Human Rights Hub paper on Regionalization, prepared towards the 2026 "Rigi Retreat on the Future of the Human Rights Treaty Body System", identifies the following sessions and pilots as proof of operational feasibility; the implementing partners show the different forms regional engagement has taken:

- Committee on the Rights of the Child, 84th Extraordinary Outreach Session, Apia, Samoa (2–6 March 2020): the first treaty body session held outside Geneva or New York. It was hosted by the Government of Samoa and the Committee/OHCHR, with implementation support from the Pacific Community's Regional Rights Resource Team (SPC RRRT).
- CEDAW Pacific Technical Cooperation Session, Suva, Fiji (7–11 April 2025): hosted by the Government of Fiji and jointly organised by the CEDAW Committee, OHCHR, the Pacific Community, UN Women, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and the University of the South Pacific. It included country exchanges with Fiji, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu, regional consultations and technical cooperation; formal concluding observations remained for adoption in Geneva.
- Treaty Body Follow-Up Review Pilot Series, Sierra Leone (2021), Grenada (2022) and the Pacific region (2023): implemented by the Geneva Human Rights Platform in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Pacific Community. Each exercise brought together members of several treaty bodies, allowing recommendations issued by different committees to be considered within a single follow-up process. The pilots in Sierra Leone and Grenada tested national-level follow-up reviews, while the Pacific pilot, held in Nadi with participants from Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu, tested a multi-country regional model. These were not formal treaty body reviews, but practical pilots examining how focused mid-cycle reviews could support the implementation of selected recommendations, normally formal follow-up priorities, and enable closer engagement with national and local stakeholders.^{xliii}

These examples show that regional engagement can widen participation, strengthen contextual understanding and reduce travel barriers, especially for small island developing States, least developed countries and geographically remote communities. Suitable OHCHR regional presences and UN hubs can connect treaty body dialogue with NHRIs, civil society, national implementation mechanisms, country teams and Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. Focused follow-up is the most natural entry point for further pilots because it addresses a limited number of priority issues and is closely tied to implementation.

3.7. Digitalisation and Continuous Information

OHCHR proposes a secure, multilingual platform through which States could submit and update treaty-related information across committees. It would display deadlines and calendars, organise information, support search and facilitate the reuse of public material already supplied to other UN mechanisms. The Working Paper also envisages an Elections Portal, extending the digital architecture to information concerning treaty body membership and elections.^{xliv}

A further possibility, not proposed in the OHCHR Working Paper, would be to connect this architecture with existing digital human rights tracking tools used at national level, such as OHCHR's National Recommendations Tracking Database (NRTD). The NRTD already enables States to organise and track implementation of recommendations from UN human rights mechanisms and use that information for reporting; other tracking tools similarly allow recommendations to be clustered, linked to responsible institutions and followed over time. Better interoperability between these national systems, the proposed treaty body platform and the Universal Human Rights Index (UHRI) could reduce repetitive data entry and create a stronger link between international review and continuous national implementation.^{xlv} Parallel case-management work for individual communications and urgent actions remains essential if digitalisation is to address protection delays rather than only State reporting.

3.8. Connecting the Three Treaty Body Strengthening Lines

Scheduling, regionalisation and digitalisation should operate as one review-and-follow-up cycle. Scheduling determines when scrutiny occurs; digital infrastructure keeps its information current; regionalisation brings dialogue and follow-up closer to implementation; and Geneva plenaries preserve collegiality and consistent

treaty interpretation. Poor sequencing could add new procedures without retiring old burdens, so pilots should test the package rather than isolated innovations.

The relationship with UN80 must remain legally disciplined. Treaty body strengthening shares UN80's concern with effectiveness, coordination and sustainable administration, and may benefit from common digital infrastructure and transparent costing. But legal obligations supervised by treaty bodies cannot be subjected to the renewal or retirement logic applicable to time-limited intergovernmental mandates. The committees should shape changes to their working methods, while Member States should address resources and any required intergovernmental authority openly.

The redesigned cycle can also connect treaty recommendations to the 2030 Agenda. Predictable reviews and follow-up can inform national development planning and Voluntary National Reviews; interoperable tools can identify converging recommendations; and regional dialogue can involve country teams and local implementation actors. This should support implementation, not convert legal findings into optional development targets or reduce rights to indicators.

With regard to the UN Charter-based mechanisms, the other half of the third concentric circle, there are two components of note. First, the UPR and second, the UN Special Procedures. With regard to the UPR, its value added has been to equalise treatment between all countries by reviewing all countries without exception (even though two countries are now declining to cooperate). However, the UPR is an interactive peer review process of a rather soft kind. Another value added is that the UPR also covers countries which have not ratified the core human rights treaties and it helps to fill in the monitoring gap on this front. Yet, it is a process which enables the State being vetted to choose whether to accept recommendations from its peers or not accept them; the oft used term 'take note' is akin to non-acceptance. After the session, the process then concentrates on follow-up, with possible mid-term reports of the implementation of the accepted recommendations. This has contributed to the establishment of national coordination structures for implementation, reporting and follow-up. OHCHR's NMIRF Knowledge Hub currently identifies 47 standing National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRFs) worldwide, bringing together relevant ministries and agencies to engage more systematically with recommendations from UN human rights mechanisms.^{xlv}

Yet, in reality, the non-accepted recommendations are often as important as the accepted ones, since they might embody the more sensitive areas which the State would not wish to address openly. In effect, the non-accepted recommendations might be classified perhaps as blind spots, perhaps obscuring key areas needing reform, which in fairness, should not be overlooked.

As for the UN Special Procedures, the members are independent experts selected under the UNHRC to help the UN address various thematic issues or country specific situations. Their value added is to produce independent assessments under their mandate, coupled with the ability to accept complaints of violations without the need to exhaust local remedies at the national level. They are very accessible to civil society and affected parties.

A positive aspect throughout the years is that they carry out country visits to monitor the situation and make recommendations for improvement at the field level, as well as to sustain the leverage when they make annual trips to Geneva or New York to report on the situation to the UNHRC and/or UNGA. This can be complemented by access to other UN organs, such as the UNSC and UNCT. However, some of the Special Procedures' mandates are politically sensitive, surrounded by virulent contestations between various concerned parties. Operationally, their work has already been affected by all-pervasive funding cuts; for example, currently they are only able to undertake one field visit per year per mandate. Streamlining is already taking place. This is exemplified by the fact that a couple of separate UN Special Rapporteurs' mandates on contemporary forms of slavery and human trafficking have been merged as a single mandate.

In between, various UN Commissions of Inquiry have been set up, especially to bridge the gap between human rights, international humanitarian law, and international criminal law in the admixture of war and peace. The long experience of the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic exemplifies the value

of documentation with verification targeting transparency, and advocacy for accountability covering both State and non-State actors, as well as redress for the victims.^{xlvii}

3.9. The Human Rights Council at Twenty and Alignment with the UN80 Mandate Review

The Human Rights Council entered this reform period at its twentieth anniversary. General Assembly resolution 80/287 of 6 July 2026 concluded the long-pending review of its status by maintaining it as a subsidiary body of the Assembly.^{xlviii} The resolution acknowledged the interdependence of peace and security, development and human rights, as well as the importance of adequate and sustainable financing, but did not elevate the Council to the position of a principal organ. It deferred reconsideration of the question until a date between the General Assembly's ninetieth and ninety-fifth sessions, approximately 2036–2041.

Resolution 80/287 is notable for what it leaves unresolved. Its preamble recognises the financing problem and the mutually reinforcing character of the three UN pillars, but its operative provisions do no more than maintain the Council's status and set a distant window for reconsideration. It does not create a new budgetary guarantee, alter the Council's relationship with the General Assembly or strengthen its formal channels to the Security Council. The twentieth-anniversary review has therefore closed without a new institutional settlement. Reform will proceed through more limited routes: the annual efficiency process in Geneva, mandate-lifecycle discussions under UN80 in New York and political initiatives to improve the Council's practice.^{xlix}

The opportunity lies now in moving from an accumulation of outputs to a clearer account of what each mandate is expected to change. The risk is that a generic review model will treat human rights mandates as interchangeable administrative products. Resolution 80/251 calls on other intergovernmental organs to review their own mandates according to their respective decision-making processes. Although the Council is a subsidiary body of the Assembly, the strongest reading is that review of Council-created mandates should build upon the Council's established annual rationalisation process rather than duplicate it in New York.ⁱ

The specificity of human rights mandates should shape the criteria. Many are created because violations are acute, the territorial State is unwilling or unable to act, and other UN organs are blocked. Speed may therefore be part of a mandate's effectiveness. Country access, cooperation and consensus are relevant, but they cannot be decisive measures of impact: non-cooperation is often a feature of the situation that made international scrutiny necessary. An investigative mechanism may still preserve evidence, establish facts, support future accountability and give victims an authoritative forum even when it is denied entry. Likewise, a thematic mandate may remain necessary because discrimination or impunity is structural and progress is incremental. Automatic sunset clauses or an expectation of consensus would be particularly ill-suited to these circumstances.ⁱⁱ

The joint civil society submissions on UN80 add an essential procedural dimension. Mandate review cannot be credible if it is conducted only by the States whose conduct may be under examination. Victims, survivors, human rights defenders and organisations working in the country concerned hold information that is necessary to assess relevance and consequences. Consultation should begin before options are narrowed and should include feedback explaining how contributions were considered. The digital tools created under UN80, including the Mandate Registry and any interoperable portals, should remain publicly accessible.ⁱⁱⁱ

Impact should be judged through a combination of evidence rather than a single performance score. Quantitative information can show the volume and timeliness of reports, communications, visits and follow-up. It cannot by itself capture whether a mandate deterred violations, legitimised the claims of victims, helped a court or inquiry, or kept an ignored crisis on the international agenda. Consultation with affected people and national actors can reveal such effects, including unintended harm. Any recommendation to adapt, merge or retire a mandate should explain the evidence used, the alternatives considered and the arrangements for preserving records, pending communications and follow-up. In this way, review becomes a form of institutional accountability instead of an austerity exercise.

3.10. From International Review to the 2030 Agenda

Repositioning should also improve the connection between the Council's findings and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the 2030 Agenda. Human rights are not a separate addition to sustainable development: they identify who is being left behind, why exclusion persists and which institutions bear responsibility. Goal 16 on inclusive institutions, access to justice, accountable decision-making and fundamental freedoms is the most visible bridge, but the relationship extends across the Agenda, including poverty, health, education, gender equality, decent work, inequality and climate action.

At present, the two systems often run in parallel. States present Voluntary National Reviews to the High-level Political Forum while responding separately to recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review and Special Procedures. UN country teams prepare Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, yet the analysis and recommendations produced by human rights mechanisms are not always translated into programme priorities. Better connection does not require a new reporting layer. It requires national authorities and UN teams to identify converging recommendations, assign responsibility, connect them to budgets and indicators, and report publicly on progress through existing national processes. Standing NMIRFs can coordinate this work, preserve institutional memory and connect recommendations with national planning and reporting cycles.

Finally, on this front, there is a new opportunity for revitalisation under the aegis of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights who launched recently the Global Alliance for Human Rights, with these tenets helping to bridge between the international and regional-cum-national levels.

'Human Rights at Home: Making human rights real in people's daily lives through local action and implementation.

Human Rights in Action: Standing with victims and defenders, advancing equality, accountability, and justice.

Human Rights in Mind: Reimagining how human rights are communicated, learned and understood.

Human Rights for the Future: Harnessing innovation, technology and youth engagement to address global challenges with human rights at the centre.'^{liii}

Under this new Alliance, an initiative of human rights in action is to provide a global help desk on business and human rights, now guided by the UN Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on business and human rights. Human rights at home is exemplified by promoting human rights cities and local governance. Human rights in mind would include an academic platform for human rights and an initiative called 'Reach Out' to enable a new conversation on human rights, as well as a philosophers' forum. As for human rights for the future, there is the aim to have the RightsX Summit as a global platform for propelling human rights in the digital age. There are to be special links with youth, faith leaders and the sports sector.

On reflection, the dynamics of the international setting above, percolating to the regional and national levels, are shaped by the following challenges:

- **Conceptual:** in principle, even though there is general verbal confluence on the universality and indivisibility of human rights, less open societies are prone to promote economic, social and cultural rights – the 'rice' factor, rather than civil and political rights – the (total) rights factor. Conversely, some regions lean towards underlining civil and political rights rather than a holistic approach.
- **Dimensional:** human rights are one of the three key pillars of the UN framework, the other two being peace and security on the one hand, and development on the other hand; they are intrinsically interwoven. Yet, on occasions, there is a segmented approach leading to debilitating compartmentalisation.
- **Geographical:** while some regions are cohesive, others are vast and not homogeneous, needing variegated engagements between themselves and with the UN system.
- **Operational:** some UN operations are still bureaucratically heavy at the top, while the real needs are at the bottom, at the field level, especially on the physical and legal protection of affected parties,

such as victims of war, and environmental and human rights defenders. On another front, the commitment by States to formal norms and standards is not necessarily matched by effective implementation at the national and local levels.

- **Relational:** withdrawal of key international actor(s) from the UN system and the spread of breaches by powerful members of the system dilute the weight of the system. The current call for Middle Powers to coalesce is innovative, and this would need some strategic hedging to ensure impact in the evolving scenario of global checks and balances.
- **Generational:** past measures were very much based on acting and reacting to the needs and rights of the present generation. The climate crisis has opened hearts and minds to the inter-generational perspective, but this still needs to be concretised through resourceful and substantive actions by the key 'trustees' of the planet to ensure benefits for later generations.
- **Spectral:** norms and standards are evolved under the spectrum of formal instruments and mechanisms, but this is not necessarily adequate unless the mind, attitude, and behaviour of the Powers-that-Be and the general populace are empathetic towards others. While human rights instruments and mechanisms can help to deliver tangibles, such as compensation, intangibles of the spiritual spectrum, such as compassion, cannot be dictated automatically by instruments and mechanisms. They would need to be nurtured by a broad humanisation process through education and socialisation. Therefore, the commitment to human rights needs to be immersive.

At the international level, a non-exhaustive list of preferred actions includes: Shift regional offices of UN agencies to the regions to economise and become more accessible to localities; Merge UN-related duplicative agencies and programmes; Streamline operations to match the scaled-down setting, and vice versa; Digitalise to save cost and promote efficiency, and track implementation-related measures continuously through data gateways and databases with a view to consistent follow-up, while not forgetting the human element; Simplify reporting procedures under the human rights treaty system, aiming to maximise human rights implementation at the national and local levels; Promote and commit to country visits by UN human rights treaty bodies and mechanisms to enable lessons to be learned and to catalyse at the field and other levels; Aim for joint visits by a variety of UN human rights bodies and mechanisms as part of the intersectional and transversal nexus; Incentivise staff and circulate them to build capacity and strengthen protection at the national and local levels; Foster mindfulness through a socialisation and educational process, embodying the spirit of empathy and mutual respect with a grounded mindset.

4. Regional

'Unity in Diversity for Universality (UID4U)':

quotation from a discussion at a recent human rights conference in Southeast Asia

4.1. European Work in Progress

Various regions of the globe have established, with intergovernmental support, regional systems to protect human rights. They usually comprise a foundational treaty stipulating the rights and various mechanisms for overseeing the implementation process, such as Commissions, Committees and Courts. The judicial arm provides the value added of binding judgments and enforcement which can offer redress, such as compensation. An important issue pertains to the availability of Communications procedures to enable affected parties to seek redress at the regional level, subject to the applicable admissibility rules, including, where required, exhaustion of effective domestic remedies and this is complemented by monitoring of the States Parties for compliance. Europe is commonly regarded as the archetype of regional human rights protection. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Council of Europe emerged as the institutional foundation of a regional system built around the protection of human rights.^{liv}

4.1.1. The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe, with 46 member States, provides the broadest treaty-based human rights framework on the continent. The European Convention on Human Rights was adopted in 1950 and was later expanded through additional protocols and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Its main innovation was to place States under the authority of an international court. Since the reforms introduced by Protocol No. 11, individuals, groups and non-governmental organisations have been able to apply directly to the Court, provided that they meet the admissibility rules. In particular, they must normally first use the effective remedies available in their own country. States can also bring cases against one another.^{lv}

The ECtHR is not an appeal court for every disagreement about national law. Its task is to decide whether a State has respected the rights protected by the Convention. National courts and public authorities remain responsible for protecting those rights in the first place. This is the principle of subsidiarity: the European system should step in when domestic protection has failed, not replace national institutions in their everyday work. Judgments of the Court are binding under Article 46 of the Convention. Even so, the Court does not itself amend a national law, reopen a trial or reform a public service. The State concerned must decide how to comply, under the supervision of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. In an individual case, this may require compensation, a new hearing or another form of redress. When a judgment reveals a wider problem, the State may also need to change legislation, judicial practice or administrative procedures so that the violation is not repeated.^{lvi}

This division of responsibilities is both a strength and a weakness. It allows national authorities to choose the most suitable way to comply, but it means that a judgment does not automatically produce change. In 2025, the ECtHR received about 31,800 applications and decided 38,573. Around 53,450 applications were still pending at the end of the year, the lowest total in two decades. During the same period, the Committee of Ministers closed 949 cases under its supervision. Nevertheless, 3,889 cases against current member States remained pending, not including the separate caseload concerning the Russian Federation. Among the cases that reveal broader or structural problems, 526 had been awaiting full implementation for more than five years.^{lvii}

Delay is sometimes caused by difficult legal reforms, divided responsibilities or a lack of resources. In other situations, it reflects political resistance. The continued detention of Osman Kavala in Türkiye, despite the Court's judgments and repeated decisions by the Committee of Ministers, shows what happens when a

government rejects the practical consequences of a ruling. The Russian Federation presents another challenge. Its departure from the Council of Europe did not end its responsibility for violations that occurred before 16 September 2022, but the lack of cooperation has left a very large number of cases unresolved. The lesson is straightforward: even the strongest regional court depends on national institutions and political commitment for its judgments to take effect.^{lviii}

The European Convention mainly protects civil and political rights. Social and economic rights are addressed more fully by the European Social Charter. The Charter covers areas such as work, housing, health, education and social protection. The European Committee of Social Rights examines reports submitted by States and can consider collective complaints for the States that have accepted that procedure.^{lix} In 2025, it found many of the situations examined not to be in conformity with the Charter, particularly in relation to pay, working time, collective bargaining and equality at work. However, only 16 States accept the collective complaints procedure, and the Committee's findings do not have the same force in domestic law as a judgment of the ECtHR. Europe therefore has strong regional standards on social rights, but the routes to enforcement are less equal and less direct.^{lx}

The Council of Europe also has bodies that work before or alongside court proceedings. The Committee for the Prevention of Torture visits prisons and other places of detention. The Commissioner for Human Rights examines country situations and wider themes. Other monitoring bodies address racism, violence against women, trafficking, child protection, corruption and minority rights. The Venice Commission advises on constitutional and rule-of-law questions. These mechanisms can identify patterns that may not be visible in one court case. Their influence, however, depends on whether governments respond to their findings and whether independent actors can follow what happens next.^{lxi}

4.1.2. The European Union (EU)

The EU framework covers fewer States – 27 – but has a strong influence on national legislation, public spending and administration. The Charter of Fundamental Rights became legally binding when the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force in 2009. It brings together civil, political, economic and social rights in one text and includes guarantees that are particularly relevant to modern regulation, such as data protection and workers' rights. The scope of the Charter is important. It always applies to the EU institutions. It applies to Member States when they are acting within the field of EU law. It is not a general bill of rights for every national dispute. This distinction can be difficult for people outside the legal profession, and sometimes for practitioners as well. A person may have a strong human rights concern but still need to rely on a national constitution or the ECHR because the matter does not fall within EU law.^{lxii}

When the Charter does apply, it can have significant effect. National courts can ask the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) to clarify the meaning of EU law, including the Charter. In some circumstances, they must set aside a national rule that conflicts with EU law. In 2025, national courts sent 642 requests for preliminary rulings to the CJEU, and 123 of those requests referred to the Charter. This creates a regular dialogue between national judges and the EU Court. It also means that the practical use of the Charter depends greatly on whether lawyers, judges and public officials recognise when EU law is relevant.^{lxiii}

The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) supports this framework through research, comparative data and advice. FRA does not decide individual complaints and cannot order a State to provide a remedy. Its role is to show patterns that individual cases may not reveal, including the experiences of groups affected by discrimination, hate crime or poor treatment at borders. This evidence can guide EU institutions, governments, national human rights bodies and civil society.^{lxiv}

The European Commission can bring legal proceedings against a Member State that breaches EU law. The EU also uses political and financial tools, including the annual Rule of Law Report, the procedure under Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union and conditions attached to EU funding. The 2026 Rule of Law Report found that 47 per cent of the recommendations made in the previous year had been fully or partly implemented. This suggests that regular monitoring can encourage reform. It is not, however, a general

measure of respect for human rights across the EU. Serious concerns remain in some countries about judicial independence, corruption, media freedom and the checks placed on government power.^{lxv} The long-running Article 7 procedure concerning Hungary also shows the limits of a process that requires a high level of political agreement among Member States.^{lxvi} Legal proceedings, political dialogue and financial pressure may work best when they reinforce each other. None of them alone guarantees change.

The relationship between the EU and the Council of Europe is still unfinished. All EU Member States are parties to the ECHR, but the EU itself has not yet joined the Convention. Accession is required by the EU Treaties and is intended to place EU institutions under the same external human rights review as national authorities. The delay leaves a gap in an otherwise closely connected European legal space.^{lxvii}

New technology shows both the reach and the limits of the EU approach. The EU Artificial Intelligence Act entered its main application phase on 2 August 2026, although amendments adopted in July 2026 deferred the principal obligations for high-risk systems to December 2027 or August 2028, depending on the category. It sets duties according to the level of risk created by an AI system and gives supervisory roles to EU and national authorities. The law can help prevent harm before it reaches a courtroom. Its real value will depend on how it is enforced, whether people receive understandable information and whether they can challenge a harmful or discriminatory decision.^{lxviii}

4.1.3. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE covers 57 participating States across Europe, Central Asia and North America. Its human rights commitments are politically binding, rather than treaty obligations in themselves. It has no human rights court and no procedure through which an individual can obtain an enforceable decision. Its contribution lies elsewhere: it provides common standards, independent observation, practical advice and opportunities to act before a situation becomes more serious.^{lxix}

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is particularly well known for election observation. It does not look only at what happens on election day. Its missions also examine the legal framework, political competition, media conditions, campaign finance, participation and the handling of complaints. The resulting recommendations give governments, parliaments and civil society a shared point of reference for reform. ODIHR also reviews draft laws and works on democratic institutions, human rights defenders, tolerance and non-discrimination.^{lxx}

Two other OSCE institutions illustrate its preventive role. The High Commissioner on National Minorities uses confidential dialogue and early warning when tensions involving minority communities may threaten peace and stability. The office is not an ombuds institution for individual complaints. Its aim is to address the wider conditions that could lead to conflict.^{lxxi} The Representative on Freedom of the Media follows developments across the OSCE area and raises concerns when journalists or media freedom are under threat. A public warning cannot provide compensation or overturn a decision, but it may draw attention to a problem before the damage becomes harder to reverse.^{lxxii} Most important OSCE decisions are taken by consensus. This gives participating States a sense of ownership, but it can also prevent collective action when governments strongly disagree. Geopolitical confrontation has made this problem more visible. Even so, the OSCE retains forms of cooperation that are difficult to reproduce elsewhere, including widely accepted election standards, field knowledge and long-term contact with public institutions and civil society. Its work should not be dismissed because it is not judicial. Nor should political dialogue be treated as a replacement for access to justice. The two serve different purposes.^{lxxiii}

4.1.4. Lessons from the European Experience

Europe's clearest contribution is to show that regional protection can combine direct access for individuals, binding judgments and collective supervision of implementation. This has produced remedies and reforms in many areas.^{lxxiv} At the same time, the credibility and effectiveness of the system depend on sustained compliance. A judgment that is not implemented, a monitoring recommendation that receives no answer or

a right that cannot be claimed at home shows the distance between institutional design and actual protection.

A second lesson is that different institutions perform different tasks. Courts provide a route to binding decisions and enforceable remedies. Preventive visits, election observation, confidential diplomacy, comparative research and specialist monitoring can identify problems that litigation may reach too late. This variety is useful when institutions share information and when people understand their roles. It risks creating confusion where responsibilities are unclear, affected people struggle to identify an appropriate avenue for redress, or institutional fragmentation weakens follow-up.

Legal and political mechanisms also depend on each other. ECtHR judgments require political supervision and administrative follow-up. OSCE commitments may influence practice without being legally binding when they are supported by credible observation and continued engagement. EU law and funding can reach areas that a human rights court cannot manage directly, while EU accession to the ECHR would extend external judicial scrutiny to the EU's own institutions.^{lxv} The practical question is not which institution is strongest. It is whether their combined work closes a protection gap.

Europe's own record also calls for humility. Strong regional standards coexist with war, democratic regression, racism, violence against women, pushbacks, social exclusion and attacks on civic actors.^{lxvi} European arrangements should therefore be offered to Asian partners as experience rather than as a model to copy. Individual access to a regional mechanism, supervision of judgments and preventive monitoring may provide useful lessons. European actors can also learn from Asian experience in dialogue, institutional networks and locally grounded implementation.^{lxvii}

4.2. Asia in Development

By contrast, Asia does not have a comprehensive human rights framework encompassing the whole region. Nor does it have a regional organisation dedicated to human rights, as was the case in Europe under the umbrella of the Council of Europe in the aftermath of World War II. This is not hard to comprehend, given the diversity between Asia and Europe, and diversity within Asia itself. The Asian region is vast and heterogeneous, comprising 60 per cent of the world's population, with two of the world's most populous countries. It consists of about 60 countries. The political cultures of that geographical jigsaw, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Pacific, with the Indian Ocean in the middle, also fluctuate immensely. Yet, as will be seen, various human rights-related challenges are of common concern to all regions and invite constructive bridge-building with stepping stones to unity and universality.

In Asia, the initiative to integrate human rights into the regional setting has thus taken place at a smaller scale – the sub-regional level, or via various 'corners' of the continent. Intriguingly, the process has involved political-economic organisations without an explicit, foundational human rights mandate. As a consequence, expectations for systems-building on this front should be modest.

There are five sub-regions or networks with various instruments and/or mechanisms on human rights: the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Arab League, and Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in concert with the slightly larger Pacific Community (PC). As the PIF, PC and Arab League are beyond the scope of ASEM, this background study will not delve into their developments. The fifth is the network known as the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF). To these can be added several other sub-regions where there are political, economic and/or security organisations which are now extending their work to cover climate change issues with impact on human rights, albeit indirectly.

Side by side with the above, there are the important (sub-)regional presences of OHCHR to help overcome protection gaps at the regional, national and local levels. Also, there is the presence of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) which is not a human rights body, but it monitors annually

SDG implementation covering aspects of human rights as part of the regional monitoring of progress and regress, illustrated below. This enables a degree of transparency of the regional situation longitudinally.

4.2.1. ASEAN^{lxxviii}

In this endeavour, the development of sub-regional systems in Asia is based on a step-by-step approach, incremental in progression and subject to the political physiognomy interfacing with them. In East Asia, the ASEAN setting is the most developed. It is a blend of eleven countries at different stages of the path towards democracy. Pursuant to the ASEAN Charter, its capstone, it established the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR).^{lxxix} There are also two companion sectoral bodies: the ASEAN Commission on the Rights of Women and Children and the ASEAN Committee on the Rights of Migrant Workers. That panorama is part of the sub-regional ecosystem, scaling up to the ASEAN Foreign Ministers and the ASEAN Summit where the most important instruments are adopted. Interestingly, in Southeast Asia, the only three treaties ratified by ASEAN countries are CRC, CEDAW and CRPD.

In reality, a key challenge has been to enable AICHR to propel not only the promotion of human rights but also and especially the protection of human rights. Human rights promotion entails capacity-building, education and awareness-raising strategies, such as seminars, conferences and studies on human rights. This is the easy side of human rights implementation. The harder side is human rights protection which advocates monitoring and situational assessment; channels to receive complaints and communications from individuals and communities affected by negative action emanating from the State and non-State actors; investigations and fact finding; and access to justice and remedies ('remediation').

In the initial phase, AICHR underlined the need to work on the basis of consensus, and the less open quarters would invoke national sovereignty and the principle of non-interference in the affairs of a State readily when human rights claims were made against a member State. The mindset was also shaped by the fact that it was not set up by a regional human rights treaty but was a consequence of a political treaty.

After AICHR was established, it formulated the 2012 ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights, as a soft law to guide the human rights approach in the region, but that instrument has given rise to ongoing debate concerning whether it adds to or subtracts from the universality of human rights standards.^{lxxx} Precisely because there were fears that it might detract from international law, its adoption was accompanied by the Phnom Penh Statement on the Adoption of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration which stipulated that the said Declaration would comply with international human rights law.

In reality, from the beginning, there have been more actions on promotion than protection; the mechanism has organised multiple meetings and dialogues, with many verbal commitments, such as Declarations and Action Plans, as well as capacity-building. Gradually, AICHR has progressed towards more human rights protection at the sub-regional level. Over the past decade, especially in regard to the protection angle, even with a weak institutional mandate, evidently individual representatives of AICHR can press tactfully for needed measures; principled ingenuity can help to attenuate structural difficulties.

Originally, pursuant to the ASEAN Charter, the Terms of Reference (TOR) which established AICHR were not clear about whether the entity could undertake human rights assessment of each member country. Nor were they definite about whether the entity could undertake field visits to investigate allegations of violations. A missing propeller hampering its mandate concerned the lack of a channel to receive communications and to render justice, especially where no remedy was available at the national level.

Step by step, those impediments are being addressed. Developments include the following.^{lxxxi}

First, at each session of AICHR, there is now an opening to discuss the human rights situation in each country. This is a positive development, despite the age-old claims of national sovereignty. The shifting mindset is that human rights assessment and advocacy are part of legitimate, international and regional jurisdiction to help improve human rights implementation.

Second, AICHR is now preparing a regional bulletin on human rights as a kind of situational assessment of the happenings in the region. This will act as a soft monitor of the human rights landscape geared to transparency. It would complement the international reports produced by the UN, such as those prepared by the Universal Periodic Review under the UN Human Rights Council, UN Special Procedures (such as UN Special Rapporteurs) and the country offices of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Third, even though investigative visits by AICHR to sensitive sites are not yet sanctioned by the entity, capacity-building visits now accompany various sessions of AICHR as a learning experience. This is a gentle approach which would not satisfy some advocates of human rights protection. Yet, there is always the option that if a member country wishes to invite the entity to enter and undertake a more detailed assessment, it can do so - on its own initiative.

Fourth, there is the important AICHR work plan which is a gateway to innovative action. The new AICHR work plan (2026-2030) charts a range of activities, some of which help to improve human rights protection.^{lxxxii} They include the advocacy of human rights due diligence concerning businesses, responsible digitalisation and AI, and measures against online scams. A new Masterplan on persons with disabilities will be finalised.

Fifth, the previous work plan (2021-2025) opened the door to a channel to receive complaints of human rights violations. This has been validated by the November 2025 'AICHR Operational Guidelines to External Communications Received'.^{lxxxiii} The new procedure is that complaints can be made to AICHR, and they should first be lodged with the human rights section of the ASEAN secretariat. The latter will send an acknowledgement to the person submitting the communication. The communication will then be sent to the representative of AICHR connected with the complaint for follow-up at the national level. Much discretion is left to the latter to respond or not, and there does not yet exist an obligation on the latter to take action in the pursuit of justice. However, to that end, the AICHR representative concerned can recommend that AICHR take any appropriate action. This can thus be described as 'graduated leveraging'. In effect, the follow-up will depend much on whether the country concerned has an effective and independent national human rights institution. Currently, national human rights commissions exist in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Myanmar, while a human rights Ombudsman exists in Timor-Leste. There is variability in their performance, especially as parts of the region are embroiled in conflicts.

Sixth, with the recent adoption of the ASEAN Declaration on the Right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, there is the opportunity to amplify the now globally recognised Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.^{lxxxiv} Despite critiques concerning the issue of (lack of) inclusivity, the value added of this ASEAN Declaration is that it integrates the notion of safety as a gateway to safety at the workplace, now covered by International Labour Organization's fundamental Conventions on occupational safety and health, and other settings. There is connectivity with disaster preparedness in concert with decarbonisation and adaptation measures, in an era of existential climate change.

Seventh, a conference was hosted by AICHR in July 2026 to examine the possibility of an ASEAN Human Rights Index. At the national level, creatively Indonesia has formulated an index to measure progress based on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which the country is a party. Examples for coverage include freedom of expression, on the one hand, and the right to education, on the other hand.

The options to be explored at the regional level can be based on an indicative approach where the index would indicate the whereabouts of databases and information gateways. Or a more ambitious agenda would be to pilot quantitative and qualitative approaches with the backdrop of statistical data, analytics and tools to show advancement or retrenchment comparatively, either at the regional level or in relation to each member country; this would be geared to improving human rights implementation and adequate resourcing.

Eighth, various national and transnational crimes, especially online scams and related human trafficking, are closely linked with human rights violations. There are various channels of cooperation between ASEAN countries, such as through its police arm - ASEANAPOL- and via other arrangements between ASEAN countries and other countries. Many of the victims are enticed from other countries by means of the lure of

easy money to act as intermediaries scamming off other victims in cyberspace. The raids on scam compounds are sometimes executed by law enforcers from different countries, not necessarily from ASEAN countries.

From the angle of the victimisation, AICHR has advocated the need for non-punishment of the victims who might have been used by the scammers to defraud other persons.^{lxxxv} Since many of the victims are rescued from the various compounds housing these operations, it is important to determine their status and screen them for their background and situation, while not presuming all too easily that the scammers in the compounds are all criminals and illegal immigrants. It is the criminal elements who have tricked them into these compounds who should be apprehended and sanctioned against, rather than gullible people tempted into these precincts to prey on others by means of tricks and treachery. More robust and concerted actions are needed in view of the exponential threat of cybercrimes. Of note is that at the end of 2025, the new multilateral Cybercrimes Convention was open for signature in an ASEAN country, and a rights-based approach should be integrated into the implementation of this treaty.^{lxxxvi}

Finally, there is now an annual ASEAN Human Rights Dialogue providing a consistent interface with different stakeholders. There is also a roster of civil society organisations enjoying consultative basis with the AICHR. It is hoped that the space for discourse will be amplified in future. This is motivated also by the guiding light of the ASEAN Vision 2045 which advocates this trajectory in relation to human rights:

‘19. An inclusive and cohesive Community that respects political, social, religious, cultural, ethnic diversities, which upholds the principles of democracy, rule of law and good governance, and respects fundamental freedoms, promotes and protects human rights, and promotes social justice.’^{lxxxvii}

Of course, that aspiration has to be translated into reality, and much will depend upon expanding its classic maxim ‘unity in diversity’ to integrate international human rights law into its operations, respecting the universality of human rights, especially from the protection angle. Parallel to the ASEAN setting, Southeast Asian countries have also set up the Southeast Asia National Human Rights Institutions Forum (SEANF). A constructive development is that now AICHR is meeting SEANF more consistently. On another front, ASEAN engages with a range of other countries, including the ASEAN +3 formula, with China, Japan and Republic of Korea. The latter covers partnerships primarily in the economic, financial, social, political and development field.

All in all, the kaleidoscope is visibly work in progress, needing to harness the synergy of stakeholders to ‘humanise’ ASEAN as a platform anchored on the plurality of its peoples.

4.2.2. Other Sub-regions of Asia

The second sub-regional setting is South Asia. The SAARC personifies a very populous geography with some challenging situations nearby.^{lxxxviii} To date, the entry point for human rights development at the SAARC level has been various human rights treaties and declarations of a cooperative kind. There is a Convention to counter the trafficking of women and children, and a Convention on child welfare arrangements. There is a Social Charter to counter poverty and to promote development, later to be complemented by the SDGs. The approach is based on human rights promotion and cooperation rather than protection geared to access to remedies at the regional level where there are no remedies at the national level. In recent years, the whole setting has been hampered by armed conflicts in various parts of that sub-region, compounded by a reversion to non-liberal settings in some areas.

That setting is paralleled by progress on some other fronts mentioned in the section on human rights protection at the national level, such as in relation to the national human rights commissions and the courts. En passant, there is another organisation nearby which interlinks between South Asia and Southeast Asia: the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). It has a socio-economic mandate to promote cooperation between the two sub-regions rather than a human rights mandate.

Those examples can be elaborated upon further in the next section of this background paper on the happenings at the national level in Asia, as there are several good national practices on climate change.

On another front, there is the network of national human rights institutions (NHRIs) interlinked by the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF).^{lxxxix} The APF is based in Australia and it has been instrumental in supporting the setting up and capacity-building of many national institutions in the form of commissions and ombudspersons in the Asia-Pacific region, and the numbers have grown impressively to over 25 national institutions as part of the network. There is connectivity with the global network of NHRIs - the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).

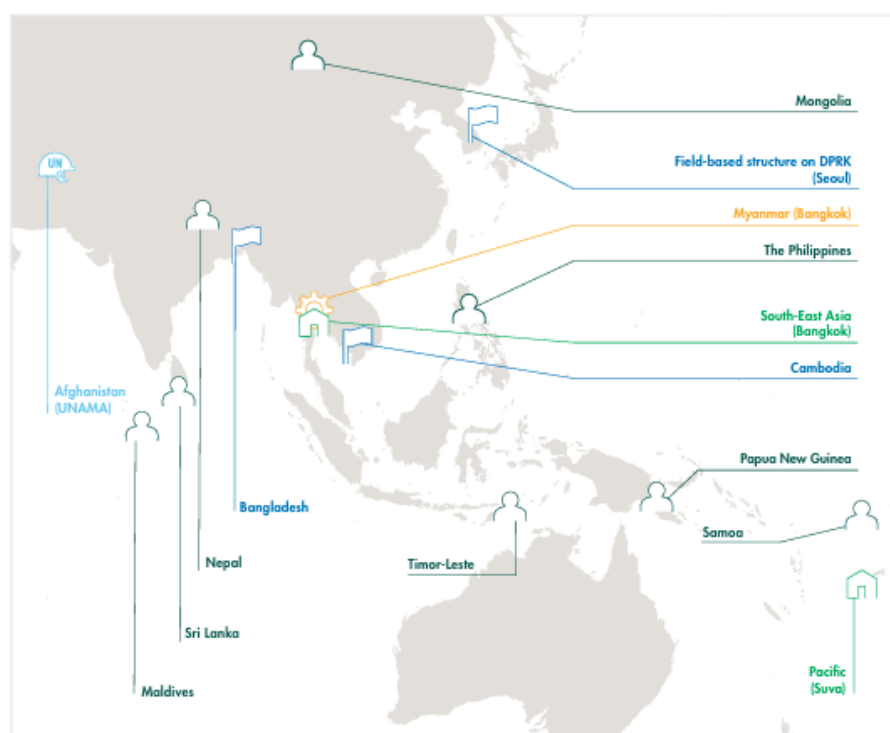
Beyond those sub-regional settings, there are several political, economic and security organisations in the Asian region, especially covering North Asia, Central Asia and West Asia. All of them are now addressing the challenge of environmental protection and climate change, partly through the lens of non-traditional security. They include the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Eurasian Economic Union, and the Economic Cooperation Organization. The European Union also holds dialogues with central Asian countries under the EU-Central Asia Cooperation on Democracy and Rights, ensuing from the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, while the Council of Europe has a Rule of Law programme to engage with Central Asian States.

4.2.3. OHCHR in Asia

Importantly, there has also been a key role of the UN human rights arm – the OHCHR – at the regional and sub-regional levels in recent decades to ensure that there is no protection deficit in the region, even though the realities are often otherwise. Since the beginning of this century, sub-regional offices of OHCHR have been set up and are operating from Bangkok, Beirut, Bishkek and Suva. There are various national offices, units and advisers.^{xc} Some are attached to peacekeeping operations. Often, they offer an indirect protection role in that they act as a conduit for complaints and grievances to be activated, especially in Geneva, particularly where the national, sub-regional and/or regional levels are unable or unwilling to act. Their presence is crucial, especially as State organs and national courts might not be reliable to render justice, while national human rights institutions might not exist or are undermined by the strong arm of the executive branch. This is all the more necessary, since many parts of the Asian region suffer from constrained civic space.

The current OHCHR-related placements are seen in the diagram below.

Diagram 2: OHCHR in the Asian region



TYPE OF PRESENCE	LOCATION
Regional Offices	South-East Asia (Bangkok, Thailand) ^a and the Pacific (Suva, Fiji)
Country Offices	Bangladesh, Cambodia and field-based structure on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) (Seoul, Republic of Korea) ^b
Human rights components in UN Peace/Political Missions	Afghanistan (UNAMA)
Human Rights Advisers in UNCTs	Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste
Other Projects/Special Presences	Myanmar (based in Bangkok, Thailand)

^a Transitioned into Regional Hub in 2026.

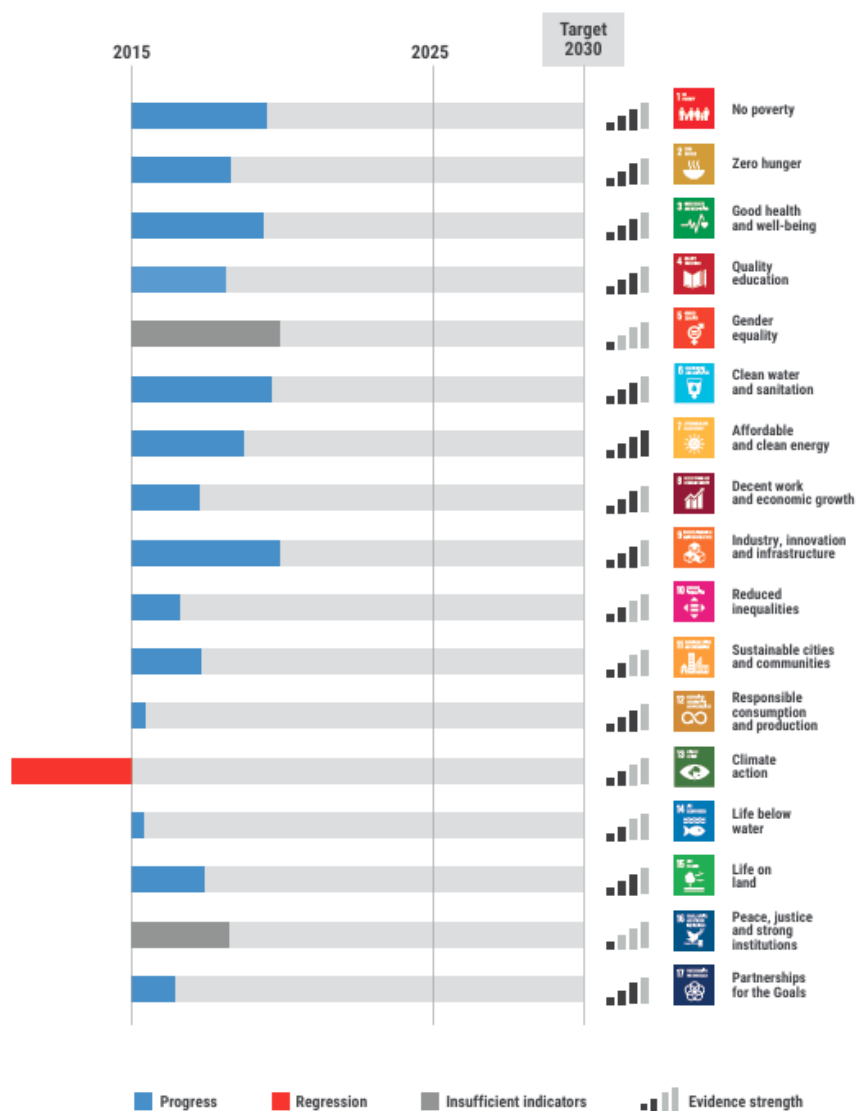
^b Mandated by Human Rights Council resolution 25/25.

Source: OHCHR 2025 Report, p. 175.

4.2.4. UN ESCAP

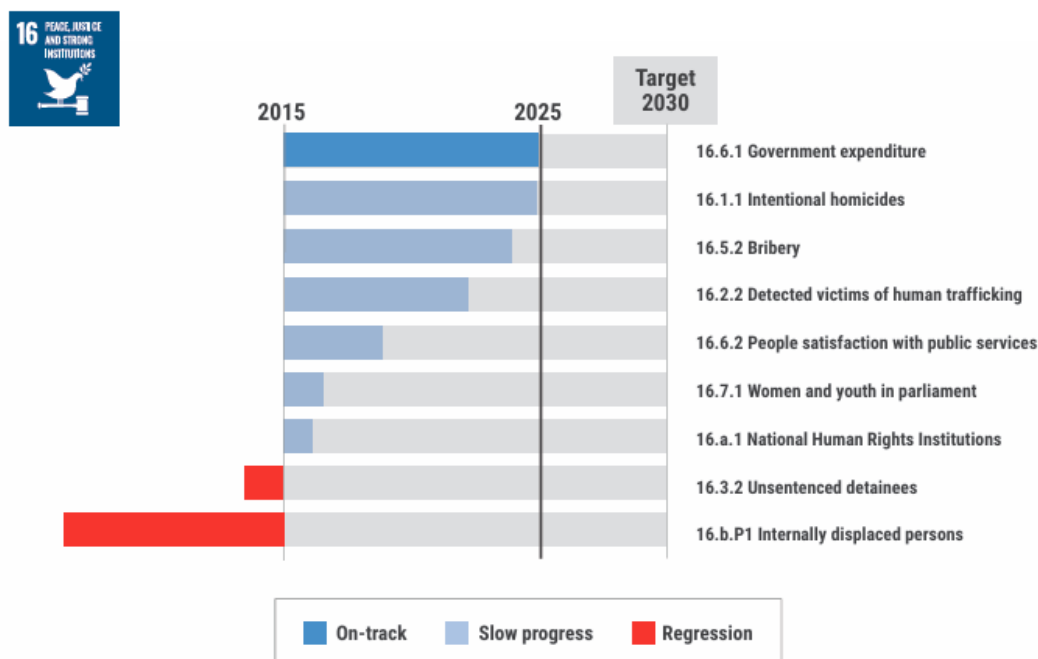
On another front, from the development-oriented dimension, UN ESCAP has provided annual monitoring on the implementation of SDGs in the Asian region, revealing also the situation in regard to human rights, especially under SDG 16.^{xcii} Unfortunately, while some gains have been made in recent years, the current indications are that the region will not meet any of the targets by 2030. The situation is seen in the general diagram on SDG implementation, followed by the other diagram on the implementation situation concerning SDG 16 as attached.

Diagram 3: ESCAP Countries and their Implementation of SDGs: Progress since 2015: General Situation



Source: UN ESCAP, SDG Report 2026, p.2.

Diagram 4: SDG 16-related Implementation Situation in ESCAP Countries



Source: ESCAP Asia-Pacific SDG Gateway, SDG Progress Snapshot. Available at <https://data.unescap.org>.

Note: 9 out of 24 official SDG indicators and one proxy indicator were used.

Source: UN ESCAP, SDG Report 2026, p.20.

A few comments might be useful to help complete the picture via the SDGs. First, the panorama is through the SDGs which have enjoyed a great ‘buy-in’ from Asian and other States. However, they cover the tip of the iceberg when compared with the more intensive standards offered by the UN treaty-based system and the UN Charter-based mechanisms referred to earlier as the third concentric circle. Second, the fact that data are missing should not mean that the situation is unknown or unclear. Data offer a quantitative assessment of the situation; they are not exhaustive or self-contained. The qualitative side invites the analyst to look to other sources of verified information to cross-check and complete the picture. There are a myriad of UN and other reports concerning human rights in the region which help to proffer the more comprehensive outlook, not necessarily impeded or daunted by lack of data. Third, indications of progress and regress are generalised under the regional window above. At the sub-regional and national levels, the situation might be brighter or darker. For instance, the SDG 16 diagram at the regional level above shows regression at the regional level on unsensenced prisoners. However, at the sub-regional level, via the recent ASEAN SDG-related report, the ASEAN measurement of SDG 16 on this issue shows progression.^{xcii} By contrast, at the national level in Thailand, the data show regression.^{xciii} Care is thus needed to disaggregate and to balance well between generalities and specificities!

4.2.5. Lessons from Asia

In retrospect, the main lesson learned is that while there is no comprehensive framework for human rights protection at the regional level in Asia, there are various entry points at the sub-regional level and various concrete activities are taking place such as in ASEAN. AICHR seems to be advancing towards a more concrete protection mechanism. Yet, the protection angle remains the more difficult angle for regionalisation or sub-regionalisation.

Meanwhile, the climate change issues offer a connecting chord for all countries of the region. On another front, due to a protection gap in the region, it is important to have a UN presence in the form of the OHCHR, either at the sub-regional and/or country level. Parallel to this, through the lens of development, there is another entry point to measure progress or regress through the SDGs. Gently, this can also be an instrument

to indicate the state of human rights in the region, to be complemented by other information to complete the picture. This goes hand in hand with the advocacy for countries to ratify human rights and related treaties, as well as to ensure effective implementation.

At the regional level, possible directions include: Strengthen the human rights standards and the protection role of human rights mechanisms at the sub-regional levels where there is no regional system; Use SDGs as an entry point to work with the setting to improve human rights implementation, while encouraging ratification of human rights and related treaties and relevant Optional Protocols; Sustain UN presences via the OHCHR in areas where there is a protection gap; Enlarge the space for civil society and interlink with the need to democratise the overall environment; Amplify measures to tackle climate change, bearing in mind the plight of small nations in the Pacific in relation to displacements, mobility and submersion; Augment anti-crime cooperation in the interface with cybercrimes, while integrating a rights-based approach in the process; Address the special vulnerabilities facing the rights of women, children, persons with disabilities, and displaced persons and communities, among other groups; Especially in the spaces not covered by sub-regional mechanisms, identify and/or set up independent and effective national human rights institutions; Interlink between the various sub-regional mechanisms in the Asian region and between those mechanisms and the mechanisms of other regions, such as those of Europe, to cross-fertilise; Share lessons learned at the regional and sub-regional levels for creative actions and resourceful mechanisms geared to effective human rights implementation; Address proactively the spread of digitalisation and AI, cross-sharing preferred safeguards and guardrails; Connect with the UN reform process and the Global Alliance for Human Rights to promote rationalisation and systems' efficiency and effectiveness, while ensuring accessibility to individuals and communities affected by negative actions relating to human rights.

5. National

“The State’s Obligation to Respect, Protect and Fulfil”:

General Comment of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

5.1. Asia-Europe’s National Progression

Much has been achieved at the national and other levels in the past 80 years and there is still the projection of possible progress. Many States have come into being with the decolonisation process and the burgeoning of the right to self-determination. Peace has reigned in most regions, despite some key clashes. Poverty has been reduced markedly in much of Asia. Infant and maternal mortality have declined in most of the Asian region. Access to education has been a remarkable achievement for many countries in this region and beyond. The concerns of developing countries have been raised more substantively in the multilateral and other settings. Vulnerabilities linked with discrimination, violence and abuse are now addressed as public matters beyond the private setting. Poverty, disparity, gender, sex, age, disability, ethnicity, displacement, sustainable development, rights, freedoms, duties/obligations, democracy, environmental protection, technologies and other challenges have come to the fore nationally much more openly to be dealt with through the spectrum of a human rights-based approach. It is heartening to appreciate the advances of humanity from the middle of the last century to the milestone quarter-mark of this century. Yet, as voiced at the beginning of this study, there loom various destructive headwinds, and bridge-building is essential for concerted actions to face them, especially to prevent, mitigate and address actual and potential harms.

In that context, improvement of human rights protection at the national level is a sturdy rudder which helps to navigate those strong currents of change. There are many ways of identifying the determinants.

5.2. Specifics from Europe

The four areas examined below - national human rights protection system, human rights action plans, human rights education, and economic, social and cultural rights - are selected because they connect central commitments of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action with the practical requirements of national implementation.^{xciv} They provide complementary perspectives on how international standards are translated into institutions, policy, knowledge and substantive protection, rather than an exhaustive catalogue of national human rights work.

National human rights protection architecture focuses on the institutions and mechanisms through which rights are protected, implemented and followed up at domestic level. This includes independent bodies such as NHRIs, ombuds institutions and equality bodies, national courts and avenues for remedy, as well as governmental coordination structures such as National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRFs). Human rights action plans provide a means of translating commitments into coordinated public policy, while human rights education addresses the knowledge and capacity needed both by rights-holders and by public officials responsible for implementation. Economic, social and cultural rights add a substantive test: whether Vienna’s affirmation of the indivisibility of all rights is reflected in protection that reaches people’s everyday living conditions and access to public services, rather than remaining confined to formal legal guarantees.

5.2.1. National Human Rights Protection Systems

National human rights protection is best understood as an architecture rather than as the work of any single institution. It brings together independent bodies such as NHRIs, ombuds institutions and equality bodies; courts and other avenues for remedy; parliaments and public authorities responsible for changing law and policy; and governmental mechanisms that coordinate implementation and follow-up. These institutions

have different mandates and degrees of independence, but protection is strongest when they complement one another: independent bodies identify gaps and scrutinise government action, courts provide remedies, and public authorities translate international and regional standards into legislation, budgets and administrative practice.^{xcv}

The European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) brings together 51 institutions across wider Europe. They take different forms, including commissions, institutes and ombuds institutions, and are assessed against the Paris Principles. Their mandates often overlap: 26 ENNHRI members are ombuds institutions, 21 are equality bodies, 27 monitor the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and 27 act as National Preventive Mechanisms under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. Combining roles can make an institution easier for the public to approach, but may also leave it carrying several demanding mandates without sufficient staff, expertise or funding.^{xcvi}

As in Asia, protection matters as much as promotion. European NHRIs and ombuds institutions may receive complaints, investigate on their own initiative, visit prisons, police cells, psychiatric facilities, care homes and migration reception centres, advise public authorities, intervene before courts, and report to international mechanisms. Equality bodies offer a more specialised route for people affected by discrimination. Two EU directives adopted in 2024 required Member States, by June 2026, to strengthen their independence, resources, accessibility and litigation powers. Accreditation or a broad mandate is nevertheless insufficient if appointments are politicised, access to information is restricted or authorities routinely leave recommendations unanswered.^{xcvii}

Independent courts are another central part of national protection. The European Court of Human Rights generally becomes involved only after domestic remedies have been exhausted, reflecting the national judge's primary role in guaranteeing Convention rights. Within the EU, national courts also apply the EU Charter when a case falls within EU law and may seek guidance from the Court of Justice. This layered system can strengthen protection, but it can be difficult to navigate. Legal aid, independent lawyers, civil society and the media help individuals reach the appropriate forum and supply evidence missing from official reports. Their position cannot be assumed. FRA's 2026 report found that 75 per cent of the civil-society organisations responding to its consultation covering 2024 had encountered barriers in their human-rights work. The figure is not population-wide, but signals serious pressure on the protection environment.^{xcviii}

National courts have also advanced climate justice. In *Urgenda v the Netherlands*, the Dutch Supreme Court relied on the rights to life and private and family life under the ECHR when it upheld an order requiring the State to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions by at least 25 per cent by the end of 2020 compared with 1990.^{xcix} In 2021, the German Federal Constitutional Court found parts of the Climate Change Act incompatible with fundamental rights because they did not set sufficiently concrete reductions after 2030, shifting excessive burdens onto younger and future generations. These cases show how domestic courts can connect constitutional and regional standards with scientific evidence. Courts, however, do not deliver the whole response: judgments still need legislation, budgets and administrative follow-up.^c

A further part of this architecture is the development of National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRFs). Unlike NHRIs, these are governmental coordination mechanisms rather than independent oversight bodies. Their purpose is to organise State engagement with international human rights mechanisms and, increasingly, to connect reporting with implementation between review cycles. A standing NMIRF can bring together ministries and other public authorities, assign responsibility for recommendations, maintain institutional memory and coordinate the information required for treaty body reviews, the Universal Periodic Review and engagement with Special Procedures.^{ci} The underlying challenge is increasingly one of information management: States may receive hundreds of overlapping recommendations from different human rights mechanisms, while responsibility for implementation is dispersed across ministries and levels of government. Digital human rights tracking tools can strengthen this coordinating role. Systems such as OHCHR's National Recommendations Tracking Database (NRTD), as well as other national platforms, allow recommendations to be clustered, linked to responsible institutions and followed over time rather than reconstructed only when a report becomes due. The important institutional

distinction should nevertheless be preserved: NMIRFs organise government implementation, while NHRIs, courts and civil society provide independent scrutiny, remedies and accountability. A mature national protection architecture therefore requires both capacities.

The most effective national protection architecture therefore connects NHRIs, ombuds and equality bodies with courts, parliaments, civil society and the authorities responsible for implementation. Standing NMIRFs can provide the coordinating infrastructure for follow-up to UN reviews and, where appropriate, regional recommendations and judgments. Such arrangements should clarify responsibility, preserve institutional memory and facilitate independent scrutiny, rather than becoming reporting structures that become active only when the next international review is due.

5.2.2. Human Rights Action Plans

The Vienna Programme of Action also encouraged national human rights action plans in Europe, but practice remains uneven. Some States use comprehensive plans; others rely on separate strategies concerning equality, disability, children, anti-racism or violence against women. Specialised plans may offer detail, but they can fragment responsibility. A comprehensive plan can connect them, provided that it does more than restate existing promises.

Spain's Second National Human Rights Plan for 2023-2027 is one recent example. Seventeen ministries prepared it through dialogue with civil society, parliamentary groups, experts, universities, the Ombudsman and autonomous communities, together with a public consultation. Its four axes, 16 general objectives and 421 measures cover international obligations, environmental and technological challenges, ageing, gender equality and non-discrimination. The breadth of the plan shows why clear responsibility and public review are indispensable.^{cii} Finland illustrates continuity: its fourth National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights, covering 2024-2027 and entitled *Fundamental and Human Rights as Part of the Rule of Law*, was adopted in November 2025. Successive plans can turn implementation into a continuing practice rather than a one-off initiative.^{ciii}

The main European lesson concerns method. A plan should start from an honest assessment of protection gaps and inclusive consultation. Measures need a responsible authority, timetable, resources and assessable results. Parliaments, NHRIs and civil society should review progress independently, while local and regional governments should participate where they deliver the service concerned. UN recommendations and regional findings can provide common evidence base instead of generating parallel lists. Digital tools can make progress visible, but cannot replace political ownership or an adequate budget.

5.2.3. Human Rights Education

Human rights education in Europe has been shaped by war, the Holocaust, fascism, authoritarian rule, colonialism and persistent discrimination. It is closely connected with democratic citizenship, historical understanding and the prevention of recurrence. The Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, adopted in 2010, asks States to make such education available to every person. Its Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture translates this aim into values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding. These resources offer common direction, while curricula and teacher training remain national responsibilities.^{civ}

Education should extend beyond learning the text of conventions. In schools, rights are also learned through experience: whether students participate, discrimination and bullying are addressed, different histories are presented fairly, and complaints can be made safely. Universities contribute through programmes, legal clinics and research. The Global Campus of Human Rights in Venice links European education with programmes in Asia and elsewhere. Memorial sites, museums, NHRIs and civil society can likewise connect historical knowledge with present-day choices, especially where debate is polarised or minorities are treated as objects of policy rather than participants.

Education must also reach people who exercise power. Judges, prosecutors, police and prison staff, teachers, care professionals, local officials and journalists make decisions affecting rights. The Council of Europe's HELP Programme offers ECHR-related courses for legal professionals, showing how continuing education can connect law with everyday cases. Comparable practical training is needed for officials who design budgets, procure technology or administer benefits, and should be assessed through changes in practice rather than certificates issued.^{cv}

A current challenge is to connect human rights education with digital, media and AI literacy. Learners need to recognise manipulation and hate speech, understand how personal data are used and know how to challenge an automated decision. The shift towards science, technology, engineering and mathematics should not push human rights aside. Ethics, social context and human consequences should form part of the education of engineers, data scientists and public administrators, while open inquiry and academic freedom remain protected. Asia-Europe exchange is particularly valuable because the technologies cross borders while their social effects and regulatory settings differ.

5.2.4. Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Economic, social and cultural rights have a strong place in Europe's post-war constitutional and welfare traditions. Nationally, they are experienced through work, social security, health care, education, housing and cultural participation. The European Social Charter and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights provide important standards, while the EU Charter protects solidarity rights when States act within EU law. Protection remains uneven because States have not accepted identical commitments and these rights depend heavily on legislation, budgets and public services. The practical test is whether everyone can obtain an essential service without discrimination.^{cvi}

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed weaknesses in care homes, unequal access to health care and digital education, and insecurity among low-paid, migrant and informal workers. Public-health restrictions still required a legal basis, a legitimate aim, necessity and proportionality, regular review and non-discriminatory application. Health backlogs, interrupted education, income loss and worsening mental health continue to affect rights, most sharply for people already disadvantaged.

Ageing is a longer-term challenge shared with Asia. Longer lives are an achievement, but require sustainable pensions, accessible health services, long-term and palliative care, and support for independent living. Community services can keep people close to familiar surroundings, but localisation must not shift responsibility onto under-resourced municipalities or unpaid relatives, most of whom are women. Technology can assist care and coordination; online-only services can exclude older persons, persons with disabilities, rural communities and people unable to afford connectivity. Human contact and offline assistance remain part of a dignified service.

Housing shortages, homelessness, energy costs and regional inequalities place further pressure on the social model. Green and digital transitions should be assessed by their distributional effects, not only aggregate efficiency. Workers and communities dependent on changing industries need a just transition, while households unable to absorb higher costs require protection. Disaggregated data should reveal differences hidden by national averages, and quantitative indicators should be read alongside testimony and qualitative evidence.

Digital administration illustrates both opportunity and danger. It can accelerate benefits and help authorities detect inconsistent information, but may also intensify surveillance, reproduce bias or multiply errors. In 2020, the District Court of The Hague found that the law underpinning SyRI, used to identify risks of social-benefit fraud, failed to strike the fair balance required by Article 8 of the ECHR. Fraud prevention does not remove the need for transparency, necessity and proportionality. Affected people must know when a consequential automated assessment is used, be able to correct inaccurate data and obtain meaningful human review.^{cvi}

Economic and social protection therefore cannot be separated from civil and political guarantees. Participation, information, privacy, non-discrimination and effective remedies help determine whether a welfare system is fair; equally, people cannot participate in public life when basic needs are unmet. National institutions should treat rights as interdependent and judge reforms by their effect on lived conditions across the population.

5.3. Specifics from Asia

Since the end of the last century, developments at the national level have been shaped catalytically by the Vienna Programme of Action from at least four angles: the call for national human rights institutions, human rights action plans, human rights education, and economic, social and cultural rights linked with the right to development. The following developments exemplify recent progression in a setting where the national setting does not fall under a regional framework of a binding and prescriptive kind as found in Europe.

5.3.1. National Human Rights Protection Systems

The drive to establish NHRIs in the Asian region can be attributed to a large extent to the Vienna Programme of Action. Currently, there are nearly 30 such bodies, usually in the form of National Human Rights Commission and/or Ombudsman in Asia and the Pacific.^{cviii} These mechanisms are to abide by the Paris Principles on NHRIs^{cix} and the crux is to ensure that the institutions and their members are independent from the executive branch at the national level, to be pluralistic in composition, and to be effective in implementation. The APF and GANHRI grade them according to these criteria; the least credible institutions are thus disengaged from the network. There is a key mandate of these NHRIs not only to promote but also to protect human rights. The latter involves the various components identified above as constituents of a protection role, including investigations and reception of complaints/communications from affected parties, coupled with the advocacy for and provision of redress.

At the field level, visits to prisons and other closed or semi-closed institutions where people are held or detained have been a good practice on the part of many of these institutions which should be maximised. Many have dealt with very sensitive issues, such as extrajudicial killings, torture and other malpractices. Most national commissions do not have the power to access the courts to enforce sanctions, but act as a check and balance at least on governmental actions, although a small number have such cross-referral power. Meanwhile, there are constructive lessons from the way that one of the National Commissions on Human Rights, together with the State Commissions, has managed to clear a huge caseload of complaints to remedy grievances. Some countries are also establishing national mechanisms to coordinate responses to human rights treaties and the UPR.

In a broader sense, independent and effective courts can also be seen as national institutions protecting human rights, and there have been seminal court cases from the region in this regard. In various SAARC countries, there are active Courts, which provide a sense of equilibrium to ensure human rights protection at the national level. The proactive nature of the Supreme Court of India is well known, and it has laid down judgments to protect child labourers, as well as on gender diversity and environmental issues. The presence of the UN in the region has complemented these developments. In particular, pursuant to student-led demonstrations and the resultant change of government in Bangladesh recently, the OHCHR set up an office in the country to help strengthen human rights protection. The country's Supreme Court has thus referred to a report from the OHCHR covering the recent history of clashes and violations as an historic document in a related judgment.^{cx}

As a pioneer, the Supreme Court of the Philippines in the *Oposa v Factoran* case was the first court in the region to advocate the inter-generational perspective in its judgment to protect the wildlife linked environment and ecosystem which humanity must protect as trustees for the next generation.^{cxii} There have also been thousands of cases in China initiated by prosecutors and environmental organisations against state enterprises and companies which fail to adapt to renewable energy. In the case – *Friends of Nature v Jiasa*, a hydropower project in China's Yunnan province threatening the local ecosystem was halted by public

interest litigation initiated by a non-governmental entity.^{cxii} This is much linked with the impetus for climate justice, often mobilised by youth groups in their commitment to the green and blue waves of the ecological undercurrents.

5.3.2. Human Rights Action Plans

Another consequence of the Vienna Programme of Action was the progression to prepare national human rights action plans, with a structured time frame for activities to implement human rights in the national setting. The UN Handbook on National Human Rights Plans of Action (2002) provides guidance for the development of such plans, supported by principles advocating a participatory process as well as a substantive outcome; commitment to universal human rights standards; implementation of international human rights obligations; interdependence and indivisibility of human rights; action orientation; a public document; monitoring and evaluation; a continuing process; a national undertaking; and the international dimension, with preparedness for potential difficulties.^{cxiii}

Several countries in Asia have adopted such Plans. In addition to long-standing national economic and social development plans, Thailand has a National Human Rights Action Plan to propel human rights improvement more specifically. Thailand's Fifth Plan, which ends next year, advocates a gradual approach towards possible abolition of the death penalty.^{cxiv} In essence, it addresses five areas for coverage: politics and governance; justice; health; education; and economy and business. It addresses the concerns of eleven groups: workers, victims in the administration of justice, children and women, human rights defenders, ageing populations, drugs addicts, gender diverse persons, persons with national registration problems and ethnic groups, persons with disabilities, detainees and ex-convicts, and persons who are ill, persons living with HIV, and persons with psycho-social problems. There has been a midterm evaluation of the Plan which was done by the concerned ministry. In future, it may be best to have an independent outside body to assess the implementation process to ensure more objectivity.

Since 2009, China has formulated and implemented five national human rights plans. In June this year, China published the 'National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2026–2030)' which covers not only a wide range of human rights issues but also it stipulates a commitment to global governance and multilateralism through dialogue and cooperation.^{cxv}

5.3.3. Human Rights Education

This item is not new, and there have been various world plans of action on the issue. It concerns both process and substance, and access to not only groups in situations of vulnerability but also power-groups who need to be catalysed to respect rights. The entry points for such education range from pre-school to primary, secondary and tertiary education, and from non-formal education to informal education, importantly with the advent of social media. The spread of human rights courses at the university level is commonplace, while less intense education can be adapted to the other levels. Networks between educational institutions in Southeast Asia have grown and there are key links with Europe such as through the Global Campus of Human Rights based in Venice, the Raoul Wallenberg Institute founded in Sweden, the Danish Institute for Human Rights and the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights.

In the broader domain of access to justice, such education is interrelated with legal aid, legal clinics, legal dissemination and legal education, and various *pro bono* hubs linked with universities complemented by civil society activism can be identified. The message is to connect the learning process with life situations and the field level; this is also a kind of learning by doing which helps to nurture organic understanding and empathy, avoiding a purely textual, normative approach.

On a cautionary note, there is emerging competition from other sciences which might be edging out the social sciences where human rights education is generally found. The shift to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) is gaining ground, consuming budgets, but there is still a window to humanise the STEM modules by integrating a human rights-based approach with human rights principles and practices into the STEM curriculum. For example, while students may wish to concentrate on computer and digital

know-how, the human and environmental history behind the computerisation and digitalisation should not be overlooked and should be taught. A case in point is that the inventor of the modern computer certainly did not have an easy time with his private orientations; he was discriminated against. Technology should also be seen as a means to an end and not an end in itself, which implies the need to interlink with the fate of humanity and ecology. The STEM orientation needs to be matched with human narratives and sensibilities.

5.3.4. Economic, Social and Cultural (ESC) Rights

The issue was covered to some extent in relation to the SDGs in the earlier section concerning the regional level. ESC rights are generally popular with all countries in Asia, while some authorities are less comfortable with civil and political rights. Even though the current assessment of SDG implementation is that the goals will not be attained by 2030, it is encouraging to recall that all regions have progressed substantially since the end of World War II.

More specifically, the issue of health care and access to universal health care was tested to the limit during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, not so long ago. There was an intrinsic link with all kinds of other rights, such as the right to education and the right to social security and the broader vista of social protection. Several countries invoked national security and public health to limit rights, and they need to be assessed from three angles: legality, necessity/proportionality, and legitimacy. The pandemic led to increasing poverty and disrupted progress in the quest for the highest available standard of living, with multilevel impact, and the consequences are still being felt.

In view of the fact that several Asian countries are now faced with an ageing population, the issue of the right to the highest attainable standard of health and preparations for life's transition invite serious reflection and preparation. Many countries deserve and should work towards universal health care, but are impeded by lack of resources. While some countries have good health care for the general public, the system will feel greater strain as the majority enters the later stages of life, needing palliative care. With the limited availability of hospitals and medical personnel, there is the need to aim for localisation to enable local communities and services to provide services. Women may face cumulative disadvantage across the life course and therefore require particular attention in ageing, health and social protection policies. Paramedics, including a helping hand from community volunteers, will be welcome. The rise of AI will also be helpful to reduce the strain on medical services, bearing in mind that while AI does not eat, it still consumes data, electricity and water. At times, it too may need to be repaired, and there is cost involved. On the other hand, as the humans become less sociable towards humans due to their fixation with the digital world, there is the intriguing question of how the psycho-social well-being of humans is being affected. Mental health is deteriorating on many fronts due to multiple pressures, and there is a need for a revitalisation process which is human-centred. Hence, the word 'digital detoxification' has crept into the contemporary vocabulary. More will be said in the later section on AI in this study.

5.4. Cross-cutting Portals

The recently launched Global Alliance for Human Rights provides a framework for prospective and future-oriented action through four pathways: Human Rights at Home, Human Rights in Action, Human Rights in Mind and Human Rights for the Future. Within and across these pathways, a number of areas are particularly relevant to the present discussion, including human rights cities and local governance, business and human rights, climate action, and responsible digitalisation and artificial intelligence. The Alliance also seeks engagement across sectors and generations, including young people, business, academia and local authorities.^{cxvi} Bearing in mind the cross-cutting importance of access to justice and remedy, accountability and policy coherence, these areas provide useful points of connection between Asian and European experience.

5.4.1. Human Rights Cities and Local Governance

The human rights cities movement predates the Global Alliance, but it has gained renewed international attention through closer engagement between OHCHR, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), local authorities and the UN human rights mechanisms. In 2025, OHCHR and UCLG issued a *Guidance Framework for Creating a Human Rights City*, providing a practical roadmap for integrating international human rights standards into local governance. The Global^{cxvii} Alliance has subsequently given further impetus to this agenda through its Human Rights at Home pathway and its support for expanding the global Human Rights Cities movement: ‘At the local level, a Human Rights City ensures that local laws, policies, services and processes align with international human rights norms and standards. The local government develops and implements measures, programmes, methods and tools to support the promotion and protection of human rights, including on monitoring progress, in collaboration with local communities, civil society, academia, national and local human rights institution and other stakeholders. At the international level, a Human Rights City participates in knowledge exchanges among local governments worldwide, contributes to OHCHR and the United Nations human rights mechanisms as well as the SDG review mechanisms under the auspices of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.’^{cxviii}

The human rights cities movement is best understood as a method for bringing the State’s international obligations into the places where rights are experienced. Local and regional governments (LRGs) are not external partners of the State for this purpose: they are public authorities through which the State acts. The national government remains internationally responsible, but many of the decisions that determine whether a person enjoys adequate housing, education, health care, water and sanitation, accessible transport, public safety or equal treatment are taken locally. The practical question is therefore not whether LRGs have a role, but how that role can be made systematic, adequately resourced and accountable.^{cxix}

A public declaration or council decision supplies the political and legal foundation, but it should be followed by an institutional structure able to coordinate work across municipal departments and by operational tools. These include a baseline assessment, an action plan, trained personnel, participatory budgeting, rights-based procurement, human rights impact assessment, indicators, annual reporting and access to a complaint or oversight mechanism. This sequence matters. Without it, the title of “human rights city” can remain largely symbolic. With it, international standards can influence ordinary administrative choices: which neighbourhood receives public investment, whether a transport project is accessible, how a city purchases goods and services, and whether residents can challenge discrimination or exclusion. Complementing this approach is the need for stronger multilevel coordination, integration of local data into national systems, engagement with NMIRFs and the use of digital human rights tracking tools to connect local implementation with national and international reporting.^{cxx}

Other localities and rural areas should not be overlooked. Human rights integration at that level would have to reflect the particular needs of rural populations, such as access to water, electricity, education, health care, income generation and other aspects of human and environmental development. Given that this setting is closely related to agriculture, there is connectivity with food security as well as carbon sinks which are very much linked with current concerns on climate change. Local plans and bodies can also incorporate special protection measures into their work, such as via provincial committees, child protection committees, youth councils, women’s associations, and farmers’ cooperatives.

Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) should also be connected more consistently to national and international accountability. They hold implementation information that is often absent from national averages and can contribute to national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up, the Universal Periodic Review, treaty-body reporting and visits by special procedures. In turn, recommendations from those mechanisms should be translated into named local actions, budgets, timetables and responsible departments. Italy’s use of a regional annex in its third-cycle UPR mid-term reporting offers one example of how subnational practice can be made visible. The aim is not to give LRGs a separate international legal status, but to make national reporting more accurate and implementation more effective.

The main constraint is the frequent mismatch between local responsibilities and local authority, finance or technical capacity. National governments should consult LRGs when commitments concern services within local competence, include them in national follow-up structures and provide the legal and fiscal space needed for implementation. LRG networks can support peer learning, but they cannot compensate for unfunded mandates or weak remedies. Ultimately, the measure of a human rights city is not the declaration or international recognition it receives. It is whether residents, including those in marginalised neighbourhoods and surrounding rural areas, can see a durable improvement in equal access, participation, accountability and protection.

5.4.1.1. Cross-cultural Good Practices

Examples include city-linked development plans, transparent budgeting, rights-based procurement such as to reflect labour standards, accessible services, and impact assessment. There is also much room for sports and cultural activities with a human rights-based approach such as to have spaces for persons with disabilities, respect for labour rights when sports venues are being built, and interlink with communities, faith leaders and religions through cross-cultural activities. Arts and music are part and parcel of the immersive wave which can reduce stress and augment the aspiration to peace, beginning with a peace of mind.

The OHCHR – UCLG Guidance Framework cites examples from various cities, including Gwangju, Vienna, Utrecht, Rabat and Mexico City.^{cxix} Gwangju in the Republic of Korea has for a long time been a centre for world conferencing on human rights cities and is a key example for that movement. The city itself has a storied and difficult human rights history.^{cxxii} Seoul has set an example for urban regeneration by rehabilitating its Cheonggyecheon Stream into a major rest and recreation area and a tourist attraction, a lesson shared with other cities worldwide. It has also adopted the Seoul Metropolitan Framework Ordinance on Human Rights to promote the dignity and welfare of its residents, with the sunny caption ‘Seoul my Soul’.^{cxxiii} In Southeast Asia, a key city is now providing diversity shelters, links between land-based, underground and waterborne transportation, and a major expansion of parks and other green areas. Judicial cases have compelled the authorities to install lifts as part of access for persons with disabilities.

The movement has also acquired a stronger collective framework. The United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) campaign “10, 100, 1000 Human Rights Cities and Territories by 2030”, launched in 2022 and advanced through the World Congress in Daejeon, seeks to connect local commitments and expand the movement to 1,000 cities and territories.^{cxixiv} At the UCLG World Congress in Tangier in June 2026, local and regional leaders adopted the New Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City. It recognises 37 rights in the city and links them to pathways for local delivery, with universal, accessible and non-discriminatory public services at the centre of the Congress outcome. By that time, more than 100 LRGs had joined the campaign.^{cxixv} This horizontal cooperation can accelerate learning and give LRGs a clearer voice in international discussions. It should nevertheless complement, rather than replace, independent monitoring and the vertical relationship with national human rights systems.

Vienna illustrates the value of moving from political commitment to institutionalisation. A study of the city’s human rights situation, prepared during the process initiated in 2013, provided a baseline for the City Council’s declaration of Vienna as a Human Rights City on 19 December 2014. The Human Rights Office, opened in September 2015, then gave the commitment an institutional home. It coordinates human rights as a cross-cutting concern within the city administration and works across municipal structures and with external actors.^{cxixvi} The importance of this arrangement is not the creation of another municipal office as such. It is the assignment of continuing responsibility to an identifiable body that can convene departments, sustain dialogue and translate principles such as non-discrimination, participation, transparency and accountability into administrative practice.

Utrecht and Barcelona demonstrate how the approach can also be integrated into sectoral policy and access to remedy. Utrecht was recognised in 2012 as the first human rights city in the Netherlands and subsequently developed a local Human Rights Coalition bringing together public authorities and other local

actors.^{cxvii} In Barcelona, local practice has included accessibility audits, adapted public transportation and efforts to align public spaces with disability-rights standards. Barcelona's Office for Non-Discrimination additionally provides a municipal route for advice, mediation and support in cases involving discrimination.^{cxviii} These examples caution against treating a human rights city as one fixed institutional design. The more important questions are whether residents can participate safely, whether policy is tested against the situation of people facing discrimination, and whether an accessible route exists for correction and remedy.

5.4.1.2. Sport and Mega-sporting Events as a Local Human Rights Test

Sport is one field in which local government can make a rights-based approach tangible. Municipalities own or regulate many facilities, fund clubs and youth programmes, control public space and transport, and influence who can participate safely. Routine decisions about opening hours, fees, accessibility, safeguarding, the allocation of playing fields and support for women's, disability and community sport can either reduce or reproduce exclusion. A human rights approach therefore looks beyond the celebratory value of sport. It asks whether children are protected, whether persons with disabilities can participate on an equal basis, whether women and girls have fair access to facilities, whether migrant and minority communities are welcomed, and whether workers in the local sport economy enjoy decent conditions.

UEFA EURO 2024 provides a useful European example of multi-level responsibility.^{cxix} UEFA, the German Football Association, the federal government, the Länder and the ten host cities, namely Berlin, Cologne, Dortmund, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Gelsenkirchen, Hamburg, Leipzig, Munich and Stuttgart made a joint human rights commitment.^{cxx} The declaration and associated strategy addressed accessibility, diversity and inclusion, non-discrimination, health and well-being, and freedom of expression. They were developed with input from human rights and stakeholder organisations. An event-wide grievance mechanism was also made available to players, spectators, journalists, human rights defenders, workers, volunteers, suppliers and service providers. The approach is significant because it placed host cities inside the governance framework rather than treating them only as venues. Yet an event-specific mechanism cannot displace ordinary judicial, administrative, labour or equality remedies. Its value depends on independence, accessibility, timely response, transparency about outcomes and coordination with competent local and national bodies.

5.4.2. Business and Human Rights

The issue of business and human rights (BHR) has become popular in Asia. Currently, various countries have adopted plans and strategies on the issue; they include Thailand, Japan, Mongolia, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Viet Nam and Malaysia. They are all guided by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights with the threefold framework of the State's duty to protect, the Business sector's duty to respect, and their shared duty to remedy negative consequences.^{cxxi}

The plans vary from a general structure to a more detailed document. Underlying issues when evolving these Plans include: What is the rationale for the Plan - human rights commitment, environment concerns, and/or membership of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development?; What key issues - for example, on the environment: clean air, climate change, carbon trade, greenwashing?; General targets or more specific indicators - should there be specific indicators in the Plan?; Which stakeholders - Government, non-government groups, state enterprises, businesses (clean versus grey), environmental and human rights defenders, communities, and/or individuals?; What tracking and who evaluates? What links with other plans - such as national development plans and international plans such as SDGs?; National impetus or international pressure e.g. fear of sanctions, extraterritorial impact of laws from other regions such as from the EU?; For business due diligence - should it be voluntary or mandatory?; What space for environmental and human rights defenders?; What remedies: formal, informal or perhaps a specific tribunal with expertise?; Should BHR be part of or independent from Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting?; How to incentivise small and medium scale industries?; What sanctions for breaches?

Japan launched its first National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAP), coupled with the 2022 Guidelines on Respecting Human Rights in Responsible Supply Chains.^{cxxii} The original Plan advocated

various cross-cutting concerns for the public and private sectors, in particular Labour (Promotion of Decent Work), Promotion and Protection of Children's Rights, Human Rights Associated with the Development of New Technologies, Rights and Roles of Consumers, Diverse Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, and Other Groups, Acceptance of and Coexistence with Foreign Nationals. There is now a revised NAP and a key area for the authorities is public procurement, while a priority for the business sector is human rights due diligence, implying the need for consistent assessment of the situation impacting on human rights, with mitigation measures and related redress. On another front, there is a debate in various settings on whether human rights due diligence should be a voluntary matter or a mandatory matter. The European trend of opting for the latter, at least for big companies and operations, has global implications, and Asian countries exporting to Europe are cognisant of the impact on their business-related activities relating to trade and commerce.

European experience provides a comparison rather than a finished model. The United Kingdom adopted its first National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights in 2013. France's 2017 duty of vigilance law moved further towards mandatory requirements by requiring large companies to establish and implement vigilance plans addressing serious human rights and environmental risks in their operations and relevant business relationships. These approaches illustrate the distinction between a government's policy commitment and duties that companies can be required to fulfil.^{cxxxiii}

At EU level, the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, adopted in 2024, establishes a framework for covered companies to identify and address adverse human rights and environmental impacts in their operations and chains of activities, including beyond Europe. This development has not been linear. Amendments adopted in 2026 narrowed its scope to the largest companies and postponed application of the national implementing measures until July 2029. They also removed the Directive's climate-transition-plan obligation and its harmonised basis for civil liability, leaving liability to national law. Europe therefore offers lessons both in making due diligence mandatory and in the political pressures that can limit its reach.^{cxxxiv}

For Asian suppliers and European buyers, the relevant question is not simply how European requirements are transmitted down a supply chain. Due diligence should also examine how purchasing practices and commercial terms may contribute to harm. European companies should support improvements and meaningful worker participation rather than merely transfer compliance costs to suppliers. Cooperation should be guided by the UN Guiding Principles and OECD standards, with attention to risks to people rather than only commercial exposure or the completion of an audit.^{cxxxv}

The National Action Plan for Law and Policy Improvement to promote responsible business practices in Viet Nam for the period 2023-2027 covers the labour issue as follows:

'In labour - Reviewing, amending, supplementing and promulgating laws and regulations concerning the promotion and protection of labour rights, welfare of employees in industrial relations and employment in line with international labour standards to which Viet Nam is a party (including Law on Safety and Occupational Hygiene, Law on Social Insurance, Law on Employment and their guiding instruments) + Lead agency: Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs + Coordinating agencies: Ministries, ministerial-level agencies, government-attached agencies and other relevant agencies' ^{cxxxvi}

And on the environment:

'd) In environment protection Studying, reviewing legislation and proposing the amendments, supplements or promulgation of legal normative documents on natural resources and environment to promote responsible business practice (RBP) - Lead agency: Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment - Coordinating agencies: ministries, ministerial-level agencies, Supreme People's Court, proceeding agencies, agencies and organizations participating in judicial support, other relevant socio-political and social organizations - Outputs: Research reports and related proposals and recommendations (if any) submitted to competent authorities.'^{cxxxvii}

In prioritising governance, labour and the environment in the Plan, Malaysia's National Business and Human Rights Action Plan 2025-30 explains well the difference between the ESG framework and the BHR framework.

Table 1: ESG and BHR per Malaysian NAP

ESG framework	BHR framework
Prescribes good practices aligned with the sustainability agenda	Reaffirms fundamental rights and accessible pathways to justice
Employs business or market-based language and approaches	Employs human rights-based language and approaches
Enhances corporate responsibility	Advances corporate accountability
Describes the risks to profit	Describes the risks to people

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Interestingly, on the issue of whether the due diligence should be mandatory or not, the Malaysia Plan stipulates that:

“G 2.5: Whether mandatory or discretionary, report on the company's efforts to ensure corporate accountability to human rights, including the Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence (HREDD) and steps to identify, prevent, mitigate and cease adverse effects on human rights.”^{cxxxviii}

The distinction between ESG reporting and business and human rights is equally important in Europe. Disclosure can make risks more visible, but it does not itself stop an abuse or provide a remedy. OECD National Contact Points, including those in European countries, offer a non-judicial route for complaints concerning the conduct of enterprises operating in or from countries adhering to the OECD Guidelines. Their role includes mediation, public recommendations and follow-up. They can connect allegations of harm outside Europe with the conduct of a European enterprise, but should complement rather than displace access to courts and other competent authorities.^{cxxxix}

The International Accord for Health and Safety in the Textile and Garment Industry provides a concrete connection between international buyers and Asian production. Its legally binding agreements between brands and trade unions support safety programmes in Bangladesh and Pakistan, combining independent inspections with corrective action and worker complaints mechanisms. Signatory brands commit to commercial terms that make required safety improvements financially feasible for suppliers. This illustrates how responsibility can be shared through enforceable commitments and worker participation, rather than relying solely on voluntary corporate assurances. Its sector-specific scope nevertheless means that it cannot substitute for the wider protection of labour rights and access to remedy.^{cxli}

In reality, in addition to the increasing emphasis on labour protection, responsible investment, and environmental protection in the NAP of these countries, a key concern has been the space for environmental and human rights defenders to be part of the process. There have been a number of cases in the Asian region where these defenders have been prosecuted and litigated against, so as to limit their role as sentinels of human rights protection. This phenomenon is known as SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation), and it is part of the shrinking civic space in parts of the region. However, various anti-SLAPP measures are also emerging to ensure a balance between public scrutiny by civil society and business-related interests. Mongolia leads the way on passing a law on the protection of human rights defenders, while the Philippines is exploring this possibility.^{cxlii} In addition to key reforms of various laws on this front to

screen out cases against human rights defenders, an interesting innovation recently was a circular from the President of the Supreme Court of Thailand to guide judges in the process. ^{cxlii}For instance, where the prosecution against a human rights defender is launched in various courts in different areas of the country simultaneously, compelling the accused person to travel all over the country to respond, this might not be seen as bona fide action but would be a form of harassment, and the courts should dispose of the cases in favour of the human rights defender accordingly.

European developments also provide a counterpart to the Asian measures against abusive litigation. The EU Anti-SLAPP Directive of 2024 requires safeguards in civil and commercial proceedings with cross-border implications, including early dismissal of manifestly unfounded claims and measures against abusive proceedings. Its transposition deadline was 7 May 2026; it does not itself cover criminal proceedings or every wholly domestic case. The Council of Europe's 2024 recommendation addresses SLAPPs more broadly, including domestic proceedings.^{cxliii} The shared lesson is that business and human rights policies depend on people being able to identify harm and challenge powerful actors without retaliation. Judicial safeguards need to operate early enough to prevent the litigation process itself from becoming the punishment.

5.4.3. Climate Change Resilience

Global warming, climate change and related environmental degradation are very much the agenda of the day. There is a multitude of international Conventions on the issue and there is great convergence between Asian and other countries on the need for global action linked with regional and national actions. As already noted, Asia, especially the Pacific Island States, played a great role in propelling the issue to ITLOS and ICJ for authoritative advice.

The primary tool for advancing the agenda is through the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) enabling States to commit to progressive actions, especially on decarbonisation linked with mitigation measures, on the one hand, and adaptation measures, on the other hand. Those NDCs need to be well complemented by national laws, policies and practices in the process; NDCs are now in the phase of NDCs 3.0. In view of the impact on the lives of peoples and communities, adjustments should be made for a just transition. For example, if renewable energy is adopted leading to job cuts, provisions to help the former employees to upskill and transition to other work should be promoted.

European practice similarly seeks to connect international climate commitments with legislation and public finance. The European Climate Law establishes EU-wide climate neutrality by 2050 and a reduction in net domestic greenhouse-gas emissions of at least 55 per cent by 2030 compared with 1990. A 2026 amendment added a 90 per cent net reduction target for 2040, allowing up to five percentage points to be met through qualifying international credits from 2036. The framework also requires progress on adaptation and national adaptation strategies and plans.^{cxliv} The practical test, as with Asian NDCs, is whether these commitments guide sectoral policies and funded implementation rather than remain distant aggregate targets.

The just-transition dimension has an institutional counterpart in the EU's Just Transition Fund, which supports territories affected by the transition, including through worker reskilling and economic diversification. The Social Climate Fund is designed to assist vulnerable households, transport users and micro-enterprises, including through building renovation and access to cleaner, affordable mobility.^{cxlv} These arrangements do not guarantee equitable outcomes. They do, however, illustrate why climate policy should consider who bears its costs and whether people have realistic alternatives. For both regions, affected workers and communities should participate in shaping the transition, rather than being consulted only after major decisions have been taken.

UN ESCAP has a monitoring process on these developments with many country examples of what is happening in the Asian region. With the ambition of net zero emission targets and long-term reduction of greenhouse gases, there are linchpins for action, including: scaling up renewable energy and improving

energy efficiency; just transition to support mitigation outcomes; promoting nature-based solutions in climate policies; putting a price on carbon and the evolving architecture; aligning adaptation components of the NDCs; and strengthening institutional arrangements, and legal and financial frameworks.

In addition, there are other factors to ensure a cohesive approach and inclusive action: collaborative governance; the growing importance of cities; strengthening resilience through an integrated climate-food-health nexus; bridging sectors for synergistic and accountable climate action; inclusivity: A country-driven gender-responsive and participatory approach; institutionalising gender-responsive tools and financing mechanisms; increasing opportunities of capacity-building for women in adaptation activities; encouraging women's participation in decision-making processes; and phase down the use of coal, bearing in mind that the region 'was home to 84 per cent of the world's coal-fired generation output in 2024 and accounted for 81.7 per cent of global coal consumption in 2023.' ^{cxlvi}

UN ESCAP notes that there is encouraging progress in regard to the following:

'Eighteen regional ESCAP member States submitted their NDCs 3.0 by 30th September 2025, together accounting for 16.8 per cent and 10.1 per cent of the regional and global greenhouse gas emissions, respectively. In addition, 26 member States submitted their 1st Biennial Transparency Reports (BTRs), 18 countries submitted their National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and 23 submitted the long-term low-emission development strategies (LT-LEDS). Cambodia, Nepal and Sri Lanka are the only three countries that have submitted NDCs 3.0, NAPs, BTRs, LT-LEDS and net zero targets. The NDCs 3.0 of Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Singapore, based on absolute reduction or economy-wide reduction scenarios, align with Global Stocktake (GST) recommendations of 60 per cent reduction from 2019 levels by 2035. Bangladesh, Cambodia, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal and Sri Lanka continued to set NDCs 3.0 targets in a Business as Usual (BAU) scenario. In some of these countries, there remains a gap in the NDC 3.0 commitments and the GST recommendations, as reflected in their emission reduction targets in a BAU scenario.' ^{cxlvii}

Examples of good practices from Asia involving nature-based solutions can be seen in the following table:

Table 2: List of Nature-based Solutions in NDCs 3.0

Country	Specific nature-based solutions
Australia	Implements the Nature Repair Market ³⁴ and the Strategy for Nature 2024–2030; the Sustainable Ocean Plan; provides leadership for the International Partnership for Blue Carbon; delivers a suite of initiatives amounting to over \$300 million to innovate and improve the capacity, capability and sustainability of the forest sector; continues to account for net emissions from emergence/loss of coastal wetlands.
Bangladesh	Includes several coastal management techniques, including coastal afforestation, and expansion of coastal greenbelt.
Cambodia	Implements the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan; develops nature-based flood control infrastructure; conserves forests ecosystems; expands coastal and marine protected areas; highlights the co-benefits of blue carbon ecosystems.
Japan	Integrates NbS with circular economy and green ecosystems; promotes living in harmony with nature: expands natural parks and nature conservation areas.
New Zealand	Strengthens its ambition and reiterates the central role of land-sector removals; however, it is yet to lay clear standalone targets or detailed implementation strategies for NbS.
Pakistan	Rehabilitates degraded inland ecosystems and large-scale mangrove plantations, yielding important co-benefits for adaptation and nature-based resilience.

Source: ESCAP 2025, p.26.

Those examples of nature-based solutions offer lessons learned as part of a whole spectrum of possible actions. Some of them are age-old, while others may need incentivisation and/or leveraging to pressure for

implementation as part of an array of needed actions in the panoply of measures to decarbonise and for adaptation.

Europe also demonstrates that strong mitigation commitments do not remove the need for immediate adaptation. The European Environment Agency's first European Climate Risk Assessment identified 36 major climate risks in 2024, with many already at critical levels. These include threats to health, water supplies and infrastructure, with the consequences differing across places and social groups.^{cxlviii} A rights-based response should therefore ask who is most exposed and least able to adapt, not only what physical assets require protection. Affordable housing, safe working conditions and accessible public services are part of climate resilience.

Barcelona's climate-shelter network offers a practical local example. Existing facilities and public spaces provide refuge from extreme temperatures while retaining their ordinary functions. The network's criteria include free access, accessibility for people with reduced mobility and drinking water.^{cxlix} This complements the Asian examples of nature-based solutions: adaptation can combine environmental improvements with public-service arrangements that reach people who cannot secure protection privately. Its effectiveness should be assessed through actual accessibility and the experience of vulnerable residents, rather than the number of facilities alone.

On another front, activism in relation to climate justice has led to a number of movements and court cases, some of which were referred to earlier in this study. In India, in the case of *M.K. Ranjitsinh v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court held that there is a fundamental right concerning protection in relation to climate change under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution. ^{cl}Interestingly, the Court advocated the need to protect the endangered Great Indian Bustard and balanced this with projects linked to renewable energy. Other judicial cases in the Philippines and China were referred to above, with the momentous contribution of youth from the Pacific Island States to the AO of ITLOS and ICJ. Cases abound in the Asian region and beyond. They are guided by various preferred directions as lessons learned from the cascade of strategic public interest litigation evolving on many fronts, including: emphasis on harm and barriers; rights and legal duties; levers, action and accountability.

European climate litigation offers a parallel route from scientific evidence to enforceable public responsibility. In *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v Switzerland*, the European Court of Human Rights held in April 2024 that inadequate State action on climate change violated Article 8 of the Convention and that the applicant association had been denied effective access to a court under Article 6(1). The case connected climate protection with the health and living conditions of older women. The Court nevertheless rejected the four individual applicants' complaints for lack of victim status, illustrating that access to climate justice remains subject to admissibility requirements.^{cli} As with the Asian cases, the significance of litigation depends on subsequent policy changes and implementation, not only the recognition of a legal principle.

A key enabler is to advocate and implement well the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, with its three main components of procedural elements, substantive elements and remedial elements. The first requires access to information and participation, such as public hearings and human rights impact assessment; the second invites focus on land, forest, sea, air and other substantive issues, such as the need for climate change law, clean air acts, reforestation and carbon sinks, bearing in mind respect for indigenous rights and ethnic cultures and livelihoods; the third calls for remedies which can vary from judicial to non-judicial, from the formal to the informal.

The Aarhus Convention gives these procedural and remedial elements a treaty-based expression across much of Europe and parts of Central Asia. It requires access to environmental information, public participation in relevant decision-making and access to review procedures, while protecting people exercising Convention rights against penalisation, persecution and harassment.^{clii} Its relevance is not confined to litigation after damage occurs. Participation before a decision is final can expose the effects of a renewable-energy project, a flood-defence scheme or a change in land use on communities and livelihoods.

Decarbonisation and adaptation should therefore proceed with, rather than at the expense of, the people affected.

The European perspective also extends beyond the region's borders. The EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism entered its definitive phase in January 2026, linking the treatment of covered imports to their embedded carbon emissions.^{cliii} For Europe–Asia cooperation, the challenge is to pursue decarbonisation without treating unequal financial and technical capacities as irrelevant. European leadership should be assessed not only through domestic targets or import requirements, but also through cooperation on cleaner production, support for adaptation and loss and damage, and participation by affected communities. These are complementary responsibilities, not alternatives to reducing emissions at home.

5.4.4. Responsible Digitalisation and AI

There is no international treaty on the nexus between human rights, digitalisation and AI, although there is soft law in the form of the Global Digital Compact. On another front, the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has had great impact globally, and many Asian countries now have data protection laws along those lines. A key principle is consent of the human person who is the subject of the data; there is the right to delete personal data in the digital spectrum where it contravenes that principle, otherwise known as 'the right to be forgotten'.

On the AI issue, there is soft law guidance from UNESCO in the form of a Recommendation on AI systems and from other quarters.^{cliv} From the hard law angle, at the regional level in Europe, there is now the Framework Convention on AI.^{clv} It is open to signature by other countries beyond Europe; from Asia, Japan is now a signatory. It highlights as overarching principles: human dignity and individual autonomy; equality and non-discrimination; respect for privacy and personal data protection; transparency and oversight; accountability and responsibility; reliability; safe innovation.

Of course, the age of digitalisation and AI is very much here. The term 'generative AI' is now commonplace, with the public fascinated that AI can actively produce content such as written and audio creations. In fact, the world is moving towards Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) whereby robots will be able to match and even outdo human intelligence. On the one hand, AI can bring great benefits, building on the strengths of existing digitalisation. It can be a useful educational tool, such as to help children who face learning difficulties or disabilities. It is a technology of connectivity and helps to facilitate communication and information dissemination. It can act as an instrument of leisure, such as to invent games. It can promote human efficiency, such as to deal with repetitive tasks in the medical field.

On the other hand, AI also brings risks. It might be a tool of exploitation, such as in relation to sexual abuse and exploitation. It is a technology of alienation used for bullying, hate speech, discrimination and violence. It lends itself to information distortion and manipulation, such as hallucinations, fakes and scams, misinformation and disinformation, propaganda and surveillance. It is an instrument of stress, replete with addiction and superficial self-validation. It is emerging as an instrument of human subjection and dejection, especially when and where it controls human lives perhaps absolutely. Aptly, its relationship with political rights such as freedom of expression, human agency and vulnerabilities, such as gender, ethnicity, age and other status, should not be overlooked.

On another front, there is the contrasting vision between ethical guidelines of a persuasive nature concerning AI utilisation and the prescriptive approach of binding regulations with consequential accountability in the case of violations. The ethical approach highlights basic principles, such as "Do No Harm", safety and security, privacy and data protection, responsibility and accountability, transparency and explainability of AI's functions. By contrast, the prime example of the prescriptive approach is the European Union's AI Act, in force in 2025. There is a list of prohibited practices. Social profiling, where data might be used to discriminate against people, is forbidden. Subliminal targeting of children's emotions as a kind of manipulation is proscribed. The collection of real-time biometric data for surveillance purposes is not allowed, although there might be some leeway in regard to national security. With lesser risks, the business

sector is called upon to have Codes of Conduct as a kind of self-regulation for policing itself, subject to linking up with the EU supervisory system as a whole. Violations can lead to massive fines.

5.4.4.1. Key Developments on AI

There is still no universal treaty devoted exclusively to AI and human rights. The Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law is the first legally binding international treaty in this field. It is open beyond Europe and was negotiated with the participation of non-European States, including Australia and Japan. It requires principles and safeguards concerning dignity and autonomy, equality, privacy, transparency, accountability, reliability, remedies and risk-and-impact management. As at 9 September 2026, the Council of Europe's status page listed the European Union as a party and Japan as a signatory; Japan should therefore not yet be described as a party.^{clvi}

Asian Developments

In Asia, the issue is gestating and there is no fixed position. Some countries have policies on AI governance along the ethical route, while others are exploring a hard law approach. Digitalisation and AI development, and related utilisation, also vary from country to country. For example, Japan is geared to the linkage between AI, robotics and manufacturing, while the Republic of Korea is oriented to AI nexus with quality inspection tools and semiconductors. Southeast Asia is more connected with fintech and e-commerce in a setting of decentralised finance, since many people are underbanked.

A key country on AI development and related policies, laws and regulations is China. Since 2023, China has been advocating the Global AI Governance Initiative. Basically, it espouses a cooperative and consensus-based approach on AI development that is people-centred. It underlines national sovereignty against manipulation and disinformation, while promoting mutual respect between nations. It upholds the protection of personal data and related risk assessment and management, backed by research aimed at transparency and predictability of AI.

The term 'ethics' enters its narrative to prevent discrimination, underpinned by ethical review(s) of AI development. The Initiative also claims space for the voices of multiple stakeholders and the interests of developing countries. As a corollary, it is agreeable to a role for the UN to establish an international framework to govern AI, interlinking between development, security and governance. This Initiative was bolstered in September 2024 by the publication of its AI Safety Governance Framework which delineates the challenges and needed responses more specifically.^{clvii} This Framework is a policy instrument which can be reinforced, in parallel, by a law or regulation. The Framework categorises various key risks and highlights actions to deal with them, while also targeting the various stakeholders in the AI techno-stream. It lists various inherent safety risks; they comprise risks from models and algorithms; risks from data; and risks from AI systems. These are compounded by risks in AI applications, in particular cyberspace risks, real world risks, cognitive risks and ethical risks. An example of risks from algorithms (which are basically techno-models or digital formulae aimed at producing various outcomes) is that they are difficult to understand and must be more explainable and transparent to the public. Risks from data include illegal collection of data and intellectual property (IP) breaches. Risks from AI systems include exploitation, whether direct or indirect.

Cyber risks include cyber-attacks, matched by real world risks such as criminal activities. Cognitive risks are shaped by mono-focal (rather than plural) information which limits the potential for broad analysis by the user, thus resulting in the 'cocoon' effect, while ethical risks include discrimination and the widening gap relating to information know-how. As preferred actions, the Framework advocates explainability of the technology, as well as secure development standards in the research and development of AI. Personal data protection, respect of IP such as through copyright and patents, protection of the user's legitimate rights to control and store the information, and responsible training, excluding sensitive data such as on nuclear weapons, may all help to address safety risks.

As for risks from AI systems, there is a need to foster risk identification and mitigation to prevent negative acts emanating from AI systems (such as malicious attacks), while the other risks can be countered by security protection mechanisms, and conditions imposed on users' applications to prevent harm, coupled

with filtering and other protection against discrimination. These can be strengthened by traceability of and through categorisation, laws/regulation, self-regulation and capacity-building to deal with the range of risks. Various stakeholders targeted by such actions include: algorithm developers, AI service providers, specific users such as officialdom, and general users.

More specifically in the hard-law field, China has taken a step-by-step approach. Even before evolving an AI law, the country passed the Personal Information Protection Law^{clviii}, resonating with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation. The law underlined the consent-based approach to personal data, enabling access to and erasure of data used without such consent, and corrective action. The law took effect on 1 November 2021, governing how organisations collect, use, store, and transfer personal information of individuals in China. Since then, it has adopted a law to compel the registration of algorithms, as well as both registration and oversight of deep synthesis systems which might produce deep fakes or hallucinations, such as deceptive visual, voice or written content. It has also introduced ethical review(s) of such systems. As part of this gradual, legal approach, in 2023, the country opted for Interim Measures on Generative AI, upholding core values, such as respect for social morality and ethics, and prevention of discrimination, and underlining personal data protection and respect for IP.^{clix} It also introduced mandatory labelling or watermarking of AI-generated content. The 2026 World Artificial Intelligence Conference & High-Level Meeting on Global AI Governance was also held in Shanghai, China in July, with a Chair's Statement highlighting the theme 'AI Partnership for a Better Future'.^{clx}

European developments

Europe illustrates the interaction of several regulatory layers rather than one unified model. The Framework Convention covers the wider Council of Europe area and is intended to connect AI governance with existing human rights obligations. Within the EU, the GDPR supplies a data-protection layer, while the EU Charter and other legislation continue to apply within their respective fields. The EU Artificial Intelligence Act adds a risk-based regulatory framework for specified AI practices and actors.

The AI Act entered into force on 1 August 2024 and has applied in stages. The first prohibited practices and AI-literacy duties applied from February 2025; governance rules and obligations for general-purpose AI models followed in August 2025; and most of the Act, including its transparency rules, became applicable on 2 August 2026. Following the 2026 amendments, rules for certain high-risk uses—including in education, employment, migration, asylum and border control—are scheduled to apply from December 2027, while some systems embedded in regulated products have until August 2028. The Act combines prohibitions with duties concerning data quality, documentation, traceability, information, human oversight, robustness and enforcement. Its practical value will depend on the capacity and independence of supervisory authorities, the accessibility of complaint and remedy routes, and whether implementation protects rights without becoming a formal compliance exercise.^{clxi}

This is a significant European contribution, but it should not be presented as the only route to responsible AI. The EU is not synonymous with Europe, and legal density does not automatically produce effective protection. Public authorities still need to identify which systems they use, assess their effects, provide understandable information and maintain non-digital alternatives where necessary. Courts, data-protection authorities, equality bodies, ombuds institutions, NHRIs, civil society and affected communities all have distinct roles in testing whether the rules work in practice.

Points of convergence and difference

Asian and European approaches increasingly use a common vocabulary: human-centred AI, safety, transparency, data protection, non-discrimination, human oversight, content labelling and accountability. This creates useful ground for cooperation. The legal form and institutional setting, however, remain different. Europe has placed greater emphasis on cross-border binding rules and independent supervisory structures. Much of Asia currently relies on a combination of national legislation, sectoral regulation, voluntary guidance and subregional coordination, although the Korean and Chinese examples show that binding approaches are also expanding.

The distinction between “ethical” and “legal” approaches should not be overstated. Ethical guidance can shape professional practice and support innovation, but it cannot replace enforceable rights where serious harm is possible. Binding rules require technical guidance, institutional capacity and professional ethics if they are to operate well. In both regions, the strongest approach is likely to combine clear legal limits, practical standards, responsible organisational culture, independent oversight, meaningful public participation and access to remedy. OHCHR has likewise stressed that AI systems incompatible with international human rights law should not be used and that high-risk systems require adequate safeguards throughout their life cycle.^{clxii}

AI and digital literacy are part of that protection. Children, parents, teachers, public officials, journalists, judges, human rights defenders and business actors need different forms of literacy. The objective is not merely to teach people how to operate a tool. It is to help them recognise uncertainty, manipulation, bias, privacy risks and synthetic content; to know when human expertise is required; and to understand how an automated outcome can be questioned.

5.4.4.2. A Developing Ecosystem of Human Rights Tools

The governance of AI is only one side of the national challenge. Digital systems can also help States and other actors implement the human rights obligations that already exist. Governments receive recommendations from UN treaty bodies, the Universal Periodic Review, Special Procedures and regional mechanisms, alongside commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals and national plans. When this information is held in separate spreadsheets, files and institutional systems, responsibility becomes diffuse, evidence is difficult to retrieve and institutional memory is easily lost.

At its best, a national system creates a continuous workflow. A recommendation can be connected to the responsible authority, the action required, a timetable, relevant policies and budgets, indicators, consultation, and supporting evidence. Ministries, parliaments, courts, national statistical offices, NHRIs, local and regional governments, civil society and rights-holders can contribute within clearly defined roles. Periodic reporting then draws on implementation work already under way instead of beginning again at the end of each cycle.

The emerging tools can be grouped by their principal function. The categories overlap: a platform may perform more than one role and may evolve over time. A recent mapping of digital human rights tracking tools provides a useful overview of this developing field.^{clxiii}

Table 3. Digital Human Rights Tools and Knowledge Gateways

Category	Principal function	Illustrative tools	Potential national value
Tracking tools	Assign responsibility and follow recommendations through action, evidence and review.	OHCHR National Recommendations Tracking Database (NRTD); IMPACT OSS and national adaptations such as SADATA in Samoa; SIMORE Plus; Norway’s NIM Human Rights Tracker; Human Rights Tracker Scotland.	Coordination across institutions, deadlines and alerts, links with SDGs and national plans, public follow-up, and reusable reporting data.
Databases	Collect and make searchable recommendations, standards, case law, decisions or documentation.	Universal Human Rights Index (UHRI); UPR Info’s Uwazi-based database; specialist national or thematic repositories.	A common evidence base for reporting, research, advocacy and legal analysis.

Category	Principal function	Illustrative tools	Potential national value
Measurement projects	Use indicators, indices or structured assessments to examine conditions and change over time.	Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) Rights Tracker; OMCT's Global Torture Index; OHCHR, <i>Human Rights Indicators: A Guide to Measurement and Implementation</i> , including its illustrative indicator tables; national human rights indicator frameworks.	Identification of disparities, trends and possible implementation gaps, provided that scores are read with context and methodological limits are visible.
Knowledge gateways	Connect several sources and add common search, navigation, visualisation or peer learning.	OHCHR Human Rights Knowledge Gateway; FRA's EU Fundamental Rights Information System (EFRIS); HURIDOCs Global Human Rights Repository (under development).	A navigable entry point to fragmented information and practices across institutions and jurisdictions.

At national level, the practical value of this ecosystem is clearest in coordination, benchmarking and alerts. Tracking tools can assign work, issue reminders and show where several recommendations call for the same reform. Databases and gateways make it easier to check the underlying standard and compare official information with independent sources. Measurement projects can show change over time or disparities between groups. Alerts can identify an overdue action, a missing data field or an unexpected pattern. They should prompt human inquiry; they should not be treated as an automatic finding that a violation has occurred.

AI and machine learning can add value once the underlying workflow and data governance are sound. Natural-language tools can help classify recommendations by right, affected group or SDG; identify duplicate or related texts; extract dates and responsible bodies; search across large multilingual collections; and support translation and accessibility. They can flag missing or inconsistent information, compare reporting from different sources and prepare a first synthesis for review. Uwazi-based projects have, for example, used machine learning for topic classification, text segmentation and information extraction, while the National Recommendations Tracking Database (NRTD) is developing assistance for report preparation.

5.4.4.3. A Practical National Approach

A meaningful human-in-the-loop approach is more than a person approving the final screen. Rights-holders and affected communities should help determine what questions the system asks, while human rights specialists define and review its categories. Data stewards should verify sources and correct errors, and analysts interpret results in their legal, social and political context. An identifiable institution should remain responsible for consequential uses, with a channel for users to understand and challenge outputs and obtain correction. The purpose is to assist judgement, not to obscure it behind an algorithm.^{clxiv}

A sensible national approach starts by mapping existing information flows and reporting burdens, then agreeing on purpose, ownership and access. A proven platform should be adapted where possible, with clear rules for data protection, retention and interoperability. Ministries, NHRIs, statistical offices, local authorities, civil society and rights-holders should participate in design and review. Records should preserve their sources, and transparency must not expose people to harm. Accessible interfaces, relevant languages and non-digital routes are essential to avoid excluding those whom the system is intended to serve.

AI should then be piloted for bounded tasks, such as classifying recommendations, retrieving related material or supporting translation, with human validation. Evaluation should examine errors, exclusions and actual time saved before wider use, alongside whether implementation improves. AI should not determine whether a State has complied with an obligation or a person has suffered a violation. The objective is not a fuller dashboard, but a more continuous, inclusive and evidence-based path from international commitments to rights enjoyed in daily life.

In this bridge-building, there are many possible stepping stones for the future, including: Expand activities in urban areas via human rights cities and other areas through local governance with a human rights-based approach and related activities, such as facilities for persons with disabilities, sports and Arts programmes

which enable cross-cultural dialogue, interplay and the building of mutual respect with a sense of tolerance and shared understanding; Apply the UNGP on business and human rights, possibly through NAP, to enhance and capacity-build for human rights due diligence in the business and other sectors; Promote Anti-SLAPP measures and open up the space for civil society participation; Strengthen implementation of climate change-related measures linked with the MEA aiming for net zero emissions and carbon neutrality, together with nature-based solutions and a just transition with due regard for inclusivity, gender sensibility, and response to vulnerability factors; Address loss and damage issues in relation to climate change and propel creative ways of generating financial support; Provide room for climate justice and mobilisation processes linked with youth and other groups, and follow up with measures pursuant to judicial advice and judgments; Explore soft and hard law approaches to deal with digitalisation and AI to integrate a human rights-based approach into their development to safeguard the interests of humanity and Nature; Promote Digital and AI literacy so that the benefits of technology are enjoyed safely, securely, 'smartly' and sustainably'; Expand safeguards to ensure safety in regard to AI so that humans must be in the loop and various malpractices such as discrimination, abuse and exploitation of children, and social profiling are prevented and countered; Develop or adapt accessible and interoperable digital systems for continuous follow-up to human rights and SDG commitments, with clear institutional ownership, source traceability, protection of sensitive data, and channels for NHRIs, civil society and local and regional governments to contribute; Use AI and machine learning selectively to assist search, classification, translation, validation and gap detection, while requiring human review, explainability, correction and institutional accountability for any consequential use.

6. Shared Pathways

'To be or not to be, that is the question': W. Shakespeare

'The Need for Compassionate AI: we must send AI engineers and developers out of their laboratories for one month. Let them meet children working in mines and factories....' Nobel Laureate from South Asia, August 2026.

This background paper has sought to bridge-build between Asia and Europe, interfacing with the future of human rights, anchored on contemporary and emerging challenges. Although the current global situation seems to be in turmoil, or a state of 'discombobulation', a longitudinal lens of progression from the end of World War II evidences much progress on many fronts in that contextual perspective, while cautioning against apathy and complacency.

From the angle of interlinking between Asia and Europe, the landscape is to amplify the long-standing collaboration between Asia and Europe under the Informal ASEM Seminars on Human Rights, with these possibilities embodying forward-looking and future-ready shared pathways:

6.1. Transformative Processes

- Support the UN reform process and aim for the repositioning of the international human rights system so that it can operate well, even where there is a decline in resources and reduction of personnel and programmes
- Deconcentrate and decentralise the UN system so that it is more accessible to the field level, and enable international human rights mechanisms to revolve and rotate between different regions to capacity-build, share good practices, and motivate changes on the basis of international standards, complemented by local wisdom
- Open up the space at the UN and in the various human rights treaties and mechanisms to enable civil society to participate more fully
- Strengthen the field presences of OHCHR and other UN-related protection agencies, such as UNHCR, so that they can render assistance and help to ensure protection for affected persons and communities

6.2. Laws, Policies/Plans and Programmes

- Utilise SDGs as an entry point for human rights implementation, especially where countries are not parties to human rights treaties, and prepare for the post-SDG phase after 2030, while encouraging ratification of key human rights and other treaties and relevant Optional Protocols, particularly those establishing individual communications procedures
- Underline in development and other planning and programming the pervasive vulnerabilities facing many groups, including in regard to gender, ethnicity, displacement, age, disability, poverty and other status, and the need to respond inclusively to these sensibilities
- Encourage the variety of National Human Rights Action Plans and NAP to integrate the human rights-based approach and to be open to monitoring and assessment of the implementation transparently
- Support green and blue laws, policies and practices linking with NDCs, premised on the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, ready with climate change-related options, such as renewable energy, nature-based solutions, carbon taxes, carbon pricing and incentives, with an inclusive approach; issues include displacement, sea level rise, global warming, pollution and loss of biodiversity

6.3. Implementation Practices

- Promote the effective implementation of human rights in the multilevel setting, bearing in mind that it is the national setting which is closest to the livelihood and well-being of the general population, with particular emphasis on protection of rights and measures to enable inclusion for all, and wise and sustained resource allocation
- Target the comprehensive implementation of human rights in the spirit of universality and indivisibility, enabling local wisdom to help raise those standards while overcoming negative traditional practices
- Implement well economic, social and cultural rights, balancing with civil and political rights, the right to development, and the changing demographic and other scenarios, such as ageing population and psycho-social aspects of health care
- Encourage implementation of the UNGP on business and human rights at the national level with good practices, such as laws and dialogue to prevent SLAPP, and interlink well with the business sector and other stakeholders for sustained due diligence and compliance

6.4. Mechanisms and Institutions

- Interlink between human rights treaties and mechanisms and environmental laws and related mechanisms to ensure a convergent approach on human rights-based environmental and climate change-related actions, levers, facilitation, incentivisation and remediation
- Promote the identification and establishment of national human rights institutions in their variety aiming to prevent and address protection gaps, underlining their independence, pluralism and effectiveness with accessibility to parties affected by negative action impacting on human rights
- Connect UN recommendations, regional findings and national plans through standing national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up.
- Support the complementarity between international, regional, sub-regional and national mechanisms to protect human rights, including integrating human rights concerns into the operations of international, regional, sub-regional and other mechanisms whose mandates do not cover human rights
- Insert the climate change agenda and environmental protection into the variety of mechanisms in the multilevel setting, even if they do not deal with human rights, thus being open to possible bridging on this issue with human rights mechanisms

6.5. Capacity-building, Education and Cross-sharing

- Share extensively the regional and sub-regional approaches and actions for human rights protection, and support well developments to enable the regional and sub-regional mechanisms to help overcome the protection deficit at the national level
- Support the cross-learning and cross-sharing of good practices between various regional and sub-regional organisations and mechanisms, as well as national experiences on human rights protection
- Interchange the know-how between different countries and regions on the possibility of wise and safe use of digitalisation and AI, as well as the preferred safeguards and guardrails, and support cross-cultural and transnational digital literacy programmes
- Promote education, awareness-raising and capacity-building to nurture humane attitudes and actions through a socialisation process respectful of humanity and Nature with national and transnational implications

- Expand and sustain human rights education, adapting it to new challenges such as emerging technologies and ensure that the increasing emphasis on STEM incorporates a human rights-based approach and human narratives
- Exchange experiences to enable human rights education to be grounded on realities connected with 'learning by doing' to catalyse not only knowledge but also the mindset and conduct, including via education hubs and pro bono activities, such as by means of legal aid
- Share lessons on Anti-SLAPP measures and capacity-build State actors and the business sector not to resort to SLAPP measures, while seeking convergent platforms with environmental and human rights defenders
- Identify the pros and cons of climate justice-related litigation, with lessons learned to enable civil society, including youth and other stakeholders, to pursue climate justice, with follow-up to ensure reform and adaptation
- Learn from different regions and societies about the spiritual (not necessarily religious) dimensions of human rights, peace and environmental protection which can offer a more holistic approach to dealing with humanity and ecology, including through indigenous wisdom

6.6. Cooperative Partnerships between Asia and Europe

- Advance the opportunities raised by the Global Alliance for Human Rights and translate its elements into inclusive and substantive action at the regional and national levels
- Reinforce cooperation against cybercrimes and other crimes impacting on human rights, as well as to promote a human rights-based approach
- Expand the network of human rights cities and local governance for human rights responsive actions, understanding the importance of localisation to help render services to persons and groups in need, in cooperation with youth and other stakeholders
- Use sports, music, the Arts and faith-based cooperation to build social networks and webs conducive to caring and sharing, respectful of human rights and peaceful dialogue and action
- Trace-track/monitor soft and hard law related experiences on digitalisation and AI to identify best practices based on inclusivity, reflective of vulnerabilities
- Set apace activities for interfacing between human rights, the social sciences and the technological field as a humanising force to sustain life and well-being, inspired by democratic governance, sustainable development, environmental protection and responsible technologies, grounded on the 5 P's panorama of people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.

7. Priority Orientations for the Two Regions

7.1. Transformative Processes

- Support the UN reform process and aim for the repositioning of the international human rights system so that it can operate effectively, even where there is a decline in resources and reduction of personnel and programmes, and deconcentrate and decentralise the UN system so that it is more accessible to the field level

7.2. Laws, Policies/Plans and Programmes

- Utilise SDGs as an entry point for human rights implementation, especially where countries are not parties to human rights treaties, and prepare for the post-SDG phase after 2030, underlining the pervasive vulnerabilities facing many groups, and the need to respond inclusively to these sensibilities, while encouraging ratification of key human rights and other treaties and relevant Optional Protocols, particularly those establishing individual communications procedures

7.3. Implementation Practices

- Promote the effective implementation of human rights in the multilevel setting, bearing in mind that it is the national setting which is closest to the livelihood and well-being of the general population, with particular emphasis on protection of rights and measures to enable inclusion for all, and sustained resource allocation, with new vistas for attention such as NAP and NDCs

7.4. Mechanisms and Institutions

- Propel the identification and establishment of national human rights institutions in their variety aiming to prevent and address protection gaps and interlink between human rights treaties and related mechanisms, and environmental laws and related mechanisms, to ensure a convergent approach on human rights-based environmental and climate change-related actions, levers, facilitation, incentivisation and remediation

7.5. Capacity-building, Education and Cross-sharing

- Share extensively the regional and sub-regional approaches and actions for human rights protection, and support well developments to enable the regional and sub-regional mechanisms to help overcome the protection deficit (where it exists) at the national level, in addition to interchanging the know-how between different countries and regions on the possibility of wise and safe use of digitalisation, climate justice-related litigation and anti-SLAPP measures, including in relation to business and human rights

7.6. Cooperative Partnerships between Asia and Europe

- Advance the opportunities raised by the Global Alliance for Human Rights and translate its elements into inclusive and substantive action at the regional and national levels, including via the network of human rights cities and regional-local governance for human rights responsive actions, in cooperation with national, local, business, sports and faith leaders, youth and other stakeholders as accelerators of political-cum-social will for catalytic change.

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