

<Annual Human
Rights Campaign>

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The European Law Students' Association

ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN **OUTLINE 2026/2027**

"HUMAN RIGHTS IN DIGITAL DEMOCRACY"

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Annual Human Rights Campaign

The Annual Human Rights Campaign (AHRC) is one of ELSA's Flagship Projects: a year-long initiative dedicated to legal education and awareness-raising on a specific human rights theme, chosen each year anew. Running from 1 August to 31 July, it brings together National and Local Groups across 41 countries and over 350 law faculties, uniting the entire ELSA Network in a shared effort to spark critical, informed dialogue on human rights. Through a wide range of events and formats, the Campaign gives law students and young lawyers a platform to engage with national and international human rights standards, not just as observers, but as participants shaping the conversation.

Over the years, through the Annual Human Rights Campaign, law students and young lawyers have had the opportunity to explore and advocate on various topics such as privacy in the digital age, international humanitarian law, the fight against corruption and its impact on human rights, criminal justice and climate justice. This year, due to its growing relevance, the theme of the Annual Human Rights Campaign 2026/2027 will be **“Human Rights in Digital Democracy”**.

1.2. ELSA DAY

ELSA Day is a key moment of the Annual Human Rights Campaign, held annually on the last Wednesday of November, when the entire ELSA Network unites under the common slogan #AllDifferentAllTogether. Introduced in 2012, it has since grown into an essential part of the Campaign, carrying forward ELSA's commitment to human rights, legal education, and cultural understanding. In 2026, ELSA Day falls on the 25th of November.

Federica Toscano, Vice President in charge of Seminars and Conferences of ELSA International 2012/2013 founded ELSA Day on a simple conviction, one that still defines it today:

“A culture of sharing and understanding shall not halt at some political borders, but should go beyond these frontiers: human dignity is not connected with a certain passport or the place where we are born. Let us ensure then that we move the discussions from the constraints of national borders and unite them under the ELSA Day.”

Fifteen years on, that idea still holds. ELSA Day remains a tradition built on solidarity, cross-border collaboration, and a shared commitment to human dignity, a platform where conversations on human rights move past national boundaries and bring the whole Network together, exactly as Toscano first imagined it.



Throughout its fourteen editions, over 2350 Annual Human Rights Campaign-related events, including ELSA Day events, have been organised by National and Local Groups across Europe, ranging from academic panels and workshops to street actions and advocacy campaigns. These activities aim to empower law students and young lawyers to become informed, independent, and critical members of society, while also celebrating cultural diversity and legal pluralism.

All events organised under the Annual Human Rights Campaign should use ELSA's official AHRC branding, giving the Campaign a consistent identity across the whole Network. To make this easier, groups are encouraged to use the [AHRC Marketing Kit](#) for support and inspiration when promoting their initiatives. By doing so, we collectively amplify the impact of our efforts and give visibility to the voices driving change. A shared look across the Network is what lets hundreds of events read as one movement!

1.3. Organisation

The Annual Human Rights Campaign officially runs from 1 August to 31 July of the following year, but the work behind each edition starts earlier. Under Article 3.1(a) of Part 6, Chapter 3 of the International Council Meeting Decision Book, ELSA International launches a call for the theme of the Campaign no later than four weeks before the opening of the second regular International Council Meeting of the term. The selected theme is announced to the Network at that same meeting, alongside the winner of the previous edition's Competition, marking the close of one Campaign and the opening of the next.

ELSA International publishes the Outline, this very document, no later than 1 September, setting out the theme, the criteria of the Competition, and the timeline for the year ahead. Supporting Materials follow every four months from there, bringing fresh sub-themes, relevant international days, and inspiration that National and Local Groups can shape into their own events.

Each National Group appoints a National Coordinator, an Officer dedicated to the Annual Human Rights Campaign, who keeps in touch with the International Board throughout the year and passes on key updates to Local Groups. The National Coordinator also submits the Specification Form and the Evaluation Form on behalf of the National Group, within the deadlines set out in the Campaign timeline. ELSA International, in turn, supports every National Coordinator individually, with guidance, materials, and a point of contact whenever questions come up, so no group is navigating the Campaign on its own.

2. Annual Human Rights Campaign 2026/2027

2.1. The topic of the 15th edition - Human Rights in Digital Democracy

As a Flagship Project dedicated to legal education on a yearly specified human rights topic, the Annual Human Rights Campaign turns each year to a different aspect of this broad field. **This year's focus is Human Rights in Digital Democracy.**

The United Nations identifies democracy as a system built on participation in public affairs, free and fair elections, transparency and accountability, and the rule of law. These elements find their basis in the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as the freedom of expression, association, and access to information.

Our topic this year focuses on the application of these principles to the digital sphere, where citizens increasingly follow public affairs, sign petitions, and take part in consultations through digital platforms, while algorithms and AI systems shape which information reaches them and, at times, how public authorities make decisions that affect them.

The relationship between human rights and digital democracy can be explored through several domains:

- **Democratic Participation and Electoral Integrity:** Examines how digital technologies influence equal and inclusive democratic participation, political engagement, and electoral integrity, as well as the human rights safeguards needed to ensure free, fair, secure, and accessible elections.
- **Democratic Debate, Media and Access to Information:** Analyses how digital platforms shape public debate, media freedom, and access to reliable information, and their impact on freedom of expression and informed democratic participation.
- **Artificial Intelligence, Automated Decision-Making and Democratic Oversight:** Investigates the use of artificial intelligence and automated decision-making in democratic governance, focusing on transparency, accountability, non-discrimination, and the protection of fundamental rights.
- **Innovation and the Future of Democracy:** Considers how emerging digital technologies create opportunities and challenges for democratic governance, with particular attention to innovation that promotes human rights, inclusion, and public participation.

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- **Algorithmic Curation and the Opinion Bubble:** Evaluates how algorithmic content curation influences public opinion, exposure to diverse perspectives, and democratic discourse, as well as its implications for freedom of expression and access to information.
 - **Privacy, Data Protection and Democratic Freedoms:** Researches how the collection, use, and processing of personal data in digital spaces affect democratic freedoms, including privacy, autonomy, and political participation, and explores the safeguards needed to prevent surveillance, manipulation, and misuse of personal information.
 - **International and Regional Legal Frameworks:** Reviews the international and regional legal frameworks that protect human rights in the digital sphere and guide the development of democratic, rights-based digital governance, including the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and the European Union's Digital Services Act and AI Act. It also examines the Council of Europe's New Democratic Pact for Europe, an ongoing political and institutional process launched in 2025 to renew democratic resilience and participation across the continent. Its pillar "Innovating for Democracy" explores how digital technologies and artificial intelligence can contribute to stronger democratic participation, greater transparency, and increased trust in democratic institutions and electoral processes.

These domains form a starting point for in-depth research into the complex interplay between digital democracy, human rights, and global justice. If you wish to further explore other topics, we encourage you to read section 3.3 for additional inspiration.

2.2. Relevant institutions

Below you will find key institutions and organisations that shape how human rights are protected as democracy moves into the digital sphere. These bodies work to establish international standards, develop policies, monitor digital developments, and implement measures aimed at ensuring that technological progress respects fundamental rights, strengthens democratic participation, and promotes inclusive digital societies.

- **United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR):** The United Nations, through bodies such as UNHRC and the OHCHR, contributes to the development of international standards on human rights, democracy, and digital governance. Through initiatives such as the Global Digital Compact, it promotes digital inclusion, responsible digital transformation, and the protection of human rights online. The OHCHR focuses particularly on issues such as privacy, freedom of expression, equality, and other human rights in digital environments.
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- **Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR):** The Council of Europe promotes human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in Europe. Through its conventions, recommendations, and policy initiatives, it addresses challenges related to digital transformation, including freedom of expression, data protection, artificial intelligence, and democratic participation. It is also leading the New Democratic Pact for Europe, an ongoing process launched in 2025 to strengthen democratic resilience and participation. The European Court of Human Rights ensures that the rights protected under the European Convention on Human Rights continue to apply in the digital age.
 - **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO):** UNESCO promotes freedom of expression, media and information literacy, and access to reliable information. Its work supports information integrity, digital inclusion, and the responsible use of technology in democratic societies.
 - **Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE):** The OSCE works to strengthen democratic institutions, human rights, and security. It addresses issues such as election interference, online disinformation, media freedom, and the protection of journalists and civil society in digital spaces.
 - **European Union (EU):** The EU develops legislation and policies that promote a rights-based approach to digital technologies. Through initiatives such as the European Democracy Action Plan, the GDPR, the Digital Services Act (DSA), and the Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act), it seeks to promote transparency, accountability, data protection, and democratic resilience.
 - **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD):** The OECD supports governments in developing evidence-based policies on democratic governance and digital transformation. Its work explores new forms of civic participation, including citizens' assemblies and digital consultation platforms, while assessing their effectiveness alongside traditional democratic processes.

Together, these institutions shape international and European responses to digital transformation through a human rights-based approach. By developing legal frameworks, promoting accountability, and supporting inclusive access to technology, they help ensure that digital innovation strengthens democracy while protecting the rights and freedoms of individuals.

2.3. Timeline

The timeline established by the International Board for organising the Annual Human Rights Campaign is outlined below. Following this schedule is crucial to ensuring the Campaign is well-structured and effectively executed. Compliance with the deadlines enables efficient coordination, timely communication, and the smooth implementation of activities across all participating groups. While minor adjustments may be required to address unforeseen circumstances, maintaining the proposed timeline will greatly contribute to delivering a successful and impactful Campaign.

Phase	Milestone	Date	Additional Information
Campaign Launch	Start of the Annual Human Rights Campaign (AHRC)	1 August 2026	Official launch of the Annual Human Rights Campaign.
Specification Form	Opening of the AHRC Specification Form	1 September 2026	National Groups appoint the National Coordinator, indicate participation and planned events.
	Deadline: <i>Competing for the Council of Europe (CoE) Visibility Materials</i>	27 September 2026	Early deadline to fill out the Specification Form for National Groups aiming to receive CoE Visibility Materials.
	Deadline: <i>Not competing for CoE Visibility Materials</i>	4 October 2026	Final deadline to fill out the Specification Form for all other National Groups.
ELSA Day	ELSA Day	25 November 2026	
Evaluation Form	Opening of the AHRC Evaluation Form	7 February 2027	
	Closing of Evaluation Form	21 March 2027	Final deadline for National Groups to submit their evaluation and competition-related reporting.
Next Campaign Planning	Opening the call for the new AHRC 2027/2028 topic	31 January 2027	Collection of proposals for the topic of the next edition of the Annual Human Rights Campaign.
	Closing the call for the new AHRC 2027/2028 topic	28 February 2027	

3. Implementation

3.1. Board member in charge

The Vice President in charge of Academic Activities holds primary responsibility for initiating and overseeing events within the framework of the Annual Human Rights Campaign (AHRC). It is advisable for the Vice Presidents in charge of Academic Activities of the National Groups to appoint a National AHRC Coordinator to assist with the coordination and implementation of AHRC events throughout the national network. While the Academic Activities Officer is generally the main organiser of AHRC and ELSA Day initiatives, in some National or Local Groups, other officers - such as the Vice President in charge of Seminars & Conferences or the Vice President in charge of Professional Development - may also take the lead, depending on the structure and capacity of the group. To ensure a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach, groups are encouraged to consider organising a Multi-Area Project (MAP), which combines lectures, visits, and research activities into a unified initiative.

3.2. How to structure your Campaign

A well-designed internal structure is essential for ensuring the successful coordination, visibility, and impact of the Annual Human Rights Campaign across a national network.

Engaging Local Groups early

Raising awareness and engaging Groups early in the term is critical. Organising dedicated meetings with Local Group officers to introduce the AHRC, explain its relevance, and present previous campaign outcomes will help build enthusiasm and commitment. Providing a flexible list of suggested subtopics aligned with this year's theme can guide groups in selecting their focus while allowing for creativity and ownership.

Establishing clear responsibilities

Establishing clear responsibilities within the internal structure is fundamental to the smooth and effective execution of the Campaign. Each role should have well-defined duties and accountability to avoid overlap and ensure efficient workflow. The National Coordinator should act as the central point of contact between the National Board and Local Groups, overseeing communication, providing support, and monitoring progress. Local Group officers must understand their specific tasks, whether that involves organising events, managing promotion, or collecting and submitting reports. Setting expectations regarding reporting deadlines, quality standards, and collaboration protocols fosters professionalism and transparency, empowering all participants to contribute effectively toward the Campaign's shared goals.

Providing supporting materials and guidance

Supporting materials and clear guidance are crucial to streamline local efforts. Toolkits should be distributed, containing comprehensive explanations of the AHRC's objectives, event planning templates, reporting forms, interactive activity ideas, and marketing resources tailored to the Campaign theme. Internal communication channels such as WhatsApp groups or shared drives create accessible hubs for resources and facilitate peer support among Local Groups.

Maintaining regular communication

Maintaining regular communication strengthens coordination and knowledge sharing. Scheduling quarterly calls between the National Coordinator and Local Groups allows participants to monitor progress, exchange best practices, discuss challenges, and collectively problem-solve, promoting cohesion and consistent quality across all campaign activities.

Running an internal competition

To motivate participation and reward excellence, implementing an internal competition is highly effective. Local Groups should be encouraged to submit their AHRC activities for evaluation based on criteria such as impact, creativity, and relevance to the theme. Recognising the top-performing groups at national events such as Council Meetings provides valuable acknowledgement and encourages continued commitment, with symbolic prizes, such as trophies or funded attendance at internal meetings, further enhancing motivation and visibility.

Building cross-area projects

Cross-area projects are an excellent way to broaden engagement and pool expertise. Encouraging Multi-Area Projects (MAPs) that integrate efforts from departments like Academic Activities, Seminars & Conferences, Professional Development, and Marketing can create more comprehensive initiatives. Activities such as workshops, institutional visits, webinars, school outreach, and essay competitions can all be designed to reflect the Campaign's theme and benefit from collaborative planning.

Preserving organisational knowledge

Preserving organisational knowledge ensures the Campaign's sustainability. As the structure develops, creating a national AHRC guideline or handbook is recommended, outlining the internal structure, responsibilities of officers, instructions for organising activities, competition scoring models, and timeline alignment. Having such a reference facilitates continuity and smoother transitions for future generations.

Staying realistic and flexible

Finally, it is important to approach implementation with realism and flexibility. National and Local Groups may face challenges integrating AHRC events into their existing agendas, so continuous encouragement and adaptability are necessary. The goal is to foster a sense of community and shared purpose rather than impose rigid requirements.



By following these guidelines, National Groups can establish a supportive and efficient internal structure that coordinates AHRC efforts effectively while inspiring meaningful engagement in human rights advocacy across the entire network. The structure should serve not only as an organisational tool but also as a catalyst to advocate louder, reach further, and unite stronger.

3.3. Events that could be organised

*Among the notable events that can be organised by your National or Local Group in the context of this year's theme, **Human Rights in Digital Democracy**:*

ELSA4Schools: *A project promoting social change through legal education for children and young people. It offers a natural platform for raising awareness among students about the relationship between digital technologies, democratic participation, and fundamental rights, through interactive sessions on online privacy, freedom of expression, misinformation, digital inclusion, and the responsible use of technology.*

Essay Competitions: *Choosing a sub-topic such as Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Online Freedom of Expression, Digital Privacy, or The Impact of Social Media on Democracy gives law students and young legal professionals room to develop their own insights and critical thinking on how digital challenges are addressed within national, regional, and international legal frameworks.*

Legal Debates: *Held locally or nationally, these allow participants to engage directly with questions such as online censorship, electoral integrity in the digital age, artificial intelligence and democratic oversight, or the responsibility of digital platforms. Consider inviting students from outside law, such as computer science, political science, journalism, or social sciences, to broaden the discussion, while keeping in mind that ELSA is a non-political organisation and all debates should stay academically and ethically grounded.*

Institutional Visits (S&C) and Lawyers at Work (PD): *These connect ELSA members with experts working in digital rights, data protection, technology law, human rights advocacy, or public institutions, offering a first-hand look at how legal professionals help protect human rights and strengthen democracy in an increasingly digital society.*

Surveys and Public Opinion Questionnaires: *Run ahead of ELSA Day, these help gauge public awareness of the relationship between human rights and digital democracy, with the results shaping your events and opening up discussions on digital rights, online participation, and the challenges raised by emerging technologies.*



Legal Research Groups, Law Reviews, and ELSA Webinars: For a more academic, in-depth approach, these formats let students engage directly with the legal frameworks and challenges around digital transformation and human rights, contributing to the wider legal discourse on topics such as artificial intelligence, algorithmic decision-making, digital equality, or international digital governance.

*This is a non-exhaustive list, and you are encouraged to be as innovative and inclusive as possible when designing your AHRC events. Let the theme of **Human Rights in Digital Democracy** inspire projects that reflect ELSA's core values and raise awareness of how technology can both strengthen and challenge the protection of human rights. For further guidance and inspiration, consult the Human Rights Handbook when planning your initiatives.*

3.4. Target audience

Human Rights in Digital Democracy is not an abstract legal question, it shapes how people actually live their civic lives today. The way we access information, take part in public debate, and exercise our fundamental freedoms is increasingly mediated by digital technologies, and with that comes real risk to privacy, free expression, equality, and genuine participation. Making sense of this takes more than legal expertise alone; it calls for law, technology, policy, advocacy, and public engagement working together.

Before planning your events, think about whom you're actually trying to reach, since that shapes everything from tone to format. Some events are about opening the door for people who've never really thought about these issues before, introducing ideas like online privacy, AI, misinformation, or digital exclusion in an accessible way. We think of this as quantitative impact: reaching as many people as possible and building a first layer of awareness. Other events are for people who already care, students and young lawyers ready to go deeper into questions like algorithmic accountability, platform regulation, or AI governance, through real discussion and exchange with people working in the field. That's qualitative impact: fewer people, but a more meaningful shift in how they think and engage.

The best campaigns don't choose between the two. They use quantitative reach to bring people in, and qualitative depth to make sure that once they're in, something actually changes for them. Together, that's how a Human Rights in Digital Democracy initiative moves from simply informing people to genuinely connecting them with what democracy in the digital age will require of all of us.

3.5. International Days that can be connected to the topic

Month	Date	International Day	Topic
September	15 September	International Day of Democracy	Democratic participation, civic engagement, and digital democracy as foundations of accountable governance.
October	1 October	International Day of Older Persons	Digital exclusion and the barriers older people face in accessing public services and exercising their rights online.
November	2 November	International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists	Protecting journalists, safeguarding press freedom, and ensuring access to reliable information as pillars of digital democracy.
December	10 December	Human Rights Day / International Digital Rights Days	Digital rights, privacy, AI ethics, and the protection of fundamental freedoms online.
January	24 January	International Day of Education	Digital literacy and media literacy as tools for informed and equal democratic participation.
February	20 February	World Day of Social Justice	Justice Bridging the digital divide and ensuring equitable access to technology and digital inclusion.
March	8 March	International Women's Day	Gender equality in digital spaces, AI bias, and combating online violence against women.
April	24 April	International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace	Global cooperation on AI governance, digital regulation, and the protection of human rights.
May	3 May	World Press Freedom Day	Media freedom, combating disinformation, and safeguarding democratic debate online.
June	18 June	International Day for Countering Hate Speech	Addressing online hate speech, content moderation, and protecting democratic dialogue.
July	17 July	World Day for International Justice	Digital evidence and emerging technologies in international criminal justice, and accountability for digital-era rights violations before international courts.

4. Assessment and Support

4.1. Specification Form and the Visibility Materials

During each AHRC, the Council of Europe (CoE) chooses the 60 most impactful, relevant and creative national or local initiatives. The CoE sends promotional materials to the organisers to contribute to the promotion of the initiatives. The exact content includes pens, notebooks, calendars, information brochures, etc. As it takes some time to pack and ship materials, we operate with deadlines ([section 2.3](#)).

Once the idea for your event takes shape, please fill in the Specification Form, where you'll provide relevant details such as the type of event, planned timeframe, location, expected number of participants, and a brief description. ELSA International will forward your events to the Council and save your form for the Competition and Report.

As part of this process, each submitted event is assessed on its creativity, on the interactivity and academic or advocacy value of its content, and on how clearly it connects to this year's topic, Human Rights in Digital Democracy.

4.2. Evaluation Form

To develop our association and improve our activities, we need to evaluate what we've achieved. In the Evaluation Form, you'll be asked to provide statistics and information on your events after they've taken place, including the real number of participants and the interactivity and advocacy achieved during the event. You will need to provide supporting proof, such as pictures showing branding, interactivity, and advocacy in practice.

Only events carrying the correct AHRC branding will be taken into account. You're also welcome to include additional events in the Evaluation Form beyond those originally listed in your Specification Form, as long as they meet the same criteria.

4.3. AHRC Competition

In addition, the Annual Human Rights Campaign Competition, which is different from the Council of Europe's Visibility Materials Competition, will be held as a tradition. The best AHRC initiative will be selected and celebrated during ICM Prague in Spring 2027. The prize will be eternal honour and glory, together with a trophy to take back to your ELSA office with pride.

This year, the **National Coordinator of the winning National Group may be offered a study visit to the Council of Europe** in Strasbourg, France, ELSA's Human Rights Partner. The study visit will last two months, with specific dates to be agreed between the selected candidate and the Directorate in order to accommodate both the activities of the Directorate and the candidate's availability. The study visit will not be compensated.



Any study visit is subject to the prior signature of a general memorandum of understanding between the Council of Europe's Directorate of Human Resources and the university/institution concerned. No study visit can be confirmed before such an agreement has been concluded.

All National Groups that complete the Specification and Evaluation Forms are automatically entered in the Competition. Both forms should be completed in accordance with the deadlines set out in the International Council Meeting Decision Book. **Remember that your event will not be included in the competition or the final statistics in the report if there is no Evaluation Form.**

Upon the discretion of ELSA International, the guiding criteria are:

- complete the necessary forms;
- organise at least one event on ELSA Day and one event earlier or later in the year;
- the topic of the events must be relevant to Human Rights in Digital Democracy;
- the academic quality of the events;
- the level of creativity;
- the online and offline visibility of the events; and
- the correct use of ELSA's official AHRC branding.

4.4. Support from ELSA International

One of the key ways ELSA International supports National and Local Groups in running the Annual Human Rights Campaign is through a layered system of support: Supporting Materials, tailored coaching, and, new this year, the AHRC Support Series.

Supporting Materials are the backbone of this system. They are published every four months, starting from 1 September, and designed to inspire and guide the Network by highlighting topics and subtopics aligned with the overarching topic of the Campaign, alongside an overview of international observances and important dates for the months ahead, especially those tied to the chosen topic. For the 2026/2027 edition, Supporting Materials will be released on 1 September, 22 December, and 1 May, giving National and Local Groups the full schedule in advance so they can plan ahead. The international dates for the coming months are fixed, though the specific topics covered may still shift slightly to reflect emerging issues and opportunities.

Beyond these scheduled releases, National Coordinators have the opportunity to have regular **coaching calls with the ELSA International AHRC Team**, who support them through guidance in the coordination of their Campaign, as well as assistance with filling out the relevant forms (the Specification and Evaluation Forms) and everything related.

As of this year, we will introduce the **AHRC Support Series**, which will be a set of interactive online sessions and workshops connected to the Campaign, built around four key moments and open for Groups to join throughout the term.





<Annual Human Rights Campaign>