

# <Annual Human Rights Campaign>

**elsa**

The European Law Students' Association

2025/2026

## **ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN** **SUPPORTING MATERIALS**

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

## Human Rights and Climate Justice

January 2026 - April 2026

JAN

### FROM FOSSIL FUELS TO HUMAN RIGHTS: THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF CLEAN ENERGY

- International Day of Clean Energy, 26th of January
- Current Trends and Challenges:
  - Lack access to electricity
  - Climate-related events such as as heatwaves, floods and storms

*"Noting that the transitions to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all should be just, inclusive, equitable and secure"* – Resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the UN on 25 August 2023

FEB

### FROM FOOTPRINTS TO FAIRNESS: ADVOCATING CLIMATE-JUST TOURISM FOR A CHANGING PLANET

- Global Tourism Resilience Day, 17th of February
- Current Trends and Challenges:
  - Renewed or intensifies over-tourism
  - Global greenhouse-gas emissions through air travel, heating and cooling of accommodation, transport, etc.,

*"Tourism activities should respect the equality of men and women; they should promote human rights and, more particularly, the individual rights of the most vulnerable groups"* - Article 5.2 of the Convention on Tourism Ethics

MAR

### FROM PROMISES TO VIOLATIONS: HOW TO BETTER PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE CLIMATE CHANGE CONTEXT

- International Women's Day, 8th March
- Current Trends and Challenges:
  - Development of Gender-Responsive Synergies Across the Rio Conventions
  - Lack of participation and leadership from women in environmental decision-making

*"Climate change exacerbates gender inequalities, rendering women particularly vulnerable to climate induced hazards."* – UNHCR report on Gender, Displacement and Climate Change

APR

### FROM COMMITMENTS TO IMPLEMENTATION: SAFEGUARDING THE RIGHT TO HEALTH AMID GLOBAL CHALLENGES

- World Health Day, 7th of April
- Current Trends and Challenges:
  - Climate change increasingly acts as a health-risk multiplier, intensifying heat-related mortality, the spread of infectious diseases, food and water insecurity, and mental-health impacts
  - Armed conflicts and forced displacement disrupt healthcare systems

*"The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health."* – Article 12 ICESCR

Need Support?

Contact us through [director.ahrc@elsa.org](mailto:director.ahrc@elsa.org)

## FOREWORD

Dear Network,  
Dear AHRC Organisers,

We were delighted to witness the engagement with the first set of supporting materials. Now, We are thrilled to share the second edition of the AHRC Supporting Materials for January to April 2026.

These resources are designed to inspire and support National and Local Groups in their efforts to highlight the importance of human rights protection. We hope you find them useful and engaging, and we look forward to seeing the creative ways you bring these materials to life.

Wishing you an inspiring start to the year,

The Contributors:

**Anastasios Vavvas**

Vice President in charge of Academic Activities  
International Board of ELSA 2025/2026

**Ndeye Fatou Ndiaye Diop**

Director for Annual Human Rights Campaign  
ELSA International 2025/2026

**Arya Gerda Haager**

Assistant for Annual Human Rights Campaign  
ELSA International 2025/2026

**Nishan Hülbig**

Assistant for Annual Human Rights Campaign  
ELSA International 2025/2026

**Ana Picado**

Assistant for Annual Human Rights Campaign  
ELSA International 2025/2026

**Tomás Vicente**

Assistant for Annual Human Rights Campaign  
ELSA International 2025/2026

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                                                                 |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>FOREWORD.....</b>                                                                                                            | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>I. From Fossil Fuels to Human Rights: The International Day of Clean Energy.....</b>                                         | <b>3</b>  |
| 1. A short Introduction.....                                                                                                    | 3         |
| 2. Legal Framework.....                                                                                                         | 4         |
| 2.1 International Frameworks.....                                                                                               | 4         |
| 2.2 Regional & National Frameworks.....                                                                                         | 5         |
| 3. Current Trends & Challenges.....                                                                                             | 6         |
| 4. Recommended Focus Areas for Events & Advocacy.....                                                                           | 7         |
| <b>II. From Footprints to Fairness: Advocating Climate-Just Tourism for a Changing Planet".....</b>                             | <b>9</b>  |
| 1. Introduction.....                                                                                                            | 9         |
| 2. Legal Framework.....                                                                                                         | 10        |
| 2.1 International Frameworks .....                                                                                              | 10        |
| 2.2 Regional & National Frameworks.....                                                                                         | 12        |
| 2.3 Case study example: Holcim and Pulau Pari – Climate Litigation for Tourism& Climate Justice.....                            | 12        |
| 3. Current Trends & Challenges.....                                                                                             | 14        |
| 4. Recommended Focus Areas for Events & Advocacy.....                                                                           | 15        |
| 5. Suggested Readings & Resources.....                                                                                          | 16        |
| <b>III. From Promises to Violations: How to Better Protect the Rights of Women and Girls in the Climate Change Context.....</b> | <b>17</b> |
| 1. Introduction.....                                                                                                            | 17        |
| 2. Legal framework.....                                                                                                         | 18        |
| 2.1 International framework.....                                                                                                | 18        |
| 3. Current trends and challenges.....                                                                                           | 19        |
| 4. Recommended Focus Areas for Events and Advocacy.....                                                                         | 20        |
| 5. Suggested Readings and Resources.....                                                                                        | 21        |
| <b>IV. From Commitments to Implementation: Safeguarding the Right to Health amid Global Challenges.....</b>                     | <b>22</b> |
| 1. Introduction.....                                                                                                            | 22        |
| 2. Legal Framework.....                                                                                                         | 22        |
| 2.1 International Frameworks .....                                                                                              | 23        |
| 2.2 Regional Legal Framework.....                                                                                               | 24        |
| 2.3 Case Study: Ebola Outbreak and the Right to Health.....                                                                     | 24        |
| 3. Current Trends & Challenges.....                                                                                             | 25        |
| 4. Recommended Focus Areas for Events & Advocacy.....                                                                           | 25        |
| 5. Suggested Readings & Resources.....                                                                                          | 26        |

# I. From Fossil Fuels to Human Rights: The International Day of Clean Energy

International Day of Clean Energy, 26<sup>th</sup> of January

## 1. A short Introduction

The International Day of Clean Energy was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on January 26th. The establishment is supposed to highlight the global importance of clean and sustainable energy - for people's well-being and for the planet. This date is also the founding date of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), which was created in 2009. The UN chose this date to honour IRENA's role in promoting renewable energy and helping in worldwide energy transition. The day is supposed to encourage governments, organizations, communities and individual people to shift from fossil fuels towards clean energy by including renewables such as solar, wind, hydro, geothermal and more efficient energy use overall. <sup>1</sup>

Clean energy plays a significant role in protecting and advancing human rights, since modern life depends highly on safe, reliable and sustainable energy. It reduces indoor and outdoor air pollution, which is currently the cause of millions of premature deaths each year. A lack of access to clean electricity and relying on polluting fuels for cooking and heating affects basic rights such as the right to education, by enabling lighting and digital access, such as the right to an adequate standard of living, by powering homes, hospitals and water systems. Additionally, clean energy is essential for safeguarding the right to a clean and healthy environment, since fossil-fuel emissions drive climate change, which threatens through extreme weather, food insecurity, displacement and loss of housing. Transitioning to clean energy helps reduce these dangers. The social justice aspect is also not to be forgotten, since a fair and inclusive energy transition can reduce inequalities by ensuring that low-income households also gain access to safe and affordable energy. <sup>2</sup>

By centering clean energy as both a development priority and a human-rights concern, the day underscores that a just and inclusive energy transition is essential for protecting human dignity, equality, and long-term environmental sustainability. In particular:

---

<sup>1</sup><https://www.irena.org/News/pressreleases/2023/Aug/UN-Declares-IRENAs-Founding-Date-as-International-Day-of-Clean-Energy>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.un.org/en/desa/boosting-rapid-transition-sustainable-energy-top-priority-un-marks-first-international-day>

- It highlights that unequal access to clean energy implicates rights to non-discrimination, participation, and accountability, since marginalized and low-income communities are most affected by energy poverty, pollution, and climate impacts.
- It offers a concrete entry point to examine how law (domestic, regional, and international) govern energy access, renewable-energy development, fossil-fuel phase-outs, climate mitigation, environmental protection, just-transition frameworks, and social protection for communities affected by energy transitions.
- It invites us to scrutinize whether states are meeting their legal obligations to protect vulnerable populations—including frontline communities, indigenous peoples, women, children, and workers—from the harms of pollution, unsafe working conditions, climate-driven disasters, and the socio-economic burdens of unequal energy systems.

## 2. Legal Framework

The recognition of the International Day of Clean Energy offers a valuable opportunity to reflect on the legal foundations that protect access to clean, affordable, and sustainable energy at the international, regional, and national levels. Energy is essential for the realization of numerous human rights, including the rights to health, housing, education, development, and a clean and healthy environment. Increasingly, international bodies, European institutions, and domestic laws acknowledge that access to clean energy is not only a technological or economic issue — it is a human-rights and climate-justice imperative.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1 International Frameworks

#### 2.1.1 The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

The ICESCR provides the central human-rights framework for understanding clean energy as essential to achieving an adequate standard of living. While the Covenant does not explicitly use the term “right to energy,” Article 11 recognizes and Article 12 affirms “the right to the highest attainable standard of health.” The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has consistently interpreted these provisions to include access to modern, affordable, reliable, and clean energy services.<sup>4</sup>

In General Comment No. 4 on the right to adequate housing and General Comment No. 15 on the right to water, CESCR explicitly links essential household energy — lighting, heating, cooking, refrigeration — to human dignity and material living conditions. Clean energy is

---

<sup>3</sup><https://www.ejiltalk.org/the-un-hrc-recognizes-the-right-to-a-healthy-environment-and-appoints-a-new-special-rapporteur-on-human-rights-and-climate-change-what-does-it-all-mean/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.engager-energy.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ENGAGER\\_Right-to-Energy-Toolkit\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.engager-energy.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ENGAGER_Right-to-Energy-Toolkit_FINAL.pdf)

therefore integral to fulfilling rights related to health, education, gender equality, and environmental protection.

From a climate-justice perspective, this framework is crucial. Fossil-fuel dependence undermines rights through air pollution, environmental degradation, and climate change. CESCR and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have emphasized that states must integrate human rights into their energy, climate-mitigation, and adaptation policies, ensuring that transitions away from fossil fuels uphold principles of participation, equity, and accountability.<sup>5</sup>

### **2.1.2 The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement**

The UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement form the core international legal architecture governing global climate action. Although environmental in focus, these instruments directly implicate human rights and clean-energy access.

The preamble to the Paris Agreement affirms that parties “should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights,” including the rights to health, development, gender equality, and the rights of Indigenous peoples. Since decarbonization requires a shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy, clean energy becomes a central mechanism for fulfilling these human-rights obligations.<sup>6</sup>

In recent negotiations, the concept of a just transition has gained prominence — ensuring that workers, communities, and vulnerable groups are protected throughout the shift to low-carbon economies. Mechanisms such as the Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) and adaptation finance commitments reinforce the idea that clean-energy transitions must be equitable, participatory, and socially protective.<sup>7</sup>

## **2.2 Regional & National Frameworks**

### **2.2.1 European and Council of Europe Frameworks on Clean Energy and Human Rights**

Within the European legal landscape, clean energy and climate justice are addressed through a combination of EU law, environmental governance, and human-rights mechanisms.

While the EU’s founding treaties do not explicitly define a right to energy, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union enshrines related rights fundamental to clean-energy access: the right to human dignity (Article 1), the right to life (Article 2), the right to

---

<sup>5</sup>[https://www.globalcompact.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Dokumente\\_PDFs/Just\\_Transition\\_and\\_Renewable\\_Energy\\_Business\\_Brief.pdf](https://www.globalcompact.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente_PDFs/Just_Transition_and_Renewable_Energy_Business_Brief.pdf)

<sup>6</sup><https://unfccc.int/11th-preambular-paragraph>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.germanwatch.org/en/91843>

health (Article 35), consumer protection (Article 38), and the obligation to ensure high levels of environmental protection (Article 37). Collectively, these provisions provide a legal basis for framing access to clean energy as part of an adequate standard of living.

The European Green Deal, the European Climate Law (Regulation (EU) 2021/1119), and the Fit for 55 Package provide the overarching framework for transforming the EU's energy system, phasing out fossil fuels, scaling up renewable energy, and ensuring that the transition is fair and inclusive. Measures such as the Renewable Energy Directive (RED III) and the Energy Efficiency Directive further articulate binding targets that support clean-energy access and climate mitigation.

The Council of Europe has also expanded its human-rights jurisprudence into environmental and energy-related issues. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has interpreted the right to life (Article 2) and the right to respect for private and family life (Article 8) to include protection from severe environmental harm — including pollution and climate-related risks that directly relate to fossil-fuel dependency.<sup>8</sup>

In recent resolutions, including significant climate-related rulings in 2024, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has underscored the need for member states to ensure that energy policies respect human rights, protect vulnerable communities, and enable a just transition toward renewables. This reflects Europe's growing recognition that energy systems must be governed not only by technological or economic considerations, but also by principles of human dignity, environmental justice, and social equity.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Current Trends & Challenges

As of 2026, energy inequality remains a critical global issue, closely intertwined with climate change and the legal and political frameworks that govern energy systems. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), over 760 million people worldwide still lack access to electricity, and more than 2.4 billion rely on traditional biomass for cooking, exposing them to severe health risks. Climate-related events such as heatwaves, floods, and storms have disrupted energy infrastructure and disproportionately affected low-income and marginalized communities, particularly in regions with limited legal protections and state support. The unequal impacts of energy poverty and environmental degradation underscore the principle of climate justice, highlighting the urgent need for legal and policy mechanisms that ensure equitable access to clean and sustainable energy.<sup>10</sup>

Gaps in recognition, enforcement, and integration of the right to clean energy into national and regional legislation remain significant. International instruments, such as the ICESCR, the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement, and various UNHRC resolutions, establish obligations for states

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/31592/html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.iea.org/news/energy-access-improving-but-international-financial-support-still-needed-to-boost-progress-and-address-disparities>

to respect, protect, and fulfil rights related to health, development, and a clean environment. However, domestic implementation is often inconsistent. For instance, many countries have yet to fully integrate the human-rights dimensions of energy access into national law, leaving vulnerable populations exposed to energy poverty, unsafe cooking methods, and inadequate infrastructure. Regulatory frameworks that promote renewable energy, energy efficiency, and climate-resilient grids frequently face delays in adoption or enforcement due to economic constraints, political lobbying, or competing industrial priorities, limiting their effectiveness in ensuring equitable access to clean energy.<sup>11</sup>

Political decisions on energy subsidies, fossil-fuel extraction, infrastructure development, and trade policies can either exacerbate or alleviate energy inequality. Controversies such as disputes over hydropower projects in Latin America or coal-to-renewable transitions in South Asia illustrate how energy policies can impact local communities, ecosystems, and access to affordable electricity. In many cases, domestic authorities fail to adequately regulate environmental risks or ensure meaningful participation of affected communities in energy planning.<sup>12</sup>

#### **4. Recommended Focus Areas for Events & Advocacy**

- Effects of access to electricity, clean cooking, and renewable energy on the realization of basic human rights such as health, education, and an adequate standard of living
- Impact of energy production and consumption on ecosystems, air quality, and climate
- Analyze how coal, oil, gas, and large-scale energy projects affect local communities, land rights, and livelihoods
- Legal Protections for Energy and Climate Activists
- How EU directives (e.g., Renewable Energy Directive, Energy Efficiency Directive) and international agreements (e.g., Paris Agreement) influence energy equity and sustainability
- Strategies to transition from fossil fuels to renewables in ways that protect workers, marginalized communities, and ecosystems
- Impact of household decisions, energy labeling, and renewable energy purchasing on energy justice and human rights
- Transparency on energy sources, carbon footprints, and ethical procurement

---

<sup>11</sup> <https://academic.oup.com/jwelb/article/18/1/jwae021/7908278>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/from-us/press-releases/systemic-human-rights-abuses-in-renewable-energy-value-chain-force-communities-to-defend-their-rights-in-court/>

## 5. Suggested Readings & Resources

- **International Day of Clean Energy”** – UN observance page –  
<https://www.un.org/en/observances/clean-energy-day>
- **A systematic review of the intersection between energy justice and human rights (2025)** – ScienceDirect –  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1364032125005659?>
- **Renewable energy and energy justice in the Middle East: international human rights, environmental and climate change law and policy perspectives (2025)** – Journal of World Energy Law & Business –  
<https://academic.oup.com/jwelb/article/18/1/jwae021/7908278>
- **The justice and policy implications of clean energy transition in Africa (2023)** – Frontiers in Environmental Science –  
<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/environmental-science/articles/10.3389/fenvs.2023.1089391/full>
- **Energy poverty assessment: Indicators and implications for developing and developed countries (2024)** – ScienceDirect –  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0196890424002656>
- **A just transition for all: Key tools for a fast and fair shift to renewable energy (2024)** – Business & Human Rights Resource Centre –  
[https://media.business-humanrights.org/media/documents/2024\\_Just\\_transition\\_guide\\_EN.pdf](https://media.business-humanrights.org/media/documents/2024_Just_transition_guide_EN.pdf)

## II. From Footprints to Fairness: Advocating Climate-Just Tourism for a Changing Planet

Global Tourism Resilience Day, 17<sup>th</sup> of February

### 1. Introduction

Global Tourism Resilience Day, observed every year on 17 February, was formally established by the United Nations in February 2023<sup>13</sup>. The initiative was introduced and championed by Jamaica, with broad international support, following years of advocacy by regions heavily affected by climate-induced shocks and economic volatility. The Day was created to underscore the urgent need for strengthening the resilience of tourism systems as one of the world's largest and most climate-sensitive industries against crises such as pandemics, natural disasters, economic instability, and, increasingly, the accelerating impacts of the climate crisis.

At its core, Global Tourism Resilience Day acknowledges that tourism is not simply an economic sector, but a lifeline for communities, especially in climate-vulnerable regions. Tourism supports livelihoods, cultural heritage, environmental stewardship, and local development. When crises strike, tourism-dependent populations experience sudden loss of income, displacement, and heightened precarity. By establishing this International Day, the UN recognizes the growing need for equitable recovery mechanisms, cross-border cooperation, and policies that prioritize the protection of people and ecosystems, not just markets.<sup>14</sup>

This emphasis aligns directly with the Annual Human Rights Campaign theme of Climate Justice. Climate justice highlights that climate impacts are not distributed equally: those who contribute least to global emissions often face the greatest harm. Tourism reveals these inequalities with particular clarity. From Mediterranean islands confronting rising sea levels and extreme heat, to Alpine communities grappling with melting glaciers and collapsing winter tourism economies, Europe's tourism sector stands at the frontline of climate injustice.<sup>15</sup> Building tourism resilience means addressing the underlying structural inequalities economic, environmental, and social that magnify harm to vulnerable populations.

The Day is also inherently linked to human rights. Tourism resilience is inseparable from rights such as the right to life, health, work, culture, adequate standard of living, and increasingly, the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, now recognized by the UN Human Rights Council. Climate-exacerbated disasters disrupt health systems, destroy natural and cultural

---

<sup>13</sup> <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/77/269>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.untourism.int/sustainable-development/un-tourism-international-network-of-sustainable-tourism-observatories>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en>

heritage, and undermine economic security. Workers in the tourism sector such as women, youth, migrants, and Indigenous communities, face disproportionate vulnerabilities during crises, including job loss, unsafe working conditions, and barriers to recovery. Strengthening tourism resilience is therefore a matter of protecting human dignity, equity, and social justice.

## 2. Legal Framework

The observance of Global Tourism Resilience Day is an occasion to review the legal foundations for sustainable tourism and community resilience at all levels. Tourism intersects with many bodies of law from trade and investment, labor rights, cultural heritage protection, environmental to climate law, all of which shape whether tourism benefits or burdens local people and ecosystems. Importantly, access to sustainable tourism is not spelled out as a discrete human right; instead, it is derived from a constellation of economic, social and cultural rights and environmental obligations.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.1 International Frameworks

#### 2.1.1. Tourism Ethics, SDGs and Human Rights

At the global level, the UN World Tourism Organization provides normative guidance. The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (1999) and its 2019 successor, the Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics, set standards for responsible tourism.<sup>17</sup> These texts are anchored in human rights: for example, they declare that tourism must advance human dignity and equality. Article 5.2 of the Convention states that “*tourism activities should respect the equality of men and women; they should promote human rights and, more particularly, the individual rights of the most vulnerable groups*”. This emphasizes duties such as combating sexual exploitation in travel and ensuring inclusive benefits from tourism development. While not a legally binding treaty until the Convention’s entry into force, these instruments guide state conduct and corporate responsibility in tourism.

Tourism is also explicitly recognized by the Sustainable Development Goals. SDG Target 8.9 calls on states to “*devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products*.”<sup>18</sup> The UN Resolution establishing Tourism Resilience Day reiterates tourism’s link to the 2030 Agenda: it highlights tourism’s role in sustainable growth, poverty reduction, women’s empowerment, youth employment, and conservation of natural resources. Similarly, UN sectoral bodies affirm tourism’s cross-cutting importance: the UN tourism agency notes that sustainable tourism advances goals on economic growth (SDG8), sustainable consumption (SDG12) and life below water/land (SDGs 14 and 15), while also contributing to zero hunger, reducing inequalities, and sustainable cities through investment in rural communities and infrastructures. These acknowledgements effectively place tourism within the

---

<sup>16</sup><https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.unwto.org/global-code-of-ethics-for-tourism>

<sup>18</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

broader human rights discourse: tourism policies should respect the rights to work, health, culture and even the environment, as affirmed by UN human rights bodies.

Tourism both contributes to climate change and suffers from it. For example, long-distance travel and energy-intensive hospitality drive greenhouse gas emissions, while destinations face sea-level rise, hurricanes, droughts and wildfire smoke that deter visitors and endanger livelihoods. The principal international climate treaties do not single out tourism, but they enjoin parties to integrate climate action with human rights and sustainable development. The Paris Agreement's preamble emphasizes that when combating climate change, parties "*should... consider their respective obligations on human rights*". This implies that climate mitigation and adaptation policies (such as carbon pricing on airlines or disaster preparedness for resorts) must also consider impacts on tourism workers and host communities. In practice, the tourism sector has begun to self-regulate on climate: for instance, the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism (launched at COP25) commits travel businesses and destinations to cut emissions and invest in resilience.<sup>19</sup> These efforts rest on the idea that safeguarding the right to a stable climate (a subset of rights to life, health, and an adequate environment) is integral to tourism resilience.

### 2.1.2 Global Code of Ethics and Other Instruments

Beyond sustainable development and climate treaties, specific UN instruments touch on tourism ethics and rights. For example, the ILO's Guidelines on Decent Work and Socially Responsible Tourism (2018) provide guidance for fair labor practices across the travel sector (covering hotels, transport, and food services). These guidelines reflect rights-based principles in employment like non-discrimination, freedom of association, and fair remuneration as applied to tourism. At the UN General Assembly level, resolutions like A/RES/78/260 (2023) proclaimed 2027 as the International Year of Sustainable and Resilient Tourism. This resolution urges states to "*take effective measures... to promote the equal participation of women and...the balanced participation of youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples and local communities*" in tourism decision-making. Such political commitments reinforce that tourism development must be inclusive and rights-affirming, aligning with broader UN treaties on women's rights, indigenous rights, and rights of persons with disabilities. In short, while there is no singular "right to tourism" treaty, international instruments weave tourism policy into the fabric of human rights and sustainability obligations.

## 2.2 Regional & National Frameworks

### 2.2.1 European and Council of Europe Frameworks

At the European level, there is growing attention to sustainable tourism, though no stand-alone "right to travel" exists. The Treaty on the Functioning of the EU explicitly lists tourism as an

<sup>19</sup><https://www.unwto.org/the-glasgow-declaration-on-climate-action-in-tourism>; [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english\\_paris\\_agreement.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf)

objective of the Union, linking it to environmental protection and social inclusion. EU law provides a supporting backdrop: for instance, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights enshrines values of human dignity, equality, health, and environmental protection. The Charter's environmental right obliges EU institutions to ensure a high level of protection, which extends to tourism activities (e.g. requiring tourist developments to comply with nature conservation laws). The EU's climate and environment legislation such as the European Climate Law (binding climate neutrality by 2050) and the Nature Restoration Law will increasingly shape tourism practices, for example by imposing new standards on building resorts, airports, and hospitality industries.

In late 2024 the European Commission unveiled its first Sustainable Tourism Strategy. This policy focuses on reducing emissions, conserving resources, and protecting cultural and natural assets as tourism grows. Commissioner Tzitzikostas emphasized that Europe's 758 million annual visitors strain infrastructure and ecosystems, so the new strategy aims to make the industry climate-resilient and community-friendly. While the EU lacks direct legislative power over tourism services, it will use sectoral tools (transport and energy regulations, the EU Green Deal funding, post-COVID recovery funds) to advance sustainability in tourism. Ongoing consultations on a 2026 EU tourism strategy indicate a legal-political shift toward viewing tourism through a "just transition" lens, balancing economic recovery with environmental justice.

### **2.3 Case study example: Holcim and Pulau Pari – Climate Litigation for Tourism& Climate Justice**

Pulau Pari, a small island north of Jakarta, suffers repeated flooding, coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion, and degradation of marine ecosystems linked to rising sea levels and climate change.<sup>20</sup> The island's economy depends largely on fishing, small-scale tourism, guesthouses and beach services, which makes the environmental damage especially devastating for local livelihoods.<sup>21</sup>

In January 2023, four residents of Pulau Pari filed a civil complaint against Holcim in the Cantonal Court of Zug, Switzerland, where the company is headquartered.<sup>22</sup> The complaint followed an earlier, unsuccessful attempt at conciliation in mid-2022. The plaintiffs argue that Holcim's historical and ongoing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have contributed to global warming, which in turn has caused sea-level rise and more frequent extreme weather. These harms have damaged the island, undermined its habitability, and threatened the residents' livelihoods.<sup>23</sup> They demand financial compensation reportedly CHF 3,600 per person to finance flood protections such as sea walls, mangrove plantations, and other adaptation measures.<sup>24</sup> In addition, they seek a legally binding commitment by Holcim to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions (the plaintiffs request a

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.climatecasechart.com/document/asmania-et-al-vs-holcim\\_f2ce](https://www.climatecasechart.com/document/asmania-et-al-vs-holcim_f2ce)

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/climate-adaptation/four-indonesian-islanders-take-on-swiss-cement-giant-holcim/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesian-islanders-file-climate-complaint-against-cement-giant-holcim>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.thejakartapost.com/culture/2025/09/01/pari-islanders-taking-swiss-concrete-giant-to-court-over-climate.html>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/cop/swiss-court-consider-climate-case-by-indonesia-islanders-against-holcim-2025-09-01/>

43% reduction by 2030 and a 69% reduction by 2040) in line with global climate goals.<sup>25</sup> According to the supporting NGOs, Holcim has emitted more than seven billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> between 1950 and 2021, amounting to about 0.42% of all global industrial CO<sub>2</sub> emissions since 1750. The plaintiffs argue this historical contribution justifies their claims for both compensation and emission reductions.

In November 2023, the Zug Cantonal Court granted the four plaintiffs legal aid that enabled the case to proceed despite their limited financial means. The court recognised their financial situation and judged that the claim was not “manifestly without chance of success.” As of September 2025, the court has begun assessing whether it has jurisdiction and whether the complaint is admissible, which is a preliminary, but decisive phase in the litigation process. If the court accepts the case, it will move to a full hearing on the merits.

This litigation is described by supporters as the first major climate-damage suit against a cement producer in Switzerland, and one of the first by islanders from a developing country suing a multinational polluter in the home country’s courts. Although the lawsuit does not concern tourism explicitly in legal terminology, it is deeply relevant for tourism-dependent communities. On Pulau Pari, damage from flooding and sea-level rise has already reduced tourist visits, destroyed guesthouses and marine habitats, and cut income for fishers and service providers which effectively undermines the island’s economic basis. By framing the harms as violations of the plaintiffs’ rights to livelihood, housing, health, and a stable environment, the case bridges environmental degradation and human rights. It challenges the notion that climate change is a remote, global matter.

Should the court recognize corporate liability for historic emissions and order compensation and adaptation funding, the case could open a legal pathway for climate-vulnerable, tourism-dependent communities worldwide to demand remedy and resilience from major polluters. Beyond compensation, the demand for emission reductions would reinforce global corporate accountability, by legally binding a major polluter to align with scientific climate goals.

### 3. Current Trends & Challenges

In 2024–2025, tourism has bounced back strongly after the COVID-19 slump: in many OECD countries, tourism’s contribution to GDP and services exports nearly returned to pre-pandemic levels.<sup>26</sup> However, this recovery coincides with a growing recognition that tourism is one of the sectors most exposed to the accelerating consequences of climate change.<sup>27</sup> The rebound in international travel has restored many livelihoods in hospitality, accommodation and transport, but prosperity is fragile. According to a recent report by OECD, while tourism demand is rising, “geopolitical tensions, cost-of-living pressures and climate-related events” such as floods,

---

<sup>25</sup><https://www.journaldebruxelles.be/en/Nature/551504-indonesian-islanders-taking-swiss-concrete-giant-to-court-over-climate.html>

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2024/07/oecd-tourism-trends-and-policies-2024\\_17ff33a3.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2024/07/oecd-tourism-trends-and-policies-2024_17ff33a3.html)

<sup>27</sup>[https://transition-pathways.europa.eu/system/files/2024-11/1.%20DG%20GROW\\_EU%20Supporting%20tourism%20resilience\\_18.10.2024\\_0.pdf](https://transition-pathways.europa.eu/system/files/2024-11/1.%20DG%20GROW_EU%20Supporting%20tourism%20resilience_18.10.2024_0.pdf)

wildfires, heatwaves or extreme weather increasingly threaten the sector's stability.<sup>28</sup> For many destinations, climate events are no longer rare anomalies but recurring disruptions. A report by European Travel Commission (ETC) published in 2024/2025 emphasizes that European tourism is confronting rising heat, water scarcity, wildfire risk, and sea-level pressures, which jeopardize both natural resources and tourism infrastructure.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, many popular destinations are experiencing renewed or intensified over-tourism, a phenomenon complicated by climate change. The growth in visitor numbers strains infrastructure, drives up housing costs, pressures water and waste systems, and erodes social cohesion. Such pressures threaten not only environmental sustainability but also social equity. Local residents often bear the social costs from loss of affordable housing to environmental degradation.

Tourism itself contributes significantly to global greenhouse-gas emissions, namely through air travel, heating and cooling of accommodation, transport, and other activities related to tourism. As the sector recovers and expands, its emissions risk undermining global climate goals. To address this, there is a growing movement among travel businesses toward climate mitigation: in 2024, the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) reported a substantial increase in the number of travel and tourism businesses committing to emissions-reduction targets — up by 27% over the last three years. More than half of major industry actors now report climate targets, and many adopt science-based commitments.<sup>30</sup>

Despite rising commitments, many tourism destinations still lack comprehensive adaptation and resilience strategies. A 2025 OECD-commissioned report argues that building “strong and resilient tourism destinations” will require systemic reforms: diversified economies, robust, climate-resilient infrastructure, inclusive governance, and policies that balance economic, social, and environmental goals. In Europe, this challenge is being addressed at policy level: in late 2025 the European Commission unveiled the EU's first-ever tourism strategy grounded in sustainability.<sup>31</sup> The strategy recognizes the dual pressures of record visitor numbers and escalating climate risks; it calls for emission reductions, resource-efficient practices, protection of natural and cultural assets, and regional development that avoids overburdening popular hotspots.

Crucially, the intersection of tourism and climate change raises issues of justice and equity. The burdens of climate impacts and unsustainable tourism often fall on local residents rather than on large tourism corporations or global travellers. For example, destinations facing water scarcity, heat stress, or environmental degradation may force long-term residents to bear higher risks to

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2024/07/oecd-tourism-trends-and-policies-2024\\_17ff33a3.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2024/07/oecd-tourism-trends-and-policies-2024_17ff33a3.html)

<sup>29</sup> <https://transition-pathways.europa.eu/tourism/knowledge-documents/etc-report-climate-challenges-and-future-tourism-europe?>

<sup>30</sup> <https://wttc.org/news/significant-surge-in-travel-and-tourism-businesses-commitment-to-net-zero-reveals-wttc-roadmap?>

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/04/building-strong-and-resilient-tourism-destinations\\_2aece83b/a57c343d-en.pdf#:~:text=Growing%20visitor%20numbers%20can%20drive,gradually%20replacing%20traditional%20residential%20and](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/04/building-strong-and-resilient-tourism-destinations_2aece83b/a57c343d-en.pdf#:~:text=Growing%20visitor%20numbers%20can%20drive,gradually%20replacing%20traditional%20residential%20and)

health, housing, and livelihoods. At the same time, communities dependent on tourism income are particularly vulnerable when climate events disrupt tourist flows or degrade the natural and cultural assets on which tourism relies. The evolving commitment of tourism businesses to climate targets is a positive sign.<sup>32</sup> Yet this commitment must translate into concrete protections and equitable transition strategies: mitigation alone is insufficient if adaptation, social inclusion, and local rights are ignored.

#### 4. Recommended Focus Areas for Events & Advocacy

- Resilient Tourism and Human Rights
- Legal Protections for Tourism Workers
- Community-Led Tourism and Inclusive Recovery
- Strengthening protections for cultural identity, community autonomy, and the right to participate in public life
- Building crisis-response systems that protect visitors and residents

#### 5. Suggested Readings & Resources

- **Building Strong and Resilient Tourism Destinations (2025) OECD**  
[https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/building-strong-and-resilient-tourism-destinations\\_a57c343d-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/building-strong-and-resilient-tourism-destinations_a57c343d-en.html)
- **Guidelines on Decent Work and Socially Responsible Tourism ILO**  
<https://www.ilo.org/resource/other/ilo-guidelines-decent-work-and-socially-responsible-tourism>
- **Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism**  
[https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/GlasgowDeclaration\\_EN\\_0.pdf](https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/GlasgowDeclaration_EN_0.pdf)
- **Balancing Tourism / Seasonality Summit podcast**  
<https://seasonalitysummit.com/podcast/>
- **“Crowded Out: The Story of Overtourism” — short documentary**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-52L7hYQjE>

---

<sup>32</sup><https://wtcc.org/news/significant-surge-in-travel-and-tourism-businesses-commitment-to-net-zero-reveals-wtcc-roadmap?>

- **Is Mass Tourism Ruining Barcelona and Ibiza?**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DyYzr-OcKI>
- **Conservationists call for Lake District to lose UNESCO world heritage status**  
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/jun/07/conservationists-call-for-lake-district-to-lose-unesco-world-heritage-status>

### **III. From Promises to Violations: How to Better Protect the Rights of Women and Girls in the Climate Change Context**

**International Women's Day, 8<sup>th</sup> March**

#### **1. Introduction**

On 8th March every year we celebrate International Women's day to mark all the feminist achievements and demand for what is still to come for gender equality. The first official International Women's Day was celebrated on the 19th March 1911 in several European countries, and while it was firstly connected to labour movements and the right to vote, it has since evolved into a day of many celebrations linked to emancipation. Taking inspiration from Simone de Beauvoir, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." and International Women's Day is the annual representation of what being a woman and a girl means, through all the achievements and demands made by those who came before. Nowadays, it serves as a day of advocacy for women's rights to address still existing issues.

In 2026 the theme for the International Women's Day is "Give to Gain" which encourages an approach based on collaboration and reciprocity.

Considering our topic of the Annual Human Rights Campaign - Human Rights and Climate Justice - we first need to point out that the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment was recognised by the UN General Assembly as has been introduced into national policies and various international documents. Since then, much advocacy has been made to show how environmental risks have a close link to gender equality, and that women and girls still stand in a vulnerable position when it comes to the consequences of climate change.

In 2024, a UN Women Report showed that by 2050 climate change may push up to 158 million more women and girls into poverty. This is because of the vulnerable position in which they are having to face the daily consequences of climate change in their agriculture and water collection, or worse, when there are extreme natural disasters which make abandoning their land the only option. Moreover, many call for the protection of women who are environmental human rights defenders and who face significant risks during their advocacy work, even though they are left to deal with the consequences of climate change while defending their land and natural resources. The protection of Indigenous minorities is also a key factor in this discussion, as they are many times left outside the conversation.

In practical terms, there are different international projects created to combat this gender inequality developing within the context of climate change - Equity Watch Initiative (Nigeria), EmpoderaClima (Brazil), Stand for Her Land (global advocacy initiative) and International Institute for Environment and Development Gender Environment Hub. All of these show the importance of local initiatives to further identify these problems and show the essential link which must be made between climate change and gender inequality.

## **2. Legal framework**

### **2.1 International framework**

#### **2.1.1. Charter of the United Nations (1945) and Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)**

Both documents are the first international law instruments to recognise equality between men and women as foundational to every society. They created obligations for the states to promote universal respect for human rights with no discrimination based on sex.

#### **2.1.2. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)**

It presents a definition on what discrimination against women is and creates the obligation for states to eliminate discriminatory laws, ensure equal participation in public and political life, and protect women's rights in healthcare, family relations, employment and education. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women makes recommendations on specific issues like trafficking of women and girls in the global migration context (General recommendation No.38 – 2020) and the right of girls and women to education (General recommendation No. 36).

#### **2.1.3. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)**

Identifies areas of concern like violence against women, the role of women in decision-making, discrimination in the access to the right to education. Still considered one of the blueprints in gender equality policy, as it has been followed by various conferences, recommendations and analysis of the practical reality women face every day.

#### **2.1.4. Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030)**

One of the goals is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by eliminating all forms of violence, ending harmful practices (child marriage, female genital mutilation), recognising unpaid care work and ensure equal participation in political life.

#### **2.1.5. Istanbul Convention from the Council of Europe on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (2011)**

It is considered one of the pillar stones of legally binding regional treaties in women's rights. Coming from the Council of Europe it sets up a comprehensive framework to prevent violence against women, protect the victims and prosecute offenders in an efficient and fair way. To do this it recognises different forms of violence such as sexual harassment, forced marriage, stalking, domestic violence and sexual violence. Moreover, it linked gender-based violence to power inequality which is inherent in our societies, so it pushed states to address structural and systemic discrimination and understand that violence against women is not isolated cases. These obligations imposed on the states are based on four core elements – prevention, protection and support, prosecution and integrated policies.

To better implement the Convention, the Council of Europe created an independent body responsible for issuing evaluation reports, country visits and adoption of recommendations – GREVIO (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence).

This convention is aligned with General Recommendations No. 19 (2017) and 35 from the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on gender-based violence against women.

#### **2.1.6. Rio Conventions and Gender Equality**

**United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** - focus on intergovernmental efforts to tackle the challenges linked to climate change. In practice, extreme weather events caused by climate change often contribute to gender-based inequalities making women more vulnerable to poverty and displacement. Moreover, they tend to suffer from environmental stress due to their roles of providing food and water within their communities.

**Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** - promote the conservation of biological diversity, the fair sharing of its commercial benefits and its sustainable use.

**United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)** - it aims to mitigate the effects of drought and combat desertification. In many regions, women's land rights are limited which makes it harder to achieve economic freedom through the productive use of the land. With land degradation gender inequality will get worse and women will be in more vulnerable situations.

### **3. Current trends and challenges**

#### **3.1. Development of Gender-Responsive Synergies Across the Rio Conventions:**

Considering the three Rio Conventions - UNCBD (biodiversity), UNFCCC (climate change) and UNCCD (desertification) - emphasis is put on the importance of integrating gender equality in the implementation of the Conventions. To properly address the environmental crisis identified

by international organisations there needs to be a gender-responsive approach which protects women's rights, for example, in land security contexts for Indigenous women.

Different studies and reports show that women from these Indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by these environmental problems - climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation. Notably, gender-based actions were developed and introduced in each of the Conventions, however, a coordinated implementation is still needed to fulfill the ultimate goal. This will come from women's participation and leadership, significant investment in gender-responsive approaches, better monitoring of the link between gender and environment to understand the intersectional perspective of the problem and coordination mechanisms.

To ensure an effective implementation of the goals UN Women presents the following key actions - (i) build capacities and leadership, (ii) coordinate gender-responsive environmental policies, (iii) increase funding to support gender equality and (iv) harmonise advocacy on gender equality.

### **3.2. Lack of participation and leadership from women in environmental decision-making:**

The lack of participation of women in decision-making exists at the local, national and international level, and, unfortunately, in almost every policy area. While there is an effort to push for women leadership in advocacy and promote political representation, we are still falling very behind. This is extremely noticeable in the environmental context. For example, women's participation in environmental decision-making remains completely underrepresented, especially in global forums like the UNFCCC COP. At the UNFCCC COP29 only 35% of delegates and 24% of heads of delegation were women. Moreover, at the global level only 28% of environmental ministers are women (2024).

The lack of representation completely undermines the goals to ensure gender equality within the climate change context, and leaves out real concerns and problems from the decision-making procedure. Only by hearing women and girls, and all the community projects developed around tackling climate change can true change be fostered.

## **4. Recommended Focus Areas for Events and Advocacy**

- The importance of intersectional approaches for gender equality
- Digital and online violence/harassment against women and girls
- The importance of education to develop gender equality
- Domestic violence and its impacts on the victims and society
- Pushing for economic equality to allow for financial independence
- Protection of women and girls in war conflicts
- Negative effects of climate change on women and girls
- Protection of Indigenous women and communities

---

## 5. Suggested Readings and Resources

- **GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women (October 2021)** –  
<https://rm.coe.int/grevio-rec-no-on-digital-violence-against-women/1680a49147>
- **Working Paper from UN Women “Advancing Gender-Responsive Synergies Across the Rio Conventions”** –  
<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/advancing-gender-responsive-synergies-across-the-rio-conventions-en.pdf>
- **“Who is Afraid of the Istanbul Convention? Explaining Opposition to and Support for Gender Equality”** –  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00104140241290205>
- **“Violence against women active in politics in the EU: A serious obstacle to political participation” from the European Parliamentary Research Service** –  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-nLqPb\\_NAQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-nLqPb_NAQ)
- **Global Database on Violence against Women and Girls (UN Women)** –  
<https://data.unwomen.org/global-database-on-violence-against-women>
- **Red Teaming Playbook on Artificial Intelligence for Social Good (UNESCO – Global AI Ethics and Governance Observatory)** –  
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000394338>
- **Working Paper from UN Women “Gender-responsive synergies across the Rio Conventions: Multi-stakeholder perspectives”** –  
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/11/gender-responsive-synergies-across-the-rio-conventions-multi-stakeholder-perspectives>

## **IV. From Commitments to Implementation: Safeguarding the Right to Health amid Global Challenges**

**World Health Day, 7<sup>th</sup> of April**

### **1. Introduction**

World Health Day, observed every year on April 7, marks the anniversary of the founding of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1948. It serves as a global reminder that health is not merely a policy objective or a social good, but a fundamental human right, inseparable from human dignity, equality and social justice.

The contemporary global health landscape is shaped by overlapping and mutually reinforcing crises. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep structural inequalities in access to healthcare, medicines and vaccines, while armed conflicts, forced displacement, climate change, food insecurity and economic instability continue to place severe pressure on health systems worldwide. At the same time, non-communicable diseases, mental-health challenges and antimicrobial resistance represent persistent and growing threats to public health.

Health outcomes remain profoundly unequal, both between States and within societies. Marginalised and vulnerable groups, including women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees, Indigenous peoples and individuals living in poverty, face disproportionate barriers to accessing healthcare and the underlying determinants of health, such as clean water, adequate housing, nutritious food and a healthy environment.

Against this backdrop, World Health Day provides a timely opportunity to engage with the Annual Human Rights Campaign theme on Human Rights and Climate Justice, by highlighting that the protection of health is inseparable from environmental conditions and climate-related risks that disproportionately affect vulnerable communities. It is therefore not merely commemorative, but a call to action, inviting States, international organisations, civil society, academic institutions and private actors to reaffirm their legal and moral obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to health.

### **2. Legal Framework**

World Health Day provides an opportunity to reaffirm that the right to health is firmly grounded in binding international and regional legal frameworks. Among these, three instruments are particularly relevant due to their normative force, practical applicability and contemporary significance.

## 2.1 International Frameworks

### 2.1.1. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights constitutes the core international legal framework for the protection of the right to health<sup>33</sup>.

Under Article 12 ICESCR, States recognise the right of everyone to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. This right extends beyond access to healthcare services and encompasses the underlying determinants of health, including safe drinking water, sanitation, adequate food, housing, healthy environmental conditions, access to health-related information and participation in decision-making processes affecting health.

Article 2(1) ICESCR obliges States to take deliberate, concrete and targeted steps, using the maximum of available resources, to progressively realise this right. This obligation also includes a duty of international cooperation and assistance, which is particularly relevant in the context of pandemics, global health emergencies, access to essential medicines and vaccine equity.

The authoritative interpretation provided by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, notably in General Comment No. 14, renders the right to health a legally operational standard for public policy, judicial review and rights-based advocacy<sup>34</sup>.

### 2.1.2. International Health Regulations (IHR, 2005)

The International Health Regulations (2005) represent the most significant binding instrument governing global public-health preparedness and response.

Adopted under the Constitution of the World Health Organization, the IHR impose legally binding obligations on States to develop minimum public-health surveillance and response capacities, detect, assess and notify health threats, and cooperate internationally in responding to public health emergencies of international concern.

Importantly, the IHR explicitly require that health measures be implemented with full respect for human dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms, ensuring that emergency responses comply with principles of legality, necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed both the centrality of the IHR framework and its limitations, reinforcing current efforts to strengthen compliance, transparency and international solidarity within global health governance.

---

<sup>33</sup>

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

<sup>34</sup>

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-14-right-highest-attainable-standard>

## 2.2 Regional Legal Framework

### 2.2.1 European Social Charter (Revised)

At the regional level, the European Social Charter (Revised) provides the most explicit and substantive protection of the right to health within the European human-rights system<sup>35</sup>.

Article 11 of the Charter recognises the right to protection of health and imposes positive obligations on States to remove the causes of ill-health, provide advisory and educational facilities for health promotion, and prevent diseases and promote public health.

The jurisprudence of the European Committee of Social Rights has progressively clarified that Article 11 requires effective access to healthcare for all, including vulnerable and marginalised groups such as migrants, children, persons living in poverty and persons with disabilities<sup>36</sup>. The Committee's decisions emphasise prevention, equality and structural public-health measures, making the Charter particularly relevant for contemporary health challenges.

Compared to the European Convention on Human Rights, which addresses health primarily through implied protections, the European Social Charter offers a direct and rights-based social framework aligned with the objectives of World Health Day.

### 2.3 Case Study: Ebola Outbreak and the Right to Health

In Sierra Leone, the 2014–2016 Ebola outbreak exposed profound weaknesses in public-health systems and the devastating human-rights consequences of inadequate preparedness and response<sup>37</sup>. The rapid spread of the virus was exacerbated by limited healthcare infrastructure, shortages of trained medical personnel, and insufficient access to essential medicines and protective equipment. As a result, thousands of preventable deaths occurred, and entire communities faced long-term physical, psychological and socio-economic harm. These circumstances demonstrate how failures in public-health governance can place individuals in conditions that jeopardise life, health and human dignity<sup>38</sup>. In its subsequent analysis, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights emphasised that States have positive obligations under international human-rights law, in particular under Article 12 ICESCR, to establish resilient health systems capable of preventing, detecting and responding to foreseeable health threats<sup>39</sup>. The Ebola crisis has since been widely cited in UN reports as evidence that inadequate investment in public health, combined with delayed international cooperation, may amount to a violation of the right to health. Scholars and human-rights bodies have drawn on this experience to reinforce a rights-based approach to epidemic preparedness, grounded in prevention, equality and international solidarity.

---

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/social-charter/european-social-charter-revised>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-committee-of-social-rights/jurisprudence>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease-outbreak-news/item/ebola-sierra-leone>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-health/right-to-health>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-health/right-to-health>

### 3. Current Trends & Challenges

In 2024–2025, the right to health faces mounting pressure from intersecting global trends. Climate change increasingly acts as a health-risk multiplier, intensifying heat-related mortality, the spread of infectious diseases, food and water insecurity, and mental-health impacts<sup>40</sup>.

Armed conflicts and forced displacement disrupt healthcare systems, while attacks on medical facilities undermine both human-rights law and international humanitarian law<sup>41</sup>.

Mental-health challenges have intensified worldwide, particularly among young people, displaced populations and communities exposed to prolonged instability. At the same time, the digitalisation of healthcare and the use of artificial intelligence raise concerns regarding data protection, informed consent, algorithmic bias and unequal access to digital health services<sup>42</sup>.

Commercial determinants of health, including pollution, harmful industrial practices and unhealthy food systems, further complicate efforts to ensure equitable health outcomes.

### 4. Recommended Focus Areas for Events & Advocacy

- Universal health coverage and equitable access to healthcare
- Global health emergencies and international cooperation
- Mental health as a human-rights issue
- Health impacts of climate change and environmental degradation
- Access to medicines, vaccines and scientific progress
- Protection of healthcare workers and health infrastructure in conflict zones
- Digital health, data protection and equality

### 5. Suggested Readings & Resources

- **Article: Health as a Human Right (WHO)** - <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/human-rights-and-health>
- **UN Fact Sheet: The Right to Health (OHCHR)** - <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Factsheet31.pdf>
- **Article: World Health Day 2025 – Healthy Beginnings, Hopeful Futures (WHO)** - <https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-health-day/2025>

<sup>40</sup> [https://www.who.int/health-topics/climate-change#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/climate-change#tab=tab_1)

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.who.int/emergencies/safeguarding-health-care>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240029200>

- 
- **Journal Collection: World Health Day 2025 – Free Research on Maternal & Newborn Health (Oxford Academic)** -  
<https://academic.oup.com/intqhc/pages/whd25>
  - **Essay Collection: Health, Human Rights, and Equity (Frontiers in Public Health)** -  
<https://www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/64175/world-health-day-2024-frontiers-in-public-health-presents-my-health-my-right>
  - **UNDP Article: Health as a Justice Issue (UNDP)** -  
<https://www.undp.org/publications/health-justice-issue>

## Your Feedback Matters

We welcome your input. We hope these resources serve as a valuable guide in planning meaningful and productive sessions for your group. Should you have any suggestions for improving these materials, or if there are specific topics or international days you would like included in future editions, please do not hesitate to share your ideas.

Please send any feedback, ideas, or suggestions to [director.ahrc@elsa.org](mailto:director.ahrc@elsa.org)