



The European Law Students' Association

# ADVOCACY GUIDELINES

---

2025/2026

# Foreword

Dear ELSA Officer,

We are very happy to present to you the **Advocacy Guidelines**. This document has been in the making for quite some time, first initiated two years ago in response to the needs and ideas expressed by the Network, and further developed thanks to the recent experiences of ELSA International in leading advocacy campaigns.

Our aim is for these guidelines to serve not as an untouchable holy product, but as a **living document** that can evolve, be updated regularly, and continue to grow with new insights, challenges, and creative approaches from across the network.

A huge thank you goes to Frida Nygren Björk, the Director for Advocacy for the terms 2023/2024 and 2024/2025, for conducting this project over her two terms. We would also like to thank Antonio Anghel, Assistant for Advocacy of 2025/2026 for his valuable support in formatting this document.

We hope you will find these guidelines useful and inspiring, and we look forward to seeing how you will make use of them to advance ELSA's vision and impact.

With warm regards,

**Gabriel Marti**

President

International Board of ELSA 2025/2026

**Anastasios Vavvas**

Vice President in charge of Academic Activities

International Board of ELSA 2025/2026

**Frida Nygren Björk**

Director for Advocacy

ELSA International Team 2024/2025



The European Law Students' Association

## Table of contents

---

<b>1. Definitions</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1. Advocacy	3
1.2. Social Responsibility	4
1.3. Non-political	4
<b>2. How ELSA Advocates</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Non-political Advocacy	5
2.2. Human rights	6
2.3. Rule of law	7
2.4. Other	7
<b>3 Methods of ELSA Advocacy</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1 Impact of the projects	8
3.1.1 ROLE	9
3.1.2 Annual Human Rights Campaign	9
3.1.3 Competitions	10
3.1.4 Other	10
3.1.5. Delegations	11
3.2 Collaborations	11

# 1. Definitions

---

## 1.1. Advocacy

---

Advocacy is regulated in the *International Council Meeting Decision Book, Part 1, Chapter 6*, as the process of raising awareness on pressing societal issues through demonstrated objective data within relevant audiences to implement actions that contribute to a specific goal<sup>1</sup>, e.g. effective humanitarian action.

Advocacy within ELSA is restricted to non-political action in accordance with the Statutes of ELSA.

Advocacy is the public support for an idea, plan or method<sup>2</sup>. It is a collective term for all measures and activities carried out by civil society, the business community or other actors to influence those who have the power to make decisions on developing, changing and implementing policies<sup>3</sup>.

Advocacy is a conscious action or process aimed at supporting a cause or issue. An advocacy campaign uses a range of targeted measures to support a cause or issue<sup>4</sup>.

The primary purpose of Non-Governmental Organisations working with advocacy is to defend or promote a specific cause and to try to influence the policies and practices of institutions.

Advocacy to empower underrepresented groups in society is not limited to helping people access information or providing them with tools to reach decision-makers. The underlying function of advocacy is often to strengthen the self-esteem of weaker groups, improve their self-confidence, create integrity and promote mutual trust.

In other words, Advocacy is a process based on facts which aims to directly and indirectly influence decision-makers and relevant target groups to support and implement measures that contribute to a specific goal, such as effective humanitarian aid. Within ELSA, advocacy is limited to non-political measures in accordance with ELSA's statutes, which is why the definition of advocacy and non-political advocacy may vary within ELSA and outside ELSA.

---

<sup>1</sup> NGO Fora Support Programme, [NGO Fora Advocacy Guide: Delivering Joint Advocacy](#), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Cambridge Dictionary

<sup>3</sup> European Youth Forum, [Advocacy Handbook](#), p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> The World Bank, [Working with NGOs. A Practical Guide to Operational Collaboration between The World Bank and Non-governmental Organizations](#), 1995, p. 14.

### 1.2. Social Responsibility

---

Social responsibility is showing concern for how one's actions affect society and the environment, being willing to consider both social good and profit, and acting in ways that promote shared values. It involves taking accountability for one's actions and behaviour toward other people and society as a whole<sup>5</sup>.

Within ELSA, Social Responsibility serves as a broad umbrella concept covering all activities of the Association. It requires considering the impact of decisions and actions on society, ensuring that projects and initiatives are aligned with the values of responsibility, inclusiveness, and social impact.

It is also about providing civil education through projects such as ROLE. Initiatives for Social Responsibility are regulated in the International Council Meeting Decision Book, Part 6, Chapter 5, as projects that aim to make ELSA members more conscious about their community and to ensure the Association's positive impact on society.

### 1.3. Non-political

---

Being non-political means not expressing or endorsing opinions that support or oppose political parties, movements, or ideologies<sup>6</sup>. It is the principle of neutrality that allows ELSA to engage with diverse stakeholders while remaining independent from political affiliations.

Some topics addressed by ELSA, such as human rights or the rule of law, may carry political dimensions. However, they can be approached in a non-political way by:

- ➔ presenting information objectively and based on legal sources,
- ➔ taking multiple perspectives into account, and
- ➔ framing discussions around international law and universally recognised standards.

This ensures that ELSA's activities, such as advocacy campaigns, public statements or projects, focus on facts, law and legal knowledge rather than partisan positions.

It is important to note that **non-political does not mean apolitical**<sup>7</sup>. Apolitical implies indifference or rejection of all political matters, whereas ELSA acknowledges the relevance of law to society and engages with it critically but without partisan bias.

---

<sup>5</sup> Cambridge Dictionary

<sup>6</sup> Cambridge Dictionary

<sup>7</sup> <https://core.ac.uk/reader/230597287>

## 2. How ELSA Advocates

---

Advocacy within ELSA is done through several different methods. These include, but are not limited to:

- Participation in discussions.
- Raising awareness of an issue through an objective point of view.
- Statements based on well-established facts.
- Contributing to knowledge.

### 2.1. Non-political Advocacy

---

The difference between political Advocacy and non-political Advocacy can be subtle, as previous discussions within the ELSA Network have shown. In general, what constitutes non-political advocacy is subjective, but some guidance can be found by remaining impartial towards political parties and raising awareness of certain issues through an objective standpoint.

In general, promoting or associating with certain political parties, opinions or politicians can be considered political advocacy.

Non-political advocacy:

- Raising awareness of an issue through an objective point of view.
- Statements based on well-established facts.
- Contributing to knowledge.
- Education within legal frameworks.
- Participation in discussions.

Raising awareness of issues from an objective perspective, for example, by considering different positions/opinions on the issue, would not imply taking a political position. Making statements or educating through well-established facts and in accordance with international law, for example, by explaining the legal situation, is not in itself political and can be used in connection with non-political advocacy. An example is organising an event that does not impose specific political views on the participant, but rather explains and presents relevant topics such as human rights, social responsibility, and so on.

Advocacy is an excellent tool for fulfilling ELSA's vision and is an opportunity for both law students and young lawyers to contribute to knowledge, improvement and development in various areas. It also has a connection to social responsibility. Through non-political advocacy, ELSA can offer training and support to both members and non-members to engage in advocacy without political interference. Advocacy, like social responsibility, is a way of raising awareness of social

issues that are not compatible with human rights and international law. Since advocacy within the ELSA network is considered a broad or narrow concept depending on the National Group it concerns, it should encompass all actions, statements and opinions expressed on a particular topic or issue in a community. There can therefore be a number of different ways of working with advocacy, either through a project dedicated solely to advocacy for a specific topic, or as part of a project with a broader purpose.

Advocacy is about influencing change for the better by using our platform to raise awareness of certain issues, promote human rights and other important topics in line with ELSA's values. Advocacy is an active and public way of educating people and helping to raise awareness and engagement to support and participate in discussions.

Advocacy is about creating positive change by using the platform we have through our network to raise awareness of certain issues, promote human rights and other important topics that are in line with ELSA's values. Advocacy is an active and public way of educating individuals and helping to raise awareness and engagement to support and participate in discussions. Educating individuals about legal issues also means helping law students actively contribute to the improvement of the legal system, the protection of human rights and the development of a just world where human dignity and cultural diversity are respected. It enables ELSA members to use their legal knowledge and skills to positively influence the legal field, both within their local communities and on a broader international scale, and make a difference in the world.

### **2.2. Human rights**

---

Many of the projects of ELSA are created with the goal of raising awareness and providing education on human rights. This is done through setting out focus topics that require special attention from the perspective of human rights.<sup>8</sup>

Advocating for Human Rights, as they are already set in place by international law, would not necessarily be trying to influence policy-making, but rather enforcing existing policy and speaking directly to those affected by it. This could always be viewed as political since many of these issues are often linked to political discussions; however, if Human Rights are discussed and advocated for from a legal perspective in an unbiased, impartial and informative way, it can be in line with ELSA's status as a Non-Political association.

According to the responses to the Advocacy Questionnaire, as long as there is a clear violation of internationally accepted and protected Human Rights, Advocacy for these rights would not

---

<sup>8</sup> International Council Meeting Decision Book, chapter 5, art 1, pt. 1.1 p. 8.

necessarily be political engagement. It is, however, important to keep the discussions open and not advocate for a single, particular view, as this could be seen as political.

### 2.3. Rule of law

---

*In its simplest form, the rule of law means that “no one is above the law.” It is the foundation for the development of peaceful, equitable and prosperous societies. For the rule of law to be effective, there must be equality under the law, transparency of law, an independent judiciary and access to legal remedy.<sup>9</sup>*

In general, the Rule of Law is a fundamental general constraint on power. It is designed not to allow the law to single out people, to maintain impartiality and enforce equality before the law and to act as a safeguard for the people. Important aspects of the Rule of Law are the separation of powers, prevention of arbitrariness, consistent application of law and legal certainty. Hence, the purpose of the Rule of Law is to foster a community where the law is just, impartial and consistently applied to ensure the stability of the community.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.4. Other

---

Other ELSA areas of Advocacy could be any sort of topic related to ELSA's vision, some examples are:

- Environmental law
- Sustainability
- Constitutional law
- Labour law

A good way to find topics for Advocacy projects is to first look at the current or previous AHRC and IFP topics, but it is not limited to those, and any topics could be combined to achieve the purpose of what you want to raise more awareness about.

Areas of advocacy can also focus on the other side of our Philosophy statement, and tackle topics of immediate interest and benefit to ELSA's members, such as:

- International cooperation
- Student mobility, cultural exchange
- Mental health in study and work

---

<sup>9</sup> LexisNexis The Rule of Law <https://www.lexisnexis.com/en-us/rule-of-law/default.page>

<sup>10</sup> LexisNexis LexisNexis Legal Awards and the Rule of Law



- Institutional support for law students & young lawyers

ELSA can also advocate about current events, for example, pending cases within topics which align with ELSA's vision. Providing examples of how to engage or learn more about relevant areas is a way to provide a platform for discussions on relevant topics.

Advocating about current events can also entail different kinds of human rights crises. To maintain the non-political status of ELSA, it is important to base these kinds of Advocacy campaigns on established international law, as well as consulting with ELSA International if any questions should arise.

### 3. Methods of ELSA Advocacy

---

ELSA carries out advocacy primarily through its projects and communication channels, with the aim of raising awareness, fostering dialogue, and promoting legal education on relevant societal issues. The main methods include:

- **Organising Events:** ELSA events can be designed specifically around advocacy on a chosen topic (e.g., human rights, the rule of law) or include advocacy elements within a broader programme. These events create spaces for discussion, education, and engagement with experts, students, and the wider public.
- **Social Media Campaigns:** Social media platforms are an essential tool to raise awareness about the societal aspects of ELSA's initiatives and projects. By using online communication strategically, ELSA is able to amplify its messages, reach broader audiences, and encourage public engagement.
- **Representation in Public Institutions:** ELSA takes advantage of its brand, reputation, and standing in the international legal community to promote its values in institutional settings. Through the ELSA Delegations project, members observe and learn from global processes but also contribute by issuing statements that reflect its core values and perspectives.

#### 3.1. Impact of the projects

---

ELSA's projects can make an impact on society by:

- Reaching law students and young lawyers.
- Providing a platform for discussions and knowledge sharing.

- Promoting cultural exchange.
- Promoting Social Responsibility.

### 3.1.1. ROLE

---

*ROLE is an educational international project of ELSA designed to provide non-formal education on the Rule of Law and leadership to high school students around Europe. ELSA members, trained as facilitators, deliver school visits based on the official ROLE Curriculum and its national derivatives. These visits aim to help students understand core Rule of Law values. Facilitators shall be trained in non-formal education methods, the ROLE curriculum content, and the fundamentals of the Rule of Law.*<sup>11</sup>

ROLE can be used as a form of Advocacy concerning the Rule of Law and education. ROLE is executed to educate younger people about the Rule of Law and, through that, their own rights. Since the Rule of Law is a broad term that includes different aspects and rights, ROLE is a good way to include more Advocacy in already existing ELSA projects, not only about the Rule of Law in general but also within specific areas of the concept or in combination with other topics. The focus of ROLE is to promote democracy and human rights.<sup>12</sup> As ROLE is a project with the aim of contributing to education and emphasising the importance of e.g. Social Responsibility<sup>13</sup> it makes it a great tool to advocate about these topics to an audience that is not normally reached by ELSA's other projects.

One way to incorporate more Advocacy within the ROLE project is to localise the ROLE Curriculum, including more specific topics, so that the students can take away what their idea of the Rule of Law is, and thereby make the project a form of informal education about their rights.

The opportunities of Advocacy with ROLE are, however, not limited to the execution of the project itself; it can also include reaching a wider audience than the students whom the project is aimed. This can be done by, for example, social media posts that dive deeper into certain topics under the Rule of Law.

### 3.1.2 Annual Human Rights Campaign

---

*The Annual Human Rights Campaign is ELSA's year-long initiative to promote legal education and raise awareness on a selected human rights theme. It mobilises National and Local Groups across 43 countries and over 350 law faculties to organise events that foster critical dialogue on human rights.*

---

<sup>11</sup> ROLE Handbook 25/26

<sup>12</sup> Academic Activities handbook, 10.1 p.24.

<sup>13</sup> Decision Book, chapter 4, art. 1, pt. 1.2, p.50.

*This international initiative unites the entire ELSA Network in a collaborative effort to create a distinctive platform where law students and young lawyers can actively engage in discussions on both national and international human rights standards. By organising different types of projects, the Campaign provides a powerful space for education, exchange, and advocacy, focusing each year on a specific theme within the field of human rights.*<sup>14</sup>

The Annual Human Rights Campaign is already a campaign that is very much in line with how ELSA can advocate. It is already stated in the explanation of the project that it's supposed to raise awareness about Human Rights and specific areas within that. Advocacy on the AHRC topic can be done through, e.g. social media campaigns to spread information or through informational lectures, seminars, conferences, etc. or combined with other projects, like, for example, Competitions through an essay competition or national Moot Court Competitions. This is a good way to include the annual topic when promoting ELSA to show what we do<sup>15</sup>.

### 3.1.3 Competitions

---

Regarding Competitions, the inclusion of Advocacy can be done through, for example, HPMCC, JHJMCC, Essay Competitions and National Moot Courts by choosing a specific subject that you would like to focus on, for example, related to the current AHRC or IFP topic to focus on or include in the purpose of the competitions.

The topics of the current or past editions of the competitions can also be used for more extensive Advocacy Campaigns by selecting a specific subtopic within the selected competition for a deeper understanding of the chosen subtopic. This is also a way to reach a broader audience apart from those participating in the competition.

### 3.1.4 Other

---

Arranging workshops, seminars, lectures, and panel discussions is a way to engage members that takes less work than arranging other projects; they are shorter events. Depending on the nature and the aim of the event, there might be a necessity to set some pre-decided rules in place. For example, concerning panel discussions, there is no way to control exactly what the panellists and the participants will say or ask. However, by starting the event with establishing ground rules for the panellists, such as explaining that this is not going to be a discussion about politics but rather a discussion on different perspectives of the chosen topic.

---

<sup>14</sup> Annual Human Rights Campaign Outline 2025/2026 Human Rights and Climate Justice p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> See the AHRC outline and supporting materials for more information.

It could also be a good idea to have moderators, especially during panel discussions, to help keep the event to its informational and Non-Political purpose. The idea would not be to control the questions or discussion, as it is important to keep an open climate; however, taking a few minutes before the events start to clarify the purpose and the expectations of the event. The topics of these kinds of events could be anything, but it could be a good idea to have them relate to the current AHRC or IFP topic.

### **3.1.5. Delegations**

---

Through ELSA Delegations, members of ELSA can gain access to important International Organisations, where significant discussions are being held on several topics of interest to the association.

Advocating about these topics through this project is a way to not lose the knowledge and experience that is gained by attending Delegations. This also makes it accessible to more people.

ELSA Delegations provide members an opportunity to take part in important discussions that are of value to the association. Advocating about these topics can be done through reports and preparations that give the delegates sufficient knowledge to be able to properly represent ELSA.

## **3.2 Collaborations**

---

Depending on the method or project, collaboration with, e.g. legislative, executive and judicial institutions on a national level is something to consider. According to the Network, this idea is something to keep in mind and could enhance the project regarding education and spreading awareness about societal issues in the context of Advocacy. However, if it's to be done, it should be done in a careful and controlled manner to refrain from harming ELSA's Non-Political status while still aiming to achieve our goals.

In a controlled and carefully thought-through manner, this kind of cooperation could be a good way to gain more visibility and reach a bigger audience as well as gain a deeper understanding of changes in the laws, proposals, etc., in an objective manner. It can also make a bigger impact for what we are trying to achieve and create more interest for members who would be interested in working in these institutions, so it could not only help with Advocacy, but also help ELSA members to stay informed about career possibilities.

This would, however, depend on the purpose of the collaboration; for example, it could help provide objective explanations and education about Human Rights if done in a careful manner, but it would also depend on the institution. Something to be considered is to evaluate beforehand

whether this is a politically dominated institution or if it is more democratically organised before reaching out and collaborating with the institution.

Furthermore, something that was expressed in the Advocacy Questionnaire that should be considered is that for single projects, it might be easier to “control” which institutions might be suitable for a collaboration with an Advocacy project or for an educational project about how these institutions work. However, if it is regarding a more long-term partnership, further vigilance might be necessary due to ELSA's Non-Political stance to keep it nuanced and thoughtful.

Regarding other NGOs, such as the Red Cross, the answers to the questionnaire were similar. While collaborating with legal institutions can help the understanding of rules and the legal process, NGOs such as the Red Cross can provide a different perspective and understanding of the issues of the chosen topic, as their work often differs from the legislative. This could, for example, help raise awareness about lesser-known Human Rights issues. Still, the same goes for these kinds of NGOs as for legal institutions; they should be chosen carefully to ensure that the project/event remains Non-Political.



The European Law Students' Association