

ACADEMIC PREPARATION HANDBOOK FOR **ELSA DELEGATIONS TO OHCHR**

SEMINARS & CONFERENCES
2024/2025



ELSA
Delegations

elsa

The European Law Students' Association

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1. Introduction

This handbook aims to provide ELSA Delegates with all the necessary information to prepare themselves academically for a respective OHCHR session. It is designed to be read alongside the Guidelines for the relevant institution. Any relevant feedback or questions are encouraged to improve this handbook for future ELSA Delegates.

1.1. About the European Law Students' Association

The European Law Students' Association (ELSA) is an international, independent, non-political, non-profit organisation run by and for students. It comprises students and recent graduates interested in academic and personal excellence in addition to their studies at their universities. ELSA offers law students a perfect platform to develop their existing skills, acquire new skills and meet fellow students and legal professionals throughout Europe.

Five law students from Austria, Hungary, Poland and West Germany founded ELSA in 1981. Today, ELSA is the world's largest independent law student association, and it is represented at nearly 432 law faculties in 41 countries across Europe with a membership of over 60,000 students and young lawyers.

ELSA's activities comprise a large variety of academic and professional events and projects organised to fulfil the vision of ELSA and to provide our members with opportunities to enhance their skills and interact with each other. Furthermore, ELSA provides law students with opportunities to develop their skills through our traineeship program and publications. Finally, working in the ELSA Network prepares active members of ELSA for their professional life through international experience gained through the association.

Vision

“A just world in which there is respect for human dignity and cultural diversity”

Purpose

The purpose is to contribute to legal education, to foster mutual understanding and to promote social responsibility of law students and young lawyers by:

- providing opportunities for law students and young lawyers to learn about other cultures and legal systems in a spirit of critical dialogue and scientific cooperation;

- assisting law students and young lawyers in being internationally minded and professionally skilled;
- encouraging law students and young lawyers to act for the good of society.

To read more about ELSA, please visit our [website](#).

1.2. ELSA and International Organisations

ELSA has gained a notable reputation in the international community. For many years, thanks to having a special status within a number of different international organisations and institutions, its members and alumni are able to participate in events organised by those institutions.

ELSA has special status and cooperation with:

- UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (since 1994);
- UN Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC) (since 1997);
- UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) (since 1997);
- UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC);
- Council of Europe (CoE) (since 2000);
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR);
- World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) (since 2005);
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (since 2016);
- Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC);
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (since 2022).

ELSA is exploring the possibility of gaining status with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

1.3. ELSA Delegations

ELSA Delegations are regulated in the [International Council Meeting Decision Book](#) under decisions relating to Seminars and Conferences (S&C). The relationship between ELSA and ELSA Delegates is regulated by the [ELSA Delegations Terms and Conditions](#).

To participate in ELSA Delegations, ELSA Members and ELSA Alumni need to fulfil the following requirements:

- The Application Form shall be submitted before the deadline;
- The Application Form shall be written in English;

- All the fields of the Application Form shall be filled.

Please refer to the relevant Guideline for more information on the process of being an ELSA Delegate. You can also find practical information pertaining to your stay in Geneva, and instructions for Delegates who will join a delegation remotely. If you have any questions, please contact your coordinator: dhrbodies@elsa.org or the Director for ELSA Delegations: delegations@elsa.org.

2. About the Institution

The [Selection Criteria](#) do not require a particular level of education for applicants to attend a delegation. In fact, an applicant's grades are not considered during the selection process. However, we believe that, in order for Delegates to represent ELSA to the best of their ability, it is important for them to have a good understanding of the session they will attend and the significance of the institution.

2.1. Introduction to OHCHR

2.1.1. What role does OHCHR play in the United Nations?¹

The Office for the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) was created to promote, safeguard, and realise the human rights that are protected by international human rights law.² These rights are outlined in the International Bill of Human Rights, which is the result of three separate international treaties being merged: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).³ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was declared a “common standard for all peoples and all nations”⁴ by the UN General Assembly in 1948. The ICESCR and ICCPR were established in 1966 by the General Assembly.⁵

The specific mandate of the UN Human Rights can be viewed [here](#).

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/about-us/mandate-un-human-rights>

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/about-us/mandate-un-human-rights>

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/what-are-human-rights/international-bill-human-rights>

⁴ [http://undocs.org/en/A/RES/217\(III\)](http://undocs.org/en/A/RES/217(III))

⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/what-are-human-rights/international-bill-human-rights>

In summary, its mandate is to “protect and promote all human rights for all”, improve and develop mechanisms by which to protect and promote human rights, prevent human rights violations, and work with governments to improve, promote, and protect human rights.

2.2. History of OHCHR

UN Human Rights was established by General Assembly Resolution 48/141 in 1993.⁶ This followed the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, which developed a plan to enhance human rights across the globe. These aims were documented in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (see [here](#)).

2.2.1. Development⁷

Below, delegates can find a brief history of OHCHR:

- **1940s** - the UN Headquarters set up a UN human rights programme;
- **1961** - UN General Assembly declared 1968 to be the “International Year for Human Rights”;⁸
- **1968** - International Conference on Human Rights in Tehran, Iran. Laid out an action plan for the progression of human rights goals, based on development since the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights;
- ⁹**1980s** - the division that dealt with the UN human rights programme became the Centre for Human Rights, based in Geneva;
- **1990** - entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- **June 1993** - adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action;¹¹
- **December 1993** - creation of the High Commissioner for Human Rights through Resolution A/RES/48/141;¹²
- **1994** - appointment of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, to protect women’s rights;

⁶ See the resolution document here: <https://undocs.org/A/RES/48/141>

⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/about-us/brief-history-un-human-rights>

⁸ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/about-us/history/vienna-declaration/teheran-vienna-timeline>

⁹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/about-us/history/vienna-declaration/teheran-vienna-timeline>

¹⁰ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/about-us/history/vienna-declaration/teheran-vienna-timeline>

¹¹ See the document [here](#)

¹² See the document [here](#).

- **1995 - 2004** - declaration of the first International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, to better international collaboration on the rights and development of indigenous people;¹³
- **2005 - 2014** - adoption of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, to further promote the rights of indigenous peoples.¹⁴

2.2.2. Other organisations¹⁵

Today, human rights have expanded in response to new challenges and developments in human rights. For example, there are more mechanisms for protecting LGBTI, indigenous peoples, human rights associated with climate change, and the role that businesses play in human rights.

More human rights bodies have been created to deal with these new elements, such as the Human Rights Council, special procedures, and committees of independent experts that ensure the States are fulfilling their human rights obligations.

2.2.3. Permanent Members¹⁶

The Human Rights Council has 47 Member States. These are elected by a majority in the General Assembly. Seats are based on geographical considerations:

- African and Asia-Pacific States have 13 seats each.
- Latin American and Caribbean States have 8 seats in total.
- Western Europe and other States have 7 seats in total.
- Eastern Europe has 6 seats in total.

Members sit for three years. It is not possible for a Member to sit for more than two consecutive terms at a time.

A complete list of Member States by region can be found on the OHCHR website, [here](#).

¹³ See [here](#).

¹⁴ See [here](#).

¹⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/about-us/brief-history-un-human-rights>.

¹⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/membership>.

2.2.4. Headquarters

Palais des Nations,
CH-1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland.

2.2.5. Useful Links:

Main website: [OHCHR](https://www.ohchr.org/)

2.3. Inside OHCHR

2.3.1. Types of Committees¹⁷

OHCHR has a number of **treaty bodies**. These are committees composed of **independent experts** that oversee the application of key human rights treaties. OHCHR has ten such committees, whose experts are nominated every four years and elected by Member State parties.

2.3.2. Sessions that ELSA Delegates regularly attend

OHCHR has a number of committees that ELSA Delegates attend regularly. This section contains more information on the types of sessions offered by OHCHR.

Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)¹⁸

CRC is a Human Rights Body composed of 18 independent experts, tasked with overseeing the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Member States. This includes monitoring how the Convention's Optional Protocols are implemented (relating to children in armed conflict and the sale of children, child pornography, and child prostitution). CRC's mandate also extends to the consideration of alleged violations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. It can also conduct inquiries into these allegations and other 'grave or systematic violations of rights under the Convention'.¹⁹

Website: [CRC](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/crc/)

¹⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies>.

¹⁸ All information taken from CRC's website.

¹⁹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/crc/introduction-committee>.

Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED)²⁰

According to OHCHR's website, an enforced disappearance is the "arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorisation, support or acquiescence of the State".²¹ If widely practised across a state, this can amount to a "crime against humanity". Thus, CED is tasked with monitoring the implementation of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which aims to protect every person from enforced disappearance. CED also supports victims and provides guidance to States on how to implement the Convention.

Website: [CED](#)

Committee Against Torture (CAT)²²

CAT is a Human Rights Body composed of **10 independent experts**, tasked with monitoring the implementation of the **Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment** within Member States. Its mandate also extends to the consideration of alleged violations of an individual's rights under the Convention; conducting inquiries into these violations; and considering inter-state complaints. The Convention also has an Optional Protocol that created the **Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture**. ELSA Delegates do not attend this session, as its mandate is to visit States that are alleged to deprive people of their liberty in order to uphold the Convention.

Website: [CAT](#)

Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)²³

CEDAW is an independent body of **23 experts** that oversees the implementation of the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women**. This is described as the "most important human rights treaty for women".²⁴ States party to the Convention must eliminate all discrimination against women and ensure women enjoy the same freedoms and human rights as men, which promotes the development and advancement of women. CEDAW regularly reviews State reports on their efforts to satisfy these aims, and can conduct inquiries into violations of women's rights under certain conditions.

Website: [CEDAW](#)

²⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, all information taken from CED's website.

²¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-disappearances/about-enforced-disappearance>.

²² All information taken from CAT's website.

²³ All information taken from CEDAW's website.

²⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw/introduction-committee>.

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)²⁵

CRPD is a Human Rights Body consisting of **18 independent experts**. Its main task is to oversee the implementation of the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**. States are obliged to submit regular reports on how they have implemented the provisions of the Convention (initially within two years of ratification, and every four years from then on). A further Optional Protocol was created at the same time as the Convention, which gives CRPD the powers to consider individual complaints about alleged violations of human rights under the Convention, and make inquiries into “grave and systematic” violations by States.²⁶

Website: [CRPD](#)

Human Rights Council (HRC)²⁷

HRC is an **intergovernmental body** tasked with furthering the protection of human rights worldwide and with promoting the implementation of these rights in Member States. It is also empowered to deal with human rights violations and make recommendations on how best to deal with alleged violations. It meets regularly to discuss thematic issues related to human rights, as well as other situations that require special attention throughout each year. It is a forum for constructive dialogues around human rights issues, taking into consideration the views of a variety of stakeholders (such as experts, civil society, NGOs, etc). It receives support from OHCHR to conduct its activities.

Website: [HRC](#)

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)²⁸

CERD is an independent body that oversees the implementation of the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination** within State parties. Three core activities include implementing its early warning procedure and reviewing complaints of alleged violations of the Convention from States and individuals. It also conducts thematic discussions and publishes general comments on the correct interpretation of the Convention. It helps States to implement the Convention by making recommendations on the amendment of State constitutions and reviewing laws that directly or indirectly sustain racial discrimination.

²⁵ All information taken from CRPD’s website.

²⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/crpd/introduction-committee>.

²⁷ All information taken from HRC’s website.

²⁸ All information taken from CERD’s website.

Website: [CERD](#)

3. Topics

3.1. What is International Human Rights Law?²⁹

International Human Rights Law is built from three Covenants known collectively as the **International Bill of Human Rights**.

These Covenants are:

- **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948;**
- **The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (+ two Optional Protocols).** These entail rights such as equality before the law, the right to a fair trial, freedom of association, freedom from arbitrary torture, slavery, arrest/detention, or discrimination, and other rights related to civil and political processes;³⁰
- **The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.** These entail the right to work in favourable and just conditions; the right to social protection, adequate living standards, and the highest standards of physical and mental well-being; and the right to education and enjoyment of cultural freedom and scientific progress.³¹

Various international treaties and instruments have since been adopted to contribute towards the strengthening and promotion of human rights across the globe. Many State constitutions and laws also incorporate human rights protections, often based on international human rights law in the form of treaties and international customary law. The aim of international human rights law is to protect individuals and groups against abuses of their human rights, and to oblige States to take action to accommodate their peoples' basic human rights.

²⁹ [Instruments](#).

³⁰ <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>;
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/OPCCPR1.aspx>;
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/2ndOPCCPR.aspx>.

³¹ [Instruments](#); [Global Issues](#).

3.2. What are human rights?³²

According to OHCHR's website, human rights are "rights we have simply because we exist as human beings - they are not granted by any state".³³ These rights are universal and inherent to every person on the globe, regardless of characteristics such as nationality, ethnic origin, sex, religion, skin colour, language, and so on. They are divided into fundamental rights (such as the right to life) and secondary human rights (such as the right to education, health, liberty, and food).

Human rights are "inalienable",³⁴ meaning they must always be upheld, except for under very specific circumstances (such as imprisonment for committing a crime, taking away the right to liberty). They are "indivisible and interdependent"³⁵ - human rights cannot exist without other human rights.

3.3. Who uses Human Rights law?

International Human Rights law aims to benefit **everyone**. It is stated under Article 1 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights".³⁶ In practice, there are human rights abuses and violations from a number of stakeholders every single day, including States that are party to the Human Rights Covenants.

3.4. What policy areas overlap with Human Rights law?

Human rights overlap with every area of life. This ranges from business and health to climate change and finance. More information about these overlaps can be found on OHCHR's website, [here](#).

4. Relevant Documents

4.1. Meeting Agendas

Delegates can search for the meeting agendas for their respective session here: [OHCHR Sessions](#).

³² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/what-are-human-rights>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/03/udhr.pdf>.

4.2. Past Documents

UN Human Rights materials: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/library/un-human-rights-materials>.

Publications and Resources: [OHCHR Publications and Resources](#).

4.3. Explanatory Videos

OHCHR Videos: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/development/videos>.

5. Treaties and Legislation

5.1. Key Treaties and Conventions

- [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\) 1948](#).
- [The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#).
- [ICCPR First Optional Protocol](#).
- [ICCPR Second Optional Protocol](#).
- [The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#)

6. Rules of Procedure

OHCHR's Rules of Procedure and working methods can be found on [OHCHR's website](#). The most up-to-date document on these rules can be found [here](#).

7. HoD Reports

If available, the Coordinator for OHCHR will share the HoD Reports from previous sessions of that Delegation's committee.

8. Archives

UN Human Rights Knowledge Gateway and Library: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/library>.