



Their right is your right

# Their right is your right

## Policy Recommendations

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## I. Introduction

In the last years, war, political and economic disorder has pushed migrations to and within Europe. Due to this migration wave, people from minority groups are poorer, have less power, less influence, and less access to remedies to deal with their problems than those from the majority population. Furthermore, the damaging political populism is also increasing. In this situation, young people with minority backgrounds are exposed to discrimination and bigotry the most. Therefore, there is a need to enhance human rights education, to prevent discrimination and to have an opportunity for better future and enhance inclusion in the society.

Just having human rights education is still not enough. As all countries around the world face challenges in meeting necessary standards for human rights, there are gaps in access to justice, especially minorities who are subjected to discrimination. Public policy is a combination of laws, regulations, actions, policies, and a lot of other factors concerning a given topic. Public policy impacts what the government does and how governmental decisions are made. In this document we have an overview of schemes and policies related to minority human rights, policy recommendations and a roadmap for the future targeted to all relevant stakeholders' levels.

## II. Overview of schemes and policies (or equivalent initiatives) related to minority human rights currently under development or implemented in Europe and in each project partner country

The COVID-19 pandemic has strengthened the vulnerability of isolated and marginalized communities and highlighted the urgent need for a more effective and comprehensive policy response at national and European level. The states as well as the people need a strong and long-term commitment to working with all stakeholders to address existing problems and challenges of different minority groups across Europe to be at risk of being exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic is generating suffering and damage in every region. It poses a far-reaching threat to human rights. As Secretary-General Guterres has warned, it threatens not only development, but also "enhanced instability, enhanced unrest, and enhanced conflict." The pandemic is exposing the damaging impact of inequalities, in every society. Several high-risk and vulnerable groups, including minorities require greater attention and mitigation measures currently. When an existential threat faces all of us, there is no place for nationalism or scapegoating – including of migrants and minority communities. There has been growing, and unacceptable, physical, and verbal attacks on people of different minorities, and action should be taken to combat this.

All countries in the world include persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, enriching the diversity of their societies. Although a great variety of minority situations exist, common to all is the fact that, too often, minorities face multiple forms of discrimination resulting in marginalisation and exclusion. Achieving effective participation of minorities and ending their exclusion requires that we embrace diversity through the promotion and implementation of international human rights standards.

The protection of the rights of minorities is provided for under article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities is the document which sets essential standards and offers guidance to States in adopting appropriate legislative and other measures to secure the rights of persons belonging to minorities. Overall, States through their commitments under treaty law, and minorities themselves, or their representatives can influence the human rights monitoring and implementation procedures and work toward securing effective participation and inclusion.

The fundamental pillar of human rights and minority legal protection are the principles of non-discrimination and equality which constitute the basis of all core human rights treaties. Minority rights are being increasingly recognized as an integral part of the United Nation's work for the promotion and protection of human rights, sustainable human development, peace, and security. OHCHR has a leading role within the UN system in this respect, as the Office has highlighted countering discrimination as one of its thematic priorities in its OHCHR Organisational Management Plan 2018-2021. OHCHR is also taking a lead in the work of the UN Network on racial discrimination and the protection of minorities which is in line with Article 9 of the Declaration, by ensuring that coordinated effort is made towards advancing and prioritising minority rights throughout the UN system.

## Bulgaria

Bulgaria is an example of country with quite big ethnic minority of Roma community and due to that over the years there was a need of setting up laws and creating policies for defending their human rights. In addition to that it was quite essential the actions of the European commission back in 2011 when they gave specific instructions to Bulgarian authorities to integrate the community.

One of the latest strategies that was successfully running in Bulgaria was the – ***Strategy for educational integration of children and students from Ethnic minorities***. Over the past few decades several Bulgarian governments and individual ministries have adopted a total of nine strategic documents for Roma integration in the period 1999-2030. Most of these documents were drafted with the active participation of civil society in Bulgaria and in response to international initiatives. With some exceptions, the most serious of which are seen in the National Strategy for Roma Integration 2012 - 2020, these documents adequately reflect the problems of discrimination against Roma and provide adequate solutions.

However, the strategic objectives set out in all documents remain somehow unfulfilled, as the main measures to combat structural discrimination in the Roma have not been undertaken by any government.

The National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration 2012 - 2020 has been developed in response to the communication from the European Commission from 05.04.2011 "EU Framework for National Strategies for Roma Integration until 2020". The coordination and control over implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan is implemented by National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and integration issues.

Although referring to previous strategic documents for Roma integration and is defined as a consolidating document of several existing strategies and plans in all areas of intervention, The 2012-2020 one makes a serious deviation from strategic goals, laid down in previous documents. This deviation is most obvious regarding the unclear priorities of the strategy to eliminate segregated Roma education. For unlike all the strategic ones adopted so far documents from different governments, the NSRF does not formulate a strategic goal to eliminate segregated schools in the separate Roma neighbourhoods, and on the contrary - provides for improving the quality of education in segregated schools. Problem analysis of

the Roma community, which the NRIS presents, also does not contain an analysis of the problem of segregated education.

This deviation and contradiction with the vision of the state from the previous 13 years is inexplicable, as whereas in the period preceding the adoption of the new strategy, successful practices of desegregation in education coming from NGOs and all international and European monitoring institutions call for the abolition of segregated schools.

The ambiguity in the attitude of the Bulgarian authorities to the de facto existing segregation in Roma education is confirmed by the adopted in 2015 Strategy of the Ministry of Education and Science for the educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities 2015 - 2020 itself. The strategy examines in detail the issues of segregation and desegregation in education but sets out the solution to the problem of equal access for Roma children to education according to "public attitudes".

### ***Lack of Policies related to hate speech, hate crimes and crimes motivated by racism.***

Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted in February 2018 a Resolution on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National minorities from Bulgaria. The resolution notes that The Penal Code of Bulgaria does not introduce qualified panels for crimes committed on racist grounds, except for murder and strong body harm.

The Committee of Ministers also emphasizes that the Roma are subject to physical attacks, and extremist political parties are trying to instrumentalize existing anti-Roma sentiment.

UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommends amendments to the Law on Protection from Racial Discrimination, to introduce a legal definition of the safeguards in accordance with Article 4 of the Convention. The introduction of standard procedures is also recommended.

In the Fifth Periodic Report on Bulgaria (2014), the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) expressed surprise and disappointment that a limited number of uses of hate speech are reached the court and that the sentences were so little. There are fears that this is sending a signal to the public that hate speech is not dangerous and can be used without consequences.

In the period 2014-2020, the Open Society Institute - Sofia studied the relationship of society to hate speech and pointed out that the Roma are the main target of hate speech, followed by LGBTQ+ group, thus urgent policy reforms are needed.

***The National Motherhood and Child Health 2014-2020 Improvement Program*** (NPHMH) serve as good example of a national health policy that Recognizes the particular vulnerability of Roma women and children. It comes due to the lack of access of Roma women and children to healthcare - "It is a particularly serious problem medical monitoring and counselling of pregnant women of the Roma ethnic group. About 60% of them are not

insured, so their pregnancy is not observed, and they do not receive antenatal consultations. [...] The majority of pregnant Roma women do not attend consultations and the first examination during their pregnancy is performed upon admission for childbirth". Regarding children's access to health care, it is also noted that "For the children's contingents another major problem is in small and remote settlements and in minority neighbourhoods where access to a GP / paediatrician is limited due to the lack of such". The implementation of the Program is carried out through construction of 31 health counselling centres in the regional hospitals, integrated and individualized medical and social services for pregnant women and children at risk, prevention, early diagnosis.

### **Health Mediator**

The position of health mediator is a bridge between Roma communities and health and social services. In Bulgaria, the model of health mediators was first introduced in 2001 by the team of the Foundation "Health Problems of minorities" and continues to develop over the years with the help of Government and Non-government institutions which in fact play a very crucial role in the country when it comes to defending minority rights. In April 2017, the National Network Association of health mediators was established-a professional organization uniting all practicing health mediators in the country, as well as doctors - specialists, general practitioners and nurses, trainers of health mediators, experts in ethnic and demographic issues, experts, and specialists in the field of public health, like-minded people and citizens who support the introduction of the health mediator figure as part from the public health system.

The main tasks for health mediators are:

- overcoming cultural barriers in communication between Roma communities and local medical staff;
- improving the access of vulnerable Roma communities to health services; overcoming existing discriminatory attitudes in local health care for the Roma;
- optimizing the implementation of prevention programs among the Roma population;
- health education of the Roma and active social work in the community.

### **Educational initiative**

Another great initiative that was implemented by the Bulgarian government in cooperation with EU institutions was a program for training of police officers working with minorities. As conclusion of that initiatives by latest reports from 2018, shows that 1,286 trainings were conducted for 22,259 police officers working in a multi-ethnic environment. They focused on prevention of law violations, ways for effective reaction when a signal is received, and non-allowance of escalation of the tension in areas with compact Roma population. Following the acquired skills and knowledge and with the help of teachers, school directors, social workers, police officers, municipal officials, mediators, civil society representatives a great success

was indicated in year 2018-2019 - 19,077 children in compulsory pre-school and school age enrolled for the first time or returned to the education system.

### **European programs empowering Roma community**

Under Operational Program “Regions in Growth” 2014-2020 of the European commission, a number of projects are being implemented to provide modern social housing for accommodation of vulnerable groups, including Roma. These include the construction or rehabilitation of over 500 housing units; building of shelters; temporary accommodation or crisis centres; upgrading educational infrastructure and social housing; modernizing the social infrastructure, etc. To improve housing conditions, activities continue on compiling cadastre maps and registers as a basis for the urban development plans. Local self-government authorities are encouraged to implement urban regulation of the residential areas with predominant Roma population and include new zones for housing development. Funds from the state budget are used for development of cadastral maps and registers, improving the existing and developing new technical infrastructure in Roma residential areas.

### **Spain**

The transformation of the state in Western Europe provides new opportunities for expression for minority nations. Spain has a long history as a multinational state and, in the twentieth century, this has been one of the principal sources of political conflict. Catalan and Basque nationalists and Galician regionalists see in Europe a new arena for the expression of their national ambitions, while maintaining a degree of ambiguity about their ultimate goals and the question of sovereignty. Those three groups according to the statistics are considered as the biggest minority groups in Spain with over 11 million people overall. In addition, there is quite big minority community of Roma people in Spain which according to the statistics is a bit less than a million people. In order to integrate the minority groups the government as well as many organizations has implemented variety of activities. As going through the years, the challenges ahead become more and more complex and the government, international, national, regional, and local organizations need to focus their attention and propose different policies as well as activities in this so dynamic time.

Spain is quite complex country with multicultural communities living there therefore the government need to impose different laws, strategies, and initiatives in order to comply with it. Recently the Spanish government has launched a Foreign Action Strategy which aims to establish the basic lines, principles, and instruments that will guide Spain's action for the period of 2021- 2024. Having in mind the global pandemic of COVID-19 the strategy is created in a way to diagnosis the current realities of a new global scenario and underlying trends influencing the international situation, which will be accelerated by the pandemic.

Based on its strengths and singularities, and with a univocally pro-European multilateral calling, Spain aspires to play a more prominent role in the international arena, with a higher profile, anticipating trends and projecting the values and principles that define us as a society: freedom, peace, equality, solidarity, justice, diversity, democracy, sustainability, and

progress. It will do so through proactive foreign action, centred around four main guiding principles: committing to “More Europe”, with a more integrated and autonomous European Union, which assumes a leading position in the world; promoting Better Multilateralism, which exploits the nodal and unifying aspect of our country as a facilitator of better global governance and management of interdependence; advancing Strategic Bilateralism, which is more selective in the prioritization of our bilateral relations according to our interests and opportunities; and deepening our Committed Solidarity through a new vision of development cooperation. All the while using the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a roadmap and guiding principles, and European external action as the main vehicle.

In 2019 Spain was awarded with Global Equality Champion Award from the Human Rights Campaign Foundation for its leadership in advancing the rights of the LGBTQ community. The fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity is indeed one of the priorities of Spanish foreign policy regarding human rights. For many years, Spain has promoted numerous actions to defend the rights of LGBTI persons across different multilateral forums: The United Nations Human Rights Council (supporting the mandate of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity), the General Assembly of the United Nations, the LGBT Core Group of the United Nations (an informal and heterogeneous network of countries, international organizations NGOs and civil organizations, which was created to give visibility and support to the demands and claims of LGBTI persons within the United Nations), the European Union (developing and approving the EU Guidelines on the rights of LGBTI persons and the EU Guidelines on Non-Discrimination), and the Equal Rights Coalition (an intergovernmental structure which promotes multilateral cooperation, information exchange and good practices in the defence and support of LGBTI persons). The question of human rights for LGBTI persons is also often raised in bilateral talks with third countries. The Human Rights Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union and Cooperation also runs a grant scheme for activities relating to the promotion and protection of human rights, announced annually, to combat discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity as priority lines of action.

Spain is today a world reference in LGBTI+ rights and tolerance. A journey that began in the 1970s by thousands of courageous people who risked their lives to defend their rights and freedom. With the new century almost upon us, Spain became in 2005 the third country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage, only behind the Netherlands (2000) and Belgium (2003). With the approval by the Spanish courts of the modification of the Civil Code, which in the eyes of the law made a homosexual union equal to that of a heterosexual union, Spain was at the forefront of LGBTI rights in the world and equal rights for all its citizens. The country even went one step further by establishing equal adoption rights between same-sex couples, which had not yet been reflected in the legislation of any other country. But the battle for equal rights had begun many years ago. While there were obviously previous individual demonstrations, the movement for LGBT+ rights in Spain emerged in the 1970s. According to EQUALDEX statistics from April -May 2021 Spain has an Equality index rate of 84% out of 100% as well as public acceptance on that of 71% and legal rights defended with closely to maximum – 97%.

**Empower civil society organizations** was used as a way for including mechanisms to promote dialogue and debate with public administrations, for instance through the State Council of NGOs for Social Action, a consultative body to encourage the participation of non-profit organizations in the drafting of social policies, including LGBT organizations. This includes the annually basis subsidies allocated to social organizations, including those promoting non-discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The first strand of subsidies benefits social organizations to develop concrete social programs, including programs regarding LGBT people. The total amount of these subsidies to social organizations is decided by income taxpayers on an annual basis. The second strand of subsidies supports management and staff costs of social organizations.

**The NGO's Platform for Social Action** is an organization of state, private, non-denominational and non-profit that works to promote the full development of social and civil rights of the most vulnerable and unprotected groups in our country and strength. The Social Action NGO Platform coordinates since 2002 the X Solidaria campaign, aimed at promoting solidarity among taxpayers so that they can check the "Activities of Social Interest" box in their income tax return and allocate a percentage of their full fee for the realization of programs aimed at people who are at risk of social exclusion in our society: elderly, disabled, people with cancer, women, and young people in exclusion. It is the X that helps the most vulnerable people. People can mark it when they make their Income statement. This box is called "Activities of Social Interest".

Since the Platform launched this awareness campaign, almost 4 million more people mark the solidarity box on their statement of income, going from 6,887,500 declarants in 2002 to 10,803,462 in 2016. It should also be noted that the collection has increased in more of 130 million euros between 2007 and 2016. This campaign has the support of the Third Sector Platform, the Volunteer Platform of Spain, the Network to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Spanish State (EAPN-ES), the Spanish Committee of Representatives of People with Disabilities (CERMI), the Platform of Child Organizations and the NGO Coordinator for Development-Spain.

**Training program on equality and non-discrimination** mainstreaming in public policies, with the support of Progress Action Grants. The project aims at fighting all kind of discrimination based on sexual orientation and identity. The beneficiaries of the project are public directives and civil servants responsible for the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies, legislation, and programs at all administrative levels. This programme includes the elaboration of a training handbook with guidelines for equality and non-discrimination mainstreaming and training activities.

In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, **multiple LGBTQI+ migrant associations** have launched initiatives to support migrants in particularly vulnerable situations. In Madrid, the Association of Lesbian, Gay, Trans and Bisexual Migrants and Refugees Association of Lesbian, Gay, Trans and Bisexual Migrants and Refugees Kifkif has moved most of their activity online. Thanks to the use of social networks, the association offers not only legal, psychosocial, and sexual health advice, but also spaces of accompaniment and socializations to anyone who requires them. It has also issued a guide with practical recommendations to help LGBTQI+ migrants during the state of alarm. The ACATHI Foundation, an NGO that

offers a range of services to LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees in Barcelona, has started an emergency fund to help those who have lost their main source of income due to the pandemic.

Spain has made unimaginable progress in tolerance, respect, and equality. It has come so far along this path, but we must remember to look back and remember those who made it possible: then continue to look forward, to protect future generations. Spain can be a true example for all other EU countries in relation to LGBTQ+ rights and there is high involvement of human rights activists, NGOs and civil society.

## Estonia

To foster the inclusion of migrants, Estonia has so far set up 4 consecutive integration strategies. The first one, Integration in the Estonian Society 2000 – 2007, focused on linguistic and communicative integration, legal and political integration, and social and economic integration. More recently, the Integrating Estonia 2020 programme, introduced in 2014, covered social cohesion, the international competitiveness of Estonia internationally, and security. A new development plan called Cohesive Estonia 2021-2030 – a joint venture between the culture, interior, and foreign ministries - has been recently completed, and is to provide the basis for development of the integration field in upcoming years. Russian-speaking citizens, both Estonian nationals and people with undetermined citizenship, as well as citizens of the Russian Federation living in Estonia, have been the traditional target group of these integration strategy documents. More emphasis has, however, been placed recently on newcomer immigrants, with a second integration strategy produced for the 2008-2013 period. The following Internal Security Development Plan 2015-2020 later introduced the first civic orientation measures and adaptation policies for newcomer immigrants in Estonia. Cohesive Estonia 2021-2030 focuses even more on the adaptation and integration of newly arrived immigrants.

As shown from the year 2000 the government of Estonia has set up a long-term strategy and it's upgrading it with every 7-year period to analyse better the new trends and the new challenges to which the strategy, laws and activities need to respond. On the other hand, even though the government of Estonia is putting a lot of effort in integration strategies and activities the chasm persists between the Estonian and Russian language speaking communities still exist in education, labour market, living environment, media consumption, etc. The increase in migration volumes and diversification of immigration groups and short-term forms of migration are becoming one of the biggest challenges in migration and integration.

On a political level back in 2019 the main course has been based on the development plan approved by the government in 2014 called "Integrating Estonia 2020", which, in addition to integrating Estonian-speaking permanent residents and residents with other mother tongues also focused on supporting the adaptation and integration of new immigrants. As a new target group for integration the state has in recent years started to provide more attention and more services to people returning to Estonia, there has been discussion on application of foreign students who have acquired higher education in Estonia and their stay in Estonia. In

2018 the Ministry of Culture started preparations for the new state integration plan “Integrating Estonia 2030”, which is a continuation of the integration development plan “Integrating Estonia 2020”, which was approved by the government in 2014.

The current STRATEGY OF THE INTEGRATION FOUNDATION for the period of 2020-2025 has focus on the following:

1. Attitudes supporting integration are entrenched in Estonia and conditions have been created for close cooperation between the various parties for the development of a cohesive society.
2. Knowledge of the Estonian cultural space and proficiency in the Estonian language. Among people with a mother tongue other than Estonian, there are improved, target groups have access to modern high-quality Estonian language learning and practice opportunities.
3. National minorities living in Estonia maintain and value their cultural traditions and do close cooperation with each other and with other sectors cultural organizers, cultural awareness diversity has grown in society.
4. People returning to Estonia and new immigrants adapt smoothly in society, live abroad compatriots are in close contact with Estonia.
5. Integration activities have and will have a significant impact effectively organized, target satisfaction services the quality is high.

A key role of the integration in Estonia plays the Integration Foundation which was founded on 31 March 1998 under the name the Non-Estonians Integration Foundation. It was created by the Estonian government and under the Ministry of culture.

Initiatives that can serve as good examples are the Estonian language houses, Human rights Guide:

### **1. Estonian Language Houses**

The Estonian Language Houses were established with the aim of offering language-learners a supportive Estonian-language environment in which to practice the national language, boost their confidence in speaking and make themselves more familiar with life in the country.

The centres offer the following:

- Language-learning consultation service – Two consultants in Tallinn and three in Narva can provide information over the phone, by e-mail, on Skype and in person about where, how and in what format you can study and practice Estonian free of charge.
- Language and culture courses- courses led by experienced teachers

## 2. Human Rights Guide

The Human Rights Guide is a human rights education project in the Baltic region. It was launched in Latvia in March 2016, with Estonian and Lithuanian versions to follow in the future. The Project is being implemented in Estonia by the Human Rights Centre. The Human Rights Guide is an online information and education resource and a self-help tool. It offers help in understanding human rights in different situations. The Guide takes a thematic approach to explaining how human rights work. Instead of listing separate rights, you can learn about the rights which are relevant to a particular topic or a situation in your daily life. New themes will be added over time.

The Guide has a section on the human rights institutions to approach for establishing whether your human rights have been violated. It explains when and how you can apply to these institutions. There is also a section on organizations which work with human rights and that can be consulted for help or further information.

As one of the most advanced digitally countries in Europe- Estonia shines with newly published this Human rights Guide which offers references to the relevant national and international laws, case law and additional documents. The Guide offers help in understanding how to complain when you believe your rights have been violated.

If we take a quick tour over this online guide, we can realize that this is quite essential easy to use platform which can save you a lot of time and resources when you believe your human rights have been violated. So, taking the tour when we open the following link: <https://www.inimoigustegiid.ee/en/themes/> and you believe that your rights as migrant have been violated there is a button "MIGRANTION AND ASELYM". Then the platform will give you quite clear information on how to distinguish different categories of migrants as they might be entitled to different rights and protections. Then from the available buttons I will choose "MIGRATION "and it will lead me to what part where it will be clearly indicated what are my rights to enter and stay in another country. And from the available buttons I can choose among "The right to enter Estonia", "Unfair expulsion", "Detention and Immigration" and "Consequences of entering without a legal ground"- than I will choose the Unfair expulsion. It will give me an information about How to complain and in addition what are the fees, deadlines, content of the appeal and what will happen after judgment as well as the legal aids.

As seen the tour to identify if and which of my rights have been violated took less than a minute and it's summarized in less than 1/3 of a written page which makes the usage of this guide and the platform itself extremely easy by the citizens. It's available in English, Estonian and Russian so even more people can benefit by using their native or first language at preference. That initiative can be definitely among top 10 Europe initiatives when comes to easy access of information to society.

### 3. Other examples of good practices:

In 2018 and 2019 a number of new and exciting solutions in the field of language learning have emerged. Four new applications have been created as new language learning tools: Speakly, WalkTalk, Multikey and Käänuk.

Various support services aimed at companies recruiting foreigners, and other stakeholders can also be pointed out as examples of good practices: such as the Institute of Baltic Studies' and Work in Estonia's application demonstrating recruiting foreign labour step-by-step, the support network for adaptation of new immigrants (an information list and support network meetings) that is coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior, and the network of employers ran by Work in Estonia and the Estonian Chamber of Commerce in order to support foreign recruitment.

Since 2018 the state offers companies foreign recruitment support, which aims to alleviate the shortage of top-level specialists in Estonia. Since 2019 the Integration Foundation offers a counselling service to persons returning to Estonia, and families with children who have stayed abroad for a long time are able to apply for a socio-economic return allowance. Ülemiste city and its development activities also stand out as a promising practice: construction of an apartment building, International House of Estonia that provides consultation services and Ülemiste Health Centre that in 2019 provides family physician's services in foreign languages.

#### Italy

People migrate for many reasons, ranging from security, demography and human rights to poverty and climate change. The number of people residing in an EU country with the citizenship of a non-member country on 1 January 2020 was 24.8 million, representing 5.1% of the EU-27's population. A further 13.3 million people living in one of the EU27- countries on 1 January 2021 were citizens of another EU country. Italy is one of the top countries 10 countries in Europe receiving migrants according to the statistics from the big waves around the year of 2015. So far in 2021, 63,062 migrants disembarked in Italy. The five main countries of origin are Tunisia, Egypt, Bangladesh, Iran and Ivory Coast. At the same time, about 1 out of 2 migrants who attempted to depart from Libya to reach Italy have been intercepted and returned to Libya.

Europe is one of the most wanted places for migrants to migrate due to its inclusion and integration policies but not only. Italy is among the few countries receiving high volume of migrants by sea, land, and air of course legally and illegally. As for the migratory phenomenon, it cannot be considered of a transitional or temporary nature. Over the years, Italy has demonstrated its ability to deal with this situation, mainly caused by political instability, conflicts, and economic unbalances. No country can tackle this challenge by itself. Italy actively promotes domestically and at EU/international level strengthened partnerships with African countries of origin and transit of migrants. In the three-year period 2017–2019, Italy devoted 230 million Euros from its Africa Fund, to support UN agencies, mostly UNHCR and IOM, working to protect refugees and migrants, particularly the most vulnerable ones.

Italy is also the second contributor with 123 million Euros to the EU Trust Fund for Africa, financing activities to foster stability and contribute to better migration. Furthermore, Italy is an active member of both the Rabat and the Khartoum Processes, promoting regional dialogue on migration issues with African countries.

In 2017, the Italian government passed the National Integration Plan to aid refugee integration in Italy. The plan is seen as a compromise and an attempt to stop the rise of anti-immigration ideology. Many politicians in the 2018 Italian elections ran on an anti-immigration platform. Once this plan is fully enacted and its results begin to show, it is hoped that the anti-immigration rhetoric will disappear.

The plan to aid refugee integration in Italy is funded by the Italian government and the European Union. It is designed to target 75,000 people with EU refugee or subsidiary protection status, meaning they are unable to return to their country of origin or home country due to fear of persecution or death. The National Integration Plan is a two-way street. Refugees will get more help finding jobs and suitable housing, while Italy and its people will feel that these refugees are becoming active members of their community, instead of a drain on a struggling economy.

A key component of the National Integration Plan is teaching the Italian language. By teaching Italian to refugees of all ages, the government hopes to increase refugee integration in Italy. After the refugees learn Italian, it will be easier for them to participate in their community. The second major component of the National Integration Plan is promoting “active citizenship”. The Italian government hopes to curb Islamophobia by fostering goodwill and communication between refugees and the Italian communities in which they live. Young refugees will begin to communicate with young Italians, mutual respect will begin to grow, and future generations will have a better understanding of each other.

An example of the plan in action can be found in a little town nestled at the bottom of the Dolomite mountain range. In 2019, in the town of Belluno, four African refugees were interviewed by The Local Italy, an international news organization. They found the four men cleaning the grounds of an old military barracks that the government planned to turn into a cultural center. Migrants have also been working in the town, cleaning parks and the city center.

### **Free, compulsory language courses**

Learning the Italian language is a right but also a duty” for new arrivals in the country, the plan states. Migrants will be required to sign up to language classes held in reception centres while under-18-year-olds must be enrolled in the Italian school system. In return, the state will recognize qualifications obtained in migrants' home countries, offer testing to ensure they are enrolled in the correct level of language course, and give special support to those who are in need.

## **Housing**

The government has committed to extending the housing options available to migrants when they leave reception centres, by including holders of international protection status (this includes refugees) in regional authorities' emergency housing plans. The plan also calls for migrants to be “distributed equally across the territory” in order to make the initiatives sustainable and avoid overcrowding in particular regions or towns.

## **Jobs**

Unemployment remains high in Italy following the financial crisis and is disproportionately elevated among foreigners. In the new plan, the government commits to promoting careers guidance, training, and apprenticeship schemes for migrants, and offering specialized support to vulnerable categories including women.

### III. Theory to Practice

It is well known by now that minority groups include national, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious groups. It also includes migrants, refugees, and indigenous and tribal people. Minorities struggle with discrimination every day and it ends with marginalization and exclusion. Human rights are based on values like dignity, fairness, equality, respect, and independence. They include the right to life and liberty, the right to work and education and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.

Most modern societies recognise two kinds of rights: those that we owe to all human beings (for example, the right to not be tortured) and those that we owe to our co-citizens in a shared society (for example, the right to vote). Ideally, these human rights apply regardless of where you are from, what you believe or how you choose to live your life. For universal human rights, everybody agrees - the obligation to respect human dignity is understandable. But with citizen rights, there is a lot of grey area. It all starts with how we determine who is a member. We can't choose when or where or whom we are born, but it does affect our entire life and our opportunities. As Ayelet Shachar says, it is a "birth right lottery" and correspondent to which particular caste you are born to.

Tying rights to memberships starts an argument about who actually "belongs", and it always raises questions and suspicion on racial, sexual or religious minorities and indigenous peoples. This type of situation leaves a lot of room to discriminate against some group of people. Most contemporary political philosophers fall into two groups - ones who believe in "terrestrial cosmopolitanism" and ones who believe in nationhood. Terrestrial cosmopolitanism means that people "carry" all of their rights with them around the world. But it does seem more like utopia than anything feasible. Then again nationhood leaves options to discriminate against some group of people. And it does seem that issues with discriminations against minorities are more about "membership" rights rather than human rights. The central premise of human rights today is that individuals intrinsically have non-negotiable entitlements and global inequality is massive. That is why it matters so much in what country you are born.

The human-rights movement has scrutinised the state of violence around the world, failures of countries to treat their citizens equally no matter their gender, race, religion, or sexual orientation. This movement has also prioritised economic and social rights - that means from employment to housing and to food. Material equality is something that human-rights law and movements never set out to defend. Therefore, human rights often served as an excuse for the narrow protections of capitalists. In human rights movement history, this institution failed to attack the victory of the rich and struggled to cope with the poverty of the rest. It paved the road to the rise of inequality and further rights abuses that we deal with today.

According to the 2018 Rule of Law index threats to human rights exist over  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the surveyed 113 countries. It is clear that many of the human rights issues fuel each other - as one becomes more significant, so do a host of others. Human trafficking, otherwise known as modern slavery, is growing around the world. It isn't limited to certain countries, but the international community needs to increase their efforts and fight with it. To end this human tragedy, it will require a multi-faceted approach that addresses the economic, social, cultural and legal realities that contribute to the problem around the globe.

Fighting with human trafficking is not easy, there are organisations that are mobilizing around the world to combat this human right issue. For example, the Not For Sale organisation. They provide support for trafficking victims, creating businesses that provide fair wage jobs for vulnerable populations. ChildVoice intersects with international efforts to combat human trafficking by empowering vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls through psychosocial counselling, life skills training and other related services. They work diligently to raise awareness and understanding of human trafficking within their communities.

One of the biggest issues with human rights relates to refugee crises. According to the U.N. chief, the world is dealing with the “highest levels of displacement on record.” Main reasons are due to armed conflict. And armed conflict is not easily resolved, therefore there will be bigger issues with this in the future. Although not all refugee camps are the same, still most of them mean that people live in tarp shelters, tents, or shipping containers. Inside refugee camps there are conflicts, difficulties with education and new language and experiences of social exclusion and discrimination. Refugee camps are in need of basic commodities: food, clothing, healthcare, shelter, household and hygiene items and of course clean water.

According to an overview of the world’s displacement crises in 2020m 82,4 million people are currently displaced from their homes. It is a record high number and of these, over 40% are refugees who have fled to another country. Most rich countries are treating refugees as somebody else’s problem. Hiding behind closed doors, they have allowed poorer countries to host refugees. And they left UN agencies so broke and without any humanitarian aid, that they can’t even feed many refugees properly anymore. For example, the UN has received less than half the funding it needs to support Syria’s 4 million refugees. One of the solutions would be resettling all refugees who need it and opening safe routes to sanctuary. With refugee crises, politicians must step up and remember what happened after World War II - most countries agreed to protect refugees through the 1951 Refugee Convention and through UN agencies like the UNHCR. Asylum is a human right.

Another issue connected with minorities and human rights belongs to gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights. Gender inequality has been a human rights issue for hundreds of years. Even though there has been great progress with gender equality, it probably will take another decade (if not even more) to accomplish gender equality. The problems that we still need to address are access to education, political representation, reproductive rights, economic opportunities and more contribute to gender inequality.

With LGBTQ+ individuals and their basic human rights - there have been some good improvements with their rights, but there is still a long way to go. Main issue still with LGBTQ individuals is hate crimes against them. In some countries gay people can get married, but they still have issues with adopting children and becoming a parent. Discrimination against LGBTQ individuals in a workplace are still strong which leads to individuals hiding their personal relationships. And transgender individuals face unique obstacles to accessing health care. Organisations like ACLU work to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people belong everywhere and live openly without discrimination, harassment, or violence.

Furthermore, we can't overlook the issues with the rise of nationalism. Despite seventy years of global leadership from institutions like the UN, nationalism is on the rise. Main drivers for nationalist movements are mostly focused on immigration issues, people being upset about open borders and trade issues. Vulnerable minority groups like LGBTQ+ community face significant danger under nationalism. In the coming years, the world needs to be aware of the risk.

In theory, we have organisations like the United Nation, that have written out "Universal Declaration of Human Rights". We have foundations and initiatives that stand up for human rights all around the world. But in practice, we must still consider that in the 2018 Rule of Law index, it was registered that over  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the surveyed 113 countries human rights issues exist. How can we implement theory into practice?

Around the world we witness the basic rights of people being stripped away. While it might not be obvious, each of us has a surprising and significant influence on the lives of others and on people we don't even know. Once we step out of our bubbles, we hold incredible power for positive change. In order to have big change, we must begin small. Every action, no matter how small, has the potential to make a difference. Here are some activities that are not radical, and everyone can do on their own:

**1. Speak up for what you care about:** Set aside time to finally give that cause that keeps nagging at your heart and reappearing in your life the attention it deserves. We all have something that we care deeply about, whether because of an experience we underwent, an encounter we've witnessed, or a story spoken by someone close to us. Advocacy has a huge impact in communities everywhere. One brave voice is enough to open up a channel for others to share their experiences and support human rights. The more awareness created around an issue, the more momentum there is for change to protect human rights.

**2. Volunteer or donate to a global organisation:** For example, [UNICEF](#) is an amazing non-profit that supports human rights around the world. [UNICEF](#) works to protect human rights, but with a focus on children. Their mission is to ensure kids have safe access to clean water, education, healthcare, and play (the right to creative expression!) in almost 200 countries.

**3. Choose fair trade & ethically made gifts:** You can positively impact so many lives simply by how you shop for gifts this holiday and throughout the year. Fair trade and ethical products follow strict guidelines for giving workers and artisans living wages, safe working conditions, dignified employment, and environmental respect to support human rights. Every ethical purchase can mean a farming family is able to eat their next meal, a child can receive an education, a garment worker can afford clothing, and an artisan can support her family. Choose [fair trade and ethically made gifts](#) for birthdays, weddings, Mother's and Father's Day... and everything in between!

**4. Listen to others' stories:** There's incredible power in listening to someone's story, especially one that is vastly different from yours. With 7 billion people on one shared planet, the world is full of diverse cultures, traditions, and ways of living that are interesting to learn about. The [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) of 1948 was the first document to state our shared rights. One important way we can empower survivors and people facing injustices is by honouring and respecting their stories.

**5. Stay connected with social movements:** A wonderful way to feel connected to social movements around the world is by engaging on Instagram and Twitter. Prominent activists and human rights organisations are happy to share the ways they are making a difference, and usually offer campaigns you can get involved with.

**6. Stand up against discrimination:** Discrimination has a way of creeping up in places we never imagined encountering it. Yet it's there, and the most important thing each of us can do is say something - don't let it slip by. And when you see someone else stand up, stand with them! When we have each other as support, we are more empowered against injustices in the workplace or in a classroom. There are more people on this earth who help and uplift others than tear people down with words or hate. Acting together, we're powerful enough to pave a new path to equality and fairness.

These are small steps for everyone that they can do individually and keep in mind in their everyday lives. If we want the theory of human rights to come to practice, then these steps above are where everybody should start. We need more awareness and have better perception on these human rights issues that we face today.

## IV. Policy Recommendations

Human rights issues today consist of refugee crises, human trafficking and rise of nationalism groups. Furthermore, inequality and discrimination against minorities is an enormous problem today and it is unlikely that human-rights movements will solve them on their own. Advocacy organisations barely make a dent in the political evil. But that doesn't mean that we should stop the fight. It means we need more awareness of the situation today and we need to revise all the current policies and give recommendations to change the policies.

The usage of the term “human rights” in English language books has increased since the 1940s, along with “constitutional rights” and “basic rights”. People have always criticised governments, but only in recent decades have they begun to do so under the perception of human rights. There has been a huge wave of protests around the world, people exercise their right to protest and demand change from those in power. For example, in September 2019 more than 7.6 million people took part in a week of climate strikes in 185 countries. The protests were organised by Fridays for Future - a youth-led movement started by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg.

Another example of protest was this November, Poland. Thousands of people gathered in Polish cities to protest the countries near total ban on abortions, venting outrage and claiming the restrictive laws had caused a pregnant woman's death. Her death, which a lawyer representing her family said came after doctors delayed a potentially life-saving abortion, has reignited the debate over the country's handling of abortion. Last year Polish court ruled that abortions would only be allowed in cases of rape or incest, or if the life of the mother is endangered. Activist groups argue that doctors held off on performing an abortion due to fear of violating the recent law. The penalty for abortion could be from five years to a life sentence.

Aftermath of the Polish government's action with the abortion law, will probably sour relations between Warsaw and Brussels. The EU has officially warned the country to not violate its citizens' fundamental rights. But then again there is a debate going on that the EU is often accused of being inconsistent with their sanctions against countries that violate basic human rights. For example, Uganda introduced anti-LGBTQ law in 2014 and several Uganda's development partners suspended aid to the country. But the EU decided not to suspend its aid, instead the EU stepped up support for civil society actors. It is clear that EU policymakers face these types of dilemmas every day and they have to find the best solution for the long haul. Normative dilemmas create conditions for EU policies. Therefore this “inconsistency” is intended and justifiable. Inconsistencies are not necessarily evidence of irresponsible decisions - rather those decisions might be meaningful with reference to other human rights concerns.

Although people are using their voices more and more, the human rights agenda is still on losing ground and authoritarianism is on the rise. People all over the world still endure constraints of their human rights - torture, gender inequality, xenophobia, racism, and intolerance. Human rights and their defenders are under increasing pressure in all regions around the world. This is the reason why human rights advocacy is a necessity today.

All countries face challenges in meeting basic standards for human rights. There are gaps in access to justice, especially minorities who are subjected to discrimination. Many public decision-making processes remain opaque and non-participatory, hindering people's ability to demand and secure accountability. Much still needs to be done to ensure that economic, social, and cultural rights can be legally claimed and arbitrated. Human rights advocacy generally involves documentation of rights violations and propagating recommendations for remedying those violations. They are also connected with public policies.

Public policy refers to laws and other actions of a government, including its funding priorities. Public policy is said to be a combination of laws, regulations, actions, policies, and a lot of other factors concerning a given topic. These policies can be political, economic, cultural, or social in nature. Public policy impacts what the government does and how governmental decisions are made. It determines the actions that a government chooses to implement or emphasise, as well as those that it decides not to act on. Public policies of a nation are shaped over time by education, advocacy groups, influences of lobbyists and conflicting interests of special interest groups.

The main idea of creating policy is to improve life for members of the public. Officials design policies that move the public closer to a desired state or public goal. Even if the ideas come from outside government, the creation of policy falls to public officials. Harold Lasswell in the 1950s, created a policy making model still used today:

**1. Agenda setting** - In this first stage, a problem or challenge that impacts the public is initially identified. Solutions are put forward by interested parties both inside and outside of the government. Agenda setting typically goes through these stages:

- **Systemic agenda** - All issues public officials feel are worth addressing
- **Institutional agenda** - Distilled from the systemic agenda list, these issues are chosen as the ones policymakers should analyse and consider acting on.
- **Discretionary agenda** - This list comes directly from lawmakers, not from the systemic and institutional agendas.
- **Decision agenda** - The final list of issues that policymakers will consider for action.

**2. Policy Formation** - This step involves the development of policy options within the government. This occurs after officials narrow the range of possible policy choices by excluding infeasible options. In this step, different interested parties attempt to have their favoured policy solution rank high among the remaining options. This step often involves a period of intense debate.

**3. Decision Making** - In this step, government leaders decide on a particular course of action. Ideally, it is the course that will best address the problem for the most members of the public.

**4. Policy Implementation** - In this step of the policy making process, governments put the chosen public policy option into effect. Officials use the tools of public administration that impact the distribution of government goods and services or make changes in how the

government taxes the public. The changes should reflect the sentiments and values of the affected parties.

**5. Policy Evaluation** - Interested parties both within and without the government monitor the impact of the policy and determine if it is achieving the intended goal. This can lead to further changes in public policy done considering the impact of the original policy.

In reality, the policy making process is not typically so linear. However, these five steps provide a framework to better understand public policy formation and help everybody identify the strengths and weaknesses of the system. As we said before, public policies are influenced by a variety of factors. These factors include public opinion, economic conditions, new scientific discoveries, technological change, interest groups, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), business lobbying, and other political activity. As a result of the wide variety of influencing factors that tend to pull and push policy in different directions, public policy change often happens slowly. Absent a crisis, and sometimes even during a crisis, the influencing factors can tend to check and counteract each other, slowing the development and implementation of new policy and tending to lead to incremental rather than radical changes in public policy. And often, the influencing agents are more effective in blocking policy change than in having new policies adopted.

Public opinion and priorities have a strong influence on public policy over time. Relevant to sustainable businesses is the increasing public concern about the environment, volatile energy prices, and global climate change. This is influencing public policy through electoral politics, citizen rallies, and actions that affect governmental decision makers. Also influencing public policy relevant for sustainable businesses are new scientific findings and information, such as new findings about climate change and the human and business impact on climate change.

Technology advancements - often motivated by market and business opportunities—also affect public policy. Technology is constantly changing, and this affects the business environment directly and also indirectly as public policies change with technological inventions. New, lower-cost, and easier-to-use technologies can increase public support for policies that promote renewable energy and energy efficiency and that reduce environmental damage. Interest groups include business and trade associations, professional organisations, labour unions, environmental advocacy organisations, and cause-oriented citizen groups and lobbies.

Individuals and businesses also organise into associations and interest groups for other reasons than to try to influence government. This includes promotional and educational efforts, to support specific activities that are relevant to members, and to provide members with select benefits. Interests' groups advocate for public policies that serve the desires of their members and further the mission of their organisations.

A public policy with human rights approach is a series of decisions and actions that the state designs, implements, monitors and evaluates - on the basis of an ongoing process of effective social inclusion, deliberation, and participation - for the purpose of protecting, promoting, respecting, and guaranteeing the human rights of all the persons, groups and communities that comprise a society, under the principles of equality and non-

discrimination, universality, access to justice, accountability, transparency, and cross-cutting and intersectional perspectives.

How individuals or a small group can influence human rights policy making and/or change? First thing is promoting - raising awareness of the importance of human rights in everyday life and showing how they empower us all. Publicly, it is easy to promote stories on your social media about people you know have stood up for rights or promote organisations that stand for minorities human rights. To have an influence on national and local authorities, use planned events in your country or region or city to promote human rights. Another good idea is to organise exhibitions on human rights in public places. Or take human rights education to schools.

As said before, human rights are all-inclusive, binding, and reliant and interrelated. For bettering human rights issues, there must be improvements for policies. First, we recommend that for better awareness among children and young people, human rights education should be included in school curriculums. The battle against discrimination, starts with awareness. Young people should know their rights and be familiar with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and how to use it in their aid.

Second, we recommend that laws and policies support programmes and organisations to ensure that information about human rights are provided to all segments of the population. Special attention should be given to minorities and marginalised populations in their access to these services. An all-encompassing methodology ought to dependably be received in the execution of human rights programs. Equivalent consideration ought to be given to common, social, monetary, political, and social rights.

Furthermore, we recommend that laws and policies support and/or provide counselling and educational intervention for minorities, who deal with discrimination and of course for other individuals whose human rights have been violated. Mostly to help them deal with the consequences of violations and discrimination. It would be helpful for communities, particularly people directly affected, to have the opportunity to be meaningfully engaged in all aspects of human rights programmes and policy design, implementation, and monitoring.

Additionally, we recommend that laws and policies should ensure that economic, social and cultural rights can be legally claimed and arbitrated. Many public decision-making processes remain opaque and non-participatory, hindering people's ability to demand and secure accountability. It would be best if they were transparent.

Lastly, we would like EU policymakers to try to be more inconsistent with sanctions against human rights violations. It is understandable, that they face normative dilemmas and have to make the best of it, but if it is clear that human lives and freedom is at risk (for example, Poland and their strict no-abortion law), they should step up more and fight against this violation.

## V. A roadmap for the future targeted to all relevant stakeholders' levels

As part of the general human rights framework, minority rights must be protected through national and EU legislation, appropriate government policies, and the support of civil society. We all have a role to play in understanding, respecting, and defending human rights, as well as our governments have that same duty but also a further obligation to ensure human rights are both protected and fulfilled. Although governments might do this in different ways, the final objective is to ensure the freedom, respect, equality, and dignity of citizens, being their rights always considered and prioritized in laws, policy and practice.

There is an increasing number of countries in which there are both in society and the government, bodies, groups, and individuals who are engaged, or prepared to engage, in the improvement of the human rights situation. However, sometimes despite the good intentions of the official authorities, violations may continue. Therefore, strategically planned preventive measures and accessible remedies to mitigate wide-ranging challenges to human rights are needed, as well as collaboration between international humanitarian and human rights actors has a particular potential.

In the following chapter, readers will be offered a roadmap in the form of recommendations targeting all relevant stakeholders' levels.

### Policy making levels (local, regional and national)

It is impossible to conceive of good governance without respect for human rights. Minority human rights must be taken into consideration in daily decisions and activities undertaken by elected representatives, in order to improve their implementation at all levels of governance and preserve a democratic society. The public power must be exercised with respect to everyone's equal value and to the freedom and dignity of the individual, as well as it should implement and follow up the principle of non-discrimination in their services. Ensuring that everyone's needs regarding support and service are observed, with particular attention to underrepresented groups and individuals in vulnerable situations is an important step that should be considered.

Indeed, one of the important functions of local governments is to provide public services that address local needs and priorities related to the realization of human rights at the local level. Although the primary responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights rests with national governments, the promotion of a human rights culture within local public services plays a vital role in promoting respect for and the realization of human rights in society.

Particularly important to strive for is the commitment of local governments to incorporate human rights in formal guidelines, procedures, and activities to support the respect, protection, fulfilment and promotion of human rights. Moreover, local governments should ensure that all public premises and public places are made accessible and available to all. Accessibility is strongly related to universal design when the approach involves direct access. This is about making things accessible to all people (whether they have a disability or not). An alternative is to provide indirect access by having the entity support the use of a person's assistive device technology to achieve access (e.g., screen readers).

There are different types of accessibility such as access to information, access to transport, access to building and access to health care. For example, many times public transport is either not accessible or not enough or irregular in nature, including public buses and taxis. No assistance is provided to ensure on and off-boarding of people with disabilities. Therefore, local governments have to take appropriate measures to develop, promulgate and monitor the implementation of minimum standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services open or provided to the public. They should provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers, and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public. Allowing service animals into a "no pet" facility is a common type of reasonable modification necessary to accommodate people who have disabilities. Service animals must be allowed in all areas of a facility where the public is allowed except where the dog's presence would create a legitimate safety risk or would fundamentally alter the nature of a public entity's services.

Apart of the physical barriers that local governments have to think about, they should also work on removing the attitudinal barriers such as stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. These barriers often emerge from a lack of understanding, which can lead people to ignore, to judge, or have misconceptions about a person with disability. People sometimes stereotype those with disabilities, assuming that disabled people cannot have a good quality of life, seeing disability as a sickness that needs to be fixed. However, it should be noted that people with disabilities are like people without disabilities, who are capable of participating fully in community life just like their non-disabled peers. In order to contribute to the full inclusion of disabled people in the society, local governments should also focus their attention on raising disability awareness because the aim of these campaigns is very simple – to educate. People who don't have a disability or know anyone who is disabled might not be aware of what it is like to live with a disability or the challenges that can be encountered on a daily basis. By educating people on these challenges, it is hoped that positive changes are made. And it works. If people or business owners don't know about a particular problem someone with disabilities may face, they are unlikely to make any changes.

Local authorities should promote the understanding of and respect for human rights of all individuals within their jurisdiction through education and training. In particular, local authorities should organize, on a systematic basis, human rights training for their elected representatives and administrative staff, and the dissemination of relevant information among citizens about their rights. A critical, but often overlooked, component of ensuring success is comprehensive and ongoing staff training, because public entities may have good policies, but their staff or volunteers are not aware of them or do not know how to

implement them. Especially important is that the front-line staff who routinely interact with the public understand the requirements on modifying policies and practices, communicating with and assisting customers, and identifying alternate ways to provide access to programs and services to accommodate individuals with a disability, when necessary.

Human rights sensitivity should be enhanced through human rights education for civil servants and by supporting human rights organizations and activities. Local public officials should keep up ongoing dialogue with citizens and with civil society. There have to be well-developed channels for this communication and collaboration. As mentioned previously in this document, the collaboration between different parties in the society is very important. Local governments should improve their collaboration with civil society organizations, because NGOs can set up arenas where people and government could communicate, being people with disabilities and their needs presented better. Along with local governments, NGOs are becoming central initiators of various forms of policymaking and strategy development on the situation of people with disabilities. Civil society organizations may also work directly with the local government to strengthen its human rights expertise and awareness.

Although we were talking until now about people with disability, there are many other minority groups that experience discrimination as an everyday reality because of their race, ethnicity, nationality, class, religion, belief, sex, gender, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, age or other status. Governments on local, regional or national levels have to make sure that minorities and vulnerable groups are integrated into society and have access to education, job opportunities and social services because it is essential for building societies based on mutual respect and inclusion.

The first responsibility of all authorities at all levels is to respect human rights in their own work. That means that local, regional and national authorities have to make sure that nobody within their organization directly or indirectly violates the human rights of any individual within its jurisdiction. It's important to be well understood in what ways political decisions, policies, and practices impact different individuals and groups, as well as how politicians and public officials do not have to violate human rights through their own actions. It should be ensured that human rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled when signing public contracts and other legal agreements.

Moreover, it should be developed appropriate mechanisms to monitor and communicate results on a regular basis. An example of such practice is the development of local Human Rights Ombudsman offices that can monitor the decision and the work carried out in the city, as well as give visibility to the local and regional authorities' important role in human rights protection. Usually, ombudsman deal with alleged breaches of civil rights, socioeconomic rights, as well as discrimination and equality issues, protection of people with disabilities, children, and prisoners. However, in order to empower the Ombudsman Institution to carry out its anti-discrimination mandate effectively, public authorities need to strengthen its capacity. The Ombudsman Institution should be offered an increase in funding for sufficient human resources and awareness raising campaigns, as well as it should be included in the decision-making processes. Public authorities should take seriously the recommendations done by the Ombudsman Institutions and try to include them when

appropriate, in order to improve administrative or legislative reforms aimed at improving the operation of public-service providers.

The counties which have established several Ombudsman institutions, such as regional, local and/or specialised bodies, should enable appropriate, effective co-ordination and co-operation among these institutions, in order to promote synergy and avoid duplication, by ensuring that legislation on Ombudsman institutions enables and encourages such co-operation. Ombudsman institutions often have a mandate beyond the investigation of complaints, which includes proactive promotion and protection of citizens' rights. In Poland, for example, the Human Rights Commissioner is under a duty to analyse, monitor, and support the equal treatment of all persons and to conduct independent research and make recommendations in relation to discrimination. In Moldova, the People's Advocate's Annual Report for 2017 shows the wide range of ways through which it seeks to promote human rights. This includes informing the public through conferences, roundtables, meetings, forums, contests, exhibitions, producing videos, distributing informative materials, training, and collaboration with the media. In 2017, 174 promotion activities were conducted by the People's Advocate, directly reaching 5800 beneficiaries. Ombudsman institutions have become an integral part of the modern model of good governance, playing an important role in protecting and promoting human rights and providing individuals with an avenue of complaint in case of alleged human rights violations. However, to be effective in their work, Ombudsman has to put people at the heart of decision-making as well as, as the Institution has to maintain its full financial independence from the government.

Local, regional and national governments should also ensure that companies situated in their territory promote diversity and inclusion through workplace adjustments, and that they don't tolerate discrimination.

Discrimination in the workplace occurs when a person is treated less favourably than others because of characteristics that are not related to the person's competencies or the inherent requirements of the job. All workers and job seekers have the right to be treated equally, regardless of any attributes other than their ability to do the job. Discrimination may occur before hiring, on the job or upon leaving. However, it is essential for workers to be able to choose their employment freely, to develop their potential to the full and to be rewarded based on merit. Freedom from discrimination is a fundamental human right, so companies should have their own anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies that make it clear that such attitudes will not be tolerated. Companies have to set standards and expectations to behaviour, including and describing the types of behaviour that are discriminatory or harassing, being these issues taken seriously. Such human rights policies should be linked to existing organizational policies and integrated into the way the organization operates on a daily basis. The right to freedom from discrimination and harassment should be extended to all employees, including full-time, part-time, temporary, probationary, casual and contract staff, as well as volunteers, co-op students, interns and apprentices. It is also unacceptable for members from a company to engage in harassment or discrimination when dealing with clients, or with others they have professional dealings with, such as suppliers or service providers. Such policy has to apply at every level of the organization and to every aspect of the workplace environment and employment relationship, including recruitment, selection, promotion, transfers, training, salaries, benefits and termination. It also covers rates of pay, overtime, hours of work, holidays, shift work, discipline and performance evaluations.

For example, companies have a crucial role to play in helping migrants and refugees to integrate in their new host communities. Local, regional and national governments should stimulate businesses to include refugees in their core business operation, engaging them as potential employees, entrepreneurs and consumers. Hiring refugees not only diversifies and strengthens a company's workforce but creates greater brand loyalty in an era when consumers want to see businesses acting as a force for good. In particular, the private sector has an enormous capacity to empower refugees as full participants in the global economy. As economic actors, policy influencers, employers and innovators, business has the tools and capacity to contribute to win-win solutions that support the integration of refugees into the workforce, bringing value to the society as a whole.

When people from refugee backgrounds are settled into their local community, a part of finding employment, there are many other things for the governments to consider such as healthcare, housing, education, community support services, interpreters and translations, financial support, and mental health services. Governments through their policies should provide technical assistance, legal advice and other forms of support to assist the authorities to further strengthen their refugee status determination procedures and ensure quality decision-making. They should invest money in training key stakeholders from the government and civil society on basic protection issues, including refugee rights, reception conditions for asylum-seekers, durable solutions and child protection. Governments should take a series of actions to eliminate discrimination pertinent to public sector officials, establishing mechanism to prevent racial and religious profiling of migrants by public authorities, training officials to detect and respond to hate crimes to administer immigration detention procedures in ways that respect human rights and non-discrimination.

Governments should promote good practices in relation to policies and measures that support effective integration of refugees into the social, economic and cultural fabric of the society, including advocacy for naturalization, long-term residence permits and family reunification.

Despite their legal obligation, governments also have a moral obligation, far more important than the legal one that calls for a more generous, more compassionate and more responsible response. Governments not only have to legally support refugees that settle in their communities and contribute to them, but they also need to influence attitudes and negative opinions coming from the local population. Refugees are often isolated and traumatized not only because of the treatment they received before fleeing persecution but because of the treatment they received after arriving in the country. Therefore, governments may need to allocate funds and find places where refugees can socialise with other members of their own community and with members of the broader community. Their children may need opportunities to play, sport and recreation and places to meet and mix with other children. Sometimes they may need food and clothing.

Although in some cases church, charitable and other NGOs have responded to these needs, still a lot of refugees didn't receive the support they need and there is much that governments can do. Indeed, governments have to strengthen and broaden public information, education, awareness-raising and sensitization through media work, school activities, special campaigns, training and capacity building activities. They have to strengthen partnerships with NGOs and other civil society actors involved in refugee protection that can support their work in mapping a route to prejudice reduction. Prejudice reduction is a growing subject of interest applied across various settings and populations, including school, workplaces, health fields, etc. Prejudice reduction interventions include initiatives such as cross-cultural/inter-group contact, diversity training, and peer learning. However, there is still insufficient evidence to understand which interventions are most likely to be effective in different contexts, but governments should understand which is the most suitable way for reducing prejudice in their communities and for improving the integration and social inclusion of their most vulnerable people.

### Youth organizations and youth workers

In our more diverse and challenging society, it becomes more important than ever that all individuals are encouraged to uphold their own rights and those of others. Indeed, human rights education is an essential part of high-quality teaching and learning, both formal and non-formal, where youth organizations and in particular, youth workers have a crucial role to play. Human rights education can foster attitudes of tolerance, respect, solidarity and responsibility as well as develop awareness of how human rights can be translated into social reality as developing skills for protecting human rights. When equipped with the right skills, competences and knowledge, youth workers can educate, inform and raise awareness of the issues that minorities may face both at national and/or international level, through different projects, workshops and interactive activities. Youth workers can empower minorities to become actively involved in the "fight" for their human and citizen's rights. Through their activities, youth workers can develop capacity and cooperation among young

people to lead and drive the creation of peaceful societies in which civic values and minority human rights are fully respected. Youth can be bridge-builders between different cultures, religions and generations. They can work toward inclusion in the society and tackle issues of discrimination, tension and intolerance. Youth can promote respect for diversity with the aim of building inclusive and peaceful societies because every person is entitled to certain fundamental rights, simply by the fact of being human.

Undoubtedly, youth led organizations are becoming visible not only in national arenas, but also in international ones. However, many of them are still struggling to gain recognition as important players in international decision-making processes. Youth led organisations are important because through their work, they allow young people to exercise their right to participation (to be involved, to lead and to take action) in improving their situation and well-being. Participation may mean being actively involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of development activities, programmes and policies that affect their lives. In addition, youth led organisations play a key role in contributing to the success of programmes, projects or initiatives related to young people. Young people have the best understanding of the challenges, strengths and opportunities that affect them. Youth led organisations are in a unique position to develop and implement initiatives that address issues from a youth perspective and offer solutions that respond to the diverse realities of young people. When young people are meaningfully included in the design, implementation and evaluation of youth-related programmes, policies and services, these initiatives can be more effective and ultimately more sustainable. In order to achieve sustainable youth participation, a strong commitment and investment from youth workers and youth organizations is needed, in addition to the support of funders, other types of organizations – public and private, international agencies, and decision-making bodies.

Although youth organizations and youth workers have a crucial role to play in educating and informing about the issues those minorities may face, often they face a lot of challenges in doing so. Non-formal education and youth work do not get the social and political recognition they deserve, especially as youth workers are often considered as “low status” professionals and the competences acquired through non-formal education are not recognized. In consequence, the educational and other relevant public authorities do not always see the value of youth work as important contributors to community cohesion, and do not consult youth workers on the development and implementation of policies of concern to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, when developing policies and procedures, authorities must consult with all relevant stakeholders, including also youth organizations and youth workers who are periodically in touch with the most vulnerable people from the society and can advocate for their needs from firsthand. Only when policies and practices are designed to reflect that the needs of minorities are explicitly recognized, they could be effective and improve the integration and well-being of minorities.

Although the power of youth organizations and youth work are not sufficiently recognized, we can definitely say that they are important actors in the promotion and advocacy for minority rights. When they do it right, youth organizations can influence people with the aim to change policies, practices, structures and attitudes. Advocacy can be done in a lot of different ways and on all different levels. There are small advocacy activities, such as starting

a petition in the local community, but there are also bigger advocacy campaigns, sometimes even on an international level, such as international calls change.org. Advocacy is generally directed at policy makers including politicians, government officials and public servants, but also private sector leaders whose decisions impact upon people's lives, as well as those whose opinions and actions influence policy makers, such as journalists and the media, development agencies and large NGOs. The final objective of an advocacy campaign is to achieve changes in legislation, policy and practice of a wide range of organizations, including governmental, supranational or intergovernmental ones.

However, often youth organizations and youth workers commit mistakes when planning their advocacy strategy and this leads to poorly designed advocacy plans which in consequence do not bring the desired change and impact. Civil society campaigns for policy change rarely achieve rapid results. They require patience, tenacity, courage and conviction. There is no blueprint for success, but there are some common denominators to almost all successful advocacy campaigns (e.g., goals should be clear and achievable; messages should be compelling for those to whom they are intended; calls to action should be specific and concise). Good planning and organisation must combine with the ability to mobilise broad coalitions of public and political support towards a common goal. Also, it's very important for youth workers to focus on one issue and to make sure that they act on the basis of consensus. In order to do this, they need to provide time for their group to discuss everything fully, making sure that everyone agrees with, or at least accepts, the final decision about the focus on the campaign and the best way to forward. Moreover, they need to involve people from minority backgrounds who can confirm that the issue is relevant, and change is needed. Those people can explain from first-hand what their real needs are and what should be done in order to make them feel not discriminated against or at least better integrated.

Public awareness campaigns should be time focused. For example, one kind of campaign is that of raising awareness of disability issues among the general public, disabled and non-disabled people, with the aim of changing negative attitudes about disabled people into positive recognition of their skills, needs and rights. Such a campaign and the sort of change doesn't happen overnight, because it takes a long time for people to begin to recognize that they have the power within themselves to produce change. Before to start changing other views, disabled people need to increase their own confidence and start celebrating who they are, and this is taking time. Moreover, in order to produce change in laws, policies, services, youth workers should organize long-term campaigns. They are more complex compared to the previous ones, because they involve careful planning of strategies and resources. They need committed and motivated people at the core of the campaign who are going to follow through with the work over a long period. In order to support campaigns for changes in laws, policies and services, youth workers need to include awareness-raising activities, direct action (demonstrations, petitions, marches), influence parliamentary representatives with a briefing paper (summary of an issue), letters, personal contact, etc. They need to define their target audience when planning any campaign, e.g., local authority, national government, the business community, the general public, etc., thinking very carefully about the best strategies for each group, because if something works well for reaching the general public, it doesn't mean that the same will be effective for reaching the national government.

It is helpful also for youth workers to identify who can indirectly influence their target audience. It can be for example an academic, an influencer or a journalist. Influencing public policy change can be difficult, particularly for those with limited power and resources. By investing in relationships, youth workers can develop trust and increase credibility with stakeholders which can lead to alliances, identify potential policy supporters, gather intelligence on policy challenges and opportunities, and also the values and convictions of decision-makers and key influencers.

Equally important is the improvement of the working conditions of youth workers and the promoting the value of youth work, as well as the provision of lifelong learning opportunities for youth workers and the exchange of expertise between youth workers and other professionals working with young people. Youth workers should always look for opportunities to exchange knowledge and competences with other youth workers or other professionals working with young people at local, national, and/or international level. They need to find for themselves relevant training programmes, online or offline, that can help them to increase the capacity-building and resources of their organizations as well as their own knowledge. By participating in such training, youth workers will be provided with quality human rights education, realizing the potential each of them has in promoting the human rights of minorities in their country or region. Regular national or international meetings can help youth workers exchange good practice on how their organizations are dealing with the violation of human rights, while learning what tools and strategies their colleagues are using. Through the participation in meetings and conferences, they can promote their cause to other stakeholders, ensuring that it will reach not only a higher number of people but also relevant stakeholders that can influence it positively. They can also give input on policies and programmes, because every youth policy should include the feedback from youth participants, especially when dealing with issues that directly affect young people.

Another important thing is that the work of young people needs to be valued and recognized, and part of this means monetary remuneration. Without remuneration, young people often seek employment in other fields, which diminishes their capacity to become meaningfully involved. Indeed, youth organizations face extreme difficulty securing funds for core operating costs, including the funds necessary to run an office, compensate staff and cover other overhead expenses. This is especially true for youth organisations that may have limited experience and lack a financial history. While all organisations face these challenges, the constant turnover of staff and leadership that youth-led organisations experience makes this a particularly difficult hurdle. In addition to this, youth workers should receive a constant orientation, training and re-training, which can help them gain new knowledge, ideas and skills that can contribute to the mission and objectives of their organization. Training should be provided in areas deemed important by the organization, such as strengthening of knowledge on key issues and skills important to the work of the organisation. The expenses related to this need to be budgeted for in advance. Youth organizations can seek out opportunities for partnerships with other youth-led and youth-serving organisations and work in coalition to leverage efforts. When resources are limited, partnerships are critical to advancing efforts and building on existing and complementary initiatives. In addition, seeking funding from diverse resources, including local government,

private foundations, international agencies, or individual funders, ensures more organizational flexibility as well as financing security for all members.

Youth organizations can help young people understand that today's world and communities have become increasingly complex, technical, and multicultural, placing new and challenging demands on them in terms of education, training, and the social and emotional skills needed. The future of the well-being of our countries depends on raising a new generation of competent and responsible young people who care about all injustice happening in the countries and are willing to contribute to the elimination of all kinds of discriminations of human rights. Youth organizations and their members have to search and ask for public investments in programs to counter such problems and to educate the young generation to be more open minded and able to support the ones in need. Moreover, they should require more public investments allocated to the prevention and control of juvenile delinquency and youth crime, helping to reduce all factors that can bring to such issues. There are some social indicators that suggest continuing problems, particularly for minority youth living in poor communities, that can be improved only if institutions promote both current well-being and successful transition into adulthood. This can be done through the inclusion of opportunities to learn skills, to make a difference in their community, to interact with youth from multicultural backgrounds, to have experiences in leadership and shared decision making. These experiences are important to all young people, but especially to the ones belonging to more vulnerable groups.

Youth organizations and youth workers should offer their support to governments for the creation of adolescent development programmes, because thanks to their close relation to young people they know and understand better what the factors are contributing to the healthy development of all young people, which is critical to the design and implementation of community programs for youth. There is extensive cultural specificity in how young needs are met, therefore, the local cultural context must be taken into account as programs are designed and evaluated correctly. In order to develop positive personal and social assets, young people should receive emotional and moral support, being in physical and psychological safety and security. They should be given the opportunities to feel a sense of belonging and being valued, opportunities to develop positive social values and norms, as well as opportunities to make contribution to one's community and to develop a sense of matter. Structure that is developmentally appropriate, with clear expectations for behaviour as well as increasing opportunities to make decisions, to participate in governance and rulemaking, and to take on leadership roles as one matures and gains more expertise. Community programs can expand the opportunities for youth to acquire personal and social assets and to experience the broad range of features of positive developmental settings. Such programmes can be provided by many different individual organizations, each with their own unique approach and programmatic activities. They may be provided by local affiliates of large national youth-serving organizations or may be an independent organization that is affiliated with a public institution, such as a school, public library or social centre. They also may be small, autonomous grassroots organizations that exist independently in a community.

However, not always the information about youth community programs is easily accessible to members from the community as well; there is no local government agency, or a

community foundation responsible for monitoring the range and quality of those youth programmes. In this case, youth organizations can provide feedback based on the regular assessment of the needs of adolescents, reviewing the available opportunities for youth and if they meet their specific needs. Since young people from minority backgrounds are a heterogeneity group, effective programs must be flexible enough to adapt to this existing diversity among the young people they serve and the communities in which they operate. Even with the best staff and best funding, no single program can serve all young people or incorporate all of the features of positive developmental settings. Therefore, communities and youth organizations should put in place some locally appropriate mechanism for monitoring the availability, accessibility, and quality of programs for youth in their community. In addition, only when a programme includes ongoing and final evaluation, it can provide important insights to inform program design, selection, and modification. Program evaluation can also help funders and policy makers make informed choices about which programs to fund for which groups of youth. The desire to conduct high-quality evaluation can help program staff clarify their objectives and decide which types of evidence will be most useful in determining if these objectives have been met. Ongoing program study and evaluation can also be used by program staff, program participants, and funders to track program objectives; this is typically done by establishing a system for ongoing data collection that measures the extent to which various aspects of the programs are being delivered, how are they delivered, who is providing these services, and who is receiving them. Such information can provide useful information to program staff to help them make changes to improve program effectiveness. Finally, program evaluation can test both new and very well-developed program designs by assessing the immediate, observable results of the program outcomes and benefits associated with participation in the program.

In addition, youth organizations should also search for private and public funders that can provide the resources needed at the community level to develop and support community-wide programming that is orderly, coordinated, and evaluated in reasonable ways. In addition to support at the community level, this is likely to involve support for intermediary organizations and collaborative teams that include researchers, practitioners, funders, and policy makers. Public and private funders should support collaboration between researchers and the practice community to develop social indicator data that build understanding of how programs are implemented and improve the ability to monitor programs. Collaborative efforts would further the understanding of the relationship between program features and positive developmental outcomes among young people. Public and private funders should provide opportunities for individual programs and communities to improve their capacity to collect and use social indicator data. This requires better training for program staff and more close collaboration between different actors, including youth organizations and youth workers. Individuals and youth organizations are committed to better understand these programs and provide assistance and guidance to encourage their success.

## EU Commission and other EU consultative bodies

The European Union (EU) is committed to supporting democracy and human rights in its external relations, in accordance with its founding principles of liberty, democracy and

respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. The EU seeks to mainstream human rights concerns into all its policies and programmes and has different human rights policy instruments for specific actions — including financing specific projects through its financing instruments.

Following a proposal from the European Commission and the Vice-President / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR), in November 2020 the Council adopted the third EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy. It sets out the EU's ambitions and priorities for the period 2020-2024, structured around five main areas of action:

- Protecting and empowering individuals;
- Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies;
- Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy;
- New technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges;
- Delivering by working together.

Although the EU Action Plan provides a broad roadmap with strong ambitions to address the increasing challenges on human rights and democracy, it is important to note that it will also require strong political determination and adequate resources to be implemented and yield effective results.

One of the biggest challenges of the EU is the rise of radical right movements, discourses and political parties in Europe which stand against the EU's fundamental values. Right-wing populism rejects the fundamental principles of liberal democracy by dismissing individual and social equality, frequently on the basis of racism and favouring members of an allegedly homogeneous "people". Minorities often serve as scapegoats of fear and deprivation, as well as anti-immigration positions combined with racist ideologies go hand in hand with Islamophobia in Western Europe and Romaphobia or anti-gypsyism in Central and Eastern Europe.

Hate speech has become part of political discourse, not only among populist and extremist groups but also across the political spectrum and information technology contributes to spreading and amplifying it. Hate speech and intolerance are on the rise in Europe, with increasing use of expressions that spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, antisemitism or other forms of hatred. When political parties bring such topics to the public sphere, as a means of increasing their political legitimacy, they bring an enormous threat to our society that should be taken very seriously. Following, the EU should ensure that hate speech should be prevented and countered effectively, encouraging cooperation among all social actors which is the only way to reinforce peaceful living together in diversity in today's Europe. The EU needs to revive its vision of European values and bring them back to the centre of political action. A strong stance against right-wing populism must include consistent handling of populist threats to democracy and democratic values. Politicians should never capitulate in front of populist pressure, and wherever possible, legal bases have to be activated.

Although institutions such as The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) is strictly monitoring all Member States and making recommendations for dealing with any problems of racism and intolerance identified there, in some countries there is still a lot to do about effective quality and access to rights, hate speech and motivated violence, and integration and inclusion. For example, in countries such as Bulgaria, the problem with the recognition, dissemination, legislation and practice in combating bias-motivated crimes is extremely serious. There is a large number of vulnerable individuals who fall victim to various forms of crimes motivated by different types and various degrees of bias, but these crimes are rarely brought to the attention of the law-enforcement authorities and even when they are, they often remain unpunished. Both the legislation for combating them and the standards for their investigation and punishment in Bulgaria are deficient and sometimes discriminatory, as well as they are still not in line with international standards. Law-enforcement bodies should fight against bias-motivated crimes, but also there is an urgent need of the involvement and commitment of the entire civil society, that can report such crimes and assist the victims. In addition, very often the unpunished preaching and incitement of racist and xenophobic hatred and violence leads to the escalation of crimes committed on the basis of discriminatory incitement.

Under the banner of “family values”, in 2020 Hungary banned adoption by same-sex couples, barred transgender people from changing their legal gender and refused to ratify the Istanbul convention, which aims to protect women from violence. This year, 2021, Hungary also passed a law which equates homosexuality with paedophilia and bans “promotion and portrayal of homosexuality” and gender diversity to under-18s, in sexuality education, films or advertisements.

Although Hungary is an EU member country and as such, it should respect human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, definitely we can see that there is a series of laws adopted in the last few years which curtail the enjoyment of human rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Such legislation has introduced new limits to the rights to family life, privacy, non-discrimination, freedom of expression, assembly and association. The laws introduced in the last years fail to address gender-based discrimination and guarantee gender equality in the workplace, and fail to protect women's rights, the rights of the Roma, refugees and asylum-seekers. Although, in September 2018, the European Parliament decided that the state of the Hungarian rule of law and democracy is at such a worrying level that the European Union has to take immediate action, as it can be noticed Hungarian government is still going against the EU values, and the right-wing government is subverting democratic principles and offering inspiration to populist parties across Europe. However, such actions can have a very negative impact on other Member States that can start to follow Hungary's blueprint. In this scenario, it's vital for EU leaders and institutions to send a clear message that they will act when EU values come under threat. Fortunately, the European Commission initially opened an infringement proceeding against Hungary in July, 2021, arguing that the amendments violated the right to freedom of expression and non-discrimination as guaranteed under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, in addition to breaching several other EU directives and principles within the EU Treaty. Following, if the Hungarian government fails to address the concerns, the European Commission could challenge the legality of the measures before the EU's top court.

When politicians of such high standing make statements against minorities rights, it is imperative for the public and private institutions dealing with protection against discrimination to take action. However, these institutions often face a lot of challenges in supporting minorities rights, being their members and volunteers subject to violation of their human rights as well as their properties. Violations most commonly target either human rights defenders themselves or the organizations and mechanisms through which they work. Occasionally, violations might target members of defenders' families, as a means of applying pressure to the defender. For example, women and LGBTI rights defenders might confront risks that are gender-specific and require particular attention.

An example of property and human rights violation was a recent attack on the office and LGBTI community centre "Rainbow Hub" in Sofia, Bulgaria that was attacked and vandalized during a trans community gathering at the end of October, 2021. The community centre was destroyed, its equipment and furniture smashed, and the group coordinator was hit in the face. The worst thing was that the attack was organized by the leader of an ultranationalist political party who is running for president, well known for his LGBTI-phobic actions and statements. Fortunately, the embassies of the United States, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom said in a joint statement that the attack against Rainbow Hub was "senseless", adding their "strongly condemn" and support to the community after the October accident. Following, also the members of the centre called for the involvement of the Bulgarian institutions to investigate, resolve the case and sanction the attackers. Rainbow Hub recently presented a petition to parliament signed by 8,000 people to demand criminalisation of hate crimes as at present

they are not included in the Bulgarian Penal Code and courts treat them as acts of hooliganism. In addition, Bulgaria has also refused to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, better known as the Istanbul Convention, under the pretext that it will open the way to legalising gay marriage. The country's Constitutional Court declared the Istanbul Convention unconstitutional.

Unfortunately, the violent threats against defenders of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights are often not taken seriously by the police and not always investigated properly. The right to peaceful assembly is also often denied to defenders working on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues or, alternatively, the police does not provide adequate protection for such demonstrations when they are taking place. Still Many States do not recognise those working on LGBTI issues as human rights defenders, and NGOs advocating in this area face a lot of challenges, not receiving the support of the public authorities. There are many cases of LGBTI Pride marches that have been banned, and conferences to address these issues shut down in the face of threats from extremists. In some cases, police have protected violent extremists at the expense of peaceful LGBTI participants.

In this negative scenario, States must recognise their responsibility to address human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity and accept these issues within the international human rights framework. If this doesn't happen the Council of Europe and its established independent bodies in charge of monitoring the EU standards, should not only provide recommendations to its Member States, but also have to take respective measures if results are not achieved, or the changes are not enough to complain with what was requested by them. Moreover, protection programmes and focal points need to be set up within governments and other institutions with specific awareness and education programmes on the specific needs of LGBTI defenders, as well as emergency response mechanisms and funding need to be available to those facing urgent risk.

Although we were talking about the LGBTI defenders, it's should be underlined that the situation with other human rights defenders is quite similar. They often might experience the same threats and face the same challenges. Therefore, appropriate measures should be taken for the protection of all human rights defenders. National human rights institutions and mainstream human rights organisations need to better integrate minority issues within their mandates and activities, as well as police need to be trained in their obligation to protect all people, regardless of their race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. The Council of Europe and all other relevant public bodies should ensure that hate crimes and violent attacks are condemned by the Member States, and that they are hardly working on reducing the minority sentiment and exclusion in the countries. There is a need for urgent steps to protect minorities against such attacks and ensure access to justice, as well as countries leaders should send immediate, strong, public, and consistent messages that violent crimes which appear to be motivated by prejudice and intolerance will be investigated thoroughly and prosecuted to the full extent of the law. For this, governments should ensure that police and investigators—as the first responders in cases of violent crime—are specifically instructed and have the necessary procedures, resources and training to identify, investigate and register bias motives before the courts, and that

prosecutors have been trained to bring evidence of bias motivations and apply the legal measures required to prosecute hate crimes. Only when there is collaboration and open dialogue between governments, other official bodies and civil society groups, there is a real opportunity for countries to combat violent hate crimes and ensure that the rights of minorities are fully respected.

## VI. Conclusion

As was said before, there has been a huge migration wave due to wars, political and economic disorder. In addition to that, COVID-19 pandemic has isolated and marginalized communities and highlighted the urgent need for a more effective and comprehensive policy response at national and European level. There are some positive impacts already for minority human rights. For example, in 2019, Spain was awarded with Global Equality Champion Award from the Human Rights Campaign Foundation for its leadership in advancing the rights of the LGBTQ community. In Baltic region, The Human Rights Guide was launched in March 2016. It is an online information and education resource and a self-help tool. It offers help in understanding human rights in different situations.

But there is still a lot of work to be done, in order to achieve better policies for minorities. There are some activities for individuals to do, in order to help. For example, volunteer or donate to global organisations, choose fair trade and ethically made gifts, stand up against discrimination and many more. For bigger impact, it is best to familiarize yourself with public policies and how to influence the policy makers. For improving human rights issues, there must be improvements for policies. We recommend that for better awareness among children and young people, human rights education should be included in school curriculums. Also, we recommend that laws and policies support and/or provide counselling and educational intervention for minorities, who deal with discrimination and of course for other individuals whose human rights have been violated. Additionally, we recommend that laws and policies should ensure that economic, social and cultural rights can be legally claimed and arbitrated. Lastly, we would like EU policymakers to try to be more inconsistent with sanctions against human rights violations.



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