

## SPECIAL REPORT

# **The Council of Europe’s Programme on Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP): Its utility for university teaching**

Julian Lonbay\* and Katerina Spanou\*\*

## **Introduction**

Many universities will be teaching in the fields covered by the Council of Europe programme on human rights education for legal professionals, commonly known by the acronym ‘HELP’. The topics covered by the HELP online courses are very broad and expanding all the time. As one might expect, they include courses on aspects of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the European Social Charter (ESC), as well as courses covering other significant conventions of the Council of Europe including areas such as bioethics,<sup>1</sup> violence against women,<sup>2</sup> the environment and human rights,<sup>3</sup> trafficking in human beings<sup>4</sup>, cybercrime<sup>5</sup> and data protection<sup>6,7</sup>. HELP courses also cover the European Union (EU) legal system, where applicable, by

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\* UK representative for training at the Council of the Bars and Law Societies of Europe, Hon. prof. University of Birmingham.

\*\* Council of Europe (member of the HELP team until October 2023).

<sup>1</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/help-course-brief-right-to-the-integrity-of-the-person-bioethics-/16809e2a6a> (Last accessed 30 July 2024)

<sup>2</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/course-brief-violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence/16808f184b> (Last accessed 30 July 2024)

<sup>3</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/help-eco-brief-en-/1680a2308c> (Last accessed 30 July 2024)

<sup>4</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/help-course-brief-combating-trafficking-of-human-beings/16808b4f42> (Last accessed 30 July 2024)

<sup>5</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/cybercrime-electronic-evidence-brief-2022-eng/1680a6ccea> (Last accessed 30 July 2024)

<sup>6</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/help-course-brief-data-protection-and-privacy-rights/16809cd3a7> (Last accessed 30 July 2024)

<sup>7</sup> A full list of current HELP courses and courses to be updated or newly developed is appended and can also be seen at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/help/courses> (Last accessed 30 July 2024)

including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and relevant EU law and jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU).

This note runs through how this might work and is designed to introduce university professors to the HELP programme and how it can be used in their teaching.

## **The origins of HELP**

The mandate for HELP stems from the Council of Europe (CoE) Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2004)<sup>4</sup> on the European Convention on Human Rights in university education and professional training.<sup>8</sup> This was reinforced by the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation (2019)<sup>5</sup> on the system of the European Convention on Human Rights in university education and professional training.<sup>9</sup> According to Recommendation (2019)<sup>5</sup>, member States are asked to:

- ensure university education on the system of the European Convention on Human Rights is in line with the needs and expectations of the different categories of the public,
- enhance the effectiveness of such university education ... by ensuring that each category of the public has access to the necessary tools to comply with the obligations stemming from the Convention.

Universities and, in particular, law schools are therefore targets within HELP's core mandate.

## **What is HELP?**

The CoE Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) programme supports the CoE Member States in implementing European standards at the national level. HELP is the main educational platform of the Council of Europe for legal professionals and others, including law students. Its aim is to train current and future judges, lawyers, and prosecutors, and university students, but also, other non-legal professionals (i.e., health and medical specialists, prison and probation staff, law enforcement, journalists, Ombudsperson staff,

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training/20-committee-ministers-recommendation-rec-2004-4-member-states-european-convention-human-rights> (last accessed on 30 July 2024).

<sup>9</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168098396e> (last accessed on 30 July 2024).

NGOs, etc.) about how to understand and use international and European human rights standards and to promote good practices. This is done through the HELP online courses which provide high quality training thus enabling legal professionals (and others) to protect human rights more effectively at the national level as well as keeping up to date with the ever-evolving European standards and case-law of the European courts.

National Justice Training Institutions (JTI), Bar Associations (BA) and University students (with a focus on law students) are the natural target audience for HELP's online courses.

### **The development of HELP online courses**

HELP courses are developed with CoE in-house expertise (including that of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and they cover various human rights-related topics, reflecting the different areas of work of the Council of Europe. HELP also collaborates closely with the European Union (EU) Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) and other relevant partners such as the European Judicial Training Network (EJTN), the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), and for specific topics, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Organisation for security and co-operation's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE ODIHR).

Apart from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), HELP covers other instruments such as the European Social Charter (ESC) or CoE Conventions in key areas like data protection, violence against women, trafficking, cybercrime, bioethics and so on. As many HELP courses cover both the Council of Europe (CoE) and EU legal systems, it helps legal professionals and other to acquire skills and knowledge in a coherent way with regards to both CoE and EU standards.

The relevant steps for the development of a new HELP course include the selection of the course topic, the selection of course authors and the team that will contribute to its drafting, and the various stages of the course building, with several Working Group meetings held at regular intervals over a period of approximatively twelve months. The update of an existing HELP course follows the same main steps and takes approximately the same amount of time

and effort, especially if both content and visual design are being substantially updated.

The course material, which is produced by the consultants, is transformed into an online learning format which is called SCORM. HELP courses are composed of several modules and apart from their text, they contain interactive materials that enable learners to deepen, improve and check their knowledge and skills. HELP courses are developed in English and then made available in the [CoE HELP e-learning platform](#) (which is based on Moodle).<sup>10</sup> The length of a HELP course ranges from 3 to 13 hours.

### **Accessibility and format of HELP courses**

All HELP courses are accessible free of charge, user friendly and self-paced (no start, end date or rhythm imposed). The platform includes model HELP courses (in English), as well as translated HELP courses (in various languages). The CoE HELP catalogue now contains [57 online courses](#) on various human rights topics,<sup>11</sup> with over 610 language versions and almost 500 national (see more about national versions below in the ‘‘HELP in tutored format’’ part) versions already available online – in English or other European languages on the CoE HELP e-learning platform.

HELP courses are interactive, visual and practical. They contain useful material on the international and European legal framework and jurisprudence (e.g. case-law of the ECtHR and the CJEU), case-studies, practical tips and useful explanations on how to invoke or implement human rights principles and standards.

### **How to access HELP courses**

HELP courses are accessible to all users<sup>12</sup> that have an account on the HELP e-learning platform.<sup>13</sup> In order to create an account, it is necessary to go to the CoE HELP e-learning platform (<https://help.elearning.ext.coe.int/>), click on the ‘‘Log in’’ button and then on the ‘‘Create New Account’’ button under the ‘‘Is this your first time here?’’. Then, choose a username and password and

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<sup>10</sup> <https://help.elearning.ext.coe.int/> (last accessed on 30 July 2024).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/help/courses> (last accessed on 30 July 2024).

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/help/help-online-platform-videos> (last accessed 30 July 2024).

<sup>13</sup> <https://help.elearning.ext.coe.int/login/signup.php> (last accessed 30 July 2024).

complete all the mandatory fields. When this is done, click “*Create my new account*” at the bottom of the page. An email will be sent to the email address provided for validation and account activation.

Once the account is activated, the user is ready to start accessing the HELP courses. To do so, the user must first log in to the platform and then can enrol in the course of his/her interest. To access a specific course, (s)he should click on the language ISO code (3-character language code in which the user wishes to follow the course). Once logged in, the user has access to the self-learning course page and can start going through the modules of the course. All the courses in which a user is enrolled can be found on their dashboard by clicking the ‘*My Courses*’ button (in the upper right-hand corner of the screen). There are tutorials on how to create a HELP account and on how to navigate in the HELP Platform and in the HELP courses.<sup>14</sup>

Courses are divided into topics and usually there is a separate topic for each course module (SCORM package). To launch a course module, click on the title of the SCORM package or in some courses the “start” image. Once inside the course module, it is very easy to navigate; the user just needs to click on the arrows to go forward or backward and (s)he can also search for a specific section via the menu. As the user advances through the module, the system will record his/her progress and will mark it ‘*complete*’ when (s)he finishes the module. The user can then proceed to the next course module (SCORM package).

Completion tracking is saved automatically, which allows users to start and stop the course at any time, by just closing the course window. Specifically, the user can access the SCORMs as many times as (s)he wishes. Any time (s)he goes into the SCORM, (s)he will get a question box asking if (s)he wishes to resume where (s)he left off or not. If (s)he presses YES, the system will respect his/her progress and take him/her to the part of the module where (s)he left off. If NO is pressed, the system will take the user to the beginning of the module and progress for that module will be lost.

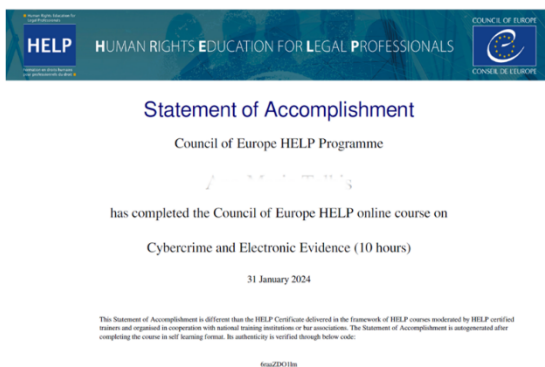
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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/help/help-online-platform-videos>. Once you have a HELP account further help is available at <https://help.elearning.ext.coe.int/course/view.php?id=5560#section-2> (last accessed 30 July 2024).

As access and navigation though the courses are completely open, legal professionals and others tend to come back to courses previously completed in order to retrieve practical information needed for their work. Thus, HELP courses are not only learning tools, but are also widely used as working tools by legal professionals, or revision tools for students.

## **HELP in self-learning format**

Participants that complete self-learning courses on the HELP platform can generate a ‘Statement of Accomplishment’ for each course directly from within



the course. These can be generated only if all the online modules (SCORM packages) of the respective course are completed, and a minimum amount of time has been spent on the course. This makes the self-learning mode of using HELP easy for using as part of a course formative assessment or unit of study.

## **HELP in tutored format**

In contrast to self-learning courses, which can be taken individually or in groups, tutored courses are delivered to selected groups and are organised in co-operation with JTIs (National Training Institutions), BAs (Bar Associations) or Universities. There are three stages applied to tutored courses, namely:

- development of the national version,
- course launch and implementation, and
- course evaluation.

National HELP tutors play a key role in all three stages. When contextualised to the national legislation and practice, HELP courses contribute to the objectives set in [the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec\(2019\)5](#) on the system of the European Convention on Human Rights in university education and professional training<sup>15</sup> and the EU Judicial Training strategy (2021-2024)<sup>16</sup> as well as to meeting the training needs identified by various Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms, including the Execution Department with regard to the execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

It is open to professors to become national HELP tutors, by following a CoE HELP Training of Trainers course. The national contextualisation includes adding into the HELP module the relevant law and practice of your jurisdiction. For non-English speaking courses it would also include proof-reading the translation of the course from English into your jurisdiction's language.

When launched in tutored format, HELP courses have a normal duration of two to four months, with about two weeks dedicated to each module at a pace of one to two hours of learning time per week. This does not include additional readings, but just all the compulsory materials and assignments. These durations can be varied to suit the audience. Often Council of Europe officials will attend the launch of a tutored course.

## **HELP and Universities**

The HELP courses are easily accessible and freely available. They are all initially drafted in English but are steadily being translated into other languages. The courses are interactive and visual and can be followed in a self-learning mode. This makes them ideal for use in the university setting. They could be used as stand-alone add-ons, or introductions to topics by students, or as part of formative assessments or even, as a training material for moot court competitions. The courses vary in length but are divided into modules which, separately, could be used by professors as part of the subject they teach.

The diversity of the HELP courses enables their use in universities depending on the level of knowledge or topical interest of the students. For example, Bachelor students can take some of the more basic HELP courses, such as the

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<sup>15</sup> See footnote 9 above.

<sup>16</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2020-12/2\\_en\\_act\\_part1\\_v4\\_0.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2020-12/2_en_act_part1_v4_0.pdf)

course on “Introduction to the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights”. The more specialised courses (e.g., “Data Protection and Privacy Rights”, “Violence Against Women”, “Refugee and Migrant Children” etc.) can be offered to more advanced students, including Master and PhD students. Some courses can very well supplement core subjects, such as the HELP course on “Procedural Safeguards in Criminal Proceedings and Victims’ Rights” that can be integrated in the Criminal Procedural Law curricula. However, the selection/choice of the HELP courses to be provided to the students depends entirely on the professor. The HELP Secretariat does not interfere and is there to support the access to the selected course (s) for students.

University professors can also contact the HELP Secretariat through the [online contact form](#)<sup>17</sup> to enquire about the creation of a virtual ‘classroom’ of a HELP course in the HELP online platform for their group of students. If the University has its own e-learning platform, or virtual learning environment (VLE), the HELP Secretariat can also provide a HELP course, or parts of a HELP course, to the University’s platform.<sup>18</sup> These pages are not accessible for the other users of the HELP Platform. The advantage is that professors can add other materials in addition to the HELP course and can enrol/disenroll students themselves, as well as follow their progress via the e-learning tools available in their VLE. In such cases the method of reporting statistics to the Council of Europe will be communicated when such a course is requested.

## **HELP in Law Schools**

HELP’s courses have already been used as additional educational materials at some law schools. For example,

the HELP course on “Admissibility criteria in applications submitted to the ECtHR” was offered to groups of students from Glasgow University in the UK

- the HELP course on “Asylum and the ECtHR” was offered for law students and PhD candidates at the Belgrade Law School in Serbia

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/help/contact> (Last accessed 30 July 2024).

<sup>18</sup> The HELP platform uses Open LMS in Moodle SaaS mode and relies on SCORM packages to launch the course zip files. Should a course be hosted on the University platform it must be compatible to receive .zip files for course SCORM packages to run.



- the HELP course on “Fight Against Racism, Xenophobia, Homophobia and Transphobia” was offered to law students from the West University of Timisoara in Romania
- In Turkey 3 HELP courses “Introduction to the European Convention on human rights” “Asylum and ECHR” and “Child-friendly Justice” were used in 4 Universities [law faculties] covering nearly 700 students
- “Bioethics” HELP course was offered in Armenia for a group of students
- The HELP course on “Labour Rights as Human Rights” was offered for lawyers and students in Ukraine
- Raising awareness event for 95 representatives of higher education institutions from different regions of Ukraine, in co-operation with the Ministry of Education
- Raising awareness events in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan)

### **Experiences from Professors and students in using HELP courses**

Alla Fedorova: Professor of International Law, Institute of International Relations of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

In 2018, the HELP course “Introduction to the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights” was proposed to Master students of International law program as a complementary element within the discipline “Council of Europe Law” for the first time. Considering the 98% of successful completion and multiple positive remarks, we have realised usefulness and interest the HELP platform holds for students. Notwithstanding the repetition of topics and materials of the HELP course during the lectures or seminars, students emphasised the possibility to consolidate the material on topic in a clearly structured, systematic way with the HELP course. Moreover, the vast majority of students express their willingness to try other courses. Inclusion and usage of HELP courses gradually have

been developing but it has flourished during Covid and war time.

Nowadays, several courses, such as “Introduction to the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights”, “Labour rights as human rights”, “Introduction to the European Social Charter”, “Property Rights” are included to the relevant disciplines within educational bachelor and master programmes as integral obligatory part. “Admissibility criteria”, “Business and Human Rights”, “Pre-trial investigation and the ECHR”, “International cooperation on criminal matters”, “Prohibition of ill-treatment”, “Anti-discrimination” are also included in the educational process as additional part of the relevant disciplines. More than 90% of students have obtained the certificate of successful accomplishment. Many other HELP courses are recommended by professors as complementary, extra activity.

Jim Murdoch: Professor of Public Law, University of Glasgow

(Excerpts from the short video about [HELP in Universities on Vimeo](#)) Students are now very used to so called blended learning particularly after the pandemic. This can mean a number of things including actively finding sources. And we are certainly finding that students once aware of the HELP Programme, are now reverting to it in order to find out a little more about their subject.

Tarlach McGonagle: Professor of Media Law, Universities of Leiden and Amsterdam

(Excerpts from the short video about [HELP in Universities on Vimeo](#)) One way of using HELP courses is also in the context of individual research projects whether the students are writing research papers or Thesis. It is an ideal starting point along with other resources when they want to orient themselves within broader topic. After you have introduced the main topics, you can point the students towards these HELP courses for further depth and exploration. The intuitive design of the HELP courses and the interactive features and the appealing visual presentation, that, speaks very directly and engagingly to the students.

Kirsty Robinson: Student, University of Glasgow

(Excerpts from the short video about [HELP in Universities on Vimeo](#)) I am using HELP courses to further enhance my knowledge on human rights. In my human rights law course we actually use HELP Programme to go over freedom of expression and human trafficking and we use this to further supplement our knowledge for the final exam. It is really easy to use. I just followed the link to the platform and then I chose the language directly in the video and that was it! I was able to certify my training through an e-certificate that I received at the end of the training so that to demonstrate that I had completed the courses and met all of the required criteria.

Linda Morina, Student, University of Pristina, Kosovo

I followed in a tutored online format the HELP course on “Violence against Women and Domestic Violence”. An important part of the training was devoted to the knowledge of the different types of violence against women and domestic violence and the signs we can recognize. The training provided a deep insight into the role we can play as individuals and as members of society in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. The training in this field was a valuable experience and had given me a new perspective on the concerns related to these sensitive issues in our society. Therefore, I would suggest to everyone, regardless of age and gender, to attend HELP courses, which are organized within the framework of the Council of Europe projects, since equipping with the necessary knowledge allows us to understand, help, protect ourselves and others from violence.

Albana Shala, Post-graduate student, University of Pristina “Hasan Pristina”, Kosovo

I followed in a tutored online format the HELP course on “Violence against Women and Domestic Violence”. The course served me as a form of relaxation after the commitments of the day to read and learn something new that is so actual and that there is so little school literature related to this sensitive topic. At first, it was fun to read the materials that were assigned to us for reading and research, then I was

looking forward to the moment of the quiz and challenging myself about the things I read. And even more, my desire for engaging in the course intensified further, especially after evaluation we received from the tutor for every assignment we submitted. The tutor's remarks with regard to our assignments were so inspiring, that it made me choose the Master Thesis topic on the same field, and today I am working on my research on **"Content, character and scope of the obligations of the States according to the Convention of the Council of Europe on preventing and combating violence against women and violence in the family: Implementation in the Republic of Kosovo"**. From this course my professional focus increased a lot in this sphere. This course increased my desire to be a part of other courses and to have as much professional baggage as possible, where I also completed the course on **"Women's Access to Justice"**, where it was also a very sensitive and very current topic. I think that these courses should definitely start being applied to the Universities of the Republic of Kosovo, this is because the benefits that I received from these two courses are almost as much as a school in itself, especially when these courses have topics that are current but for which there is not a lot of literature in the Universities. I constantly see announcements about these courses and I always tell my social circle about the benefits and gains I got from these two courses. I am very grateful for this opportunity that was provided to me!

Teuta Vuciterna,

I followed in a tutored online format the HELP courses on "Violence against Women and Domestic Violence" and on "Asylum and Human Rights". Both courses offered me the opportunity to become more familiar with some of the legislation and practices applied in Europe in relation to these thematic. While attending the HELP course on "Asylum and Human Rights", I gained a very good knowledge of the relevant legislation and the case-law of the ECtHR. I became more familiar with the problems and solutions in the field of asylum, which will serve me a lot in the future. During the HELP course – **"Violence against women and domestic violence"**, I became familiar with the legislation and protection mechanisms for victims of violence, I learned about the mechanisms that are in function of protecting women who are exposed to domestic violence and I got to

know the concrete provisions of the European conventions relating to this thematic. The experience and knowledge gained during these two courses has helped me a lot in my daily work withing the justice system of Kosovo.

## Appendix

### *List of HELP courses*<sup>19</sup>

- Access to Justice for women
- Admissibility criteria for applications submitted to the European Court of Human Rights
- Alternative measures to detention and community sanctions
- Alternatives to Immigration Detention
- Anti-discrimination
- Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights
- Asylum and Human Rights
- Business and Human Rights
- Child-friendly Justice
- Children Rights – Children's Rights in digital environment and protection against sexual exploitation/abuse
- Combating trafficking in human beings
- Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) Standards
- Cybercrime and Electronic Evidence
- Data Protection and Privacy Rights
- Ethics for Judges, Prosecutors and Lawyers
- Family Law and Human Rights
- Fight Against Racism, Xenophobia, Homophobia and Transphobia
- Freedom of Expression
- Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming
- Hate Crime
- Hate Speech
- Human Rights in Sport
- Human Rights in the Armed Forces
- Internal Displacement
- International Cooperation in Criminal Matters
- International Cooperation in Criminal Matters
- International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights
- Interplay Between the ECHR and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights
- Introduction to the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights
- Introduction to the European Social Charter

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<sup>19</sup> Available online at <http://rm.coe.int/council-of-europe-help-programme-catalogue-of-online-courses/16809e0eb7> (Last accessed 30 July 2024)

- Introduction to Corruption Prevention
- Judicial Reasoning and Human Rights
- Judges Upholding the Rule of Law
- Judicial Reasoning and Human Rights
- Key human rights principles in biomedicine (Bioethics)
- Labour Rights as Human Rights
- LGBTI Persons in the Asylum Procedure
- Managing foreign national prisoners/EuroPris
- Personal Data Protection in Publication of Judicial Decisions
- Pharmaceutical crime and the MEDICRIME Convention
- Pre Trial Investigation and the European Convention on Human Rights
- Procedural Safeguards in Criminal Proceedings and Victims' Rights
- Prohibition of Ill-Treatment
- Protection and Safety of Journalists
- Property Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights
- Quality of Justice - the Work of the CEPEJ
- Radicalisation Prevention
- Refugee and Migrant Children
- Right to Liberty and Security - Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights
- Right to the Integrity of the Person (Bioethics)
- Right to Respect for Family and Private Life - Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights
- Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Personal Data Protection in Public Judicial Decisions
- Temporary Protection in the European Union
- The Environment and Human Rights
- Transitional Justice and Human Rights
- Transition of Migrant and Refugee Children to Adulthood
- Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence
- Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for Law Enforcement

*New Courses / Modules under preparation:*

- Combating sexual exploitation of children (Lanzarote Convention)
- Deportation of Children during Armed Conflicts
- ECHR Knowledge – sharing platform
- Human Rights and the Use of Drugs
- Mental Health and Human Rights