



ENNHRI

European Network of
National Human Rights Institutions

**PROMOTING AND PROTECTING
HUMAN RIGHTS ACROSS WIDER EUROPE**

NHRI Accreditation at a Glance



NHRI ACCREDITATION AT A GLANCE

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are state mandated bodies, independent of government, with a broad mandate to promote and protect human rights.

NHRIs are the only national bodies working on human rights that are accredited periodically to ensure their independence, pluralism, effectiveness and accountability. This makes them unique and crucial actors in the human rights framework, and trusted interlocutors for a variety of actors.

This publication provides a brief overview of the role of NHRI accreditation in the national and international arenas, and outlines the accreditation process.

WHAT IS NHRI ACCREDITATION?

Paris Principles

The Paris Workshop, held in 1991, was a first step in the development of standards for NHRIs. These were subsequently endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 1993 (Resolution A/RES/48/134) and are generally referred to as “the Paris Principles”.

The Paris Principles apply to diverse national and legal contexts, and can be fulfilled by various types of institutions. In order to assist in the application of the Paris Principles in practice, General Observations have been developed as interpretative tools, for application during the accreditation process, and to assist NHRIs in developing their own practices and procedures in compliance with the Paris Principles.

The NHRI accreditation system

“Accreditation” refers to the process put in place to assess and make public the level of compliance of NHRIs with the Paris Principles. NHRIs must meet the following main criteria in order to be considered Paris Principles-compliant:

- A legislative or constitutional basis
- A broad mandate to promote and protect human rights
- Independence from government and other actors
- Pluralism, including through membership, staff and/or effective cooperation
- Transparent appointment, dismissal and security of tenure for members
- Adequate resources, human and financial
- Adequate powers of investigation
- Cooperation with national and international actors, including civil society
- Accountability, in particular through annual reporting

Following the assessment, NHRIs can receive:

- “A-status” if they are in compliance with the Paris Principles
- “B-status” if they are partially in compliance with the Paris Principles
- No status, if they are not in compliance with the Paris Principles

THE ADDED VALUE OF ACCREDITATION

All A-status and B-status accredited NHRIs worldwide come together to form GANHRI, the Global Alliance of NHRIs. GANHRI is made up of four Regional Networks, including ENNHRI, the European Network of NHRIs. GANHRI accredits NHRIs through peer review, with support from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

NHRI accreditation identifies NHRIs as unique institutions, with a special role and status at the local, national and international levels.

National recognition

Accreditation provides legitimacy and standing at the national level. A-status accreditation identifies that an institution operates independently, with expertise, impartiality and accountability on the wide range of issues it addresses. A-status accreditation promotes recognition and trust in NHRIs by national actors, including civil society and state authorities. Recommendations made to NHRIs in the process of accreditation also help their understanding and advocacy of the Paris Principles.

The accreditation of an NHRI also shows a state’s commitment to its international human rights obligations more generally, as A-status NHRIs promote and protect all international human rights standards. Indeed, the UN, Council of Europe and European Union all call for the establishment and A-status accreditation of a NHRI in each of their member states.

THE ADDED VALUE OF ACCREDITATION

International recognition

Accreditation provides evidence at the international level that a NHRI can be trusted as a credible and independent actor. NHRIs have been progressively integrated in the procedures of international human rights fora, with accreditation determining their level of participation.

A-status NHRIs have specific participation rights in UN processes and mechanisms. For example, they have speaking rights immediately following their respective state in the Human Rights Council, for the Universal Periodic Review, and before some Treaty Bodies. In Europe, A-status NHRIs are valued interlocutors for regional mechanisms, such as the OSCE, the Council of Europe and European Union institutions and agencies. Through all of these activities, accredited NHRIs provide a bridging role between the national and international arenas.

A-status NHRIs have voting rights and can hold governance positions in NHRI networks, such as ENNHRI and GANHRI, although decisions are taken by consensus where possible.

Responsibility for NHRIs

NHRIs have privileged access to international and national actors, and they also face considerable obligations and responsibilities. They report annually on the national human rights situation; they are accountable on various levels; and must maintain their independence while cooperating with diverse actors. In order to fulfil these obligations, NHRIs must have adequate resources and apply objective criteria for strategic priorities within their broad mandates.

THE NHRI ACCREDITATION PROCESS: KEY ACTORS

The Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA)

The SCA assesses NHRIs and recommends a status for their accreditation. The SCA is composed of one A-status NHRI from each of the four Regional Networks of NHRIs (Africa, Americas, Asia Pacific and Europe). Each member is elected by their Regional Network for a renewable term of three years, and the Chair rotates between regions. The SCA meets for a week-long session, twice a year, in Geneva.



The SCA meets at the UN headquarters in Geneva to assess NHRIs

The Applicant NHRI

The applicant NHRI initiates the accreditation process, through a written request to the SCA Secretariat. During the accreditation process, it must provide to the SCA all necessary information to show compliance with the Paris Principles. A-status NHRIs are re-accredited every five years, and other NHRIs can apply for accreditation at any time.

OHCHR / SCA Secretariat

OHCHR acts as GANHRI's and the SCA's Secretariat through its Regional Mechanisms, National Institutions, and Civil Society Section (NRCS). It does not advocate for any accreditation classification.

THE NHRI ACCREDITATION PROCESS: KEY ACTORS

GANHRI Bureau

The GANHRI Bureau is composed of 16 A-status NHRIs, four from each of the four Regional Networks. The Bureau takes the final decision on NHRI accreditation, based on the recommendation of the SCA, any challenge from the applicant NHRI, and all other relevant information.

Regional Network Secretariats

A representative from each of the Regional Networks Secretariats may attend the SCA as an observer. They assist SCA members in understanding any relevant regional context. They also assist their members to participate in the process. They do not advocate for any accreditation classification.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

CSOs and other actors can provide information relevant to the accreditation of the applicant NHRI, at least four months before the SCA review. The applicant NHRI is sent all third party submissions, and has the opportunity to respond to the information in advance of the accreditation review.

THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS: STEP BY STEP

1. An NHRI submits an application to GANHRI

The NHRI is invited to submit its application to the SCA Secretariat at least four months before the scheduled meeting of the SCA. It must provide the Statement of Compliance and all supporting documentation in a working language of GANHRI (Arabic, English, French or Spanish). CSOs and other actors can also provide information to NRCS at least four months prior to the scheduled meeting of the SCA. This information is shared with the applicant NHRI for response.

All information submitted for the accreditation review is shared by the SCA Secretariat with SCA members and regional representatives through a confidential database.

Checklist of documentation to provide

- ✓ A Statement of Compliance with the Paris Principles, including any aspects of non-compliance and proposals to ensure future compliance
- ✓ A copy of the founding legislation or other instrument
- ✓ An outline of the organisational structure, including staff and annual budget
- ✓ A copy of the most recent annual report

2. The SCA Secretariat processes the application

Following any requests for further information or clarifications, the SCA Secretariat prepares a summary of the application. The applicant NHRI has an opportunity to comment on the summary before it is provided to the SCA.

THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS: STEP BY STEP

3. The SCA meets to review the NHRI application

The review is based on all documents submitted within the deadline, and the SCA Secretariat summary. OHCHR desk officers and Regional Network representatives are invited, as observers, to provide information from their work with the applicant NHRI.

The SCA discusses the application, and agrees on a list of questions to ask the applicant NHRI. Although NHRIs do not attend the meeting in person, they have the opportunity to respond to all of the SCA's questions by telephone. This helps ensure equal treatment, as not all NHRIs can travel to Geneva for the meeting.

Following deliberations, the SCA agrees on a recommended accreditation status ("A"; "B" or no status), as well as recommended actions to be taken for the NHRI to comply with the Paris Principles. The SCA drafts a collegiate meeting report while in session.

4. The SCA recommendations are shared with the applicant NHRI

The NHRI has 28 days to respond before the recommendation is sent to the GANHRI Bureau. The NHRI can challenge the SCA recommendation, with reasons set out in writing, during this 28 day period.



Following deliberations the SCA agrees on a recommended accreditation status

Challenges to SCA recommendations

The SCA recommendation can be contested by the NHRI under review, through a written challenge addressed to the GANHRI Chair within 28 days of receipt of the SCA recommendation. The challenge, as well as all other relevant information, is sent to the GANHRI Bureau for its review.

If one GANHRI Bureau member supports the challenge within 20 days of receipt, then all GANHRI Bureau members have another 20 days to consider the NHRI's challenge. If a total of at least four GANHRI Bureau members, from at least two regions, support the challenge, then the matter is referred to the next GANHRI Bureau meeting. Otherwise, the SCA recommendation becomes final, through decision of the GANHRI Bureau, at the expiration of the 20 day period.

5. The SCA recommendations are shared with the GANHRI Bureau, which decides on the NHRI's accreditation status.

If no challenges are made to the SCA recommendations, the recommendations are deemed to be approved by the GANHRI Bureau and the decision is final. If the SCA recommends that an NHRI is downgraded from A-status to B-status, the NHRI has one year to provide written evidence of its continued compliance with the Paris Principles. Its A-status is maintained during that period.

6. NHRI acts to address the SCA recommendations

Following the accreditation review, the NHRI must take steps, including advocacy, to address the recommendations. If the NHRI was accredited with A-status, it will come before the SCA for re-accreditation after five years. If the NHRI was accredited with 'B' or no status, it can apply for re-accreditation when it believes sufficient actions have been taken to fulfil the SCA recommendations.

At the time of re-accreditation, the SCA will consider whether the NHRI has adequately addressed its previous recommendations and, if not, what efforts the NHRI has made to address them, as well as any other changes in circumstances that could impact on the accreditation status.

THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS: ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

Deferral

The SCA may decide to defer an application rather than make a decision on the NHRI status. In this case, the NHRI cannot challenge the decision of the SCA. NHRIs can also request a deferral of their re-accreditation. In this case, the written justifications provided by the NHRI are reviewed, and a deferral can be granted for a limited period, where the request is considered to be reasonable. During that time, the accreditation status of the NHRI is maintained.

Special Review

If it is considered that circumstances have changed in any way that could affect an NHRI's accreditation status, the SCA may undertake a Special Review. The NHRI cannot challenge an SCA decision to carry out a Special Review. During the Special Review, the NHRI can bring information to the SCA to demonstrate its continued compliance with the Paris Principles. The existing accreditation status of the NHRI is maintained during the Special Review.

Immediate suspension

In exceptional circumstances, the GANHRI Bureau can decide upon the immediate suspension of an NHRI's accreditation status. In this case, The NHRI is notified and can challenge this procedure through the GANHRI Secretariat. Should the challenge receive enough support from the GANHRI Bureau within the time allocated, the recommendation to suspend is referred to the next GANHRI Bureau meeting for decision.

ABOUT ENNHRI

The European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) supports NHRIs from across wider Europe to promote and protect human rights. It carries this out through assisting in their establishment and accreditation; coordinating exchange of information and good practice; providing capacity building; and facilitating engagement with regional and international mechanisms. ENNHRI has an Accreditation Support Group, made up of European NHRIs that have recently gone through the process of establishment or accreditation or served on the Sub-Committee on Accreditation, and who offer peer support from their own experiences.

Further information

- [Paris Principles](#) relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (Annex to General Assembly resolution 48/134 of 20 December 1993)
- [General Observations of the SCA](#)
- [GANHRI Statute](#)
- [Compilation of the Rules and Working Methods of the SCA](#)
- [FRA Handbook](#) on the establishment and accreditation of National Human Rights Institutions in the European Union



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