



Council of the
European Union

**Brussels, 25 June 2024
(OR. en)**

11596/24

**COJUR 70
COHAFA 51**

NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Working Party on Public International Law
Subject:	Report on the implementation of pledges submitted to the 33 rd International Red Cross and Red Crescent conference by the European Union and its Member States.

Delegations will find attached the final version of the Report on the implementation of pledges submitted to the 33rd International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference by the European Union and its Member States.

REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PLEDGES SUBMITTED TO THE 33RD INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT CONFERENCE BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS MEMBER STATES

At the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (ICRCRC), which took place in Geneva on 9-12 December 2019, the EU and its Member States submitted the joint pledges indicated below. In view of the next ICRCRC, which will take place in October 2024, the EU and its Member States¹ have prepared this voluntary report on the implementation of said pledges. The report is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to present some of the actions and best practices of the EU and its Member States to implement the commitments undertaken. The contributions of Member States presented in this report are without prejudice to the contributions appearing in their respective national reports and do not necessarily reflect positions agreed within the EU and its Member States.

Pledge 1: Strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) through its promotion, dissemination and implementation

Insufficient respect for and observance of the rules of international humanitarian law (IHL) remains an abiding problem, despite recent efforts to improve the prevention, cessation and repression of IHL violations. Anti-personnel landmines, cluster munitions, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war continue to pose a serious threat to people's life and health. Proper training in, dissemination and implementation of IHL especially in peacetime, is required to ensure better compliance with IHL in time of armed conflict.

The EU and its Member States therefore pledge to:

- *use the available mechanisms at national, regional and international level for strengthening respect for IHL and continue to explore opportunities, both legal and operational, to improve IHL compliance;*
- *strengthen the visibility and coherence of EU action for the promotion of IHL and, in this respect, continue to support the work of the European Union Special Representative for Human Rights, whose reinforced mandate includes contributing to the implementation of the Union's positions in the area of promoting compliance with IHL;*
- *improve implementation of IHL, strengthen cooperation with their respective National Red Cross Societies, which, under the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, have a recognized role in assisting their governments in disseminating IHL, and cooperating with them to ensure respect for IHL;*
- *further support the implementation of relevant non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control treaties in order to ensure respect for IHL;*
- *advocate, as appropriate, in support of international instruments seeking to address humanitarian hazards of explosive remnants of war, cluster munitions, improvised explosive devices and anti-personnel landmines.*

¹ 16 Member States have contributed to this report: AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EL, FI, HR, IE, IT, LT, NL, RO, SE, SI, SK.

The EU, and its Member States and the EU National Red Cross Societies pledge to, according to their respective mandates, and in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the 1949 Geneva Conventions:

- *adopt the necessary legislative, administrative and practical measures to ensure and further strengthen domestic implementation of IHL;*
- *strengthen their efforts to promote and disseminate IHL inside and outside the EU, in particular to the armed forces, as well as armed non-state actors, humanitarian and medical personnel, including local humanitarian actors and other groups or individuals who may encounter the application of IHL in their work;*
- *promote and strengthen the role and work of National IHL Committees and cooperation amongst themselves.*

EUROPEAN UNION

During the reporting period, the European Union has been very active in the promotion and dissemination of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

The EU has advocated for the meaningful implementation of the 2022 EWIPA Declaration. The European Commission has organized several advocacy events: a panel discussion on urban warfare at the 2023 European Humanitarian Forum, a Humanitarian Talk at the 2024 Humanitarian Forum (‘Protecting Civilians in Conflict and Recovery: Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and the Link to Landmines and Explosive Ordnance Contamination’), an internal event on advocacy for protection, using the example of EWIPA in December 2022, as well as several internal presentations to raise awareness. Additionally, the EU’s humanitarian aid budget has financed a policy project implemented by Humanity and Inclusion. The project focuses on the humanitarian consequences of EWIPA and aims to address some key gaps, namely data collection on civilian harm. It will also enable better dissemination and exchange of information and good practices, through evidence-based advocacy and promoting interaction between governments, civil society and international organisations.

During the reporting period, the EU continued to advocate for and support initiatives designed to improve compliance with international humanitarian law and safeguard the humanitarian space, in particular reaffirming its strong commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. The EU remained active in promoting respect for IHL by using its wide range of tools included in the EU Guidelines on promoting compliance with international humanitarian law, adopted in 2005 and updated in 2009. The Guidelines underline the EU’s commitment to promoting compliance with IHL and provide the EU’s main tools in its relations with third countries. These operational tools are: political dialogue, general public statements, demarches, restrictive measures, cooperation with other international bodies, including UN and relevant regional organisations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), crisis-management operations, individual criminal responsibility and training.

Since 2018, an Annual report on the Implementation of the EU Guidelines on Promoting Compliance with IHL is issued. Since 2021, this annual report² has been launched publicly by the Presidency of the Council of the EU during an ad hoc online event.

In the multilateral fora, as well as through high-level dialogues, donor conferences, political demarches, field missions, and bilateral dialogues, the EU has been very active in raising its voice

² https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/67000/20223869_pdf_qc0722720enn_002.pdf

against violations of international humanitarian law. Among others, the EU was vocal on IHL matters in a range of international organisations and bodies. For example, the EU took part in open debates of the UN Security Council, including the debates on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, where its statements frequently underlined the EU's commitment to IHL.

In 2021, the EU co-organised, together with France and Germany, a high-level side event at the margins of the UN General Assembly Ministerial Week on how to reinforce IHL monitoring and improve compliance. In 2022, the EU co-organised, together with Belgium and the Democratic Republic of Congo, a high-level side event in the same forum on promoting accountability for IHL violations, especially sexual and gender-based violence.

In March 2022, the EU held its first European Humanitarian Forum, with IHL at the center of discussions. The Forum gathered EU Member States, donors, partners from around the world with the aim to foster innovative thinking both at high-level and technical level. On this occasion, a ministerial session on improving compliance with IHL to safeguard humanitarian space was also held. In March 2023, the EU held the second edition of the European Humanitarian Forum, with IHL being one of the key topics. The panel discussions focused, among others, on improving accountability for violations of IHL, urban warfare, protecting children in armed conflicts, humanitarian diplomacy for access, restrictive measures and IHL, as well as the protection of humanitarian workers from attacks.

The EU has also raised concerns linked to IHL in public statements. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy frequently issued statements calling on the parties to armed conflicts to respect IHL and condemning any violations. The Commissioner for Crisis Management has also issued numerous statements, calling for respect for IHL, the protection of conflict-affected civilians and rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access. A list of these statements is recorded in the yearly report on the implementation of the EU Guidelines on Promoting Compliance with IHL³.

On 10 March 2021, the Commission issued a **Communication on the EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles**. One of the main objectives of the Communication was to support putting compliance with IHL at the heart of the EU's external action to protect civilian populations, support principled humanitarian action and protect humanitarian and health care workers. In line with the call in the Communication, the Commission has taken steps to establish an EU-level coordination mechanism on IHL to ensure better monitoring of IHL violations in the world, facilitate the coordination of relevant EU actors and support stronger EU humanitarian diplomacy.

As to the dissemination of IHL outside Europe, the EU has been active in advocating for respect of IHL in various conflicts, as well as funding humanitarian actions encompassing the promotion of IHL by the ICRC and other partners. In particular, the EU has engaged in promoting IHL compliance through effective civil-military coordination in relevant contexts. From 2020 to 2023, the EU's humanitarian aid budget also supported projects encompassing dissemination of IHL in a number of countries, such as Ukraine, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Sahel, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Iraq. For example, in Syria and Iraq, the EU's humanitarian aid budget supported projects to prevent and reduce IHL violations through direct engagement with parties to the conflict. In Iraq, military officers received training on IHL and International Human Rights Law.

³ (ihl-report-en-2021.pdf (europa.eu) 2020 Report; Working Party On Public International Law (COJUR) (Europa.Eu) 2021 Report; 2022 report <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/documents-publications/publications/ihl-report-eu-guidelines-2023>).

On anti-personnel mines, the EU continues to support victims of mine accidents, provides mine risk education and, to a certain extent, humanitarian demining. In recent years (2022-23) such activities have been implemented in several contexts around the world, including Ukraine, Colombia, Myanmar, Sudan, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan or Yemen.

The EU has remained committed to ensure **IHL due diligence** in the provision of military support to third countries. EU Training Missions included the promotion of IHL compliance in their training activities. For example, in 2021, the EU included dedicated IHL modules to the military CSDP EU Training Mission in Mozambique. Furthermore, the EU increased its internal capacity on IHL, by providing IHL trainings for EU military, security forces and diplomatic personnel, provided by the European Security & Defence College and joint activities with the ICRC. The 2021 regulation establishing the new NDICI instrument also established that EU action should promote respect for and be rooted in IHL, including when addressing migration and forced displacement-related situations. Among others, under NDICI-GE geographical programmes, the EU provided specific support to partner countries to safeguard IHL in relevant sectors such as human rights, justice – including transitional justice – accountability and the fight against impunity, as well as security sector reform.

In order to better support humanitarian diplomacy, the EU remained committed to strengthening the **monitoring of IHL violations**. To that end, the EU supported several projects aimed at addressing gaps in terms of monitoring IHL violations, strengthening data collection, reinforcing evidence-based advocacy or strengthening monitoring standards.

The EU has continued to advocate for and support the **protection of education** from attacks in armed conflicts, including on the occasion of the International Day to Protect Education from Attack. The EU has also continued to condemn targeted attacks against education and the military use of education facilities, which may constitute violations of IHL. The EU supported the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration commitments and funded measures to keep girls and boys safe from violence, conflict and hazards in and around schools. Protection of education has been explicitly indicated as a priority in humanitarian assistance to Palestine, Mozambique, Greater Horn of Africa, Great Lakes, or West and Central Africa. Since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the EU has dedicated over EUR 100 million for the rehabilitation of damaged school buildings in Ukraine. Responding to and preventing attacks on schools, supporting inclusive aspects of education and protecting students and teachers was jointly called for by the European Commission and UNICEF during the High-Level Conference on Education in Emergencies held in March 2023 in Brussels. On a yearly basis, thanks to our 10% funding that goes to Education in Emergencies support, the EU helped provide access to safe and quality learning at primary and secondary levels to nearly 2 million children affected by crises.

The EU stepped up actions for Children Associated with Armed Conflict, continuing a strong advocacy work, delivering on the commitments made in the first-ever EU's Strategy on the Rights of the Child and funding several projects on this thematic. These actions encompass various activities such as release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and armed groups, provisions of psycho-social support and a dedicated project aimed at improving access to justice mechanisms for children associated with armed conflicts. The review of the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict was officially launched in November 2023.

The EU also supported the implementation of UNSC Resolution 2417 on conflict-induced food insecurity by bringing this topic to the public attention through public statements, including strong condemnation of Russia's attacks on Ukraine's grain facilities, participating in and organising dedicated events, including at the annual European Humanitarian Forum, and financially supporting the gathering of evidence on violations to UNSC Resolution 2417, to help monitor this practice and inform advocacy efforts.

The EU remained concerned about the use of critical infrastructure, such as water supply systems or energy facilities, as strategic military targets by parties to conflicts, and emphasised the need to strengthen the efforts of the international community to advocate for IHL, promote the identification and acceptance of key infrastructures as safe zones and denounce attacks by the warring factions.

The European Union has also increased its **support to the work of National IHL committees**. Through the frame of the EU funded, pilot Programmatic Partnership "Prevention of IHL violations", the ICRC provided technical assistance to national IHL committees, supported the establishment or reactivation of such committees, and facilitated exchanges between committees in different countries. It continued to engage with national IHL committees through its online community platform, which facilitates peer-to-peer exchanges among such committees. As of September 2023, there were 119 national IHL committees worldwide; these included the newly established committees in Estonia and Mozambique (both established in 2022).

As a major humanitarian donor, the EU considers that strengthening compliance with IHL is an important factor when disbursing funds from the EU humanitarian aid budget. The EU continued to support the work of the ICRC, one of the EU's most trusted humanitarian partners, and a key partner in upholding respect for IHL and humanitarian principles. In 2023, the ICRC received approximately EUR 166 million in funding from the EU's humanitarian aid budget. This represented an increase from EUR 110 million in 2020, EUR 120 million in 2021, and EUR 131.5 million in 2022. Among the projects, the EU committed EUR 30 million for a Programmatic Partnership on 'Prevention of IHL violations' in support of the ICRC global prevention programme. The EU also funded humanitarian actions encompassing the promotion of IHL by ICRC and other partners in a number of contexts, such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Ukraine, Sahel, Nigeria, Ethiopia, or Colombia.

The EU continued to be committed to uphold respect for IHL when adopting **EU restrictive measures** and avoid, or, where unavoidable, mitigate, unintended negative impacts of EU restrictive measures on principled humanitarian actions. For instance, the EU introduced humanitarian exemptions in line with UNSCR 2664 into 31 EU regimes of restrictive measures (including 15 of the EU autonomous regimes). Of the EU autonomous regimes involving asset freeze measures which do not have the UNSCR 2664-style exemption, the vast majority include an EU-tailored humanitarian exemption. The EU has systematically raised awareness and discussed with key stakeholders the issue of unintended impacts of EU restrictive measures on the delivery of humanitarian aid and how to tackle these in a joined and multi-stakeholder' approach, for example during the European Humanitarian Forum 2023 in the session '*Safeguarding principled humanitarian action from the unintended negative impact of sanctions and counter-terrorism*'. The EU has also continued to actively liaise with the humanitarian sector and, where possible, work closely with the financial institutions to try to limit the effects of over compliance and de-risking. Moreover, the EU has published several guidance documents aimed at assisting humanitarian operators, banks, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure the continued delivery of humanitarian aid in compliance with EU restrictive measures.

EU MEMBER STATES

EU Member States have continued to adopt the necessary legislative measures to ensure and further strengthen **domestic implementation** of IHL.

During the reporting period Bulgaria, for example, adopted the Law on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and on the Control of Toxic Chemical Substances and Their Precursors and the Law on the Implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Storage, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and Their Destruction, in order to fulfil its obligations under those Conventions.

Reporting Member States fully apply at the domestic level the IHL related provisions of the **Arms Trade Treaty**, consistently with the principles regarding respect for IHL in arms transfers, as enshrined in EU Common Position 2008/944/CFSP on arms export, and sometimes have amended their national export control regime accordingly.

The EU and its Member States have continued to **advocate for compliance with IHL in relevant multilateral and bilateral fora**.

During its term on the UN Security Council from 2021-2022, “Ensuring Accountability” was one of the three core principles guiding Ireland’s Council membership. In practice, this meant promoting IHL, international criminal law, and international human rights law across all regional and thematic files, as well as supporting international courts and tribunals, in particular the International Court of Justice, the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT), and the International Criminal Court (ICC). Ireland (with the United States) initiated and led the negotiation of Resolution 2664, co-sponsored by 26 EU Member States, which introduced an exemption for humanitarian activities in all UN sanctions regimes.

In October 2022, Austria initiated and coordinated a **joint statement** by 70 States in the **UNGA 1st Committee**, which calls for the regulation of and necessity of human control over autonomous weapons systems. In October 2023, Austria initiated the first-ever **UNGA resolution on autonomous weapons systems** (A/Res/78/241) which was adopted with the support of 164 States. The resolution requests the UN Secretary General to submit a report reflecting the views of States on lethal autonomous weapons systems and ways to address the challenges arising from humanitarian, legal, security, technological and ethical perspectives, including the role of humans in the use of force.

One of the themes of the Interactive ILC Dialogue organized by Sweden during the International Law week in the UN 2022 was the protection of the environment in relation to armed conflict. The discussion focused inter alia on the complementarity between the ILC’s work on the protection of the environment in relation to armed conflict and the work of the ICRC to update its Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict.

Other opportunities for IHL advocacy included UNGA’s side events, the World Summit of the Centre of Competence for Humanitarian Negotiations (CCHN) as well as donor forums.

Germany continued to advocate for the “*Call for Action to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law and principled humanitarian action*”, jointly launched by Germany and France in September 2019.

A Core Group of States, including Austria and Ireland, initiated and shaped the negotiations for a **Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA)**. The Declaration was formally adopted in a conference in Dublin on 18 November 2022, and was endorsed by 83 States from all regions (including a large majority of EU and NATO states). The EWIPA Declaration represents an important step forward in the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure.

The **protection of civilians during armed conflicts** has been a priority for EU Member States. Activities focused on limiting the harmful impact of weapons on civilians. In this regard, Austria organised in October 2019 the Vienna Conference “Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare”.

The EU and its Member States have also strengthened their efforts to promote and disseminate IHL inside and **outside** the EU, in particular to the **armed forces**, as well as armed non-state actors, humanitarian and medical personnel.

EU Member States provide regular training on IHL to their armed forces. In Croatia, for example, during regular education and training programs in various phases of military service, members of the armed forces - conscripts, cadets, soldiers, non-commissioned officers and officers - acquire basic knowledge of international humanitarian law, including the rights of certain specific groups that enjoy special protection (civilian population, protection of women and children). Members of the armed forces who are planned to participate in international peace operations, missions or other activities abroad under the auspices of NATO, the EU and the UN undergo special pre-deployment training where they acquire advanced knowledge of international humanitarian law, the rights of children, women and generally protected categories.

The Austrian Defence Academy offers, on a regular basis, trainings, workshops and seminars on IHL and specific aspects thereof to members of the armed forces. These are often also open to other civilian stakeholders.

In Ireland, IHL training to the Defence Forces takes the form of a graduated increase in exposure to IHL practices and methods and is in direct relation to a member’s rise in rank and responsibility within the Defence Forces. The United Nations Training School Ireland (UNTSI) offers training of international officers through specific courses and international seminars.

Besides continuing to develop its training activities on IHL destined to its armed forces, Belgium contributed to the training of the armed forces of other partner countries, including a Zambian regiment for MINUSMA, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic.

Lithuania provides international humanitarian law and international human rights law training to their military personnel assigned to participate in international operations. The subject of international humanitarian law is included in education programmes for the military personnel at all levels, and is also included in the education curriculum for police personnel, secondary schools etc.

Dissemination of IHL within the armed forces and law enforcement authorities as well as the civil society remains a priority for Member States. In this context, Greece has incorporated a number of training activities, including lectures, related to international humanitarian law into the curriculum of the Hellenic Military Academies. Furthermore, the Ministry of National Defence, in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, regularly organizes seminars and workshops for the training of its personnel, both legal advisors and operational staff tasked with the planning and conduct of military operations, on subjects related to the rules and principles of International Humanitarian Law. In Italy, training programs for the various components of the Armed Forces are organised by military academies and military commands present on the national territory.

Since 2019, the Czech Red Cross has organized a number of IHL trainings, some of them exclusively for members of the Czech Armed Forces. The participants further disseminate IHL within the “POKOS” program (Preparedness to Defend the State Program) in elementary and high schools throughout the Czech Republic.

Germany trains its (civilian) police officers and service men/women (soldiers, air men/women, sailors) as required for the deployment in EU missions. Pre-deployment training includes training in international law, including basic principles of IHL. Military contingent leaders are specifically instructed to respect IHL before being deployed in EU military missions.

A few years ago Slovenia established the Peacekeeping Operations Training Centre (POTC), which implements certified training and education for the military, police, civilian functional specialists and other civilian personnel prior to their deployment to peacekeeping operations and missions within the UN, EU, NATO and the OSCE.

Consolidating knowledge about IHL is part of the continuous professional training of the Romanian Armed Forces, the curricula of military educational institutions, as well as of the planning and conduct of domestic or international military operations. The Centre for International Humanitarian Law within the "Carol I" National Defence University plays an important part in the training of the Romanian armed forces in the IHL field.

In 2023, Italy set up a Working Group charged with drafting a new military manual focussed on IHL issues and public international law aspects of military operations abroad.

EU Member States have also focused on enhancing the knowledge about IHL among **civilians**, in particular young people, mainly through dissemination activities often organised in cooperation with educational institutions.

Students from several Member States, including Bulgaria, Slovenia, Ireland and Italy, participated in national IHL competitions, which often include a series of scenarios and a moot court to test students' knowledge of IHL. In Italy, the competition is composed of different gaming ‘thematic stations’ where students will have to act in first person in fictional scenarios, including a visit to a prison camp, an interview with a prisoner of war, or a trial in a criminal court.

Efforts were made to use new technologies and **innovative forms of dissemination** utilizing digital technology and new media formats to enhance the dissemination of IHL.

Bulgaria, for example, launched a social media campaign dedicated to the Red Cross emblem, consisting of several information posts aimed at raising awareness among the civilian population on the proper use of the emblem, prevention of its abuse and procedures in cases of abuse.

The Romanian authorities continued to organize various celebratory events to mark the 14th of May as day of international humanitarian law at national level. The aim of this anniversary is to raise awareness about IHL within the Romanian society. The “Nicolae Titulescu” University (Bucharest) has continued to organize, each year, an inter-university contest of international humanitarian and refugee law. The contest helps bolster the IHL profile and the students’ interest for this subject matter within the academic community.

Romania also adopted legislative measures aimed at strengthening the protection of the Red Cross emblem, by amending its Criminal Code.

Through its project activities, the Bulgarian Red Cross Youth achieved a very high national coverage, with significant presence, especially in the field of education of young people on fundamental principles, common human values and IHL.

Lithuania provides distance-learning military training courses for soldiers on the law of armed conflict, while Bulgaria’s Red Cross has compiled a step-by-step guide for conducting an online social media campaign dedicated to the Emblems, to be disseminated to other national societies. An information database in tabular form with data on Bulgarian academics in the field of IHL, human rights, public international law and other related disciplines has also been prepared.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, the Belgian Red Cross adapted its existing IHL annual course for the general public into an online format. Each thematic module contains activities to be undertaken through a digital learning platform before the course, virtual interactive sessions with the speaker, and some activities to be done after the session to test the participants’ knowledge. This new online format has contributed to increase the number of participants who have an interest for IHL or deal with IHL issues in their professional activities, and allowed them to participate in the course in a more proactive and interactive manner.

In 2023, Belgium also organised the improvisation performance “This is not a target” in cooperation with a troop of artists to raise awareness on the existence of IHL, its relevance and the main concepts, as well as the potential role of citizens in the promotion of better respect for human dignity in armed conflicts. This event was promoted several times on the national radio and in this context, the opportunity was seized to recall to the public the importance of IHL and its respect.

Slovakia, with the collaboration of the Archeofilm festival in December 2023, also screened films related to the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict.

Some Member States have also been working on the official **translation of IHL instruments** into their national languages. For example, in 2021, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland translated the ICRC’s *Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict* into Finnish and organized a workshop on the guidelines. Finland is also currently updating the Finnish translations of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. Slovenia is preparing the translation of the Geneva List of Principles on the Protection of Water infrastructure into the Slovenian language.

In 2021, Italy established the Commission for the Study and Development of International Humanitarian Law. The Commission, composed of representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence, Justice, and the Italian Red Cross, acts as an IHL national Committee and has, among others, the task of contributing to study and research in the IHL sector, promoting initiatives aimed at the wider dissemination and application of IHL rules, stimulating the adaptation of the Italian legal system to them and facilitating coordination between public authorities and other relevant civil society bodies.

Some Member States prioritized robust and transparent **reporting**, where applicable, in accordance with the provisions of treaties in the field of non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control. Germany, for example, publishes a yearly report on its efforts in arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation and ensures timely completion of all relevant reporting requirements in the framework of the above-mentioned treaties.

Austria regularly reports on the implementation of its obligations under international treaties, in particular the NPT, CWC, CCW, APM, CCM and ATT.

The Czech Republic honours its commitments under the treaties in the field of non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control and reports regularly as per relevant agreements. Bulgaria periodically produced and sent to the IHL network bulletins on IHL and related topical issues, including the process of tracking existing arms transfer regimes relevant to compliance with IHL norms and reporting on progress made.

In 2021, Romania approved the first voluntary report on the implementation of IHL at the domestic level. Italy submitted its voluntary report on the implementation of IHL in 2023. Some other Member States, including Austria, Slovenia and Ireland, are in the process of preparing such voluntary reports.

Some Member States, including Austria, Slovenia and Ireland, are in the process of preparing a voluntary report on the implementation of IHL at the domestic level.

Member States have **strengthened cooperation with their respective National Red Cross Societies and National IHL Committees**. During 2020-2023, for example, the Belgian authorities have increased their cooperation with the Belgian Red Cross. Beyond its activities of IHL dissemination towards different target audiences, the Belgian Red Cross was able to engage in cooperation with several Belgian authorities to support them in training sessions and integration of IHL in practice. For example, it worked together with the Ministry of Defence on various IHL dissemination activities. The National Society has systematically been requested to participate in planning exercises with the members of the Belgian armed forces (officers), and occasionally members of armed forces from partner countries (NATO, EU Member States and other countries).

Romania promotes IHL implementation through bilateral meetings of its IHL National Commission with other national committees from neighbouring countries. The Romanian National Commission on IHL had a joint meeting in Chişinău, in July 2023, with the National Commission on International Humanitarian Law of the Republic of Moldova.

The Netherlands has strengthened its cooperation with the Netherlands Red Cross through the establishment of an IHL platform to facilitate continuous information exchanges between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence and the Netherlands Red Cross. Furthermore, as the host state for numerous courts, tribunals, and organizations dedicated to the promotion and enforcement of international law, the Netherlands has played an active role in upholding and enforcing international legal norms.

Austria works closely with the Austrian Red Cross and other relevant stakeholders at the national level in order to promote observance and dissemination of IHL standards. In March 2023, Austria, the Austrian Red Cross and the ICRC organised the European regional conference of National Committees on International Humanitarian Law (NCIHL).

In addition, Austria organises meetings of the National Committee on IHL twice per year, bringing together stakeholders including from the Federal Government (Foreign Affairs, Defence, Home Affairs, Justice, Arts and Culture), the Austrian Red Cross and universities.

Cooperation between the Finnish Defence Forces and the Finnish Red Cross has become deeper with the introduction of new common training modules and themes, such as the protection of environment during conflict. In connection with meetings of the EU Red Cross National Society legal advisors network (European Legal Support Group), the Finnish Red Cross, along with its sister national societies, have regularly shared practices on the promotion, dissemination and implementation of IHL.

Romania reinforced its cooperation with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. In March 2024, agreements with the ICRC and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) were signed, on the privileges and immunities of the ICRC in Romania and on the legal status and establishment of a delegation of the IFRC in Romania. The composition and attributions of the National Commission on IHL were equally reinforced through legislative measures.

Sweden has a close and trustful relationship with the Swedish Red Cross, meeting regularly in the Swedish Defence Council's International Law Council. Sweden also participated in the Fifth Universal Meeting of National Committees and Similar entities on International Humanitarian Law on "Bringing IHL Home through Domestic Law and Policy end of 2021. The Swedish Red Cross has inter alia provided courses on IHL, participated in national legislative work, launched yearly yearbooks on IHL, launched a publication with a humanitarian perspective on the Total defence system in Sweden as well as a publication on Gender and IHL: Practical Implications for Military Operations.

Pledge 2: International Criminal Court and the fight against impunity

Ensuring accountability for the most serious crimes of concern to the international community is essential to support a rules-based international order.

*The EU and its Member States **pledge** to:*

- *support the full implementation of the Rome Statute system, which provides that primary responsibility for bringing offenders to justice lies with States themselves;*
- *support the work and efficient functioning of the International Criminal Court as an important actor in the global fight against impunity, including by upholding its judicial independence;*

- *promote the universality and preserve the integrity of the Rome Statute.*
- *include the fight against impunity for the most serious crimes of international concern as one of the shared values of the EU and its partners through the insertion of provisions concerning the ICC and international justice into its relevant agreements with candidate countries and third parties;*
- *support third States interested in receiving assistance in order to become party to the Rome Statute or to implement it;*
- *together with the ICC, other interested States, international organizations and non-governmental organizations promote and raise awareness of the ICC.*

The EU and its Member States continued to support the work of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and its efforts in combating the impunity of perpetrators of serious crimes of concern to the international community.

EUROPEAN UNION

The EU has provided financial assistance to the ICC, both directly by contributing to the Court's outreach activities, and indirectly, by supporting civil society organisations that support the work of the ICC (such as the Coalition for the International Criminal Court).

The EU has provided EUR 40 million since the ICC's creation. EU's commitment to the ICC is based on Council Decision 2011/168/CFSP⁴, with over 15 support projects⁵. The EU has also focused on helping the Court to counter external attacks and support its independence.

In 2022, the EU launched a special project, devoting up to EUR 7.25 million to enhance the investigative capacities of the ICC's Office of the Prosecutor.

The EU continued to make every effort to further promote the universality and integrity of the Rome Statute, in particular during its regular human rights dialogues with over 40 countries and through systematic demarche campaigns encouraging accession to and ratification and implementation of the Rome Statute. It also organized dedicated high level and cooperation seminars, fostered closer cooperation between States and the Court and provided assistance and guidance to visiting ICC teams through the EU Delegations worldwide in relation to political, logistical, organisational and security matters.

During the reporting period, the EU has systematically included an ICC clause in agreements concluded with third countries, such as the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Kazakhstan in 2020.

Also, the EU has encouraged voluntary cooperation of States with the ICC, such as through agreements on the protection and relocation of victims and witnesses.

The EU and the ICC continue to work together in accordance with the 2006 Agreement on cooperation and assistance, with regular consultations taking place with the organs of the Court and follow-up on requests for assistance by the ICC.

⁴ COUNCIL DECISION 2011/168/CFSP of 21 March 2011 on the International Criminal Court and repealing Common Position 2003/444/CFSP

⁵ Data based on 2022.

The EU has also provided support to the criminal justice systems of different countries, such as Afghanistan, Myanmar/Burma, Georgia, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Guinea, Mali and Uganda. The EU also continued to maintain its support for a number of international criminal tribunals and mechanisms, including the Special Criminal Court in the Central African Republic, the Special Court for Sierra Leone, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, and the UN International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals.

The EU and its Member States also supported the opening in The Hague of the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine, which contributes to national investigations related to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

EU MEMBER STATES

EU Member States were actively engaged in the Assembly of States Parties of the Rome Statute (ASP), some of them acting as focal points on issues of complementarity, universality and non-cooperation, as members of the Bureau, as well as in the framework of the Informal Ministerial Network supporting the ICC.

The EU and its Member States also provided political support to the Court in UN fora. Ireland, for example, used its term on the UN Security Council to promote and defend the Court. In June 2022, it organised an Arria Formula meeting on the relationship between the ICC and the UN and published the Chair's Summary of this meeting in September 2022, with recommendations on how to optimise this relationship. On different occasions, all reporting Member States joined or co-sponsored statements and supported resolutions in support of the ICC, including for the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the Rome Statute in July 2022 and the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute in July 2023.

EU Member States have encouraged States not yet party to the Rome Statute to accede to/ratify it, e.g. within the framework of the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review.

Member States contributed significantly to the Trust Fund for Victims and the Trust Fund on family visits. Some of them also provided support to numerous other ICC-related funds, for example the Prosecutor's Trust Fund for Technological Enhancement and Specialized Capacity; the Special Fund on Relocations; the Trust Fund for the Development of Interns and Visiting Professionals; the Trust Fund for the Participation of Least Developed Countries and other Developing States in the work of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute.

Member States also provide legal assistance to the ICC, for example transfer, transit and enforcement assistance. In order to specifically support the work of the ICC Prosecutor, several Member States have seconded staff to his Office. Sweden has for example provided the ICC with a voluntary financial contribution and secondment of Swedish prosecutors. The Swedish Police Authority has also seconded experts.

During the reporting period, some Member States concluded cooperation agreements with the ICC. Slovenia, for example, concluded an agreement on the enforcement of sentences and Romania adopted a law on judicial cooperation with the ICC, which regulates the procedure for judicial cooperation between the Romanian authorities and the International Criminal Court, in accordance with the Rome Statute.

At the end of 2023, the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic initiated legislative work on the adoption of a draft law on judicial cooperation in criminal matters, which includes a special section on cooperation with international criminal courts. The new and comprehensive regulation responds to the need to regulate the cooperation with international tribunals that might arise in the future and is subsidiary to the regulation of cooperation with the ICC (Rome Statute).

In 2022, all EU Member States, together with several third States, decided to collectively refer the situation in Ukraine to the ICC. A Joint Investigation Team (JIT) has been set up within Eurojust with the participation of several Member States in order to investigate alleged core international crimes committed in Ukraine. The ICC joined the JIT, with the aim of supporting the exchange of information and evidence.

The EU and its Member States continued to be fully committed to the implementation of the principle of complementarity enshrined in the Rome Statute and have striven to increase the capacities of national justice systems through bilateral or EU-financed development programmes. Some Member States, including Finland, promoted criminal accountability by supporting the Justice Rapid Response (JRR) cooperation mechanism that provides States and international organizations with experts to assist with investigations of the most serious international crimes and human rights violations.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute, in July 2023, EU Member States organised a number of activities to mark this historical date, including several commemoration events, seminars and symposiums.

EU Member States also worked on the domestic implementation of the Rome Statute. For example, in 2022 Italy established a Commission responsible for preparing a draft 'Code of International Crime - CIC' whose purpose is to fully implement the Rome Statute into the domestic legal system by adopting substantive legislation on international crimes. The CIC Draft Law is currently being finalized.

Pledge 3: Ratification of international humanitarian law (IHL) instruments

Achieving universality of IHL legal instruments contributes to responsible State behaviour and to reducing suffering during armed conflict.

*The EU Member States **pledge** to:*

- *work towards further participation in the principal IHL instruments and other relevant international legal instruments by considering ratification of those instruments to which they are not yet party;*
- *explore ways of better using existing mechanisms and procedures at the domestic level, such as national IHL committees, to promote ratification and implementation of IHL instruments.*

The EU Member States will consider the ratification of IHL and other relevant instruments to which they are not yet all parties, such as:

- *The 2006 Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance;*
- *The Additional Protocol III to the Geneva Conventions;*

- *The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict;*
- *The First Protocol to the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict;*
- *The Second Protocol to the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict;*
- *Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War (Protocol V) to the 1980 Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of the Certain Conventional Weapons which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects;*
- *The Convention on the Prohibition of Military Use of Environmental Modification Techniques;*
- *The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction.*

The EU and its Member States continued working towards further participation in the principal IHL instruments and other relevant legal instruments that have an impact on IHL.

EUROPEAN UNION

The EU continued supporting third States in their efforts to adopt relevant national legislation pertinent to their IHL obligations. For instance, the EU actively advocated accession to the main IHL instruments, including the Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, allowing for the full application of IHL in the context of non-international armed conflicts.

The EU also continued its outreach activities to support third countries in promoting the universalisation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), and a large number of activities were carried out, including several regional workshops and individual assistance events.

The EU also continued to actively support the implementation and universalisation of non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control conventions and agreements that are inspired by, and often entirely based on, the application of IHL.

These include the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), the UN Programme of Action against the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM).

EU MEMBER STATES

During the reporting period, four Member States⁶ have ratified or were in the process of ratifying the **2006 International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance**. To date, 18 Member States are parties to that Convention.

⁶ FI, SI, LU, RO.

14 EU Member States are party to the **Additional Protocol III to the Geneva Conventions**. To date, all EU Member States are parties to the **1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict**; 24 Member States are parties to its First Protocol and 21 are parties to its Second Protocol.

All EU Member States are parties to the **Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War** (Protocol V) of the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons which may be deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to have Indiscriminate Effects.

Twenty-one EU Member States are parties to the **Convention on the prohibition of military use of environmental modification techniques**.

All 27 EU Member States are parties to the **Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction**.

EU Member States contributed substantially, within the MLA Initiative Core Group, to the adoption of a new multilateral instrument, the **Ljubljana-The Hague Convention on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes and other International Crimes**. Slovenia hosted a Diplomatic Conference in Ljubljana from 15-26 May 2023, where the Convention was adopted on 26 May 2023. In February 2024, the Netherlands hosted a signing ceremony of the Ljubljana-The Hague Convention at the Peace Palace and co-hosted a seminar to explore the implications and impact of the convention on all stakeholders involved in investigating and prosecuting core international crimes. The Ljubljana-The Hague Convention represents a landmark treaty that will help deliver justice to victims of atrocities and strengthen international legal cooperation.

Pledge 4: Protecting humanitarian and medical personnel

Attacks against humanitarian workers and volunteers as well as medical personnel or patients in situations of armed conflicts are to be resolutely condemned, as they constitute violations of international law and reduce humanitarian access to populations in vulnerable situations.

Recalling UN Security Council Resolution 2286, the EU, its Member States and the joining EU National Red Cross Societies pledge:

- *according to their respective mandates, to seek ways of enhancing their support in the implementation of, and respect for the legal framework regulating humanitarian work, especially to enhance the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel, both staff and volunteers.*

EUROPEAN UNION

The EU continued to be active in supporting the protection of humanitarian and medical workers in armed conflicts, including by supporting the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2286. In this context, throughout 2021 it organised a Discussion Series on the safety of Humanitarian and Medical Personnel. The Outcome Document of the Series was transmitted to the UN Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly, and subsequently shared with UN Member States.

The EU was also active in advocating for the respect of UN Security Council Resolution 2286 on healthcare in armed conflict⁷, among others through EU co-sponsorship of a high-level side event at the Protection of Civilians Week, on the occasion of the 5th anniversary of the Resolution.

The EU continued to support, among others in the DRC and in Mozambique, the ICRC's Health Care in Danger Initiative. The EU's humanitarian aid budget also contributed to policy initiatives supporting the protection of humanitarian workers and of healthcare in armed conflicts. For instance, in 2021 the EU funded IRC Germany for an action called "Ending violence against healthcare in conflict". The also EU supported a project by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Action Contre la Faim/Action Against Hunger (ACF), Humanity and Inclusion and Médecins du Monde on the state of play on measures needed to protect aid workers, among others through reinforced security risk management mechanisms, reliable data collection and sharing mechanisms, and enhancing the respect of the humanitarian space, IHL, humanitarian principles and medical ethics.

In addition, the EU continued to support the UN Department for safety and Security (UNDSS) and International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) on supporting the humanitarian community regarding security risk analysis and management. Finally, the EU also supports in some contexts World Health Organisation's Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care (SSA), which systematically collects data on attacks on health care.

The EU has also paid specific attention to the protection of local actors against attacks. The European Commission (DG ECHO)'s guidance on promoting equitable partnerships with local responders in humanitarian settings, published in March 2023, recognizes the gravity of the issue and suggests a number of mitigating measures. These include training, advice, timely information on security risks, and supporting equipment and other means of improving safety and security.

The EU started supporting a new programme called Protect Aid Workers, which will support humanitarian workers with tangible legal, medical, psychological or material support in the context of incidents or imminent threats. Many of these projects take forward recommendations of the above-mentioned Discussion Series.

EU MEMBER STATES

During the reporting period, several Member States introduced or reviewed national legislation, policies and procedures relevant to the provision of humanitarian assistance and medical care in armed conflict, with a view to enhancing compliance with international law in this field. In 2023, Austria, for example, finalized a new Strategy on humanitarian assistance, which recognizes the particular importance of IHL in ensuring the protection of civilians and humanitarian personnel and defines a rights-based approach as a central tenet to humanitarian assistance.

Belgium created an ad hoc working group within its National IHL Committee to analyse the national legal framework on the organization and protection of health care in emergency situations, including in armed conflict. This working group is tasked with analysing the national legal framework which governs the organization of health care and the protection of health personnel, means of transport and infrastructure, to identify legislative provisions that could be strengthened.

⁷ Resolution 2286 (2016) Adopted by the Security Council at its 7685th meeting, on 3 May 2016

In November 2020, the Czech Republic endorsed the Political declaration on the protection of medical care in armed conflicts (2017), based on the UN Security Council Resolution 2286 (2016) and funded a study on how to implement the UNSC Resolution and the Declaration in its national law.

Finland has engaged in regular dialogue with the national Red Cross to assess how to enhance the implementation of the provisions related to humanitarian assistance and medical care in armed conflict in its national legislation.

In relation to the **support to States and non-state actors in enhancing the safety of humanitarian workers and medical personnel**, Austria and Germany support the work of specialised organisations such as Geneva Call or the Centre of Competence for Humanitarian Negotiations (CCHN) that engage with armed groups and de facto authorities, and aim to raise awareness and compliance with international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and their infrastructures, such as hospitals and schools, children, vulnerable populations and humanitarian workers.

In several EU Member States, for example Lithuania and Belgium, **training on relevant norms and rules of IHL on the protection of civilians**, the provision of healthcare and humanitarian access, as well as on the rights and responsibilities of humanitarian and healthcare personnel is an integral part of both routine as well as pre-deployment training for the military personnel. In the Czech Republic, such trainings are organized also for diplomats prior to their posting abroad as well as for implementing partners in humanitarian aid and NGOs.

Some EU Member States, including Belgium, include specific sections on the rights and responsibilities of medical personnel in armed conflict in the modules on IHL provided to groups of officers and non-commissioned officers of the medical component of the national armed forces and, in some cases, also to the civilian medical personnel.

EU Member States, for example Germany and Finland, have supported the dissemination of and training in relevant rules of IHL governing the provision of healthcare and humanitarian aid, for example through annual and ad hoc conferences and seminars.

Member States also implemented different **awareness-raising measures to promote respect for principled humanitarian action**. These initiatives included public communication measures concerning the protection of medical personnel, such as a press release for World Humanitarian Day, and public statements emphasizing the need for respect and protection of medical personnel in the field. Finland co-sponsored a side-event at the ECOSOC humanitarian affairs segment on the protection of humanitarian and health workers. While on the UN Security Council, Ireland sought to ensure that relevant aspects of IHL on the protection of civilians, the provision of healthcare and humanitarian access, as well as on the rights and responsibilities of humanitarian and healthcare personnel were included in resolutions where applicable and appropriate.

In the context of their internal IHL training and dissemination activities, some Member States, for example Finland, focused on strengthening knowledge and awareness of the international obligations related to the protection and facilitation of humanitarian action and medical care in armed conflict. The aim was to enhance the capacities of regional and local Red Cross staff and volunteers to engage with their respective public authorities, in order to facilitate effective humanitarian action.

Some Member States, including Austria and Belgium, worked on cases concerning the misuse of the Red Cross emblem, in particular through their national Red Cross Societies in order to raise awareness about the protection of the medical mission. They also participated in a European-wide social media campaign on emblem protection in 2023 and other campaigns dedicated to the protection of medical care in conflict, including the #NotATarget and #HealthCareInDanger campaigns.

Pledge 5: Humanitarian impact of climate change

Climate change is among the biggest humanitarian challenges of the 21st century. Climate change acts as a threat multiplier and increasingly as a threat to peace and security in its own right, with serious implications across the globe. In the absence of urgent and scaled-up climate action, it will have devastating effects on the most vulnerable people and communities around the world and will lead to an increase of humanitarian needs. There is an urgent need to better manage the rising risks of climate change through better adaptation and resilience building, early warning, early action, anticipatory action and disaster risk reduction.

The EU and its Member States pledge to:

- *strongly support the effective implementation of the existing legal framework dealing with disasters, especially legislation for disaster risk reduction;*
- *improve anticipation of disasters in addition to reacting to them, including better understanding of how climate change may affect disaster risks, and promote forward-looking humanitarian assistance;*
- *enhance preparedness and response capacities of humanitarian actors;*
- *further engage in UNFCCC processes and in the implementation of the Paris Agreement, the implementation of the Agenda for Humanity and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and seek for enhanced synergies.*

EUROPEAN UNION

To fully implement the **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)**, the EU has been working on strengthening disaster resilience thanks to the adoption, with its Member States, of a new European disaster resilience agenda and of five Disaster Resilience Goals. These goals will guide the Union's policy dialogue with partner countries, improving resilience worldwide. The EU will contribute to the UN's Secretary General's Early Warning for All initiative, with several EU Member States announcing new commitments to initiatives such as the Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems (CREWS) and the Systematic Observations Financing Facility (SOFF).

Robust early warnings will enable the EU to scale-up anticipatory action and early action. The EU is also continuing to increase funding for adaptation and climate resilience, with a focus on the most vulnerable countries and on building back better. The EU is engaging constructively in the implementation of new funding arrangements responding to loss and damage, including through climate and disaster risk finance and insurance mechanisms. The EU is also furthering cooperation by strengthening the synergies between development, climate and humanitarian assistance, as well as better management of natural resources to address the root causes of disasters. This is key to building community-level resilience and ensuring that no one is left behind.

The EU continues supporting the preparedness and response capacities of humanitarian actors through its Disaster Preparedness Budget Line, which increased from EUR 76.5 million in 2022 to EUR 78 million in 2023. Through this budget line, the EU supports actions all over the world to strengthen the preparedness of partners, authorities and communities to respond to emergencies, including the development of Anticipatory Action frameworks to be able to act in anticipation to shocks. Additionally, the EU continues mainstreaming disaster preparedness within all its programming, ensuring that all the actions it funds are risk informed. In 2023, 85% of the EU's actions were considered to include preparedness elements in their design. In line with the commitments made in the 2021 Humanitarian Aid Communication, the EU is rolling out a series of pilots to test different approaches to scale up its investment in **Anticipatory Action**. This includes funding to the Start Ready pooled fund managed by the Start Network, testing the use of Crisis Modifiers for Anticipatory Action through pilot actions managed by different partners and a series of workshops with the IFRC to explore ways to refine the Anticipatory Action pillar of the Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) in order to increase the EU contribution to it. The results of these pilots will then inform a more long-term strategy to scale up investment in the “fuel” part of Anticipatory Action.

The “COP28 Dubai Consensus” included outcomes on the global goal on adaptation, the mitigation work programme, finance and loss and damage. One of the key successes delivered at the start of COP 28 was the operationalization of the funding arrangements, including a fund to respond to “loss and damage” in particularly vulnerable developing countries. The EU and its Member States led the way contributing with more than EUR 400 million, over two thirds of the initial funding pledges. The Dubai Consensus will continue featuring in the international climate negotiations and the European Union will continue engaging constructively on it.

EU MEMBER STATES

In Slovenia, the national programme of protection against natural and other disasters, which follows the guidelines of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, has been aligned with Decision 1313/2013/EU⁸ on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism, which is aimed at strengthening Member States' cooperation in providing security and protection for the population, property, and the environment, including cultural heritage, during natural and other disasters, and which promotes greater coherence and efficiency of international rescue operations. In January 2024, the Slovenian Ministry of Defence adopted the Long-Term Guidelines for Enhancing Climate Resilience in the Defence Sector, which set out the objectives and actions to adapt to, and mitigate, the effects of climate change. The Guidelines cover measures to increase energy efficiency, reduce carbon footprints and other negative impacts, and other measures to protect the environment, as well as measures to establish a system for predicting, preventing and managing risks in a changing climate.

Slovenia has also appointed an Ambassador-at-Large for Climate Diplomacy and an Ambassador-at-Large for Water Diplomacy, to foster preparedness and response at national, regional and local levels.

⁸ Decision No. 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism, OJ L 347, 20.12.201

Since 2018 the Czech Republic implements special bilateral DRR and resilience programmes, promoting the implementation of the Sendai Framework for DRR and resilience, supporting development of national DRR plans, Early Warning Systems and localised nature-based solutions in fragile countries, mainly less developed countries.

In 2019, Bulgaria adopted a National Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change and an Action Plan to implement it. The document outlines the strategic framework and priorities for climate change adaptation until 2030. The aim is to reduce the country's vulnerability to climate change's effects and improving the capacity of ecological, social and economic systems adaptation to these effects. In 2022, Bulgaria adopted a long-term strategy for mitigating climate change until 2050.

Romania has approved a National Strategy on Education for the Environment and Climate Change 2023 – 2030. The programmatic document establishes clear actions to increase the degree of education and awareness, among children and young people, regarding sustainable development and environmental responsibility. Additionally, Romania is revising its National Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change for 2024 - 2030 and developing the National Action Plan its implementation during the period 2024-2030.

In 2023, Italy introduced a framework bill 'Post-Disaster Reconstruction' to regulate the coordination of procedures and reconstruction activities in the territories affected by natural or human-triggered disasters, for which the state of emergency of national importance has ceased or been lifted. The bill defines a single and homogeneous model for reconstructions, as well as streamlined and accelerated procedures to speed up post-emergency needs.

Several EU Member States, including Austria, have scaled up preventive and anticipatory measures in their national strategies on humanitarian assistance.

During the reporting period, Greece has initiated the National Dialogue on Climate Crisis. In this framework, a survey concerning views and positions on climate change has taken place with the active participation of parliamentary parties, the academic community and civil society. The results of the survey reflect the concern about the challenges and threats for the environment and the need for the elaboration of a new “climate culture”.

Germany has initiated projects focused on improving the collection, analysis and sustainability of disaster risk data, as well as access to datasets for humanitarian organisations and national disaster risk management authorities. For example, Germany funded a project entitled “Sendai Framework Implementation: Accelerating Disaster Risk Reduction in Humanitarian Action”. The project focuses on facilitating and implementing disaster risk reduction measures in humanitarian contexts including improving cooperation with development practitioners and local government authorities. Italy has created a National Public Warning System, providing immediate information to the population in case of upcoming or ongoing major emergencies or disasters. The testing phase started in 2022-2023.

In October 2022, Belgium submitted a mid-term report to Sendai for the first time.

Germany supported local authorities and national disaster management authorities in integrating anticipatory humanitarian action into DRR strategies as part of many anticipatory action projects with UN agencies or NGOs. For example, a project with the German Red Cross on scaling-up anticipatory action globally includes funding for integrating developed anticipatory action systems into national disaster risk management systems.

Austria adopted a climate change mitigation strategy, which includes a chapter on mitigation in disaster management. Austria also introduced a disaster warning app, including a cell-broadcast warning system, in 2017. Within the research programme KIRAS, Austria provides funding for projects regarding population warning systems or safety-relevant consequences of climate change. For example, the project RELIANCE looked into the needs of persons with disabilities in warning systems.

Germany also supports the Anticipation Hub, a “one-stop-shop” for everything related to anticipatory action. The Hub provides information on anticipatory action (e.g. background, studies, blog articles, etc.) and enables exchange among practitioners (e.g. through working groups, workshops and conferences).

Moreover, Member States fund the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) for the development of tools, guidance and best practices on governance protocols, and knowledge base for a more structured and cohesive anticipatory finance architecture at country or regional levels, including through the commissioning of a study/guidance on sources for financing anticipatory action.

Finland also supports the key financing mechanisms of the EW4ALL, such as SOFF and CREWS.

In 2022, under the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Council approved the first ever Council Conclusions on DRR in EU external action, which promote DRR and climate security across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

Pledge 6: Enhancing protection of specific groups in vulnerable situations in armed conflicts, disasters and other crises

In times of armed conflict, disasters and other crises, enhanced measures are required for the protection of specific groups in vulnerable situations (such as women and girls, children, LGBTI-persons, persons with disabilities, elderly persons, refugees, persons belonging to religious minorities).

*Recalling UN Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019) on sexual violence in conflict and UN Security Council Resolution 2475 (2019) on the situation of persons with disabilities in armed conflict and humanitarian crises, the EU and its Member States **pledge** to:*

- *enhance the effective implementation of the existing legal framework on the protection of specific groups in vulnerable situations, including exploring legal and practical means at national level;*

- *advocate for the compliance with international guidelines, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Handbook on Gender in Humanitarian Aid, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee GBV Guidelines, the IASC Gender with Age Marker and the IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings;*
- *take measures to address gender inequalities and promote the empowerment and meaningful participation of women and girls as well as their organisations, by including them and demanding their inclusion in decision-making processes in humanitarian and stabilization projects;*
- *take measures to promote the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in the decision-making processes and implementation of humanitarian projects;*
- *strengthen the collection and dissemination of disaggregated data on sex, age and disability in humanitarian projects;*
- *strengthen institutional women, peace and security (WPS) capacities at the international and regional level, in particular by contributing funds to relevant UN initiatives;*
- *systematically screen all humanitarian funding proposals with regard to their gender-, age-, and disability -sensitive design and implementation;*
- *enhance the efforts in addressing and eliminating sexual violence in situations of armed conflicts and take measures to improve the protection of women and girls, as well as men and boys, in fragile environments and/or conflict-affected contexts to help prevent and respond to all forms of sexual and gender-based violence ensuring victim-centered approach, including by addressing the needs of survivors and victims and their children born of sexual violence in conflict, facilitating their reintegration into family and society, strengthening justice including restorative justice, holding perpetrators to account, and providing medical, psychological and social relief.*

EUROPEAN UNION

The EU continued to stress in its advocacy that conflict and natural hazards continue to affect adversely persons in the most vulnerable situations. The EU encourages its partners to implement the relevant global standards and align with EU policies (i.e. the Protection policy, Gender and Age Policy, the Operational Guidance on Disability Inclusion, the Health Policy Guidelines).

The EU remains committed to implement quality **mental health and psychosocial support** (MHPSS) in emergencies: between 2020 and 2023, the EU has allocated EUR 111.2 million to mental health and psychosocial support in emergency situations. In addition, the EU also promotes MHPSS actively in its policy work. Cooperating with Germany and the Netherlands in a Team Europe Approach, the EU has co-organized a series of 4 webinars on MHPSS in the Middle East and North Africa Region in 2022, as well as in the Latin America and Caribbean Region in July 2023 and February 2024. In addition, the EU published the Communication “A comprehensive approach to mental health” in June 2023, detailing its contribution to MHPSS worldwide, particularly with the aim of fostering an adequate and effective prevention, better access to high quality and affordable mental healthcare and treatment, and a successful reintegration into society after recovery.

Between 2020 and 2023, the EU (through DG ECHO) has disbursed EUR 46 million for the medical response to GBV. This complements EUR 102.6 million dedicated to sexual and reproductive health, committed to the implementation of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on GBV.

The European Commission continued to mainstream a gender perspective in line with the **Third Gender Action Plan 2021-2025 (GAP III)**. In this context, the Commission continued to carry out gender-sensitive needs assessments and analyses in its actions, in order to gain greater insight into the roles, access to resources, existing inequalities and supportive local structures (including women's organisations), specific needs, vulnerabilities, risks (such as sexual and gender-based violence), coping strategies and capacities of women, girls, boys and men.

The Gender Action Plan for 2021-2025 considers WPS a priority thematic area and promotes a gender-responsive approach which encompasses prevention, participation and leadership (including within the EU), justice, recovery, inclusion of women in peace processes and in all measures related to security-related issues (including outside of conflict affected situations).

From a more general point of view, the EU aims to accelerate progress on empowering women and girls, and safeguard gains made on gender equality during the 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action and to be in the front-line helping women's participation in the political and decision-making processes of countries in conflict, like in Syria, Libya, Colombia, Afghanistan or Yemen.

The EU has made specific commitments to WPS, building on UNSCR 1325. In 2019, the EU issued the **2019-2024 EU's Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security**. The EU has designed conflict sensitivity guidance notes on Gender and Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding, including WPS. The EU Council conclusions on Women, Peace and Security of 14 November 2022 commit to closer partnership with civil society organisations, call for gender-responsive leadership and highlight the importance of grounding WPS support on gender-responsive conflict analysis. The EU Council's Strategic Compass for Security and Defence of 21 March 2022 further integrates a WPS component serving as a guideline for all EU Delegations.

As for WPS interventions, UN and development agencies are the main actors implementing EU support, followed by international CSOs/NGOs. During the period 2019 to 2022, the evaluation team identified a portfolio of EUR 31 billion contracted interventions promoting gender equality, 3% of which represented support to WPS.

The EU staff, both in headquarters (HQ) and in EU Delegations located in third countries, contribute to WPS through political and policy dialogue, public diplomacy and spending actions, especially when related to recovery and reconstruction, participation of women as civil society actors and human rights defenders, women as agents of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and protection and prevention of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. The EU also has guidelines and training on WPS for its staff in HQ and in the field.

For military missions, since 2022 there is an Action Plan for military CSDP on the implementation of GAP III, issued by the EU Military Staff Gender Focal Point. The pre-deployment training in Brussels offered by the European Security and Defence College includes sessions on human rights mainstreaming and gender equality/WPS.

Regarding the actions related to WPS, the EU supported GBV response, reintegration of women former combatants, participation of women in peace negotiations and political life. For example, in Colombia, the EU funded actions on the reintegration of women combatants, and community-based peacebuilding. In the Philippines, a gender perspective has been thoroughly mainstreamed in all aspects of the EU's ambitious programme supporting peacebuilding in Mindanao, where the EU supported the government to design its peacebuilding strategy, including on gender equality aspects. EU humanitarian funding proposals are screened against the OECD DAC Marker on disability and gender. The EU also ensures that considerations related to gender, age or disability as well as protection mainstreaming are present in the implementation of EU-funded humanitarian aid projects.

The EU is striving to ensure a comprehensive analysis of intersecting vulnerabilities and invests in training its staff on various aspects of inclusive programming. In addition, since 2014, the EU uses a Gender-Age Marker to measure the extent to which EU-funded humanitarian actions integrate gender and age considerations. In 2021, an assessment of EU's Gender and Age Marker indicated that 96 per cent of all EU humanitarian aid had integrated gender and age considerations 'strongly' or 'to a certain extent'.

As far as **disaggregated data** are concerned, since 2019, the EU requires that its humanitarian partners provide disaggregated data on beneficiaries with disabilities. The EU encourages its partners to use the 'Washington Short Set of Questions'.

During the reporting period, the EU continued to be active on advocating for the protection from **sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in armed conflict**, including through its membership in the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence.

In 2016, the EU adopted the EU Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, which included a call for stronger advocacy and preventions of SGBV, and enhanced participation of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

In 2023 alone, the EU allocated approximately EUR 38.5 million from its humanitarian aid budget for targeted actions to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence in emergencies. In addition, in 2023, the EU's humanitarian aid budget allocated approximately EUR 31.5 million to accommodate the sexual and reproductive health needs of women and girls in humanitarian situations. The EU supported interventions through an integrated approach including medical care, mental health and psychosocial support, but also referral to legal services and, if possible, livelihood support or socio-economic assistance. The EU has funded a broad range of initiatives and programmes worldwide aiming to end all forms of gender-based violence with special emphasis on the dire effects of conflict-related sexual violence.

EU MEMBER STATES

During the reporting period, several EU Member States have prioritized the centrality of protection of groups in vulnerable situations in their humanitarian funding.

Belgium's interventions, for example, supported the protection of, among others, refugees/displaced populations, children, women and girls. Some Member States have organised ad hoc events aimed at highlighting and addressing needs of specific groups in vulnerable situations.

Centrality of protection is a specific objective in the Swedish humanitarian strategy since 2021. Sweden is working closely with other States to promote the Centrality of Protection within the humanitarian system and to increase accountability and leadership to address protection risks facing vulnerable groups with the objective of reaching collective protection outcomes.

In Austria, the new Strategy on Humanitarian Assistance, finalized in October 2023, sets the inclusion of vulnerable groups in decision-making processes as an intersectional goal in the programming and delivery of humanitarian aid, so that their rights and specific needs are duly respected. This includes ensuring the protection and security of persons with disabilities, as well as ensuring gender-responsive justice and the rights of women and girls.

For Finland, the promotion of the rights of **persons with disabilities** is a long-standing priority. Finland is a donor to the UNDRR and has supported UNDRR's work on disability inclusive disaster risk reduction through additional financial aid.

Some Member States, including the Czech Republic, have joined the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. Consequently, the participation of persons with disabilities has been promoted both in their National Humanitarian Response Strategies and in particular projects.

In order to foster the well-being of persons with disabilities, Lithuania has approved in 2023 a national Plan for the Implementation of Measures to Improve the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities in the Ministry of Defence. The Plan sets out measures to improve their integration through the adaptation of the physical environment to their needs, the provision of information to persons with disabilities through the means of communication of their choice, and the increase of employment opportunities.

In Romania, the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has concluded a protocol with the Ministry of Internal Affairs-Department of Emergency situations to carry out activities in the field of preparation for actions in the event of a major emergency or disaster in order to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

Greece has strengthened its regulatory and institutional framework concerning civil protection through the introduction of special provisions regarding the protection of vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, from natural and man-made disasters, including in the General Plans for Countering Cases of Emergency and Managing the Consequences of Disasters. Videos with guidance for self-protection for any type of natural disaster have also become fully accessible to persons with hearing and visual disabilities (integrating interpretation to the sign language, subtitles etc).

In 2021, on the side-lines of the ministerial week of the 76th United Nations General Assembly, Belgium and the European Commission co-organized a side-event on the humanitarian aspects of **child protection**, to highlight the combined impact of armed conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic on children.

Bulgaria also provided voluntary earmarked contributions to UNICEF for the implementation of projects such as ‘Support for Social Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Armenia’ or ‘Integration of the most vulnerable children and adolescents out of school in Georgia’.

Italy regularly makes specific recommendations to individual States at the Universal Periodic Review on the importance of preventing the recruitment and use of children during armed conflict, and ensuring the release of child soldiers and their reintegration through long-term interventions, including promoting universal adherence to the Safe Schools Declaration.

In 2023, Germany took the lead of the Call to Action on Protection from **Gender-based Violence (GBV)** with the objective to improve accountability for and protection from GBV within the international humanitarian system; establish sustainable partnerships with local and women-led organisations and improve their inclusion within the humanitarian system; improve the response and prevention of GBV in contexts of (forced) displacement and for forcibly displaced women and girls.

This happened for example through convening a High-Level Roundtable with IASC⁹ principals on prioritization and better funding to GBV in emergencies; co-leading with UNHCR a Multi-Stakeholder Pledge on GBV in forced displacement; convening an Annual Partners Meeting with significant participation of women-led organisations.

In 2022, on the side-lines of the ministerial week of the 77th United Nations General Assembly, Belgium, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the European Commission co-organized a side-event on the fight against impunity in matter of sexual violence. The session examined how to support justice and accountability for serious violations of IHL, in order to strengthen efforts to consolidate commitment to IHL.

In 2022-2023, Belgium and Finland co-chaired the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, which had as priority themes ‘inclusion’ and ‘protection’ (with focus on gender equality). The discussions highlighted the ICRC's operational approach to combating sexual violence and presented a study on financing the inclusion of disabilities within humanitarian action.

Sweden actively takes measures to ensure that a gender perspective is integrated in all international missions in conflict and post-conflict countries. Sweden is further strengthening its capacity and internal guidelines to ensure that Sex, Age and Disability disaggregated data (SADDD) is part of analysis, implementation and follow up.

During the reporting period, EU Member States have continued to implement the UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on **Women, Peace and Security (WPS)**, focusing on the promotion of gender equality, women’s participation in international operations, and education of military personnel on gender equality issues, in particular on sexual abuse, violence and harassment on gender basis.

⁹ Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Gender Equality and the empowerment of women and girls

WPS is an integral part of pre-deployment preparations for all Swedish troops, and all deployed contingents have specially trained gender advisers. The overall Swedish priority is to make visible and strengthen women's influence and meaningful participation as actors for peace and security. For this, a holistic approach to peace and security is required in which the activity must be based on and integrate gender perspectives and conflict analysis. Sweden's fourth National Action Plan on WPS clarifies priorities, establishes an overall strategic focus of Sweden's WPS engagement, and identifies which actors will implement the plan.

Some Member States¹⁰ have issued new **National action plans** on WPS, which promote the integration of a gender perspective into international humanitarian law and enhance capacity building and empowerment of women in fragile and conflict-affected situations, as well as the protection of women's human rights and their specific needs in line with the WPS agenda.

Efforts to enhance cooperation with women-led organisations, not least in very gender-sensitive settings such as Afghanistan or Yemen, in the EU and UN context were also stepped up.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls remain important themes in the international relief efforts led by The Netherlands. The Netherlands does not operate its own specific programs within its humanitarian action and diplomacy policy. All humanitarian partners of The Netherlands have integrated gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls into their strategic plans, often exemplified by Gender Action Plans. These plans consistently emphasize ensuring women's and girls' access to emergency assistance, conducting gender analyses in response planning, promoting meaningful participation of women in humanitarian decision-making, and addressing gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH). Additionally, The Netherlands Red Cross has engaged in further dialogue to ensure special attention is given to the position and security of women and girls in conflict areas.

Some Member States, including Germany, also promote the mainstreaming of Gender, Age and Disability into all project funding by introducing a Gender-Age-Disability Marker in the application process.

In some Member States, including the Czech Republic, the prevention of GBV and the protection and care for victims are a substantive part of humanitarian response to conflict and forced displacement in countries such as Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Libya, Ethiopia, Sudan, Ukraine, in coordination with national and international NGOs (Care, Caritas) and other international partners.

In 2022, Romania established the Working Group on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Risks Associated with Human Trafficking for Displaced Persons from Ukraine. It was set-up under the National Plan of measures regarding the protection and inclusion of displaced persons from Ukraine receiving temporary protection in Romania. The working group drafted an action plan, aimed at preventing and combating exploitation and (sexual) abuse in the community of Ukrainian citizens, beneficiaries of temporary protection.

¹⁰ Including FI, CZ, SK, IT

Ireland has a strategic partnership with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a world leader in gender equality and women's protection and empowerment, specialising in prevention and response to GBV in emergencies. The partnership supports capacity building and strengthening of local women's organisations.

In Italy, the specific training of military and civilian personnel to be employed in conflict zones focussed, inter alia, on the legal aspects of sexual and gender-based violence.

Ireland also regularly takes part in **advocacy** events, underlining the importance of gender-responsive, inclusive humanitarian assistance, e.g. at the Global Refugee Forum 2023, in bilateral talks with international organisations, or during panel discussions.

Some Member States advocated gender- and age-sensitive humanitarian programming, which is free from all kind of discrimination, during their terms in the Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS and UNICEF, with a special focus on participation of vulnerable beneficiaries in the design and evaluation of humanitarian response.

Several Member States, including Ireland, take active part in the implementation of the Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies, with a special focus on empowerment of women and girls. They promote women-to-women civil partnerships and access of girls and women to safe education, health care, including sexual and *reproductive* health-care services (SRHS), and sustainable livelihood.

Pledge 7: Safeguarding and protecting cultural property (Open pledge)

Attacks against cultural property as such constitute violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and affect the identity, the memory and the dignity of entire populations.

Increased targeting of cultural property in situations of contemporary armed conflicts, either international or non-international, is a worrisome trend that speaks of the need for more efficient measures and joint action in this area.

Considering the continued relevance of the existing IHL treaties concerning the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict and other relevant international treaties, national implementation plays a central role in fulfilling the obligation to respect IHL as recalled in the proposed ICRC Resolution "Bringing IHL home: A road map for better national implementation of international humanitarian law".

The Signatory States pledge to:

- make every effort to promote the ratification of relevant treaties concerning the protection of cultural property;*
- take the operational, regulatory and legislative implementation measures as appropriate to actively support efforts to protect cultural heritage and fight illicit trafficking of cultural property that may be at risk due to armed conflict;*
- promote the role of National IHL Committees in the implementation of the international legal framework on the protection of cultural property and in the mutual support between States in this area.*

EU MEMBER STATES

The safeguarding of cultural property during armed conflict is a priority for several EU Member States. The 1954 UNESCO Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols (1954 and 1999), referred to as the Hague Convention, is a pivotal guiding instrument in its field. 26 EU Member States are party to the Convention; 25 are party to its First and Second Protocols. Some EU Member States have also ratified the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

Ireland reported that it established a National Advisory Committee on the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict, comprised of representatives from various disciplines and policy areas such as officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs, members of the Defence Forces, and agents from several cultural institutions. The Committee meets to discuss, among others, issues such as the implementation of the Convention and its Second Protocol, awareness raising activities to promote the Convention and the protected status of cultural property, as well as the development of training courses in collaboration with the Defence Forces.

Lithuania reported that it has established a specific position of Chief Specialist of Cultural Heritage protection, whose main task is to coordinate and ensure implementation of the 1954 Convention within the national defence system.

In March 2022, Italy set up the ‘Blue Helmets of Culture’ Task Force as a Ministerial permanent operational structure to manage the activities related to the protection of cultural heritage at national and international level in relation to crisis situations.

Some Member States, for example the Czech Republic and Ireland, regularly contribute to the Fund for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, which assists the States Parties to the 1999 Second Protocol by providing financial as well as technical assistance in relation to emergency, provisional or other measures to protect cultural property during armed conflict.

As to the efforts to ensure the **implementation of IHL treaties on the protection of cultural property through national legislative, regulatory and practical measures**, some Member States have issued decrees laying down provisions on preparedness. In Finland, for example, the owner and occupant of a building, a government agency or institution, at the site in question are obliged to prevent the occurrence of a hazardous situation, to prepare for the protection of persons, property and the environment in the event of a hazardous situation, and to take any rescue measures they are able to take independently.

Specific national legislation in some Member States prescribes the procedure to be followed by the institutions performing the protection and preservation of cultural property. In Croatia, for example, the legislation details the protection that the owners of cultural property are obliged to ensure in peacetime, in cooperation with the competent authority, and refers to the conditions for the protection and preservation of cultural property in extraordinary circumstances such as armed conflicts, floods, fires and earthquakes, as well as measures to prevent theft, robbery and illegal appropriation of cultural property. In Romania, inventories of both movable and immovable cultural property, including digitalised registries, are available and constantly updated; for some public entities – such as museums – keeping up to date inventories is mandatory.

During the reporting period, Greece issued a Military Manual for the Protection of Cultural Property in Armed Conflict. The objective of the Manual, which is based on the relevant UNESCO Military Manual, is to promote awareness among members of the Hellenic Armed Forces, including those participating in peacekeeping operations in the framework of international organizations, on their obligations stemming from international law concerning the protection of cultural property in armed conflict but also in peacetime.

Austria has set a best practise that receives worldwide attention through the creation of the Society for the Protection of Cultural Property and a Blue Shield National Committee, active at the national and international levels. A so-called "Cultural Property Protection Panel" was also set up to promote co-operation, particularly between the responsible federal ministries. In 2023, Austria published a new "Checklist for the safe acquisition of cultural goods", to raise awareness and as a hands-on tool in the trade of cultural property (for sellers and buyers).

Efforts are also made to increase the number of cultural properties inscribed on the International List of Cultural Property under Enhanced Protection. The Czech Republic, for example, following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, established a working group tasked with developing crisis plans for all buildings and compounds under the administration of its National Heritage Institute.

The Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic submitted a project under the "Restore Your House" call for proposals. The project is aimed at increasing the protection of national cultural monuments through the Blue Shield protective emblem. Furthermore, the Slovak Committee of the Blue Shield is in the negotiation process with the representatives of the Ministry of Defense on the selection of national cultural monuments which will be marked with the Blue Shield and at the same time included in the military maps (approximately 200 – 300 national monuments).

Regarding the **fight against the illegal trade in cultural goods**, some Member States have adopted legislation implementing the provisions of Directive 2014/60/EU on the return of cultural objects illegally removed from the territory of Member States.

Croatia maintains a Register to collect data in order to prevent the illegal handling of cultural goods. Natural and legal persons, when putting movable cultural goods on the market, are obliged to check their origin and to keep records of purchases and sales and other legal transactions related to these cultural goods in order to prevent illegal handling in the trade of cultural goods.

In November 2023, Lithuania established a working group tasked with evaluating the protection of national heritage located in foreign countries, making an inventory of stolen cultural goods and their restitution.

The Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic has submitted a project to the UNESCO and International Council of Museums (ICOM) to combat the illegal trade with antiquities.

As regards the **use of advanced digital tools and technologies to record, document and preserve cultural heritage**, some Member States, for example Austria, made efforts, through relevant Ministries of Arts, Culture and Sport, to digitise collections and make them accessible in order to preserve and develop cultural heritage.

In Germany, publications related to international humanitarian law include the text of the 1954 Hague Convention, its Protocols as well as its implementing regulations. Manuals addressed to the armed forces summarize the provisions on international humanitarian law and the protection of cultural property and present them as rules to be observed by all military personnel.

Austria offers targeted workshops and training courses on the protection of cultural property, to raise awareness and provide practical guidance, especially in the military sector.

Finland also organises training and information events related to the 1954 Convention for experts in the field (defence and civilian crisis management) and owners of sites.

Bulgaria organizes annual conferences held in the Ministry of Interior to share experiences and build coordination mechanisms. Seminars are held for police officers, with the participation of experts from the Ministry of Culture.

In Lithuania, specialized training is also offered to police and customs officers and border guards to improve skills to recognize cases of illegal transportation of cultural goods, identification of forgeries, imitations, or replicas of fine art works.

In Germany, the exchange of best practices with regard to the protection of cultural property, including through exchanges between National IHL Committees, is often ensured by different means, inter alia by supporting emergency associations for cultural property preservation and the promotion and implementation of research projects in the area of cultural property protection, in accordance with the Hague Convention.

In May 2024, The Netherlands in collaboration with UNESCO organized the conference “Building on 70 years of the UNESCO Hague Convention for the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict” to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the 1954 Hague Convention. The conference emphasized the significance of the Convention and its two additional protocols, thereby advancing the broader promotion of IHL. In preparation for the conference, the Netherlands has exchanged best practices on national implementation measures for the Convention and its protocols with interested States.

Pledge 8: Digital transformation, its use and impact in the context of IHL-related activities

Technical progress presents both risks and opportunities that need to be responsibly managed by States to the benefit of the most vulnerable, humanitarian personnel and volunteers. One example of the opportunities offered by new technologies relates to the development and use of better tools to identify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons. Respect for human dignity and privacy should at all times govern the collection of data.

The EU and its Member States pledge to:

- *continue their efforts to address the profound humanitarian consequences of the enforced disappearance of persons during armed conflict by supporting effective investigation and resolution of cases of missing persons in different regions of the world;*
- *implement the highest standards of protection of personal data of persons, especially of persons in vulnerable situations and of humanitarian workers and volunteers, in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and, as appropriate, encourage the development of such standards in third States.*

EUROPEAN UNION

With regard to the **protection of personal data of persons**, since 2019 the EU has made available contractual templates (MGA and HACA) where standard corporate data protection-related clauses are included by default. Under these clauses, EU funded organisations must abide by a number of data protection rules and principles. Moreover, EU partners are requested to detail appropriate mitigation measures in the application process (Single Form), including any Data Protection Impact and to assess the data protection risks connected to the collection and storage of that data.

Additionally, the EU (through cooperation between the European Commission (DG ECHO) and the OCHA centre for Humanitarian Data), has provided guidance to assist partners in the responsible use of data, and recommended that partners consult sectoral best practice including, inter-alia, the ICRC Handbook for the protection of personal data in humanitarian action.

EU MEMBER STATES

With regard to efforts to address the **humanitarian consequences of the enforced disappearance of persons during armed conflict**, some Member States, including Germany, reported that they consistently supported the work of the Committee on Enforced Disappearance both financially and politically. This includes funding projects addressing enforced disappearance on the ground and providing political support to the efforts to establish a mechanism on missing persons in Syria.

The Czech Republic reported that, at the national level, the collection of personal data complies with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the competent authorities have adopted internal regulations to ensure its uniform application.

Digitalisation was a priority for the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU, in particular within the Working Group on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA). In cooperation with the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), a paper was published on the challenges of digitalisation in forgotten crises¹¹.

The Slovak Republic joined the Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Autonomy. The Declaration states that the military use of AI can and should be ethical, responsible, and enhance international security, and must be in compliance with applicable international law. States should take appropriate measures to ensure the responsible development, deployment, and use of their military AI capabilities, including those enabling autonomous functions and systems.

¹¹ SI: <https://ecdpm.org/publications/digitalisation-humanitarian-aid-opportunities-challenges-forgotten-crises>