

HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT HUB



The Human Rights Impact Hub — a new platform to enhance accountability for grave human rights abuses

Background

To enhance accountability and end impunity for grave human rights abuses in the Former Soviet Union (FSU) region, lawyers and human rights defenders have to increasingly think creatively and design out-of-the-box legal approaches. Domestic prosecutions are confronted with obstacles and strong functional challenges such as lack of independent, impartial and effective judicial remedies. The international landscape is undermined by the International Criminal Court's exceptional slowness and failure to enforce successful prosecutions of high-ranked perpetrators. Furthermore, state responsibility in strengthening compliance and accountability for rights violations is showing its limits. States frequently overlook judgements and decisions of key international structures, such as the UN Treaty Bodies or the European Court of Human Rights. Along the same lines, governments continue to engage in projects which blatantly disregard their climate obligations and socio-environmental standards, thereby putting local communities' human rights as well as ecosystems' well-being at stake.

IPHR closely collaborates with its partners to provide civil society actors from the FSU region with capacity-building opportunities which they can use to promote human rights accountability and protection. On the one hand, IPHR and Global Diligence LLP have trained hundreds of individuals on topics ranging from strategic litigation and linkage evidence to legal writing skills. On the other, IPHR is currently developing virtual pan-Eurasian networks on specific legal mechanisms, to scale up its capacity-building work. Arising out of the necessity to ensure greater collaboration between human rights defenders with shared legal goals and adapting to the new COVID-19 context, these online networks will provide lawyers with an additional tool to generate innovative ideas and skills to bridge the impunity gap. Thus, creating a hub to regroup these complementary training modules and virtual networks, and uniting participants through a shared end-goal of initiating impactful legal actions can give coherence and a driving force to IPHR's and its partners' work.

Windows of opportunity: universal jurisdiction, targeted sanction and climate justice

IPHR has identified windows of opportunity to bridge the impunity gap thanks to three underexploited legal mechanisms: universal jurisdiction (UJ), targeted sanctions and climate litigation. Indeed, domestic prosecutorial mechanisms in third countries, with functioning and independent judicial systems, seem to be a reasonable option for victims, their lawyers and supporting civil society organizations. Both targeted sanctions regimes and UJ reduce perpetrators' ability to travel and target their funding streams. Freely roaming perpetrators of environmental crimes that destroy ecosystems and violate the rights of communities and individuals can also be held accountable through legal actions. Litigation strategies can provide redress and compensation as well as prevent the implementation of harmful projects initiated by economic, financial and industrial stakeholders, local or global as well as private or public.

Yet, fragile understanding of how these three tools work in practice, low capacity to navigate and dissect relevant laws and legislations, poor quality of argumentation and lack of quality supporting evidence explain their rare use and/or their unsuccessful implementation in the FSU region. IPHR believes that it can fill gaps in the human rights and legal landscape of the FSU region through providing lawyers with practical knowledge on how to use UJ, sanctions and climate litigation and exploring these viable alternatives.

Proposed intervention

The Human Rights Impact Hub seeks to support lawyers from FSU countries to impactfully enhance human rights protection and accountability. More precisely, the hub serves as a platform which regroups capacity-building and knowledge-sharing tools used by lawyers and designed to foster a sense of community among these human rights defenders to work on UJ, sanctions and climate justice. The hub links training efforts, individual mentorship and virtual pan-Eurasian networks together with the common objective of creating impactful legal actions. In other words, the hub's mission is to forge an ecosystem of complementary resources as a means to provide lawyers with practical skills necessary to innovative litigation strategies.

The Human Rights Impact Hub: how does it function?

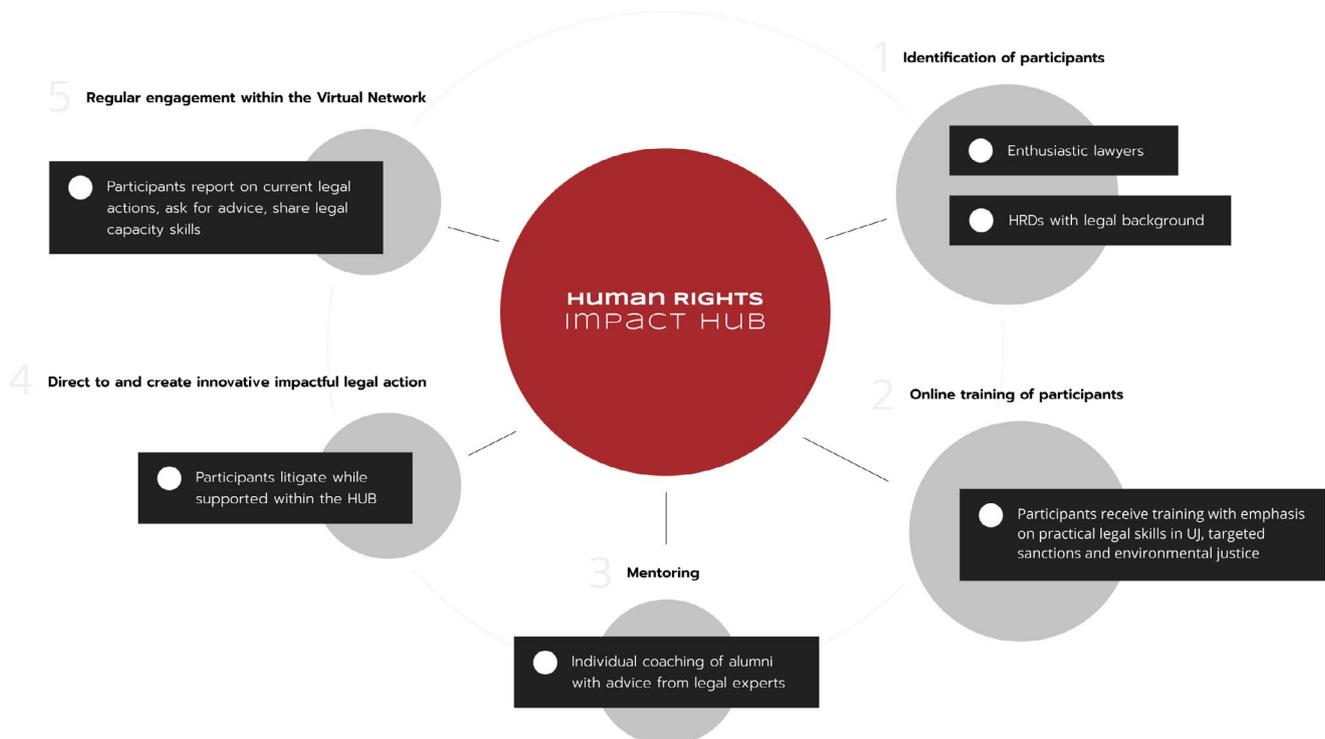
The model of the Human Rights Impact Hub is based on five components or steps:

1. IPHR will select young and enthusiastic lawyers and human rights defenders with a strong legal background. It is important that selected individuals have pre-existing legal experience in order to be able to engage in litigation strategies after receiving training and thereby fulfil the hub's impact end-goal.
2. After being selected, participants will follow online courses on UJ, targeted sanctions and climate justice. Importantly, the hub's training modules are aimed at being topic-specific and teaching legal skills that can be practically used to litigate.
3. Participants will then take advantage of the opportunity of being mentored by leading practitioners and experts of the covered topics. The participants will thereby not be "lost in nature" after training but will be assisted in their future legal work.
4. To achieve the hub's impact-driven raison d'être, participants will engage in legal actions and work on real-life cases. IPHR will furthermore channel financial resources from a legal aid fund on a case to case basis to these impactful individuals. By helping to cover legal fees, the hub will practically support

and further incentivize participants to pursue work on UJ, targeted sanctions and climate justice in the post-training period.

5. During the litigation process, the hub's participants will be able to seek advice through the three virtual networks, respectively specializing on UJ, sanctions and climate justice. These networks will act as platforms to generate new ideas as well as share knowledge on legal issues or on cases. Participants will be encouraged to provide feedback on their past or current litigation efforts, as a means to inspire other hub members.

Hub Model



Conclusion: the hub's added value

The Human Rights Impact Hub frames, organizes and gives common purpose to diverse yet relatable activities by IPHR and its partners. Most importantly, the hub acts as a reminder of the empirical end-goal and the on-ground result aimed through each initiative. Indeed, training modules provide skills; virtual networks create communication channels and a sense of community; mentoring brings greater expertise; yet the common purpose of these efforts is litigation which successfully ends impunity and holds perpetrators accountable.

IPHR and its partners have always put energy into testing new grounds. The hub is an opportunity to deepen our work and expertise in the three identified legal areas.

Partnering with Global Diligence and Human Rights First in this initiative is also a logical continuation and upgrade to past years of collaboration. By tapping into regional niche fields and by monitoring the hub together, we will not only be well positioned to endorse a leading role in the FSU region on UJ, sanctions and climate justice but also to generate concrete results through launching new waves of innovative legal actions.

Visit www.humanrightsimpacthub.eu to learn more.