

NHC Strategy 2019-2022



**NETHERLANDS
HELSINKI
COMMITTEE**

*Building and securing
justice across Europe*

Introduction

The mission of the **Netherlands Helsinki Committee (NHC)** is to ***build and secure justice and compliance with international human rights agreements within OSCE participating states.*** Established in 1987, the NHC represented Dutch civil society in the **Helsinki Process**, following the examples of sister Helsinki Committees from across the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (**OSCE**) area. Through our work, we contribute to wider international agendas such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Today we are recognised as one of the key non-governmental organisations contributing to dialogue and cooperation amongst actors in the areas of rule of law and human rights. The current strategy describes the internal and external factors shaping the NHC's strategic choices for the 2019-2022 period.

Working Towards Open and Just Societies

NHC work is aimed at contributing to a world in which **citizens across the OSCE area peacefully live in more open and just societies.** In order to secure the rule of law, safeguard human rights and strengthen civil society, we believe it is necessary to:

- ➔ **Hold to account and, where necessary, put pressure on authorities to act in line with human rights obligations.** This is a major role for civil society, in particular of human rights organisations and people engaged in human rights as part of their professional duties such as lawyers or the media. Therefore, the capacities of these actors should be strengthened. They should also be protected against attacks and be able to operate freely.
- ➔ **Cooperate with professionally run public institutions and independent oversight institutions.** This entails ensuring public institutions (i.e. Ministries, Ombudsman, and Audit Authorities) have staff determined to keep up ethical standards and maintain human rights principles. Additionally this involves investing in a judiciary that is resistant to political forces, government or other undue interference in their work.

Security and Human Rights: *The Helsinki Process* **Explained**

The *Helsinki Process* describes events culminating in the signing of the 1975 Helsinki Accords and follow up process. The Accords are the founding documents of the OSCE and contained the ground-breaking concept of *comprehensive security*. This is the notion that real security is achieved by building democratic, free, and rights-respecting societies (*human dimension*), combined with furthering social-economic cooperation and security (*economic dimension*) and with military trust-building and non-violent conflict resolution (*political-military dimension*). The *human dimension* created an environment in which domestic human rights violations could be held politically accountable at an international level. It is also intrinsically connected the notion of security to human rights and the rule of law.

The inclusion of representatives of civil society in the discussions, both at the founding conferences, and today in the framework of the OSCE, allows these actors to hold governments accountable for implementing the 'principles of the Helsinki Accords' as part of the wider *Helsinki Process*.

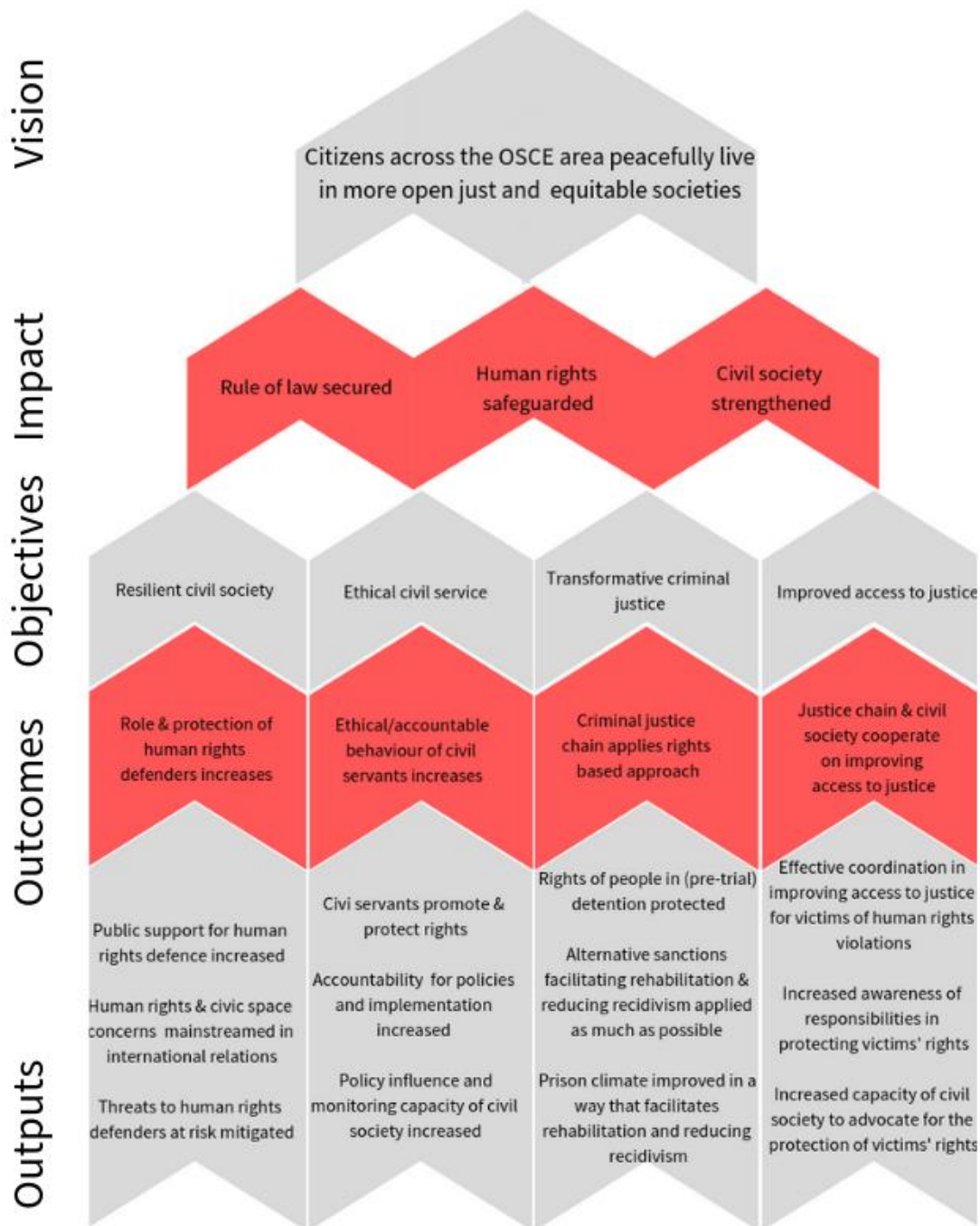
Today the OSCE contributes to the reduction of tension between participating states. It is a platform for dialogue between states providing security in disputed areas and a platform for dialogue between states and civil society, where the NHC actively participates.

➔ **Ensure that operations of the criminal justice system align with human rights standards.**

The chain formed by police, prosecution services, courts and institutions involved in criminal sanctions have far-reaching authority to interfere with the lives of citizens. Therefore, they should scrupulously maintain international standards and treat citizens fairly. Civil society can monitor and assist these institutions thereby ensuring the rights of all citizens.

➔ **Pay particular attention to the protection of vulnerable and marginalised groups.** Often neglected by government institutions and stigmatized in society, these groups are the most susceptible to violations of their human rights. It is therefore necessary to facilitate and improve access to the justice system for them.

The figure below illustrates how work towards the NHC's mission contributes to short and longer-term results which ultimately lead to achieving its vision.



Operational Environment

Internal Factors: “Strengths and Challenges”

The NHC has developed key traits in its 30 years of experience that have been recognised by partners and funders. The following define the strengths the organisation:

- **Focus:** Being the only organisation in the Netherlands that **focuses exclusively on the OSCE area**, and is closely linked to the **OSCE principles and agenda**;
- **Capabilities:** Having a **strong convening power** as well as the **ability to build bridges between different types of actors**;
- **Assets:** Having a **strong and diverse professional network** both in and outside the Netherlands among civil society, national governments, and regional and multilateral institutions. It is also an organisation of **renowned practitioners** with both thematic and geographical expertise; and
- **Method:** Addressing both **push and pull factors** to reach careful political context analyses. Projects designed by the NHC start from a **holistic approach** and aim to strengthen cooperation and coordination between various actors and linking different processes.

At the same time, challenges for the organisation have also been identified. While the NHC yields concrete results in its *project* implementation, sharpening the *programmatic* focus by developing and pursuing projects in line with the newly developed strategy will create increased impact on the topics it works on with increased efficiency. Additionally, while we are seen as trustworthy by direct partners, efforts aimed at reaching the wider public have traditionally been limited. In order to reach new potential partners, and to reach a broader audience, we are strengthening our public image.

"NHC work on humanising detention conditions, the recognition of the rights of trafficked persons and improving access to justice at the national and international level for all members of our communities are extremely important undertakings"

Thomas Greminger, OSCE Secretary General

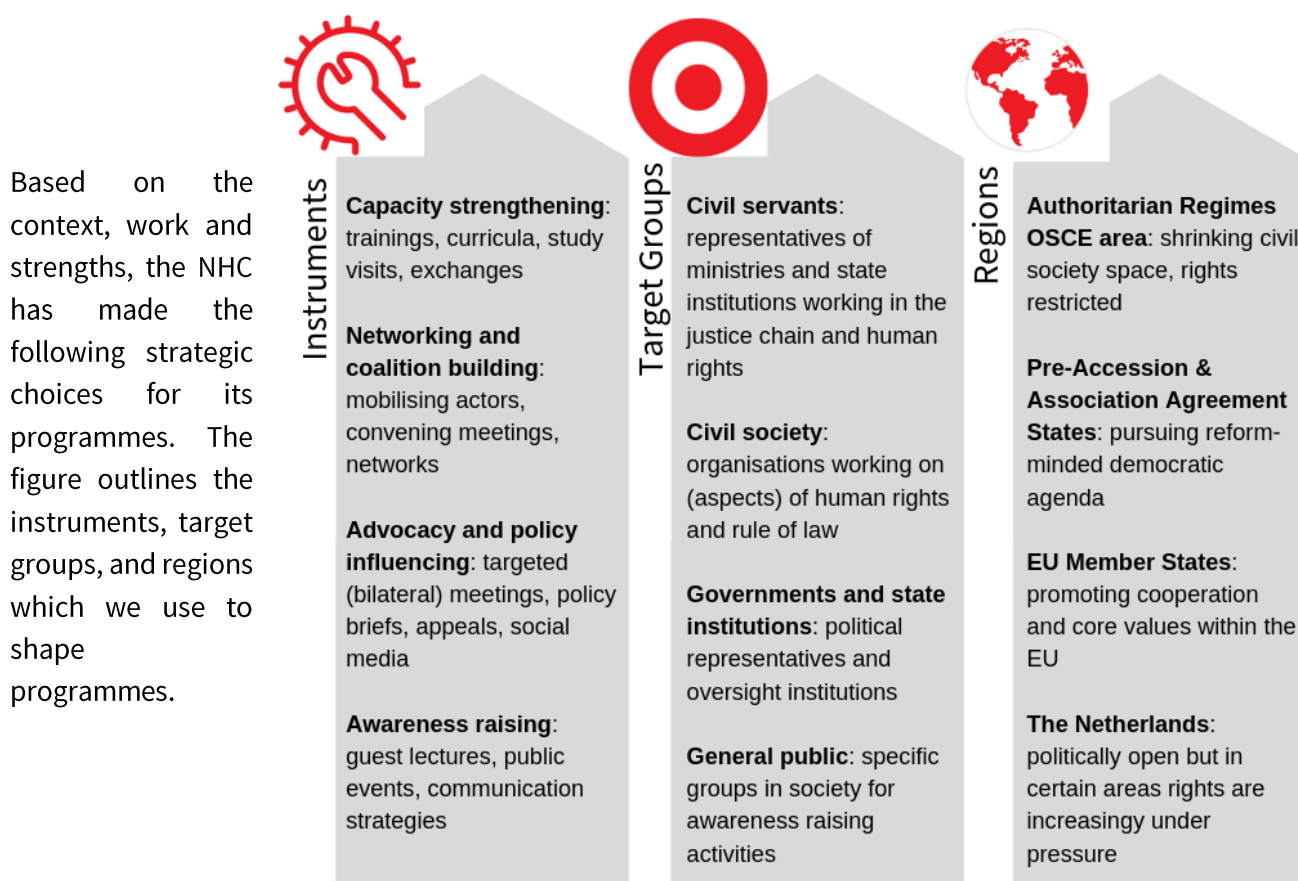


External Analysis: “Threats and Opportunities”

The NHC has identified certain threats to our work based on an analysis of the current regional and geopolitical context. These threats could make our work more difficult. However as outlined in the figure below, if such threats are met with an appropriate response, they provide opportunities that can further strengthen the NHC’s position and contribute to our mission.



Strategic Choices of the NHC



Programmes for 2019-2022

- ➔ **Human Rights Defence:** the NHC works to assert a positive role for human rights defenders in society and contribute to protecting defenders under threat. We strengthen their capacities for effective communication to win public support for human rights. We promote recognition of human rights concerns in international relations. We also contribute to keeping human rights defenders in difficult circumstances active, to sustain their work as agents of change.
- ➔ **Access to Justice for Vulnerable Groups:** the NHC contributes to a criminal justice process in which the rights of vulnerable groups are protected. We strengthen capacities of actors in the justice chain, as well as of civil society organisations that assist these groups. By focusing on networking and coalition building, we bring actors together that do not normally cooperate.
- ➔ **Criminal Justice Chain Reform:** the NHC strengthens capacities of different actors in the criminal justice chain. By cooperating with police, prosecution and judges, we contribute to fair trials, improved conditions for those convicted, and respect of the rights of those under custody. We work to enhance the use of alternatives to imprisonment and facilitation of rehabilitation.
- ➔ **Integrity and Accountability:** the NHC increases the accountability of governments by strengthening the capacities of state institutions like the ministries, the judiciary, and public institution. We train and assist actors in increasing the integrity of civil service, improving the accountability of the state, and fighting corruption schemes. In our work, we relate to agendas connected to international treaties and commitments, monitored by intergovernmental bodies and independent state institutions upholding the rule of law.

Strategic choices in practice:

This figure below depicts the various factors that go into defining our strategy and programmes. It shows how contextual analysis helps define groups we target, and the instruments we use in the various geographical regions of our work.



By pursuing our mission to **build and secure justice and compliance with international human rights agreements within OSCE participating states**, the NHC also works towards its vision that **citizens across the OSCE peacefully live in more open, just, and equitable societies**. This contributes to global goals such as SDG 16: *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.*

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