

ECtHR: COMPOSITION & ELECTION PROCESS

COMPOSITION OF THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The European Court of Human Rights ([ECtHR](#)) is a regional human rights judicial body based in Strasbourg, France, created under the auspices of the [Council of Europe](#). The Court has jurisdiction to decide complaints (“applications”) submitted by individuals and States concerning violations of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention), which principally concerns civil and political rights. The Court cannot take up a case on its own initiative.

Judges

The ECtHR is composed of a number of judges that is equal to the number of State parties to the European Convention. As of July 2020, there are 47 State parties to the Convention and, therefore, 47 judges on the Court. Judges are elected in their individual capacity and do not represent any State party to the Convention. According to Article 21 of the Convention and Rule 4 of the Rules of Court, judges are salaried, serve on a full-time basis and cannot engage in any activities that would be incompatible with their independence, impartiality, and demands of their role as judges. According to Article 23 of the Convention, judges are elected for a non-renewable term of **nine years**. Their terms expire when they turn 70¹ years old.

Sources of Law

- Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights) ([text](#))
- ECtHR Rules of Court ([text](#))

The ECtHR is divided into **five Sections**, which are administrative entities, and each Section has a President, Vice President, and a number of judges that make up a chamber. A chamber is a judicial formation of the Court within a given Section. According to Rule 25 of the Rules of Court, each judge must be a member of a Section and each Section must be geographically and gender balanced.

Judges work in four different kinds of judicial procedures to adjudicate individual complaints: a single judge procedure, a committee, a chamber, and the Grand Chamber. A **single judge** procedure may only issue decisions on individual complaints that are clearly inadmissible on the face of the application. A **committee** (composed of three judges belonging to the same Section) may rule on admissibility, and on the merits only for cases concerning issues that falls within the Court’s well-established case law. According to Article 28 of the Convention and Rule 53 of the Rules of Court, all committee decisions must be unanimous.

A **chamber** (composed of seven judges, including a Section President, Vice-President, and a “national judge”²) has the broadest authority to resolve complaints, and may rule on admissibility and merits for cases that raise issues that have not been ruled on repeatedly. Pursuant to Rule 56 of the Rules of Court, Chamber decisions are made by majority and sitting judges are not permitted to abstain from a vote. The **Grand Chamber** (composed of 17 judges, including the President and Vice-President of the Court as well as the Presidents of the five Sections and a “national judge”) hears cases that have been appealed from a Chamber or relinquished by a Chamber, generally when a case involves an important or novel question.

¹ When Protocol No.15 to the Convention enters into force, judges will be able to serve on the Court until they are 74 years old.

² A “national judge” is a judge with the nationality of the State against which the application is lodged.

Bureau of the Court

The Court also has a Bureau that assists the President of the ECtHR in carrying out his or her work and facilitates coordination between the Court's five Sections, among other tasks as stated in Rule 9A of the Rules of Court. The Bureau is composed of the President of the Court, the Vice-Presidents of the Court, and the Section Presidents.

Ad hoc Judges

Sources of Law

- **Rule 29** of ECtHR Rules of Court on *ad hoc* judges

The President of a chamber may appoint *ad hoc* judges when the national judge cannot sit in a case before the chamber because of an inability, withdrawal, or exemption arising from Rule 28 of the Rules of Court. The President of the chamber will select the *ad hoc* judge from a list of three to five individuals submitted by the relevant State party. If

the State party does not submit a list of individuals or the President of the chamber or if the President does not find that the individuals meet satisfy the requirements to serve on the Court, the President of the chamber may appoint another elected judge to sit as an *ad hoc* judge. According to Rule 29 of the Rules of Court, *ad hoc* judges serve for a renewable four-year term and must meet the same requirements as the judges on the ECtHR.

Court Registry

The Court also includes a Registrar, elected by the plenary ECtHR for a **five-year term**, which may be renewed once. The Registrar assists the judges in carrying out their work, under the ECtHR President's authority, and is responsible for the Court's archives as well as for maintaining all communications related to cases before the Court. The Registrar is also responsible for appointing the Court's Registry officials, which consist of the five Section Registries and are responsible for providing legal and administrative support to the Court.

Sources of Law

- **Rules 15 to 18B** of ECtHR Rules of Court on the Registry

The plenary Court elects the Registrar by secret ballot and requires an absolute majority vote by ECtHR elected judges. The Registrar may not be dismissed from office unless two-thirds of the ECtHR elected judges agree that the Registrar cannot fulfill his or her duties. While any judge may initiate the procedure to dismiss the Registrar from office, the Registrar must first be heard by the plenary Court. The plenary Court also elects one or more Deputy Registrars for a five-year term, following the same voting process.

Current Composition*

Section I	Section II	Section III	Section IV	Section V
<p>President: Ksenija Turković, Croatia, <i>ECTHR Vice-President</i> (2013-Oct. 2021)</p> <p>Vice-President: Krzysztof Wojtyczek, Poland (2012-Nov. 2021)</p> <p>Judges:</p> <p>Linos-Alexandre Sicilianos, Greece, <i>ECTHR Deputy Registrar</i> (2011-May 2020)³</p> <p>Aleš Pejchal, Czech Republic (2012-Nov. 2021)</p> <p>Armen Harutyunyan, Armenia (2015-Sept. 2024)</p> <p>Pere Pastor Vilanova, Andorra (2015-Nov. 2024)</p> <p>Pauliine Koskelo, Finland (2016-Jan. 2025)</p> <p>Tim Eicke, United Kingdom, <i>ECTHR Registrar</i> (2016-Sept. 2025)</p> <p>Jovan Ilievski, Macedonia (2017-Feb. 2026)</p> <p>Raffaele Sabato, Italy (2019-May 2028)</p>	<p>President: Jon Fridrik Kjølbro, Denmark, <i>ECTHR Vice-President</i> (2014-April 2023)</p> <p>Vice-President: Marko Bošnjak, Slovenia (2016-May 2025)</p> <p>Judges:</p> <p>Valeriu Grițco, Moldova (2012-Nov. 2020)</p> <p>Egidius Kūris, Lithuania (2013-Oct. 2022)</p> <p>Ivana Jelić, Montenegro (2018-July 2027)</p> <p>Arnfinn Bårdsen, Norway (2019-Jan. 2028)</p> <p>Darian Pavli, Albania (2019-Jan. 2028)</p> <p>Saadet Yüksel, Turkey (2019-July 2028)</p> <p>Peeter Roosma, Estonia (2020-Jan. 2029)</p>	<p>President: Paul Lemmens, Belgium (2012-Sept. 2021)</p> <p>Vice-President: Georgios Serghides, Cyprus, duty judge in charge of interim measures (2016-April 2025)</p> <p>Judges:</p> <p>Helen Keller, Switzerland (2011-Oct. 2020)</p> <p>Dmitry Dedov, Russia (2013-Oct. 2022)</p> <p>Alena Poláčková, Slovakia (2015- Dec. 2024)</p> <p>María Elósegui, Spain (2018-March 2027)</p> <p>Gilberto Felici, San Marino (2018-Sept. 2027)</p> <p>Erik Wennerström, Sweden (2019-April 2028)</p> <p>Lorraine Schembri Orland, Malta (2019-Sept. 2028)</p> <p>Ana Maria Guerra Martins, Portugal (2020-April 2029)</p>	<p>President: Yonko Grozev, Bulgaria (2015-April 2024)</p> <p>Vice-President: Faris Vehabović, Bosnia and Herzegovina, duty judge in charge of interim measures (2012-Dec. 2020)</p> <p>Judges:</p> <p>Iulia Antoanella Motoc, Romania (2013-Dec. 2022)</p> <p>Branko Lubarda, Serbia (2015-April 2024)</p> <p>Carlo Ranzoni, Liechtenstein (2015-Sept. 2024)</p> <p>Stéphanie Mourou-Vikström, Monaco (2015-Sept. 2024)</p> <p>Georges Ravarani, Luxembourg (2015-Nov. 2024)</p> <p>Jolien Schukking, Netherlands (2017-April 2026)</p> <p>Péter Paczolay, Hungary (2017-May 2026)</p>	<p>President: Síofra O’Leary, Ireland (2015-July 2024)</p> <p>Vice-President: Gabriele Kucsko-Stadlmayer, Austria, duty judge in charge of interim measures (2015-Nov. 2024)</p> <p>Judges:</p> <p>Robert Spano, Iceland, <i>ECTHR President</i> (2013-Oct. 2022)</p> <p>Ganna Yudkivska, Ukraine (2010-June 2019)⁴</p> <p>Mārtiņš Mits, Latvia (2015-Sept. 2024)</p> <p>Lətif Hüseynov, Azerbaijan (2017-Jan. 2026)</p> <p>Lado Chanturia, Georgia (2018-Jan. 2027)</p> <p>Anja Seibert-Fohr, Germany (2020-Jan. 2029)</p> <p>Mattias Guyomar, France (2020-June 2029)</p>
<p>Registrar: Abel Campos</p> <p>Deputy Registrar: Renata Degener</p>	<p>Registrar: Stanley Naismith</p> <p>Deputy Registrar: Hasan Bakırcı</p>	<p>Registrar: Milan Blasko</p> <p>Deputy Registrar: Olga Chernishova</p>	<p>Registrar: Andrea Tamietti</p> <p>Deputy Registrar: Ilse Freiwirth</p>	<p>Registrar</p> <p>Deputy Registrar: Victor Soloveytschik</p>

* Last updated July 2020.

³ According to the country-by-country “table of progress,” Greece was invited to submit a list of three candidates by December 9, 2019, <https://assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/CDH/Pdf/TableForthcomingJudgesElections-EN.pdf>.

⁴ According to the country-by-country “table of progress,” Ukraine was invited to submit a list of three candidates by December 6, 2018, <https://assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/CDH/Pdf/TableForthcomingJudgesElections-EN.pdf>.

ELECTION OF JUDGES

Election Process

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe elects the judges to the ECtHR. Pursuant to Article 22 of the Convention, the process to elect judges involves two phases: first, there is a national selection procedure in which each State party is responsible for presenting three qualified candidates to the Assembly; second, the Assembly assesses the qualifications of the proposed candidates, evaluates the fairness of the national procedure, and elects one of the proposed candidates as judge.

The **national election procedure** begins about one year before there is an expected vacancy. It is triggered when the Secretary General of the Assembly invites a State party to submit a list of candidates by a given deadline. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has set up an Advisory Panel of Experts to assist States in selecting candidates. States parties are invited to submit to the Panel of Experts the names and Curriculum Vitae of the proposed candidates. The Panel will then decide, by written procedure or at a meeting, whether the proposed candidates meet the requirements stipulated in Article 21 of the Convention. While States are not required to follow the Panel's recommendations, the Committee of Ministers insists that States parties give "due consideration" to the Panel's decisions.

Nomination of Judges

- Guidelines on the selection of candidates for the post of judge at the European Court of Human Rights ([text](#))
- Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1646 (2009) ([text](#))

In 2012, the Committee of Ministers adopted a set of "Guidelines on the selection of candidates for the post of judge at the European Court of Human Rights." These address the procedures for the selection of judges at the national level and outline requirements that each individual candidate must meet. A State must describe its national procedure for selecting candidates in the letter to the Assembly listing its proposed candidates. Once the list of candidates is before the Assembly, the Assembly will publish it on its website.

The **election procedure before the Assembly** begins with the Committee on the Election of Judges to the ECtHR— a special parliamentary committee composed of 22 legal experts nominated by political groups within the Assembly, including the chairpersons of the Committees on Legal Affairs and Equality and Non-Discrimination. The Committee on the Election of Judges will review a State's list of candidates. It may reject the list by majority vote if it determines that the national election procedure lacks fairness, transparency, and consistency, or that the list is not gender balanced. Single-sex lists will be rejected unless the candidates belong to the underrepresented sex on the Court (the sex that 40% or less of the judges belong to). The Committee will vote on the candidate it prefers by secret ballot, and will communicate its decision to the Assembly before the session during which the election is scheduled to take place.

Election Procedure

- Parliamentary Assembly, Procedure for the election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights, 26 May 2020 ([text](#))

The Assembly, made up of 324 parliamentarians, will vote on the list of candidates reviewed by the Committee during the Assembly's plenary sessions. Members of the Assembly will vote by secret ballot. If one candidate obtains an absolute majority, he or she will be elected. If not, a second round of voting

will take place. Only a relative majority is needed during the second round. The President of the Assembly will then announce the election results.

ECTHR Presidency

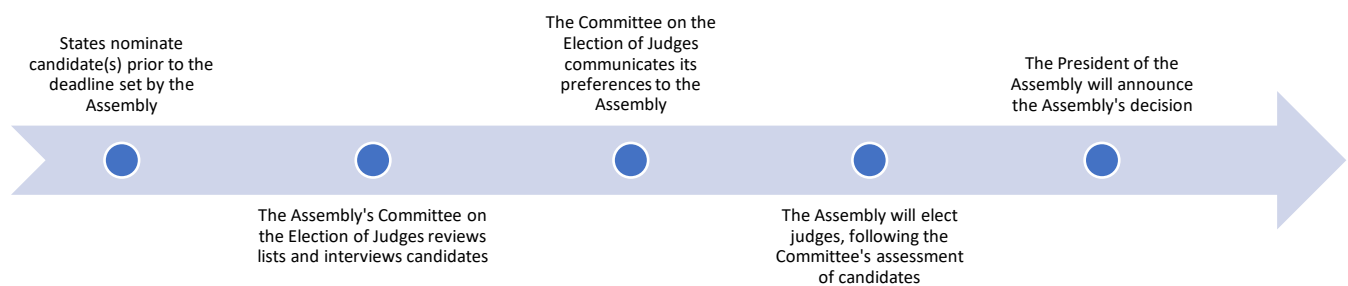
Of the elected judges, the plenary Court elects its President and two Vice-Presidents for a **three-year period**, with the possibility of reelection, pursuant to Article 25 of the Convention and Rule 8 of the Rules of Court. The plenary Court also elects Section Presidents and Vice-Presidents for a **two-year period**, renewable. Both the Court and Section Presidents and Vice-Presidents are elected by secret ballot, and only judges who are present may cast a vote. An absolute majority of the votes cast is required.

If none of the candidates for President or Vice-President of the Court receive an absolute majority, additional rounds of voting will take place until one candidate receives an absolute majority. After each round, candidates who received less than five votes will be eliminated. If more than two candidates receive five votes or more in subsequent rounds, the candidate with the least number of votes will be eliminated. If there is a tie in the final round, the judge with precedence – as established in Rule 5 of the Rules of Court – will be elected. A similar process will be followed to elect a President or Vice-President of a Section; however, for these elections, if candidates do not receive an absolute majority, only the candidates who receive the least number of votes after each round of voting will be eliminated. Rule 14 of the Rules of Court requires the Court to pursue a policy aimed at securing a balanced gender representation within its Presidency.

Dismissals & Resignations

According to Rule 7 of the Rules of Court, any judge may set in motion the procedure to dismiss another judge from office if “he or she has ceased to fulfil the required conditions.” A two-thirds majority of elected judges is necessary to remove a judge from office, and the judge being dismissed must first be heard by the plenary Court. Pursuant to Rule 7 of the Rules of Court, Judges may also resign from their post by notifying the President of the Court, who will then submit the resignation to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Timing



ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The process of selecting candidates for nomination and possible election determines the future composition of the Commission. Civil society involvement is essential in ensuring that nominations for Commissioners meet the requirements set forth in the relevant rules.

The European Court maintains a “[table of progress by Contracting Party](#)” that is regularly updated with information about upcoming elections. Civil society should monitor the table of progress to stay informed about which States are undergoing the national selection procedure. While the role of civil society is limited at the Court level, opportunities exist at the national level.

The Open Society Justice Initiative, in partnership with the International Commission of Jurists, has published a [report](#) on the domestic nomination process of candidates to regional human rights systems in Africa, the Americas, and Europe. The report provides a detailed profile of Algeria, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Mozambique, South Africa, and Uganda. It finds that States and regional bodies often fall short of their international legal obligations with respect to their nomination and election processes, and recommends to States that they hold a meaningful consultation with civil society to improve the nomination process at the domestic level, among other recommendations.