

# Evaluation of the Human Rights House Concept and its Advocacy Component

Final Report

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## **Disclaimer**

This evaluation followed and was guided by the Terms of Reference issued by the Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF). The evaluation was supported by the HRHF Board, as well as the members of the Human Rights House Network. It is planned that the findings and recommendations will be utilized during the strategic planning process, designed to better promote and protect human rights in the targeted countries and worldwide. The views expressed in this report are those of the consultant and should in no way be taken to represent those of the Human Rights House Foundation. Any mistakes or omissions are the responsibility of the author.

## List of Acronyms

BHRH	The Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House
COE	Council of Europe
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EHRH	Educational Human Rights House
EU	European Union
GA	General Assembly
GoA	Government of Azerbaijan
GoG	Government of Georgia
GYLA	Georgian Young Lawyers' Association
HRHF	Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights
HRC	Human Rights Committee
HRD	Human Rights Defender
HRH	Human Rights House
HRHA	Human Rights House Azerbaijan
HRHB	Human Rights House Belgrade
HRHF	Human Rights House Foundation
HRHN	Human Rights House Network
HRHT	Human Rights House Tbilisi
HRHZ	Human Rights House Zagreb
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ILIA	International Law in Advocacy
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IO	International Organizations
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning
MIL	Media and Information Literacy
MBO	Membership Based Organization
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PIN	People in Need
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Background**

The evaluation of the Human Rights House (HRH) concept and its advocacy component was commissioned by the Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF), in order to ascertain the extent to which the existing Houses are able to serve the human rights cause and meet the new challenges on the path to protect and promote human rights. Specifically, the consultant was asked to draw conclusions on the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of the HRH concept and the different House models for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and to identify recommendations to update the concept, with aim to maximize the potential positive impact for the human rights cause both locally, as well as globally. The evaluation was conducted during September-December 2017, with field work taking place in three phases during October-November 2017. Preliminary findings and recommendations were presented to the HRHF Board and management in December 2017, which the final assessment shared with the HRHs in January 2018.

### **Findings**

#### *Relevance*

Relevance of the Human Rights House concept was found to be high, both in terms of alignment with local human rights and development needs and the declared priorities of the host countries at the time of their creation. Furthermore, the Houses were responsive to underlying needs of civil society organizations (CSOs) on the ground, as they strove (1) to strengthen the professional capacities of HRDs, human rights lawyers, youth, and civil society organizations, (2) to provide safe space for human rights organizations and civic activists, and (3) to support HRDs and the member CSOs in regional and international networking. The HRHs' relevance to the needs of non-member civic activists, CSOs, and HRDs was found to be less pronounced in the classical House model, than in the model, where the House is serving as a hub for common activities, with its members maintaining their own offices. While the Houses are responsive to the changing local and global contexts, there is a need to be more relevant to the needs of local populations.

#### *Effectiveness*

In general, the reviewed Houses have been effective in achieving their objectives of enhancing solidarity among member and non-member CSOs and improving human rights protection in their countries, including through collaborative advocacy on national and international levels. The effectiveness of the House is not pre-determined by the HRH model selected by its members, but rather by a host of other factors connected to the Houses' governance, donor support, and the role played by HRHF. There has been a significant difference in the HRHs' outreach to stakeholders both domestically and internationally, which is partly related to complex institutional set up that is difficult to communicate and partly to the inability of the House management and membership to be open to the outside world. Communication within the HRH Network and with external stakeholders is hampered by language barriers.

#### *Impact*

Both micro- and macro-level impact has been achieved, which was mainly due to the fact that the HRH design is flexible to reflect the needs on the ground and allows for beneficiary

participation and collaborative advocacy. The impact of the HRH concept on the wider civil society community is undeniable, as through the HRHs the Foundation was providing “core support” to human rights organizations, when such a notion did not even exist. The protection program, together with HRHF’s efforts to establish standards for states to create an enabling environment for human rights defenders (HRDs), has had direct positive impact on the lives of the HRDs under siege. Furthermore, educational programming has had impact both in terms of increasing human rights knowledge of the beneficiaries, as well as inspiring its beneficiaries to do more human rights work. Yet, direct impact on the population was less pronounced, given the weak relevance of the Houses to the latter’s needs. There is a clear systemic impact achieved through successful advocacy for the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus and the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.

### **Recommendations**

1. The Houses are recommended regularly to review their practices and procedures, with aim to ensure democratic, transparent, and efficient governance and to respond to the challenges facing the Houses. This would mean empowering both the membership assemblies and the House management, as well as opening up of the Boards for external stakeholders.
2. The Houses need to have long-term strategies and its implementation action plans, both at the time of their establishment and onward. When strategizing, the House members need to define their roles beyond the needs of individual organizations, identify concrete means of collaboration, when collaboration is not automatically generated by physical proximity, and address the challenge of availability to citizens.
3. The Houses and their member CSOs need to address the challenge of availability to citizens both in the internal legal and technical documents of the HRHs and via concrete actions that respond to the population’s needs on the ground. Responding to what the citizens perceive to be their biggest human rights challenges does not mean that the Houses should abandon working on civil and political rights. Furthermore, the HRHs could improve their work with local communities, so that they can really become centers for community activism.
4. Given the developments within and around the Houses, HRHF should revisit the requirements set forth in the Manual for the members of the core group. While previous cooperation among the potential members may be an asset, the practice shows that it can lead to the creation of an old friends’ club, which precludes inter-generational dialogue and makes it difficult for the Houses to be open to others. In addition, HRHF is recommended to consider a conditionality approach when setting up the Houses and being involved in their Boards from the beginning, to provide a different perspective and the needed mentoring to the management team. When the creation of a House involves purchasing of an office space, HRHF is advised to consider maintaining partial or full ownership of the property, both to mitigate the expropriation risks, as well as the risks that are associated with weak internal governance of the HRHs.
5. The Foundation is advised to look carefully into opening up the Human Rights House Network by establishing Houses in other regions of the world, including Western Europe. Opening up the Network can promote experience sharing among and cooperation between

human rights organizations and activists and can contribute to both enhanced visibility of HRDs and increased effectiveness of the existing Houses.

6. There is an urgent need to implement the communication strategy that has been developed by HRHF, to improve communication with external stakeholders, as well as within the HRHN. The Houses too should take more active steps to communicate with external stakeholders and the public. The communication materials should be about the impact and not about activities, as often is the case. Furthermore, for enhanced effectiveness and impact, it is important that communication materials are also developed in English.
7. HRHF is advised to look into developing an HRH-tailored co-working toolkit. The toolkit alone will not be enough, as the House members and management also need to work on cultivating the skills of communal living. Given that this is a Network-wise issue, it would work best, if the Foundation considered running such skills-building workshops.
8. The Houses and the member CSO could benefit from such capacity building efforts as fundraising methods, results-based management, monitoring and evaluation. Other capacity building efforts could involve thematic trainings of social and economic rights issues, perhaps, through curriculum of the ILIA-Stronger or through partnerships with other INGOs that specialize on these rights. There is a general need to build capacity of the Houses and member CSOs on good governance principles and development concepts, so that they practice what they preach and can respond to the recent illiberal tendencies.
9. HRHF advocacy team should continue with the good practice of defining the Foundation's international advocacy priorities and working with the Houses to develop country-specific advocacy strategies. It would enhance the HRH's effectiveness and impact, if these strategies would outline in detail how the House and its member CSOs will be engaging national authorities to effect positive changes.
10. HRHF should continue to advocate and support the mandates of the Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in Belarus and on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, while also cultivating relations with other SRs and countering the tendencies of weaken the international human rights mechanisms.
11. In light of the recent decision of the European Commission to initiate the Article 7 procedures against Poland and the interest among the Houses to increase advocacy on the EU level, explore whether there is a potential for dialing up advocacy work in Brussels, provided that there is a commitment from the Houses and a clear idea, as to the issues they would like to emphasize. Alternatively, consider whether a presence in the capital of a powerful EU-member state may be more effective for impacting the human rights agenda.

## II. INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of the Human Rights House Concept and its advocacy component was commissioned by the Human Rights House Foundation, so as to receive an overall assessment of the concept and its relevance, by looking at the extent to which the existing Houses are able to serve the human rights cause and meet the new challenges on the path to protect and promote human rights. This was not an evaluation of HRHF, the Human Rights House Network (HRHN), or its member organizations. However, it still required a review of previous and current activities of the Houses and their national and international level advocacy, in order to identify shortcomings and good practices that have affected the ability of HRHs to meet the challenges faced by HRDs and CSOs all over the world.

An Inception Report detailing the approach and methodology of the consultant was submitted to and approved by HRHF in September 2017. The evaluation was conducted during September-December 2017, with field work taking place in three phases during October 19-22, October 30-November 3, and November 19-23. The field visits enabled the consultant to learn about the functioning of three different House models in Vilnius, Lithuania (for the Belarusian HRH), Zagreb, Croatia (for HRH Zagreb), and Kiev and Chernihiv, Ukraine (for Educational HRH). Around 50% of interviews with partners and stakeholders were conducted remotely. Preliminary findings and recommendations were presented to HRHF staff and Board in December 2017. The original assessment report was written in English and shared with HRHF and the HRHs in January 2018.

## III. OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The ToR issued by HRHF concerned the evaluation of the HRH concept and its advocacy component, so as to obtain an overall assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of the concept, by looking at the extent to which the existing Houses are able to fulfill the original purpose of improving “the national capacity to uphold and protect human rights” and benefiting the human rights community by “providing a stable and sustainable base of human rights activities.”<sup>1</sup> By focusing on the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of the existing HRH models, the consultant was asked (1) to draw conclusions on the overall relevance of the HRH concept and the different House models for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and (2) to identify recommendations to update the concept and the existing models with aim to maximize the potential positive impact for the human rights cause both locally, as well as globally.

Apart from the global objectives identified above, the ToR asked several specific questions that can be grouped under one of the five DAC evaluation criteria. Thus, under the **Relevance** criterion, HRHF seeks the consultant’s assessment of the extent to which the HRH models are congruous with the purpose for which they were set up and are in line with the needs and priorities of the country and target group of CSOs. The ToR also required that the consultant assessed whether the House design is still responsive to the changing international and local contexts, so as to draw lessons learned for future interventions.

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Manual for Establishing a Human Rights House*, Human Rights House Foundation, p. 6.



Under the **Effectiveness** criterion, the ToR requested that the consultant look into the extent to which the evaluated Houses have been able to achieve the objectives for which they have been set up, both in terms of improving the human rights protection in their respective countries, as well as supporting collaborative advocacy and enhancing solidarity among the member and non-member NGOs. The consultant was asked to look into the reasons for lackluster performance, as well as to identify those factors that have contributed to increased effectiveness of a given House, as these factors may need to be nurtured over time or can be promoted across the network to achieve maximum effectiveness.

The Foundation also required an assessment of the HRHs **impact** on the situation in terms of the change they have brought to the victims of human rights violations and the wider NGO community. It requested that the consultant look into whether there are “examples of best practice, where a House is meeting all or most of the needs,” managing to adapt to the changing environment to maximize its positive impact on the human rights cause.

#### **IV. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION**

To undertake the evaluation, the consultant initially conducted desk research, collecting and analyzing secondary sources of data, both on the external environment for human rights in the targeted regions and on the HRH concept and its history, as well as the activities and the impact of the different Houses that are operational to date. During the desk phase, the consultant collected information mostly through analysis of secondary sources of data, complemented by several interviews with representatives of the Foundation. The regional selection for the desk phase was determined by the consultant’s knowledge of the Houses operating in the Caucasus and the need to learn more about the beginnings of the HRH concept, which dates back to the creation of the HRH in Oslo.

The secondary data gathered from desk research was complemented with primary data from fieldwork. In consultation with HRHF, the consultant decided to visit Vilnius, Kiev, Chernihiv, and Zagreb to learn more about the Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House (BHRH), Educational Human Rights House in Chernihiv (EHRH), and Human Rights House Zagreb (HRHZ). The regional selection was determined by the consultant’s knowledge of the Houses operating in the South Caucasus region, the need to learn about the different House models to fulfill the requirements of the ToR, and availability of the Houses for the duration of the field visit.<sup>2</sup>

To collect the data from primary sources, the consultant resorted to semi-structured individual and focus group interviews, selecting the respondents through a combination of two non-probability sampling methods – purposive and snowball sampling. The consultant decided to use the purposive sampling method, as it allows to select each sample element for a purpose, usually because of its unique position. Furthermore, a purposive sample allows the researcher to target individuals, who are particularly knowledgeable about the issues under investigation.

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<sup>2</sup> The consultant had an opportunity to learn about the Human Rights House Tbilisi in spring 2017, when undertaking HRHT’s institutional capacity assessment, which was to feed into the evaluation of the HRH concept. In addition, in 2013, the consultant evaluated an EU-funded EIDHR project involving Human Rights House Azerbaijan (HRHA) and its members, which gave her good exposure to the work of the House in Baku.

Throughout the evaluation, the consultant followed the Rubin Criteria<sup>3</sup> when selecting informants (the target population) for this assessment:

1. Informants should be knowledgeable about the situation or experience being studied,
2. Informants should be willing to talk, and
3. Informants should be representative of the range of points of view.

While purposive sampling was the main method used in this research, the consultant complemented this method with the use of snowball sampling, to identify the underlying and invisible connections between different members of the target population. The application of this method has improved the quality of the analysis, as it helped identify several key individuals who provided valuable information for the report.

Over the course of the evaluation, the consultant interviewed the following groups of individuals:

1. **HRHF representatives:** management team, program managers and staff involved in advocacy and capacity building, as well as the Board Chair,
2. **Internal and external stakeholders of the existing Houses,** including House member CSOs, other members of civil society, locally present donor community, national human rights institutions, representatives of Academia, etc.,
3. **Key international human rights actors,** including those that have been exposed to the advocacy efforts of the HRH Foundation, including representatives of the UN, EU, COE, OSCE, HRW, NED, Save the Children, Solidarity Center, etc.,
4. **HRH donors** that support the work of the Houses nationally, as well as relevant Embassy staff, who have had exposure to the Houses and can provide feedback about their assessment of the Houses and their impact, and
5. **The House beneficiaries.**

By December 24, the consultant had concluded a critical mass of interviews, as a result of which she achieved completeness and saturation in responses, allowing her to complete the interviewing process as per the Rubin Criteria.<sup>4</sup>

### Constraints and Mitigation

One of the key limitations facing the consultant was related to the geography of the assessment, as it was to cover multiple countries and time zones in a fairly short timeframe. This limitation was mitigated by careful and collaborative planning, with great support provided to the consultant by HRHF, as well as HRH staff from Vilnius, Chernihiv, and Zagreb. Excellent communication with BHRH was instrumental in planning the field visit in Vilnius at the time of the 4<sup>th</sup> Belarusian Human Rights Defenders' Forum, which brought together virtually all Belarusian HRDs and Belarus donor community to Vilnius and afforded the consultant a unique opportunity to hear

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<sup>3</sup> Herbert Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995, p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> According to Rubin criteria, for interviewing to end, the researcher should feel that she or he achieved completeness and saturation in responses. The completeness test is passed when the data gathered by the researcher provides an overall sense of the meaning of a concept, theme, or process. Saturation, on the other hand, is achieved when the researcher gains confidence that with each new interview she or he is learning little that was not already disclosed in previous interviews.

about the challenges facing the HRD community, as well as to learn the views of the donor community supporting the civil society sector in Belarus.

Another key limitation for this evaluation was the respondents' willingness to talk. The Network-wide recognition of the need to conduct the assessment greatly mitigated this risk from the House member CSOs, with vast majority of those contacted for the evaluation making time to share information. While there were some issues were experienced when getting in touch with or interview representatives from the different Houses, it was not comparable to the difficulties encountered with key international human rights actors, with many not responding to several requests for an interview. In a few cases, interviews were scheduled and duly confirmed, but the respondent did not make an appearance. While creating challenges, respondents' willingness to talk did not impact the outcome of the evaluation, as the consultant was able to reach around 100 individuals from different groups, which has allowed her to achieve completeness and saturation in responses.

## **V. ABOUT THE HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE CONCEPT**

The HRH concept is based on the premise that for civil society organizations (CSOs) and human rights defenders (HRDs) to be successful in promoting and protecting human rights, they need to collaborate within a specific country, as well as outside its borders. The deeper and the wider the collaboration between likeminded actors with shared values and objectives, the more effective they can be in addressing the common challenges of (1) shrinking space for civic activism and human rights work, (2) low institutional capacity of CSOs and diminished pool of funding, (3) increasingly dangerous operating environment for HRDs, and (4) dwindling interest among the Western governments to promote improved protection of human rights worldwide. Thus, the Houses have been established in different parts of the world as one of the means of addressing the existing and emerging local and global human rights challenges through (1) creating an environment that stimulates collaboration and co-operation, (2) enhancing networking, moral support, and solidarity among organizations, (3) increasing the visibility of its member organizations and the human rights community at large, and (4) providing a stable and secure base of activities for CSOs and HRDs.<sup>5</sup>

It is noteworthy that the first HRH was set up in 1989 not in a developing country with rampant human rights violations and difficult operational environment for CSOs, but in Oslo, Norway. The House's establishment was in part prompted by the geo-political changes that were taking place at the time, which culminated in the fall of the Berlin wall and then the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Despite the fact that since the establishment of the first House, all but two HRH was established in the post-communist and often post-conflict states, the concept's applicability is not narrowly circumscribed by a specific geo-political, historical, or socio-economic context. Rather it is mindful of the fact that while different "environments create their own particular challenges and difficulties" for human rights organizations, there are "a number of challenges and problems that seem to be shared by most" despite their size, type, country origin, or operational environment.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the HRH concept is framed as a way of "meeting common

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<sup>5</sup> See *The Manual for Establishing a Human Rights House*, Human Rights House Foundation, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

challenges,” with a preferred strategy of physical co-location to overcome difficulties and address both local and global needs.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, from its inception, the House concept has had both domestic and international dimensions, as it is impossible to effectively promote and protect human rights without simultaneously targeting national governments and the international community. Consequently, it has been envisioned that domestically the Houses are to become centers of human rights promotion and protection, by strengthening and building the capacity of its members and other CSOs and enhancing collaboration among HRDs, through common educational, monitoring, and advocacy efforts and shared space. Most HRHs represent a variation of a single-tier membership-based organization that unite multiple civil society actors from a given country; by design, it is to be a fluid MBO, with the founding members taking on an inclusivity obligation, which means openness of the House both as a physical space for work, as well as a virtual domain for like-minded activists and CSOs to follow their missions and to advocate for better protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

As noted, co-location is the preferred set-up for the HRHs, as it is believed that the sheer proximity with each other creates synergies and facilitates better information-sharing, coordination, and cost-savings for the member CSOs, which, in turn, contributes to more effective human rights work. While a good majority of the existing Houses are located in a common physical premises, this is but one of the three House models operational to date. The other two models also center on physical space either with a lead CSOs providing access to premises and opportunities for other CSOs (as is the case with the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights in Poland<sup>8</sup> and the Rafto House) or with the House serving as a hub for common activities, with its members maintaining their own offices (Educational Human Rights House in Chernihiv and previously operational HRH in Azerbaijan).

Initially, all Houses start as “virtual” houses, in that the founding member CSOs (referred to as the core group) spend between one to three years cooperating with each other, as they agree on the institutional set up of the House, as well as select and refurbish the needed space. These diverse HRH models have come about both due to the specificities of local contexts and from differing wants of the House founding member CSOs, both factors necessitating different structures and methods to serve the human rights’ needs.

Another way of classifying the Houses is by way in which the real estate properties are handled. The differences are connected in part to local legal and political contexts, as well as the desires of the House member CSOs. Thus, according to the Manual for Establishing a Human Rights House, there are following models when deciding whether to buy, rent or build the HRH premises: (1) renting at commercial rates, (2) inexpensive or free lease with the title of the premises resting on a third part, be it a private investor or a local government, (3) joint ownership,

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> It is difficult for most to place the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights into the HRH network, as it does not position itself as a House either nationally or internationally. If it is open to other CSOs in Poland, it is not visible externally or within the HRH Network, which does not serve as a good example to other newly established Houses, which struggle with being accessible to non-member CSOs and the public and are often reminded that diversity and openness is one of the main components of the HRH concept.

where the House premises are co-owned by the core group and the funds are raised and donated to them by the Foundation, (4) ownership of the premises by one of the House member CSOs, and (5) trusteeship, whereby the premises are owned by those, who have no vested interest in the House member CSOs.<sup>9</sup> The Manual also provides for a networking model as a way of handling the issue of premises, whereby CSOs agree on setting up a “virtual House,” so as to promote collaboration and networking, till the time when political context will make it possible to move into joint offices. The assessment demonstrated that this cannot be viewed as a separate implementation modality, but rather a stage in establishing of a House.<sup>10</sup>

Connecting local with global is the international advocacy arm of the Human Rights House Foundation, which supports the existing Houses in identifying international advocacy opportunities and promoting human rights causes on the international plane. Through the Foundation’s work in Geneva, Strasbourg, and Brussels, all HRHs are able to enjoy international standing and advocate as a community of likeminded actors at the UN, the EU, and the CoE.

Another avenue of connecting local with global is the Human Rights House Network (HRHN), which was envisioned as a bottom-up endeavor to strengthen the work of organizations, to generate political support for the work of HRDs and the civil society at large, to promote knowledge sharing between the members, and to focus on the promotion and the protection of the rights to freedom of assembly, freedom of association and freedom of expression, and the right to be an HRD.<sup>11</sup> The importance of both local and international dimensions is clearly noted in the HRH Network Agreement, as well as the HRHF Results Framework, though perhaps not as well spelt out in the statutes of individual HRHs.

## VI. CONTEXT

The geopolitical context within which the Human Rights House Foundation and the Houses operate has changed significantly over the past two decades, with many developments directly impacting the civil society sector and human rights organizations. Thus, while the 1990s were characterized by the “global associational revolution”<sup>12</sup> and rapid growth of CSOs around the world, the recent decade has witnessed a “counter-revolution,” with governments from various parts of the world trying to silence different or dissenting voices found within their societies. This counter-revolution has led to global worsening of the situation with respect to fundamental rights of association, peaceful assembly and expression, with already 106 counties seriously

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<sup>9</sup> *The Manual for Establishing a Human Rights House* also provides for a networking model, whereby there is no possibility to have premises due to the oppressive environment in the country, but the CSOs agree on setting up a “virtual house” in hopes that sometime in the future they will be able to share offices (see pp. 20-1).

<sup>10</sup> This was confirmed by the developments related to the BHRH and the views of those CSOs engaged in setting up a Crimea Human Rights House in Exile – they do not consider that they will be establishing as a virtual house.

<sup>11</sup> Agreement on Cooperation between the Members of the Human Rights House Network, art. 2.

<sup>12</sup> The term was developed by Lester Salaman in his 1994 Foreign Affairs article and later explored in the 1999 book Salamon, Lester M.; Anheier, Helmut K.; List, Regina; Toepler, Stefan; Sokolowski, S. Wojciech; Associates, *Global Civil Society: Dimensions of the Nonprofit Sector*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.

constraining civic space, leading experts to assert that ‘the restriction of civic space has become the norm rather than the exception. It should now be considered a global emergency.’<sup>13</sup>

Human rights defenders, “individuals who promote and protect all human rights through peaceful means without discrimination,”<sup>14</sup> have been bearing the brunt of the government-led counter-revolution, for their vocal criticism of public authorities, corporations and other non-state actors that abuse their powers. To silence the critical voices and to maintain their hold on power, many governments have significantly restricted the enjoyment of civil and political rights by their citizens and most especially by the HRDs. As estimated, “more than 120 laws restricting civic rights were introduced or proposed in 60 countries” between 2012 and 2015,<sup>15</sup> which included criminalization of previously permitted activities, bans on foreign sources of funding, suppression on online freedom of expression and use of the internet, strikes against judicial independence, etc. Apart from enacting restrictive laws, the governments have resorted to personally attacking HRDs, with the world witnessing killings and forced disappearances, criminal prosecutions on unfounded charges, surveillance and smear campaigns to delegitimize the HRDs and civic activists, etc.

Unfortunately, the space is shrinking in the developed world as well, with the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association reporting that surveillance of civil society, notably police infiltration and heightened scrutiny of civic activists, has been an issue even in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States.<sup>16</sup> These types of violations have further emboldened the autocratic regimes that were previously somewhat checked by the international community. Moreover, diminished interest in and appetite for the protection of human rights among some of the Western democracies, has made things even more difficult for HRDs and civil society groups, not the least because of dwindling international funds to support their work.

As civil society organizations and human rights defenders face unprecedented attacks on their legitimacy and security, they have to counter their own weaknesses, most especially, long-term sustainability. Reasons for sustainability challenges are many, ranging from weak institutional capacity and inability to maintain qualified human resources to weak connections with local constituencies and inability to access funding, either due to their own governments or the restrictions imposed by international donors. Perhaps due to the latter issue, CSOs are often found in competition with each other, rather than trying to share experiences and lessons learned,

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<sup>13</sup> See the 2017 CIVICUS Civil Society Index at <http://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2017/state-of-civil-society-report-2017-executive-summary-en.pdf> (last accessed on January 2, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> As defined by the Human Rights House Network.

<sup>15</sup> See Emelie Aho and Jonatan Grinde, *Shrinking Space for Civil Society – Challenges in Implementing the 2030 Agenda*, p. 5 at [http://www.forumsyd.org/PageFiles/8150/PO150943\\_Rapport\\_5maj\\_web.pdf](http://www.forumsyd.org/PageFiles/8150/PO150943_Rapport_5maj_web.pdf) (last accessed on January 2, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> See Maina Kiai, *Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development*, Human Rights Council, Report A/HRC/26/29, 2014 at [http://freeassembly.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/A-HRC-26-29\\_en1.pdf](http://freeassembly.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/A-HRC-26-29_en1.pdf) and Maina Kiai, *Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms*, UN General Assembly, Report A70/266, 2015 at [http://freeassembly.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/A\\_70\\_266\\_ENG.pdf](http://freeassembly.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/A_70_266_ENG.pdf) (last accessed on January 2, 2018).

so that together they can better respond to the roadblocks that are put forward by the governments.

## **VII. FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION**

### **Relevance**

Per the DAC criteria and the ToR request, the consultant assessed whether the HRH concept and the existing House models are congruous with the purpose for which they were set up and are in line with the needs and priorities of the country and the target group of CSOs. As part of the evaluation, the consultant also reviewed whether the House design is still responsive to the changing international and local contexts, so as to draw lessons learned for future interventions.

#### Relevance to the Needs and Priorities on the Ground

The relevance of the Human Rights House Concept was found to be high, in terms of alignment with local human rights and development needs, as well as with the declared priorities of the host countries at the time of their creation. This includes even countries like Azerbaijan, where the Government has identified consolidation of democracy, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms as one of the priorities of the state.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, at the time of their establishment, the Houses were also responsive to underlying needs of civil society organizations on the ground, as they strove to strengthen the professional capacities of HRDs, human rights lawyers, youth, and civil society organizations, to provide safe space for human rights organizations and civic activists, and to support HRDs and the member CSOs in regional and international networking. Given the generous and long-term support from HRHF, the Houses were also able to provide the member CSOs with a financial safety net, which has become more important in the new international reality, as western states try to cope with the effects of global economic crisis and host governments are cutting their support for democratic civil society organizations.<sup>18</sup>

When it comes to the relevance to the needs of the target group of CSOs, a distinction is to be made between the core group and other CSOs operating in the country. Given the financial difficulties that are encountered by many human rights CSOs, the relevance of the classical House concept to the member CSOs is obvious, as it responds to the financial needs of the members. The review of the available applications from the core group to HRHF suggests that the concept is also relevant to the substantive needs of the members, as they are usually selected from the organizations that have a history of and the need to cooperate for common causes and seek better platforms to effect positive changes. At the same time, the relevance to the needs of

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<sup>17</sup> See the 2006 EU-Azerbaijan ENP Action Plan and the 2011-2013 National Indicative Program (NIP) for Azerbaijan.

<sup>18</sup> In Georgia, CSOs already have had to make great adjustment from the post-2008 war largesse from international donors to the post-global economic crisis scarcity in funding, which has had detrimental effect on some of the previously well-funded CSOs, including most members of the Human Rights House Tbilisi. In Croatia and Poland, CSOs that have been supported through public funds to protect and promote human rights, have been denied such support in recent years, leaving them strapped for cash and hampered to work toward the achievement of their missions.

non-member civic activists, CSOs, and HRDs is sometimes a bit less pronounced in the classical House model where the members are sharing common office space and more visible in models where the House is serving as a hub for common activities, with its members maintaining their own offices (e. g. the Educational Human Rights House in Chernihiv and the previously operational HRH in Azerbaijan).

The concept's design and implementation highlighted a need to be more relevant to local population. To be fair, the latter's needs have not been fully forgotten by the Houses and their member CSOs, as the majority of the applications to set up the Houses, as well as the House statutes, note the need to reach out to the citizens and to inform them about their human rights, so that they are more vigilant in defending them.<sup>19</sup> However, there is little notice of addressing those human rights needs that are problematized by the citizens of the targeted countries. The challenge of availability to the citizens or what could be termed as the legitimacy challenge faced by most CSOs in the targeted region is also not addressed in the Manual for Establishing the Human Rights House, which is focusing only on the following five common challenges shared by most human rights organizations: cooperation, networking, utilization of scarce resources, gaining influence, and security. Consequently, there is a weaker relevance of the Houses and their members to the population's needs on the ground, who often perceive their immediate human rights needs connected to the protection of their social and economic rights (e. g. health, labor, education, housing, etc.).<sup>20</sup> The weaker relevance to the population's human rights needs has repercussions for the HRHs' effectiveness and impact and precludes the Houses from being truly open to the communities in which they operate. Putting more emphasis on being more open and available to the citizens will serve well both the Houses and their member CSOs, as the increasing distance of CSOs from the populations they are to serve has provided fertile grounds for authoritarian attacks on the civil society, with the latter being portrayed as implementers of different foreign agendas, rather than the representatives of their constituencies.<sup>21</sup>

### Flexibility and Responsiveness to Changing Contexts

The consultant found that the House concept and the various House models are still responsive to the changing local and global contexts. It speaks of the flexibility of the House concept that the Belarusian Human Rights House (BHRH) was eventually established in Vilnius and works in exile until such time when the situation allows for the BHRH's work from Minsk, while the HRH in Azerbaijan was established not as a local entity, but as an international branch of the Foundation, so that it could become a safe space and a hub of common activities, to respond to the most pressing needs of the Azerbaijani civil society at large. It also speaks well about the relevance and flexibility of the House concept that the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, which unlike other Houses is not an MBO and never positioned itself as an HRH, has found it

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<sup>19</sup> See for example HRH Statutes and applications to the HRHF from the core groups located in Ukraine (Chernihiv), Armenia (Yerevan), Georgia (Tbilisi), Croatia (Zagreb), etc.

<sup>20</sup> For example, according to the Office of the Parliament Human Rights Commissioner in Ukraine, at least 1/3 of all the applications they received from the citizens in 2016, were connected to possible violations of their social and economic rights. This assessment is in line with country-wide and regional opinion polls (see at [http://www.ua.undp.org/content/ukraine/en/home/library/democratic\\_governance/civic\\_literacy\\_in\\_three\\_countries.html](http://www.ua.undp.org/content/ukraine/en/home/library/democratic_governance/civic_literacy_in_three_countries.html) and [https://issuu.com/undpukraine/docs/hrba\\_en/7](https://issuu.com/undpukraine/docs/hrba_en/7)).

<sup>21</sup> See the 2017 CIVICUS Civil Society Index.



increasingly helpful to find a refuge in the HRH concept, as it tries to counter the illiberal and undemocratic tendencies in Poland.

It is also important to highlight the new-found relevance of the Human Rights House concept, as the different Houses, mostly notably the HRH Tbilisi, Educational Human Rights House in Chernihiv, and the Belarusian HRH, increasingly engage in the protection of HRDs under siege, offering them shelter away from their home countries and providing the much needed legal, financial, and psychological support to them and their families. The work conducted in Geneva and Oslo by HRHF, as well as in Tbilisi and Chernihiv by the Houses there, must be underscored, given that the beneficiaries are mostly foreign nationals, from Azerbaijan, North Caucasus, Uzbekistan, and Russia, who are under siege and require international protection outside their countries of residence.

In the era of increasingly fast-changing human rights national and international contexts, maintaining relevance requires constant planning and situation analysis. There are good practices within the Human Rights House Network, both from HRHF, as well as the member Houses. Most notable among the latter is the Belarusian Human Rights House, which has supported or initiated the two most recent country-wide evaluations, one reviewing the potential for solidarity in the Belarusian society and within the civil society, and another evaluating the human rights community in the country. According to the BHRH member CSOs, they have been reflecting on the findings internally, to consider the future of the House and its activities.

These positive findings notwithstanding, there is a risk that the Houses could lose relevance, if the member organizations position the House as merely an office space, rather than a community space that is open to other civil society actors and citizens. This risk is present in all House models, but it is particularly obvious in the classic House design, especially, as it is encouraged that the member organizations move their entire secretariats to the HRH premises,<sup>22</sup> which then leads the core members' groundless belief that by opening up to the outside community of civic actors, they will be foregoing the office space that they consider to be theirs. Some Houses have dealt with this risk better than others, with the House in Tbilisi remaining particularly closed to the new membership or external stakeholders, still unable to undertake the needed reforms to be more responsive to the changing local context. On a more positive note, the Human Rights House Zagreb and BHRH have been more successful in making such changes, becoming increasingly open and transparent not only to the membership, but also to the rest of the human rights community. This has been achieved as a result of candid and constructive discussions, as well as changes in the management structures and behavior. In the case of BHRH, the changes were also helped by the political contexts within with the House and its member CSOs operate and by the special role of HRHF in the BHRH governance processes.

### Factors Influencing the HRH Relevance

The evaluation found that the continuous relevance of the Houses is impacted by both the human factor and the institutional design of the House. Indeed, the approaches adopted by the House management and its member CSOs, as well as their relations *inter se*, are largely responsible for the degree of flexibility demonstrated by the specific institution, including its openness to new

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<sup>22</sup> See the Manual for Establishing a Human Rights House, p. 26.

fields and ideas, as well as to other CSOs, social movements or individual civic activists. Similarly, it is the House member CSOs and the HRH management, who are responsible for making efforts to assess the context within which they operate, in order to determine how they can best respond to the identified changes and to maintain or augment the relevance of the Human Rights House in a given country.

One of the main factors that has driven the Houses to be responsive to changing local and global contexts is the Human Rights House Foundation. It has done so using various forms of support, such as direct involvement in the governance of the House (in Belarus and Azerbaijan), supporting institutional review and strategic planning processes, as they relate to international advocacy efforts (in Belarus, Croatia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Poland, and Georgia), providing capacity building opportunities (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia), identifying emerging global trends and international advocacy opportunities, etc. Of particular importance has been the flexibility of funding and effort shown by the Foundation, as it relates to supporting the HRDs under attack. Furthermore, HRHF has been instrumental in bringing together the HRH Network members through supporting common projects, including more recently the through the so-called House-to-House initiative, educational programs, and research endeavors (most recently on illiberal democracies). These and other efforts of the Foundation have greatly contributed to continued relevance of the Houses.

### **Effectiveness**

Under the effectiveness, the consultant assessed whether the Houses have been able to achieve the objectives for which they were set up, in terms of improving human rights protection, supporting collaborative advocacy, and enhancing solidarity among the member and non-member CSOs. Since effectiveness can also be assessed in terms of outreach, both geographically and with respect to target groups, beneficiaries, and stakeholders, the consultant also evaluated the stakeholder outreach and participation. When focusing on the effectiveness of the HRH concept, the consultant looked into the reasons for both successful and lackluster performance, as these factors may need to be addressed or nurtured over time or be promoted across the network to achieve maximum results.

In general, the reviewed Houses have been effective in achieving their objectives of enhancing solidarity among member and non-member CSOs and improving human rights protection in their countries, including through collaborative advocacy on national and international levels. There has been a significant difference in the HRHs' outreach to stakeholders both domestically and internationally, which is partly related to complex institutional set up that is difficult to communicate and partly to the inability of the House management and membership to be truly open to the outside world.

### Quantitative and Qualitative Aspects

#### *The Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House*

Since its creation, the BHRH has been able to bring together 10 member CSOs under one roof and create a safe environment for all Belarusian human rights defenders to meet and discuss

issues and to plan common advocacy campaigns. Given the political situation in Belarus, it has been called upon to provide shelter to HRDs under siege and has been referred to as an island of liberty by some of the respondents. In recent years, the House has become more open to non-member human rights CSOs, including those that are not in the mainstream of the HRD community, setting a good example to the Belarusian human rights community, which is characterized by its isolation from the rest of the (democratic) civil society groups and other agents of change. The BHRH has done so through supporting capacity building of all interested HRDs and non-member CSOs, engaging in and promoting collaborative human rights advocacy (mostly on the international plane), and providing protection to the HRDs under attack.

After 10 years of its operations, the BHRH boasts with around 30 user CSOs from Belarus and 1,450 individual users per year, who have benefited from the BHRH's facilities (accommodation, library space, and meeting rooms), as well as capacity building and protection support.<sup>23</sup> Importantly, it has conducted more than 60 events each year, including 3 triennial Belarusian Human Rights Defender Forums that brought together 80+ HRDs to discuss salient for the community issues and to promote broader and more strategic-level thinking among them.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, through its human rights education programming, the House has been effective in promoting human rights, by training more than 120 lawyers and human rights defenders, with vast majority of whom have since collaborated with or worked for various human rights CSOs.<sup>25</sup> The House has also been effectively protecting human rights defenders, providing them shelter and supporting at least 5 HRDs per year during the past two years. Just as importantly, the BHRH's efforts have been effective in enhancing the digital security of its members and the human rights community at large, by providing digital security trainings, audits, and hands-on support, protecting HRDs and civic activists from Belarus and other parts of the world from unauthorized access.

The House was not always effective in achieving its objectives. According to the respondents, initially, BHRH was not as well run as envisioned, being significantly more closed to both member and non-member CSOs. Some of the reasons for these initial setbacks were connected with ambiguous or faulty internal policies of the House, lack of communication within the Board about the challenges and obstacles faced within the House, the profile of the House manager selected to lead the establishment process, and the membership's inability to open up to non-BHRH member CSOs.

The stakeholders credit the BHRH transformation and improved effectiveness to bringing on board the new House Director, who has increased the House's transparency and brought with her excellent facilitation skills, which has ensured growth of the House not independently from its members, but rather reflecting their needs and positions. The positive changes within the BHRH were also driven by institutional developments, with the House changing many of its old procedures and developing new ones, in order to improve democratic and transparent governance of the House and to respond to the emerging needs and challenges of Belarusian CSOs. Furthermore, the formal role of the Foundation in the House governance has played a positive

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<sup>23</sup> *The Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House: First 10 Years of Activities 2007-2016*, Vilnius, Lithuania; March 2017, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> The latest HRD Forum organized by the House was in October 2017.

<sup>25</sup> See *The Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House: First 10 Years of Activities 2007-2016*, p. 7.

role in transforming the BHRH. There is still room for improvement, as noted by both BHRH and international stakeholders, not the least of which is the need to activate some of the dormant member CSOs, allowing for membership renewal, finding ways to translate gains from international advocacy into the local-level improvements, and strengthening institutional capacities of both the BHRH and its members, so that they are able to withstand and grow from leadership succession.

### *Human Rights House Zagreb*

During more than eight years of its existence, the Human Rights House Zagreb has become “the center of expertise on human rights,” improving human rights protection, enhancing solidarity among CSOs and HRDs, and waging collaborative advocacy campaigns. Unlike the BHRH, the HRHZ annual or programmatic reports are not available in English, which has precluded the consultant from referring to specific quantitative information related to the HRHZ effectiveness.<sup>26</sup> However, the information gained from the interviews with the House member and non-member CSOs, beneficiaries, and other national and international stakeholders, as well as the review of the documents provided by the HRHZ, confirmed that the HRHZ’s research, monitoring, educational, and advocacy work has been effective in the Zagreb House reaching its objectives.

More specifically, the HRHZ research efforts have fostered solidarity among CSOs, as well as created evidence on the state of democracy and human rights in Croatia, both through annual reports on the human rights situation, as well as thematic research focusing on specific rights or areas.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the HRHZ and its member CSOs have been effectively monitoring the implementation of the human rights obligations that have been taken on by the Croatian Government under various human rights regimes. The information gleaned from research and monitoring activities allows the House and its member CSOs to engage in evidence-based advocacy both independently and as part of various coalitions (most notably, the Platform 112), targeting national and international institutions and decision makers, as well as the Croatian public.

Just like the Belarusian Human Rights House, the Zagreb House has implemented successful educational programming and contributed to educational activities of other CSOs, targeting both youth and professionals, improving their human rights knowledge and enhancing their capacity to impart this knowledge to others. The interviews confirmed that the beneficiaries of the HRHZ Train-the-Trainer programming have been able to utilize the teaching methods they have learned in their careers as teachers and human rights advocates.<sup>28</sup> It has also been noted that the Ranko Helbrant library at the HRHZ, which specializes on human rights, has made a significant contribution to human education in Croatia. The contributions of the House and its members to human rights education has been noted by the Zagreb University’s Law Faculty, which is keen

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<sup>26</sup> Annual programmatic and financial reports from HRHZ are available online in Croatian at <http://www.kucaljudskihprava.hr/en/about-us/>, last accessed on December 23, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Just recently, HRHZ contributed to Resisting Ill Democracies report, as well as conducted independent work on whistleblower protection.

<sup>28</sup> Beneficiaries have also noted that they would like to learn a modernized curriculum, which focuses a bit more on medial and information literacy (MIL), public speaking and interviewing skills, especially for radio and TV programming,

to consider developing a master's level course on international human rights law, in cooperation with the House and its international partners.<sup>29</sup> Lastly, it speaks of the effectiveness of the HRHZ that, together with two other CSOs, it has been selected by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) as its national focal point for Croatia.

The House in Zagreb also underwent significant transformation, which according to all stakeholders has significantly enhanced its effectiveness. The transformation involved both institutional and generational changes. Since then, the HRHZ has become more relevant and effective in achieving its objectives, opening up to external stakeholders and tackling the many challenges it continues to face, including membership empowerment and renewal, fundraising, institutional capacity building, openness to civil society and to cross-sectoral cooperation, as well as to the wider public.

### *Educational Human Rights House*

EHRH is a fairly new institution, established just over three years ago, with a mission “to develop human rights education in Ukraine, to provide legal advice, and to carry out consolidated human rights educational campaigns.”<sup>30</sup> Since its establishment, the House has been busy with reconstruction works and making the EHRH building habitable, trying to address the feedback received from training participants and guests. The building is now operational, boasting several hostel-style rooms and a dining area, as well as training facilities and a comfortable library space. [Recognizing the importance of making human rights education accessible for all people, EHRH has made efforts to increase accessibility to the House, including constructing a wheelchair ramp and implementing accessibility features in bathrooms and other areas of the building. These were acknowledged during the festival by the co-founder of accessibility initiative Dostupno UA, who celebrated the upgrades and marked the House with a “recommended” sticker.](#) During 2015-2016, EHRH conducted 97 events in partnership with 14 organizations, hosting 2,272 participants from all over Ukraine. Around 75% of the events taking place on the EHRH premises were trainings or educational programs on human rights. The House has effectively partnered with other CSOs, academia, public officials, and the media to support the protection of human rights in the east of Ukraine. This included more than 60 events, ranging from roundtables, expert meetings, trainings, and counseling sessions, which bore results to many HRDs from Crimea and other parts of Ukraine.<sup>31</sup>

The achievements described in the 2015 and 2016 EHRH Annual Reports have been confirmed by non-member CSOs, as well as international organizations operating in Ukraine, some of whom were initially skeptical about the success of EHRH. The vast majority of external stakeholders have noted high visibility of the EHRH member CSOs and EHRH in the capital, as well as commented on the House's capacity to run trainings and to create safe and inspiring

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<sup>29</sup> HRHF, with its connections to Norwegian academic institutions, may want to consider this possibility of cross-sectoral cooperation and support HRHZ, if the interest continues to persist.

<sup>30</sup> See the Chernihiv Core Group Application to HRHF, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Like the Human Rights House Zagreb, EHRH reports are only available in Ukrainian, which makes it difficult to access information and learn about EHRH's achievements. The reviewed annual reports from 2016 and 2015 (see at <https://goo.gl/ZRJhvA> and <https://goo.gl/yiCFfx>, last accessed on January 24, 2018) are mostly descriptive, focusing on projects and specific activities, rather than how the EHRH work contributes to the achievement of its mission and objectives.

environment, where it is possible to immerse in productive discussions of various human rights issues. Quite unexpectedly, the environment, rather than cost-efficiency, was noted by many as the main reason for wanting to organize their events at the EHRH in Chernihiv. Furthermore, external stakeholders have attested to the fact that by engaging in different working groups and councils set up with various public institutions, the EHRH experts, mostly from the EHRH member CSOs, have been effective in pushing human rights education agenda, especially with respect to the secondary school education.<sup>32</sup> All have underscored that in the extremely complex and divided civil society scene, bringing CSOs together is already to be considered a success, crediting this success to “the unique methodology” that underpins the human rights house concept and underlining that “the House is unique in its format and not in its work.”

The EHRH is not without its own challenges, having gone through three executive directors in the three years of its operations. At the time of the field visit, the position of the House Executive Director was still vacant, with the Deputy Director recruited recently from the private sector and the Chair of the Board managing a lot of the EHRH’s daily activities. It is very important that the EHRH Board reflect on the reasons behind managing the House activities and address them as soon as possible, so that the Board can focus on its main tasks of providing sound governance, strategic direction, and oversight. This way, the EHRH will be able to avoid some of the governance issues that have made other Houses less effective. A more strategic Board may also help with increased membership engagement and expanding the EHRH programming, so that the House continues to be relevant to the emerging human rights’ needs. Both the House member CSOs and the House staff see that the EHRH could do significantly better in cross-sectoral cooperation and outreach to the public, in order to reach the EHRH’s objectives.

### External Communication

The evaluation found that there is room for improvement when it comes to communicating about the Human Rights House concept to both external audiences, as well as internally, within the HRHN and even the individual Houses. The fact that external communication should be improved has been noted across the board by HRHF, the HRHs, and other stakeholders. The existing website [www.humanrightshouse.org](http://www.humanrightshouse.org) provides only basic information about the House as a concept, as well as the individual Houses or the Foundation. Not all HRHs have their own websites and in some cases, there are multiple websites and Facebook pages that require updates and synchronization. With the new website coming soon from HRHF, some of the issues will likely be resolved, but it may still be useful to highlight this finding, so that it can be considered for future planning.

Most international stakeholders are unaware of the long history of the Foundation and the story behind the HRH concept. However, all are aware of the Houses providing physical space for CSOs and HRDs to work together, noting that the physicality of the concept is what makes it unique and worth the effort. At the same time, there seems to be a general confusion about the relationship between the Foundation, HRHN, and HRHs, whereby the Network and the Foundation are often confused and used interchangeably, mostly to refer to the Foundation.

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<sup>32</sup> They refer to the State Program on Human Rights Education which was initiated by the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union and EHRH and which involves the Ministry of Justice, OSCE, Amnesty International, and the Swiss MFA.

Furthermore, with the HRHs being considered as country offices of HRHF, attribution seems to always be an issue, with most external stakeholders confused about what activities or results can be attributed to the work of the individual Houses, the HRH Network or the Foundation. This confusion also creates a certain reputational risk for HRHF, as international actors expect the Foundation to have the powers to effect the processes that take place in different HRHs and express their confusion as to why the needed changes are not made in a timely manner.

It is clear that some of the issues with external messaging come from the fact that HRHF's communication team does not have access to information on or from the individual HRHs. This is in part due to the internal communication issues experienced by some of the Houses, as well as the language barrier, which has been noted as an issue by many stakeholders. According to the HRHs, they have difficulties in providing HRHF with external communications materials in English, given that many Houses or their members do not have enough staff with English language facility or funds to engage a translator for outreach materials.

The tensions between the House and its member CSOs, the lack of clear messages to be conveyed or the need to communicate diluted messages following the lowest common denominator approach is making the work of the communications staff both at HRHF and the HRHs very difficult. Another major cause for lackluster external communication is an internal confusion as to the House concept and the role played by the Foundation with respect to the HRHs and the Network (partner, donor, friend, stakeholder, enforcer, etc.). Strategic discussions that are planned in 2018 will greatly help with further clarifying the messages to be shared externally and make the work of the HRHF communications team more manageable.

#### Communication within the HRH Network

The evaluation found that most members of the HRHs were unaware of the story behind establishing the very first House and, thus, could not communicate it to others or appreciate the positive value of multi-sectoral partnerships that have allowed for this social innovation to emerge. By viewing a Human Rights House only as an initiative of likeminded CSOs, the members are prone to be more dismissive of the value that could be brought by partnerships with other sectors, which could include enhancing the capacity of human rights CSOs and improving human rights protection across the various sectors through collaboration, monitoring, and cross-sectoral learning.

Moreover, most HRH members have little information about their counterparts that make up the Houses across the region. Many respondents have noted that they would communicate across the Network better, if there were a database of experts from different Houses that would give them information of what type of knowledge and skills are available across the Network. While the consultant agrees that, in principle, this is a good idea, it is unclear as to why the Houses have been unable to act upon this desire, looking at the Foundation to set up this database, when they can easily do so independently, given the advances of science and technology.

The Houses also noted that in-person meetings during the HRHN annual meetings have been very helpful in bringing the Network together and learning about the work of various Houses. However, many have pointed out that the reach of annual meetings is not universal, as not

everyone can be brought to these meetings. Moreover, it was also noted that language barriers preclude communication among those, who do attend these events.<sup>33</sup> As noted above, language has been highlighted by various stakeholders as one of the biggest challenges for external communications as well.

### Communication within the Individual HRHs

Internal communications or lack thereof, is one of the biggest challenges that has faced and still faces the HRHs. Arguably, one of the many reasons behind the developments in HRH Kiev was also internal communications. As a result of bad internal communications, some House member CSOs feel very much uninformed about the activities implemented by others within the same House or by the House itself, while some members believe that the good work they are doing is not seen by their colleagues, and yet others are demotivated to collaborate due to constant feeling of mistrust among the member CSOs. In fact, a good deal of issues faced by the Houses arise from insufficient flow of information between the various governance bodies of a given House or among the membership. According to the respondents, problems in this area stem not just from lack of internal communications procedures, but also from deficiencies in the so-called good people skills, such as basic skills in listening, speaking, questioning, and providing feedback.

### Factors Affecting HRH Effectiveness

The evaluation found that the effectiveness of a House is not pre-determined by the HRH model selected by its members. Rather, the House effectiveness was impacted by the following factors:

1. Ability of the HRH member CSOs to see the value of the House and empowering the House manager to effect the needed changes without micro-managing every aspect of the House's operations.

The Houses are significantly more effective in improving human rights protection, supporting collaborative advocacy, and enhancing solidarity among the member and non-member CSOs, when the member CSOs are able to see the value of the House and view themselves not just as the House beneficiaries or tenants, but as its partners and contributors. The Human Rights Houses in Zagreb and Belgrade, as well as the Belarusian House, serve as good examples of member CSOs seeing the value of the House and empowering the House manager (where this position exists) to effect the needed changes without micro-managing every aspect of operations.

Outwardly, all HRH member CSOs appreciate the value of the House, but acting upon their best intentions seems to be a consistent problem and is often connected to the zero-sum thinking within the HRH member organizations and their leadership, whereby the members believe that the success of the House or its increased visibility would chip away from that of the membership. This is the case with the Human Rights House Tbilisi, where lack of shared vision and the zero-sum thinking within the membership has deterred both member and non-member CSOs from taking full advantage of the benefits offered by the HRH concept.

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<sup>33</sup> For example, it was noted that those from the Balkans and CEE are unable to interact with those from the Russian-speaking FSU countries, as they do not always speak the same language.



As the example of the Belarusian House demonstrates, the House v. Membership discourse is both misguided and unhealthy. In fact, while the BHRH is institutionally more developed than its members or most of the Belarusian HRD community, it continues to be reflective of and has been serving the needs of its constituencies, both the member CSOs and the larger civil society of Belarus. The BHRH does so through championing their causes in front of the international donor community, fundraising for common projects, serving as a conduit of funds, and supporting capacity building efforts of its members. Similarly, the increasingly stronger institutional profile of the Zagreb House has not made it detached from its members. As an MBO, the HRHZ and its management continue to support its members and the HRD community through fundraising, networking, and advocacy.

It has been suggested by some of the respondents, as well as implied in the Manual for Establishing the HRHs, that the House should not be “more than its members.” However, such a prescription seems a bit too drastic, as arguably, it is the membership that is to decide the shape and the form of the House, given that the setup of most HRHs is that of an MBO. At the same time, with most HRHs comprised of institutionally weak members that often have difficulties raising funds for their own activities, prescribing a creation of a House that is even weaker than its membership goes against the common interest of ensuring long-term sustainability of both the HRHs and their members.

2. Capacity of the House manager to facilitate internal discussions and to drive the implementation of the board’s decisions in a transparent and participatory manner.

The profile of the House manager is one of the most important factors impacting the effectiveness of the HRH. The profile is to be decided by the board, which determines what type of skill-set is needed in the House manager. It does so by identifying the organization’s current needs, its future development trajectory, and indicators for success. The board should also keep in mind the organizational culture of the House and what types of “soft” skills maybe needed effectively to lead the organization.

Despite the many variations in the existing HRHs, they still have many commonalities that allow the consultant to draw up a general list of skills and competencies that are required for a successful House manager.<sup>34</sup> To begin with, it is important that the HRH manager internalizes the House mission and is a self-starter, who is able to generate ideas and implement them within the mandate that is provided by the Board. He or she must have fundraising skills and financial acumen, as well as the ability to listen and identify opportunities for collaboration. As one of the interviewed House managers aptly put it, the House manager must have excellent facilitation skills and must possess a good dose of patience, to handle adversity with grace, to maintain perspective, and to help the members in drawing the most benefit from co-location and effectively to utilize the premises. It goes without saying that fluency in written and spoken English must be required for all House managers.

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<sup>34</sup> This discussion is not pertinent to the Houses where a lead CSO is providing access to its own premises, as the manager of the House is by default, the Head of the lead organization.

While the list enumerated above is not drawn up with a concrete House manager in mind, many of these skills and competencies can be found in the HRHZ and BHRH managers and not surprising, their role in improving the effectiveness of the House has been underscored by internal and external stakeholders alike.

3. Good internal communication, as well as constant review and improvement of practices and procedures, so that they reflect good governance principles and allow the HRHs operate in a democratic and transparent manner.

Experts of organizational behavior assert that effective communication (internal and external) is the foundation for effectiveness in an organization. Indeed, deficiencies in internal communication is one of the biggest factors that negatively impact the HRH effectiveness.<sup>35</sup> In some Houses, this seems to be a problem that is growing in magnitude with time, while other Houses have been able to address this issue, improving the morale within the institution, as well as its effectiveness. While the existence of a formal policy is important, effective internal communication starts with effective communication skills, such as basic skills in listening, speaking, questioning, and providing feedback. Moreover, the responsibility for internal communication must be shared by the board, members, and staff.

Similarly, the responsibility to review and improve the House practices and procedures is to be shared by the House Board and its management, so that together, they are able to reflect on and assess internal needs and external developments, devising policies and procedures that ensure more democratic and transparent governance of the House and respond to the changing environment. While all Houses have at some point attempted to improve their policies and procedures, these have been mostly in response to the crisis situations and as a matter of last resort.<sup>36</sup> It is time for the HRHs to develop a habit of regular review, so that they are both prepared for and responsive to the changes within and around them.

The consultant already identified one issue that requires an immediate attention from the Houses. Both the desk review and the field phase revealed that most HRH statutes lack provisions on how long a dormant, non-active, or defunct CSO can remain as a member of the House, before it is expelled from the membership. During the interviews, all HRH internal stakeholders noted that the HRHs' inability to renew membership is one of the main reasons for keeping the Houses closed to the rest of the civil society. Yet, none of the Houses have been able to address this issue by way of modifying the HRH statutes or bylaws. The HRH boards and membership assemblies have been avoiding this issue, as the House for them is an organization of friends and no one wants to broach the difficult subject of ousting one of their friends. This, in turn, takes away the flexibility of the House and keeps it closed to new members and new ideas.

4. Donor support, especially, with large-scale and procedure-heavy funding mechanisms that have necessitated professionalization of the HRH work.

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<sup>35</sup> In fact, lack of communication between the Board and the House manager was noted as one of the reasons for the dismantling of the HRH in Kiev.

<sup>36</sup> BHRH is an exception, where some changes have taken place as a result of routine assessments of the context, rather than in response to the crisis situations.

It is clear that large-scale and procedure-heavy grants from donors (e. g. from the EU), while extremely hard to win for the Houses, have necessitated professionalization of the HRH work, often forcing the members to address governance and financial control issues that they would not have addressed otherwise. It also helps with professionalization of the member CSOs, given that the re-granting rules also have strict requirements.

5. Formal role of the Human Rights House Foundation in governance structures and mentoring of the board and the House manager.

While HRHF does not have a formal role in the governance structures of most HRHs, it is still very much involved in the life of the Houses, in terms of providing (non-binding) advice, funding, and international advocacy support.<sup>37</sup> This involvement has been instrumental in keeping the Houses more relevant on the ground and responsive to the changing local and international contexts. The funding that is provided by the Foundation for the House-to-House initiatives, research endeavors, educational programming, and various other HRH projects has greatly contributed to the latter's effectiveness.<sup>38</sup> However, it is the formal involvement of the Foundation in the governance of the House that has made a real difference in the enhancing their effectiveness.

For example, the BHRH membership and management credit the HRHF's formal role in the House decision-making for the latter's successful transformation, especially, since despite creating the House, the members had hard time wrapping their minds around the HRH concept and often required reminding of what the concept entailed and how the various decisions made by the General Meeting of Stakeholders could impact the BHRH's development. The formal presence of the Foundation at the meetings also helped with professionalization of the House Director and the Board, as well as with ensuring a more democratic, transparent, and accountable governance of the House. Perhaps most importantly, having HRHF on board meant that the members of the BHRH could no longer shy away from discussing sensitive issues, which without the external presence or critical inquiry would have gone unaddressed. Furthermore, the formal role of HRHF<sup>39</sup> in the BHRH governance has helped the BHRH stakeholders to better manage the natural conflict of interest situations that stem from the fact that the House board members are also the leaders of the member CSOs, which sometimes makes it difficult for them to fulfill their fiduciary duties both toward the House and the CSOs that they represent.

After considering the BHRH governance against the backdrop of other Houses and keeping in mind the magnitude of the HRHF effort that is put into the Houses, the consultant came to the conclusion that, at least for the medium term, HRHF should consider being formally

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<sup>37</sup> The only two Houses, where HRHF has had a formal role in governance, are the Belarusian HRH and the Human Rights House Azerbaijan, which unlike the BHRH was opened as an international branch of HRHF.

<sup>38</sup> This section already provided many examples from BHRH, HRHZ, and EHRH. However, as interviews with other HRH representatives have demonstrated, HRHF's involvement and support has greatly enhanced the effectiveness of other Houses, including the ones in Tbilisi, Poland, and Azerbaijan.

<sup>39</sup> The formal role of the Foundation is neither decisive nor controlling. HRHF has just one vote among many at the General Meetings of BHRH stakeholders (members) and, therefore, has a formal opportunity to table issues and to participate in discussions and decisions.

engaged in the governance of all the Houses and even maintain a hold on the purchased premises.<sup>40</sup> This way, the Foundation will be able to help set up viable governance structures and democratic decision-making processes and ensure the long-term effectiveness of these institutions.

6. Targeted international advocacy and exposure to other regions also influences the effectiveness of the Houses.

In their international advocacy, the Houses are supported by the HRHF international advocacy team, which supports the HRHs in identifying international advocacy opportunities and promoting human rights causes on the international plane. Through the Foundation's work in Geneva, Bern, Oslo, Strasbourg, Brussels, Berlin, Vienna, Dublin, London, New York, and Washington, DC,<sup>41</sup> the Houses are able to enjoy international standing and advocate as a community of likeminded actors at the UN, the EU, the CoE, and the OSCE. HRHF's international advocacy support enhances the HRH effectiveness, as it is able to bring up issues of concern to external stakeholders (MEPs, representatives of international organizations and foreign governments) in an efficient and easy to digest manner, without foregoing the credibility that comes from the Houses, their members, and partner CSOs.

Not all Houses are open to taking advantage of the opportunities that are offered through HRHF, but those that have the internal drive and collaborate with the HRHF advocacy team have been more effective in keeping their issues of concern on the international agenda (e.g. BHRH, HRHA, and recently the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights in Poland and EHRH and partner CSOs that work on Crimea). Effectiveness is closely linked with the existence of a formal advocacy strategy, which delineates objectives, timelines, activities, and advocacy opportunities. There is a mixed view about the common statements issued by the HRHN or in partnership with other INGOs, given the security concerns in some of the countries, where the Houses or their member CSOs operate. However, where the security of HRDs is not an overwhelming concern, statements supported by the Network and other INGOs have been proven to be more effective in presenting the messages to the governments.<sup>42</sup>

Exposure to social movements, professional unions, CSOs, and HRDs from other parts of the world could enhance the effectiveness of the existing Houses, as it would help the HRHs and their member CSOs to learn about different citizen engagement, mobilization, and

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<sup>40</sup> Some of the respondents believe that the HRH concept precludes donor engagement in its governance and, therefore, giving HRHF a formal role in the House governance would be against the principles that underpin the HRH concept. The consultant disagrees with this view, since the original design of the Human Rights House precludes control and interference from external donor and not their engagement with the entity.

<sup>41</sup> Some INGOs and diplomats, as well as partners in Ukraine, have highlighted HRHF's advocacy on Crimea in the United States, which included meetings in the US Congress (<https://twitter.com/HRHFoundation>), as well as editorials in influential newspapers ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/the-trump-administration-has-expanded-sanctions-on-russia-heres-what-it-should-target-next/2017/06/21/c6dc5d64-55e3-11e7-b38e-35fd8e0c288f\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.3f47549cd83e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/the-trump-administration-has-expanded-sanctions-on-russia-heres-what-it-should-target-next/2017/06/21/c6dc5d64-55e3-11e7-b38e-35fd8e0c288f_story.html?utm_term=.3f47549cd83e)).

<sup>42</sup> See for example a statement on the Polish constitutional crisis at <http://www.hfhr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Apel-90-org-zalecenia-KE-2016-10-19-a-1.pdf> (last accessed on January 1, 2018).

advocacy methods. While the human rights challenges are fairly similar in every region, methods of citizen mobilization and advocacy are evolving and the Houses could use a fresher perspective from their colleagues that are operating in other parts of the world. Presence in other parts of the world would also increase the Foundation's credibility, when engaging in thematic advocacy.<sup>43</sup>

## **Impact**

The impact can be assessed on both micro and macro levels. The micro-level impact can be seen in terms of the manifested improvements of the target group's situation through strengthening their capacities and potential, as well as provision of the needed services. The macro-level impact is focused on the systemic changes that have been effected by the HRHs and the international advocacy efforts supported by the Human Rights House Foundation. It is the opinion of the consultant that the adequate level of impact was achieved, which was mainly due to the fact that human rights house design is flexible to reflect the needs on the ground and allows for beneficiary participation and collaborative advocacy on both national and international levels. Where impact was not achieved or not sustained, it was due to weaker relevance, low levels of cooperation, and inability to translate international advocacy gains into tangible changes on the national level.

### Impact on the HRH Member CSOs and the Wider Civil Society

The impact of the Human Rights House concept on the wider civil society community is undeniable, as through the HRHs the Foundation was providing core support to human rights organizations, when such a notion did not even exist. The Foundation saw very early on that the longevity and complexity of human rights issues necessitated a long-term approach to human rights organizations on the ground. With office space and multi-year grant support to the Houses, HRHF provided the targeted CSOs and HRDs the predictability of funding that they needed to focus on implementing monitoring and advocacy activities toward achieving their missions. The core support from the Foundation also provided the flexibility to act upon emerging challenges and develop pilot interventions that could later be funded by other donors with significantly lower risk appetites.

Indeed, the Houses can be credited for supporting their members during some of the most difficult times, when they were unable to raise funds due to withdrawal of international donors or unexpected loss of public funding. Furthermore, many HRH member CSOs have used the office space and the grant funding provided to them through the Houses to meet the co-financing thresholds set by the donors, thus, improving their chances of winning project funding and ensuring longer-term financing of their work. When empowered by the membership, the Houses have been able to raise funds for collaborative human rights interventions, which has contributed to improved human rights protection and institutional strengthening of the HRH member CSOs. Just as importantly, the core support has enhanced solidarity among organizations and provided HRDs a much needed moral support.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Some of the donors have noted that it would make HRHF more fundable.

<sup>44</sup> This is particularly important for CSOs and HRDs operating in Azerbaijan and Belarus, who have noted "loneliness" as one of their biggest challenges.

The evaluation revealed an unintended impact of core support on the targeted CSOs, with most Houses, irrespective of the specificities of their design, keeping alive CSOs that would not have been around without their membership in the HRH. While it is commendable that the HRHs provide support to their member CSOs experiencing short-term financial difficulties, it is problematic that the Houses are keeping afloat defunct organizations, when active ones remain outside the HRH. This is as much an issue of the House design as it is of culture and availability of funds from HRHF. When it comes to the House design, most statutes lack provisions on how long a dormant, non-active, or defunct member CSO can remain as a member of the House before it is expelled from the membership. However, the assessment also made it clear that even if such clear provisions were to be in place, they would not be implemented, as the respondents could not imagine going through this process, given their cultural moors. Lastly, the Foundation also contributes to this unintended impact by not putting any conditions on how the Houses channel HRHF funds to their member CSOs.

Some impact can be seen on CSOs that are not members of the Houses, but it is not as significant as could have been expected, given the description of the HRH concept. Mostly, impact has been achieved through the HRH projects, capacity building actions, and international advocacy efforts, which involved the House member and non-member CSOs and have contributed to improved monitoring and advocacy skills among them. The impact seems to be more pronounced when trainings, workshops, and other capacity building actions are connected with learning by doing opportunities, whereby the beneficiaries are able to utilize the new skills and knowledge during follow up monitoring or advocacy work. For example, the Foundation often organizes trainings and workshops to prepare CSOs for the UPR cycle, during which they invite a diverse group of CSOs (HRH members and non-members, newly created CSOs, CSOs that work on social and economic rights), to learn not only about the UPR process, but also about developing their own long-term advocacy agenda around the many international advocacy opportunities that are available for their country. The participants of these capacity building events are also encouraged to cooperate and learn how to use the UPR process to strike relationships with donors and embassies, as well as to reach out to the general public. The positive impact of such an approach has been noted by beneficiaries from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Croatia, and Ukraine.

The fact that the impact on non-HRH member CSOs is less than anticipated is in large part due to the fact that despite many attempts, the Houses have mostly remained closed to other members of civil society. This is particularly obvious in the classical Houses, where there is a resistance to new members, as the latter are associated with a possibility of foregoing the hard gained free office space.<sup>45</sup> In addition, openness or increased membership is frowned upon, as it is often associated with cumbersome decision-making processes or loss of control by the HRH founding CSOs. At the same time, the new members are also not flocking the HRHs, in part due to low national-level visibility of the Houses and their image as old friends' club that is not open to new members or new ideas. The latter image may have something to do with the requirement that the founding members of the HRH must have prior experience of working together, which

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<sup>45</sup> This is less of an issue in the Houses that are serving as a hub for common activities, with its members maintaining their own offices. For example, prior to closing down the HRHA by the Government of Azerbaijan, the House users exceeded 6,000 people and it was truly used as a resource by the local human rights CSOs as a safe meeting and discussion space.

inadvertently is bringing together organizations that are often connected by friendships of their leaders.

### Impact on Individual Human Rights Defenders

The protection program, developed in HRHF and run through the Houses, has had direct positive impact on the lives of HRDs under siege, with more than 400 HRDs supported through the Houses and HRHF in just 2016.<sup>46</sup> For example, since its creation only three years ago, the EHRH has been at the forefront of supporting HRDs in exile, providing them with shelter and the needed legal aid. Thus, more than forty prisoners, who came to the EHRH from the occupied Crimea were supported in getting their Ukrainian passports, while HRDs from other parts of the world were assisted in gaining temporary residence permits for Ukraine. The Belarusian House has not only sheltered human rights defenders, but has also made broader HRD community more protected from government interference via digital security audits. Similarly, while beset with many problems, the Human Rights House Tbilisi has done a great job of supporting Azerbaijani HRDs in exile. The good work of the House and its members has been underscored by multiple donors, who have noted the significance of the HRHT's efforts for these HRDs and their families, highlighting the importance of Azeri beneficiaries being directly engaged in the implementation of the HRHT projects, not just to draw salaries, but to promote the human rights causes in the same manner as they would have done in their home country prior to their expulsion.

External stakeholders that are also providing emergency support to the HRDs under siege have highlighted the strategic importance of the Foundation's efforts, as with the Houses on the ground, it is possible to support the human rights defenders closer to their environment or within an environment that is not completely alien to them. Some of the external stakeholders that are currently funding or implementing emergency programming also feel that, if HRHF so decided, it has the passion, capacity, and the network to consider coordination of these programs for better results for the HRDs.<sup>47</sup>

The respondents also underscored the impact of HRHF's international advocacy efforts by keeping the plight of human rights defenders front and center, be it through working with Special Rapporteurs or organizing memorable advocacy actions, such as the one at the CoE about the imprisoned HRDs. A particular mention in this regard was given to HRHF's recent advocacy efforts with respect to the situation in Crimea and HRHF's efforts to establish principles and standards for states to create an enabling environment for human rights defenders. External stakeholders, much like the HRDs, have noted the importance of alerting the international community about the fate of every persecuted or imprisoned HRD, which while does not help

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<sup>46</sup> See the 2016 Annual Report of the Human Rights House Foundation, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Examples of individual HRDs supported by HRHF and HRHs are many, but perhaps one of the most dramatic is the case of Emin Huseynov, who sought refuge at the Swiss Embassy in Baku, fearing for his life. After 10 months at the Embassy and failing to reach a satisfactory solution between him and Azerbaijani authorities, Emin was brought to Bern by the Federal Councilor Didier Burkhalter, who represented Switzerland at the opening ceremony of the first European Games. Apart from HRHF, Emin Huseynov was supported by multiple international actors, such as Civil Rights Defenders, COE, OSCE, Article 19, Committee to Support Journalists, and others. However, given that the refuge was provided by the Swiss authorities and the role played by the HRHF advocacy team in providing the interested governments and international organizations credible information from Azerbaijan, the stakeholders have specifically highlighted the importance of the Foundation's efforts in this regard.

them in leaving the prison cells, often keeps the government actions checked due to the pressure exerted by the informed western governments or international organizations. It has been underscored multiple times, that HRHF's advocacy has impact on the international level, because it is based on credible information from the ground, which is gathered by the HRHs and their member CSOs, as they monitor trials or otherwise gather evidence on various human rights violations.

### Impact on the Participants of HRH Education Programs

Educational programming has had impact both in terms of increasing human rights knowledge of the beneficiaries and inspiring them to do more human rights work. The reach of the educational programs implemented by the Houses has already been discussed in the previous sections. Here it is important to focus on the impact it has had on the participants. To begin with, the interviewed beneficiaries of various educational programs have noted improvements in their knowledge of human rights issues or capacities to impart this knowledge to others. More importantly, they have been inspired to continue their work toward achieving tangible positive changes in the promotion and protection of human rights. For example, the trainers and graduates of the BHRH educational programming have contributed to the analytical reporting to various human rights bodies and submitted 115 of the 235 Belarus-related individual complaints to the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), thus, contributing to effective protection of human rights. Furthermore, one of the most recent campaign launched by the alumni of the BHRH educational programming in Homiel contributed to the country-wide protests aimed at the cancellation of the Presidential Decree #3 on the Prevention of Social Parasitism.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, many EHRH alumni have applied their knowledge for the benefit of the human rights community, serving as the EHRH trainers, leading human rights programming in the EHRH partner CSOs from various parts of Ukraine, providing *pro bono* legal advice to human rights defenders, monitoring the situation of people with mental disabilities in closed institutions and advocating for changes.

As one of the external stakeholders noted, the impact of HRHF and the Houses can also be seen in bringing up a new generation of human rights leaders from the region, who after graduating from the International Law in Advocacy (ILIA)<sup>49</sup> program become leaders of human rights organizations, as is the case with the former Chairwoman of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA). It is likely that there are many other examples of educational programs bringing up new and committed cadre of human rights defenders, but the consultant was unable to find information, documenting the extent of the impact. As the Head of the EHRH Board noted in the 2016 Annual Report of the Human Rights House Foundation, "human rights education often lacks visible short term results, but we know that it is vital work along with responding to the demands of the situation in Ukraine."<sup>50</sup> This is why it is that much more important meticulously to document the impact that is attributable to human rights education, to ensure continuity of programming and support.

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<sup>48</sup> See the 2016 Annual Report of the Human Rights House Foundation, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> It is important that ILIA's reach is only to the Russian-speaking population, as up until now it has been run only in Russian language. However, as the Houses and HRHF are working on revamping the program, they may want to consider offering it in English as well, in order to attract younger HRDs and civic activists, especially, from non-Russian-speaking countries.

<sup>50</sup> See the HRHF 2016 Annual Report, p. 29.



## Impact on the Population

Direct impact on the population was less pronounced, given the weak relevance of the Houses to the latter's needs. This said, provision of services to people with disabilities or of legal aid has been done successfully by various members of HRHs,<sup>51</sup> with some of the interviewed Houses and their members already seeing the need to address the legitimacy challenge, if they want to be more relevant to the people and get their support for the human rights cause.<sup>52</sup> There is readiness among the Houses that they need to do more outreach to the citizens, so that the latter understand their rights and seek remedies, when these rights are violated. According to public opinion surveys and the statistics kept by the national human rights institutions of the targeted countries, people are increasingly concerned about their social and economic rights, such as labor rights, right to health, right to education, etc.

While the human rights community sees this concern, the readiness to act upon it is still not there. For some, working on these rights is synonymous to service delivery, which precludes advocacy for improvements. For others, concentrating on politically less charged issues means that human rights organizations will be playing government's game, as the authorities would like to see human rights organizations concentrating on less politically charged issues, leaving aside advocacy for civil and political rights. However, as the former UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association noted on the record, it is misguided to believe that it is possible to defend social and economic rights without extending civil and political rights. Indeed, there are multiple interesting cases from African and Latin American countries, whereby the use of rights-based approaches to development by social movements or CSOs has also led to enhanced protection of civil and political rights. A good example of this is the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) from South Africa, which demonstrates how the fight for social and economic rights (namely, the right to access to health care) has defended and extended the rights to freedom of speech and peaceful assembly.<sup>53</sup>

## Systemic Impact

The Foundation and the Houses have been successful in influencing the global human rights agenda. They have done so through various methods, often with the Foundation leading the efforts, but with some good examples of the Houses taking ownership of the issue and together with HRHF promoting it on the global stage. A great example of the latter is the impact achieved through advocacy for the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, which was established by the Human Rights Council in 2012 (Resolution 20/13). This systemic and sustainable impact is fully attributable to the work of the Human Rights House

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<sup>51</sup> For example B.a.b.e., Svitanje –Association for Protection and Promotion of Mental Health, and Documenta (HRHZ members), Human Rights Center and Article 42 (HRHT members), YUCOM (HRHB member), and others.

<sup>52</sup> For example, the HRHZ member Center for Peace Studies, which among other work supports the protection of migrants' rights, will be adding a new component to its portfolio, directed toward addressing the human rights needs of the majority of the population.

<sup>53</sup> See more in Melissa Mbali, "TAC in the History of Rights-Based, Patient Driven HIV/AIDS Activism in South Africa" at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/passages/4761530.0010.011/--tac-in-the-history-of-rights-based-patient-driven-hiv-aids?rgn=main;view=fulltext> (last accessed on December 30, 2017).

Foundation and the Belarusian Human Rights House and their good collaboration. In fact, it is a story of an excellent partnership between the House and the Foundation, whereby the discussions between the BHRH and HRHF on how to keep Belarus relevant on the international scene and to develop an effective human rights protection mechanism have led to the idea of a Special Rapporteur mandate.<sup>54</sup> The idea originated from the late President of the BHRH, Barys Zvozkau, and it inspired long-term collaborative international advocacy initially to establish and later to seek the renewal of the Special Rapporteur's mandate. As noted by external stakeholders, this was an uphill battle, with many countries and other INGOs opposed to the SR Mandate. However, HRHF's nuanced and targeted approach to advocacy, together with its "ability to humanize the issues," have ensured the creation of the SR mandate, which is perhaps the only independent mechanism available to the Belarusian human rights defenders for keeping the western governments informed about and involved in their struggle for human rights.

Another systemic impact of the work of the Foundation's international advocacy efforts has been the establishment of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association by the Human Rights Council in 2010. Since its establishment, HRHF together with several other international NGOs has been working closely with the Special Rapporteur<sup>55</sup> supporting its fact-finding missions in the countries where the HRHs are present,<sup>56</sup> as well as providing recommendations to the mandate ahead of reporting in front of the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly (GA). The contributions from HRHF and the Houses can be seen in many of the thematic reports of the SR, including, for example, the last thematic report, which highlights the significance of civil society and aims "to ensure that the successes and achievements of civil society over recent years can continue sustainably, in a safer and more conducive environment."<sup>57</sup> This report was nicely followed by a publication and presentation of the study *Ill democracies in Europe. Understanding the playbook of illiberal governments to better resist them: A case-study of Croatia, Hungary, Poland and Serbia*.<sup>58</sup> It is anticipated that this study, which was a result of cooperation between HRHF and the HRHs in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Poland, and NGOs operating in Hungary, will translate into national level advocacy and systemic impact in the countries in question.

While the long term engagement with the two above-mentioned SRs is noteworthy, the Foundation's advocacy is not limited to the two mandates that it supported to establish. Rather, advocacy opportunities are sought and utilized as they lend themselves to issues that concern the

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<sup>54</sup> The initial idea for the SR was discussed during a meeting with several international partners. However, it was only HRHF that noted that it would be possible to make it happen, despite the many challenges. All other international partners present at the meeting openly refused to support the idea.

<sup>55</sup> Individual factor is extremely important when working with SRs, as the Rapporteur should be willing to collaborate and engage with stakeholders, including HRHF. In both cases, the SRs have been open to and interested in the feedback provided by stakeholders, believing strongly in participatory advocacy. At the same time, they had felt that the feedback provided from the Foundation was particularly valuable, given the credibility of information from the ground, attention to detail, and participatory approaches to advocacy utilized by the HRHF. Importantly, given the initial support provided to the SR mandate and to the individual candidates from HRHF, there was no time lag between the SR appointment and the start of cooperation.

<sup>56</sup> Namely, the February 2012 visit to Georgia.

<sup>57</sup> *Imagining a World without Participation: Mapping the Achievements of Civil Society*, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, Maina Kiai to the Human Rights Council, 35<sup>th</sup> session, 23 May 2017, and p.1.

<sup>58</sup> See the report at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/22898.html>, last accessed on December 31, 2017.

Foundation and the HRHs (individually or as a network). Thus, the need to defend lawyers that take on human rights cases translated into targeted advocacy of HRHF and partners from the HRH ILIA program, which resulted in the Special Rapporteur on Lawyers and Judges issuing “a report on standards aimed at protecting lawyers working on human rights related issues and defending human rights defenders.”<sup>59</sup> It also resulted in the June 2017 resolution on independence of the lawyers of the Human Rights Committee, which “[c]ondemn[ed] the increasingly frequent attacks on the independence of judges, lawyers, prosecutors and court officials, in particular threats, intimidation and interference in the discharge of their professional functions” and called upon “all States to guarantee the independence of judges and lawyers and the objectivity and impartiality of prosecutors, as well as their ability to perform their functions accordingly.”<sup>60</sup> As above, the task will be for the HRHs to make these standards known and adhered to at the national level.

Some of the sections above already touched upon the micro-level impact of UPR reporting, as the latter contributes to strengthened capacity of CSOs engaged in reporting and fostering cooperation between them during the reporting period. On the macro-level, the reporting contributes to the achievement of the UPR’s goal of prompting, supporting, and expanding the promotion and protection of human rights on the ground. It does so both by providing objective and reliable information to the Committee, as well as supporting the targeted CSOs in developing and implementing national advocacy strategies. The national-level impact of UPR is less pronounced, with not all House member CSOs seeing the value of UPR advocacy on the national level, either because the governments are not listening to the civil society or it is considered to be less relevant for the countries that have concluded Association Agreements with the EU. This said, the Human Rights House Zagreb together with the Platform 112 has been utilizing the UPR for putting human rights back on the Croatian Government’s agenda, using Croatia’s membership of the UN Human Rights Council as an additional advocacy tool.

While systemic impact of advocacy in Brussels has not been noted, it has enhanced the effectiveness of advocacy efforts related to Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Crimea. HRHF’s presence in Brussels has been highly praised by the Houses and INGOs that have been supported by the HRHF advocacy team. Interestingly, there is a demand from the Houses to do more EU-level advocacy, especially, as it relates to the illiberal tendencies in the new member states and the EU funding modalities for civil society. This demand might increase after the December 20, 2017 decision of the European Commission, which launched the Article 7 Procedure against Poland, concluding that “there is a clear risk of a serious breach of the rule of law in Poland.”<sup>61</sup> It speaks well of the HRHF international advocacy team that it has seen the problem early on and has been supporting the efforts of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights via targeted advocacy in Strasbourg, Geneva, and Brussels. The latter included cultivation of relationships with sympathetic members of the European Parliament, which has a key role in the Article 7 Procedure. The results of these efforts remain to be seen, but it is clear that there is a potential

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<sup>59</sup> The 2016 Annual Report of the Human Rights House Foundation, p. 16.

<sup>60</sup> See the resolution at [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/35/L.20](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/35/L.20) (last accessed on January 24, 2018).

<sup>61</sup> The European Commission proposed that the Council adopt a decision under Art. 7(1) of the Treaty on the EU. For more details, see the December 20, 2017 Press Release of the European Commission at [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-17-5367\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-5367_en.htm) (last accessed on December 30, 2017).

for dialing up advocacy work in Brussels, if there is commitment from the Houses and a clear idea, as to the issues they would like to advocate.

## **VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following section of the report will be devoted to outlining recommendations that will help the Human Rights House Foundation and the existing Houses in updating the HRH concept, to ensure that it continues to be relevant, effective, and capable of delivering tangible positive impact. The recommendations below should also serve as a starting point for the Foundation's strategic planning exercise, which is to result in the HRHF's 2019-2023 strategy.

### **Governance**

1. All Houses should revisit their view of the Board, so that the Boards are able to serve their strategic purpose. This would mean empowering both the membership assemblies and the House management, as well as paying more attention to the profile of the House membership. As most Houses struggle with being open to external stakeholders, they could consider adding non-HRH members to the Board, especially those, who have very good understanding of the HRH concept and have experience in running or supporting similar entities in other countries, but are able fulfill the fiduciary duties toward the House. At least in the interim period, it would be best if HRHF were to be provided a formal role in the House governance structures.

The Foundation, in cooperation with the Houses, should review the model legal and technical documents that are provided to the applicant CSOs that want to be united under the Human Rights House umbrella, so that these documents reflect some the governance-related findings of this evaluation. Similarly, the Houses are encouraged to review their practices and procedures, with aim to ensure democratic and transparent governance and to respond to the challenges identified in this evaluation. To build and maintain the unity of the Houses, the HRH governing bodies should also consider different ways of improving internal communication between the members, as well as between the Board and the staff.

2. The Houses need to have long-term strategies and their implementation action plans, both at the time of their establishment and onward. Where the Houses have started to be more strategic, they need to be mindful of implementation issues, so that the action plans are not left on paper and materialize in tangible positive changes for their members, other HRDs and CSOs, and the public. When strategizing, the HRH management has to be inclusive and mindful of the membership needs, while the members are encouraged to define their roles beyond the needs of individual organizations, so that they can ensure maximum effectiveness of the Houses. In addition, long-term strategic planning should be used for identifying concrete means of collaboration, when collaboration is not automatically generated by physical proximity.
3. The profile of the House manager is one of the most important factors for the effectiveness of the HRH. The HRH manager should be able to internalize the House mission and should be a self-starter, who is able to generate ideas and implement them within the mandate that

is provided by the Board. He or she must have fundraising skills and financial acumen, as well as the ability to listen and identify opportunities for collaboration. The House manager must have excellent facilitation skills and must possess a good dose of patience, to handle adversity with grace, to maintain perspective, and to help the members in drawing the most benefit from co-location. Fluency in written and spoken English must be required of all House managers.

4. The Houses and their member CSOs need to address the challenge of availability to citizens, both in the Manual for Establishing a Human Rights House, as well as in the internal legal and technical documents of the HRHs. More importantly, it has to be addressed via concrete actions that respond to the population's needs on the ground. These needs will differ in each society, but can be determined by reviewing public opinion polls and other research conducted by credible organizations. It can also be ascertained by closely cooperating with national human rights institutions that keep statistics about the number and type of referrals they receive from the public. Responding to what the citizens perceive to be their biggest human rights challenges does not mean that the Houses should abandon working on civil and political rights, as it could mean neglecting the rights the minorities. However, as noted above, protection of social and economic rights goes hand-in-hand with protection of civil and political rights.

To address the challenge of availability to citizens, the Houses could improve the way in which they communicate with the public, framing their struggle for civil and political rights in less legalistic terms, making it more understandable to the information consumer. Furthermore, the HRHs could improve their work with local communities, so that they can truly become centers for community activism. Putting emphasis on being more open and available to the citizens will serve well both the Houses and their member CSOs, as the increasing distance of CSOs from local populations has provided fertile grounds for authoritarian attacks on civil society, with the latter portrayed implementers of foreign agendas.

5. Given the developments within and around the Houses, HRHF should revisit the requirements set forth in the Manual for the members of the core group. While previous cooperation among the potential members may be an asset, the practice shows that it can lead to the creation of an old friends' club, which precludes inter-generational dialogue and makes it difficult for the Houses to be open to others.

In addition, HRHF is recommended to consider a conditionality approach when setting up the Houses and being involved in their Boards from the beginning, to provide a different perspective and the needed mentoring to the management team. When the creation of a House involves purchasing of an office space, HRHF is advised to consider maintaining partial or full ownership of the property, both to mitigate the expropriation risks, as well as the risks that are associated with weak internal governance of the HRHs (e. g. micro-managing board, non-democratic governance practices, etc.). Conditionality approach should be used when providing grant support to the Houses, so that the funds from HRHF are not contributing to keeping on board defunct organizations.

6. The Foundation is advised to look carefully into opening up the Human Rights House Network by establishing Houses in other regions of the world, including Western Europe. Opening up the Network can promote experience sharing among and cooperation between human rights organizations and activists and can contribute to both enhanced visibility of HRDs and increased effectiveness of the existing Houses.

## **Communication**

7. There is an urgent need to implement the communication strategy that has been developed by HRHF. By implementing the strategy, HRHF will be able to address the following recommendations:
  - Communicate information about the HRHF's international advocacy efforts to the Houses and their member CSOs. Ensure that the story behind the Human Rights House concept is told internally to the Houses and their member CSOs, as well as to external stakeholders. External communication efforts should address the general confusion about the relationship between the Foundation, HRHN, and HRHs, whereby HRHN and HRHF are often confused and used interchangeably to refer to the Foundation and HRHs are considered as country offices of HRHF. The latter poses a reputational risk to the Foundation, which can be addressed through external communication efforts.
  - For the external communication to be effective, HRHF and the Houses need to address the internal confusion about the concept, as well as to clarify the role or the roles of the Foundation, so that there is a clearer understanding of the relationship between the Foundation and the Houses and how it affects the future development of the HRHs and the HRH Network.
8. The Houses too should take more active steps to communicate with external stakeholders and the public. The communication materials should be about the impact and not about activities, as often is the case. Furthermore, for enhanced effectiveness and impact, it is important that communication materials are also developed in English.

## **Capacity Building**

9. It is clear to the HRH members and management that physical proximity alone does not generate collaboration and they do not have the tools or experience to draw out the benefits of co-location. In addition, all Houses must learn about and develop viable participation mechanisms for non-member CSOs, so that all sides can benefit from cooperation. This includes both the use of physical space offered by the House, as well as services provided through the Houses and its members. Given the above-mentioned, the Foundation is advised to look into developing an HRH-tailored co-working toolkit. While HRHs are different from ordinary co-working spaces, there are things that can be learnt from them, since much like the HRHs, the co-working spaces have to struggle with cultivating membership, developing programs, effectively using of premises, creating partnerships with other sectors, etc. This toolkit can be part of the Manual for Establishing a Human Rights House, as it is important for the applicant CSOs to know what it entails to create a Human Rights House. The toolkit alone will not be enough, as the House members and management also need to work on

cultivating the skills of communal living. Since this is a Network-wide issue, it would work best, if the Foundation considered developing and running such skills-building workshops.

10. The Houses and their member CSO could benefit from such capacity building efforts as citizen engagement and mobilization, fundraising methods, results-based management, monitoring and evaluation, and international advocacy. Other capacity building efforts could involve thematic trainings on social and economic rights issues, perhaps, through curriculum of the ILIA-Stronger or through partnerships with other INGOs that specialize on these rights. There is a general need to build capacity of the Houses and member CSOs on good governance principles and development concepts, so that they practice what they preach and can respond to the recent illiberal tendencies.
11. Similarly, there is a need to support development actors in utilizing a human rights based approach to service delivery or policy development, which involves a consideration of both what they are going to do based on the principles of human rights and how they are going to do their work in ways that promote these rights. Some of the HRHs and member CSOs, which have gained such skills with support from international donor organizations, may want to consider working toward this direction, as apart from promoting human rights, this approach will open doors for cross-sectoral cooperation and learning.

### **International Advocacy**

12. The HRHF advocacy team should continue the good practice of defining the Foundation's international advocacy priorities, as well as working with the Houses to develop country-specific advocacy strategies, which outline key objectives, issues of concern, activity timelines, and applicable advocacy venues and opportunities. It would enhance the HRHs' effectiveness and impact, if these strategies will outline in detail how the Houses and their member CSOs will be engaging national authorities to effect positive changes.
13. Continue to advocate for and support the mandates of the Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in Belarus and on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. At the same time, cultivate relations with other SRs, provided that their mandates are relevant to the work of the existing HRHs.
14. In light of the recent decision of the European Commission to initiate the Article 7 procedures against Poland and the interest among the Houses to increase advocacy on the EU level, explore whether there is a potential for dialing up advocacy work in Brussels, provided that there is a commitment from the Houses and a clear idea, as to the issues they would like to emphasize. Alternatively, consider whether HRHF's presence in the capital of a leading EU member state may be more effective for impacting the human rights agenda.

## ANNEX 1: LIST OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

1. Rupert Abbott, Manager, Institutional Development, HRHF
2. Ketevan Abashidze, Human Rights Officer for Eastern Europe, HRHF
3. Florian Irminger, Head of Advocacy, HRHF
4. Daiva Petkeviciute, Administration and Fundraising Manager, HRHF
5. Maria Dahle, Director, HRHF
6. Matthew Jones, International Advocacy Officer, HRHF
7. Kaja Haldorsen, Communication Manager, HRHF
8. Alexander Sjodin, European Advocacy Officer, HRHF
9. Ane Bonde, Regional Manager, Eastern Europe and Caucasus, HRHF
10. Bernt Hagtvet, Chair of the Board, HRHF
11. Anna Gerasimova, Director, BHRH
12. Zhanna Litvina Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ)
13. Tatsiana Reviaka, President of the BHRH
14. Ales Bialiatiski, Head of the Human Rights Centre Viasna
15. Siarhiej Mackievic, Head of the Supolnasc Centre
16. Raisa Mikhailovskaia, Belarusian Documentation Center
17. Olga Smolianko, Lawtrend
18. Ana Furtuna, Civil Rights Defenders
19. Ognjen Radonic, Forum Syd
20. Vytis Jurkonis, Freedom House
21. Volodymyr Yavorskyy, BHRH
22. Andrei Yahorau from the Centre for European Transformation
23. Shahla Ismayil, WARD (HRH Azerbaijan member)
24. Ulvi Ismayil, formerly USAID Azerbaijan
25. Emin Milli, Meidan TV
26. Robert Denis, Meidan TV
27. Ambassador Erling Skjonsberg, former Ambassador of Norway in Azerbaijan
28. Gabriela Svarovska, Prague Civil Society Center
29. Milan Antoniejvic, HRH Belgrade
30. Bohdan Kryvlyvenko, Head of the Secretariat of the Ukrainian Parliament  
Commissioner for Human Rights
31. Aydar Khalilov, PACT-Ukraine
32. Vadym Pyvovarov, Association of Ukrainian Human Rights Monitors on Law  
Enforcement (Association UMDPL)
33. Konstantin Reutski, Vostok SOS – NGO “Postup”
34. Maryna Homeyuk, NGO Monitors of National Preventive Mechanism “Ukraine  
without Torture”
35. Anastasia Martinoska, Ukraine Helsinki Union for Human Rights, graduate of the ILIA  
program
36. Denys Rabomiso, private attorney at law, graduate of the ILIA program
37. Stanyslav Topolnytski, the EU Delegation Kiev
38. Eda Helenurm, the EU Delegation Kiev
39. Natalia Betsa, OSCE Project Office
40. Olena Ursu, UNDP DHRP Project Coordinator



41. Tatiana Marinashchenko, Civil Youth Center Gmenia (EHRH Partner)
42. Olena Trubenok, Voice of Parents, (EHRH Partner; the first EHRH Director)
43. Ruslana Burova, MART (member of the EHRH)
44. Yuriy Trofimenko, AHALAR (member of the EHRH)
45. Serhiy Burov, EHRH Chair of the Board
46. Nelli Selyutina, Donbas SOS (Kiev-based NGO utilizing EHRH space)
47. Violeta Artemchuk, Donbas SOS (Kiev-based NGO utilizing EHRH space)
48. Lilia Pavlova, EHRH Deputy Director
49. Svitlana Kolyshko, Human Rights Team Lead, Strengthening Capacities of the Ombudsperson's Office, UNDP Project
50. Tetyana Pechonchuk, Human Rights Information Center
51. Valentyna Potapova, Almeda Center for Civic Education
52. Daria Svyrydova, Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, Almenda Center for Civic Education, plus Ukraine ILIA Coordinator
53. Fiona Frazer, Head of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine
54. Benjamin Moreau, Deputy Head of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine
55. Danuta Przywara, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HRH Poland)
56. Dominika Bychawska, Helsinki Foundation of Human Rights (Poland)
57. Serghei Ostaf, CREDO (applicant for HRH Moldova)
58. Nino Ghvedashvili, former coordinator of HRHT
59. Milan Antonjevich, HRH Belgrade
60. Ivan Novosel, Director of Programs, HRHZ
61. Tina Đaković, Organizational Coordinator, HRHZ
62. Gordana Bosanac, Center for Peace Studies (HRHZ member)
63. Zdravka Sadžakov, B. a. B. e. (HRHZ member)
64. Sanja Sarnavka, former Chair of the HRHZ Board
65. Cvijeta Senta, Center for Peace Studies (HRHZ member)
66. Kristina Jandrić, Svitanje (HRHZ member)
67. Marina Škrabalo, Manager, Solidarna – Foundation for Human Rights and Solidarity
68. Jelena Berković, Director, GONG
69. Andreja Maretić Vuković, Senior Political Officer, British Embassy Zagreb
70. Krunoslav Badel, Political Officer, US Embassy Zagreb
71. Željka Leljak Gracin, President, Friends of the Earth Croatia
72. Jay Poštić, Executive Coordinator, Zagreb Pride
73. Adaleta Bečirović, HRHZ Beneficiary
74. Lana Bobić, HRHZ Beneficiary
75. Martin Bogdan, HRHZ Beneficiary
76. Dr. sc. Snježana Vasiljević, Law School, University of Zagreb
77. Mario Mažić, Director of Programs, Youth Initiative for Human Rights Croatia
78. Milene Čalić Jelić, Documenta (HRHZ member)
79. Nikola Mokrović, Documenta (HRHZ member)
80. Branka Juran, CROSOL
81. Tatjana Vlasic, Human Rights Specialist, Office of the Croatian Ombudsman
82. Hovhannes Madoyan, HRH Yerevan
83. Mamikon Hovsepyan HRH Yerevan

84. Kati Piri, Member of the European Parliament
85. Laure-Hélène Laissue-Martin, Collaboratrice diplomatique – Section Politique des droits de l’homme *Afrique, liberté d’expression, défenseurs des droits de l’homme*, Directorate of Political Affairs DP, Human Security Division, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland
86. Ryota Jonen, Director of the World Movement for Democracy (National Endowment for Democracy)
87. Jonas Pasquier, Second Secretary (Political Affairs) at the Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations in New York
88. Anna Dobrovolskaya, HRH Voronezh
89. Rebecca Vincent, Reporters without Borders
90. Shawna Bader-Blau, Solidarity Center
91. Maina Kiai, former UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association
92. Miklos Haraszti, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus
93. Maran Turner, Freedom Now
94. Claudio Nardi, Permanent Mission of Lichtenstein to the United Nations
95. Philippe Dam, Human Rights Watch
96. Guenter Schirmer, Deputy to the Head, Directorate General of Legal Affairs and Human Rights, COE
97. Alexandre Girard, Human Rights Officer at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
98. Frank Power, former Deputy Ambassador of Ireland to the Council of Europe
99. Jacqueline Hale, Head of Advocacy - Save the Children EU Office
100. Olena Ivantsiv, Head of the People in Need Centre for Human Rights and Democracy
101. Nicholas Detsch, Former Human Rights Officer at the OSCE Baku

## **ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE**

### **Evaluation of the Human Rights House concept and its advocacy component**

#### **A. Introduction**

Established in 1992, the Human Rights House Foundation (“HRHF”) supports the establishment of Human Rights Houses (“HRHs” or “Houses”) – communities of human rights NGOs – and facilitates the connection of these Houses in a network of Houses, the Human Rights House Network (“HRHN”). There are currently Houses in 13 countries, all in Europe, which are home to more than 100 independent NGOs. Houses play an important role in facilitating joint initiatives by their member and partner NGOs. Along with supporting the establishment of Houses and providing ongoing financial and other support, the HRHF has invested significant resources in supporting the Houses and their member and partner NGOs in undertaking international advocacy.

Twenty-five years on, in a different and fast changing world, do existing HRHs offer the needed response to the local needs? HRHF is commissioning an external evaluation of the HRH concept, supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We wish to determine whether different House models are still fit for purpose to serve the human rights cause, as part of the effort to strengthen civil society as a whole, including with regard to facilitating and supporting advocacy, and to identify recommendations to update the HRH concept to ensure that it continues to be relevant.

#### **B. Background**

The HRHF supports the establishment of a HRH where certain criteria are met, especially demand for a HRH from local human rights NGOs. The HRH concept is designed to be flexible, but the overall purpose of every HRH is to serve the human rights cause, as part of the effort to strengthen civil society as a whole. This is achieved through stimulating collaboration between member NGOs on human rights education, legal aid, networking and advocacy for example; enhancing solidarity, cutting costs, further increasing member NGOs’ visibility including vis-à-vis decision makers, and making member NGOs more accessible to victims and human rights defenders.

The ‘classic’ HRH is a physical structure established and managed by a community of NGOs, co-located in the same premises. Such a House is usually locally owned and registered as a new joint legal entity, with a Board made up of representatives from the member NGOs. Two other HRH models have emerged: a ‘House with one NGO as leader’, with one NGO as the formal owner of the premises, providing others with access and opportunities to use the space; and a ‘resource House’, where all participating NGOs maintain their own offices elsewhere and the House serves as a joint space devoted to various purposes such as human rights education, training, events or the provision of legal aid. Where restrictions on civil society in any given country are severe, a HRH may be established in exile. A HRH may also combine elements of the above models.

For more information on the HRH concept and its history, please see the ‘Manual for Establishing a Human Rights House’, available on the HRHN website: <http://humanrightshouse.org/noop/page.php?p=Articles/5215.html&d=1>

The Manual will be updated to incorporate learning from the planned evaluation, and in particular around ensuring that established Houses are sustainable.

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported an external evaluation of the HRH concept previously, in 2005–2006. This process was instrumental in informing the strategies of the HRHF and Houses from 2007 onward.

However, ten years on, the HRHF has invested in its advocacy programme to support the Houses, new Houses have been established, many of the Houses operate in different contexts, and new opportunities and challenges have emerged. For example, in many countries there are growing restrictions on civil society, while the communications and social media revolution are changing the way human rights work may be done, with new human rights actors emerging and challenging the dominance of established NGOs.

### **C. Rationale**

The planned evaluation is envisaged in the ‘HRHN Five-Year Strategy 2014-18’ and the related Results Framework, which will be provided to the evaluator.

The HRHF will use the learning from the planned evaluation to update the HRH concept so as to ensure that it is fit for purpose, can meet new challenges faced by the human rights community and wider civil society, and make the most of new opportunities. Specifically, this will mean:

- Updating the ‘Manual for Establishing a Human Rights House’, and in particular with regard to the sustainability of established Houses.
- Sharing and explaining the findings and recommendations of the evaluation with each House, including around governance, strategic planning and the role of Houses with regard to facilitating and supporting advocacy.
- Shaping the Foundation’s advocacy work with the Houses, including identifying new advocacy opportunities.
- Feeding the learning into the HRHN Five-Year Strategy 2019-23, to include support for existing and new Houses to incorporate the learning from the evaluation in to their design, operations and activities.
- Sharing the learning with donors and other stakeholder

### **D. Scope**

The objectives of the evaluation are to:

1. Assess whether the HRH concept and the different House models are fit for purpose to serve the human rights cause, as part of the effort to strengthen civil society as a whole, including with regard to facilitating and supporting advocacy.
2. Identify recommendations to update the HRH concept and the different House models to ensure that they are fit for purpose, including with regard to advocacy – being actors for change in their countries and wider regions.

Specifically, the evaluator will consider the following questions:

**1. Assess whether the HRH concept and the different House models are fit for purpose:**

- In countries in which a House is located, what are the needs of the member NGOs and wider human rights community?
- Have these needs changed since the House was established, and in light of emerging opportunities and challenges?
- Is the House meeting these needs? Is it adapting to emerging opportunities and challenges? Specifically, including with reference to the ‘Manual for Establishing a Human Rights House’ (pages 5 to 8), is the House:
  - o Creating an environment that stimulates active collaboration and cooperation through synergies?
  - o Made up of diverse and active member organisations involved in a wide range of different activities?
  - o Run and managed by equal participation and representation of the member organisations?
  - o Perceived as being independent?
  - o Facilitating and supporting joint advocacy? Linked to this, how do members in each House perceive the support provided by the HRHF on advocacy? Do they see this support as adding value and, if they do, in what way? Do member and partner NGOs of each House see the House-related advocacy as competing with their individual agendas and visibility? Do members in each House perceive the connection to other Houses as adding value in terms of advocacy? How do advocacy targets perceive the HRHF’s approach to advocacy (driven by the Houses/their members)? Have the international advocacy initiatives been grounded in national realities, focused on bringing change in the country of each HRH?
  - o Making the partner and member organisations more visible to the public and decision-makers, for the purposes of advocacy?
  - o Enhancing solidarity amongst member and partner NGOs in each House and amongst the Houses?
  - o Cutting costs for members, releasing funds for activities?
  - o Providing a stable and secure base for activities, providing protection?
  - o A national (or sub-national) centre of human rights, drawing the attention of everyone engaged in human rights in the country?
  - o Benefitting the wider human rights community as a whole, beyond the member NGOs?o Accessible to victims of human rights violations and open (open space and open mind) to human rights defenders, beyond the partner and member organisations?
  - o Used and/or referred to by others, including non-member NGOs, youth movements, unions, emerging social movements, students, researchers, and other for meetings, activities, resources, and events?
  - o Meeting new needs, not envisaged in its original design?
- If the House is not meeting these needs, why not?
- Are there any examples of best practice, where a House is meeting all or most of the needs and/or has managed to adapt to meet new challenges and make the most of new opportunities?

**2. Identify recommendations to update the HRH concept:**

- How can the House concept and different models be adapted to ensure that ongoing needs are being met?
- How can the House concept and different models be adapted to ensure that new needs are being met, including needs around advocacy at the international and national levels to impact domestic decision-makers, and with reference to emerging opportunities and challenges?
- Does the HRHF need to adapt its approaches to the establishment and support of Houses, including with regard to governance?
- Which such recommendations should be prioritised?

## **E. Methodology and Stakeholders**

The evaluator will be expected to develop a detailed evaluation methodology to ensure that findings and recommendations are based on a representative selection of samples and facts.

The evaluation methodology, process and outputs must adhere to the OECD Development Quality Standards for Development Evaluation. These standards include a requirement for the evaluator to be mindful of gender roles, ethnicity, ability, age, sexual orientation, language and other differences when designing and carrying out the evaluation.

The HRHF envisages that the evaluation methodology will include:

- Desk research/literature review on the external environment for the human rights movement, particularly in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Balkans, including emerging opportunities and challenges. However, the evaluator will be expected to already have this knowledge and expertise.
- Desk research/literature review, to read background documents provided by the HRHF and Houses, to ensure familiarity with the House concept and its history.
- Interviews – in-person and remotely – with relevant stakeholders, to answer the evaluation questions.

The evaluator must conduct a participatory evaluation, which will involve some travel in Europe. While there will be some flexibility, the evaluator should be available for some travel to undertake the evaluation.

The following stakeholders should be involved in the evaluation:

- At least five (5) different Houses, to include: at least two ‘classic’ Houses, such as HRH Zagreb, of which one is in exile, such as Belarusian HRH; one House owned by one NGO, such as HRH Warsaw (Polish Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights); one ‘resource centre’, namely Educational HRH Chernihiv; and HRH Azerbaijan:
  - o Board members;
  - o Management/Coordinator;
  - o Staff of member and partner organisations.
- External stakeholders, including advocacy targets:
  - o Individuals using the House who are not members;
  - o Representatives of other human rights NGOs;

- o Key international human rights actors (INGOs, intergovernmental organisations' human rights mechanisms, such as UN special rapporteurs, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights) that have worked with Houses and/or HRHF;
- o Donors;
- o Diplomats in embassies in countries of at least the five (5) above-mentioned HRHs, as well as diplomats representing countries identified by HRHF as advocacy targets, in Brussels, Geneva, New York, and Strasbourg;
- o Decision maker(s) in the countries in which HRHF works, such as heads of National Human Rights Institutes and municipalities;
- o Parliamentarians and elected government officials.
  - At the HRHF:
    - o Board members;
    - o Director;
    - o Managers and other staff.

## F. Schedule and Deliverables

The evaluator will prepare:

1. An evaluation workplan, to include a detailed evaluation methodology.
2. An evaluation report.
3. A presentation on the evaluation report and its main findings and recommendations.

The evaluator must prepare these deliverables in English and submit them to the HRHF by email to the designated contact point. The evaluator will be provided with a contact point at management level within the HRHF.

The evaluator will adhere to the following schedule:

<i>Draft Evaluation Workplan</i>	A draft detailed workplan will be submitted within two (2) weeks of the signing of the contract. It is envisaged that the contract will be signed by the end of August 2017.
<i>Final Evaluation Workplan</i>	Within one (1) week of receiving HRHF's comments on the draft detailed workplan, the evaluator will produce a final evaluation workplan.
<i>Draft Evaluation Report</i>	The evaluator will submit a draft evaluation report for review by HRHF within eight (8) weeks of producing the final workplan. For the avoidance of doubt, the draft report must be submitted by the end of November 2017.
<i>Final Evaluation Report</i>	Within two (2) weeks of receiving HRHF's comments on the draft report, the evaluator will submit a final evaluation report, including an evaluation abstract/executive summary.
<i>Presentation</i>	The evaluator will be required to give a presentation on the main findings and recommendations. This is likely to be required in December 2017.

## G. Budget

The project is budgeted with an input of up to 50 consultant days.

The tenderer shall quote a total price for the assignment exclusive of costs for travel and related expenses. Travel and related expenses will be covered by the HRHF, in accordance with its rules and procedures on travel.

## **H. Evaluator – Required Experience, Skills and Qualifications**

The evaluator will need the following experience, skills and qualifications:

- Extensive experience in conducting evaluations and a proven record in delivering professional results.
- Experience undertaking evaluations of complex human rights programmes.
- Experience working in civil society and preferably in the human rights field, with strong knowledge of the human rights movement.
- Knowledge of the human rights situation and environment for civil society in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Balkans.
- Experience working in at least one of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Balkans is desirable.
- Experience undertaking evaluations for European funded programmes is desirable.
- Fluent in English and Russian (the evaluation report must be written in English).

## **I. Call for proposals**

Any individual or firm interested in undertaking this evaluation should submit a proposal by the end of 31 July 2017 to Rupert Abbott, HRHF: [rupert.abbott@humanrightshouse.org](mailto:rupert.abbott@humanrightshouse.org)

They should include:

- Technical proposal, including the proposed evaluation methodology and brief workplan (no more than two (2) pages);
- Financial proposal, including the proposed fee and breakdown (no more than one (1) page);
- CV(s), including examples of other evaluations undertaken by the individual(s) (no more than two (2) pages each);
- A list of at least three referees for each individual, including contact details;
- Information on their legal form and ownership structure where applicable; • Confirmation of their good standing and that they are an eligible tenderer as defined in the rules and principles for procurement for projects funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (template to be sent by request); and
- Confirmation that they are not aware of any conflict of interest that may arise in undertaking the evaluation (template to be sent by request).

The HRHF will reject any proposal should it suspect any illegal or corrupt practices have taken place in connection with the same, and may terminate any contract to undertake the evaluation should it find that illegal or corrupt practices have taken place.

For any questions, please email Rupert Abbott, as above