



European Democratic Citizenship Awards

Category : NGO of the Year

Name of the Organisation: Hungarian Helsinki Committee (Magyar Helsinki Bizottság)

Description of the Organisation:

Since its founding in 1989, the HHC has acquired a strong reputation of professionalism and credibility. The HHC's main areas of activities are centred on protecting the rights of asylum-seekers and other foreigners in need of international protection, as well as monitoring the human rights performance of law enforcement agencies and the judicial system. It particularly focuses on the conditions of detention, the effective enforcement of the right to defence and equality before the law. Beyond its long-standing experience in detention monitoring, advocacy as well as legal counselling and representation for detainees and asylum-seekers (e.g. over 12 000 asylum-seekers assisted since 1998), the HHC has unique expertise among European NGOs in human rights and asylum-related training. We have delivered over 200 training sessions and courses in recent years in dozens of European and Latin-American countries.

Impact achieved by your Organisation:

The HHC has been particularly effective in representing the cause of detainees, refugees and other victims of human rights violation in recent years. For example, both the EU Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights decided favourably in several cases of asylum-seekers represented by the HHC. In 2013, we reached a favourable judgment in 82% of the asylum appeal cases we represented before national courts. The HHC submitted formal complaints against Hungary to the European Commission for non-compliance with EU law, which resulted in a pilot infringement procedure against the country and the rectification of several shortcomings in legislation and practice. International human rights bodies (UN, CoE, etc.), rapporteurs, national courts and the US State Department regularly quote the HHC as a reliable source of information about human rights, rule of law and asylum in Hungary (e.g. HHC was referred to 22 times in the latest US State Department human rights report).

What makes the Organisation innovative?

The HHC is the only refugee-assisting civil society organisation that is regularly invited to train state authorities and judges in various countries. Since 2004, we have been managing the world's only on-line university curriculum for the teaching of refugee law, the Refugee Law Reader (in 4 languages, over 100 000 visits per year). The HHC has gained specific reputation for leading some of the most innovative and powerful training initiatives in the field of asylum internationally, such as the CREDO initiative (increasingly used and referred to in different parts of the world). The HHC has applied innovative solutions in other areas of its activity as well: in an effort to reform the Hungarian criminal legal aid system, it has in cooperation with the police and bar associations developed and tested in three pilot sites a computerized system for selecting lawyers in order to exclude the possibility of the police choosing non-independent lawyers for the suspects.

Contribution to European values:

rule of law, respect for human rights, freedom of speech, equality, rights of persons belonging to minorities, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice

Website or promotional materials:

<http://helsinki.hu/en/>