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WORKING PAPERS

The Emergence of Digital Human Rights Tracking Tools and Databases

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1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the last decade, the human rights ecosystem witnessed a major breakthrough in the use of digital technology for the advancement of human rights across all regions. Since the mid-2000s, both national and international human rights actors have introduced a growing number of digital tracking tools and databases designed to facilitate a more holistic approach to the monitoring, implementation, reporting and follow-up of international human rights recommendations. Such tools represent an innovative solution for all human rights actors to better organize and coordinate information gathering and data collection on the steps taken to implement international human rights recommendations. Today more than ever, one major aim of any national human rights system¹ is in fact that of efficiently coordinating national human rights data collection. This is a growingly onerous task, given the burden states are subject to due to an increasing number of recommendations issued by the United Nations (UN) Treaty Bodies, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and Special Procedures, regional human rights mechanisms as well as achieving progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Can the current international human rights system benefit from more effective measures of data collection and digital tracking at the national level?

This working paper addresses this question in light of available information management tools developed by different international and national stakeholders. UN agencies, regional human rights protection systems, national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up (NMIRFs), national human rights institutions (NHRIs), civil society organizations (CSOs), academia as well as national statistical offices and public-private partnerships across the

world have developed an array of digital human rights tracking tools and databases. Whilst the trend is expanding, what is missing is coordination and exchange of good practices/challenges among developers and users of these different tools.

To find ways to counter this issue and devise solutions, the Geneva Human Right Platform (GHRP) organized, as part of its 2022 Annual Conference, [an expert roundtable](#) with representatives of 15 different governments, international organizations, NHRIs and CSOs that spearheaded this ‘human rights data revolution’ by launching innovative digital human rights tracking tools and databases. This working paper offers an introduction to this cutting-edge field of practice, including an overview of the main functions, relevant stakeholders as well as main challenges specific to the work of 15 different digital human rights tracking tools and databases.

2. THE EMERGENCE OF DIGITAL HUMAN RIGHTS TRACKING TOOLS AND DATABASES – WHAT IS AT STAKE?

The supply of relevant, timely and usable data is essential for countries to set priorities, make informed choices and better policies for the implementation of recommendations from UN and regional human rights mechanisms as well as to achieve progress on sustainable development. Advances in the ability to manage, exchange, combine and analyse human rights data, and to disseminate statistical information online, are changing the way traditional statistical processes are carried out. The development of digital human rights tracking tools and databases is a potentially significant

¹ Geneva Academy Briefing n. 18, National Human Rights Strategies: the role of national human rights systems in the implementation of international human rights standards (January 2021) available at <https://www.geneva-academy.ch/joomlatools-files/docman-files/Academy%20Briefing%2018.pdf>.

step forward for the realisation of human rights and the SDGs at national level.

The exact nature of the reporting burden differs from country to country, with hundreds of human rights recommendations and obligations often overlapping in nature, to varying degrees. This challenge is often exacerbated by competing demands and priorities, such as SDG reporting, for example, and the regular receipt of further recommendations at the conclusion of each treaty body review, UPR or special procedures' visits. From the outset, this makes tracking implementation and data collection an onerous task that needs to compete for attention with other national priorities. Consequently, data collection often occurs only once a periodic report is due or overdue.

During any given reporting cycle, if data is not regularly collected it is unlikely that full datasets will be available when required. It may not even be straightforward to identify who the data owners are or how to contact them. Staff turnover also contributes to the reporting burden. Having knowledge of data sources and reporting deadlines and requirements (submission process, formatting standards, word limits, etc.) across the various Treaty Bodies is not easy due to the lack of a standardized approach. It is not uncommon to find that a state is unaware of when its reports are due, how a report should be submitted, as well as the required format and length. If reporting becomes too difficult whilst competing with other priorities, states revert to an ad hoc approach, which often means recommendations do not see the light of day until the next report is due. If the number and complexity of a set of recommendations received by a state are unmanageable, then comprehensive and coordinated implementation (and therefore effective data collection and reporting) is almost an impossibility. As a result, ministries work in siloes and rarely engage with other implementing actors in a systematic and regular manner. In turn, this leads to implementation gaps and/or duplication of work and inconsistent messaging.

The implementation challenges can be summarised as follows:

1. Government ministries (and other implementing actors) working in siloes with no coordinated approach;
2. Implementation gaps;
3. Duplication of activities;
4. Inconsistent messaging;
5. Lack of indicators and baselines (against which progress or deterioration can be measured)
6. Low levels of engagement with the international human rights system at the domestic level.

Broadly speaking, the introduction of digital human rights tracking tools and databases may counter such challenges and facilitate human rights implementation in various ways, including by:

1. Tracking and thematically clustering recommendations and decisions by the international and regional human rights mechanisms;
2. Linking specific recommendations to the Sustainable Development Goals;
3. Identifying responsible government ministries and/or agencies for their implementation;
4. Developing follow-up plans, including timelines with all relevant domestic actors, to facilitate a coordinated monitoring of implementation; and
5. Managing information regarding the implementation of treaty provisions and recommendations.

3. DIGITAL HUMAN RIGHTS TRACKING TOOLS AND DATABASES - A PRELIMINARY COMPENDIUM

The following section offers an analysis of 15 different tools and databases, including the dedicated hyperlink, main functions, list of stakeholders responsible for the administration of the tool, list of main users as well as specific challenges. As the table suggests, these tools and databases have been developed by a heterogeneous group of human rights actors and represent only a selection of available software. This table will be updated on a regular basis throughout 2023 to include a comprehensive list of all such tools and databases in existence today.

UHRI and NRTD - Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)		
Link to the tool/database	Universal Human Rights Index: uhri.ohchr.org	National Recommendations Tracking Database: nrt.ohchr.org
Main functions	<p>The UHRI is a searchable database containing the record of observations and recommendations issued by Treaty Bodies, Universal Periodic Review and Special Procedures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Searchable by human rights themes, groups of affected persons, SDGs and targets (all supported by automatic classification using machine learning/NLP); • Available in all 6 UN languages (depending on availability of translation for documents); • Data export via spreadsheet and API (XLSX/JSON). 	<p>The NRTD is a country-specific tracking database to support national follow-up to recommendations. It aims to offer all functionality that is typically required in the process of follow-up and reporting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A complete record of observations and recommendations (via UHRI); • Clustering of recommendations by themes, groups, and SDGs; • Planning of follow-up activities to implement recommendations; • Designation of lead institutions charged with implementation; • Developing indicators for recommendations and clusters; • Tracking of implementation progress, including statistics; • Exporting information from the database; • Drafting reports to human rights mechanisms; • Available in 5 UN languages. Translation into national languages is possible upon request.

Stakeholders responsible for the administration/up dating of the tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OHCHR • Partnership with Danish Institute and HURIDOCS for machine learning/NLP. 	
Users of the tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone: NMIRFs, human rights focal points in different ministries, NHRIs, civil society, academics, staff of UN and other IOs, human rights and sustainable development professionals, citizens, private sector, etc. • Publicly accessible with no restrictions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States (National Mechanisms for Follow-up and Review and human rights focal points).
Main challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacking well-established and empowered NMIRFs for administrating NRTD; • Evolution and harmonization of the human rights mechanisms' working methods – transition from the standard reporting procedure to the simplified procedure; • Growing demand from different states to roll out NRTD and the need to adapt its functionality to the national context and procedures; • Absence of coordinated approaches to implementing and following up human rights recommendations at the national level; • Constant turnover of human rights focal points undermining institutional memory; • Limited awareness and experience of national human rights mechanisms to utilize digital technologies; • Accessibility of human rights information for wider audiences: even where UHRI/NRTD are reasonably easy to use, the human rights system remains full of complicated terminology and processes that create barriers; • Linking NRTD with regional human rights mechanisms, facilitating monitoring and implementation of national human rights recommendations. 	
SIMORE Plus – Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Paraguay		
Link to the tool/database	https://www.mre.gov.py/simoreplus/	
	Paraguay has a permanent inter-institutional mechanism called SIMORE Plus, which is an online monitoring and reporting tool on the implementation of international human rights recommendations from both the Universal System (Treaty Bodies, UPR, Special Rapporteurs) and the Inter-American System. (Resolutive points of the Inter-American Court).	

<p>Main functions</p>	<p>SIMORE Plus links the monitoring of international human rights recommendations to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their targets. In addition to public access to the recommendations and their follow-up (without the need for a username or password), the mechanism offers the possibility for CSOs to register and enter the software to make comments and observations on the follow-ups, which are notified to both the Administrators as well as the Focal Points responsible for follow-up, for their consideration. Finally, it is important to mention the establishment of a necessary prior phase of socialization of state reports in the Regulations of the mechanism, promoting even more citizen participation, transparency and accountability of the State to the population.</p> <p>This mechanism has a national scope since it works based on a network of around 170 focal points belonging to some 70 public institutions of the three branches of government and other relevant organizations, which are responsible for following up on the recommendations assigned to their respective institutions. These focal points are in charge of uploading the institutional actions aimed at implementing the recommendations of their competence to the SIMORE Plus online platform.</p> <p>SIMORE Plus has demonstrated its effectiveness by strengthening the capacity of State institutions in the coordinated and articulated follow-up of international recommendations, through the exchange of information and experiences in the generation and execution of policies, plans and programs, avoiding dispersion and duplication of efforts, in addition to facilitating the preparation of national reports, enabling the identification of advances and challenges.</p>
<p>Stakeholders responsible for the administration/updating of the tool</p>	<p>The mechanism is made up of joint coordination processes between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice, where personnel are in charge, in addition to their own functions within the respective general directorates, of absorbing the tasks of administering the digital platform and the coordination of the network of focal points themselves.</p>
<p>Users of the tool</p>	<p>The SIMORE User Regulations establish the creation of a network of focal points from the competent public institutions of the three branches of government and other relevant organizations, who are responsible for following up on the recommendations assigned to their respective institutions.</p> <p>These focal points are designated by the highest authorities of each institution in accordance with internal administrative procedures in order to represent their institution. In practice, appointments fall to technical-level officials in the areas of Human Rights, Legal Affairs or International Affairs. Currently, around 170 officials make up the Network of SIMORE focal points.</p> <p>SIMORE Plus also benefits from coordination exercised jointly by the General Human Rights Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE) and the General Directorate of Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice (MJ).</p>

	<p>The SIMORE Paraguay Technical Cooperation Programme aims to support the development of national monitoring systems for international human rights recommendations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Paraguay has implemented the Programme since 2015 and SIMORE Plus is now being used in several Latin American countries, including Chile, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Uruguay, Argentina, Costa Rica as well as by the Organization of American States (OAS).</p>
<p>Main challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability of the mechanism, which largely depends on the solidity of its two main components: Technological and Human; • Constant updating and optimization of the computer tool; and on the other, the strengthening of its human factor (network of focal points); • Constant training of focal points in human rights mechanisms and report writing, in accordance with the standards of the various mechanisms, as well as incentives and stimuli for them to take ownership of the System; • Ensure the continuity of acquired experiences and installed capacities in the face of changes in authorities; • Establishment of a comprehensive strategy to update the system and increase the follow-up rate; • Sustain political-institutional commitment for the continuity and stability of the System during changes of government; • Encourage the creation of areas with exclusive dedication personnel to operate the System in the Institutions; • Obtain a budget to allocate exclusive personnel to the administration/coordination of the System; • Involvement of local governments (Municipalities, Governorates), as well as high authorities of the Central Government in the follow-up of complex implementation recommendations that require political impetus; • Incorporation of structural, process and results indicators, in accordance with the Guide for the measurement and application of Human Rights indicators; • Linking SIMORE Plus with the Universal Human Rights Index (UHRI); • Strengthen the synergy between SIMORE Plus and the platform for monitoring the implementation of the SDGs of the National Institute of Statistics; • Strengthen the implementation of the Regulations with regard to the planning of activities, the scheduling of meetings, and the monitoring and evaluation of follow-up rates; • Updating of Regulations and User Manual- SIMORE Plus; • Promotion of greater use of the OSC Plus platform, harmonization of SIMORE Plus – OSC interaction, in accordance with the Transparency Law; • Improve inclusiveness of software for PwD.

SIMORED Plus – Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic

<p>Link to the tool/database</p>	<p>https://simored.mirex.gob.do/simored/</p>
<p>Main functions</p>	<p>The Monitoring System of International Recommendations on Human Rights (SIMORED-PLUS) is a digital tool that facilitates the systematization of international human rights recommendations made to the Dominican Republic by the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies, UPR and Special Procedures and other human rights monitoring bodies.</p> <p>This tool allows access to updated information on the actions deployed by State institutions, linked to their compliance and implementation of human rights commitments. This new update of the SIMORED-PLUS version has a link to the SDGs, so it can also track advances in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.</p> <p>The objective of this initiative is to strengthen the capacity of State institutions to follow up and monitor the implementation of international recommendations, as well as their capacity to present reports on the human rights situation in the country. Likewise, it seeks to provide civil society with a transparent tool, freely and easily accessible so that it can follow up on the work of the different institutions there are responsible to provide and protect human rights.</p>
<p>Stakeholders responsible for the administration/up dating of the tool</p>	<p>The platform is operated by all institutions linked to national and international responsibilities vis-à-vis international recommendations, based on standardized templates. This guarantees that the data supplied maintains a certain homogeneity, allows accurate calculation of the level of compliance and facilitates inter-institutional interaction.</p> <p>Specifically, in the case of the Dominican Republic, such institutions are those belonging to the inter-institutional Human Rights Commission, a body that was introduced in 2004 by Presidential Decree 408-04. Today, 34 institutions of the Dominican Republic compose this Commission including central government, legislative body, justice, judicial power, ombudsman, municipal power and city council of Santo Domingo city.</p> <p>In this way, SIMORED-PLUS comes to complement the Commission, allowing it to carry out its work more effectively. In turn, this tool will allow a greater degree of precision and efficiency in the preparation of the international reports that the country must submit periodically, while at the same time becoming a tool of transparency and open access for all civil society.</p>
	<p>As president of the inter-institutional Commission of Human Rights, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic has the task to manage the tool, validate the information upload from the institutions and make it public. Every institution has its assigned code within the tool,</p>

<p>Users of the tool</p>	<p>which links them to each specific recommendation they have to follow up on. As such, it is a tool that allows personalized mechanisms for each member, highlighting each institution's own commitment.</p> <p>It is a public tool. As soon as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs validates the data, the public will be able to visit the tool and make searches on specific human rights themes or mechanism as well as the status of implementation by each stakeholder. It thus also acts as a transparency tool for the Dominican Republic.</p>
<p>Main challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making the tool viable for all stakeholders, including forming the tools' users in reporting skills and timely commital to report; • SIMORED Plus may soon also be taken by the Dominican Republic Presidency (e.g. office of the Vice-Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs) as the mechanism of follow-up for human rights advancement in the country. If this takes place, it will raise the importance this tool has in the public sector; • Follow-ups and making new procedures to make the reports more available, fast and accurate.
<p>Inter-American SIMORE – Organization of American States</p>	
<p>Link to the tool/database</p>	<p>https://www.oas.org/ext/es/derechos-humanos/simore/</p>
<p>Main functions</p>	<p>The Inter-American SIMORE seeks to strengthen the follow-up carried out by the IACHR to verify and promote compliance with the human rights recommendations that it makes to the Member States of the Organization of American States (OAS).</p> <p>To achieve this objective, the SIMORE performs two main functions. On the one hand, it systematizes the recommendations issued through the IACHR's various mechanisms. On the other hand, it allows the stakeholders involved in the follow-up processes of these recommendations to publish information relevant to their compliance.</p> <p>Regarding the first function, the SIMORE allows anyone to search for specific recommendations that are of interest to them, which can be linked to specific cases or structural issues. This search is done by applying specific criteria such as a population of interest, a particular topic, the year a recommendation was made, the type of measure recommended or the country to which it is addressed.</p> <p>Regarding the second function, the SIMORE allows OAS Member States, civil society organizations, national human rights institutions, or academics to publish information relevant to the compliance with specific recommendations. This information may consist of compliance measures adopted (e.g., legislation, public policies, training programs or dissemination campaigns); main advances and challenges regarding</p>

	implementation; compliance indicators; and institutions involved. This information may be published with respect to recommendations of a structural scope that are not related to specific cases.
Stakeholders responsible for the administration/up dating of the tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is in charge of systematizing and classifying recommendations in the SIMORE; - It authorizes the creation of accounts for users from States, civil society organizations, autonomous bodies, and academia; - It authorizes the publication of the information reported by the different actors involved with respect to specific recommendations. • Member States of the OAS, civil society organizations, autonomous bodies and academics that have Inter-American SIMORE user accounts: They publish information on compliance with specific recommendations.
Users of the tool	The Inter-American SIMORE is aimed at anyone interested in being informed of the recommendations issued through the IACHR’s various mechanisms, as well as information relevant to their compliance. Specifically, the SIMORE was created to democratize the follow-up of recommendations and promote the participation of the different actors involved through an exchange of information between States, civil society organizations, national human rights institutions and academics.
Main challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States could allocate more time and resources publishing information on compliance with recommendations. It is important to encourage them to perceive the Inter-American SIMORE as a mechanism that facilitates the follow-up of international recommendations related to human rights, and not as a burden; • As an innovative tool for following up on the IACHR’s recommendations, effective training strategies are needed to allow civil society organizations to feel increasingly comfortable using the SIMORE. To the extent that these actors are familiar with this tool, it can be used as an effective advocacy mechanism with the States; • Increasingly simplify the SIMORE platform to make it accessible to all. Since its objective is to democratize the recommendation follow-up processes, interested parties should be able to both access and actively participate in the platform by exchanging information useful to the follow-up of recommendations.
IMPACT OSS – IMPACT OSS Trust	
Link to the tool/database	Version 1 “Human Rights and SDGs” https://demo.impactoss.org/

	<p>Version 2 “Frameworks” https://demo-frameworks.impactoss.org/</p>
Main functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain, categorise/cluster and filter recommendations and targets from multiple “frameworks” (such as national and international human rights mechanisms, the SDGs, and national development strategies); • Maintain, categorise/cluster and filter (government) actions and activities from multiple agencies and organisations, as well as link them with one or more recommendations; • Define indicators for actions including a reporting schedule, as well as assign them to relevant users for reporting progress; • Enter (scheduled and unscheduled) progress reports for indicators, as well as send automatic email reminders to assigned users ahead and after scheduled reporting dates; • Identify implementation gaps; • Map overlap across HR recommendations, the SDGs and national development plans to create efficiencies in data entry.
Stakeholders responsible for the administration/ updating of the tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration: NMIRF / lead ministry officials; • Updating: ministry focal points.
Users of the tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duty bearers - Primarily to coordinate, track and report on human rights obligations, the SDGs and national development plans. Additionally, as a resource for policy formulation; • NHRIs and Civil society organisations - to contribute data relating to human rights, the SDGs and national development plans, and to hold government to account for the overall implementation of these commitments; • Development partners - to identify implementation gaps and potential areas of support; • The United Nations Treaty Bodies, Special Procedures and Human Rights Council - a resource for reviewing country progress against recommendations and prior to country visits or reviews; • General public - an accountability resource for rights holders and a resource for a range of stakeholders including academics, students, etc.
Main challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely digital access to HR recommendations; • Splitting of combined and clustering of duplicate and (partially) overlapping recommendations; • Lack of Government willingness to make actions public and transparent; • User adoption; • Funding for ongoing development, i.e. implementation of new features, optimisation of existing codebase.

SADATA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Samoa

Link to the tool/database	www.sadata.ws
Main functions	<p>To coordinate, and monitor the implementation of human rights recommendations and obligations, and at the same time, provide a broader picture of the interlinkages between human rights, Sustainable Development Goals, and now the Pathway for the Development of Samoa.</p> <p>SADATA automates the data collection and uses a clustering system on all international and national recommendations to reduce the amount of time needed to write reports, eliminate duplication of activities and identify implementation gaps.</p>
Stakeholders responsible for the administration/updating of the tool	Secretariat of the NMIRF (National Mechanism for the Implementation, Reporting and Follow Up) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, International Relations Division.
Users of the tool	SADATA is a public access web tool where info can be accessed by anyone with or without a SADATA account. Users of the tool include, government stakeholders, UN and international organisations staff, NGOs, civil society, academia, students etc.
Main challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited capacity: Due to turnovers across government and civil society, it is essential to train new staff at the NMIRF Secretariat and new stakeholders on how to administer and navigate SADATA; • IT: The technical upgrades, debugging and hosting are outsourced as MFAT does not have the technical skills or infrastructure for either; • Time Intensive: Dedicated time is required to update and upload new and existing data on SADATA. This is difficult due to competing priorities; • Data collection.

Human Rights Tracker – Equality and Human Rights Commission

Link to the tool/database	https://humanrightstracker.com/en/
Main functions	The Human Rights Tracker has three functions. The search function allows users to search and filter the UN recommendations submitted to the UK. The monitoring and reporting section of the Tracker provides a guide to how human rights are monitored in the UK, including information about treaty cycles and reporting deadlines. Finally, the progress assessment element describes and evaluates the progress being made on human rights by the UK and Welsh Governments.

Stakeholders responsible for the administration/up dating of the tool	The Human Rights Monitoring Team at the Equality and Human Rights Commission.
Users of the tool	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Civil society 2. Members of the public 3. UK and Welsh Governments 4. Parliamentarians, including parliamentary scrutiny committees 5. International human rights community
Main challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capacity; 2. Keeping the Tracker relevant and able to achieve its goals, including to best influence the UK and Welsh Governments to make progress in implementing human rights; 3. Monitoring the Tracker's impact to justify the resources it requires.
Uwazi - HURIDOCs	
Link to the tool/database	https://uwazi.io
Main functions	<p>Uwazi is an open-source web-based database application that is designed for human rights defenders to manage collections of information. 'Uwazi means 'openness' in Swahili and was launched in 2017 to help human rights groups manage large amounts of information such as documents, evidence, cases, complaints, research, and materials.</p> <p>As of August 2022, Uwazi is certified as a Digital Public Good as it is an open-source tool that adheres to privacy and other applicable laws, uses best practices, does no harm and helps to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).</p> <p>Collect and categorise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capture and organise raw data, including text, documents, images and video; • Add context to information; • Create templates to categorise and retrieve items. <p>Store and analyse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use relationships to track complex cases; • Store large amounts of information; • Decide what information to share with the public; • Search and filter for subsets of information; • Analyse content by displaying it in tables, graphs and maps. <p>Collaborate and protect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive information through public submission forms; • Choose what is shared with each collaborator or team; • Ensure information is safe by keeping an eye on all changes made;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect accounts with an extra security layer. <p>Assess and showcase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a public version of a collection; • Tell stories with the data to show why it matters; • Export information into commonly used formats; • Share information privately for advocacy, litigation and accountability purposes. <p>More recently, Uwazi started to leverage machine learning services to make human rights information easier to collect and categorise, and to make it more accessible.</p>
<p>Stakeholders responsible for the administration/up dating of the tool</p>	<p>Uwazi is developed by an in-house team of software engineers at HURIDOCs, a global NGO, and new features are added on a regular basis.</p>
<p>Users of the tool</p>	<p>At the moment, more than 150 human rights organisations across the globe are using Uwazi as a database tool – some for more than one collection. That brings the total to more than 300 public and private Uwazi databases.</p> <p>Users present at the GHRP roundtable discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UPR Info Database; • Girls Rights Platform (Plan International); • African Human Rights Case Law Analyzer (IHRDA). <p>The following groups of people are already using Uwazi in a number of ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human rights defenders; • Journalists; • Academics and researchers; • Museum workers and art curators; • Librarians and archivists; • Educators; • Lawyers; • Open knowledge activists. <p>Human rights defenders can use Uwazi for a variety of needs, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserving and archiving evidence of ongoing human rights violations; • Managing cases for strategic human rights litigation; • Tracking complaints made to human rights institutions and advocacy organisations; • Compiling libraries of human rights laws, recommendations and court decisions; • Monitoring a human rights situation for the purposes of reporting

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing progress around the implementation of human rights-related policies; • Building collective memories that support transitional justice and reconciliation; • Cataloguing a collection of campaign or advocacy materials.
<p>Main challenges</p>	<p>Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donor funding is essential to the development of the tool; • Fee-for-service funding is needed to sustain the further development of the tool; • Donor funding is essential for those who use the tool to document human rights-related information (documentation initiatives that have reached the end of their funding cycles, are usually not sustained); • Continuously improving the tool to provide human rights defenders with solutions that meet their requirements to maximise long-term impact. <p>Accessibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions to the internet and electricity remains a core challenge for some users and partners (interoperability with Tella is a solution that is addressing this issue). <p>Technical challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scalable and reliable infrastructure that is cost-effective, accessible and usable; • Process of authentication of primary information and enhanced security practices.
<p>UPR INFO Database – UPR INFO</p>	
<p>Link to the tool/database</p>	<p>https://upr-info-database.uwazi.io/</p>
<p>Main functions</p>	<p>UPR Info’s online tool is a searchable online database currently including more than 90,000 UPR recommendations and 1,500 voluntary pledges that States have made throughout all 3 cycles of the Universal Periodic Review.</p> <p>The database uses a web-based platform (Uwazi) designed by HURIDOCS with the specific scope of making human rights information more open and accessible to those who need it. It includes a more robust set of filters, which allows UPR stakeholders to find what they are searching for with increased ease.</p> <p>UPR Info’s database objective is to support the advocacy, monitoring and implementation work on UPR recommendations for different national and international stakeholders.</p>

Stakeholders responsible for the administration/ updating of the tool	UPR Info is responsible for updating and managing the database. Machine learning algorithms are integrated into the new version of this tool. One smart feature skims through the reports published by the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), and it extracts the recommendations and the related metadata, and another looks through the language and makes suggestions for how to categorize the recommendations by topic and type of action. Colleagues from HURIDOCS provide technical assistance.
Users of the tool	The tool is mainly used by civil society, including CSOs, NHRIs, parliamentarians and media, and UN Member States both in view of the UPR of their own country as well as to prepare recommendations for other States under Review. UN Agencies and UN Country Teams also use the database. A large number of researchers and students also use UPR Info's database as a source of information.
Main challenges	<p>To better improve the database, UPR Info will address in the near future the following challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add features to further disaggregate data; • Improve accessibility including through translating the database in additional languages (currently available in English and French); • Show trends between cycles and how human rights issues evolve between cycles (including by introducing more visual features, graphics and charts). <p>Another key challenge to solve in this regard is the issue of staff turnover to monitor and/or revise data collection in a regular and consistent manner.</p>
Girls Rights Platfom – Plan International	
Link to the tool/database	https://database.girlsrightsplatform.org/en
Main functions	<p>Provide a single access point to international policy documentation, through a user-friendly Platform, for advocates and policy influencers with all levels of expertise.</p> <p>Enable users to effectively find and track the progression of human rights language within international-level policy.</p> <p>Provide users with a database of international policy equipped with features which allow them to apply an intersectional lens to research</p>
Stakeholders responsible for the administration/ updating of the tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan International (content administration/updates); • HURIDOCS (technical development/updates);
Main users of the tool include policy influencers and advocates from:	

<p>Users of the tool</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent Missions (Geneva, New York and in capital); • UN agency staff; • NGO policy and advocacy staff.
<p>Main challenges</p>	<p>Accessibility Defining set indicators in policy language by which users can clearly track the progression, regression or stagnation of language in international policy across various human rights issues. While Plan International may be able to define indicators according to its perspective and position as an organisation, its own biases will prevent them from being able to define indicators which are universal to all users.</p> <p>Technical Finding and correcting gaps in large pools of data to ameliorate the user experience. For example, finding and correcting errors which then define how users are able to filter and search through data becomes more difficult as you have more information within the database.</p> <p>Sustainability There is often a certain sense of competition created between human rights tracking tools and databases with similar or the same user base, although ultimately all tools realistically provide complementary information. This is largely a reflection of limited resources in terms of time and capacity of different users to onboard various tools, although they can all facilitate different aspects of the users' work. For example, as many systems look and function differently, users with limited time will select a single human rights tracking tool or database which <i>most</i> serves their needs, rather than onboard a set of tools or databases which can, together, address all of their needs.</p> <p>Consistent turnover and rotation of staff in Plan International's user base means the onboarding process is never-ending, requiring to continuously allocate human resources to outreach and trainings despite often limited capacity within its teams.</p>
<p>The African Human Rights Case-Law Analyzer – Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa</p>	
<p>Link to the tool/database</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">https://ihrda.uwazi.io/</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate access to legal resources (case-law and legislation) in the African human rights system (AHRs) for actors in the protection and promotion of human rights in Africa. • Ease the understanding of African human rights jurisprudence by organizing information into diverse search formats and generating hyperlinks to all citations relating to case-law and legislation from

Main functions	various international human rights systems, notably the AU, UN, European and Inter-American human rights systems. Thus, the Case Law Analyzer does not simply list decisions and instruments, but presents them as interacting and interrelated texts to facilitate research friendliness and a better understanding of the web of textual and jurisprudential interaction in the African human rights system. It allows for easy browsing experience and simultaneous consultation of instruments and mechanisms cited by loading related texts and documents within the same reading panel.
Stakeholders responsible for the administration/up dating of the tool	IHRDA publications/communications team, in collaboration with colleagues in the legal team, as well as the developers (HURIDOCS) for technical support.
Users of the tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lawyers, jurists, human rights activists and CSOs that work closely with individuals, groups and communities at grassroot-levels to offer legal support; • Officials in domestic and regional judicial and quasi-judicial institutions; • Law and human rights researchers and students in and out of Africa.
Main challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtaining case-law from regional mechanisms (some older decisions are only available in print format, while new decisions are not always readily available); • Lengthy processing time to generate hyperlinks, especially for lengthy documents; • Limited availability of curating skills; • Inadequate internet availability (with curating and use depending entirely on internet connectivity); • Difficulty generating hyperlinks on Image-Only PDF files.
SUMMA – Center for Justice and International Law	
Link to the tool/database	https://summa.cejil.org/
Main functions	<p>SUMMA is a free and open-access online database available that provides users with a complete overview of cases heard by the Inter-American Commission and Court of Human Rights.</p> <p>SUMMA displays all documents on a timeline, showing in a simple and unique manner the relationships between documents, cases and protection measures, while different filters enable efficient searches.</p>
Stakeholders responsible for the administration/up dating of the tool	CEJIL, Center for Justice and International Law.

<p>Users of the tool</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human rights defenders; • Human rights activists; • Academics in international law and human rights; • Lawyers; • Government officials.
<p>Main challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make accessible the information published on the official web pages of human rights organizations, linking the largest amount of available information; • Publish available information on the impact of the work of international organizations on people's lives. <p>In relation to the use of Uwazi for SUMMA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the visualization of the available data and the relationships between them; • Adapt Uwazi developments to apply them to a database of SUMMA's characteristics.
<p>SDG Explorer – The Danish Institute for Human Rights</p>	
<p>Link to the tool/database</p>	<p>https://sdgdata.humanrights.dk/en</p>
<p>Main functions</p>	<p>The SDG – Human Rights Data Explorer is a searchable database that links monitoring information from the international human rights system to the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It allows users to explore the recommendations and observations of international human rights monitoring bodies, as they relate to the implementation of the SDGs and their 169 targets in specific countries. The links are powered by an expert-trained algorithm. Users can filter the data according to their interests, such as for instance country, year, SDGs or rights holder group. An overview report of the country of interest is available with graphics and contains information on the distribution of topics and issues in the recommendations given to the country in focus.</p>
<p>Stakeholders responsible for the administration/ updating of the tool</p>	<p>The Danish Institute for Human Rights is responsible for the upkeep, maintenance and changes or improvements. The Danish Institute updates the tool by retrieving recommendations when they become available in the Universal Human Rights Index (UHRI) by OHCHR.</p>
<p>Users of the tool</p>	<p>Intended users: Researchers, human rights professionals interested in sustainable development, development professionals interested in human rights.</p> <p>Example: NHRI staff interested in collaborating with line ministries to increase human rights integration with development planning and policies at national level.</p>

	Use cases: national implementation, follow up and review on both national level and regional level.
Main challenges	<p>The website:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the usability and keeping it relevant; • Keeping the recommendations updated in a timely manner due to dependence on an external source; • Significant challenge over the years has been a lack of feedback loop – there is a lot of excitement about the tool but it is difficult to know exactly how users utilise it to be able to continually develop it. <p>Development of the classification algorithm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overlap between categories and unclearly defined categories; • Ongoing improvements to the categories and the algorithm.
Women’s Human Rights App – Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs/University of Bern	
Link to the tool/database	https://womenshumanrights.ch/
Main functions	<p>It is a practical tool for easy access to international legal instruments as well as Agreed Language contained in over 670 documents on women’s human rights and gender equality adopted by UN bodies such as the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council or the Economic and Social Council. The App does also provide key paragraphs based on the annual sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In addition, the App comprises regional legal basis documents from e.g. Europe or Africa.</p> <p>The user’s search is facilitated by almost 140 keywords with regular add-ons of relevant issues. All the keywords and paragraphs are thematically and chronologically interlinked as well as tagged by related topics. The user-friendliness has been further improved by bookmarks and share buttons. The next feature will be a more sophisticated search function.</p>
Stakeholders responsible for the administration/up dating of the tool	<p>The W’sHR App and Website are an endeavour by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies (ICFG) at the University of Bern.</p> <p>The ICFG (University of Bern) is in charge of regular content updates of the W’sHR App.</p> <p>The Swiss government (FDFA) re-launched a new version of the W’sHR App in March 2021.</p>

Users of the tool	Created originally to facilitate negotiations on women’s rights and gender equality at the UN. Today’s users and target groups involve persons from diplomacy, academia, media, education, NGOs, advocacy work and development programmes.
Main challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constantly growing database: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Search provides always more results which makes it more difficult for the users to get an overview; ○ Selection and/or limitation schemes could help to manage the constantly growing database, but at the expense of a holistic overview (e.g. shortcomings for historical research). • More and more keywords were/are continuously added to the App. Some keywords were planned in advance, others emerged as urgent relevant topics (e.g. COVID-19 was added in 2021). Some keywords cover a very broad area (e.g. Discrimination), whereas others are very specific (e.g. Obstetric fistula). This leads to a considerable variety in the types of keywords; • Simultaneous aspiration: The tool should be as simple as possible in terms of functionality and technical access for broad international outreach (including e.g. challenging internet connections). At the same time, it should be as comprehensive and precise as possible in terms of content. • Technical challenges for some functions: There is e.g. a function called “Similar Language” that shows if similar wording in Agreed Language has already been used in the past. However, it is too expensive to automatize and too inaccurate to be done by hand; • The App does only contain unanimously accepted legal language. On the one hand, this selection criterion is a strength of the App in terms of argumentation and user-friendliness. On the other hand, it means that e.g. not all relevant or progressive resolutions or paragraphs regarding gender equality and women’s rights were/are considered, because they were not unanimously accepted. <p>It is a challenge to receive direct feedback from people who are using the App on a regular basis (especially from users based in different parts of the world using different electronic devices). Such a participatory quality control would be useful to further improve the App.</p>
EFRIS – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights	
Link to the tool/database	https://fra.europa.eu/en/databases/efris/
Main functions	The EU Fundamental Rights Information System (EFRIS) extracts data from existing databases on EU Member States’ human rights commitments and their compliance with those commitments. It then visualises that data in the form of charts, tables and maps, while also providing direct links to the data used to create the visualisations.

	The main data providers at present are the Council of Europe and the United Nations, and there are plans to widen the range of data providers in the future to include other organisations (e.g. Court of Justice of the EU, International Labor Organisation).
Stakeholders responsible for the administration/ updating of the tool	The tool is managed by the FRA, so technical and usability updates to the application are done by the Agency and its web development contractor. EFRIS retrieves data itself regularly from external databases, so most data updates happen automatically. The content of the external databases is updated by their owners (CoE and UN).
Users of the tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU institutions and agencies (e.g. European Commission, European Parliament, EU agencies); • International organisations; • Civil society groups (e.g. NGOs, NHRIs); • National-level stakeholders (e.g. policy-makers); • Academia and media; • Documentation centres and libraries.
Main challenges	The complexity of the tool – which consists of several components that work together to retrieve and display information from multiple online sources – means that it requires a lot of maintenance in order to keep it operational. For example, changes in the source data or in the endpoints providing that data will require modifications to the EFRIS application. Or network issues may cause data retrieval to fail, resulting in the application having outdated data or no data at all.

4. BENEFITS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

Today, almost all areas of international governance have been subject to the growing use of indicators and quantitative measurement indicating achievement or performance. As showcased above, this trend is also becoming a common feature for tracking the impact of international human rights recommendations. Governments, NHRIs, CSOs and academics alike are dedicating increasing time, attention and resources to the production of indicators and the collection and disaggregation of data. However, just as the use of indicators and quantitative measurement has gathered momentum, so have the concerns expressed about it.

What explains the rise in the use of indicators and what are the main concerns?

The benefits of such an approach include the following elements²:

- a. **Objectivity:** objective measurement as solution to the disparity between agreed obligations and actual performance. In other words, objective measures supposedly allow for making objective judgments about progress, thus providing information on what has been achieved and what remains to be achieved, equipping the relevant stakeholders with the necessary knowledge to make progress as well as making the work of the monitoring bodies more efficient and streamlined;
- b. **Consistency:** Unlike the subjective opinion of individual researchers/experts, an indicator allows close tracking of performance over time, permitting the

accurate assessment of improvement or failure;

- c. **Mainstreaming:** Indicators link the conceptual discussion about human rights compliance to implementation practices. They do not merely measure human rights compliance in the abstract; they also instigate movement in pre-determined directions and supply ready-made policy goals, thus setting priorities, informing strategies and budgeting, establishing accountability and ultimately assessing impact;
- d. **Normativity:** indicators imply the existence of ideals and in a sense, are also *communicative instruments*. They are not merely data but also statements of what is desirable, which means that they can express values. This gives indicators a certain political usefulness.

In a sense, what we are witnessing today represents a 'human rights data revolution', a process that is bringing technological innovation to different aspects of the monitoring, implementation, reporting and follow-up of international human rights recommendations.

At the same time, the emergence of digital human rights tracking tools and databases may eventually pose a risk to the substantive monitoring by both national and international human rights actors. Over-reliance on the production of indicators, disaggregated data and quantitative measurement may eventually lead human rights reporting cycles into audit-like processes, thus replacing - or at least overshadowing - the more discursive or narrative-based processes. As such, the potential consequent pitfalls of such an approach may be summarized as follows³:

² The following elements are adapted from David McGrogan, Human Rights Indicators and the Sovereignty of Technique, *European Journal of International Law*, Volume 27, Issue 2, May 2016, Pages 385–408 available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chw020>.

³ Ibid.

- a. **Oversimplification:** a change in emphasis from judgment-based decision-making to an exercise in verification and checking of indicators agreed by supra-national fora, can only artificially close the gap between international law and domestic policy. This brings with it the concern that monitoring through indicators ignores the contextual complexity of what human rights represent;
- b. **Imprecision:** gross, aggregate indices belie the diverse contextual factors that have a real bearing on why the numbers come out the way they do; they are thus not sufficiently precise to allow analytical conclusions from them as conditions of data-gathering vary so dramatically between countries;
- c. **Disconnection:** strong incentive for the subjects of an audit to attempt to render the process ‘ceremonial’ – to produce comfort in the auditing body through ritualized compliance and the production of ‘auditable form’ rather than actual human rights protection;
- d. **Capture:** the values and practices of auditing permeate an organization – or a state – to such an extent that it creates new mentalities, new strategies and new goals that interact in unpredictable ways. At its worst, it removes socio-political values from the public realm and embeds them in the construction of indicators, which shifts the balance of power towards the experts engaged in that process.

Taken together, these pitfalls may have a long-lasting negative effect on human rights implementation efforts:

The current trend risks to simply ‘buffer away’ the monitoring process by going through an ineffectual, but apparently exhaustive, set of checking and measurement, issuing of technical guidance, production of

measures and metrics and so forth [...]. To this might be added the opportunity cost of diverting resources and time towards the creation of auditable performance (indicators, standards, measures and associated data collection and disaggregation) as opposed to the actual protection of individual citizens’ human rights.⁴

To avoid a future in which human rights actors consider the creation of auditable outputs to satisfy external monitors *as an end in itself*, independent, cross-disciplinary collaboration and human-centred design deserve to be at the forefront of the ongoing ‘human rights data revolution’. Statistical data on local, national and international trends should not supplant the traditional reliance on non-quantitative forms of reporting and advocacy, using empirical, comparative studies that make treasure of anecdotal evidence, eyewitness testimonials and the individualized human rights story.

With that said, the development of digital human rights tracking tools and databases represents a potentially significant step forward for the realization of human rights at the national level and progress towards the SDGs. It is a growing trend with little empirical evidence of their true practical value. There is still an emerging understanding of the best way to refine and evolve the tools that currently exist. As of 2023, there is serious interest in such tools but not yet the critical mass of acceptance required that would result in the investments needed. The global interest in such software and the maturity of available tools indicates that it is only a matter of time before these are the rule, rather than the exception. The potential this has for transforming the implementation of human rights and the development agenda represents an exciting prospect.

⁴ *Ibid.* at 398.

5. NEXT STEPS

The GHRP will continue its initiatives in this field, firstly by brokering collaboration between two key human rights actors involved in this project: human rights software developers and policy-makers/users of digital human rights tracking tools and databases. Several barriers currently hinder the effective collaboration between these two "worlds". Overcoming such barriers, including needs-based assessments of both developers and users, will be a key target to achieve. One aim for this project is to improve knowledge exchange between software developers and policymakers using such tools and databases, thus fostering cooperation between these two categories of human rights actors. One other aim is to identify convergences, challenges and best practices concerning available human rights tracking tools and to assess the value of digitalization for a more systemic approach to human rights monitoring and implementation. The gaps and strategies identified will benefit four categories of stakeholders:

- Human rights software developers, currently working in siloes and lacking comparative studies on existing human rights tracking initiatives;
- International Organizations in their servicing the international and regional human rights accountability systems;
- National human rights actors, including government ministries, NMIRFs, NHRIs, parliamentarians and CSOs, who can improve the efficiency of their work through the knowledge and use of digital human rights tracking tools;
- Human rights defenders and rights-holders more generally, who deserve to be better informed on available human rights tracking tools, their benefits but also their potential impact on citizens' privacy and daily lives.

The project's final report will provide the international community with an in-depth analysis of all available human rights digital tracking tools and databases, their specific pros and cons, as well as delineating a clear policy agenda for more comprehensive digital tracking of international human rights recommendations' implementation. In such a way, the GHRP wishes to contribute to better and more coordinated monitoring and follow-up of recommendations from both UN and regional human rights systems at national level through the use of digital technology, thus enhancing human rights implementation efforts.

The Geneva Academy Human Rights Platform

The Geneva Human Rights Platform (GHRP) provides a dynamic forum in Geneva for all stakeholders in the field of human rights – experts, practitioners, diplomats and civil society – to discuss and debate topical issues and challenges. Relying on academic research and findings, it enables various actors to become better connected, break down silos and, ultimately, advance human rights.

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