

● UpRights⁷

ANNUAL REPORT

2025

Building Partnerships To Advance Human Rights Through International Law

UpRights is an independent non-profit providing expert legal support to governments, judiciaries, prosecutors, international organisations, and civil society. We combine deep legal expertise with a genuine commitment to nationally and locally owned processes — because lasting justice can only be built from within.

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Letter from the Co-Directors

2025 reminded us of why this work matters. Around the world, the pursuit of justice and accountability for human rights violations and international crimes continues - often quietly and against significant odds - carried forward by those on the ground including those directly harmed and the prosecutors, judges, civil society organisations, and national institutions that refuse to accept injustice as inevitable.

UpRights exists to support those efforts. Through our work we aim to contribute to just, resilient and sustainable societies that effectively address human rights violations, strengthen the structures necessary to prevent future violations and are responsive to the needs of their citizens. What has grown is our understanding of where legal and technical support makes the most difference, and our conviction that working in genuine partnership with the actors closest to these issues remains the most effective way to deliver it.

In a landscape where resources for human rights work are constrained, we believe that targeted support is among the most cost-effective investments available. Our partners, from national governments navigating complex transitions to civil society organisations defending democratic futures under pressure, deserve the strongest possible foundation for their work.

We are grateful to everyone who has made 2025 possible including our partners, our funders, and our board. If this report resonates with you, we would warmly welcome your support, whether through partnership, engagement, or helping us build the connections that allow this work to grow.



Valerie Gabard
Co-Director



Asa Solway
Co-Director

Our Work at a Glance

Translating our mission into action.

UpRights is an independent non-profit providing expert legal support to governments, judiciaries, prosecutors, international organisations, and civil society.

We combine deep legal expertise with a genuine commitment to nationally and locally owned processes - because lasting justice can only be built from within – to **promote human rights and stronger, peaceful, and more resilient societies.**

Our work is organised around four complementary methodologies, each addressing a distinct dimension of our mission:

Ensuring those responsible for human rights violations and international crimes are held accountable

Building more just and peaceful societies through transitional justice and institutional reform

Holding corporations accountable for their human rights impact

Supporting civil society to protect the human rights of those most at risk

Our Impact in 2025

In 2025, we worked alongside a **wide range of partners** — governments, judiciaries, civil society organisations, and international institutions — on **human rights documentation, accountability for international crimes, transitional justice,** and **business and human rights.**

Our work took different forms depending on the needs, but was always guided by the same question: **how can our specialized support make a genuine difference to those who need it most?**

200+

Ukrainian public servants trained on transitional justice,

60+

Judicial authorities trained on the adjudication of international crimes,

30+

Auditors trained on business and human rights due diligence

7+

Research reports, practitioner guides, and policy publications produced or contributed to

3+

Formal submissions to international and regional accountability bodies

20+

Partners supported among civil society organisations, research centers, international organisations, and national authorities.

4+

Workshops, conferences, and expert meetings convened on emerging international law questions

Ensuring those responsible for human rights violations and international crimes are held accountable

Based on our conviction that lasting accountability is only achievable when the actors closest to the harm are genuinely empowered to lead it, we support government entities, national judiciaries, prosecutorial offices, and NGOs engaged in the documentation, prosecution, and adjudication of human rights violations and international crimes.

To do so, we conduct needs assessments to better understand and target what is needed, map frameworks to identify the most strategic pathways to accountability and provide targeted advice that is directly integrated into our partners' operational realities. Our work is rooted in assessing what is possible now and how to preserve information and create new pathways in the future.

Our impact in 2025

- Produced and contributed to at least 5 research reports that advanced the legal and institutional frameworks for accountability across DRC, Iran, North Korea and Ukraine.
- Worked alongside national prosecutors to translate international legal standards into actionable prosecutorial strategies on themes like the engagement of children in hostilities.
- Developed resources specifically designed for use by lawyers, investigators, and human rights practitioners.
- Contributed to training programmes for judges, prosecutors, and legal practitioners across multiple jurisdictions to investigate and adjudicate international crimes effectively.

Accountability Pathways for International Crimes in Iran

Since 2023, UpRights has been providing sustained legal support to Human Rights Activists (HRA) in Iran on the Pasdaran Documentation Project, a comprehensive initiative examining the structure, history, human rights violations, and potential international crimes associated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

In 2025, this collaboration resulted in the publication of Accountability Pathways: A Practitioner's Guide to Addressing Alleged Serious Human Rights Violations and International Crimes Committed by the IRGC in Iran and Abroad. UpRights provided the legal analysis and drafting support that underpins the guide, which is designed for lawyers, investigators, and human rights practitioners seeking to identify and pursue available accountability mechanisms for IRGC crimes, whether before domestic courts, international tribunals, or through universal jurisdiction.

Fighting Impunity in the Democratic Republic of Congo

In April, UpRights, commissioned by TRIAL International, published a comprehensive report assessing the capacity of the Congolese justice system to prosecute international crimes, within the framework of the Global Initiative Against Impunity: Making Justice Work. The report was produced with the support of the Congolese Conseil supérieur de la magistrature, reflecting a collaborative process that engaged national judicial authorities directly in examining the strengths, gaps, and prospects of the DRC's accountability architecture.

Some of the core findings:

The DRC has rendered at least 131 judgments in international crime cases since 2004 – a little-known but remarkable result achieved under severe security and budgetary constraints.

Despite this progress, the vast majority of international crimes committed since the early 1990s remain judicially unaddressed, and those responsible for crimes committed before 2004 continue to benefit from impunity.

The report recommends the establishment of an enhanced international support mechanism specifically dedicated to the fight against impunity, designed to provide strategic, technical, logistical and financial support to Congolese courts.

On institutional reform, the report concludes that specialized mixed chambers integrated into the existing Congolese judicial system represent the most viable option.

Mapping Universal Jurisdiction: The 2025 UJAR

The Universal Jurisdiction Annual Review (UJAR) is the most comprehensive annual mapping of extraterritorial and universal jurisdiction cases worldwide. The 2025 edition, produced with the financial support of the City of Geneva, the European Union, Oak Foundation, and the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, was researched and drafted by UpRights and compiled developments across 95 cases prosecuted in 16 countries, charting the continued expansion of universal jurisdiction as a tool for international accountability.

The UJAR 2025 documented 36 new cases opened or made public in 2024, and 27 convictions in first instance or on appeal – nearly double the number recorded in the previous year. It also identified a number of structural challenges: the failure to open investigations into alleged crimes in Gaza was noted as a significant threat to the perceived legitimacy of international criminal justice, while cases linked to Ukraine and Belarus demonstrated both the potential and the limits of universal jurisdiction as a response to large-scale atrocity.

The Review was published by TRIAL International in collaboration with Civitas Maxima, the Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA), the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and REDRESS. While UpRights does not litigate universal jurisdiction cases directly, its expertise lies in supporting the NGOs and practitioners who do.

With more than 130 matters under investigation or in different stages of judicial proceedings over the course of the year, extraterritorial and universal jurisdiction cases continued to be a central pillar of the global fight against impunity

– TRIAL International

95

Cases mapped across 16 countries in the UJAR 2025

36

New cases opened or made public in 2024

27

Convictions – nearly double the previous year

Children Recruited for Crimes Against National Security: Supporting Ukraine's Prosecutors

In 2025, UpRights conducted a [research project](#) for the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine (OPG), addressing a specific and particularly grave category of violation documented in the conflict: the recruitment and use of children to commit acts that threaten national security.

The research examined how Ukrainian domestic law interacts with international standards – including international humanitarian law and international human rights law – on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, and how these intersecting frameworks can inform prosecutorial strategy.

The findings were presented directly to prosecutors from the OPG and its regional offices at a Council of Europe-convened [event](#) in December 2025. This work formed part of the Council of Europe project Fostering Human Rights in the Criminal Justice System in Ukraine Phase II, under the Action Plan for Ukraine Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction (2023-2026).

Building Expertise in International Criminal Law

Across 2025, UpRights contributed to a range of specialist training programmes for legal professionals engaged in international criminal law and accountability, reinforcing the expertise of practitioners at both national and international levels.

In June 2025, Co-Director Valérie Gabard once more contributed to *Enquêter et Poursuivre: Les Enjeux de la Justice Pénale Internationale*, the annual training programme of the French National School for the Judiciary (École Nationale de la Magistrature, ENM). Her session focused on the principle of complementarity within the ICC system, examining admissibility, the development of positive complementarity, and the critical role of national judges in ensuring that international justice mechanisms and domestic jurisdictions reinforce rather than substitute for one another.

Throughout the year, UpRights staff led and contributed to technical training programs for members of the judiciary and local and national authorities in Ukraine. These programs addressed a wide range of topics, including forced conscription, the use of protected persons in hostilities, judgment drafting, the application of universal jurisdiction in war crimes prosecutions, the role of cross-border collaboration, and the contribution of NGOs and civil society to advancing justice.

Building more just and peaceful societies through transitional justice and institutional reform

Peaceful and just societies require that the people and institutions responsible for them have the knowledge, tools, and institutional backing to do so.

UpRights works with state institutions, local authorities, civil society organisations, and international partners to design and implement institutional reform and transitional justice processes that are legally sound, politically viable, and responsive to the needs of affected communities.

Our impact in 2025

- Continued rolling out structured transitional justice training to Ukrainian civil servants.
- Co-organised two conferences and one expert workshop in Ukraine, bringing together public officials, civil society organisations, and international partners.
- Assisted the EU Delegation in the DRC in drafting a new action plan for an EU-funded transitional justice project.
- Drafted a flagship EU policy report on the implementation of the 2015 EU Transitional Justice Policy Framework.

Building Ukraine's Transitional Justice Capacity from Within

Since 2023, UpRights has been a partner in the programme Restoring Dignity and Justice in Ukraine, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented by the International Development Law Organization (IDLO), with T.M.C. Asser Institute, the Center for International Legal Cooperation, and the Netherlands Helsinki Committee. Through this programme, UpRights has contributed to the development and national rollout of a Training of Trainers (ToT) course on transitional justice for Ukrainian civil servants and regional government officials.

“We are all traumatized by the war. [...] We are traumatized but we are ready to work on transitional justice, we are ready to speak about transitional justice and promote the concept further.”

– A note made by one of the participants.

In 2025, the rollout continued to nearly 500 civil servants across Ukrainian regional governments. By equipping actors with a working understanding of transitional justice principles and their application in de-occupied communities, the programme contributes to build civil servants understanding of the role transitional justice processes can have to support Ukraine.

“There is a need for international cooperation that would allow us to reach all concerned groups, from high level officials to any other role in civil society institutions.”

– A note made by one of the governmental partners.

Supporting EU Transitional Justice Policy in the DRC

In May 2025, UpRights assisted the EU Delegation in the Democratic Republic of Congo with the drafting of a new action plan for an EU-funded transitional justice project, supported by Particip.

UpRights' contribution to the action plan drew on its direct knowledge of the DRC's justice system, including the findings of the April 2025 report on the fight against impunity co-published with TRIAL International, to support the design of a programme that is grounded in the realities of the Congolese context rather than imported from elsewhere.

Contributing to EU Transitional Justice Policy: The TED Initiative Report

In 2025, UpRights conducted a six-country study assessing how the EU's 2015 Transitional Justice Policy Framework has been implemented in practice, and identifying avenues to strengthen its application.

A confidential version of the study was presented before COHOM, the Council of the EU's Working Party on Human Rights, and shared with relevant stakeholders. It underlines tools to better promote nationally and locally owned transitional justice processes, to ensure genuine victim participation. It also emphasizes transitional justice as a critical instrument for the EU and its member states in responding to the global rise in instability, democratic backsliding, and proliferation of conflict.

A public version of the report was subsequently published in March 2026 by the [Team Europe Democracy \(TED\) Initiative](#) as [Supporting Implementation of the 2015 EU Transitional Justice Policy Framework](#).

Convening Experts and Practitioners on Transitional Justice in Ukraine

In 2025, UpRights co-organised and contributed to three events in Ukraine that brought together public officials, civil society organisations, and international experts to advance policy and practice on transitional justice.

In March, UpRights co-hosted "[The Role of Transitional Justice in Ukraine: National and Local Dimensions](#)" in Kyiv, with the [National Agency of Ukraine on Civil Service](#), the [High School of Public Governance](#), and [The Hague Academy for Local Governance](#), supported by the [Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#). The conference focused on how transitional justice applies at the local and municipal level, a dimension often overlooked in national policy debates, but critical given the role of local authorities in supporting communities returning to de-occupied areas.

In May, UpRights contributed expertise on accountability pathways to "[Building Bridges Through Justice: Addressing the Consequences of Russian Aggression](#)", an international conference examining the legal and institutional responses to Russian aggression.

In July, UpRights and the [T.M.C. Asser Institute](#) jointly organised a closed-door expert workshop on the issue of collaboration in Ukraine. The workshop brought together civil society, government, and international experts to examine case practice and develop concrete policy recommendations. UpRights drafted a summary report compiling the conclusions and proposed next steps for use in ongoing policy deliberations.

Holding corporations accountable for their human rights impact

Companies operating in high-risk environments can contribute through their operations to human rights violations and international crimes.

Legal frameworks requiring corporations to identify and address those risks are increasingly in place, but implementation remains uneven, and affected communities often have little recourse when companies fall short.

UpRights works at both ends of this problem. We support affected communities and civil society organisations in holding companies to account for documented violations and we work with standard-setting bodies and auditors to strengthen the frameworks and practical tools that determine how human rights due diligence is conducted in practice.

Our impact in 2025

- Supported civil society advocacy for an independent investigation into violations linked to TotalEnergies' LNG project in Mozambique.
- Delivered a training programme on human rights due diligence auditing to 30 auditors across 17 certification bodies in 11 countries.
- Provided expert legal analysis on the situation of North Korean workers in Russia.

Seeking Accountability for Violations at TotalEnergies' Mozambique LNG Project

Since 2023, UpRights has been engaged in efforts to document and seek accountability for serious human rights violations allegedly committed by Mozambique armed forces in the context of TotalEnergies' liquefied natural gas project in Cabo Delgado Province, a region that has experienced a protracted armed conflict since 2017, with severe consequences for local communities.

In 2025, UpRights continued its cooperation with Friends of the Earth Europe and Milieudefensie by drafting a formal letter to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), requesting the establishment of an independent investigation into documented violations. Signed by local chiefs and 66 human rights and environmental organisations, the letter argues that the scale and gravity of the documented violations, and the role of TotalEnergies' project in the context in which they occurred, warrant independent international scrutiny.

Expert Consultation on North Korean Workers in Russia

In June and July 2025, UpRights conducted an expert consultation for the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (NKDB), examining the situation of North Korean workers deployed to Russia under international law. The analysis covered applicable frameworks under business and human rights law and international human rights law, addressing questions of state responsibility, corporate complicity, and the rights of workers who are deployed through state-controlled programmes with no meaningful freedom of movement or consent.

“[...] North Korea’s alliance with Russia has transformed its long-standing labor export program into a militarized apparatus serving the state’s geopolitical and strategic objectives. What began as a scheme to generate hard currency has evolved into a system of state-sponsored exploitation with global security implications.”

– NKDB Report, September 2025

UpRights' analysis directly informed NKDB's report "Transnational Repression and Exploitation of North Korean Workers in Russia", published on 22 September 2025. The report documents how North Korean workers in Russia are subject to systematic control, exploitation, and deprivation of rights, and how the revenue generated from their labour flows back to the North Korean state.

Training GOTS Auditors on Human Rights Due Diligence

In June 2025, UpRights delivered a [training programme](#) on auditing human rights due diligence (HRDD) under the [Global Organic Textile Standard \(GOTS\)](#), one of the world's leading standards for the processing of organic fibres. The programme was delivered to 30 auditors from 17 GOTS-approved Certification Bodies operating across 11 countries, including Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Portugal, Poland, Italy, Turkey, India, Bangladesh, China, and Indonesia. It was funded in part through an Impulse Grant from the ISEAL Innovations Fund, in partnership with Global Standard.

Our work in numbers:



The training built directly on the [Due Diligence Handbook for Auditors](#) that UpRights helped develop in 2024, translating its methodologies and tools into a practical learning programme. Participants were equipped to assess companies' HRDD compliance under the GOTS framework, identifying risks, evaluating processes, and applying consistent standards across very different national and supply chain contexts.

In parallel, the OECD published its final report on the alignment of the GOTS framework with OECD due diligence guidance, an external validation of the framework's robustness to which UpRights' prior contributions had directly fed. The assessment confirmed a strong degree of alignment, reinforcing the credibility of GOTS as a due diligence standard in the textile sector.

"The realistic audit flow was excellent. Going through desk review, walkthroughs, interviews, and document checks made it feel like we were in an actual audit. It really helped connect theory with practice [...]"

— Participant discussing Module 3's simulation exercise

Supporting civil society to protect the human rights of those most at risk

Civil society organisations working to protect the rights of marginalised and vulnerable communities are often under pressure and operate in hostile environments.

We work alongside civil society partners as a resource so that their advocacy and litigation rests on the strongest possible legal foundation.

Our impact in 2025

- Provided drafting support for ILGA-Europe's Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of LGBTI People in Europe and Central Asia.
- Filed an urgent request to the UN Human Rights Committee that resulted in interim measures ordering Malta to rescue 32 people in distress at sea — the first such measures granted against an EU member state for failure to fulfil search and rescue obligations. A second set of interim measures was obtained in March 2026 in a distinct situation in the Central Mediterranean.
- Continued legal scrutiny of Italy's cooperation framework with Libya, building on the 2024 Navigating Troubled Waters report.

Monitoring LGBTI Rights Across Europe and Central Asia

Since 2024, UpRights has provided drafting support for [ILGA-Europe's Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of LGBTI People in Europe and Central Asia](#), the most comprehensive annual monitoring publication on LGBTI rights across the region. Drawing on the work of activists and monitors across 54 countries, the Review documents legislative developments, judicial decisions, policy changes, and incidents of violence and discrimination affecting LGBTI communities. It functions simultaneously as a monitoring tool for international bodies, a strategic resource for national advocates, and an accountability mechanism, naming states where backsliding is occurring and creating a public record that advocates can use to demand compliance with international human rights standards.

Some of the core findings:

For the first time, an EU Member State adopted primary legislation banning Pride and other LGBTI assemblies.

Criminal and quasi-criminal measures framed around child protection, public morality, or national values have expanded.

A marked shift away from rights-based governance is restricting trans and gender-diverse people's full participation in public life.

Child protection and curriculum regulation are being used to define what can be taught, discussed, or even acknowledged in educational settings.

Despite escalating repression in parts of the region, 2025 also recorded important reversals and reinforcements of protections.

Requesting Interim Measures to Protect Migrants in Distress at Sea

On 4 March 2025, UpRights, [StraLi](#), and [SOS Humanity](#) filed an [urgent request](#) to the UN Human Rights Committee after 32 people were stranded in distress for four days near the Miskar gas platform in the Central Mediterranean. The Committee issued interim measures the following day, ordering Malta to immediately coordinate a search and rescue operation and ensure the disembarkation of those rescued in a place of safety.

The case was significant not only for its immediate outcome but for its legal implications. Our request represented the first instance of an interim measures request being granted by the UN Human Rights Committee against a European Union member state for failure to fulfil its search and rescue obligations.

“According to international human rights and maritime laws, Malta must coordinate search and rescue operations in its search and rescue zone. This also entails ensuring that people rescued from distress are disembarked in a place of safety where their fundamental rights and the principle of non-refoulement are respected.”

– Serena Zanirato, StraLi

In March 2026, UpRights and StraLi, this time together with [Médecins Sans Frontières](#) and [Pro Iura](#), obtained a [second set of interim measures](#) from the same Committee against Malta, for a separate situation in the Central Mediterranean.

Monitoring the Italy–Libya Memorandum of Understanding

UpRights continued in 2025 its long-running legal scrutiny of the Memorandum of Understanding between Italy and Libya, through its partnership with StraLi. The MoU, which provides Italian funding and support to Libyan authorities, in particular the Libyan Coast Guard, has been extensively documented as enabling a cycle of interception at sea, arbitrary detention, and ill-treatment of migrants and asylum seekers in Libyan detention centres.

This work builds on the 2024 report [“Navigating Troubled Waters: Italy’s Human Rights Dilemma in the Mediterranean”](#), co-published by UpRights and StraLi, which provided a detailed legal and factual assessment of Italy’s responsibilities under international human rights and refugee law.

In 2025, UpRights continued to track developments in this framework and their legal implications, contributing to ongoing advocacy and litigation efforts aimed at challenging Italy’s externalisation policies.

Partnerships for human rights

In 2025, every piece of work UpRights produced was shaped by **partnerships built on shared purpose**.

Our collaborators are not simply supporters — they are the organisations and individuals without whom this work would not exist.

Together, we have stood alongside partners to **pursue justice where it matters most** — in national courtrooms, international forums, policy processes, and the communities most affected by violations. None of this work is ours alone.

We owe deep gratitude to our **partners, funders, and board members** whose trust and commitment sustained us throughout the year. It is a privilege to work alongside people and organisations who treat **accountability not as an abstract ideal, but as something worth fighting for**, every day.

UpRights operates primarily through **contractual agreements** with non-profit organisations and international institutions, with original funding often deriving from **national government grants**.

Detailed financial information including funding sources is not publicly available but **can be provided upon request**.



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