



Welcome to the Treaty Body Impact Database 2020+!

Your assignment

We thank all country researchers who have agreed to collect primary documents showing the impact of the UN human rights treaty system in a particular country, to be used in 'impact database 2020+'. The goal is to make it easy for everyone in the world to track and help improve the impact of the UN human rights treaty system.

We do hope that you will find this to be a worthwhile experience and an opportunity to learn more about a largely unknown aspect of human rights, and to contribute towards a project that will have long-term positive implications for human rights worldwide.

Could we ask you as a first step to make sure you have read the description of the treaty system impact study as a whole, which you can find [here](#). As you will see, we are essentially interested in collecting the primary documents showing first-hand to what extent the treaty system has made or makes a difference on the country-level in as many parts of the world as possible.

If you need more information on the treaty system, it is available on the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) [website](#). This is where you will find information on the treaties themselves, as well as the outputs of the treaty bodies.

The names of the countries that we currently cover for the impact database 2020+ and of those responsible for each country can be found [here](#). Your name will be added as the person currently responsible, and once you have submitted the documents that you have found, your name will be retained on the website as one of the valued contributors to the study in respect of the documentation on that particular country. Due to the volume of work, more than one person will be able to focus on any one country.

To summarise your assignment: We are asking you to collect and send us primary or first-hand documents (hard or soft copy) that show the impact of the treaty system (the treaties themselves or the outputs of the treaty monitoring bodies) in the country that you are covering. We are asking you to send us only what we call 'country documents' – that is, official and other documents produced in the country, which are not already available on the United Nations system.

We will now explain the assignment in more detail.

General notions useful for your assignment

The **treaty system** is comprised of two elements:

- the UN human rights *treaties* themselves (there are nine such treaties; e.g. the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, etc.), as well as
- the outputs of the *treaty monitoring bodies* (also called the treaty bodies, e.g. the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, etc.).

We are thus interested in the impact of the treaties themselves as well as that of the output of the treaty bodies.

The **outputs** of the treaty bodies include, for example:

- the 'views' (similar to judgments) that they publish after consideration of individual communications against a state party to a particular treaty;
- the 'concluding observations' that treaty bodies adopt once they have completed a country review of a particular state, based on, inter alia, reports submitted by the state and relevant parallel reports submitted by the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), civil society organizations, and others; and
- the 'general comments' or other similar documents in which a treaty body sets out their view on the obligations of states under the different treaties.

A document shows evidence of **impact** if it appears from the document that some aspect of the treaty system played a discernable or in the country in question. This would be the case, for example,

- where a particular treaty is mentioned by name in the preamble of a law of that country (in which case we will want a copy of that law); or
- the documents setting out the history of a particular law (including the constitution) which show that the treaty had a role when the law was drafted (we will then want a copy of the relevant parts of those documents); or
- the views of a treaty body or general comments have been cited in a decision of a court in the country (in which case we will want to see the relevant parts of that decision to see whether it was e.g. merely cited by the court in passing, or relied upon for substance), etc.
- the concluding observations of the treaty body has been cited in any of the documents of the institutions discussed below.

The **areas of potential impact** of the treaty system in the country that we are interested in relates to the work of the following institutions:

- The *legislature* (e.g. Acts; Bills; subordinate legislation; extracts from debates in the legislature, for example in Hansards, etc. This also includes information showing the

- impact of the treaty system on the drafting of the constitution or constitutional amendments.)
- The *executive* (e.g. government policies; ministerial reports; significant comments by politicians, etc. showing why treaties were ratified or not ratified by the state, or reflecting governmental reaction or inaction to the views or concluding observations of the treaty bodies (e.g. proof that someone in detention was released because of what a treaty body has said)
 - The *judiciary* (court decisions; court guidelines; heads of argument, etc.)
 - Documents of *other state institutions* (e.g. relevant NHRI reports; ombudsman reports; commissions of inquiry, etc). In countries with National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow up (NMRFs), it will be important to track their work as well.
 - Reports in the *media*, videos covering the impact of the treaty system, as well as *academic studies* and *NGO reports*

Documents such as those mentioned above are often to be found in the official publications of the state, which in many cases are available online and should be downloaded. If not, please find the hard copies and capture them electronically. If primary documents cannot be found, secondary sources showing impact will also be welcomed.

We are interested in documents which cover the situation since the start of the treaty system, though if you have to choose, focus on the more recent years. You are merely expected to find as many documents as you can within the time you have available for this assignment. Someone else will take over after you and look for more documents. It will be important also to tell us which potential sources for documents you have covered, so your successors know what has been done.

Please note: For the purposes of this study we are interested only in the impact of the UN human rights treaty system, as described above; we are NOT covering the impact of the other UN human rights mechanisms, such as the Universal Peer Review or the Special Procedures. However, in dealing with a particular country, these other mechanisms often refer to the compliance (or lack thereof) of the state with obligations imposed by the treaty system, and as such it may be a useful source of information on what to look for in your country.

Also: We are NOT asking you to send us documents that are already available on the UN website, such as the reports submitted by the state or NGOs to the treaty bodies, or the concluding observations of the treaty bodies in respect of the country. We already have access to those documents. We are only asking you to send us the country documents that are not already available on the UN system. At the same time, as explained below, we do encourage you look for your own purposes at the treaty system documents that are already available on the OHCHR website when you start your work. These documents often provide good leads to the relevant country documentation that we want you to find in your country. In fact, in many instances this will be the best starting point for our country researchers. (As soon as the algorithm that we are developing to identify these 'UN documents' is operational, we will forward you the relevant information, but please do not rely on this for the time being.)

Where do I start? Step-by-step methodology toolkit

Step 1 – Identify documents used by treaty bodies on the OHCHR website

We suggest you start by looking at the information in respect of the different treaties as they relate to your country on the OHCHR website provided above. In order to do so, make sure you know which treaties have been adhered to by your country, and which procedures your country has adopted (e.g. has it adopted the individual communications procedure in respect of the treaties that provide for such a procedure?).

Within the OHCHR website, there are two useful “landing” pages for Step 1:

- The **country-specific information page**, which provides country-specific information on :
 - The ratification of international human rights treaties
 - The reporting cycles
 - documents related to reporting cycle (not complete, often only the State Party report)

The screenshot shows the OHCHR website's country-specific information page for Argentina. The page is titled "Argentina" and is part of the "HUMAN RIGHTS BY COUNTRY" section. It features a navigation menu with options like HOME, ABOUT US, ISSUES, HUMAN RIGHTS BY COUNTRY, WHERE WE WORK, HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES, NEWS AND EVENTS, and PUBLICATIONS AND RESOURCES. The main content area is divided into several sections: "Useful Information" (Recent news, Archived news, Publications), "Contact Information" (Headquarters, Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division (FOTCD), Americas Section), "Argentina and UN Charter-based Bodies" (Universal Periodic Review, Social Procedures), "Argentina and UN Treaty Bodies" (Most recent concluding observations, Committee on Migrant Workers), and "Feature stories" (Wikipedia marathons, Recovered identity). A map of Argentina is also displayed, with a disclaimer: "The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations".

- Next you should visit the **committee-specific page**, which provides the complete set of documentation stemming from all relevant procedures (State Reporting, Individual Communications, Inquiries, etc.). With regards to the State Reporting procedure, all relevant country information (not just the State Party report) is to be found under the *Sessions* tag, on the right-hand side bar under “meeting and deadlines”. Within the Sessions page, you will then be able to scroll to the country you are covering. It is here that it will be possible to look at the latest reporting cycles for each of the different treaties that the country has adhered to, and in particular 'the list of issues (prior to reporting)', 'the 'state report', and the 'concluding observations'. It will also be possible to look at all parallel reports that were submitted (e.g. by the NHRI, CSOs, etc.). For those treaties for which this is available on the website, also look at the 'follow-up reports'.

While doing this, keep record of country documents that you think may be relevant. Also look at the 'views' of the treaty bodies on individual communications, where appropriate.

Step 2 – ... then find original documents used by treaty bodies in country records ...

The next step is to locate the original documents that were relied upon in the treaty body procedures in the official and other records in your country, and to capture them digitally. If you have time, go back and look at earlier reporting cycles and go through the process again to make sure you have all the relevant documents.

Step 3 – ... and then find documents not used by treaty bodies in country sources.

Once you have found the documents to which there is a lead in the UN system, the real fun starts. You will now start looking for country documents for which you did not find a link in the UN system. You may start by looking for the record of the adoption of the constitution - does it show that the treaty system had an influence? Or is there perhaps a reference in the constitution itself? Then look for other legislation showing impact, then judicial decisions, etc., following the list of potential areas of impact provided above.

Step 4 - Submission of country documents

Once you have done the above, please follow the steps set out below on how to submit the documentation to us:

- All documents should be sent to us in electronic format. Material on the internet should be downloaded.
- When you send your documents to us, please provide an index of all documents submitted, per treaty, and which briefly explains why you are sending each document to us (how does it show impact?). As far as possible, please follow the sequence of the list of sources of these documents as set out above, e.g. documents from the legislature first, executive second, etc.
- Please send the documents in English, if possible. If the documents are not available in English, you are not required to translate the whole document, but please screen the relevant part in yellow and provide a translation of that section.

Optional essay

Country researchers are also invited, if they so wish, to provide us with a short essay setting out their findings on the impact of the treaty system in the country in question.

Requirements to be a country researcher

Country researchers should have at least a foundational understanding of the UN human rights system. They must understand the language in which official documents are published in the country and have personal experience with the country they are researching.

Intellectual property

The nature of the project dictates that country researchers or their home institutions will allow the database to use the information they provide, but the country researchers are also welcome to use it themselves in their own subsequent studies or publications.

Thank you very much and please do not hesitate to contact us should you get stuck or want to discuss something!

*The Impact Database 2020+ Team
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