



IOI European Region Newsletter

April – June 2026

The IOI European Regional Board wants to be transparent about its activities and therefore sends you this quarterly newsletter. Feel free to share it with whomever is interested.

The IOI European Regional Board

The IOI European board met online on Wednesday 6 May and discussed the agenda for the IOI World Board meeting in Curacao.

Ombudsman attending:

Reinier van Zutphen
Joseph Zammit McKeon
Maria Stylianou

Absent with notification

Dmytro Lubinets

Absent without notification

Marino Fardelli

Staff present:

Paul Borg
Jurgen Cassar
Stephan Sjouke
Mykhailo Spasov

And the IOI European Board members met during the IOI World Board meeting in Curacao on Monday 11 May.

Ombudsman attending:

Reinier van Zutphen
Joseph Zammit McKeon

Absent with notification

Dmytro Lubinets
Maria Stylianou
Marino Fardelli

Staff present:

Paul Borg
Jurgen Cassar
Stephan Sjouke

ON Forum 2027

For two years now there has been a high-level conference in Strasbourg where national human rights institutions and ombudsman institutions meet. These meetings have proved very fruitful and useful, as it is the only occasion on which these two types of institution come together. Given that ombudsman institutions are becoming more aware of their responsibility in the field of human rights, this relationship should be strengthened further. As of this year, the high-level conference is called the ON Forum.

The Netherlands will assume the presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe from May to November 2027. As the IOI European Regional President is also the National Ombudsman of the Netherlands, Reinier van Zutphen is aiming to organise the next ON Forum in June 2027. The outlook is good, and we hope to build on the work already done by Luxembourg and Moldova, which organised the conferences in 2025 and 2026.

Ombuds Academy

The Greek Ombudsman, in collaboration with its Dutch counterpart and with the support of the Dutch Embassy in Greece, organised the third educational meeting of the Ombudsman Learning Academy. The two-day seminar was held on Thursday 4 and Friday 5 June in Athens, and staff from 13 European ombuds institutions took part. The theme was “Giving voice to the voiceless.” The aim of the seminar was cooperation and the exchange of experiences in the fields of research, the drafting of special reports and mediation.



The focus was first on the way large-scale investigations are conducted. The Dutch and Greek interpretations were presented, and it was clear that the term “large-scale investigations” could refer to own-initiative investigations but also to more extensive investigations into recurring complaints. This last type is, of course, a good way to reach those who are not able to find the institution on their own.

In the afternoon, outreach was discussed, again from the Dutch and Greek perspectives. Outreach can be many things; one interpretation is that anything taking place outside the office is outreach. This way of looking at the work may differ from institution to institution, but all agreed that it is important to be aware of how and when you become visible outside your office. At the same time, there was wide variety in the ways of reaching those who

do not approach the ombudsman themselves, even though they clearly need the institution's attention.

On Friday there were two presentations: one from the former IOI President and Irish Ombudsman, Peter Tyndall, and one from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, Sir Rob Behrens. They shared their rich experience, with particular attention to how they reached those whose voices were not heard. They also spoke openly about the challenges they encountered in their efforts to bring the voiceless to the forefront and demand proper treatment for them.

See also this [linkedin post from the Netherlands embassy](#).

Venice Principles

As mentioned in the previous newsletter, the IOI European Regional President, Reinier van Zutphen, and the IOI President, Nadine Mailloux, requested a mandate from the IOI World Board to continue their work on developing the relationship with the Venice Commission, with the aim of producing a series of comments on the Venice Principles. The IOI World Board granted the mandate, and a letter is currently being drafted in which the Venice Commission is asked to elaborate on several of the principles. If all goes to plan, we hope to provide you with the first comment on the Venice Principles by the end of the year. At the same time, the IOI is developing its relationship with the UN and working on a new UN General Assembly resolution that it hopes will be adopted by the end of the year.

Migration Pact

On 12 June 2026, the Pact on Migration and Asylum entered into force. With the Pact, the European Union (EU) aims to reform European asylum and migration policy. Nine new EU regulations and one new EU directive have been adopted. For the National Ombudsman / IOI European Regional President, Reinier van Zutphen, this was reason to organise an informal meeting where participants could exchange their experiences so far with the implementation of the Pact.

Forty participants from twenty countries took part. The conference began the day before with a visit to the Fenix museum in Rotterdam, which showcases the migratory nature of humankind, past and present, across the world. The conference was held in a Rotterdam neighbourhood where many migrants had lived, and the venue itself held many migrants' stories.

The goal of the meeting was to explore whether it would be possible to make a joint inventory of the consequences of the Migration Pact for ombuds institutions, and to identify important topics that might form part of a shared agenda. It soon became apparent that more questions were being raised than solutions offered.

Five topics were selected for further discussion: border procedures and detention; reception; monitoring, including the independent monitoring mechanisms; children under the Migration Pact; and return. These topics were introduced, among others, by the Greek Ombudsman, Andreas

Pottakis; the Ombudsman of Estonia, Ülle Madise; and Tineke Strik, MEP for the Greens and professor of citizenship and migration law.

Following these presentations, open-table discussions were held in the Polder Shop format, in which participants could freely discuss their expectations of the Pact and their experiences with their respective governments regarding the implementation of the regulations and the directive so far. Some key takeaways: the border procedure and detention provisions in the Pact are seen as tools to lower protection standards. Standards in general remain below what ombuds institutions consider adequate. The independent monitoring mechanism is not yet in place anywhere, and in many cases it is unclear which institution will take on this task. Some ombuds institutions that already carry multiple responsibilities will face an additional burden.

The position of children throughout the Pact requires close monitoring by children's ombuds



institutions, as certain provisions appear to allow government actions that are incompatible with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Regarding returns, it remains unclear whether these will be adequately organised, let alone what the situation surrounding the external processing hubs will be.

The Pact and its implementation have consequences for ombuds institutions. Since they are all confronted with the same regulations and directive, this development should be used as an opportunity to build a closer working relationship on the topic. The IOI European Region has therefore established a working group on migration, made up of experts from ombuds institutions. This group can help strengthen insight and expertise on the topic and may also support efforts to inform the EU of ombuds institutions' findings. It is clear that the discussion will continue — we will keep you posted on developments.

Academia

On 22 and 23 June, an international workshop on “The Ombudsman’s Response to Global Crises” was organised at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory of the University of Belgrade. The workshop was organised by Luka Glušac (University of Belgrade), Naomi Creutzfeldt (University of Kent) and Chris Gill (University of Glasgow). After a call for papers in March, this time the outlines of the contributions were shared and discussed during the two day event. A renewed acquaintance between the IOI and the organisers led to the realisation that we should pay more attention to the publications written about ombuds institutions. We hope to include more structural references to academic work related to ombudsman institutions in the future. Some of the contributions from this meeting will find their way into a new book to be published next year and we will keep you posted.



Upcoming conferences

The Ararteko (the Ombudsman of the Basque Country) is organising an international conference, **“Strengthening Ombuds Institutions to Underpin Democracy.”** It will take place on 18 and 19 November 2026 in Bilbao (Basque Country, Spain).

Save the date: on Friday 4 December, the biennial **IOI European Regional Conference** will take place in Brussels. It will start with a dinner on Thursday 3 December, followed by a members’ meeting on Friday morning. The afternoon will be open to the public and will address a general topic of interest to ombudsman institutions. The meeting will be hybrid and held in the three languages of the IOI. More information will follow after the summer.