



The European Court of Human Rights is launching a new case processing strategy

Launched in 2010, the Interlaken [reform process](#), formally closed in Athens in November 2020, has enabled the Court to reduce its backlog from 160,000 pending cases in 2011 to 65,000 today. It mainly focussed on the volume of cases processed by the Court.

Over that same period a [prioritisation policy](#) has been pursued to speed up processing times and to dispose of the most important, most serious and most urgent cases. The Court has established seven categories, ranging from urgent applications to those that are manifestly inadmissible. Some important cases may, however, be found in the intermediate categories, for which processing may take between five and six years. These are Chamber cases of particular importance for the development of the human rights protection system and which raise new questions concerning the interpretation and application of the European Convention on Human Rights. These cases, now referred to as “impact” cases, are at the heart of the Court’s new strategy.

President Robert Spano stated before the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe: “[A]t the beginning of 2021, a paradigm shift is needed. [T]he Court will increasingly focus on strengthening its prioritisation policy, focusing more on the expeditious identification of cases of impact and relevance for applicants and for the Member States. [T]he success of the Court will no longer be measured primarily by the total number of cases dealt with in a given period, but rather by the way it has dealt with the most important cases under our priority policy, those which are essential for applicants, each Member State and also for the wider European legal area.”

These “impact” cases will be identified on the basis of certain predefined criteria. The processing of all the other cases (which are neither priority nor “impact” cases) will in future be dealt with by three-judge Committees rather than seven-judge Chambers.

The Registry has published on the Court’s website a [summary document](#) describing the main aspects of this new strategy.

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The European Court of Human Rights was set up in Strasbourg by the Council of Europe Member States in 1959 to deal with alleged violations of the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights.