

What is an NPM annual report ?

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An annual report is a document, in which the NPM publicly presents the main activities conducted during the year and key recommendations in relation to the prevention of torture and ill-treatment, mainly based on observations made during monitoring visits to places of deprivation of liberty. It is also an opportunity to present achievements, as well as priorities and perspectives for the following year. Annual reports are also an important communication tool for NPMs and many use them to present their specific approach and working methods, including in accessible language. This can help to increase the trust and legitimacy of the NPM, particularly among individuals and organisations who might not otherwise be aware of what it is or how it works. The annual report complements other types of reports NPMs may publish, including reports of visits to places of deprivation of liberty and thematic reports addressing specific detention issues.

Why draft an annual report ?

Article 23 of the OPCAT requires states parties to “publish and disseminate the annual reports of the national preventive mechanisms.” Although this obligation is formulated as an obligation of the state, it is a clear requirement for NPMs to produce such a report every year. Beyond the obligation contained in the OPCAT, annual reports serve several purposes.

Below are the main reasons why NPMs should produce and publish them:

- *To give visibility to NPM actions and challenges*

The annual report is, first of all, an opportunity for the NPM to publicize a summary of its main activities during the year, including for example: types and number of places visited, advice on laws and policies, and engagement with national authorities, regional and international human rights bodies, and other stakeholders, including civil society organisations. It is also an opportunity to bring up challenges faced by the NPM in the fulfilment of its torture prevention mandate, including, for example, a lack of resources or cooperation from the authorities.

- *To demonstrate the NPM is accountable*

As a public institution, the NPM is accountable to the state and those who live there and most NPMs have an obligation to report annually on their activities to the government and/or parliament. Publishing the annual report enables the NPM to demonstrate it is accountable for its actions, both to the authorities and to the general population, by illustrating how its work can make a difference in practice. This is also why presenting NPM working methods in the annual report can be useful – as a way of demonstrating, not only the differences to which it contributed, but also how and why prevention works.

- *To highlight key issues and recommendations on torture prevention*

The purpose of an NPM annual report is to publish a synthesis of its main findings and challenges relating to torture prevention. Based on these findings, the NPM can then present ways forward and key recommendations to the different state authorities on the measures to be taken at the legal, policy and practical levels to better prevent torture and other ill-treatment in detention. This analysis will contribute to public debates on the NPM findings. It will also facilitate an ongoing dialogue with the authorities and help other actors, including civil society organisations, to advocate for change, based on the NPM’s public recommendations.

What is the target audience of an NPM annual report ?

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The annual report is an essential communication tool. It helps to make the NPM mandate and work better known and understood by a broad audience, including non-specialists and the media. The target audience of the report can therefore be quite large. Many actors may have an interest in NPM activities, including national civil society organisations, as well as organizations working specifically on torture prevention and detention issues, academic researchers, bar associations, practitioners working in relevant areas, and persons deprived of their liberty and their relatives.

At the global level, many institutions, in particular the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT) and other NPMs, will have an interest in NPM activities.

Nevertheless, the primary target of NPM annual reports should be the national authorities to whom the recommendations are addressed, including the three branches of government (the executive, legislative and judicial) and “operational” authorities in charge of detention facilities.

Prior to embarking on the drafting of its annual report, it is therefore key for the NPM to agree internally on the main target audience and to adapt the style and format of the report accordingly. A key consideration, when defining the format of those reports, is their readability and accessibility (for example publication in an accessible format for persons with visual impairments), bearing in mind that the audience for such reports can be very broad.

What should be the content of an NPM annual report ?

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Different factors influence the content of an NPM annual report, in particular: whether it is a first annual report; whether the NPM publishes other types of reports (for example, visit or thematic reports); whether the NPM is part of a broader institution (for example, a National Human Rights Commission or ombuds institution), is composed of multiple institutions or is a new specialised institution.

Regardless of the type of NPM, an annual report can include:

General issues, including mandate and structure

- A foreword (for example written by a known national expert, to increase interest in the report, or, in the case of a multiple body NPM, written and signed by all the chairs of the institutions who make up the NPM).
- A short introduction on the OPCAT and background on NPM designation and establishment processes and legal basis. In the first annual report, the NPM can include a longer background section related to the designation and establishment processes, legal basis and structure of the NPM.
- An introduction to NPM working methods and the NPM approach. This is not only to increase accountability, but also for the sake of sharing and learning between NPMs, and possibly to inspire other control and monitoring bodies. In cases where the description of methods sparks discussion, this can also be an opportunity for the NPM to reflect on its approach or enter into further explanations about why its particular methods are preferred.
- An overview of NPM structure, resources and finances.

Activities, themes and issues

- An overview of key NPM activities during the year (visits, observations on legislation, training and awareness-raising), including both quantitative and qualitative information.
- An analysis of the most important findings and recommendations from visit reports (especially if they are not public).
- An overview of progress made (or lack thereof) in the implementation of NPM recommendations, how the authorities are responding to NPM recommendations and the changes that have occurred.
- Information on cooperation with other actors working on the prevention of torture at the national and international level.
- Perspectives and priorities for the following year.

A good practice observed in some NPM annual reports is the inclusion of a specific thematic focus in relation to issues the NPM has analysed during the year and to use the annual report to write articles on themes observed across visits and sectors. This can even be a good alternative to writing a thematic report if resources or data do not allow for a full-scale report on a particular topic.

In addition, after several years of practice (5 or 10 years, for example), some NPMs have conducted a self-evaluation of their work, identifying key milestones and impact on the prevention of torture and ill-treatment. The result of this analysis may also be reflected in a specific chapter of the relevant annual report.

Finally, due consideration should be given to the following elements when drafting an NPM annual report:

- Confidential information should remain privileged and no personal data should ever be published without the express consent of the person concerned.
- The tone of the report should be constructive, to reflect the spirit of cooperation and dialogue enshrined in the OPCAT.

What should be the format of an NPM annual report ?

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Annual reports can take different forms and the following should be considered prior to their elaboration:

- Printed and online? Many annual reports are published in printed form but most NPMs now also make their annual reports available online to facilitate broad dissemination. Printed reports may be particularly useful for those, including many detainees, who do not have access to the internet.
- Use of infographics? NPMs increasingly use infographics to make some of their findings and statistics more accessible.
- Use of pictures? Pictures can be very powerful to illustrate specific conditions or situations documented in the report but NPMs should ensure that individual persons cannot be identified.
- Annexes? NPMs often add annexes to their annual reports including, for example, relevant legislation. Those should be kept to a minimum and could even be made available online on the NPM website for future reference.

A key consideration, when defining the format of annual reports, is their readability and accessibility, bearing in mind they can have a rather broad audience. If the annual report is very long, it may be good to include an executive summary and to prepare a specific kit for the media to ensure that key messages are widely disseminated.

When NPMs operate within a broader institution or are comprised of several institutions, should the NPM annual report be published separately ?

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In cases of NPMs that are part of a broader institution (National Human Rights Commission or ombuds institution, for example), the question is whether the annual report should be published as part of the broader institution's annual report or as a separate report. A good practice is for NPMs who are part of a broader institution to publish their annual report as a separate report or to have a specific chapter or section in the broader report of the institution. In the latter case, the communication strategy surrounding the publication of the report should ensure enough visibility for NPM work as one of the core mandates of the institution. Publication of a separate NPM annual report may be particularly important for those NPMs who do not publish visit reports and for whom an annual report is the main public communication to a wider audience. Multiple body NPMs should publish a joint report, based on discussions among all institutions to ensure that the key findings and recommendations reflect the key issues in the different areas of deprivation of liberty covered by each institution. This is in addition to any individual reports published by each institution to cover their non-OPCAT activities.

Who should write an NPM annual report ?

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An important consideration is that the annual report of an NPM ought to be written internally by NPM members or staff. Writing the report is an opportunity for the whole institution to reflect jointly and strategically on the main achievements of the year and on issues deserving public attention. It also contributes to internal information-sharing and building of institutional memory within the NPM.

In cases where the NPM formally involves non-governmental organisations in its work (such as in an “Ombudsman plus” model), they should be consulted on the content of the report and be able to make comments on it. In practice, for multiple body NPMs, the drafting process is usually led by the NPM coordinating institution.

How to strategically disseminate an annual report ?

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Although the OPCAT refers to the state's obligation to disseminate NPM reports, in practice it is a task that is performed by the NPM. The NPM should therefore guarantee that it receives and allocates sufficient funds, time and personnel every year to publish and disseminate the report, including to the authorities and other interested parties.

The NPM should adopt a specific strategy for dissemination of the report, which can include the following actions:

- Presentation of the report to high-level authorities, including through a formal hearing with the parliament.
- Bilateral meetings with the head of government, and inter-institutional roundtables with several ministries.
- Public event to launch the report and raise awareness, as well as spark debate on key issues.
- Press conference and release of a media kit.
- Working meetings with other stakeholders, in particular civil society organisations, bar associations and other actors interacting with the NPM and who can play a role in the implementation of its recommendations.
- Wide dissemination of the report (by email and regular mail) to all the above-mentioned institutions and organisations.
- Bringing a set of copies of the annual report to lectures, training events and meetings during the year in order to help present the NPM and the work it does.
- Publicising the report on social media.
- Publish thematic articles drawn from the annual report one by one over the following year.
- Distribution of the report to detention libraries, where it can be accessed by staff and persons deprived of liberty.

Although not the target audience of NPM reports, a number of international human rights bodies and mechanisms have an interest in NPM annual reports, in particular the SPT, other international and regional bodies and other NPMs. It is therefore also important for the NPM to ensure wide dissemination of its annual report beyond its national borders. A good practice is to send NPM annual reports to the SPT, who, in turn, publicizes them on its [own website](#). It is also useful for NPMs to send their reports to other NPMs and to relevant regional and international human rights bodies working on detention issues as a way of engaging and sharing information that can feed into their deliberation.

Annual reports should be translated into the national languages of the country in which the NPM operates, including indigenous languages. For the purpose of international dissemination and to facilitate future exchanges on the content of the report with the SPT, it is also a good practice to publish the full report (or at least its executive summary) in English.