DISCRIMINATION AND THE REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION SYSTEMS: THE ENIGMA OF EFFECTIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

Despite the creation of regional human rights protection systems and their efforts, the problems of discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization continue to be widespread, posing formidable barriers for many persons to exercise their basic civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. These considerations raise the question of whether the regional human rights protection systems in the Americas and Europe can really impact substantially the eradication of the problem of discrimination, which is part of their mandate.

The author contends in this article that the Inter-American and European Systems do have potential to contribute to the prevention and response to the problem of discrimination, through the execution of their varied mandates and mechanisms. In this sense, the author discusses in the article emerging legal tendencies that are noteworthy from both systems, among these: i) the special treatment of a number of groups as “vulnerable” or “in a situation of vulnerability;” ii) an approach considering the intersection of different identities or factors of discrimination; iii) a flexible reading to the textual prohibition of discrimination in the major treaties, identifying more prohibited motives such as sexual orientation and gender identity; iv) an avid link between violence and discrimination, and the obligation to act with due diligence when

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these acts are committed by non-State actors; and v) the issue of stereotypes and how these influence negatively the actions of State authorities towards historically marginalized groups and society as a whole. The article will review how these legal tendencies offer both opportunities and challenges to these two regional protection systems to improve their effectiveness in efforts to address in a structural and transformative way the problem of discrimination in the Americas and in Europe.

This paper contributes to current scholarship in this area by comparing the approach to discrimination issues of two regional human rights protection systems; examining the overall response of these institutions to discrimination through the lens of effectiveness and the varied mechanisms of each system; and considering the different social contexts, political realities, and financial pressures these systems face, which impact their overall work in the protection and promotion of human rights.


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1. INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the regional human rights protection systems in the Americas and Europe and ponders the following provocative question: Can they ever be fully effective in the prevention and response to the problem of discrimination and its different manifestations?

Despite their different conformations, both the Inter-American and European systems have taken advantage of their various mandates to issue many case decisions and pronouncements rejecting practices which are considered discriminatory, and issuing orders to states as to how to address these in the present and the future.¹ Many of the human rights violations tackled by these systems relate to discrimination within the family, being perpetrated by partners against partners, by parents against children, and by the government authorities against families.² Others have taken place in the health, education, employment, and various public settings.³ Women and children, racial and ethnic

¹ See, e.g., Atala Riffo & Children v. Chile, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Judgment, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R. (ser. C) No. 239, at 86–87 (Feb. 24, 2012) (holding that the State had violated the victim’s rights to equality and non-discrimination on the basis of her sexual orientation, thereby requiring the State to provide medical and psychiatric care, free of charge and in an immediate, appropriate and effective manner, through its specialized public health institutions, among other reparations); Jessica Lenahan (Gonzales) et al. v. United States. Case 12.626, Inter-Am. Comm’n H.R., Report No. 80/11, OEA/Ser.L/V/II. doc. 69 (2011) (finding the state responsible for violations of Articles I, II, VII, and XVIII of the American Declaration by failing to exercise due diligence to protect Jessica Lenahan and her daughters from acts of domestic violence perpetrated by her ex-husband); D.H. & Others v. Czech Republic, App. No. 57325/00, Eur. Ct. H.R. (2007).


³ See, e.g., Hacienda Brasil Verde Workers v. Brazil, Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R. (ser. C) No. 3181, ¶¶ 435–508 (Oct. 20, 2016) (holding that the State violated the rights of workers used as slave labor, entitling them to reparation damages); I.V. v. Bolivia, Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R., Series C, No. 32, ¶¶ 117–323 (Nov. 30, 2016) (holding that the State violated the rights to liberty, dignity, private and family life, and access to information of a woman sterilized without her consent); Gonzales Lluy et al. v. Ecuador, Preliminary Objections, Merits,
minorities, and persons discriminated against on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity have been very prominent in this work, frequently the target of discrimination, exclusion, and bias, both individually and structurally.⁴

Reparations and Costs, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R., Series C, No. 298, ¶¶ 156–229 (Sept. 1, 2015) (finding the victim suffered intersectional discrimination due to her situation as a person living with HIV, a child, a female, and living in conditions of poverty); see also Carvalho Pinto de Sousa Morais v. Portugal, App. No. 17484/15, Eur. Ct. H.R., (July 25, 2017) (holding that the Supreme Administrative Court’s decision to reduce the amount initially awarded to the applicant in respect to non-pecuniary damage had amounted to discrimination on the grounds of sex and age in violation of Article 14 together with Article 8 of the Convention); Konstantin Markin v. Russia [GC App. No. 30078/06, Eur. Ct. H.R. (Mar. 22, 2012) (discussing how the refusal of the domestic authorities’ to grant the applicant parental leave because he belonged to the male sex was a violation of the applicant’s Convention Rights); Kiyutin v. Russia, App. No. 2700/10, 53 Eur. H.R. Rep. 26 (2011) (explaining that the applicant alleged that he had been a victim of discrimination when applying for a Russian residence permit, on the basis of his health); V.C. v. Slovakia, App. No. 18968/07, Eur. Ct. H. R (2011) (ruling in favor of the applicant who was a victim of forced sterilization in a state hospital in Slovakia, and concluding that the applicant’s rights to freedom from degrading and inhuman treatment (under article 3 of the Convention) and the right to private and family life (under article 8 of the Convention) had been violated).

⁴ See, e.g., Expelled Dominicans & Haitians v. Dominican Republic, Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R. (ser. C) No. 282, ¶ 439 (Aug. 28, 2014) (delineating various rights the State violated, including the right to nationality, in a context of discrimination against persons born in the Dominican Republic of Haitian descent); González et al. (“Cotton Field”) v. Mexico, Preliminary Objection, Merits, Reparations, and Costs, Judgment, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R. (ser. C) No. 205, ¶ 127 (Nov. 16, 2009) (highlighting state failures to protect the rights to life and to be free from all forms of violence and discrimination of three women who were first reported as disappeared and then found dead in Ciudad Juarez); Jessica Lenahan (Gonzales) et al. v. United States. Case 12.626, Inter-Am. Comm’n H.R., Report No. 80/11, OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 32 (2011) (indicating that the State has a legal and due diligence obligation to adopt positive measures to protect women from domestic violence under Article II of the American Declaration); Girls Yean & Bosico v. Dominican Republic, Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Inter-Am Ct. H.R. (Ser. C) No. 130 ¶¶ 59–60 (2005) (ordering that the State publicly apologize to the victims whose applications for birth certificates the State rejected; the lack of birth certificates had constituted a barrier for the victims to attend school and various other crucial activities); Opuz v. Turkey, App. No. 33401/02, Eur. Ct. H.R. ¶ 48 (2009) (underscoring the complex and widespread nature of the problem of domestic violence and the duty of states to act with due diligence to prevent and respond to this issue); N.B. v. Slovakia, App. No. 29518/10, Eur. Ct. H.R. ¶ 15 (June 12, 2012) (discussing how the victim’s “right to respect for her private and family life had been violated as a result of her sterilization, which had been carried out contrary to the requirements of the relevant law and without her and her mother’s full and informed consent”); Karner v. Austria, App. No. 40016/98, Eur. Ct. H.R. ¶ 9 (July 24, 2003) (highlighting and subsequently rejecting the Government’s argument that a difference in treatment based on sex or sexual orientation is justified and proportional to the aim of protecting the family in a traditional sense).
Nonetheless, the issues of discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization are still widespread in Europe and the Americas, posing formidable barriers for many persons to exercise their basic civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.\(^5\)

Both systems continue to receive in the present case petitions and information from different sectors claiming forms of discrimination, and a great deal of their work is dedicated to issuing rulings concerning these issues.\(^6\) Discrimination is also an evolving social issue, exemplified by the problems the Americas and Europe face today, including hate speech, xenophobia, and persistent systemic and institutional discrimination.\(^7\) Leaders of key countries


\(^{6}\) For recent rulings on discrimination issues from both the European and Inter-American systems, see generally Carvalho Pinto de Sousa Morais v. Portugal, App. No. 17484/15, Eur. Ct. H.R., (July 25, 2017) (holding that the Supreme Administrative Court’s decision to reduce the amount initially awarded to the applicant in respect of non-pecuniary damage had amounted to discrimination on the grounds of sex and age in violation of Article 14 together with Article 8 of the Convention); see also Konstantin Markin v. Russia [GC App. No. 30078/06, Eur. Ct. H.R. (Mar. 22, 2012) (discussing how the refusal of the domestic authorities’ to grant the applicant parental leave because he belonged to the male sex was a violation of the applicant’s Convention Rights); Hacienda Brasil Verde Workers v. Brazil, Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R. (ser. C) No. 3181 (Oct. 20, 2016) (holding that the State violated the rights of workers, entitling them to reparation damages); I.V. v. Bolivia, Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R., Series C, No. 32 (Nov. 30, 2016) (holding that the State violated a person’s right to liberty, dignity, privacy and access of information as well as a person’s right to start a family).

have been elected after waging campaigns filled with messages contrary to the principles of discrimination, equality, inclusion, and human rights.\(^8\) The perpetrators are varied, going beyond the State, including businesses and individuals.\(^9\) The most extreme manifestation of discrimination, violence, has a more expansive definition and exemplification every day, extending beyond the rubrics of the physical, psychological, and sexual; occurring in the internet, cyber space, employment, and medical institutions, among others; and permeating many social spheres. There are mass movements all over the Americas and Europe demanding attention, prevention, and adequate response to violence and abuse, such as “me too”, “Time’s Up”, and “Ni una menos”, which advocate for

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women to speak out and be heard regarding their experiences with sexual assault and harassment.\footnote{10}

This complex context and developments raise the question of whether there are ways to make these regional protection systems more effective, or even preserve the level of impact they have today, in addressing the nuance of discrimination. In the author’s view, the way the regional protection systems respond to these highly prevalent issues through their case law and other mechanisms is a window to their present and future relevance.

As a potential response to the question initially posited, this article discusses the concept of effectiveness in international human rights law and examines the work of these systems in the area of discrimination through their impact in theory and practice, considering the contemporary challenges these institutions face. The author discusses emerging legal tendencies that are noteworthy from both systems, including: i) the special treatment of a number of persons and groups as “vulnerable” or “in a situation of vulnerability”, along with a better understanding of the issue of stereotypes and how these negatively influence the actions of state authorities towards historically marginalized groups;\footnote{11} ii) an


approach considering the intersection of different identities or factors of discrimination in the response to human rights violations faced by persons or groups;\textsuperscript{12} iii) a flexible reading to the textual prohibition of discrimination in the major treaties, identifying more prohibited motives such as sexual orientation and gender identity;\textsuperscript{13} and iv) an avid link between violence and discrimination, and the obligation to act with due diligence when these acts are committed by non-state actors.\textsuperscript{14}

The article reviews how these legal tendencies offer both opportunities and challenges faced by these two regional protection systems to improve the effectiveness of their efforts to address discrimination and its many forms in the Americas and in Europe in a structural and transformative way. The author will focus primarily on the case-law issued by both systems and on regional treaties that address cornerstone discrimination issues in both the Americas and Europe. It is important to note however that a great deal of pronouncements issued at the European and Inter-American levels on discrimination issues have occurred outside the realm of case decisions, and some of these will sometimes be referred to throughout the article when relevant.

This article seeks to contribute to current scholarship in this area by comparing the approach to discrimination of two regional human rights protection systems; examining the overall response of these institutions to the complexity of discrimination through the lens of effectiveness and the varied mechanisms of each system; and considering the different social contexts, political realities, and intolerance, including those reflected in teaching materials which portray stereotypes).


financial pressures these systems face which impact their overall work in the protection and promotion of human rights.

In the first section of this article, the author discusses some background information on the differences between the European and Inter-American systems, the current institutional, political, and economic challenges they face, and their work on discrimination. In the second part of this article, the author analyzes the concept of effectiveness and its different dimensions when discussing regional human rights protection systems and their work on discrimination. In the third part of this article, the author analyzes tendencies that are evident in the jurisprudence and legal work of the European and Inter-American systems which present important opportunities in standard setting, despite the challenges described above, analyzing in particular cases concerning women; children; racial and ethnic minorities; and persons discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The article will also advance considerations related to dispositions contained in new regional treaties adopted by both systems which are relevant to the prohibition of discrimination and the guarantee of equality.

The author closes this paper with some final thoughts concerning key challenges and opportunities the European and Inter-American systems will face in order to become more effective in the area of discrimination.

1.1. The European and Inter-American Human Rights Protection Systems, Discrimination, and Contemporary Problems

It is important to begin by noting that the European and Inter-American systems have different structures. The most important case work of the European system of human rights is performed under the rubric of the Council of Europe and its full-time Court [hereinafter European Court of Human Rights or European Court] as well as the supervision offered by the Committee of Ministers. Other entities within the Council of Europe also address human

rights issues employing diverse mechanisms, such as its Parliamentary Assembly and its Commissioner for Human Rights.\textsuperscript{16}

The Inter-American system—created under the purview of the Organization of American States (OAS)—is composed of a Commission [hereinafter Inter-American Commission] which is a quasi-judicial body with the mandate to process individual case petitions and monitor human rights generally through on-site visits, the publication of country and regional reports, and the adoption of urgent measures.\textsuperscript{17} The Americas also has a Court [hereinafter Inter-American Court] which has both contentious and advisory jurisdiction. Significantly, the Americas system is part-time, which means that the Commissioners and Judges appointed to these organs are not full-time employees; a major difference with the European system.\textsuperscript{18} This paper takes into account these differences when comparing the case work of these systems. An important similarity is that both the OAS and the Council of Europe have the capacity to adopt their own regional treaties, some general and some specific in nature, a faculty which will be discussed throughout this paper when pertinent; and have referred to each other’s standards when ruling in key areas of human rights.\textsuperscript{19}

The question of effectiveness is even more acute today since the European and Inter-American systems are facing a number of significant contemporary challenges. They operate in contexts such as Europe and the Americas, where there is a rise of nationalist movements which do not favor multilateral conformations and human rights protection systems.\textsuperscript{20} Some of the countries which

\textsuperscript{16} For information on the mandate and functioning of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council Europe, see http://website-pace.net/en_GB/web/apce/in-brief [https://perma.cc/VG8L-FX4J]. For reports and other statements of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, see https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner [https://perma.cc/T62G-4B5Y].


\textsuperscript{18} See American Convention, supra note 17, arts. 52–69; see also IACHR Rules of Procedure, supra note 17, arts. 34–56, 70–75.


\textsuperscript{20} See AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, The State of the World’s Human Rights, Report 2016/2017 (Feb. 22, 2017) (indicating that President Trump’s policies will significantly undermine multilateral co-operation and usher in a new era of greater
integrate these systems have recently elected leaders who waged campaigns advancing a very public anti-human rights and discriminatory discourse, and are issuing measures which echo these themes.\textsuperscript{21} The continued relevance of supranational protection systems and international law is frequently called into question by many officials.\textsuperscript{22} Some key states have also publicly withdrawn from major treaties which govern the functioning of these systems, and some leaders have encouraged this tendency.\textsuperscript{23} The systems are

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also tackling important structural challenges such as the partial or complete non-compliance with judgments, staffing shortages, and financial concerns.24

Based on these considerations, the author in the next section discusses variables which affect the effectiveness of these two regional human rights protection systems, and later analyzes promising tendencies in the area of discrimination that present important opportunities to become more impactful and maintain their relevance.

1.2. The Challenge of Effectiveness in International Human Rights

The author considers that it is important to examine the body of work and the legal standards set by a regional human rights system as a measure of present and future effectiveness. As indicated in her previous scholarship, a major part of the work of regional human rights protection systems is devoted to producing legal standards with important implications for states.25 A human rights standard constitutes a legal obligation for the state involved and sheds light on the content of this obligation. In this sense, the case decisions


adopted by the European Court, and the Inter-American Commission and the Court, constitute legal and authoritative pronouncements related to the scope of individual articles of the European and Inter-American regional treaties and instruments. A standard issued by these regional protection systems can also offer an important guideline for the state implicated on how to adequately and effectively implement, at the national level, the individual rights contained in the governing instruments of these systems. These standards can be issued in the context of individual case decisions, but also in non-case work. The ability to produce legal standards and pronouncements which are well-researched, relevant, timely, and informed, which lead States to adopt measures at the ground level to comply with their internationally-assumed obligations, is an important variable in measuring the effectiveness of a regional protection system. This is key to achieve full protection from human rights violations and their short- and long-term prevention.

There is already some scholarship devoted to examining whether the regional systems in Europe and the Americas are effective as a whole in the area of human rights protection, in particular for individual case decisions. Scholars have also developed important doctrine concerning the treatment of discrimination and the legal developments in the two systems. The


most important variable historically used to assess whether the European and Inter-American systems are effective in a given area has been whether states fully comply with their case decisions. The analysis usually centers on whether a state adjusted its conduct as a result of the case decision at issue. The conduct change can be in the form of completing an investigation or reforming the legislation, public policies, institutions, and programs in a given country as a result of the case at issue.

For the author, though, effectiveness is a broad and integral concept, extending beyond the objective notion of compliance with case decisions. A regional human rights system can have a significant subjective influence on state conduct and discourse without having those same states fully comply with its case decisions.

State conduct is also not the only measure of effectiveness of a regional human rights protection system. In the author’s view, there are many variables that affect whether a given system is having impact on a human rights issue. Take for example an issue very linked to discrimination—the widespread problem of violence against women. Even though compliance with the judgments of the European and Inter-American Court is still lacking and the problem...
is widespread, it is undisputable today that the work of these systems on this issue has contributed to the following positives: the development of jurisprudence and legal standards with content conducive to enforcement; the collaboration between systems and cross-referencing of their work; the existence of progress and advances in the legislation, policies, and programs at the national level in Europe and the Americas; an increased participation of victims, states, civil society organizations, international entities, and academic institutions in the work of these systems in a specific area; and a plethora of initiatives to increase the capacity of states and their own entities in the enforcement of the judgments and orders of the regional human rights protection systems.31 The OAS and the Council of Europe have also adopted treaties solely devoted to violence against women, which is not a minor achievement, in an area with a great deal of deep-seated structural and cultural challenges.

The author considers these objective and subjective variables in concluding that the legal tendencies described in the following section entail potential opportunities for the European and Inter-American systems to set legal standards that increase their effectiveness in the area of discrimination.

2. MOVING FORWARD IN DEFINING THE CONTOURS OF DISCRIMINATION: KEY LEGAL TENDENCIES IN EUROPE AND THE AMERICAS

Some of the most interesting work of the European and Inter-American systems is devoted to the situation of persons and groups who have been affected by a history of discrimination,

marginalization, and exclusion. In this area in particular, there are four legal tendencies that pose some interesting opportunities and challenges for both systems.

First, there is a noteworthy and increased use of an approach that considers the “vulnerability” of persons and groups to given human rights violations, and the stereotypes that accentuate this risk. Second, there is an increasing incorporation of the “intersectional” focus, which considers the multiple factors that when combined increase the exposure of a person to discrimination.

Third, there is a cognizable tendency to identify new prohibited motives to discriminate as part of the non-discrimination clauses in the regional treaties, and their interpretation.

Fourth, there is a consistent link associated between discrimination and violence, and a reiteration of the due diligence standard as a benchmark to prevent and respond to this violence; especially when perpetrated by non-state actors. The

32 See, e.g., V.C. v. Slovakia, App. No. 18968/07, Eur. Ct. H. R., ¶ 146 (2011) (noting that the problem of forced sterilization affected vulnerable persons belonging to ethnic groups, like the Roma population of Eastern Slovakia); Inter-Am. Comm’n H. R., Truth, Justice and Reparation: Fourth Report on Human Rights Situation in Colombia, OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 49/13, ¶¶ 614–67 (Dec. 31, 2013) (detailing the specific groups that are especially vulnerable and suffer discrimination, such as Afro-descendant persons and indigenous peoples, in the context of the Colombian armed conflict); Istanbul Convention, supra note 11, art. 12 (detailing a number of state obligations to prevent and respond to violence against women); Convention of Belém do Pará, supra note 11, art. 6 (providing that a woman’s right to be free from violence includes her right to be free from all forms of discrimination); OAS Convention on Discrimination and Intolerance, supra note 11, art. 4(x) (alluding to state obligations to address the stereotypes referred to in teaching materials and other tools).

33 See, e.g., B.S. v. Spain, App. No. 47159/08, Eur. Ct. H.R., ¶¶ 58–63 (July 24, 2012) (explaining that when state authorities investigate violent incidents, they have a correlative obligation to identify whether racist motives had a role in the events); Gonzales Lluy et al. v. Ecuador, Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R., Series C, No. 298 (Sept. 1, 2015) (discussing the concept of intersectionality and its connection with discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, age, economic position, and health status).


author presents below some considerations related to these tendencies and their relevance for the effectiveness of these systems.

### 2.1. Vulnerability, Stereotypes, and Beyond

When the discrimination work of both the European and Inter-American systems is compared, an increased and more specialized focus on persons and groups that are in a “vulnerable” position, and particularly exposed to barriers in the exercise of their human rights, seems evident.

In the European system, this approach has been illustrated in its case law, in decisions from the European Court concerning the Roma, women, persons with disabilities, persons living with HIV, children, and detainees, among others affected. At least two tendencies can be identified in the European Court’s case law: i) treating certain persons and groups as “vulnerable”; and ii) offering special treatment or protection to given persons and groups without calling them vulnerable per se.

Key examples of this trend in the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights can be found in its cases concerning the Roma in different countries and difficulties in exercising basic rights in the education and health settings, among other areas. In *D.H. & Others vs. the Czech Republic*, the Court refers to the history of disadvantage and vulnerability of the Roma population in the Czech Republic, and how the problem of indirect discrimination impacts

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the services they receive in the education setting. The case relates to Roma children who were placed in special education schooling—a largely segregated system—without justification, as opposed to non-Roma children. The Court considered, based on statistical evidence, that Roma children were over-represented in special schools and shifted the burden of proof to the state to prove that this different treatment on the basis of ethnic origin had an objective and reasonable justification. The Court concluded that the state had failed to duly justify the different treatment by basing school placement decisions on biased and prejudiced testing, which severely impacted the education and personal development of Roma children, in violation of Article 14 of the European Convention, in conjunction with Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 on the right to education.

Turning to the health setting, in V.C. vs. Slovakia, the European Court found violations to the right to private life of the applicant under Article 8 and to inhumane and degrading treatment under Article 3, as well as other rights under the European Convention, when she was sterilized without her consent. The applicant claimed that she had been sterilized without her informed consent in a public hospital due to her Roma origin, which ended in her infertility, resulting in her ostracism by the Roma community, and the divorce of her husband. The Court notes in its legal analysis the situation of vulnerability of the applicant as a woman of Roma origin and how the issue of sterilization and its improper use reflected this risk. The Court noted that her “vulnerability” was worsened by “widespread” negative attitudes regarding the relatively high birth rate among the Roma and the increased population living on social benefits.

The European Court has also extended the vulnerability focus to victims of domestic violence, considering the failure of states to adequately protect them from harm as a form of discrimination. In Opuz vs. Turkey, the Court found the State responsible under several provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights for its

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39 Id. ¶¶ 19–28, 198.
40 Id. ¶¶ 185–95, 196.
41 Id. ¶ 200–02.
43 Id. ¶¶ 8–20.
44 Id. ¶ 146.
failure to protect the applicant—Nahide Opuz—and her mother from an ongoing pattern of domestic violence, resulting in the death of the latter. The Court found violations to the right to life under Article 2, the prohibition of torture, inhuman, and degrading treatment encompassed in Article 3, and the prohibition of discrimination under Article 14. The applicant alleged that the "injuries and anguish" that were inflicted by her husband, and the failure of the authorities to protect her made her feel "debased, hopeless, and vulnerable." In reaching its decision, the Court considered that Nahide Opuz was in a situation of vulnerability due to the ongoing acts of violence perpetrated against her, and a documented "culture of domestic violence" in Turkey. The European Court recently applied similar reasoning in the domestic violence case of Talpis vs. Italy, expressly considering that the national authorities should take into account the different dimensions of the victim's vulnerability—insecurity, moral, physical, and material—and promptly initiate criminal prosecutions of aggressors when needed.

This focus on vulnerability, or conditions which make a person vulnerable, is also illustrated in the text of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence [hereinafter Istanbul Convention] adopted in 2011, which codifies an expansive prohibition of the issue of

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46 Id. ¶¶ 128–202.
47 Id. ¶ 155.
48 Id. ¶ 99–100.
49 See Talpis v. Italy, App. No. 41237/14, Eur. Ct. H.R. (2017), ¶¶ 95–106: 126–32 (establishing that a positive obligation for a State to act occurs when the "authorities knew or ought to have known . . . [that there was a] real and immediate risk to the life of an identified individual from the criminal acts of a third party"); Bălsan v. Romania, App. No. 49645/09, Eur. Ct. H. R. ¶ 57 (2017) (listing the State’s obligations as consisting of reasonable measures that prevent mistreatment as well as effective official investigations into claims of mistreatment).
50 See Istanbul Convention, supra note 11, (defining in Article 3 “violence against women,” “domestic violence,” “gender,” “gender-based violence against women,” “victim,” “women.” Articles 4 and 5 list fundamental rights to equality and non-discrimination while mandating states to adopt necessary measures to prevent acts of violence against women by state and non-state actors. Article 6 calls parties to incorporate a gender perspective “to promote and effectively implement policies of equality between women and men and the empowerment of women.” Article 12 mandates states to adopt actions to eradicate “prejudices, customs, and traditions” based on the inferiority of women. Article 53 requires parties to take all necessary measures to ensure the availability of restraining or protection orders for victims of all forms of violence).
violence against women, including economic harm and the “threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” 51 The Convention in its Article 12 explicitly indicates that parties shall adopt measures to eradicate “prejudices, customs, traditions, and all other practices” based on the inferiority of women, and that any measures should take into account “the specific needs of persons made vulnerable by particular circumstances” and “place the human rights of all victims at their center.” 52 Lastly, in the Council of Europe, it is also noteworthy to underscore the reports issued by the Human Rights Commissioner, highlighting the situation of vulnerability in Europe of persons based on a diversity of factors, including children, migrants, persons with disabilities, and the Roma. 53

The Inter-American system itself has been structured to attend to the particular needs of persons and groups at increased risk to human rights violations. The system has created Rapпортurships devoted to offering attention to the needs of persons and groups considered in vulnerable conditions, including women; children; indigenous peoples; afro-descendent persons; persons deprived of liberty; migrants; and human rights defenders; among others. 54 The system also has a number of treaties adopted on behalf of specific groups, emulating the United Nations system in this regard, including women, those affected by disabilities, and older persons. 55

51 Id. art. 3(a) (defining “violence against women” as “a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”).

52 Id. arts. 12(1), 12(3) (requiring states to “take the necessary measures to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men.” “[M]easures taken pursuant to this chapter shall take into account and address the specific needs of persons made vulnerable by particular circumstances and shall place the human rights of all victims at their centre”).


55 The OAS has adopted a number of specialized treaties focusing on the situation of persons and groups in a position of vulnerability. These include the
The Commission has officially incorporated this approach in its strategic plan for 2017–2021, referring in particular to persons and groups in a situation of vulnerability, and has also added persons with disabilities and older persons to this consideration. 56 The approach has also been incorporated in the work of the Commission in both regional and country reports. 57

The Inter-American Commission and the Court have also adopted a number of case decisions referring to persons in a situation of vulnerability. These bodies have referred explicitly to the term “vulnerability” in certain instances, and also generally discussed the situation of risk of specific groups and their need for a particularized focus when it comes to state measures. For example, in the case of IV. v. Bolivia, the Inter-American Court found the state responsible for violations to the rights to personal integrity and liberty, dignity, private and family life, and access to information under the American Convention and other regional instruments for a sterilization without consent performed in a public hospital to the detriment of I.V. 58 The Court also found that the victim was subjected to inhumane and degrading treatment, resulting in the permanent loss of her reproductive capacity. 59 In its very detailed analysis, the Court expressed concern over the

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56 See generally Inter-Am. Comm'n H.R., Strategic Plan, supra note 7, at 31–36, 39–41 (naming the populations of special focus in its work priorities, including: indigenous peoples, women, migrants, refugees, stateless persons, victims of human trafficking, and internally displaced persons, freedom of expression, children and adolescents, human rights defenders, persons deprived of liberty, Afro-Descendants, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex persons, persons with disabilities, and older persons).


59 Id. ¶¶ 257–70.
increased situation of risk or vulnerability of women in public health institutions, due to their historical discrimination, and negative gender stereotypes about their lack of capacity to adopt major decisions concerning their health and reproductive life.\textsuperscript{60}

The Inter-American Court in other cases has recognized the increased vulnerability of displaced persons and human rights defenders in the Colombian armed conflict.\textsuperscript{61} In its judgment related to the \textit{Mapiripan Massacre vs. Colombia}, the Court refers to the situation of increased exposure to human rights violations of displaced persons and identifies women, heads of households, children, and older persons at particular risk to human rights violations; vulnerability that it considers reproduced by cultural prejudices that hinder the integration of displaced persons in their new societies.\textsuperscript{62}

\subsection{2.1.1. Considerations regarding the vulnerability approach in the inter-American and European systems}

Even though the European and Inter-American systems have different institutional structures and styles of legal analysis, there are some commonalities in the identification of a specific person or group as fitting the rubric of “vulnerability.” From the cases discussed previously, it seems that an important factor is evidence of a history of discrimination, exclusion, and risk to human rights violations. Other important variables include: whether the person is under state control or custody, the identification of a person or group as being at increased risk to human rights violations by the international community and United Nations bodies and the context

\textsuperscript{60} Id. ¶ 265.

\textsuperscript{61} See, e.g., Yarce et al. v. Colom., Preliminary Objection, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R., (ser. C), no. 326 ¶¶ 87–99; 185–91 (Nov. 22, 2016) (finding the state of Colombia responsible for several human rights violations by failing to protect the rights to life, integrity, and to be free from violence of several women human rights defenders working in the context of the Colombian armed conflict and the Comuna 13); Case of the Afro-descendant communities displaced from the Cacarica River Basin (Operation Genesis) v. Colom., Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R., (ser. C), no. 270 ¶¶ 472–73 (Nov. 20, 2013) (recognizing that the State made reparations to victims of the armed conflict, specifically victims belonging to Afro-Colombian, Raizal, and Palenquera communities).

in which the violation takes place, which was exemplified by cases dealing with armed conflict settings.

In the author’s view, there are some advantages to incorporating an approach considering conditions which render a person or group particularly vulnerable or at an increased risk to human rights violations from the viewpoint of effectiveness. First, it opens an institutional space to address the specific human rights situation and particularities of attention of the person involved. Second, it has allowed bodies in the European and Inter-American systems to exemplify what state obligations are in addressing the specific needs of these persons and groups through detailed jurisprudence. In the case of the European System, noteworthy lines of jurisprudence have developed with a focus on the Roma and LGBTI persons. In the case of the Inter-American system, this tendency is exemplified by the work on women’s rights and indigenous peoples. Case decisions in these areas illustrate concrete analysis and are part of a

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body of work which reflects the realities for these groups in the field and at the national level.

Third, the identification of a specific person or group as vulnerable can also increase the participation of those persons in the system themselves and their mechanisms. In the case of the European System, a great number of women’s rights experts participated in the drafting of the Istanbul Convention, and are now participating in its monitoring. In the Inter-American system, at least one-third of the hearings granted per year are related to persons and groups at risk for human rights violations.

In the Inter-American system, this has been very evident in the area of LGBTI issues. After the first judgment of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on this issue, the case of *Atala Riffo and others vs. Chile,* a specific Rapporteurship was created in 2014 to attend to issues concerning LGBTI persons; there has been a noticeable increase in the number of hearings on this issue before the Inter-American system; and an official core group of states which prioritizes LGBTI matters has been created.

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Fourth, an approach considering “vulnerability” has paved the way for the adoption of a number of treaties addressing the concrete situation of persons and groups at increased risk of human rights violations. This has been particularly evident at the OAS level, with the adoption in the past six years of two Conventions specialized on racial intolerance, racism, and discrimination issues, as well as the first international treaty solely devoted to the rights of older persons.\textsuperscript{68} The OAS is a very complex organization, integrated by an eclectic combination of cultures, legal traditions, languages, and policy interests. It is truly a key moment when the thirty-five OAS Member States adopt a new treaty or instrument, even when the treaties may have content flaws and voids. It is a reflection of regional priorities, values, and principles in which there is consensus and commitment of state action and attention, despite the typical implementation challenges.

The 2013 OAS Conventions on Discrimination are very laudable in including a groundbreaking and inclusive definition of discrimination, extending beyond the grounds traditionally recognized by international treaties and in codifying definitions of key concepts in discrimination law, such as indirect discrimination, multiple forms of discrimination, racism, and the problem of intolerance.\textsuperscript{69} In its language, the 2015 OAS Convention on Older Persons solidifies a formal recognition of this group as rights-holders, motivating their full inclusion, integration, and


\textsuperscript{69} See OAS Convention on Discrimination and Intolerance, \textit{supra} note 11, Preamble, arts. 1-14 (defining “discrimination” as “any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference, in any area of public or private life, the purpose or effect of which is to nullify or curtail the equal recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of one or more human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the international instruments applicable to State Parties’’); Inter-American Convention Against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Forms of Intolerance, ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (2013) Preamble, arts. 1-14 [hereinafter OAS Convention on Racism].
participation in society. The Convention is groundbreaking in defining concepts such as ageing, abuse, negligence, integrated social and health care services, palliative care, and abandonment, and affirmatively advocating for the full enjoyment by older persons of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. The Convention codifies a number of classical rights for older persons, such as the rights to life, personal integrity, and to live free from discrimination. The Convention also includes a detailed list of rights which are very specific to the needs of older persons in the areas of long-term care and personal mobility, among others.

Despite these laudable steps in case law and treaties, one lingering challenge is ensuring that a focus on vulnerability does not promote a stereotyped vision and treatment of the human rights realities of various persons and groups. This danger has been alluded to by various scholars. It has been exemplified by the criticisms to the OAS Convention on Persons with Disabilities and its assistentialist approach, marking it as different from the empowerment focus of the equivalent United Nations Convention.

A correlated issue is that some of the regional Court judgments to date can seem contradictory in advancing the need for a

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70 OAS Convention on Older Persons, supra note 68, preamble, arts. 1–3 (article 1 in particular indicates that “The purpose of this Convention is to promote, protect and ensure the recognition and the full enjoyment and exercise, on an equal basis, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of older persons, in order to contribute to their full inclusion, integration, and participation in society . . . .”).

71 Id. arts. 2–4.

72 Id. arts. 5–31.

73 See, e.g., Peroni & Timmer, supra note 37; MARTHA ALBERTSON FINNEMAN & ANNA GREAR, REFLECTIONS ON A NEW ETHICAL FOUNDATION FOR LAW AND POLITICS (Ben Waters ed. 2013) (developing the “vulnerability thesis” and its potential as a new ethical foundation for law and politics).

“vulnerability” focus, while at the same time advancing autonomy and participation concepts.\textsuperscript{75}

The author considers that there should also be more documentation and research performed on whether such a particularized approach to human rights protection does contribute to addressing larger systemic issues such as structural discrimination. The Inter-American Court has begun alluding to the issue of structural discrimination and its importance to fully eradicate forms of exclusion in societies throughout the Americas. For example, the Court in its judgment in the case of Hacienda Brazil Verde Workers vs. Brazil, related to the practice of slave work in the state of Pará, identified criteria to determine whether there is “structural discrimination” in a particular case, including: i) whether the group has characteristics which are “immutable” or have been subjected to historical discrimination; ii) whether the group has faced a systemic or historical situation of exclusion, marginalization, or subordination which impede access to basic human development conditions; iii) that this situation of exclusion is concentrated in a specific geographic zone or is prevalent in the entire territory of a State; and iv) that persons belonging to the group at issue are victims of indirect discrimination or discrimination in practice due to state measures.\textsuperscript{76} The author hopes to see more legal development in the future of the content of the term “structural discrimination” and its connection to the situation of persons which can be considered in a vulnerable social position.

In this sense and in the realm of treaties, the OAS Conventions on Discrimination do contain important principles applicable to persons in a situation of vulnerability, but the author notes the lack of a holistic approach which may challenge their effective enforcement by States. As indicated earlier, the Conventions are better at defining and identifying concepts than providing a roadmap to address larger structural issues in the area of discrimination.\textsuperscript{77} When they are read integrally, it is evident that they are missing a comprehensive framework that captures all


\textsuperscript{77} OAS Convention on Discrimination and Intolerance, supra note 11, Preamble, Articles 1–14 (reaffirming the general principles of anti-discrimination and tolerance); OAS Convention on Racism, supra note 69, preamble, arts. 1–14.
dimensions of the problem of discrimination, and the strategies needed to prevent and eradicate the same, at the structural and institutional levels. There also seems to be a contradiction between providing for multiple forms of discrimination, but then separating the concept of racial discrimination from other forms by dividing the original draft treaty in two. The Conventions also offer an abstract recognition of the collective experience of discrimination and intolerance, but miss language confirming that States have collective obligations, as well as individual ones in this area, which is an issue of primary importance for indigenous peoples and afro-descendent communities.

2.1.2. Vulnerability and Stereotypes

The issue of stereotypes has had increased coverage at both the Inter-American and European systems in recent years, but the efforts have been limited largely to fleshing out the relationship between vulnerabilities and stereotypes.

In its judgment in the case of *I.V. vs. Bolivia*, the Inter-American Court does discuss the issue of stereotypes in great detail, alluding to the negative social preconceptions of women as “vulnerable” persons, incapable of making quality decisions concerning their health. Therefore, for the Court the notion of vulnerability is multidimensional, involving different risks to human rights violations when women are receiving treatment in public hospitals, including being the subject of harmful stereotypes. In the Inter-American Court judgment in *Artavia Murillo vs. Costa Rica*, the Court found a ban on in vitro fertilization incompatible with the American Convention, and established that this kind of restriction had differentiated negative impacts on both women and men who suffer from infertility due to social prejudices and stereotypes. The Court alluded to the social expectations that both women and men face socially to have children, and how the suffering can be severe, hidden, and a disability in cases in which access to reproductive

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technology is the only option to conceive children. In both its judgments of Fornerón vs. Argentina and Karen Atala vs. Chile, the Inter-American Court also alludes to stereotypes which may negatively influence custody proceedings involving parents of different sexual orientations and income levels, in the form of “speculations, presumptions, stereotypes, generalized considerations on the personal characteristics of the parents, or cultural preferences regarding traditional concepts of the family.”

The Inter-American Court has also advanced in cases related to Mexico and Guatemala thorough analysis of how gender stereotypes about women and girls' conduct, dress, and behaviour often influence negatively the investigation of violence against women cases; and how this constitutes a prohibited form of discrimination under the American Convention on Human Rights and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women [hereinafter Convention of Belém do Pará]. In an earlier case, María Eugenia Morales de Sierra vs. Guatemala, the Inter-American Commission also expressed its concern over the codification in national law of stereotyped roles for women and men within the marriage, resulting in discrimination, subordination, and violence against women within this institution.

80 Id. ¶¶ 294–302 (holding that gender stereotypes negatively influence international human rights law and should be eliminated).
The European Court has gradually adopted interesting cases shedding substantive light on the concept of stereotypes and their human rights repercussions. Some of the analysis of the Court has been focused on groups considered in a situation of vulnerability, and the negative effect of stereotypes on their life plans, while others have addressed the situation of persons which may be impacted by stereotypes in the exercise of their civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. In the case of Konstantin Markin vs. Russia, the applicant complained that he was discriminated against by the domestic authorities due to their refusal to grant him parental leave in violation of Article 14 of the European Convention, in connection with Article 8. The applicant as a serviceman had no statutory right to three years’ parental leave, while servicewomen were entitled to this benefit. The Court ruled in favour of the applicant indicating that these differences in treatment perpetuated gender stereotypes, relegating women to the home and limiting men’s family life. In Asku v. Turkey, the Grand Chamber of the European Court considered that the negative stereotyping of a group in government-sponsored publications, such as the Roma, can impact their sense of identity; produce feelings of “self-worth and self-confidence;” and affect their private life. In the case of V.C. v. Slovakia referred to earlier, related to a Roma woman who was sterilized without her consent at a public health hospital, the European Court refers to language hinting at stereotypes which drove this medical decision, calling the actions of hospital staff “paternalistic,” in complete disregard of the choice and autonomy of the woman affected as a patient.

The European Court also presents ground breaking analysis regarding gender and age specific stereotypes in its recent judgment

85 Id. ¶ 131.
86 Id. ¶ 141.
87 See Asku v. Turk. [GC], App. Nos. 4149/04 and 41029/04, Eur. Ct. H. R., ¶ 58 (Mar. 15, 2012) (describing that the “prosecution had used stereotyped formula in all their requests for extension without submitting any evidence in support of their argument that the applicant might abscond or interfere with the investigation” and no alternative preventive measures were considered).
of Carvalho Pinto de Sousa Mourais v. Portugal. The applicant in the case suffered medical malpractice during a surgery, which left her with different physical ailments, including difficulty in having sexual relations, urinary incontinence, and depression. She claimed that the Supreme Administrative Court discriminated against her on the grounds of her sex and age in lowering the amount of non-pecuniary damage awarded, considering that she "was already fifty years old at the time of the surgery and had two children, that is, an age when sexuality is not as important as in younger years, its significance diminishing with age." In the applicant’s opinion, by expressly referring to the fact that she was fifty, the Administrative Court undermined her right to a sex life and violated articles 8 and 14 of the European Convention. The Court did side with the applicant ruling that the Administrative Court’s assumption that sexuality is not as important for a fifty-year old woman and mother of two children as for someone younger, advanced traditional notions of female sexuality as linked solely to child-rearing purposes—a presumption which failed to take into consideration all the dimensions of a woman’s sexuality. Citing the CEDAW Committee and the UN Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges, the Court referred as well to gender-based prejudices and stereotypes in the judiciary in Portugal.

The judgment of the European Court in the case of Carvalho Pinto de Sousa Mourais also hints that more rulings may come from the Court advancing an intersectional approach, considering the different factors which may expose a person to disparate treatment, including their sex and age; a tendency discussed in the next section of this article. The Court also clarified that cases falling under the rubric of Article 14 of the European Convention are not exclusively those addressing potentially arbitrary treatment between similarly situated persons. The Court confirms that the cases covered by Article 14 of the European Convention also include those in which a person or group is treated less favourably than another without proper justification, “even though the more favourable treatment is

90 Id. ¶ 1–19.
91 Id. ¶ 49.
92 Id. ¶¶ 38–40.
93 Id. ¶ 52.
94 Id. ¶ 54.
not called for by the Convention.”95 Several scholars on the European system have remarked how the Court is moving away from a “comparative” approach in its interpretation of Article 14 to a broader focus including the situation of disadvantaged groups; a tendency which in the author’s view is a necessary shift to contribute to the inclusion, autonomy, and social participation necessary for substantive equality.

The author contends in this article that the increased focus and content to the notions of vulnerability and stereotypes by both systems is a positive tendency. However, there needs to be more legal analysis oriented towards establishing the connection between these two mutually reinforcing notions, and how these are connected to other legal issues such as the general prohibition of discrimination, and problems such as violence and its many forms. It is also important that the organs of both systems shift from a vulnerable focus to an empowerment and participatory approach for persons that are continuously excluded, disadvantaged, marginalized, and subjected to negative stereotypes. In this sense, persons and groups themselves have claimed their need to feel empowered before the Inter-American system and to not be treated as “victims” in the development of legal standards.97 It is also key to encourage that the beneficiaries of this work participate more in hearings, on-site visits, third-party interventions, and in the filing of cases, and that they are made aware that these judgments and standards exist. This is vital to the effectiveness of these systems in the area of discrimination, aside from seeking the full compliance of the judgments in itself.

95 Id. ¶ 44 (“The notion of discrimination within the meaning of Article 14 also includes cases where a person or group is treated, without proper justification, less favourably than another, even though the more favourable treatment is not called for by the Convention.”).


2.2. The Intersectionality Focus

It is also evident, in particular, in the Inter-American system, that there is an increasing intersectionality approach or a focus that considers the multiple identities and factors which may expose a given person to discrimination. This approach has been employed mostly in the case of women, in particular highlighting the specific risk factors they can suffer when they are girls,\(^8\) and indigenous and Afro-descendent.\(^9\) This approach first found its expression in the Inter-American Commission reports concerning Canada\(^10\) and

\(^8\) See Gonzales Lluy et al. v. Ecuador, Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R., Series C, No. 298 (Sept. 1, 2015) (recognizing Ecuador’s failure to provide specialized care for Talia, who was infected with HIV due to a blood transfusion at a young age); González et al. (“Cotton Field”) v. Mex., Preliminary Objection, Merits, Reparations, and Costs, Judgment, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R. (ser. C) no. 205, ¶ 403-11 (Nov. 16, 2009) (finding that states have a duty to act with strict due diligence to search for girls reported as missing in known contexts of discrimination and violence).


Colombia, when referring to the situation of indigenous and afro-
descendant women, and its regional reports on the situation of afro-
descendant persons and access to justice for victims of violence against women. It is important to note as well that the Convention of Belém do Pará requires states in its Article 9 to take into account the increased vulnerability women may face to violence on the basis of several factors, including their age, race, ethnic background, and situation of disability, among other variables.

Probably the case from the Inter-American Court that best illustrates this approach is Gonzalez Lluy et al. v. Ecuador, in which it found the state of Ecuador responsible for violations to the rights to life and personal integrity under the American Convention of Taílla Gonzalez Lluy after being infected with HIV upon receiving a blood transfusion from a Red Cross Bank in a private health clinic when she was three years old. The Court ruled that Taílla Gonzales Lluy suffered discrimination derived from her situation as a person living with HIV, a child, a female, and living in conditions of poverty. As part of this finding, the Court listed these not only as “vulnerability factors”, but also as intersectional motives that increased her discrimination and stigmatized her as a person living with HIV.

Perhaps the most important legacy of using the intersectional approach at the Inter-American system has been opening the door for encouraging states to pursue a holistic approach, considering the

101 See Violence Against Women in the Armed Conflict in Colombia, supra note 99, at ¶103 (“Women from the indigenous and Afro-Colombian population suffer multiple/intersectional discrimination on the basis of gender, race, color and ethnic origin and as internally displaced persons . . . .”).


103 See Inter-Am. Comm’n H.R., Access to Justice for Women Victims of Violence in the Americas, supra note 99, ¶¶ 195–97 (showing that there is very little knowledge in Central America about the laws supporting international women’s rights).


105 Id. ¶ 291.

106 Id. ¶ 290 (explaining that discriminatory factors work together to exacerbate unfair treatment).
underlying factors of discrimination that originate and exacerbate violence. In its Canada report, the Commission advanced these principles, referring to the work of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its causes and consequences, highlighting that “interpersonal, institutional and structural forms of violence perpetuate gender inequalities, but also racial hierarchies, ethnic group exclusionary practices and allocations of resources that benefit some groups of women at the expense of others.”

For the Inter-American Commission, this approach overall entails addressing the past and present structural inequalities confronted by different persons and groups which have been the subject of historical discrimination. It is noteworthy as well that both of the recently adopted discrimination conventions of the OAS recognized the concept of “multiple or aggravated discrimination” as “any preference, distinction, exclusion, or restriction based simultaneously on two or more” of the prohibited factors recognized in Article 1.1 in the Convention. As indicated earlier, the list of prohibited factors included in Article 1.1 of said instrument is very extensive, including new ones for international treaties such as sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, cultural identity, political opinions, and mental or physical health condition.

In the European System, the case decision of B.S. v. Spain could signal the beginning of more legal developments concerning intersectionality issues. In this case, the allegations focused on a woman of Nigerian origin who was stopped by the police while working as a prostitute in the outskirts of Palma de Mallorca.

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108 Id. ¶ 149 (stating that past and present inequalities must be corrected to address violence against women holistically).

109 See OAS Convention on Discrimination and Intolerance, supra note 11, art. 1.3; OAS Convention on Racism, supra note 69, art. 1.3.

110 See OAS Convention on Discrimination and Intolerance, supra note 11, art. 1.1.

111 See B.S. v. Spain, App. No. 47159/08, Eur. Ct. H.R., ¶¶ 58–63 (July 24, 2012) (requiring State authorities to adopt all reasonable measures to identify whether there were racist motives when investigating violent incidents); see also Carvalho Pinto de Sousa Morais v. Portugal, App. No. 17484/15, Eur. Ct. H.R., (July 25, 2017) (concerning the reduction of a compensation award to the applicant because of stereotypes based on her age and gender).

applicant claimed that the national police both verbally and physically abused her when they stopped and questioned her. She also alleged that the police discriminated against her on account of her skin color and gender, claiming that other women with a “European phenotype” carrying on the same activity had not been approached by police. The Court found a violation of Article 14 of the Convention, taken in conjunction with Article 3, since the domestic courts failed to take into account “the applicant’s particular vulnerability inherent in her position as an African woman working as a prostitute” therefore failing to adopt all possible measures to determine whether a discriminatory attitude played a role in these events. Even though the Court does not refer to the concept of intersectionality per se, the case might signal the beginning of a consideration of the connection between different motives, identities, or factors which can expose a person to discrimination. As indicated earlier, the European Court’s decision in the case of Carvalho could be considered as part of this tendency, due to the allegations concerning the sex and age of the victim.

In the Inter-American system an important contribution of the inter-sectional approach has been evident in the realm of reparations. In this sphere, the Inter-American Court has been moving towards an approach towards reparations that is more transformative and intersectional in nature, as opposed to restitution-based, considering the contexts of structural discrimination and inequalities that often foster the human rights violations seen by the Court. As it is, it is a Court well-recognized for its expansive and evolving approach to reparations.

113 Id.
114 Id. at ¶ 29.
115 Id. at ¶ 62.
117 See González et al. (“Cotton Field”) v. Mex., Preliminary Objection, Merits, Reparations, and Costs, Judgment, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R. (ser. C) no. 205, ¶ 450 (Nov. 16, 2009) (recognizing the need for rectification measures to address the context of structural discrimination that lead to the events, as opposed to reparation solely based on restitution).
For example, in the case of Ines Fernandez Ortega — in which a 27-year old indigenous woman was raped by members of the Mexican Army — the Court found that the victim had faced multiple forms of discrimination on the basis of her gender, race, and socio-economic status which increased her risk to rape, and ordered the State to implement permanent training programs for the judiciary and the armed forces to prevent these acts, and investigate these cases with an ethnic and gender perspective.\(^{119}\)

An important challenge inherent in the “intersectional approach” is the need for States to have guidelines and content on how to best reflect it in their legislative and public policy efforts, and how to best promote an adequate enforcement. In the author’s view, it is key to balance well the incorporation of an “intersectional” approach with the need of specific persons and groups to have specialized attention at the national level, such as women and children. The more intersectional legislation and public policies become, the less specialized they can turn to the point of dilution. It is important that bodies such as the Inter-American Commission and Court, as well as the European Court take advantage of future cases to issue decisions which exemplify how an intersectional approach should be reflected in theory and in practice.

### 2.3. The Identification of New Prohibited Motives of Discrimination

In the Author’s view, one of the most important tendencies in the area of discrimination has been the flexible reading of discrimination clauses in regional treaties to identify new prohibited motives of discrimination. This tendency has been very well illustrated in the case law of both the European and Inter-American

\(^{119}\) See Rosendo-Cantú et al. v. Mex., Preliminary Objection, Merits, Reparations, and Costs, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R. Series (ser C) No. 216, ¶¶ 308 (Aug. 31, 2010) (ordering the State to continue implementing training programs to promote the diligent investigation of cases of sexual abuse against women, guided by a gender and ethnic perspective).
The developments that will be described below from both the European and Inter-American Courts have also paved the way for the recently adopted OAS Conventions and the Istanbul Convention to recognize new motives that can be used to discriminate, as described earlier.

In the European system, the line of caselaw related to sexual orientation and gender identity have been extremely important in this regard. For example, in *Karner v. Austria*, the applicant alleged that the Supreme Court’s decision to not recognize his right to succeed to a tenancy after the death of his companion constituted discrimination on the basis of his sexual orientation in breach of Article 14 of the European Convention, in conjunction with Article 8. The Court underscored in its analysis by explaining that for purposes of Article 14, a difference in treatment is discriminatory if it lacks an “objective and reasonable justification”, “does not pursue a legitimate aim”, and there is “no reasonable relationship of proportionality between the means employed and the aim” pursued. The Court emphasized in particular the need for “very weighty reasons” to be advanced for a difference in treatment on the grounds of sexual orientation to be compatible with the European Convention, even though sexual orientation is not listed among the prohibited grounds in Article 14. Based on this analysis, the Court

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122 See id. ¶ 3.

123 See id. ¶ 37 (“The Court reiterates that, for the purposes of Article 14, a difference in treatment is discriminatory if it has no objective and reasonable justification, that is, if it does not pursue a legitimate aim or if there is not a reasonable relationship of proportionality between the means employed and the aim sought to be realised . . . .”)

124 Id.
found that the government had not advanced “convincing and weighty reasons” justifying a narrow interpretation of the Rent Act at issue.\footnote{Id. ¶ 42.}

The European Court has also recognized other grounds as prohibited under Article 14 of the European Court of Human Rights. In \textit{Kiyutin vs. Russia}, the applicant presented allegations claiming discrimination based on health status in his application for a Russian residence permit.\footnote{Id. ¶ 3.} As part of this process, he had to undergo a medical examination in which he tested positive for HIV, resulting in the rejection of his application.\footnote{See Kiyutin v. Russia, App. No. 2700/10, 53 Eur. H.R. Rep. 26, ¶ 9 (2011) (explaining that the applicant was required to undergo a medical examination following his application for a residence permit, in which he tested HIV positive, and consequently his application was denied).} In its analysis of whether the applicant’s health status fell under the “[O]ther status” clause within the meaning of Article 14, the Court considered that the list of discriminatory factors set out in Article 14 is not exhaustive and that this open “interpretation has not been limited to characteristics which are personal in the sense that they are innate or inherent . . . .”\footnote{Id. ¶ 56.} Therefore, the Court found that a distinction based on account of a person’s health status, including conditions such as HIV infection, should be covered by the term “[O]ther status” in the text of Article 14 of the Convention.\footnote{Id.} In its application of a more rigorous standard of review, the Court placed heavy emphasis on the marginalization that persons infected with HIV have suffered historically.\footnote{See id. ¶ 64 (“Ignorance about how the disease spreads has bred prejudices which, in turn, has stigmatised or marginalised those who carry the virus.”).}

A landmark ruling of the Inter-American Court in this regard was in the case of \textit{Atala Riffo and Daughters vs. Chile}.\footnote{See generally Atala Riffo & Children v. Chile, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Judgment, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R. (ser. C) No. 239 (Feb. 24, 2012)} In this case, the petitioners alleged that the Chilean State was responsible for human rights violations committed amidst a custody proceeding where Karen Atala, a well-known judge, lost custody of her three daughters M., V., and R., based on her sexual orientation by means of a Supreme Court of Justice decision. In ruling in favor of the petitioners, the Inter-American Court found for the first time that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity
are comprehended within the phrase “other social condition” under Article 1.1 of the American Convention. The Inter-American Court also found for the first time that distinctions based on sexual orientation should be subjected to a rigorous scrutiny, demanding from the State the presentation of very weighty reasons to justify that the decision examined was not based on discrimination. It is important to note the significant influence of European Court judgments in the resolution of this case by the Inter-American Court, the first for the Inter-American system on discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

More recently, the Inter-American Court recognized poverty as a discrimination factor prohibited under Article 1.1 of the American Convention in its judgment in the case of Hacienda Brazil Verde vs. Brazil, related to the practice of slave work. The Court alludes to the different categories comprehended under Article 1.1 to which poverty is related to, including economic position and social origin, and how this issue can be related to discrimination based on multiple grounds. The Court presents very thorough analysis related to the link between poverty, slave labor, and human trafficking, and how poverty curbs the exercise of basic human rights, and impedes persons from living a life of dignity and autonomy.

The Author has indicated previously in her scholarship that an open interpretation of the non-discrimination clauses in regional treaties is a key gain for legal standards related to discrimination,

132 See id. ¶ 91 (“[N]o domestic regulation, decision, or practice, whether by state authorities or individuals, may diminish or restrict, in any way whatsoever, the rights of a person based on his or her sexual orientation.”).

133 See id. ¶ 124 (shifting the burden of proof to the State authority to show that its decision does not have a discriminatory purpose or effect).

134 See id. (referring to cases from the European Court of Human Rights); Karner v. Austria, App. No. 40016/98 Eur. Ct. H.R., ¶ 37 (2003) (reiterating that, under Article 14, a difference in treatment is discriminatory if it has no objective and reasonable justification); Kozak v. Pol., App. No. 13102/02, Eur. Ct. H. R., ¶ 92 (2010) (“Where a difference of treatment is based on . . . sexual orientation the margin of appreciation afforded to the State is narrow and in such situations the principle of proportionality does not merely require that the measure chosen is in general suited for realizing the aim sought but it must also be shown that it was necessary in the circumstances.”).


136 Id. ¶ 50.

137 Id. ¶ 54.
and for sectors and communities particularly exposed to human rights violations.\textsuperscript{138} This facilitates the recognition of new forms of discrimination which may not yet be acknowledged by the international community, or that may be in an incipient stage of recognition. It echoes also the universal system tendency.\textsuperscript{139}

In the Author’s view, it is important that regional human rights protection systems are responsive to the experience of marginalization that certain groups of the population face. In the same line, the author considers that there is a need to interpret the regional human rights treaties as “living” documents, in light of the current times and emerging forms of discrimination, taking into account the evolving nature of the international human rights law system, its values, and standards. It is also paramount that the regional protection systems offer an expansive interpretation to general phrasing in non-discrimination provisions of regional treaties because these treaties have more ratifications than the new ones adopted by the regional systems.

As illustrated by the cases referred to above, the history of discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion suffered by a given group of the population based on a specific ground is a factor of paramount importance in determining whether certain distinctions should be considered suspect for judicial review purposes. However, it is key that both the Inter-American and European Court identify more clearly which is the criteria to consider a new factor of discrimination as prohibited under the leading treaties, and which of these merits suspect analysis. It is also key to continue underscoring that major provisions—such as Article 1.1 of the American Convention and Article 14 of the European Convention—include situations in which certain groups of the population receive treatment which is disadvantageous in society.

\textsuperscript{138} See Celorio, The Case of Karen Atala and Daughters, supra note 27 (discussing the legacy of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights judgments regarding women’s rights issues and the interrelated problems of discrimination and violence against women, along with the scope of state obligations to prevent, investigate, sanction and offer reparations for these acts).

\textsuperscript{139} See, e.g., General Comment No. 20 on Non-discrimination in Economic, economic, social and cultural rights (art. 2, para. 2, of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 42nd Sess., E/C.12/GC/20 ¶¶ 15–35 (July 2, 2009) (listing prohibited grounds of discrimination, including those explicitly recognized in treaties and those that could be considered implicit, and emphasizing that the nature of discrimination varies according to context and evolves over time).
The case decisions described above illustrate how regional precedent can be combined and interpreted in a way that offers the most legal protection to persons who have and still suffer serious forms of discrimination. The adoption of the OAS Discrimination Conventions and the Istanbul Convention also offer an important opportunity for these systems to dialogue with states over the components of a comprehensive framework that captures all dimensions of the problem of discrimination, and the strategies needed to prevent and eradicate the same, at the structural and institutional levels.

2.4. Discrimination, violence, and due diligence

One important positive for the Inter-American and European Systems has been the adoption of a number of rulings recognizing important linkages in the areas of discrimination and violence, as well as the duty of states to act with due diligence to prevent both of these human rights issues.

The Inter-American Court and Commission have adopted landmark cases advancing key legal standards confirming the link between discrimination and violence against women, and reaffirming the duty of states to act with due diligence to address these acts.140 Regarding the standard of due diligence, the rulings have aimed to shed light on the content of the obligations to prevent, investigate, sanction, and offer reparations. These rulings have

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underscored the duty to address forms of violence, the discrimination that underlies these acts, as well as the need for a concrete focus on specific groups of women that are particularly at risk of human rights violations, including girls, adolescents, indigenous, and afro-descendent.

In regards to the principle of due diligence, the Commission in its *Jessica Lenahan vs. United States* decision, concerning the failure of police authorities to enforce a domestic violence protection order resulting in the death of three girls, recognized four components of the same.\textsuperscript{141} First, the Commission indicated that a state “[M]ay incur international responsibility for failing to act with due diligence to prevent, investigate, sanction and offer reparations for acts of violence against women; a duty which may apply to actions committed by private actors in certain circumstances.”\textsuperscript{142} Second, the Commission underscored the link between discrimination, violence, and due diligence, highlighting that a States’ duty to address violence against women also implicates measures to prevent and respond to the discrimination that perpetuates this problem.\textsuperscript{143} For the Commission, States are also required to adopt measures to modify social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women and to eradicate prejudices, customary and other practices based on the supposed inferiority of women or stereotyped notions of their roles. Thirdly, the Inter-American Commission highlighted the link between the duty to act with due diligence and the state obligation to guarantee access to adequate and judicial remedies for victims and their family members when they suffer acts of violence.\textsuperscript{144} Fourth, in the adoption of measures to prevent all forms of violence, the Commission indicated that states have a duty to consider the particular risks of human rights violations faced by certain groups of women, based on a number of factors; including girls and women of ethnic, racial, and minority groups.\textsuperscript{145}


\textsuperscript{142} *Id.* ¶ 126.

\textsuperscript{143} *Id.*

\textsuperscript{144} *Id.*

\textsuperscript{145} *Id.* ¶ 127 (holding that States are required to consider the enhanced risk to discrimination faced by certain group of women due to their race and ethnicity, among other factors).
One important contribution of the use of the due diligence standard is the beginning of a definition of obligations of state authorities over the acts of non-state actors. Many of the cases ruled by the Inter-American Commission and the Court in this area have dealt with the acts of private individuals or acts where it could be presumed that private individuals were involved.

The European Court cases have also been illustrative in this tendency. The European Court has issued a number of rulings finding states responsible for failing to protect different victims from imminent acts of violence perpetrated by private individuals when it was considered that the authorities knew of a situation of real or immediate risk to the wife, her children and/or other family members, created by the estranged partner, and the authorities failed to protect them from harm. In ruling on the question of knowledge, important elements considered by the Court have been that the state authorities had already detained the aggressor,146 assisted the victim and/or her family members in the filing of complaints,147 and instituted criminal proceedings148 in response to the victim’s and/or her family members repeated contacts with the authorities.

When this European Court line of cases is reviewed as a whole, a number of important principles can be identified which shed light on the content and scope of the obligation of a state to protect persons against private acts of violence; standards also applicable to the prevention of discrimination. The protection obligation is one of means and not results, meaning that a state can be responsible when it fails to adopt reasonable measures that had a real prospect of altering the outcome or mitigating the harm.149 Understanding the context and the victims is key; in the case of domestic violence, its hidden nature and prevalence may require attention from the

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149 See id., ¶ 136 (reiterating that the local authorities’ failure to take reasonable measures which could have had a real prospect of altering the outcome or mitigating the harm is sufficient to engage state responsibility); E & Others v. United Kingdom, App no. 33218/96, Eur. Ct. H.R., ¶ 99 (2002) (emphasizing that the test under Article 3 does not require it to be shown that “but for the failing of the public authority, ill treatment would not have happened”).
authorities, even in cases where complaints have been withdrawn.\textsuperscript{150} Lastly, the failure by the police and judicial authorities to protect a woman from domestic violence breaches her right to equal protection—the failure need not be intentional.\textsuperscript{151}

3. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES: THE ROAD AHEAD IN THE REGIONAL PREVENTION AND RESPONSE TO DISCRIMINATION

It is important to note that the effectiveness of a regional human rights system to address complex discrimination issues is driven not only by its legal standards, but also by the context in which the legal standards are enforced, and on the strength of its institutions. In this sense, it is important for both the Inter-American and European systems to find creative ways to face contemporary political and institutional challenges.

One important institutional obstacle is the enforcement problem of case rulings. In Europe, experts in the system have identified a number of states that have lingering enforcement issues, and compose also the largest caseload of the European system.\textsuperscript{152} In the Americas, the enforcement of judgments is very mixed, being particularly weak in the areas concerning the administration of justice and impunity issues.\textsuperscript{153} Important strategies have been employed by the different systems to improve compliance with judgments, including the adoption of Protocol 16 by the European Court of Human Rights and the Conventionality Control Doctrine of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.\textsuperscript{154} The Inter-

\textsuperscript{150} Opuz v. Turkey, App. No. 33401/02, Eur. Ct. H.R. (2009) (noting that the crimes committed by the perpetrator were sufficiently serious to warrant preventive measures and therefore the local authorities could have foreseen a lethal attack).

\textsuperscript{151} See id. ¶ 191 ("It transpires from the above-mentioned rules and decisions that the State’s failure to protect women against domestic violence breaches their right to equal protection of the law and that this failure does not need to be intentional.").

\textsuperscript{152} See Anagnostou & Mungiu-Pippidi, for more analysis supra note 26.

\textsuperscript{153} See Alexandra Huneeus, supra note 26 (showing that enforcement of issues remains weak in the Americas); Dulitzky, supra note 26 (identifying needed measures to enhance the inter-American system of human rights).

American Commission on Human Rights has identified the supervision of compliance of rulings and judgments as one of the priority areas in its new strategic plan between 2017 and 2021, and the Inter-American Court has created a section solely devoted to this issue. It is important to follow closely strategies employed by these systems to improve compliance with judgments. In the Americas system, a related obstacle is the significant delays that affect the processing of case petitions. These institutional challenges negatively affect their overall work in the area of discrimination and any future strategies should consider the intricacies and complexities of addressing discrimination issues at the national level.

These systems are also facing enormous political pressures today from different states, which affect their daily operations and effectiveness. Problems of this kind are inherent in these systems as they are inter-governmental in nature. Their proximity to states is both a challenge and an opportunity of influence. In the case of

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156 See Inter-Am. Comm’n H.R., Strategic Plan, supra note 7, at 51-52, (explaining that case-processing delays are one of the most challenging issues faced in the present by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to fulfill its protection and promotion mandates).

157 For more discussion on the relationship of States with the regional human rights protection systems in the Americas and Europe, see Pinto, supra note 24; Dia Anagnostou & Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, Domestic Implementation of Human Rights...
the Americas, two states have already withdrawn from the American Convention, and there is a group of states that is constantly criticizing the measures and pronouncements issued by the Inter-American Commission.\footnote{158} Venezuela has already expressed its intention to withdraw from the OAS Charter.\footnote{159} This is compounded by one of the most public financial crises the Inter-American Commission has faced in its history, and difficulties in balancing its protection and promotion work.\footnote{160} In Europe, the tensions with Russia and the exit process of the United Kingdom from the European Union bring fears of what kind of impact this all will have in the work of the European Court and its operations.\footnote{161}

\footnote{158} See Pinto, supra note 24 (identifying as a system challenge the lack of universal ratification of the leading treaties and limited acceptance of the Court’s jurisdiction).


Despite the challenges mentioned above, the author believes these two systems have important opportunities to contribute with quality legal standards to prevent and respond to the issue discrimination and its many forms at the national level.

Firstly, the standards already set by these regional protection systems should be expanded and reconciled with the contexts in which discrimination is taking place. It is key that the systems address concretely cornerstone issues such as hate speech, xenophobia, structural discrimination, racially-motivated bias and violence, and gender-based discrimination, which are greatly affecting the Americas and Europe. There is also important terminology and forms of violence which need more analysis and definition by the regional protection systems, such as sexual and labor harassment, and violence occurring in the realm of technology.

In the case of hate speech in particular, the inter-American system has very solid standards on freedom of expression matters largely carved by its full-time Rapporteurship, and as discussed throughout this article, the system has also adopted important case decisions related to the prohibition of discrimination. However, the relationship between these two areas of international law and its applicability to the issue of hate speech is still very unsettled. There is a need to define a well-articulated legal approach to hate speech when it is directed against a class or group of persons protected by international and regional treaties. Events in Charlottesville, VA, and other localities in the Americas concerning racially-motivated hate speech inciting to violence have renewed the need to clarify the content of hate speech, and the correlative limitations and contours of the right to protest when racially-motivated speech is present. The Inter-American system has a human rights implications of Brexit will be difficult to predict and are dependent on a number of factors).


163 For some analysis from the Inter-American System of Human Rights on the issue of hate speech, see Inter-Am. Comm’n H.R., Violence against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Persons in the Americas, OEA/Ser.L/V/II.rev.1 Doc. 36 (Nov. 12, 2015), paras. 213–261 (expressing the concern of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights over the high levels of violence against individuals and groups in the LGBTI community, and the need for more adequate prevention and response measures from states).

164 See, e.g., Inter-Am. Comm’n H.R., Press Release No. 124/17, IACHR Repudiates Hate Speech and Violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, United States (Aug. 18,
very important opportunity to carve legal standards and guidance on the legality of those limitations, which may be imposed while also safeguarding their flexible interpretation of freedom of speech rights. Both the Inter-American and European Court should also take advantage of future cases to exemplify which discriminatory content can be considered “hate speech” and when restrictions to freedom of expression should be considered proportional, especially in cases in which the speech at issue is not inciting to violence or crimes.\footnote{165}

In regards to gender-based discrimination, it is key that both the European and Inter-American systems begin setting legal positions on problems such as the use of “gender ideology” to promote patriarchalism and traditional notions of the family.\footnote{166} It is

\footnote{\textit{See}, e.g., Vejdeland & Others v. Sweden, App. No. 1813/07, Eur. Ct. H.R., ¶¶ 7–17, 47–60 (Feb. 9, 2012) (exemplifying content which may be considered hate speech in the area of “sexual orientation” and permissible restrictions to the right to freedom of expression under Article 10 of the European Convention).

important to recognize the effort of both systems to offer a broad
definition of the concept of the family, recognizing equal rights for
same-sex couples and their right to form life plans free from
stereotypes, discrimination, and forms of exclusion.\textsuperscript{167} Both systems
are also very well-positioned to begin setting legal standards
advancing the prohibition of different forms of violence—such as
cyber bullying and revenge porn—which typically happen in the
internet space and have discrimination connotations.\textsuperscript{168}

Second, both the Inter-American and European systems also
have the opportunity to adopt more case decisions which are
coherent and establish connections between the discrimination
approaches discussed in this article. It is very important to begin
exploring the relationship between vulnerabilities and intersections,
as well as how these impact state obligations when private actors are
involved. Overarching discrimination concepts such as structural,
institutional, and multiple forms of discrimination need more
nuanced content. It is certainly a gain that the Inter-American
system has begun using key terminology such as “structural
discrimination” and “multiple forms of discrimination,” but these
ccepts need content for states to be able to enforce them
properly.\textsuperscript{169} There are ways—illustrated by the work of the United

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\textsuperscript{167} Gender identity, and equality and non-discrimination with regard to same-
sex couples. State obligations in relation to change of name, gender identity, and
rights deriving from a relationship between same-sex couples (interpretation and
scope of Articles 1(1), 3, 7, 11(2), 13, 17, 18 and 24, in relation to Article 1, of the
187 (July 21, 2015) (holding that there is a positive obligation upon member states
to provide legal recognition for same-sex marriage—not doing so, would be a
violation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights).

\textsuperscript{168} For more discussion on cyber bullying and revenge porn, see Danielle
Keats Citron & Mary Anne Franks, Criminalizing Revenge Porn, 49 WAKE FOREST L.
REV. 345, 346 (2014) (explaining that criminalization of revenge porn is “necessary
to protect against devasting privacy invasions that chill self-expression and ruin
lives”); Raul R. Calvoz, Bradley W. Davis, and Mark A. Gooden, Cyber Bullying and
(discussing the effect of cyber bullying and analyzes the current scope of
constitutional protections surrounding student speech rights).

\textsuperscript{169} See, e.g., Expelled Dominicans and Haitians v. Dom. Rep. Preliminary
302–318 (Aug. 28, 2014). For more discussion on the use of the concept of
“structural discrimination” in the jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court, see
Nations—in which more legal content can be offered to concepts such as “intersectionality” or “multiple forms of discrimination” and what they mean for a state, without overtaking the specialized approach that has been historically demanded by civil society organizations and victims for protected groups.\(^\text{170}\)

Third, future case decisions are definitely a vehicle for more content to these terms, but in the case of quasi-judicial bodies such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the adoption of guidance notes and more practical materials explaining legal standards is also key to promote state compliance.\(^\text{171}\)

Fourth, at the present collaboration between the systems is paramount, as the regional human rights protections systems are stronger when they collaborate with each other and refer to each other’s standards, as discussed earlier in this article.

Fifth, strategies to obtain a larger number of ratifications of treaties related to persons in a situation of risk and discrimination is also important, since they are lagging at the moment, including those related to key treaties such as Protocol 12 of the European

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\(^{171}\) For more information on recent efforts in this regard, see Inter-Am. Comm’n H.R., *Practical Guide to Reduce Pretrial Detention*, OEA/Ser.L/V/II.163 Doc. 107 (2017), [http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/GUIDE-PretrialDetention.pdf](http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/GUIDE-PretrialDetention.pdf) (providing recommendations aimed at reducing the use of pretrial detention in accordance with international standards in this subject, with an emphasis on the application of alternative measures that allow the accused person to be released while the criminal procedure goes forward); *Fact Sheets issued by the European Court of Human Rights on pending case-law and pending cases*, [http://echr.coe.int/Pages/home.aspx?p=press/factsheets](http://echr.coe.int/Pages/home.aspx?p=press/factsheets) (compiling factsheets by theme on the Court’s case-law and pending cases).
Convention, the Istanbul Convention, and the OAS Discrimination Conventions.\textsuperscript{172}

In the author’s view, there are other important legal questions that the regional protection systems are well-placed to answer in the realm of discrimination. Both systems are well-equipped to identify the criteria which makes a discrimination motive worthy of “suspect level scrutiny”. One important issue to explore is whether the main issue is “immutability” or whether a more nuanced analysis is needed.\textsuperscript{173} In terms of the due diligence obligation of States, it would be interesting to advance more analysis of how it is applicable to cases which occur in settings driven by economic and social rights, such as discrimination which occurs in the education, health, and employment settings. It is also important to define better what the scope of the due diligence obligation is when businesses and international organizations are the ones committing human rights violations, since this violence and discrimination affects many indigenous peoples, afro-descendent communities, and women.\textsuperscript{174}

As indicated earlier, there are a number of doctrines and strategies that have been advanced by the regional protection systems to be closer to domestic tribunals in order to improve the


\textsuperscript{173} For more detailed analysis, see Celorio, The Case of Karen Atala and Daughters, supra note 27, at 362–371.

\textsuperscript{174} For more reading, see HANNUM, supra note 9, 335–461; see also Inter-Am. Comm’n H.R., Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendent Communities, and Natural Resources: Human Rights Protection in the Context of Extraction, Exploitation, and Development Activities, OEA/Ser.L/V/II.Doc. 47/15, ¶¶ 1–21 (2015) (addressing State obligations with regard to extraction, exploitation, and development activities concerning natural resources which may be harmful towards indigenous peoples and afro-descendent persons in the Americas).
follow-up of standards and judgments. In this sense, it would be great to see more analysis from the Inter-American Court and its application of the Conventionality Control doctrine to cases involving discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities, as well as women.

Lastly, there are important limitations in the text of treaties which can be better addressed by the regional systems in their interpretations of dispositions to increase legal protections for persons and groups who have suffered historical discrimination. For example, in the case of the European system, the non-independent character of Article 14 of the European Convention continues to be a limitation in the analysis the Court can advance on discrimination issues. There are some recent cases though which exemplify the potential of the Court to overcome this limitation; rulings which contain more expansive analysis of non-discrimination issues such as Carvalho Pinto de Sousa Morais v. Portugal discussed earlier. There are also cases that the European Court is tackling with major discrimination implications based on important grounds such as sex, gender, and religion, that the Court has not analysed under the rubric of Article 14, missing an important opportunity. For example, the women applicants in both Leyla Sahin

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v. Turkey\textsuperscript{177} and SAS v. France\textsuperscript{178}—related to the regulation of headscarves and veils—presented discrimination allegations based on gender and religious grounds, and these were not addressed by the European Court under Article 14, which the author hopes it does in the future.

In the case of the Inter-American system, there has been ample scholarship developed on the limitations of Article 26 of the American Convention to address economic, social, and cultural matters, which are intrinsically related to discrimination issues, and the importance of ruling more cases which add content to this Article since the San Salvador Protocol has only been ratified by sixteen states.\textsuperscript{179} The Inter-American Court just expanded the scope of its analysis of Article 26 of the American Convention in the case of Lagos del Campo v. Peru.\textsuperscript{180} The author has already shared in her scholarship her concerns over the segmented interpretation of the Inter-American Court of the relationship between Articles 1.1 and 24 of the American Convention, which the author considers should be undertaken in a more organic and integral sense, according to international law principles.\textsuperscript{181} Both systems should also continue using their mandates to offer expansive definitions to treaty dispositions in the area of discrimination; a task that has many opportunities as exemplified in the cases already discussed from


both systems which offer a broad reading to the general
discrimination prohibition in Article 1.1. of the American
Convention and Article 14 of the European Convention.

I do hope to continue seeing increased uniformity of legal
interpretations and legal principles in the area of discrimination
from both regional systems. Some of the most important statements
from both systems have been issued referring to the other.\textsuperscript{182} It is
also key that regional protection systems and the universal system
work in tandem to obtain a certain degree of uniformity in their legal
standards concerning discrimination.

4. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The continued existence of human rights protection systems in
Europe and the Americas is fundamental for international dialogue
and cooperation, as well as for the possibilities they offer to review
issues at a supranational level, and as a second avenue for victims
of human rights violations. In the author’s view, finding ways to
make them more effective is vital for their survival.

The continued financial and political support of human rights
systems is also key for them to succeed; support that depends
greatly on their short-, medium-, and long-term effectiveness. In the
author’s view, the systems should prioritize not only finding
creative ways to become more effective, but strategies to preserve
their present impact or \textit{acquis}, given the present challenges.

Discrimination today in Europe and the Americas is an ongoing
problem, with many layers and dimensions to address.
Discrimination is direct and indirect, systemic and structural. It
affects persons of every sex, gender, age, racial and ethnic
background, and social class. It can be in the form of disparate or
disadvantageous treatment without justification. It is illustrated in

\textsuperscript{182} See Atala Ríffo & Children v. Chile, Merits, Reparations and Costs,
cases from the European Court of Human Rights); Karner v. Austria, App. No.
40016/98 Eur. Ct. H.R. ¶ 37 (2003) (which reiterates that, for the purposes of Article
14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, a difference in treatment is
discriminatory if it has no objective and reasonable justification, that is, if it
does not pursue a legitimate aim or if there is no a reasonable relationship of
proportionality between the means employed and the aim sought to be realized);
of the European Convention on Human Rights and noting that sexual orientation
is a covered concept of the Article).
hate speech; cyber violence; sexual harassment; the “Me too” and “Time’s Up” movements; and domestic and sexual violence. It happens in homes, schools, employment places, prisons, religious settings, and health institutions. The way regional protection systems address discrimination and its many forms in the present and the future is a key determinant of their continued relevance.

Despite the complexity of the current context and the intricate dynamics of discrimination and social exclusion, the author remains hopeful that the regional human rights protection systems do have windows of opportunity and are producing an important body of work which could have a measure of impact at the national level. A well-articulated strategy, including the participation of persons and groups who are the main bearers of social discrimination and continued exclusion, continues to be key to improve the effectiveness of the work and state compliance.

In the current global scheme, the author considers vital that the regional protection systems continue employing all means at their disposal to promote and serve as symbols of substantive equality, inclusion, leadership, and the full exercise of human rights for all. This is a key ingredient to resolve the enigma of effectiveness.