



**Ph.D. in “Human rights: evolution, protections, limits”**  
**Planning document of the XL cycle, a.y. 2025/26**

*1. Brief description of the reflections and steps that led to the establishment of the Doctoral Program*

The Doctoral Program in Human Rights was established in 1993 and since then has produced and accumulated significant expertise on the proposed research topic, in parallel with the development and growth in importance of human rights over the past three decades.

This is evidenced by more than 120 approved doctoral dissertations, many of them in English(<https://www.unipa.it/dipartimenti/di.gi./dottorati/dirittiumanievoluzionetutelaelimitiinternazionale/alumni-00001/index.html>), as well as the extensive collaboration of national and international experts who have participated in the activities of the Doctoral Program(<https://www.unipa.it/dipartimenti/di.gi./dottorati/dirittiumani/.content/documenti/celebrazione-dottorato-elenco-ospiti.pdf>).

The Doctoral Program in Human Rights is part of the Doctoral School of the University of Palermo.

*2. Research themes*

The research topics of the Doctoral Program include problems related to the domestic and international protection of human rights, issues of gender and discrimination, problems of international justice, general questions of bioethics, ecology, resource allocation, migration, sustainable development, war and humanitarian intervention, as well as related philosophical and theoretical legal issues concerning their history, the practice of their protection, and their impact on national and supranational legal systems.

The program embraces the complex field of human rights according to the different perspectives and methodologies proper to the disciplinary fields involved: the philosophy of law and political philosophy; the history of law and the phenomenon of human rights in particular; European and international law; national, European and comparative public and administrative law; national, international and comparative criminal law; national and comparative private and procedural law; national and comparative tax law; and national, comparative, European and international labor law.

The interdisciplinary approach pursued is embodied in: 1) the acceptance of highly diversified research projects, both in terms of the specific themes and the perspectives and methods of investigation; 2) the planning of an equally interdisciplinary and differentiated teaching activity, both in terms of themes and methods; and 3) a Doctoral Board of Professors (“Collegio dei docenti”) with diversified expertise.

The current composition of the Board allows for appropriate planning of teaching activities in relation to the challenges posed to human rights by scientific-social progress: several

Board members are/were recently involved, either as *principal investigators* or as participants, in numerous research projects on the main challenges of contemporary society, which is increasingly multicultural, digitized, and with growing socioeconomic inequalities (e.g., the Prin The Dark Side of Law, Religious Norm and Legal Precept, Protection Against Unjustified Dismissal projects, the prin pnrr 2022 YES-Youth Employment Strategy and Hydra-Hybrid threats versus Democratic Resilience; the Erasmus KA2 Recognise and Fontes projects; the Horizon 2020 TransMaking project; the Jean Monnet Code project; the PON-gov JustSmart project).

In relation to the generic and cross-cutting objectives of the NRRP (M.D. 118-Investment 4.1 generic), the research activities will focus on the analysis and implementation of technical-legal instruments for the protection and promotion of social inclusion and cohesion in the light of constitutional, international and European principles, taking into account the various challenges to which academic and high culture institutions are called upon to respond (by way of paradigm, fight against poverty and discrimination; right to a decent wage; creation of sustainable and green economies; digitalization, innovation and competitiveness of the productive fabric).

### 3. Formative objectives

The course aims to promote debate among scholars on subjects that, while connoting the course itself in interdisciplinary terms, also, given the links between the disciplinary fields involved, allow for a common perspective, which makes for a more fruitful and fruitful dialogue between social scientists and philosophers and jurists with different expertise.

The main objective of the Doctoral Program in Human Rights is to adequately structure and interconnect the research training activities of doctoral students, with a marked focus on the protection of fundamental rights through constant scientific debate among scholars from the various branches of legal knowledge.

Particular importance is attached to the methodological training of young researchers. The affinities between the various areas of legal studies involved in the course of the doctorate allow for the achievement of specific levels of depth in the cycles of joint frontal teaching on cross-cutting topics.

As has been done in the past, internationally renowned external scholars will also be involved, and relations with foreign universities, as well as civil society, will be intensified.

### 4. Internationalization

The Doctoral Program has a strong international vocation. Since the year 2000, with the first funding for the internationalization of the Italian doctorate, there has been a stable collaboration with the University of Valencia, substantiated in several successive agreements.

In recent years, agreements have been signed with the University of Makeni in Sierra Leone and the *Academia de derechos humanos* of the University of Coahuila in Mexico. In addition, a framework thesis cotutela agreement has been operational since 2023 with the École Doctorale in *Obligations, Marchés, Institutions* (OMI), incardinated at the Faculté de Droit of the Université Paris-est Créteil val de Marne.

A total of as many as ten members of the college are professors at universities in other European (France, Spain, United Kingdom) and non-European (Mexico, Sierra Leone) countries. The teaching activities of the Doctoral Program are conducted largely in English, and with extensive participation of international experts and faculty from foreign universities.

The Doctoral Program has international visibility through its web page, which is periodically updated and contains all the educational and training activities carried out. In this regard, a working group in charge of updating the site is established on an annual basis, which includes a member of the Board and three doctoral students, one for each active cycle.

Finally, the conclusion of joint supervision agreements or the obtaining of the additional title of *Doctor Europaeus* is promoted. In the cycles concluded in the last four years (cycles XXXIV, XXXV, XXXVI, XXXVII), 11 students have done their theses under joint supervision arrangements with other European universities, and 1 student has also obtained the additional title of *Doctor Europaeus*. In subsequent cycles, no joint supervision agreements have currently been concluded.

### 3. Planning and organization of training activities

Since 2016, a regulation approved by the College has been in effect (minutes of the College meetings of April 4, 2016 and May 2, 2017), which provides for the following educational activities each year:

(1) An *Introductory Course (Introductory course)*, intended for first-year doctoral students only, in which the basic methodological knowledge for interdisciplinary human rights research, thesis and monograph writing, and bibliographic research are provided. The Introductory Course takes place in the first semester. Duration: 5 days (20 hours).

(2) Two courses in *Human Rights Theory and Practice*, a *Summer School in Human Rights* and a *Winter School in Human Rights*.

*Winter* and *Summer schools* are monographic in nature, and involve high-profile international experts and practitioners, while respecting the principle of gender equality. The *Human Rights Theory and Practice* courses have a more flexible structure and see greater involvement of Board members.

The *Summer* and *Winter School* may be open to the outside public, according to the model provided by the University regulations:

<https://www.unipa.it/amministrazione/direzione generale/sspinternationalrelationsoffice/u>.

[o.cooperationandnetworks/.content/documenti/cooperazioneinternazionale/summerwinterschool/regolamento\\_corsi\\_internazionali\\_studi\\_avanzati.pdf](https://www.unipa.it/didattica/dottorati/.content/documenti/cooperazioneinternazionale/summerwinterschool/regolamento_corsi_internazionali_studi_avanzati.pdf)).

The Course in Human Rights Theory and Practice I and Winter School take place in the first semester.

The Course in Human Rights Theory and Practice II and the Summer School take place in the second semester.

Duration of each course: 5 days (25 hours). Total commitment for the 4 courses: 20 days (100 hours).

Participation in four courses is mandatory for first-, second- and third-year doctoral students.

(3) Self-managed activity by doctoral students and PhD students (self-directed seminar, PhD Symposium, PhD Workshop). This is an activity that already has several editions, designed and implemented by doctoral students, often in collaboration with other doctoral programs, and with *call for abstracts* open to doctoral students and PhDs from other universities. Participation in the self-managed activity is mandatory for all doctoral students.

(4) Additional seminars organized during the year on different topics within the educational objectives of the doctoral program. Participation of doctoral students in the additional seminars is optional.

The preferred language for all educational activities is English.

In compliance with the University regulations ([https://www.unipa.it/didattica/dottorati/.content/documenti/dottorato/ciclo\\_XXXIII/regolamento/2022\\_3900\\_Regolamento-Dottorato-Ricerca.pdf](https://www.unipa.it/didattica/dottorati/.content/documenti/dottorato/ciclo_XXXIII/regolamento/2022_3900_Regolamento-Dottorato-Ricerca.pdf)), the activity of doctoral students is expressed in ECTS, amounting to 60 ECTS per year.

ECTS are distributed as follows:

- for the first year, 6 ECTS for the Course in Human Rights Theory and Practice I, 6 ECTS for the Course in Human Rights Theory and Practice II, 6 ECTS for the Summer School, 6 CFU for the Winter School, 3 ECTS for the Introductory Course, 25 ECTS for research activities;

- for the second and third years, 6 ECTS for the Course in Human Rights Theory and Practice I, 6 ECTS for the Course in Human Rights Theory and Practice II, 6 ECTS for the Summer School, 6 ECTS for the Winter School, 28 ECTS for research activities.

Doctoral students may be authorized not to participate in teaching activities due to time zone reasons by virtue of the performance outside Europe of the mobility period. In this case, they may acquire ECTS through the performance of alternative teaching activities approved by the College (participation in conferences and seminars, etc.).

ECTS related to research activity are considered acquired, for first- and second-year doctoral students, with the Board's approval of the report submitted at the end of each year in accordance with the doctoral regulations

(<https://www.unipa.it/dipartimenti/di.gi./dottorati/dirittiumanievoluzionetutelaelimitiinternazionale/regolamento.html>).

Said report must contain: for first-year doctoral students, an annotated index of the entire work and/or a chapter; for second-year doctoral students, in addition to the updated index, two chapters (or equivalent part of the thesis). For doctoral students/ae, the ECTS related to the research activity are understood to be acquired through the approval of the final thesis to be sent to the evaluators.

Teaching activities under (1), (2) and (3) are planned by the Doctoral Board, after submission of project proposals by a special Teaching Commission, established in November 2021. In identifying and selecting topics, special attention shall be paid to new human rights challenges and innovative perspectives on traditional problems.

For the academic year 2025/2026, the planned activities are as follows: (a) Introductory Course, November-December 2025; (b) Winter School: Individuals and environment: rights, principles and sustainable development (prof. Celone), February-March 2026; (c) Course in Human Rights Theory and Practice I: Nature and rights. Disciplines and protections (prof. Gullo), February-March 2026; (d) Summer School: Crisis of the liberal order and rights. An interdisciplinary perspective (prof. De Sena), May-June 2026; (e) Course in Human Rights Theory and Practice II: The categories of legal pluralism in the crisis of the liberal order (prof. Mazzarella), May-June 2026.

The autonomy of doctoral students is promoted through self-directed activity; through their involvement in the organization of other teaching activities, including taking on the role of *discussants* in seminars; through the obligation to make, at the end of the second and third years, a public presentation of the results of their research (including as a report in the PhD Workshop).

The Board will: (a) authorize the participation of doctoral students in all scientific events relevant to the educational objectives of the course, and compatible with teaching and research activities; (b) through mentors, encourage doctoral students to publicly present the results of their research at conferences and other scientific events; (c) also authorize the participation of doctoral students in research projects relevant to the educational objectives of the course, and compatible with teaching and research activities.

In addition to the above activities organized by the Ph.D. are cross-curricular activities organized, starting this year, by the Doctoral School of the University of Palermo. The cross-curricular activities take place every first Monday of even-numbered months, starting in October 2025, and aim at the development of *soft skills* (writing, publishing, research planning and design). Doctoral students are required to take at least 10 hours of cross-curricular activities each year.

Cross-curricular activities consist of interdisciplinary-transversal seminars covering the following topics:

- how to write a scientific paper;



- how to write a research project;
- Research and knowledge management of European and international research systems;
- the valorization and dissemination of research results;
- Intellectual property and open access to research data and products;
- the basic principles of ethics and integrity.

The Doctoral School is also committed to developing seminars related to the *European charter for researchers*.

On the mobility front, the doctoral regulations require doctoral students to spend at least three months abroad, supported by funds entered in the doctoral and university budgets (50 percent surcharge and 10 percent addition for mobility).

The location in which to carry out the period of mobility will be identified among foreign universities or other institutions (e.g., intergovernmental organizations, public administrations, public and private research centers) in which specific studies on the topic being researched are carried out, also because of the well-established scientific cooperation relationships of the members of the Board. The conclusion of joint supervision agreements or the obtaining of the additional title of *Doctor Europaeus* is also promoted. Ph.D. students will be allowed to participate in supplementary educational activities in compliance with the maximum annual amount of hours stipulated by the university regulations (40 hours). These activities - paradigmatically, student reception, tutoring activities, seminars - will never take place concurrently with compulsory doctoral activities: in this way, the full participation of doctoral students in the three-year training course will be allowed.

#### 4. *Quality assurance process*

In accordance with the guidance received from ANVUR and in compliance with the University of Palermo's Strategic Plan (addendum for 2023), the PhD in Human Rights adopts a quality monitoring system.

The parameters taken into account will be:

- Percentage of doctoral candidates/s and students/s in the first year of course who have obtained their entrance qualification at another University. In the XL cycle, it reached 42% (out of 7 students, 3 have obtained their entrance qualification at another university). For the XLI cycle, the aim is to reach at least 20% (threshold set by the Strategic Plan of University: 14%).
- Percentage of first year PhD students/s who have obtained the Access Certificate abroad. In the XL cycle, it reached 0% (out of 7 students, 0 have obtained their entrance qualification abroad). For the XLI cycle, the aim is to reach at least 20% (threshold set by the Strategic Plan of University: 20%).
- Percentage of female and male PhD researchers who have spent at least three months abroad. In the last closed cycle, the XXXVII, it reached 81% (of 11 doctors, 9 spent more than 3 months abroad - note, however, that the cycle took place partially during the

pandemic, and suffered restrictions). In the closing cycle, the XXXVIII, it reached 71% (here referred to doctoral students/ and who still have to achieve the title: out of 7, 5 have spent more than 3 months abroad).

Note that the XXXVII cycle has been affected by restrictions due to the pandemic.

For the XLI cycle, 100% is targeted.

- Percentage of grants financed by external bodies. Considering that any funding from funds other than the University funds is derived from an external entity, the total number of external grants in the XXXIX cycle on PNRR funds was 5, plus 1 regional grant and 1 INPS. For the XL cycle, 4 external grants were obtained on PNRR funds and 2 regional grants. For the XLI cycle, the aim is to obtain two external scholarships (threshold set by the Strategic Plan of the University: 2).

- Percentage of PhD students who have spent at least six months in public or private institutions, other than the location of the PhD courses (includes months spent abroad). In the last closed cycle, the XXXVII, it reached 42% (out of 11 doctors, 5 spent more than 6 months at institutions other than the headquarters). In the closing cycle, the XXXVIII, it reached 57% (here referred to doctoral students/ and who still have to achieve the title: out of 7 enrolled, 4 have spent more than 6 months at institutions other than headquarters). It should be noted that the XXXVII cycle has been severely affected by restrictions due to the pandemic.

For the XLI cycle, the target is 30%.

- Average number of research products generated by Ph.Ds within one year of completion. For the XLI cycle (2028), we aim to reach an average of 1 product.

- Presence of a system for surveying doctoral students' opinions during the course and one year after obtaining the course; its use in the course reformulation and updating. In this regard, the following surveys will be conducted:

(a) At the end of the first and second year of the doctoral course, the special satisfaction questionnaire prepared by ANVUR will be administered to doctoral students;

(b) within one year of graduation, new Ph.Ds will be administered the special satisfaction questionnaire prepared by ANVUR.

The questionnaires will be reviewed at a special meeting of the College, and the results will be considered in reshaping the doctoral course's educational activities.

Following the college meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2024, the QA Commission is composed as follows: for the teaching component, Professors Riccobono, De Grazia and Russo; for the student component, Dr. Cascio.

Following the college meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2024, the Teaching Commission is composed as follows: for the teaching component, Professors Bologna, Mazzagrecò, Previti and Mauri; for the student component, Dr. Di Rosa.