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**CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN JUDGES  
(CCJE)**

**CCJE Opinion No. 28 (2025)  
on the importance of judicial well-being  
for the delivery of justice**

## **I. Introduction: background, motivation, purpose and scope of the Opinion**

1. In accordance with the mandate given to it by the Committee of Ministers, the Consultative Council of European Judges (CCJE) has prepared the present Opinion on the importance of judicial well-being for the delivery of justice.
2. A well-functioning, independent, and impartial judiciary is central to the proper functioning of any democratic society. It is a fundamental principle and right guaranteed by Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) that everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal.<sup>1</sup> These core tenets of judicial independence and impartiality underpin the proper administration of justice and the rule of law. Their utmost importance is reflected by the fact that they are protected internationally by the ECHR,<sup>2</sup> the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,<sup>3</sup> the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,<sup>4</sup> and domestic constitutional, statutory and common laws.
3. By virtue of their office, judges serve a vital function in society as guardians of the rule of law. Entrusted to protect fundamental human rights and the proper administration of justice, they also keep vital checks and balances on the executive power, ensuring such power is not exercised arbitrarily or without accountability.
4. In recent years, however, the judiciary has faced acute challenges which threaten the foregoing fundamental principles and rights. The COVID-19 pandemic, growing democratic instability, war and global conflict pose inherent threats to the rule of law, which judges are instrumental in protecting. Lack of respect for judicial independence by government, parliament, the media, and social media is an increasing issue.<sup>5</sup> A natural consequence of the right to a public hearing guaranteed by Article 6 of the ECHR is that judges are exposed to heightened external scrutiny and challenge. Furthermore, the proliferation of misinformation damages judicial reputation and creates pressure on judicial independence and decision making. Against this backdrop, concerns have arisen regarding judges' well-being, including their personal safety and security. These concerns have direct implications on the quality and efficiency of judicial work and the integrity and proper functioning of the judicial system.
5. Significant internal and external pressures can potentially undermine judicial independence and impartiality, and judges' resilience to withstand such pressures.<sup>6</sup> Such pressures may also compromise a judge's ability to engage with the impartial assessment of evidence and interpretation of the law required to make well-reasoned

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<sup>1</sup> CCJE Opinion No. 3 (2002), para 14; see also CCJE Magna Carta of Judges (Fundamental Principles) of 2010, paras 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> European Convention on Human Rights, Art. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 10.

<sup>4</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Art. 14.

<sup>5</sup> European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ), Survey among judges on the independence of the judiciary (2025), pages 46-48.

<sup>6</sup> CCJE Opinion No. 25 (2022), para 60.

judgments.<sup>7</sup> Too heavy workloads, excessive time pressure, and fatigue can lead to cognitive depletion, potentially impairing the quality of judicial decision making and the ability of judges to manage their workload effectively and maintain efficiency in courtroom proceedings. When judges are well and able to function at their best, the judiciary is seen as competent and fair, which in turn strengthens public trust and confidence in the justice system.<sup>8</sup>

6. The Opinion therefore examines how the well-being of judges may be protected and promoted to enhance the quality and efficiency of work and support judicial independence and impartiality as fundamental components of a proper functioning judicial system.<sup>9</sup>
7. The Opinion has been prepared on the basis of previous CCJE Opinions,<sup>10</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on judges: independence, efficiency and responsibilities, the documents of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) and European Committee on Legal Co-operation (CDCJ). It also considers the United Nations Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary, the Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct, the Nauru Declaration on Judicial Well-Being, and other relevant instruments relating to occupational health and safety.<sup>11</sup>
8. Finally, the Opinion takes account of member states' responses to the questionnaire on the importance of judicial well-being for the delivery of justice and is based on a preliminary draft prepared by the CCJE expert appointed by the Council of Europe, Ms. Lucinda Soon.

## **II. Defining judicial well-being**

9. For the purposes of this opinion, judicial well-being is defined as a continuous process enabling judges to thrive across all aspects of their professional lives, and at the very least to maintain the physical and psychological health required to fulfil their judicial duties effectively and efficiently, with independence, impartiality and integrity. Judicial

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<sup>7</sup> CCJE Opinion No. 11 (2008), para 34.

<sup>8</sup> CCJE Opinion No. 1 (2001), para 12.

<sup>9</sup> European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights, Art. 47; Inter-American Convention on Human Rights, Art. 8; Mount Scopus International Standards of Judicial Independence, Principle 1.1.

<sup>10</sup> In particular the CCJE Magna Carta of Judges (2010); Opinion No. 1 (2001) concerning the independence of the judiciary and the irremovability of judges; Opinion No. 2 (2001) on the funding and management of courts; Opinion No. 3 (2002) on the principles and rules governing judges' professional conduct, in particular ethics, incompatible behaviour and impartiality; Opinion No. 6 (2004) on fair trial within a reasonable time; Opinion No. 11 (2008) on the quality of judicial decisions; CCJE Opinion No. 17 (2014) on the evaluation of judges' work, the quality of justice and respect for judicial independence; Opinion No. 18 (2015) on the position of the judiciary and its relation with the other powers of state in a modern democracy; Opinion No. 25 (2022) on freedom of expression of judges; and Opinion No. 26 (2023) on moving forward: the use of assistive technology in the judiciary.

<sup>11</sup> Including the International Labour Organization Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) and the International Labour Organization Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187).

well-being is multidimensional, comprising positive facets such as work engagement, motivation, and work satisfaction, as well as negative facets including psychological strain, anxiety, depression, burnout, and work-induced trauma.

10. The stringent demands of judicial work can lead to judges experiencing profound stress, but the degree to which stress is experienced is contingent on the availability of physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of work that can help them achieve their work goals, reduce work demands, and stimulate personal growth, learning and development.
11. Despite their heavy work demands, judges experience several sources of satisfaction which play a positive role in their well-being. Purpose and meaningful work were most frequently identified in the questionnaire responses of CCJE member states as a positive feature of judicial work. Responses repeatedly acknowledged immense satisfaction arising from the public service nature of judicial work, administering justice and upholding the rule of law.
12. Other prevalent sources of satisfaction for judges include autonomy and independence in decision making, exposure to intellectually stimulating and challenging work, professional growth, career security, recognition and respect, and being part of a judicial community that offers collegiality and support. These sources of satisfaction, or positive features of judicial work, offer vital mechanisms by which judges experience well-being.

### **III. The challenges of judicial work**

13. Judicial work is inherently complex and demanding, requiring judges to carry out their roles under a multitude of structural, procedural, and societal pressures. This section examines these challenges and their impact on judicial well-being. Considering factors to minimise the experienced challenges of judicial work is particularly important owing to the demanding nature of the work and the typically limited funding available to meet these demands.

#### **(i) Workload and time pressures**

14. Heavy workloads, long working hours, and time pressure are significant stressors affecting judges.<sup>12</sup> These demands can compromise the quality of judicial reasoning and decision making if judges do not have adequate time to prepare their decisions.<sup>13</sup> They are also a major issue affecting judicial independence and the right to a fair hearing within a reasonable time under Article 6 of the ECHR.<sup>14</sup> Independence may be severely

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<sup>12</sup> Global Judicial Integrity Network, UNODC. Exploring linkages between judicial well-being and judicial integrity (2022), Geneva.

<sup>13</sup> CCJE Opinion No. 11 (2008), paras 26, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Global Judicial Integrity Network, UNODC. Exploring linkages between judicial well-being and judicial integrity (2022), Geneva. See also, European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ) Survey among judges on the independence of the Judiciary (2025), page 36.

diminished if judges lack the time to conduct procedures in the manner they deem necessary for a fair trial.<sup>15</sup>

15. Undue pressure to expedite proceedings and reach production targets can influence judicial independence by creating implicit incentives to prioritise efficiency, confusing the quality of justice with an overemphasis on productivity.<sup>16</sup> Under such pressures, judges can experience excessive conflict between the quality and quantity of work.<sup>17</sup>
16. In part, these challenges are amplified by the increasing complexity of legal systems. While judicial work inherently requires judges to work in an environment of legal and interpersonal conflict, the escalation of such conflicts in modern society have stimulated a growth in the number of cases requiring judicial intervention, with an increasingly overwhelming volume of documentation to analyse and evaluate. This growing complexity combined with the proliferation of cases appearing before the courts has direct implications on the right to a fair trial within a reasonable time.

**(ii) Exposure to traumatic material**

17. Exposure to traumatic material in matters including those relating to criminal, family, immigration and asylum law can present a higher risk of judicial stress. These cases typically involve allegations of serious violent crimes, war crimes, sexual abuse and exploitation, fatal tragedies, custody disputes, parental violence, child welfare issues, human trafficking and cruelty. In such matters, where judges are routinely dealing with vulnerable individuals who have undergone enormously traumatic experiences, the vicarious trauma experienced by judges can significantly impair their well-being. The ability to manage heightened emotional demands may be exacerbated by work pressures and time constraints.<sup>18</sup>

**(iii) The use of artificial intelligence (AI) and other assistive technologies**

18. In previous Opinions, the CCJE emphasised the importance of developing and using technology in ways that maintain and enhance judicial autonomy independence, impartiality, and the rule of law.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ) Survey among judges on the independence of the judiciary (2025), page 34.

<sup>16</sup> CCJE Opinion No. 17 (2014), para 35; CCJE Opinion No. 6 (2004), para 42; European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ) Survey among judges on the independence of the judiciary (2025), page 26.

<sup>17</sup> CCJE Opinion No. 17 (2014), para 42. CEPEJ Guidelines on the evaluation of the quality of work of judges (2024), guideline 12, page 15.

<sup>18</sup> Regarding the psychosocial burden on judges caused by certain situations and its impact on impartiality, see CEPEJ document: Breaking up judges' isolation. Guidelines to improve the judge's skills and competences, strengthen knowledge sharing and collaboration, and move beyond a culture of judicial isolation (2019), paras 101, 102, 104.

<sup>19</sup> CCJE Opinion No. 26 (2023). See also the CEPEJ European Ethical Charter on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Judicial Systems and their Environment (2018) and in particular its fifth Principle 'under user control' and the CEPEJ Guidelines on Electronic Court Filing (e-filing) and Digitalisation of Courts (2021).

19. Poor judicial well-being can lead to an inappropriate over-reliance on AI and other technologies. This may be particularly pronounced when judges are under extreme stress and pressure such that their emotional and cognitive resources are depleted. In these circumstances, judges may be tempted to resort to relying on technology without applying the necessary decision-making oversight to the outputs produced by the technology used and without conducting proper checks to identify potential AI hallucinations they may contain.<sup>20</sup> Safeguarding judicial well-being is thus critical to the effective and responsible use of AI and other assistive technology.
20. If assistive technology is not implemented appropriately,<sup>21</sup> judges can experience a loss of autonomy and control and diminished confidence and self-efficacy. Judges may feel their autonomy is threatened if there is inadequate or inappropriate guidance on the proper use of technology. The widespread use of IT tools and artificial intelligence can also result in a significant increase in procedural documents and an accompanying lack of systematic effort by litigating parties to sufficiently structure, summarise or clarify facts. Inappropriate use of these technologies can thus impact the workload of judges and the quality of work produced by increasing the number of cases which judges are able to handle within a given time frame and the speed with which a case is processed.<sup>22</sup>

#### **(iv) Funding challenges**

21. Adequate funding of the judiciary<sup>23</sup> is closely linked to judicial independence, access to justice, and the right to a fair hearing within a reasonable time.<sup>24</sup> Underfunding and inadequate remuneration for judges<sup>25</sup> can lead to judicial vacancies, recruitment and retention issues, staff shortages, and case backlogs, increasing judges' workloads and elevating their levels of stress, which in turn can affect the quality of their decision-making.

#### **(v) Political interference**

22. In recent years, political interference in some countries has eroded judicial independence and impartiality, in turn undermining democracy and the rule of law.<sup>26</sup> Lack of respect for judicial independence by government, parliament, and the media is an increasing issue

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<sup>20</sup> "AI hallucinations" refer to instances where an artificial intelligence system generates information that appears plausible but is factually incorrect, fabricated, or unsupported by verifiable data.

<sup>21</sup> CCJE Opinion No. 26 (2023).

<sup>22</sup> CEPEJ Guidelines on the quality of jurisdictional debate in civil and administrative matters (2025), paras 13-14.

<sup>23</sup> On the percentage of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) allocated to justice, see CEPEJ 2024 Evaluation Report of European Judicial Systems (2022 data), Trends and Conclusions, page 2.

<sup>24</sup> CCJE Opinion No. 2 (2001), paras 2-3; see also, CCJE Opinion No. 6 (2004), para 20; CCJE Opinion No. 11 (2008), para 14; CCJE Opinion No. 18 (2015), para 51. See also the CEPEJ 2024 Evaluation Report of European Judicial Systems (2022 data), Part 1: General analyses, page 19.

<sup>25</sup> On funding of the judiciary, see CEPEJ 2024 Evaluation Report of European Judicial Systems (2022 data), Part 1: General analyses, page 19 and following. See also European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ) Survey among judges on the independence of the judiciary (2025), page 34.

<sup>26</sup> 2025 Report of the Secretary General entitled "Towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe", key findings under the section of Functioning of Democratic Institutions, page 35. See also Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, 16 July 2020, A/74/176, para 63.

across those member states.<sup>27</sup> Judges may experience pressure to deliver judgments that align with political expectations at the risk of their impartiality, or they may face accusations of judicial bias when they rule on matters considered unfavourable to political ideologies. Political interference is sometimes disguised as the introduction of reforms which do not have the legitimate aim of improving the quality of the administration of justice but on the contrary have as their goal the changing of personnel and/or lowering the guarantees of judicial independence.<sup>28</sup>

23. For several years now, there has been a growing tendency in some member states where further pressure may be exerted on judges when executive power fails to comply with or execute judgments rendered against it.
24. In states where democratic backsliding is particularly pronounced, judges may face direct threats to their independence and safety. These can include surveillance, harassment, public vilification, or even physical violence. In extreme cases, judges may be detained, removed from office, or forced into exile for decisions perceived as unfavourable to the ruling authorities. These political influences can create significant judicial stress, which can diminish a judge's ability to exercise due restraint to uphold their independence and impartiality in the face of such pressure.
25. Pressure on judges to conform to or support political agendas, [whether such pressure originates externally or internally within the judiciary itself], has harmful consequences for judicial integrity and independence, public confidence in the judiciary, and ultimately the rule of law.<sup>29</sup> These political influences can create significant judicial stress, which can diminish a judge's ability to exercise due restraint to uphold their independence and impartiality in the face of such pressure.<sup>30</sup>

**(vi) Threats to personal safety and security**

26. Article 6 of the ECHR requires court proceedings and judgments to be publicly accessible. The CCJE affirms its support for this fundamental principle which reinforces public confidence in the judicial system but can also expose judges to heightened public scrutiny and personal risk.

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<sup>27</sup> The CDCJ Report to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on Review of the Implementation of the Council of Europe Plan of Action on Strengthening Judicial Independence and Impartiality (2022), para 5. See also European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ) Survey among judges on the independence of the judiciary (2025), pages 46-48.

<sup>28</sup> "Personnel" includes judges, judicial officers and staff.

<sup>29</sup> The Venice Commission's Rule of Law Checklist (2016) provided all basic elements of judicial independence and impartiality. It is being updated in 2025, and will build upon those elements, see Introductory Memorandum: Updating the Venice Commission Rule of Law Checklist: a contribution by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. See also the CDCJ Report to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on Review of the Implementation of the Council of Europe Plan of Action on Strengthening Judicial Independence and Impartiality (2022), para 15.

<sup>30</sup> The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has developed vast case law on the independence and impartiality of judges, e.g. *Juszczyszyn v. Poland* (judgment of 30 January 2023), *Eminağaoğlu v. Turkey* (judgment of 9 March 2021), *Guðmundur Andri Ástráðsson v. Iceland* (judgment of 1 December 2020).

27. Concerns regarding threats to the personal safety and security of judges have been reported elsewhere and need to be addressed.<sup>31</sup> Hostile attacks on judges in the form of verbal abuse and online harassment, intimidation and, in some cases, physical violence, are often fuelled by political polarisation, media misinformation, and public dissatisfaction with judicial decisions, particularly in high-profile cases involving politically controversial or socially sensitive matters.
28. Threats to judges' personal safety and security pose serious implications for judicial integrity and independence.<sup>32</sup> When judges are subjected to intimidation or fear for their personal safety, and the safety of their families, there is a risk that their ability to adjudicate impartially may be compromised.<sup>33</sup>
29. The rise of social media has amplified these risks, enabling the rapid spread of aggressive rhetoric and the exposure of judges' personal information. In extreme cases, judges may feel increased pressure to explain themselves beyond the formal judgments they deliver. While issues around the actual, or anticipated, actions of the media (e.g. press, television and radio) are ongoing concerns in terms of their inappropriate impact on judicial decisions, the inappropriate impact of social media is increasing.<sup>34</sup>
30. Persistent threats and security concerns can have severe implications on the well-being of judges, leading to anxiety and feelings of isolation, particularly when judges are forced to alter their routines or restrict their public presence.

**(vii) War and global conflict**

31. Political repression and threats to personal safety and security are heightened during times of war and global conflict. These conditions often trigger increasing attacks on the rule of law as governments invoke emergency powers, restrict civil liberties, and prioritise national security over individual rights. Judges must adjudicate in an uncertain environment where legal principles may be deliberately circumvented and where their decisions may be directly challenged by political or military interests.
32. In times of war, the physical and psychological toll on judges can be profound. Aside from the actual or anticipated destruction of court buildings and legal infrastructures, significant resource loss can occur through constant exposure to high-stakes cases, threats to personal safety, and the moral weight of decisions affecting lives and liberties. These cumulative losses create a high-stress environment in which judges must continue to perform their duties under immense psychological strain. Without adequate peer and institutional support, judges can experience acute isolation, and their well-being can rapidly deteriorate.

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<sup>31</sup> European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ), Survey among judges on the independence of the judiciary (2025), page 23.

<sup>32</sup> CCJE Bureau Report on judicial independence and impartiality in the Council of Europe member states (2019 edition), paras 41-43.

<sup>33</sup> CCJE Opinion No. 21 (2018).

<sup>34</sup> European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ), Survey among judges on the independence of the judiciary (2025), page 22.



## **IV. Initiatives to protect judicial well-being**

33. The judiciary must fully engage with and support initiatives that protect, reinforce and enhance the positive features of judicial work while minimising its negative features. The stigma attached to stress and poor well-being can present a barrier to engage in conversation with peers and others and seek help and support when needed. When stress is incorrectly perceived as a weakness or a form of impairment, rather than as a normal human reaction to situational pressures, participation in any organised well-being initiative is hampered. This applies also for judges who in general are used to solving problems independently and autonomously. Incorporating international standards into judicial governance frameworks aligns with global best practices and affirms the judiciary's commitment to its independence.<sup>35</sup>

### **(A) Overarching governance and accountability**

34. At the core of any approach to judicial well-being is a robust governance framework that recognises the well-being of judges as an essential prerequisite to judicial independence, impartiality, and quality of judicial work. The judiciary must take ownership of developing and maintaining such governance. Creating internal mechanisms to improve judicial well-being will foster greater independence and resilience within the judiciary, and safeguard initiatives from political interference and abuse.

35. The judiciary should have the necessary power and influence to ensure that proper well-being governance structures are in place, with effective systems, processes, and controls, and that court resources are sufficiently allocated to designing the policies and procedures that would support the well-being of judges. Dedicated well-being committees may be established to ensure that strategies and plans to improve judicial well-being are developed and effectively implemented and co-ordinated. Ideally, well-being strategies should be standardised to apply nationally to all courts in a member state.

36. Dedicated occupational risk prevention units may also be established to organise and prioritise initiatives. The duties of such offices may include conducting periodic psychosocial risk assessments of judges' working conditions, evaluating levels of judicial stress at appropriate intervals, producing well-being policies and procedures, and designing and implementing targeted interventions to mitigate identified risks. Employing or developing partnerships with trained and qualified occupational health and well-being professionals such as organisational psychologists can assist with these tasks.

### **(B) Prevention**

37. Initiatives should focus on preventing excessive judicial stress and ill-being. Such initiatives should be organised with the active participation of judges to ensure that relevant, realistic and practical changes are made. They should raise awareness of the need to ensure that judges' working conditions, such as their workload, physical environment, and remuneration, are reasonable to support their well-being.

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<sup>35</sup> ILO Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155); ILO Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187).

**(i) Safeguarding personal safety and security**

38. In some member states, judges are exposed to targeted acts of violence, intimidation, abuse, and harassment, often driven by ill-informed media coverage and orchestrated political attacks on the judiciary. These hostile attacks seek to weaken judicial independence and impartiality and undermine public trust and confidence in the judiciary.<sup>36</sup>
39. Safety and security risks can also extend beyond physical threats to include significant vulnerabilities in cybersecurity and data protection. Judges often handle sensitive personal and case-related information, making them potential targets for cyberattacks and data breaches. Exposure of confidential data can compromise not only the integrity of judicial proceedings but also the personal safety of judges and their families.
40. It is vital that effective systems, processes, and controls are in place in all courts to evaluate and monitor threats to the personal safety and security of judges and ensure that incidents are investigated and appropriate measures are put in place depending on the nature of the threat. Such measures should be continuously reviewed to assess whether they remain appropriate or are still needed. At the very least, court buildings should be installed with adequate levels of security, which may be heightened as needs require when judges preside over particularly high-profile matters or in times of crisis.<sup>37</sup> In extreme cases, where a judge's life, safety and security are at high risk, it is the duty of the state under Articles 2 and 3 of the ECHR to investigate and prosecute such criminal acts. Further, and where necessary, the obligation to put in place additional security measures to protect judges and their families may arise.
41. While adverse public comments cannot be avoided,<sup>38</sup> the judiciary can implement measures to ensure that judges do not feel isolated and abandoned particularly when deciding on high-profile cases where they are exposed public criticism and abuse. In these situations, the unity and support of colleagues, court presidents and/or councils for the judiciary may provide critical resources to protect the well-being of judges should such personal attacks against them arise.
42. Judicial press offices may address challenges arising from media misinformation and misreporting, providing a formal channel for the public communication of judgment summaries and a process by which to respond to comments arising. The establishment of courts' spokespersons or media and communication offices has been encouraged by the CCJE and Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.<sup>39</sup> These measures can ease the pressure experienced by judges to defend themselves publicly, avoiding any impression of a lack of impartiality or independence.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> CCJE Bureau Report on judicial independence and impartiality in the Council of Europe member states (2019 edition), paras 41-43.

<sup>37</sup> CEPEJ Guidelines on the organisation and accessibility of court premises (2014), Section 4.4.1.

<sup>38</sup> Noting the fundamental right to freedom of expression, ECHR, Art. 10.

<sup>39</sup> Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers CM/Rec (2010) 12 on Judges: Independence, Efficiency and Responsibilities, para 29; see also, CCJE Opinion No. 25 (2022), para 64.

<sup>40</sup> CCJE Opinion No. 18 (2015), para 53.

**(ii) Transparency and destigmatising stress**

43. Judges must feel confident to speak up about any concerns they may have regarding their safety, security, and well-being. If judges do not feel free to discuss or raise these concerns, this can lead to increasing feelings of isolation which can compound any experienced levels of stress.
44. The need to combat stigma in the judiciary arises at the systemic level and is crucial to encourage engagement with initiatives that support judges' well-being through training and education. Efforts to implement any organised well-being initiative will be futile if judges do not participate in them. It is therefore essential to nurture a culture which normalises conversations around stress and seeking support.

**(iii) Fair and transparent human resource practices**

45. Human resources policies and practices regarding performance management, learning and development can be designed to stimulate engagement and reinforce judges' sense of judicial purpose and meaning as regards their role within the legal profession and in society. Transparent human resources policies and processes concerning judicial appointments and promotion may also help to strengthen judges' experiences of career stability and security and encourage feelings of autonomy and of being in control of their professional growth and development. Judicial well-being may further be enhanced through the availability of flexible working arrangements to make it easier for judges to combine their roles with their family responsibilities and recreational interests. Such arrangements may also reinforce feelings of work-life balance, another resource that can reduce or eliminate judges' experiences of stress.

**(iv) Fostering positive leadership**

46. Judges must have full clarity and certainty on all matters which affect them. Structured conversations between judges in leadership positions and individual judges should be scheduled periodically to discuss specific well-being challenges and document any agreed actions that will be taken to mitigate those challenges. This will not only reinforce the message that judicial well-being is an important matter and is being taken seriously by the judiciary, but it can also enhance judges' feelings of autonomy and career security.
47. Judges in leadership positions can also facilitate a sense of meaningful work among judges, a significant resource to judicial well-being which can be diminished by many of the challenges discussed in this Opinion, for example through political interference, personal attacks against judges, and prolonged exposure to difficult and traumatic cases.

**(v) Developing inclusive court cultures and social networks**

48. A positive court culture where judges experience supportive relations with their colleagues can foster a sense of belonging and a stronger sense of professional

identity.<sup>41</sup> These positive social interactions provide judges with the opportunity to assist, mentor, and support their peers, and may be particularly vital to ensure that judges feel they can seek the guidance of their colleagues when presiding over difficult or traumatic cases.

49. In many countries, the judiciary has established judicial support networks to provide a forum for judges to access peer support and build their professional connections. These networks can also encourage feelings of collegiality, collective purpose, and community, which can all serve as vital resources to safeguard and promote judicial well-being, particularly when judges are exposed to targeted and hostile attacks from the government, Parliament and (social) media. Judges' associations contribute significantly to the collegiality and community spirit among judges. Social events and other activities may also be implemented to foster inclusion and belonging.

#### **(vi) Implementing and maintaining assistive technology**

50. The CCJE reiterates the general principles relating to technology in judicial systems previously recommended to mitigate judges' workload and stress.<sup>42</sup> If assistive technology is not implemented and maintained appropriately, several issues can arise in respect to judicial well-being. Specific measures outlined here concern those principles which would especially assist in protecting and promoting the well-being of judges who use assistive technology.
51. Assistive technology should only be used to support and enhance the rule of law and should not be used to predict or replace an individual judge's decision-making.<sup>43</sup> This is not only essential to safeguard judicial independence and impartiality, but it is also necessary to ensure that judges do not experience a loss of judicial autonomy which would otherwise buffer their experiences of stress.
52. Appropriate channels of communication should be established to ensure that judges are properly informed about, and have the opportunities to participate in, the design, development, and improvement of technology.<sup>44</sup> Lack of involvement of the judiciary in digitalisation processes can negatively impact judges' experiences of working with applications, which can affect their independence.<sup>45</sup>

#### **(C) Training and education**

53. Initiatives should provide judges with timely support and training to help them carry out their roles safely, effectively, and in accordance with the rule of law. Such initiatives should aim to upskill judges, offer them confidence and security, and strengthen judges' individual capacities to manage stress.

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<sup>41</sup> See CEPEJ document: Breaking up judges' isolation. Guidelines to improve the judge's skills and competences, strengthen knowledge sharing and collaboration, and move beyond a culture of judicial isolation (2019).

<sup>42</sup> CCJE Opinion No. 26 (2023), para 92.

<sup>43</sup> CCJE Opinion No. 26 (2023), para 92, general principles (i), (ii), (iii).

<sup>44</sup> CCJE Opinion No. 26 (2023), para 92, general principle (viii).

<sup>45</sup> European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ) Survey among judges on the independence of the Judiciary (2025), page 36.

54. Many judges hold a deeply internalised sense of duty and professional responsibility, often setting extremely high standards for themselves. This can lead to self-imposed perfectionism which, while rooted in a strong commitment to justice, can intensify stress and contribute to burnout. Judges may feel they must always deliver flawless decisions, with expectations that are difficult to sustain in demanding and emotionally charged environments. These internal expectations can compound the external pressures of judicial work, particularly when resources are lacking or when systemic constraints limit their ability to meet such standards.
55. Training and education should aim to build judges' awareness and understanding of the challenges that can negatively impact their well-being and encourage help-seeking behaviours. These objectives may be achieved through formal judicial training and education programmes provided at national and European level and delivering tailored individual interventions.<sup>46</sup> Programmes should be available to all judges and offer a range of structured courses on how judges can individually protect their well-being. Cross border exchanges and training organised at European level would allow for the exchange of best practices and create and strengthen European judicial solidarity, thus reducing the feeling of loneliness and isolation of judges. They should cover general matters such as effective stress management as well as more specialised topics such as managing complex cases, responding to vicarious trauma, and dealing with communications with the media and public. While participation should be voluntary, the perceived value of these courses should be encouraged.

#### **(D) Individual support measures**

56. Judicial well-being is a shared responsibility, and individual judges must take active steps to maintain their well-being.<sup>47</sup> Support initiatives delivered to individual judges aim to supplement universally provided training programmes and include digital self-help tools, which can be easily delivered to all judges. Additional training and coaching may be provided to support judges navigate complex or sensitive cases. Measures could also include mentoring programmes and developing tailored and personalised well-being development plans. Creating structured debriefing protocols following difficult and traumatic cases to normalise conversations around challenging emotions can also help to create a safe space for judges to process and make sense of such emotions.
57. Initiatives can also include providing judges with access to a suitably trained and accredited occupational health specialist such as a clinical or occupational psychologist who can guide them on a one-to-one basis on techniques or strategies to help them better manage and cope with particular challenges they may be experiencing. Access to such services should be funded and be available, but voluntary.

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<sup>46</sup> Notably through the European Judicial Training Network (EJTN) and the Council of Europe Programme on Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP).

<sup>47</sup> Nauru Declaration on Judicial Well-being, Principle 3.

## **(E) Return to judicial duties**

58. Where judges have sustained physical or psychological illness or injury that may have resulted in a period of absence from judicial duties, measures should be taken to support their safe return to work. Such measures may include access to psychological services, reasonable accommodations, counselling and therapy. Reasonable accommodations may include giving the judge flexibility to return to office, such as part-time hours or a phased re-entry to work, and regular support meetings with a supervisor to discuss how the court can meet their needs.

## **V. Recommendations**

59. It is of utmost importance that systematic efforts are made to protect and promote judges' well-being.
60. Accordingly, the CCJE recommends that initiatives to protect, promote and support judicial well-being should respect the following principles:
- (i) Judicial well-being is essential for the delivery of justice. The judiciary must take ownership of developing and maintaining a robust governance framework that recognises the well-being of judges as an essential prerequisite to judicial independence, impartiality, quality and efficiency, and the rule of law.
  - (ii) The judiciary must fully engage with and support initiatives that protect, reinforce and enhance the positive features of judicial work (for example, purpose and meaningful work, autonomy and independence) while minimising its negative features. Initiatives should raise awareness of the need to ensure that judges' working conditions, such as their workload, physical environment, and remuneration, are reasonable to support their well-being.
  - (iii) Initiatives should focus on preventing extreme and unnecessary judicial stress and should be organised with the active participation of judges to ensure that relevant, realistic and practical changes are made.
  - (iv) It is vital that effective systems, processes, and monitoring systems are in place in all courts to evaluate and monitor threats to the physical, psychological and digital safety and security of judges. It is the duty of the state to investigate and prosecute criminal acts affecting the safety and security of judges and implement additional measures to protect judges and their families when their safety and security are at high risk.
  - (v) Efforts must seek to combat stigma in the judiciary so that judges feel confident to speak up about concerns they may have regarding their safety, security, and well-being.
  - (vi) Human resources policies must be fair and transparent to support the recruitment and retention of judicial appointments. Policies and processes must

support judges' career progression, professional security, and offer opportunities for learning and development and work-life balance.

- (vii) Positive leadership practices should be fostered and effective channels of communication established so that all judges have full clarity and certainty on all matters which affect them.
- (viii) Inclusive court cultures and social networks should be developed to support collegiality, professional identity, inclusion and belonging among judges, recognising the benefits of such positive social interactions to judicial well-being.
- (ix) Assistive technology should only be used to support and enhance the rule of law and should not be used to predict or replace an individual judge's decision-making.
- (x) Appropriate channels of communication should be established to ensure that judges are properly informed about, and have the opportunities to participate in, the design, development, and improvement of technology.
- (xi) Judges should be provided at the national and European level with timely support and should have access to training to help them carry out their roles safely and effectively. Cross border exchanges and training at European level would allow for the exchange of best practices.
- (xii) Training should cover effective stress management and specialised topics such as managing difficult cases and responding to vicarious trauma. All judges should have access to training and education programmes to support their well-being at all stages of their career.
- (xiii) Individual judges must take active steps to maintain their well-being. To help them do this, judges should have access to individual support measures to supplement universally provided training programmes. Such measures should be personalised to meet individual needs and support judges with any particular challenges they may be experiencing. Access to occupational health services should be funded and available to judges on a voluntary basis.
- (xiv) Where physical or psychological illness or injury has resulted in a period of absence from judicial duties, measures should be taken to accommodate the safe return to office, with appropriate individual support as required.