

The Changing Role of UN Treaty Bodies in Contemporary Human Rights Governance

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Abstract — The UN human rights treaty body system was built, between 1969 and 2010, around a modest function: a state submits a periodic report, a committee of independent experts questions its delegation, and the committee records its concerns as concluding observations. Half a century on, the same ten committees issue interpretive General Comments that resemble international law-making, decide individual complaints in a form close to judicial adjudication, and are being asked to extend inherited mandates to problems as different as artificial intelligence and climate displacement, all while carrying a caseload their founding design never anticipated. This paper asks how the functional role of UN treaty bodies has changed in the decade since the General Assembly's 2014 resolution on treaty body strengthening, and whether the system's operating capacity has kept pace with that change. It pursues four objectives: to map how the three core treaty body functions, periodic state reporting, individual communications, and General Comments, have each evolved since 2014; to quantify growth in caseload, backlog and reporting non-compliance across the system using verified institutional data; to assess whether the procedural reforms adopted after 2014 have narrowed or widened the gap between demand and capacity; and to illustrate the reporting-compliance problem through India's own experience before the Human Rights Committee. The paper draws on United Nations General Assembly resolutions and Secretary-General reports from 2014 to 2016, current OHCHR treaty body statistics reported through February 2026, civil society monitoring published between 2024 and 2026, and the peer-reviewed literature on treaty body legitimacy, compliance and institutional overlap, read thematically alongside this quantitative record. The findings show a system whose functions have genuinely broadened: General Comments increasingly operate as informal law-making and views on individual communications increasingly resemble quasi-judicial rulings, notwithstanding their non-binding form. The operational data point the other way. Individual communications registered across the system rose from 170 in 2012 to 307 in 2015 and 485 in 2025, while the pending caseload rose from an estimated 771 in 2015 to 1,913 by the end of 2023; only 13 percent of states parties were fully compliant with their reporting obligations in 2016, and by the end of 2023, 143 of 197 states parties collectively owed 483 overdue reports. India's own fourth periodic report to the Human Rights Committee was examined in July 2024, 27 years after its previous appearance before that Committee. The paper concludes that the 2014 reforms addressed procedure without resolving the underlying resource mismatch, so that treaty bodies are acquiring interpretive authority at precisely the moment their capacity to perform their original monitoring function is most strained.

Keywords: Treaty Body Reform; Human Rights Governance; Concluding Observations; Individual Communications; General Comments; Reporting Compliance; India

I. INTRODUCTION

The ten UN human rights treaty bodies were established in stages, from the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 1969 to the Committee on Enforced Disappearances in 2010 [1]. Each was built around broadly the same design: a body of independent experts reviews a state party's periodic report, questions its delegation in a public dialogue, and records its concerns and recommendations as concluding observations, a design whose legal character and authority remain genuinely contested in the scholarship discussed below [2]. The concern is not new: two decades earlier, an edited collection by Alston and Crawford had already described the same system as one in crisis, unable to keep pace with the reports its own growing membership generated [3]. By the early 2010s, growth in the number of reports, communications and other activity generated by this design had produced what the UN General Assembly itself treated as a system approaching its limits: individual communications registered across the system rose by 80 percent between 2012 and 2015 alone, and the backlog of communications pending review rose by 31 percent over the same three years [4].

The General Assembly responded in April 2014 with resolution 68/268 on strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system, which capped the length of state reports and treaty body documents, tied meeting time to a formula based on caseload, and required a review of the system's sustainability within six years [5]. A decade later, the system's own chairs told the General Assembly that whole sessions had been cancelled for want of funds, that treaty body chairs had joined the General Assembly's annual dialogue by video link for the first time rather than in person, and that 1,913 individual communications sat in the queue at the end of 2023 alone, a backlog that would take an estimated 6.65 years to clear at existing capacity even without a single new complaint [6].

Scholarship on UN treaty bodies has tended to pursue two questions largely apart from one another. One strand asks what kind of legal authority treaty body output actually carries: whether General Comments function as an informal source of international law despite their non-binding form [7], whether committees exercising the individual communications function should be understood as quasi-judicial bodies notwithstanding the absence of coercive enforcement [8], and how treaty bodies ought to relate to the regional human rights courts that increasingly rule on the same facts [9].

A second strand asks whether any of this output changes state behaviour, and here the literature disagrees

sharply: studies of compliance with concluding observations find effects that are real but modest and highly dependent on domestic mobilisation [10], while studies of compliance with individual decisions produce compliance estimates that move by tens of percentage points depending on how compliance itself is defined and measured [11]. A newly assembled dataset covering 1,403 adverse decisions across eight committees between 1979 and 2019 puts the range at 19 to 39 percent, a spread its own authors attribute chiefly to measurement choice rather than to any single correct answer [12], a conclusion contested on methodological grounds by other researchers working with the same underlying decisions [13].

What is largely missing from this scholarship is an account that reads these two literatures together. The treaty bodies whose interpretive reach is expanding, through General Comments, through the individual communications procedure, through informal dialogue with regional courts, are the same treaty bodies whose capacity to perform their original reporting function is visibly contracting, and the empirical record of that contraction has rarely been set alongside the doctrinal argument about growing authority [14]. Ten years after resolution 68/268, whether the reform narrowed or widened this mismatch is a checkable empirical question rather than a matter of impression, and it is the question this paper takes up.

This paper pursues four objectives. First, to map how the three core functions performed by UN treaty bodies, periodic state reporting, individual communications, and General Comments, have each changed since the 2014 strengthening process. Second, to quantify, using verified institutional data, the growth in caseload, backlog and reporting non-compliance across the system between 2012 and 2026. Third, to assess whether the procedural reforms adopted after 2014, including the simplified reporting procedure and the revised meeting-time formula, have closed or widened the gap between demand on the system and its operating capacity. Fourth, to illustrate the reporting-compliance dimension of this problem through the clearest available single case, India's engagement with the Human Rights Committee, without treating that case as representative of the system as a whole.

Three questions organise what follows. How has the functional character of UN treaty body output changed since 2014, and in what sense, if any, has that change amounted to an expansion of treaty body authority. What does the verified quantitative record show about the relationship between treaty body caseload and treaty body capacity over the same period. And what does the persistence of severe reporting delay, illustrated by India's case, suggest about the limits of procedural reform as a response to what is, at bottom, a resourcing problem.

The account that follows should be of use to three audiences. States parties negotiating the next round of treaty body reform at the General Assembly's Fifth Committee need an accurate empirical baseline rather than the anecdote that debates over funding often rely on. Scholars of international human rights law gain a bridge between the doctrinal debate over treaty body authority and a compliance literature that has generally proceeded independently of it. National human rights institutions and civil society organisations preparing

state party submissions gain a clearer sense of where, in a visibly strained system, engagement is still most likely to be heard.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The legal character of treaty body output: from monitoring to quasi-adjudication

Nothing in the founding treaties describes concluding observations, views on individual communications, or General Comments as legally binding, yet all three are routinely treated by states, courts and scholars as carrying real interpretive weight. Keller and Ulfstein's edited collection frames this as a legitimacy problem rather than a legal-authority problem: treaty bodies derive whatever authority they have from the quality of their reasoning and the consistency of their practice, not from a delegated power to bind. Takata's two-tiered bounded deliberative democracy theory answers the recurring objection that unelected experts lack standing to constrain elected governments by framing treaty organs as protectors of domestic deliberation and enforcers of internationally settled minimum standards that bound, without replacing, national decision-making. Galand examines a sharper version of the same question: when a treaty body and a regional court have ruled on the same facts, treaty bodies have no formal obligation to defer, and typically accept a regional court's factual findings while revising its reasoning on the margin of appreciation, producing informal horizontal dialogue rather than a settled hierarchy.

On individual communications specifically, Shikhelman's analysis of 76 communications and 300 remedies decided by the Human Rights Committee between 2014 and 2016 finds that a state's underlying human rights record and GDP per capita predict compliance better than its democracy level or civil society strength, a finding at odds with much of the wider compliance literature; an earlier report she cites found only 12.37 percent of Committee views fully implemented. Ullmann and von Staden's Treaty Body Views Dataset, covering 1,403 adverse decisions by eight committees between 1979 and 2019, produces compliance estimates of 19 to 39 percent depending on measurement assumptions, with remedy type and violation type predicting compliance better than country-level variables. In an earlier exchange the same authors argued that Shikhelman's cross-sectional design understates implementation timelines and may suffer selection bias in which cases the Committee follows up, showing how contested compliance measurement remains even among specialists sharing the same institutional record. Bayefsky's 2002 practitioner guide is a useful marker precisely because the modest, little-known procedure it describes looks nothing like the one straining under an almost two-thousand-case backlog two decades later.

B. General Comments and the reach of soft standard-setting

Lesch and Reiners argue that treaty bodies use General Comments as informal law-making, drawing on expert and civil-society networks to shape drafting and content, developing human rights law while formal, state-driven treaty-making has stalled. Venn tests this against climate change and identifies five obstacles to using existing machinery against it, jurisdictional exclusivity, internal

operational constraints, restrictive complaints rules, diffuse-emissions causation, and extraterritoriality limits, arguing these are real but not fixed, since state-responsibility doctrine can in principle be adapted. Vijayarasa's assessment of CEDAW's 2017 General Recommendation No. 35 is more circumspect: it advances how gender-based violence is framed but falls short on the depth needed to guide states through the problem's present-day forms, a caution worth weighing against confident claims for General Comments as a law-making tool.

C. Compliance and the limits of concluding observations

Krommendijk finds the system's defective design and limited legitimacy inhibit effectiveness in aggregate, though domestic civil-society mobilisation has made concluding observations a genuine lever in specific cases, so effectiveness depends more on the domestic conditions a recommendation lands in than on the recommendation itself. Creamer and Simmons take a more optimistic view of self-reporting, arguing across multiple treaty regimes that the process itself generates improvement through elite socialisation, bureaucratic learning, grassroots mobilisation and incremental legal development. Yoshida's Japan case study complicates both: treaty bodies are designed to persuade rather than induce compliance through social acculturation, and domestic advocacy regularly fails when officials themselves have only a thin grasp of the underlying standard. Krommendijk, Creamer and Simmons, and Yoshida study different treaties, countries and periods, so the gap between a pessimistic aggregate finding and an optimistic mechanism-based one may reflect what each study could observe as much as any real difference in the phenomenon. Abashidze and Koneva's assessment of the post-2014 reform lands closer to Krommendijk, identifying persistent funding shortfalls and unresolved disagreement over standardising working methods, and arguing for gradual refinement over structural overhaul.

D. Institutional overlap: treaty bodies, the Universal Periodic Review, and regional courts

Gaer's early assessment of the then-proposed Universal Periodic Review worried that a Council-based peer-review mechanism could duplicate or undercut treaty body scrutiny. Carraro's later empirical work is more reassuring: the Review generates political pressure through peer scrutiny and NGO involvement while treaty bodies remain better placed for accurate assessment and learning, so enforcement-style pressure explains compliance among reluctant states better than managerial or constructivist accounts. Her study of torture-related recommendations across fourteen countries, 2012-2016, finds duplication frequent but contradiction rare, though overlap lets states selectively invoke the more convenient, and formally voluntary, forum. Galand's account of dialogue with regional courts, above, extends the same point: as more disputes are litigated in parallel before regional and UN forums, the absence of a formal hierarchy is becoming structural rather than incidental.

E. Independence, resources, and the limits of top-down reform

Carraro's study of treaty body elections finds that, despite openly politicised state bargaining, committees retain adequate independent expertise because consensus-based decision-making filters out individually biased contributions, a legitimacy finding that says nothing about whether committees have the staff and time to act on that expertise. Grohmann's recent monograph turns to capacity directly, arguing treaty bodies can strengthen mandates through assertive interpretation of existing powers and coordination via the Meeting of Chairpersons rather than waiting on formal reform that, as resolution 68/268 shows, can take years to negotiate and still leave funding untouched. Abashidze and Koneva warn from the opposite direction that externally imposed standardisation risks trading away the working methods that make each committee useful for its treaty, without addressing the funding shortfall that is the more basic constraint.

India illustrates how this mismatch plays out for one long-standing state party. Kothari and Sharma find real but uneven domestic effect from India's engagement with the treaty system, concentrated where ratification and reporting coincide with an active domestic constituency able to use the resulting recommendations. Vasudevan reads India's continuing declaration against CEDAW's Article 5(a), through the 1985 Shah Bano judgment and the 1987 Roop Kanwar case, as a calculated response to a perceived domestic median voter rather than indifference to international norms. Nanda's study of India's 2017 Universal Periodic Review cycle finds India accepted only 152 of 250 recommendations, rejecting those on gender-based violence, LGBTQ+ rights and discriminatory personal law, evidence the gap is selective substantive disagreement rather than simple incapacity.

III. THE RESEARCH GAP

Four things follow. The doctrinal literature increasingly describes General Comments and individual-communications views as informal law-making with real interpretive authority. The compliance literature is divided on whether that authority changes behaviour, and the division tracks methodological choice, cross-sectional against longitudinal, aggregate against case-based, as much as any real difference in the phenomenon. The overlap literature shows the same facts now reviewable by a treaty body, the Universal Periodic Review, and a regional court with no formal rule on precedence. And the resource literature confirms this expanding authority sits on a secretariat whose funding has not grown to match. None of these strands holds the doctrinal account of expanding authority against the verified caseload and backlog data for the same period, leaving open whether growing reach and growing strain are separate stories or one story told from different vantage points. This paper addresses that gap using verified statistics from 2012 through early 2026 alongside the literature reviewed here, with India's reporting record as one closely examined illustration.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive-analytical, secondary-data study, combining institutional and doctrinal analysis of how treaty body functions have been redefined since 2014 with a quantitative description of caseload, backlog and compliance data, in the spirit of Ullmann and von Staden's argument that claims about treaty body effectiveness should rest on an assembled, checkable record rather than impression. The design suits the research questions because none asks about statistical causation; each asks what has changed, by how much, and whether verified reform measures correspond to verified outcomes.

All data are secondary. Table 2 lists the seven categories of source used and what each contributes: United Nations General Assembly resolution 68/268 for the legal design of the 2014 reform; the Secretary-General's 2016 status report, whose data cut-off is 31 December 2015, for the baseline against which the reform's effects can be measured; OHCHR meeting summaries and press releases from 2024 covering three Human Rights Committee sessions and India's fourth periodic review, for current per-session output and the India illustration; OHCHR's individual communications statistics page, current to February 2026, for the most recent system-wide registration, decision and backlog figures; the Geneva Human Rights Platform's October 2024 report for an intermediate backlog data point at the end of 2021; the International Service for Human Rights' reporting on the 36th annual meeting of treaty body chairpersons and on the wider 2025 resourcing crisis, for reporting-compliance and civil society engagement statistics; and the Treaty Body Views Dataset for an independent, academic compliance-rate estimate spanning four decades.

Committee	Instrument monitored	Established
CERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	1969
CESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	1976
CCPR (Human Rights Committee)	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	1976
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	1981
CAT	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	1987
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child	1990
CMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families	2003

SPT	Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture	2006
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	2008
CED	International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance	2010

Table 1: The ten UN human rights treaty bodies, by year established

Source: Compiled by the author from Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2026a). Establishment year is the year the monitoring committee was created following the entry into force of the relevant instrument.

A. Rising demand has outpaced capacity across the system

Figure 1 shows the individual communications backlog across all complaint-receiving committees at four points between 2015 and 2026: an estimated 771 pending at the end of 2015, rising to 1,800 by the end of 2021, 1,913 by the end of 2023, and 1,600 living registered cases as of February 2026. Figure 2 shows why the backlog grew even as some recent relief appears: communications registered across the system rose from 170 in 2012 to 307 in 2015, an 80 percent increase in three years, and reached 485 in 2025. Registrations, in other words, have kept climbing across the whole period for which verified figures exist, and the apparent easing after 2023 visible in Figure 1 should be read alongside OHCHR's own change in terminology, from cases "pending review" to "living registered cases," a change that may reflect a narrower definition rather than a genuine reduction in unresolved complaints. The Human Rights Committee's own account of its position in March 2024, 1,338 cases under active monitoring and a further 1,341 awaiting initial consideration, with only eight states parties out of many more having opted out of the simplified reporting procedure and a backlog its own vice-chair described as having grown dramatically over the preceding five years, is consistent with a system still under real and rising pressure rather than one that has quietly resolved its capacity problem. Ullmann and von Staden's dataset supplies the relevant historical baseline for interpreting this growth: across the full 1979 to 2019 period they cover, the system decided 1,403 adverse individual communications in total, a figure smaller than the number now pending at any single recent year-end, which puts the scale of the current backlog in useful perspective.

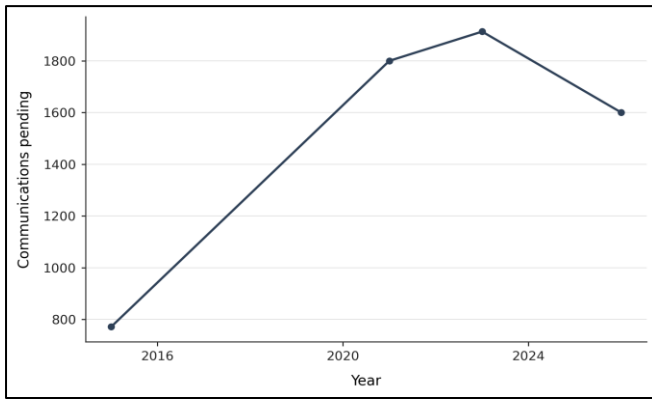


Fig. 1: Individual communications pending across all complaint-receiving treaty bodies, 2015-2026

Source: Compiled by the author from United Nations Secretary-General (2016, para 36; the 2015 value of 771 is the author's estimate, since the source reports only that the Human Rights Committee and the Committee against Torture together held 89 percent of the total), Callejon (2024), McEvoy & Kantaria (2024), and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2026b). The 2026 figure uses the Office's "living registered cases" terminology, which may not be fully equivalent to the earlier "pending review" figures; the apparent decline after 2023 should be read with that caution.

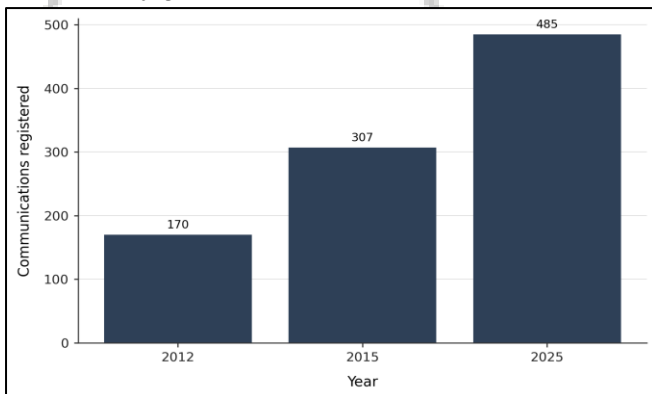


Fig. 2: Individual communications registered across all complaint-receiving treaty bodies, selected years

Source: Compiled by the author from United Nations Secretary-General (2016, para 21) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2026b).

B. Reporting compliance remains structurally weak, and India illustrates why

Compliance with the more basic reporting obligation, as distinct from the individual communications procedure, shows a similar pattern. In January 2016, only 25 of 197 states parties, 13 percent, were fully compliant with their reporting obligations across all applicable treaties, and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination alone was missing 56 percent of the reports formally due to it. By the end of 2023, 143 of 197 states parties, 72.6 percent, collectively owed 483 overdue reports between them, with a further ten reports added to the queue by May 2024, bringing the total to 493. Figure 3 breaks down where the report backlog concentrated at the earlier, 2015 data point: the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Committee on the

Elimination of Discrimination against Women together accounted for 60 percent of all pending reports, with the Committee on the Rights of the Child alone still carrying 69 pending state reports by 2024, an estimated three-year queue at that committee's own current review capacity. India's experience puts a single, well-documented state behind these aggregate figures. India's fourth periodic report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was examined by the Human Rights Committee on 16 July 2024, 27 years after India's previous dialogue with the same Committee in 1997. This is consistent with Krommendijk's and Yoshida's shared observation that non-compliance with reporting obligations is rarely a matter of a state formally rejecting the treaty body system; India remained a state party in good standing throughout the intervening 27 years, and the eventual dialogue in 2024 was substantive, covering topics from constitutional gender-quota legislation to custodial deaths and manual scavenging. The gap is nonetheless striking set against Nanda's finding that India's 2017 Universal Periodic Review engagement, though selective, was at least active and current, suggesting the reporting delay reflects a genuine capacity and prioritisation problem within India's own reporting apparatus rather than a considered decision to disengage from the treaty body system specifically, a distinction Vasudevan's median-voter account would predict is more likely where the underlying issue, such as personal-law reform, carries direct domestic political cost.

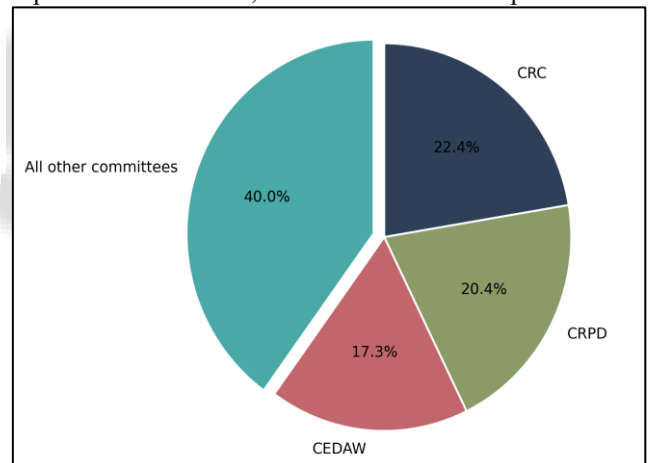


Fig. 3: Composition of the state-party report backlog by committee, 31 December 2015

Source: Compiled by the author from United Nations Secretary-General (2016, para 32-33). The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women together represented 60 percent of the total; the total (255) and the 'all other committees' residual (102) are the author's calculation from that stated percentage.

C. Ten years of reform has changed procedure more than it has changed capacity

Resolution 68/268 introduced concrete, verifiable changes: word limits of 10,700 words for treaty body documents and between 21,200 and 42,400 words for state reports depending on report type, a formula tying meeting time to a minimum of 2.5 reports reviewed per week plus 1.3 hours allocated per individual communication, and a mandated review of the

whole arrangement within six years. Figure 4 shows what those formula-driven changes did to meeting time actually allocated to four committees between 2015 and the 2018-19 projection built into the same reform: the Human Rights Committee's allocation rose from 14.7 to 19.8 weeks a year and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities from 8.5 to 10 weeks, while the Committee on the Rights of the Child's allocation fell from 15 to 12 weeks and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights from 10 to 8 weeks, a redistribution rather than a net expansion of total capacity. Total meeting time in 2015 stood at 96.6 weeks a year, 20.6 weeks above the pre-resolution baseline, but growth then slowed sharply, to a projected 93.2 weeks by 2018-19, essentially flat. Grohmann's argument that treaty bodies can strengthen themselves through interpretation and coordination rather than waiting on formal reform reads, against this record, less like an alternative to structural reform and more like a necessary response to the fact that structural reform, even when agreed, has not kept meeting time growing at anything like the rate at which caseload has grown. The most recent civil society reporting suggests the redistribution identified in Figure 4 has since become an outright contraction: OHCHR cut 18 posts in 2025, a 16 percent reduction from the previous year, civil society participation in the Committee against Torture's sessions fell from 111 organisations in 2023 to 65 in 2025, and Human Rights Committee session participation fell from 220 to 94 over the same two years, evidence that the 2014 reform's procedural gains are now being eroded by a funding crisis the reform itself did not anticipate.

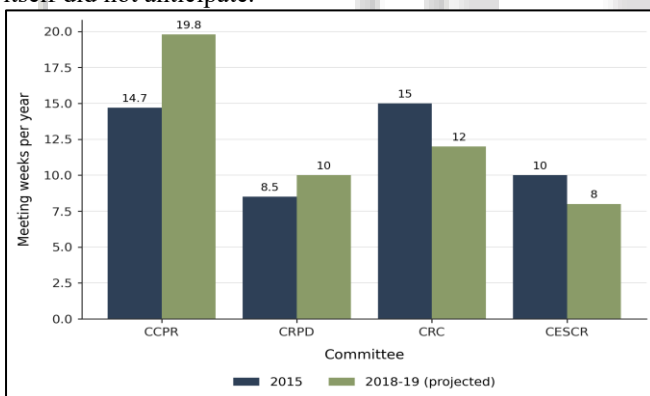


Fig. 4: Annual meeting time allocated to selected treaty bodies: 2015 actual versus 2018-19 projection

Source: Compiled by the author from United Nations Secretary-General (2016, para 40). Weeks are per calendar year.

D. The system is reaching for new authority it may not have the capacity to exercise

The clearest sign that treaty bodies are extending their functional role, rather than simply managing an existing one under strain, is their move into subject matter the founding treaties never contemplated. Venn's account of the obstacles to using human rights machinery against climate-related harm, and the Human Rights Committee's own emerging jurisprudence on the right to life in the context of climate displacement, both signal an institution attempting to extend interpretive authority into terrain that will generate exactly the kind of individual communications already straining the

system's capacity. CEDAW's General Recommendation No. 35 shows the same dynamic within an existing mandate: a genuine conceptual advance on gender-based violence that, on Vijayarasa's reading, still falls short of the depth needed to guide states through the issue's present-day forms, a shortfall that a resourcing crisis of the kind documented above can only make harder to correct in the Recommendation's next revision. Read together with the backlog and compliance figures set out above, the picture that emerges is not one of a system either straightforwardly succeeding or straightforwardly failing, but of a system whose doctrinal ambition, documented across the literature review, and whose operational capacity, documented in this section, are moving in opposite directions at the same time.

V. CONCLUSION

Two findings run through this paper. Treaty body functions have genuinely broadened since the 2014 reform process: General Comments increasingly operate as informal law-making, decisions on individual communications increasingly resemble quasi-judicial rulings, and committees are extending interpretive authority into subject matter, climate displacement most visibly, that the founding treaties never anticipated. At the same time, the verified operational record shows a system whose capacity has not grown to match: registrations rose from 170 in 2012 to 485 in 2025, the individual communications backlog reached 1,913 cases at the end of 2023, reporting compliance stood at just 13 percent of states parties in 2016 and had not structurally improved by 2023, and India's own 27-year gap between periodic reviews shows what this mismatch looks like for a single major state party. Resolution 68/268 changed procedure, word limits, a meeting-time formula, a review deadline, more than it changed the underlying resource base, and the most recent civil society reporting suggests that base is now shrinking rather than merely failing to grow.

Three suggestions follow directly from these findings. The General Assembly's Fifth Committee, which controls the treaty body system's budget, should treat the 2025 funding cuts documented here as a direct threat to the 2014 reform's own stated goals rather than as a routine, sector-neutral austerity measure, since a system already six years behind its own review deadline cannot absorb further cuts without the backlog figures in Figures 1 and 2 continuing to rise. OHCHR and the treaty body chairs should extend the simplified reporting procedure to the small number of states, including committees where uptake remains uneven, that have not yet adopted it, since the procedure is one of the few reforms shown here to reduce the burden on both sides of the reporting relationship without requiring new funding. And states parties with long reporting gaps of the kind illustrated by India's case should treat domestic reporting capacity, rather than treaty ratification itself, as the binding constraint worth addressing, since India's 27-year gap occurred without India ever formally disengaging from the Covenant or the Committee.

Future research should extend the four-point backlog series assembled here into a complete annual series across all ten committees, which would allow a proper trend estimate rather than the suggestive comparison offered in

Figures 1 and 2. It should also extend Shikhelman's and Ullmann and von Staden's compliance methods, developed for the Human Rights Committee and for civil and political rights more generally, to the newer committees, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Committee on Enforced Disappearances especially, where no comparable compliance dataset yet exists. A system built by accretion over four decades is now being asked to do more, in more registers, than it was ever resourced to do, and closing that gap, rather than continuing to reform around it, is the task the next decade of treaty body debate cannot keep deferring.

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