



Sine Qua Non

Activity Report

2018–2024



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President's Letter

Dear Members, Partners and Friends,

As I reflect on my time as President of Sine Qua Non (SQN), I am grateful to look back on the journey we've taken together and the achievements we've realized since our founding in May 2018. From the initial idea to the organisation we are today, SQN has grown and evolved with a clear purpose: to contribute meaningfully to a more just and equitable world.

Sine Qua Non was born from Marta Rovira's exile. Following the events of 2017, the Secretary General of Esquerra Republicana and former member of the Catalan Parliament made the difficult decision to flee the country and seek a place where her rights would not be at risk. From Geneva, Sine Qua Non was established with the aim of fighting against political repression and denouncing human rights violations in Catalonia to the United Nations and the network of international organisations based in Geneva.

Shortly after its creation, it became clear that the project's potential extended beyond its initial goal and beyond Catalonia. SQN's experience could be used to provide support to other movements and activists around the world, assisting them in defending their rights and freedoms. This is exactly what we have been doing - sharing our experience, network and knowledge with other civil society organisation that could benefit from it to advance their causes.

From the moment we expanded our scope, SQN's work has addressed the challenges confronting our societies by advocating for solutions to secure human rights, promote peace, and strengthen democratic values.

The 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December 2023 marked a milestone that invited us to reaffirm our commitment to fundamental rights, equality, and freedom. The principles set out in the Declaration continue to guide our work, strengthening our commitment to continue to seek accountability for human rights abuses.

Looking ahead, 2025 will mark a new phase in SQN's development, representing a pivotal shift in our project. As we move into this next stage, we are committed to expanding our reach and deepening our impact, with strong partnerships, innovative advocacy strategies, and capacity-building efforts.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to our members for their unwavering support, to our partners for their trust and efforts, and to our collaborators for their commitment and dedication. Together, we are stronger, and together, we will continue to make a lasting impact.

May this coming year bring continued success and meaningful achievements for us all.

Jordi Serra

Geneva, Novembre 2024



About Sine Qua Non

Sine Qua Non is a non-profit association dedicated to advancing human rights, peace, and democracy worldwide.

Founded in Geneva in 2018, SQN promotes social transformation by sharing expertise, advocating for fundamental rights, and fostering democratic values.

Our aim is to drive accountability and ensure compliance with human rights standards by reporting violations to international bodies and amplifying the voices of those affected. We believe that lasting change is achieved through collaboration, and we work alongside other NGOs and human rights defenders to champion a world where human rights, peace, and democracy are accessible to all.

Together, we strive to create a more just and peaceful society, one step at a time.

Human rights are the sine qua non-condition and the basis for a free and just life. SQN is an innovative, project-oriented collaborative platform to promote and secure human rights, peace, and democracy. We continue to grow daily as we consolidate the experience acquired since its inception.

Vision, Mission and Values

VISION

We believe in a free, critical, gender-sensitive, and committed citizenship, living in a peaceful and sustainable world where human rights are accessible and secured to all.

MISSION

SQN responds to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, building capacities in human rights for “people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership” through the three pillars of its mission:

- We empower civil society organisations and other stakeholders to expand their work globally contributing to multilateral and international organisations’ systems.
- We raise awareness of human rights violations and seek justice through international litigation and advocacy work.
- We build a network of experts and share knowledge on conflict transformation, negotiation, and peacebuilding processes

VALUES

We are guided by the principles of equality, peace, integrity, accuracy, and transparency.



People

SQN Committee

The members of the Committee are elected by the General Assembly. The Committee has the most extensive powers to manage current affairs.

- **Jordi Serra** – President
- **Maria Balasch** – Secretary
- **Noemi Kohler** – Treasurer

Human Rights Team

We are fortunate to have highly motivated individuals with extensive academic training and professional experience, forming a comprehensive network of knowledge dedicated to advocating for the protection of human rights.

- **Gonzalo Bonnín** – Law
- **Ma. Àngels Espachs** – Law
- **Marta Lucas** – Communications
- **Ariadna Roig** – Psychology and Innovation
- **Marta Rovira** – Law and Political Science
- **Clara Serra** – Law
- **Teresa Vallverdú** – Narratives and Communication

A Partnership-Based Approach

At Sine Qua Non, we work closely with civil society organisations and other stakeholders who share our vision and goals.

Our partnerships are built on a commitment to advancing human rights through international or multi-level strategies. We collaborate with organisations that seek support in developing litigation or advocacy strategies, need assistance in reporting rights violations, face reprisals for defending human rights, are ready to amplify their cause, or wish to exchange best practices in conflict transformation.

Through our extensive network, we facilitate a dynamic exchange of experiences and proven practices, enabling effective knowledge transfer to civil society organisations. Each partnership is tailored to meet the unique needs and objectives of our collaborators, ensuring that our support is strategic, practical, and impactful.

Areas of Work

Our work spans three main project areas: civil society empowerment, international strategic litigation and conflict transformation, negotiation processes and peacebuilding. Within each of these areas, we work to make human rights violations visible and to advance their protection and compliance.



Empowerment of Civil Society

We support stakeholders that want to take on global challenges and make contributions to the United Nations system, or to other international organisations for the defence of human rights and democracy.

We closely follow the work of international organisations such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe and detect participation opportunities for our partners. We also identify relevant reports, resolutions or decisions favourable to the defence of human rights that affect the causes that we or our stakeholders defend.



International Strategic Litigation

We develop international litigation strategies to denounce human rights violations and to guarantee their respect. Through international litigation, we seek that those affected by human rights violations have effective responses to their claims.



Conflict Transformation, Negotiation and Peace-Building Processes

We focus part of our resources on building a network and securing knowledge in the field of conflict resolution and negotiation. We share our experience on conflict transformation to promote well-being and peaceful societies.

Main Results




Empowerment of Civil Society

Our primary objective is to empower civil society by facilitating engagement with international human rights mechanisms. To achieve this, we offer an array of resources that help civil society navigate and effectively engage with these mechanisms, ensuring they can leverage the opportunities available to advance human rights causes.


A. PRACTICAL GUIDES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT WITH INTERNATIONAL BODIES

To support civil society in navigating the complexities of international organisations and human rights frameworks, we have developed comprehensive guides tailored to various needs:


1. Guide for Women Defenders Facing Reprisals in UN Engagements

This step-by-step guide offers women human rights defenders critical support and resources to navigate and respond to reprisals faced when engaging or cooperating with United Nations bodies. It aims to empower defenders by providing practical tools for safety and advocacy. [Access the guide](#) 

2. Guide for Civil Society Organizations' Engagement with the Council of Europe

This document guides NGOs in engaging with mechanisms within the Council of Europe, an organisation committed to upholding human rights, democracy, and the rule of law across Europe. By participating, NGOs strengthen democratic frameworks by encouraging public engagement, oversight, and accountability. [Download the guide](#) 

3. Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Toolkit for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

This toolkit demystifies the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, an essential mechanism of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), which reviews human rights practices of all member states. Designed as a practical tool for CSOs, it explains how they can contribute to each phase of the UPR process. Additionally, it includes guidelines for submitting written reports, ensuring CSOs can make impactful contributions. [Explore the UPR Toolkit](#) 

GUIDE FOR WOMEN DEFENDERS

Facing reprisals for attempting to or cooperating with a United Nations agency

WHO ARE WOMEN HUMAN RIGHT DEFENDERS (WHRD)?

WHRD are “all women and girls working on any human rights issue, and people of all genders who work to promote women’s rights related to gender equality”. The United Nations has a specific mandate* that aims to report and address any retaliation faced by civil society sectors when attempting to engage with the UN.



3 PRIMARY STEPS TO REPORT INSTANCES OF INTIMIDATION OR RETALIATION AND PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND THEIR WORK.

1. DETECT AND UNDERSTAND A REPRISAL

WHO AND WHY PERPETRATES REPRISALS?

State or non-State actors whose goal is to dissuade from further participation with the UN

WHO CAN BE AFFECTED?

“Women defenders”, their families, lawyers, or close ones

WHEN DO REPRISALS TAKE PLACE?

Reprisals can occur at any point of contact between UN actors and victims or human rights defenders, including online.

WHO PERPETRATES REPRISALS AND WHY DO THEY DO IT?

Reprisals can occur at any point of contact between UN actors and victims or human rights defenders, including online.

WHAT KINDS OF CONSEQUENCES CAN A HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER (WHRD) ENCOUNTER?

These may include travel bans, being denied access to funding or UN buildings, online harassment and defamation, judicial harassment, espionage threats, arbitrary detention, torture, and more.

WHY IS IT CRUCIAL TO ADDRESS REPRISALS?

Reprisals are an effort to silence, restrict, or suppress the progress of a particular human right. They may also be in collusion with other international and codified human rights, either directly or indirectly.



2. ADDRESS SECURITY CONCERNS



Consider a risk analysis before interacting with a UN agency and before deciding to report/denounce reprisals.

Assess, if faced with a security concern, whether continuing to communicate with the agency or denouncing the situation may serve a protective function or expose you to further threat or risk

Analyse, among others, who will attend the event, political context of the region, potential opponents or allies of the right supported, existing similar reprisals to the same group, etc.

Mitigate the risks of cooperation. I.e., non-disclosure of identity or other personal features that may further expose the “women defender” to further harm).

3. REPORT THE SITUATION

Notify the concerned agency by email
For instance, Special Procedures: urgent-action@ohchr.org; Human Rights Council Secretariat: hrcngo@ohchr.org; Universal Periodic Review: uprreprisals@ohchr.org.

Notify the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights at email reprisals@ohchr.org
Provide a detailed description of how the reported situation is connected to the UN agency’s cooperation activities,

including the who, what, when, and how. Indicate if the victim’s information should be kept confidential or not.

Consider whether reporting a situation of reprisals to Human Rights mechanisms such as Treaty Bodies (Complaints Procedure) or special procedures.

For more information visit our website: <https://sqn-org.ch/resources/>



MORE INFORMATION HERE:

<https://sqn-org.ch/resources/>

 **SQN** Sine Qua Non
Building Capacities
for Peace & Human Rights

B. ENGAGEMENT WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

ECOSOC CONSULTATIVE STATUS SUPPORT

Over seven years, we have actively supported civil society organisations seeking consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Council of Europe. Achieving consultative status is vital for NGOs aiming to formally engage with the UN system, allowing them direct access to UN meetings, participation in policy discussions, and opportunities to organize side-events.

1. Benefits of ECOSOC Consultative Status

NGOs granted consultative status can obtain UN grounds passes, access conference rooms, and directly interact with diplomats and UN staff, providing them a platform to contribute formally in UN sessions and discussions.

2. Navigating the Application Process

The consultative status application process is lengthy and complex. Sine Qua Non provides tailored guidance, helping CSOs navigate each step. This includes liaising with relevant representatives and attending Committee on NGOs sessions in New York to advocate on behalf of applicant organisations. So far, SQN has assisted nine organisations through the application process.



SQN following the regular session of the NGO Committee that took place from 23 January to 1 February, 2023, in New York

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The Human Rights Council (HRC) is the United Nations' primary intergovernmental body dedicated to human rights issues. Its mission is to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide. Comprising 47 member states, the Council provides a multilateral forum for addressing human rights violations in various countries, responding to urgent human rights situations, and making recommendations to ensure these rights are upheld on the ground.

Room XX of the Palais des Nations in Geneva during a session



1. Monitoring of the Sessions and Decisions

As part of its work, the Council adopts resolutions and decisions and serves as an international forum for dialogue on human rights issues, engaging UN officials, mandated experts, states, civil society, and other stakeholders. It holds at least three regular sessions per year, totaling a minimum of ten weeks. These sessions are scheduled between February and March, June and July, and September and October, with each session lasting three to five weeks, depending on the agenda.

At Sine Qua Non, we closely monitor these sessions, where the Council adopts reports with recommendations, resolutions, and decisions on key issues that shape human rights globally. We keep stakeholders informed of significant developments in areas relevant to their interests and work, ensuring they stay updated on impactful progress and emerging issues.

1.1 Side-Events and Interventions

During these sessions, NGOs with ECOSOC status can apply to organize side events and deliver oral interventions. Such interactions are crucial for bringing relevant information to the Council, with the potential to shape its decision-making processes.

Sine Qua Non offers technical support to NGOs throughout this process, ensuring they can effectively contribute and amplify their impact.







Side event organized by a Partner organisation at the 41st session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, focused on the political participation of minority women

1.2 Special Procedures Engagement

The Special Procedures are a critical HRC mechanism comprising independent experts on thematic and country-specific human rights issues. SQN supports CSOs in providing relevant information to Special Rapporteurs, including contributing to thematic reports.

SQN has enabled CSOs to participate in numerous calls for inputs, amplifying their capacity to influence the development of human rights reports and recommendations.

Read here the [written submission sent by Fundació Josep Irla](#) , a partner organisation, providing insight for the [Project of joint statement on the notion of short-term enforced disappearance](#)  that involved multiple UN mechanisms.

Access a [written submission](#)  to a call for input for the thematic report to the 78th session of the UN General Assembly on «[The rights to water and sanitation as a tool for peace, prevention and cooperation](#)»  issued by the Special Rapporteur on the rights to water and sanitation.



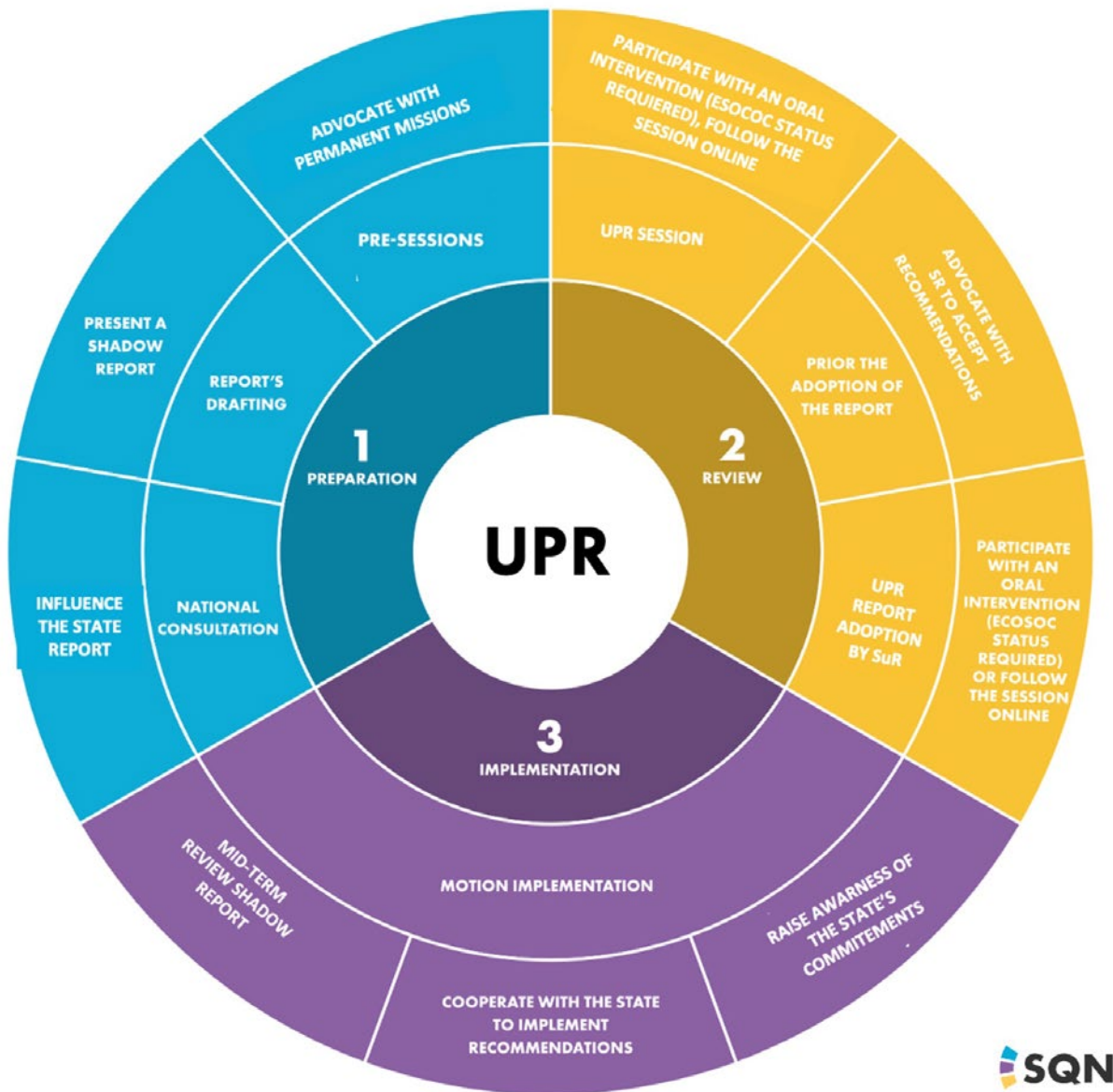
Side-event of a partner organisation on Opportunities and Limits of a New Treaty on Minority Rights. Organised in November 2023 to reflect on the UN minority rights framework from the perspective of stateless nations



Meeting between a partner organisation and the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Fernand de Varennes

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a peer review process where all UN member states' human rights practices are periodically examined. SQN actively promotes CSO involvement in the UPR by assisting with shadow report submissions and organizing workshops to prepare organisations for effective participation.



The full cycle of the UPR process and advocacy opportunities for civil society

Sine Qua Non promoted civil society participation in the 3rd cycle of the UPR in 2019, raising awareness and building capacity to mobilize NGO participation in the mechanism.

Among other actions, we provided technical support for the preparation and submission of shadow reports and contributed to organizing a press conference following a pre-session to highlight civil society efforts and the main human rights deficits raised in the procedure.

1. UPR Toolkit and training sessions


SQN organized training sessions and provided technical support to over 30 organisations during the third and fourth UPR cycles.

As previously mentioned, our UPR Toolkit is available to further equip CSOs with essential tools for meaningful UPR participation.

[Access the UPR Toolkit](#) 



A press conference was organized at the Club Suisse de la Presse in Geneva by civil society organisations following a pre-session of the 3rd cycle of the UPR.

You can access the [recording here](#) 

2. SQN Submissions


We have also contributed to the UPR process with a mid-term review report for the third cycle and submitted three shadow reports for the fourth cycle.

2.1 UPR's 3rd Cycle – Mid-Term Review

Sine Qua Non, together with Amnistia i Llibertat, Associació Catalana de Professionals, Centre Internacional Escarré per les Minories Ètniques i Nacionals (CIEMEN), Fundació Josep Irla, Grup de Periodistes Ramon Barnils, Language Rights and Plataforma per la Llengua, presented a mid-term report that followed up the implementation of a set of recommendations that were made to the Spanish state within the 3rd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review.



UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR)
SPAIN 2025

- INFORMATIVE SESSIONS**
We hold periodic open sessions to explain the technical details of the reports 
- REPORT PREPARATION**
We guide you in the preparation of reports to achieve maximum impact. 
- REPORT IMPACT MONITORING**
We monitor the status of the submitted report throughout the cycle. 


SQN UPR support for civil society organisations

The report concludes that the Spanish state does not sufficiently protect civil and political rights and, by limiting citizens' rights to freedom of public participation, limits democracy. In this regard, it requested the state to work to implement the pending recommendations in the two and a half years remaining before the new cycle of the United Nations Universal Periodic Review, and to do so in collaboration with civil society organisations.


[Access the mid-term review report](#) 

2.2 UPR's 4th Cycle – Alternatives Reports Submitted


a. Civil and political rights

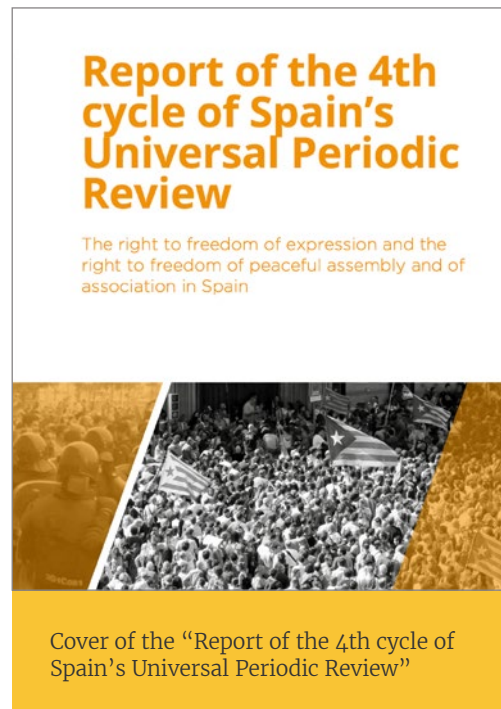
SQN submitted a report focusing on civil and political rights in Spain, co-signed by 10 NGOs. The document examines Spain's compliance with international human rights standards and makes recommendations to protect the right to freedom of expression, and the right to peaceful assembly and association, including improving transparency, police conduct and current legislation. You can [read the full report here](#). 

b. Catalan in schools

SQN also contributed to a specialised report on the situation of the Catalan language in schools. The report highlights how the Catalan language has been targeted by political prosecutions, highlighting the risks of entrusting language policy decisions to the judiciary. It underlines the importance of strengthening language policies to protect and promote Catalan in education and public life, and to ensure that linguistic rights are respected and preserved. For more details, [see the report here](#). 

c. The political conflict between Catalonia and Spain

Finally, SQN, together with Amnistia i Llibertat, prepared a contribution analysing the political conflict in Catalonia and its consequences in terms of rights violations. The report urges Spain to respect human rights and encourages the Spanish government to advance the conflict resolution process, starting by ensuring the full application of the Amnesty Law. The [full document can be found here](#). 



C. PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL FORUMS

SQN encourages and facilitates civil society participation in various international human rights forums. These events provide a unique platform for CSOs to voice concerns, engage with policymakers, and advocate for human rights.



SQN at the Oslo Freedom Forum in May 2022

Some of the international fora that SQN and our partners have been actively following are:

- UN Forum on Democracy, Human Rights and Rule of Law
- UN Social Forum
- UN Forum on Minority Issues
- The State of the Union
- Global Democracy Coalition Regional Fora
- Oslo Freedom Forum
- Geneva Summit
- Geneva Peace Week

We have supported partner organisations who have actively participated in numerous international forums.



UN Forum on democracy, human rights and rule of law that took place the 24 - 25 November 2022 in the Room XIX of the Palais des Nations, Geneva. The theme addressed was "Strengthening Democracies To Build Back Better: Challenges And Opportunities"



SQN intervening at the 16th Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva in 2023. The theme addressed was "Minorities and Cohesive Societies: Equality, Social Inclusion, and Socio-Economic Participation"

Transforming Tourism

Regional perspectives on a global phenomenon

Executive summary and background

"Transforming Tourism: Regional perspectives on a global phenomenon" is a collective work published by Coppieters Foundation in 2019. It summarises the main conclusions and panels from an international workshop to analyse sustainable and regional development in societies heavily dependent on tourism. In the workshop we looked at diverse and multilingual societies with devolved powers.

We observe that, very often, there is a struggle to balance conflicting imperatives of preservation of the communities' identity and economic growth. Local communities face strong challenges to develop more sustainable growth strategies. This shows the need to address the impact of tourism, especially on indigenous, autochthonous and minority groups.

HERE ARE THE MAIN TOPICS OF ANALYSIS:

Degrowth in Tourism: The Need to Rightsize or Downscale Tourism Activity

Sustainable Tourism and regional development requires degrowth in demand. To achieve it we need to introduce changes in consumer behaviour; put the focus on the value of local economies and communities; set limits to growth in tourism; and increase awareness on the negative impact of mass tourism.

Collaborative Tourism Platforms

Collaborative Economy ecosystems can potentially offer new alternatives to traditional production and consumption models, as well as more equitable forms of democratic platform governance and cooperativism. Sharing economy, within a wider collaborative economy, has the potential to transform Tourism.

Event Based Tourism and Social Responsibility: Tensions between Global and Local

Global events often jeopardize the sustainable development of local societies (Global vs Local). This is especially the case in diverse societies where minority groups and unrecognized nations have difficulties to be acknowledged. Global events are in nature temporally and geographically space bounded, hence events can be considered reflections or responses to societal norms and standards.



Accessible Tourism: Wheels of all Sizes

Leisure and contact with nature have proven to increase quality of life. Sustainable development, also in tourism-based economies, needs to guarantee access for all: children, the elderly, persons with special needs and people in situations of vulnerability.

Seeing Tourism Transformations in Europe through Algorithmic, Techno-Political, and City-Regional Lenses

Technological change will ultimately provide the means to achieve data devolution, technological sovereignty, and citizens empowerment in European cities and regions. Such a change would align a citizen-to-citizen tourism interactions between visitors and residents and would take communities back to the basics, where ultimately citizens decide - without any undesirable, external, disruptive algorithmic influence - their own choice, and thus, their own future.

A Review of the Causes and Consequences of Tourism Saturation

Tourism is, as a matter of fact, an effective way to achieve economic growth and development if it is not over exploited. Mass tourism has a negative impact that outweighs the economic benefits for receiving societies. To acknowledge the risk of tourism saturation and thus, to reflect afterwards on restrictions is the first step to preserve the positive impact of tourism in the economy and to reduce the social, economic and environmental impairment it generates.

The COVID-19 crisis could be an opportunity to transform the impact of tourism on societies, nature, climate, and the economy.

It brings us the chance to build more resilient communities and businesses through innovation, digitalization, sustainability, and partnerships.

Key conclusions

- Degrowth-inspired tourism agendas might help to overturn the current trends: Mass Tourism and over exploited local economies.
- A redefinition of Tourism is needed. Tourism needs to be considered within its appropriate context of global mobility, human wellbeing and a sustainable future.
- Education and awareness-raising are needed to move towards a shift to tourism values disconnected from excessive commodification and exploitation.
- Tourism must trigger positive interaction and connection with local cultures and societies. There is also a need to warn about corporations from over exploiting resources hence, hampering sustainable development for local economies.
- Decision makers would benefit from engaging suppliers and the general tourism value chain actors at an early stage to identify innovative solutions and business models for an increased offer of more sustainable products and services.
- Measuring and reporting on the benefits and impacts of sustainable consumption and production should not be neglected when defining public policies.
- The concepts of reduction, reuse and recycling in tourism are still to be more strongly embedded in local tourism management and carrying capacity theories.



Want to know more? Download the study here!



www.ideasforeurope.eu/activity/publication/transforming-tourism/

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Poster on Transforming Tourism – Regional perspectives on a global phenomenon presented at the 8th World Sustainability Forum in 2020 by a partner organisation.

For a comprehensive list of resources, guides, and reports, please visit our [resources page](#).

D. ENGAGEMENT WITH REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS

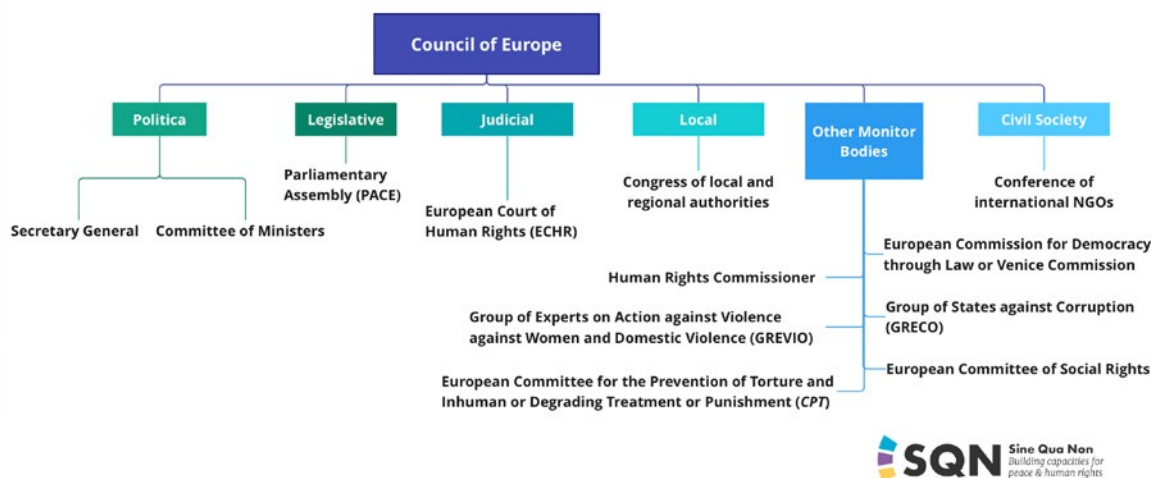
The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is an international organisation whose aim is to protect human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in Europe. 46 European countries are members of the Council of Europe, united in their commitment to promote harmony, cooperation, good governance, and human rights.

NGOs play a key role in a pluralistic democracy by promoting public engagement, supporting democratic values, bringing technical expertise based on bottom-up knowledge, and seeking accountability when abuses are made.

Sine Qua Non follow closely the resolutions adopted by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly as well as recommendations and decisions made by its other human rights mechanism such as the Human Rights Commissioner, the European Court of Human Rights or the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture.

CoE – Structure



Council of Europe's Bodies

As we do at the UN, we provide technical support to civil society organisations and human rights defenders that wish to engage with the CoE in any capacity.

See [PACE's Resolution 2321 \(2021\)](#) on Should politicians be prosecuted for statements made in the exercise of their mandate? and its [follow up report \(2022\)](#); and the [Report \(Doc 15825, 2023\)](#) of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights on Pegasus and similar spyware and secret state surveillance.

The European Union

Although the European Union has smaller scope and a more focused approach on economic and social issues, we also pay close attention to its decisions. In this regard, we monitor the reports adopted by the European Parliament and keep relevant stakeholders informed as part of our awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns, given the EU's significant influence.

We follow the European Commission's annual Rule of Law Report with particular interest, encouraging and supporting our partners who contribute information to it. Civil society plays an essential role in providing first-hand information and in counterbalancing the narratives presented by states.

E. TAILORED TRAINING PROGRAMS AND WORKSHOPS

Sine Qua Non dedicates a significant part of its work to empowering civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and activists worldwide. Through tailored training programs and workshops, we provide the skills and resources necessary for effective engagement with international bodies, such as the United Nations (UN) and the Council of Europe (CoE). Our support includes facilitating access to international systems, offering technical and legal assistance, and sharing best practices in advocacy and strategic litigation.

To this end, we design training programs focused on our organisation's three main areas of expertise: human rights, democracy, and peace. These programs introduce participants to key international and

regional institutions based in Europe and provide guidance on utilizing these institutions to promote human rights, strengthen democracy, and foster peace. Our network of experts helps participants navigate engagement with the EU, the Council of Europe, and the UN.

These collaborative efforts aim to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to engage meaningfully with international bodies and to further their causes on a global scale.

In this sense, in 2024, we partnered to organize a training trip across Europe specifically designed for activists advocating for human rights. This program introduced participants to key international and regional institutions and highlighted opportunities for strategic litigation and advocacy. The trip began in Brussels, where participants were introduced to the European Union, continued in Strasbourg with a visit to the Council of Europe, and concluded in Geneva, a leading center of global governance.



Visit to the European Parliament in Brussels during a pilot trip of a training program in human rights in Europe

F. WE ACT AS GLOBAL OFFICE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL NGOS

As part of our services, Sine Qua Non serves as a Global Office for our stakeholders, enhancing their international human rights strategy and expanding their impact. We facilitate their access to global bodies, identify participation opportunities in international forums, and offer comprehensive technical and legal support to help them engage effectively. Additionally, we share best practices on advocacy and strategic litigation to strengthen their initiatives.

Based in Geneva, Sine Qua Non has direct access to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), enabling us to closely monitor UN activities and respond promptly to relevant developments.

Our extensive network also keeps us informed and engaged with the work of the Council of Europe and the European Union, ensuring our partners stay connected to key decisions and actions across these international organisations.

In this role, we support our partners in their global awareness-raising efforts, providing them with our full range of expertise to amplify their voices on the international stage.



Sine Qua Non reporting to members of a partner organisation on the work carried out as its Global Office in 2023



International Strategic Litigation

International strategic litigation is a powerful tool in the fight for human rights, as it allows for targeted legal action to address and deter systemic human rights abuses. By bringing cases to international forums, strategic litigation seeks not only justice for individual victims but also broader accountability and policy change. This approach can raise public awareness, shape judicial and legislative practices, and strengthen the enforcement of human rights standards worldwide.

SCOPE OF OUR WORK

At Sine Qua Non, our strategic litigation efforts have been primarily focused on Europe, where we are working to expose and seek accountability for human rights violations.

We collaborate closely with victims and their legal teams to build strong cases, utilizing our advocacy tools and resources to highlight these issues on international platforms. Through our extensive network, we bring together supporters from civil society, policymakers, and legal experts to build solidarity and maximize impact.

KEY FOCUS AREAS

In recent years, our strategic litigation work has addressed several critical areas:

1. Abusive and Illegal Use of Spyware

We have denounced the abusive use of spyware to surveil political dissidents, social activists, and ordinary citizens. Such practices violate privacy and undermine democracy by creating a climate of fear. Our efforts include supporting victims in filing complaints, advocating through international channels, and mobilizing public opinion to call for state accountability.

In coordination with other Catalan actors, Sine Qua Non sent information on behalf of victims from Esquerra Republicana to the UN denouncing the use of Pegasus spyware. The targets included lawyers, journalists, activists and publicly elected figures, such as the President of the Catalan government or the Secretary General of the political party.

In the letter sent to Spain on 24 October 2022, the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; and the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association expressed their concerns about the extensive and well-coordinated espionage activities targeting Catalan activists and prominent public figures, interfering with their rights to freely hold and express their views, exchange and disseminate information and ideas, assemble peacefully and participate in associations, maintain a private life and the privacy of their correspondence, and to be equal before the law and entitled to equal protection under the law without any discrimination.

“All of the above gives the impression of a consistent pattern and a well-planned program targeting activists belonging to the Catalan minority and their supporters in relation to their views, opinions, and activities. This factor adds to the seriousness of the allegations and our concerns.”

They also alerted of the risk of self-censorship and the chilling effect these abusive practices have on the rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

Read the [UN Communication AL ESP 8/2022](#). 

2. Repression of Political Actors

SQN has supported cases addressing state repression of political actors, including violations of the rights to freedom of assembly, association, opinion, and expression. We have worked with affected parties to raise these issues in international bodies, demonstrating how such repression curtails fundamental democratic freedoms and harms civic and political participation.

We submitted information on behalf of Esquerra Republicana to denounce the political persecution its members and families had suffered for being part of the Catalan pro-independence movement.

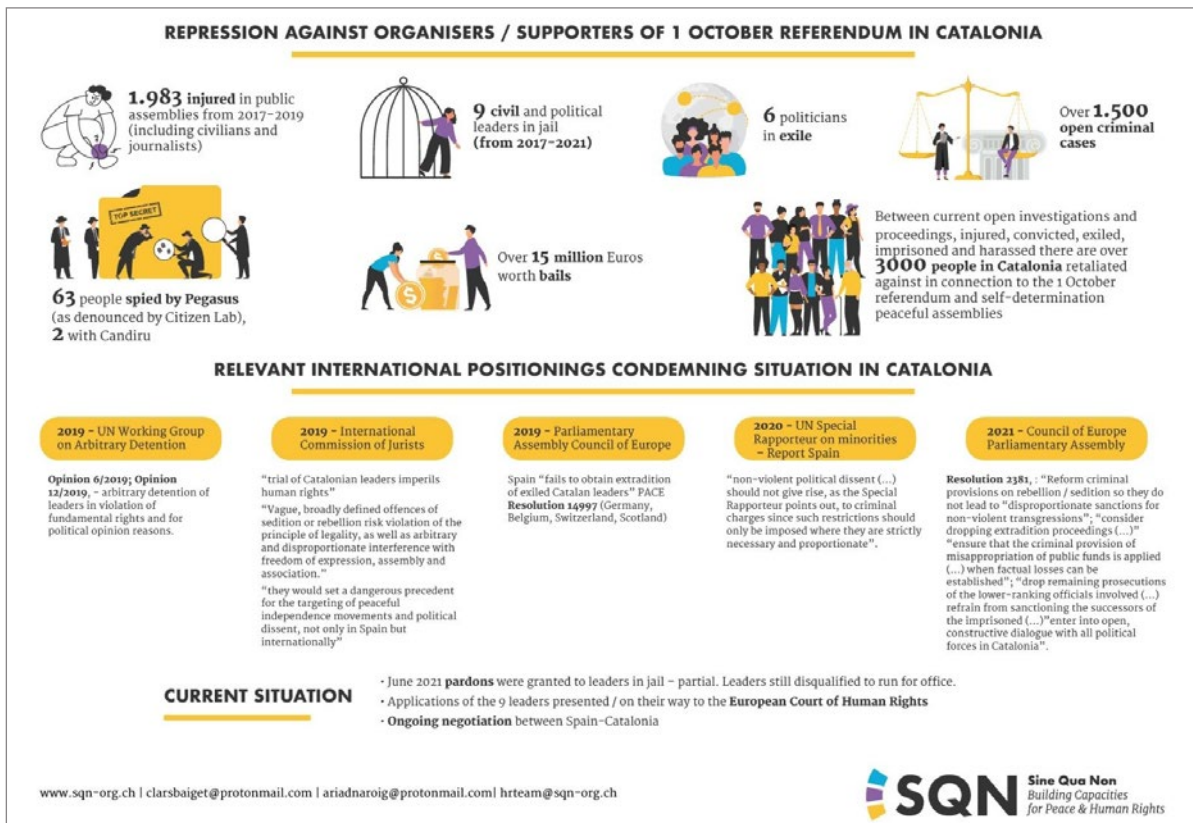
The mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers; and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism addressed a letter to the Spanish authorities on February 8, 2023, expressing their concerns about the reported violations.

In particular, the independent experts stressed the State’s obligations to ensure all individuals can peacefully express their opinions without fear and exercise their rights of freedom of association and assembly, even when such opinions or beliefs are dissident.

“We are concerned that these actions of criminalizing individuals exercising their civil and political rights may become a systematic pattern, as, if confirmed, such allegations could constitute a serious violation of the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly.”

In their communication, the experts also urged the Spanish government to take all necessary measures to protect the rights and freedoms of the victims, to investigate, prosecute and impose appropriate sanctions on anyone responsible for the alleged violations, and to implement effective measures to prevent repetition of such events.

Read the [UN Communication AL ESP 11/2022](#). 



SQN infographic to denounce political repression in Catalonia in 2022.

3. Attacks on Minority Language Rights in Education

We have also tackled abuses aimed at dismantling protections for minority languages in public education. This work is essential to preserving cultural diversity and preventing discrimination against minority communities. We have filed communications and collaborated with advocacy networks to protect these rights on international platforms.

Sine Qua Non, along Plataforma per la Llengua, el Sindicat d'Estudiants dels Països Catalans (SEPC), Fundació Escola Valenciana, Language Rights, USTEC-STEs and La Intersindical, informed the UN rapporteur on minority issues at the time, Fernand de Varennes, on the campaign of the Spanish courts to put an end to linguistic immersion and impose the vehicularity of Spanish in the educational system of Catalonia.

The rapporteur in the letter he addressed to the Spanish authorities on October 13, 2023, expressed his concern that the decisions of the High Court of Justice of Catalonia against the Catalan immersion model, which has been considered highly successful by UNESCO and other international commentators, result in reduced exposure to the Catalan language.

"Reducing the use of the Catalan language in the successful immersion program in Catalonia, it is alleged, would risk children and students from Spanish-speaking backgrounds not learning Catalan properly."

He also urged Spain to explain how the issues that have been brought to his attention are compatible with their international obligations and what measures they plan to take to correct inconsistencies with international human rights standards.

[Read the UN Communication](#) 



Press conference organised to inform of the content of the UN communication on the limitations imposed on the Immersion Model for teaching in the Catalan language

SQN has also provided assistance to civil society actors who have faced state reprisals after engaging with the UN, as well as in cases related to the misuse of counter-terrorism legislation against civil, social, and political actors. We have also supported strategic litigation aimed at addressing economic repression tactics used to suppress social movements, advocating for the decriminalization of abortion, and other human rights causes.

RAISING AWARENESS AND BUILDING NETWORKS

As part of its supporting litigation activity, SQN actively raises awareness of human rights abuses within other regional bodies, such as the Council of Europe and the European Union. By collaborating with our network of civil society organisations, policymakers, and other influential actors, we work to amplify these issues and advocate for systemic change. Our strategic approach seeks that human rights abuses are exposed at multiple levels, generating pressure for accountability and political reforms.



SIDE EVENT
Monday, 23th January
Palais de l'Europe, 13h
Hosted by Laura Castel

Political Rights in full Democracies: The Catalan Case

Carme Forcadell, former President of the Catalan Parliament and political prisoner
Raül Romeva, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Catalonia and political prisoner
Andreu Van den Eynde, criminal lawyer
Bill Bowring, Prof. of Human Rights and International Law at University of London

Lunch and drinks available



Side event organised in 2022 at the Palais de l'Europe of the Council of Europe to denounce political repression



In this sense, we have assisted in the identification of amicus curiae for cases before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). These consists of expert briefs, submitted by individuals or organisations who are not parties to a case but have expertise on the cause, providing the Court with additional perspectives, legal arguments, or relevant research to consider when making its decisions. These Amicus are especially valuable in complex cases with wide implications, as they help to bring light to the potential human rights impact of the Court's judgment.

Through our strategic litigation efforts and thanks to a collaborative network, SQN strives to uphold and advance human rights by ensuring that injustices are brought to the attention of influential global actors and that those affected are empowered to pursue justice.

One example of such collaboration is the comparative research report on the crime of sedition that we commissioned from the Oxford Pro Bono Research Group.

Sine Qua Non is also member of the Global Democracy Coalition, a multi-stakeholder strategic alliance established in 2021 with the aim to bring together organisations dedicated to advancing democracy. The network enables its members to share information on democratic innovations and best practices, identify opportunities for collaboration, and better coordinate their efforts to strengthen democracy more broadly. The Coalition amplifies the voice of partner organisations through collective action.



European Regional GDC Forum in 2024.



Conflict Transformation, Negotiation and Peace-Building Processes

Conflict is an inherent part of human interactions, arising from differences in interests, values, needs, or power among individuals or groups. When managed constructively, conflict can drive positive change, but unresolved disputes can lead to persistent issues and sometimes violence.

Peace building processes seek to transform conflict by not only addressing the immediate issues but also creating sustainable peace by transforming the underlying causes of conflict. Through negotiations parties can focus on the needs and goals of those involved to foster reconciliation and long-term stability through innovative solutions.

BUILDING AN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK AND KNOWLEDGE REPOSITORY

Sine Qua Non dedicates significant resources to building a comprehensive network of knowledge and stakeholders in the fields of conflict resolution and negotiation. Through collaboration with experts and organisations, we aim to support and promote innovative solutions that contribute to lasting peace and constructive change.

Through one partnership with a party involved in an active conflict, Sine Qua Non has been closely following and supporting a negotiation process. Our role included enhancing the international visibility of the negotiation efforts, helping to create awareness and support for the peace process on a global scale. As part of our engagement, we supported the organisation of training sessions and workshops with international actors for the negotiators and their preparation team, which provide them with crucial skills and strategies for navigating complexity. Additionally, we organized periodic updates with international experts and stakeholders to highlight the main achievements and challenges within the process, ensuring an informed and connected support network.

This experience has enabled us to establish connections with international specialists in conflict mediation and transformation, including notable organisations like the Berghof Foundation, Conciliation Resources, Humanitarian Dialogue, and the International Center for Transitional Justice. By learning from these experts, we have deepened our understanding of effective conflict resolution methods and innovative negotiation tactics.

SELF-DETERMINATION CONFLICTS

Conflicts involving self-determination claims are particularly complex and impactful in today's world, where issues of identity, autonomy, and sovereignty frequently drive tensions across regions and communities. Addressing these conflicts creatively and effectively is essential to support peaceful solutions that respect the aspirations of the people involved. As these disputes are increasingly visible and influential in shaping global dynamics, prioritizing them within conflict resolution efforts is crucial for fostering equitable and lasting peace.

Sine Qua Non is particularly invested in conflicts centered around the right to self-determination. We believe that political negotiation processes should explore creative solutions that honor the aspirations of all parties involved, creating pathways toward mutually satisfying outcomes. By promoting constructive dialogue and respectful negotiation, we strive to build a foundation for long-term peace and stability for those involved in self-determination struggles.

To further our mission, we are committed to sharing our experience, resources, and knowledge with other actors who may face similar situations. By fostering collaboration and supporting those engaged in conflict transformation, Sine Qua Non aims to contribute meaningfully to the development of peaceful societies worldwide.

In this sense, we participated in a Joint Analysis Workshops in December 2022 organised by Conciliation Resources in preparation for their publication "Mediating Self-determination Conflicts" that was published in October 2023.

EXILES AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

RECOVERY OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

Through a partnership with Fundació Josep Irla, Sine Qua Non has conducted a research project with the aim of preserving the life and works of relevant personalities, particularly their time as a political exile, not only recovering forgotten histories but also contributing to the broader effort of understanding conflict today. By shedding light on personal accounts of exile and the broader political context, we aim to create dialogue, promote understanding, and encourage a deeper reflection on how conflicts can shape present and future peacebuilding efforts. In this way, the recovery of historical memory becomes an essential step in transforming conflict, honoring the past, and building a more just and peaceful future.



Aurora Bertrana in Switzerland

The first part of this project was dedicated to research and preservation initiative centered on the life and works of Catalan writer Aurora Bertrana, with particular attention to her experiences as a political exile in Switzerland. The project aims to recover historical memory, deepen our understanding of Bertrana's literary contributions, and explore the broader context of Catalan political exile.

The project consisted in the following activities:

1. Bibliographic Research and Acquisition

A comprehensive bibliographic search was conducted to acquire critical copies of Bertrana's works and related documents. Each acquisition was followed by a detailed study to enrich the historical and literary context surrounding her writings.

2. Academic Engagement

A series of academic meetings were held with literary specialists, focusing on Bertrana's career, themes, and contributions to Catalan literature. These sessions have fostered collaboration and allowed for the exchange of insights into Bertrana's unique experiences and creative output.

3. Research on Aurora Bertrana's Swiss Exile

Our research concentrated on Bertrana's time in Switzerland, where she lived as a Catalan political exile. Efforts included identifying personal contacts in Geneva and locating documentation that sheds light on her life in exile.

To advance our research, we have conducted extensive archival work and interviews, which have led to significant findings:

- University of Geneva: Conducted an in-depth search for documents and records related to Bertrana's academic engagements and social networks.
- Société des Arts: Investigated Bertrana's potential connections with the artistic community in Geneva.
- Radio Télévision Suisse (RTS): Examined archives for news and media materials mentioning or featuring Bertrana.
- International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC): Researched records that might provide insights into the socio-political climate during Bertrana's exile.
- Dalcroze Institute: Located historical records that document Bertrana's involvement and influence within Geneva's cultural circles.

Key Results

Our project has successfully uncovered previously unknown and unpublished materials related to Aurora Bertrana:

- Location of Historical Archives at the Dalcroze Institut: Important materials from this institution provided insight into Bertrana's influence within the cultural and intellectual community of Geneva.
- Rediscovery of News Items: We located media coverage and articles related to Bertrana, enhancing our understanding of her public presence during her time in Switzerland.
- Publication of the Unpublished Work "Six Épaves": This publication has brought to light a previously unknown aspect of Bertrana's literary work, adding valuable content to her body of work.

- **Obtaining Unpublished Personal Documents:** Through our research, we have obtained personal documents that offer a rare glimpse into Bertrana’s personal life, thoughts, and experiences as an exile.

On May 20, 2022 a conference was organised at Musée d’ethnographie de Genève, on “The journey of a written life. The legacy of Aurora Bertrana”. In a conversation with researcher Adriana Bàrcia, Catalan philologist and writer, the life and works of Aurora Bertrana were discussed.

In 2024, an exhibition was set up in Palau Robert in Barcelona, showcasing Bertrana’s personal artifacts, writings, and other materials, offering the public a unique perspective on her life and contributions as a Catalan intellectual and exile.

Through this project, we are not only preserving the legacy of Aurora Bertrana but also contributing to a broader dialogue on historical memory, exile, and conflict transformation.



Exposition “Aurora Bertrana, polièdrica,” at Palau Robert of Barcelona in September 2024.

Thank you

We thank our members for their support and our partner organisations for their trust. Without them this project would not have existed.

