

ICF Advocacy Toolkit

Europe

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Introduction

Since the creation of the International Coaching Federation in 1995, ICF leadership, members and staff have been active proponents of self-regulation of professional coaching. ICF's rigorous standards and credentialing and accreditation programs represent expertise and discipline in an industry that is frequently targeted for piecemeal regulation or wholly misunderstood by legislators and regulators unfamiliar with the profession.

The goals of this handbook are to:

- ▶ **Communicate basic, broadly held tenets regarding the regulation and monitoring of coaches, as espoused by ICF and its membership.**
- ▶ **Look at the regulatory process and how ICF Members can help shape the landscape of industry regulation to promote and maintain industry quality.**
- ▶ **Look at recent, real-world examples of instances where laws and regulations could have had a significant impact on ICF Members and their clients.**
- ▶ **Show how you can become a resource to regulatory officials who are unfamiliar with coaching and how you can work with them to create the best regulatory landscape for both members and clients.**

Why self-regulation?

According to Europa.eu, there are 705 delegates to the European Parliament. Add to this the thousands of elected officials of the highest order among member states and non-elected regulatory staff, the number of stakeholders in the governing and regulatory process grows exponentially.

The time pressures and knowledge pressures faced by those elected officials, appointed officials, and their staffs are quite daunting. They are tasked with being subject-matter experts on many topics. Constituents often bring up topics for attention, consideration, and action about which the official (and their staff) have little to no awareness, knowledge, or interest.

That's why associations like ICF can play such a vital role in the policymaking process. ICF, with strict standards and self-regulatory guidelines in place, is a tremendous source of instant expertise and guidance to policymakers that may only be familiar with coaches that wear whistles around their necks. In the 2020 ICF Global Coaching Study, 65 percent of European coach practitioners said they believed that coaching should be regulated. Among those respondents (including both coaches and managers/leaders using coaching skills) not ruling out the prospect of regulation, nearly 80% of European respondents said that professional coaching associations were best positioned to regulate the industry.

Over the past 25 years, ICF has grown into a global organization, with a membership of more than 41,000 professional, personal and business coaches in 140-plus countries and territories. Globally, more than 35,000 coaches hold an ICF Credential. ICF also has nearly 140 chapters in 80 countries worldwide. ICF is dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high standards, providing independent certification and building a worldwide network of accredited coach training programs. States, cities, and other governmental units looking at a successful self-regulatory model should look to ICF rather than creating a hodgepodge of regulatory frameworks that may differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.



For any questions or concerns you may have about ICF regulatory issues, please contact the ICF Ethics Assist line at ethics@coachingfederation.org or [+1.859.226.4245](tel:+18592264245).

Section 1: Why Advocacy is Important to ICF

ICF believes there is a solid, compelling case to be made for self-regulation of ICF Members and ICF-credentialed coaches.

ICF's foundation for self-regulation of coaching are based on:

- ▶ Core Competencies that define a professional coach's required skills and establish the foundation for the professional credentialing examination and accreditation for coach training programs.
- ▶ A strictly enforced Code of Ethics to which coaches pledge commitment and accountability to standards of professional conduct.
- ▶ Professional oversight through an Ethical Conduct Review (ECR) process, which allows the public to report concerns and to be confident of objective investigation, follow-up and disciplinary action (including termination of ICF Membership or Credential) by an Independent Review Board (IRB).
- ▶ Professional coach credentialing, entailing a stringent examination and review process in which coaches must demonstrate their skills, proficiency, and documented experience in application of the ICF Core Competencies.
- ▶ Continuing education requirements for periodic renewal of coaching credentials to ensure continued professional growth and development.
- ▶ Professional coach training accreditation, in which coach-training programs submit to review and continuing oversight to demonstrate their commitment to the highest standards for curricula and alignment with defined core competencies, faculty, structure, proficiency and ethics to support excellence in coach training.
- ▶ Ongoing self-regulatory oversight initiatives to track the needs and concerns of individual and organizational clients on an international basis and to demonstrate an active commitment to meaningful, professional self-governance.

In a 2011 article on the professionalization of coaching, David Gray of the United Kingdom's University of Surrey notes that "professional work is defined and redefined through the continuous struggle between different occupational groups. If successful, society (the State) grants professional groups a degree of autonomy in exchange for self-regulation—a promise that the profession will set up and enforce standards of professional development and ethical practice."

Gray adds that groups like ICF can offer a solid alternative to a completely new, state-created regulatory apparatus:

"It appears ... the existence of an association like the ICF, with its code of ethics, has given some surety to state legislators that self-regulation is taking place ... and that state regulation is unnecessary. However, the fact that several US states have considered the regulation of coaching suggests that continuing self-regulation is not guaranteed."

Indeed, several states have introduced legislation to regulate coaching, requiring mobilization of ICF staff and leadership resources.

In all instances, the most important component of ICF's regulatory action is you, the member and practitioner. ICF has staff members who monitor and respond quickly to legislative and regulatory issues. But, as famed U.S. politician Thomas "Tip" O'Neill noted, all politics is local. Your voice, and your action on important issues, is most important and impactful.

Letters from Lexington, Kentucky, to elected officials in Juneau, Montpelier, or Pierre are necessary and important, but they don't carry the impact of a detailed, reasoned letter from a constituent. ICF, as an organization, cannot vote. Staff of ICF don't vote in state and local elections where members are located. ICF speaks authoritatively, but doesn't have the impact of someone, in a local district, who lives, works, pays taxes, and votes in that area. You, as an individual member of ICF, matter to your elected officials... not a big, global organization. To help yourself, your profession, and your colleagues, you need to be an involved, informed advocate for ICF and the coaching profession.

Example of ICF Self-Regulation

In 2020, 32 formal complaints were filed against ICF Members. Of those 32 cases:

- ▶ **7 were moved to ICF Coaching Education's Program Complaint Process**
- ▶ **17 met the requirements for Initial Review**
- ▶ **8 were adjudicated by the Independent Review Board**

Items addressed by the review process included:

- ▶ **Not maintaining appropriate boundaries**
- ▶ **Breach of confidentiality**
- ▶ **Conflict of interest**

In addition, more than 50 trademark and logo issues were addressed.

Section 2: Basic ICF Positions/Talking Points on Important Issues

According to the best estimates available, nearly half of all coaches worldwide are members of ICF. This depth of membership allows ICF to be recognized as the global authority on the profession. As such, it is ICF's responsibility to ensure that professional coach practitioners have the best regulatory atmosphere available in which to practice their craft. There are some basic tenets that have emerged through ICF's advocacy efforts that have become building blocks of current and future advocacy efforts:

- ▶ **Recognition of coaching as a distinct profession—ICF Members have presented testimony on this issue, most notably in the District of Columbia. The main points of the testimony are:**
 - Coaching is not psychology and does not diagnose, treat, or prescribe medication.
 - Coaching is not backward-looking, but instead is rooted firmly in the present.
 - Coaching is not about pathology, or exploring past issues impacting current behaviors.
 - Coaching is about self-discovery and habits that are rooted in the present.
 - A psychologist can be a coach, but a coach does not have to be a psychologist.

- ▶ **Another fundamental tenet of ICF advocacy is that industry self-regulation is more effective, efficient and stringent than a patchwork of different state and local regulations. Points ICF has made on this issue include:**
 - Self-regulation, conducted by an internationally-known organization with significant membership and licensing requirements, is preferred to piecemeal and uninformed regulation by individual states and localities.
 - Very few state legislators have experience with coaching, and less than a handful of coaches are legislators or have legislative experience.
 - When tasked with discussing coaching and the regulation of coaches, legislators will be reliant on external stakeholders.
 - As the saying goes, the squeaky wheel gets the grease ... and those that are persistent in communicating their views set the tone for the regulatory discussion.
 - ICF has a stringent, comprehensive system in place that exceeds the capacity and expertise of what states can create on their own.
 - A system of individual regulatory systems will be confusing and duplicative and create a dual compliance system for ICF Members.

- ▶ **Other important points that ICF makes in communications with lawmakers include:**
 - Coaching supports personal and professional growth based on self-initiated change in pursuit of specific, actionable outcomes.
 - Coaching is distinct from psychology and requires highly specific education. ICF coaches have completed at least 60 hours of coaching education, with many exceeding 200 hours of education. ICF has created a substantive, comprehensive training and regulatory structure to ensure that the public can rely on professional coaches.
 - Coaching is taught separately from psychology at institutions such as Georgetown University, Columbia University, New York University and the University of Wisconsin, among many others. The academic community recognizes the difference in education, scope, and purpose between the two professions.

Section 3: Why ICF Members Should be Involved in the Advocacy Process

In the past decade the United Kingdom seen a tremendous amount of government-sponsored activity to increase the involvement of people in decisions, policies and services in public life. For several reasons, the government of the UK has committed publicly to increase the involvement and empowerment of ordinary citizens. Supporting ICF policy initiatives is in keeping with this spirit of increased civic involvement.

By participating in the advocacy process, you will be viewed as:

- ▶ **A resource.** A travel industry association conducted an annual visit to Congress to educate them on issues important to the industry. Over time, relationships formed with elected officials and, more importantly, their staffs. A legislator's staff is the gatekeeper and relationship manager, and the tracker of meetings and topics. A member, who participated in the annual visits, called the association headquarters saying that staff from their senator's office called them and asked them for their views on legislation pending in Congress. The member was astonished to be contacted, but the staff knew that they were a constituent with knowledge of the industry, and they trusted their viewpoint.
- ▶ **A leader of your profession.** Speaking strongly and authoritatively about your profession positions you as an expert among your peers and potential clients. Advocacy, and the attention it brings, can have tangible benefits that transcend the issue.
- ▶ **A subject-matter expert.** Being known as an authority on coaching and the self-regulation of the profession opens opportunities in industry education, consulting, and thought leadership.
- ▶ **An agent to preserve the integrity of the coaching profession.** ICF's self-regulation system is comprehensive and strictly enforced. Coaches (those with the most expertise about the profession) are actively policing the profession and staying abreast of global trends. Piecemeal state and local regulations may result in the overall decline in industry quality and lead to a loss of public confidence in the coaching profession.

The best advocacy is rooted in fact-based, supportable arguments. With its extensive research capacity, ICF Headquarters can provide statistics and information for use in advocacy efforts. Presenting exaggerated or unsupported arguments will undermine your efforts and severely damage your ability to work effectively with your elected officials moving forward.

Research has consistently shown that citizen advocacy is effective. For example, researchers Daniel Bergan and Richard Cole conducted an experiment involving Michigan state legislators contacted at random about a specific bill. They found that being contacted by constituents increases the probability of supporting the relevant legislation by about 12 percentage points.

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ICF's vast network of chapters helps to ensure that the organization is aware of, and can respond to, legislative issues that arise on the local, state, and national levels.

ICF Chapter Members are encouraged to take a proactive stance by contacting their local legislators and potential regulators to raise their awareness of coaching as a profession and to explain the actions ICF has taken to ensure that high-quality services are provided. For example, ICF staff were alerted to an important situation in Oregon that demanded immediate attention.

A bill was drafted that would attempt to create a voluntary register of "alternative therapy providers" and that certain categories of "life coaches" would be asked to voluntarily register. While the provisions of the bill were ostensibly voluntary and didn't place restriction on who could coach, it was felt that this was the first effort at regulating the industry and that further, more restrictive actions would be taken if this bill were enacted.

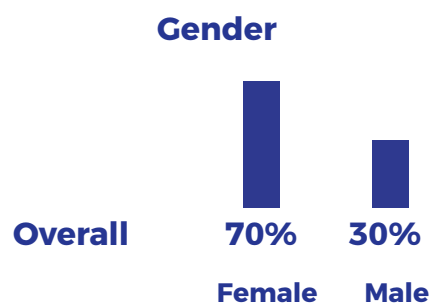
ICF Headquarters worked very closely with ICF Oregon and joined in a coalition of professions that would have been impacted by this law. After a couple of hearings and an outpouring of concern from their effected constituents, the legislators sponsoring the bill decided to pull it from the docket and no further action was taken. However, it is anticipated that further legislative efforts will be undertaken in Oregon and other jurisdictions.

Should any ICF Member become aware of legislative action or potential action pertaining to the regulation of the profession, they should contact their Chapter Leaders and ICF Headquarters. ICF Headquarters staff and the ICF Chapter will then coordinate their efforts to address the matter quickly and appropriately.

ICF Member Profile Information

Age	ICF Membership Percentage
34 and under	5%
35-44	21%
45-54	35%
55-64	29%
65+	10%

Higher Educational level obtained, Europe	
Primary	9%
Secondary	30%
Tertiary	61%



Profile Information, European Parliament

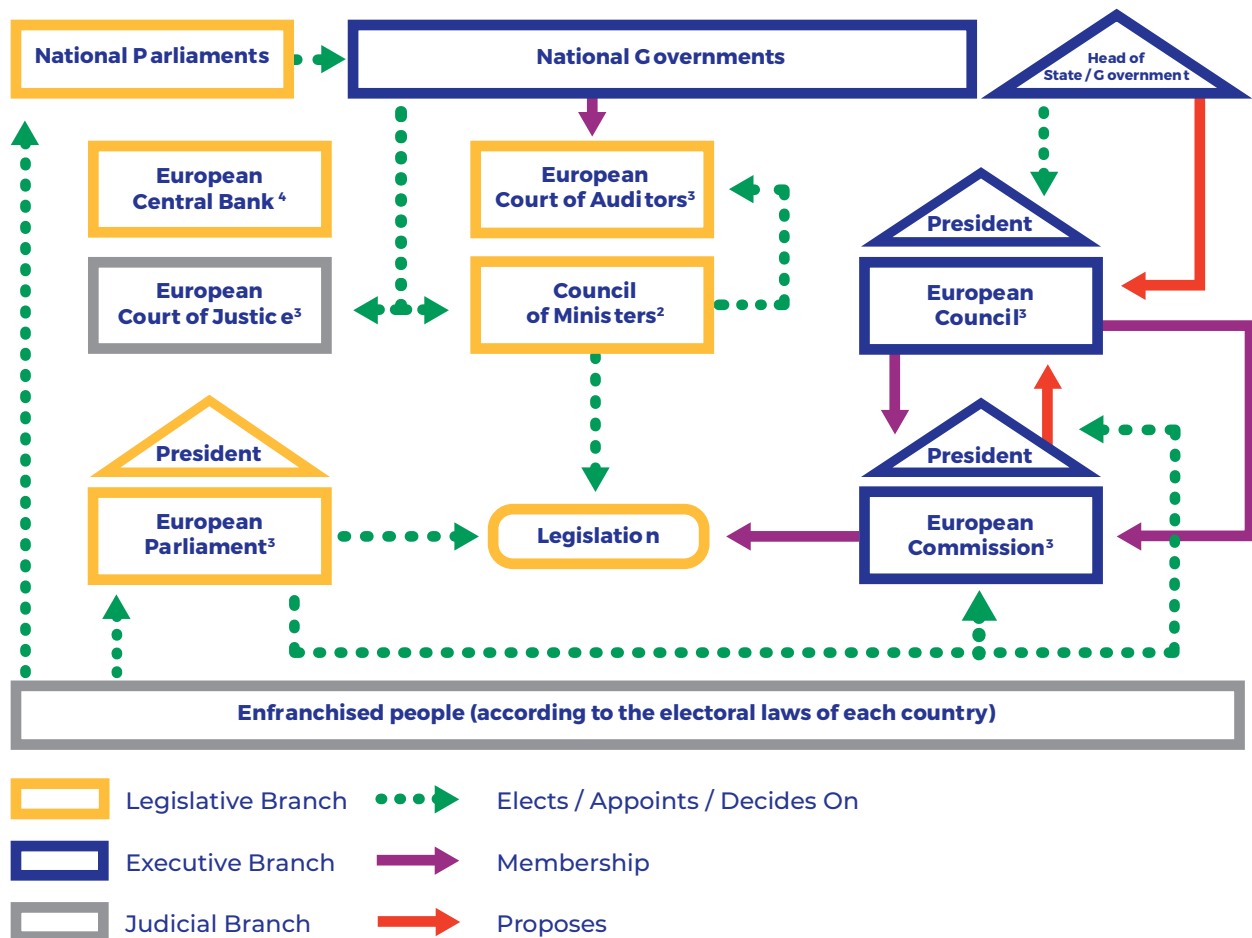
Source: *Europa.eu*

- ▶ The average age of all Parliamentarians is 55, compared with 43 for the European population. The median age of the average ICF Member is 45–54.
- ▶ Women comprise 59 percent of European Parliamentarians. ICF's membership is nearly 70 percent female.
- ▶ ICF's overwhelmingly female membership is an important demographic point for legislators. Legislators do not like to create regulatory burdens for small business, particularly women- or minority-owned businesses.

Section 4: How a Bill Becomes a Law

Important points in the legislative process:

- ▶ What is the impetus for the legislation to be introduced? What perceived problem is being addressed? Often, coaching is casually tossed in legislation pertaining to psychology either due to ignorance of the profession or at the request of psychologists. If we need to be regulated, they reason, then coaches do too. ICF advocacy has consistently distinguished between psychology and coaching.
- ▶ There is ample time built in the legislative process for citizen input. Lawmakers genuinely want to hear from you. Passing unpopular legislation is not a recipe for re-election



Section 5: How to Influence Your Members of the European Parliament

You've learned of an issue involving the regulation of coaching. You've alerted your ICF Chapter Leader, who has in turn contacted ICF Staff. After quickly researching the issue you are asked, as a constituent of the committee chair that will be considering the legislation, to contact your elected official and urge them to make changes favorable to the treatment of the coaching profession.

What do you do? The European Commission outlines several ways EU citizens can get involved in the legislative process. Most activity would be conducted at the ICF Chapter level, in conjunction with ICF Global:

The Initial Idea

- ▶ Send your views on initial ideas for new laws or on plans for evaluations of individual laws and “fitness checks” of multiple laws. Proposed actions are set out in documents called road maps and inception impact assessments.

Consultation period: 4 weeks

- ▶ **Public Consultations:** Through open public consultations you can express your views on aspects of impact assessments before the Commission finalizes its proposals. Impact assessments cover the issues to be tackled, whether action should be taken at EU level and the potential effects of different solutions outlined.

Consultation period: A minimum of 12 weeks

- ▶ **EU Commission Proposal:** Once the Commission has agreed on a legislative proposal and put it forward for adoption by the EU Parliament and Council, you can give your feedback on it, and on the published impact assessment report. The Commission will collect your views and present them to the Parliament and Council.

Feedback period: 8 weeks following publication of the Commission proposal in all EU languages

- ▶ **Evaluative Meetings:** Through open public consultations you can contribute to evaluations and fitness checks of how existing laws are performing in practice.

Consultation period: A minimum of 12 weeks

- ▶ **Draft Implementing and Delegated Acts:** You can express your views on draft texts of Commission acts that either amend or supplement nonessential elements of existing laws, via delegated acts, or specify the conditions for existing laws to be implemented in the same way across the EU, via implementing acts.

Feedback period: 4 weeks

- ▶ **How to Improve Existing Laws:** At any time, you can tell the European Commission how you think existing laws could be better. The Commission will examine your suggestions to simplify EU laws and reduce regulatory burden. Your ideas may be submitted to the REFIT platform.

Feedback period: Anytime

Section 6: ICF Members in Action – Case Studies

Several times in the last decade, ICF Chapter Leaders, Members and staff have responded to inquiries from governmental bodies considering the regulation of coaching.



EU Charter

On June 29, 2011, ICF and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) jointly filed with the EU a Professional Charter for Coaching and Mentoring as the benchmark standard for the coaching and mentoring professions. The Charter, which is continually reviewed and enhanced, establishes ethical standards and forms the basis for the development of self-regulation. Since then, other coaching bodies have signed on to the initiative.



France

A bill was introduced that would modify existing statutes regarding the license of psychologists in the state. ICF France, working with other coaching colleagues, established a definition of professional coaching within the country. This will assist with correct tax identification for coaches in France. They will no longer need to self-identify as trainers, consultants, etc.



Hungary

Unclear legislation was passed in Hungary that many thought would impact professional coaching. Rather than specifically calling out coaching, the law included language that may include coaching if read to the widest extent possible, particularly impacting coaching training programs. The law potentially could have required anyone that practices as a coach in the country to complete training at a training provider certified by the government. ICF Global worked very closely with ICF Hungary to get a better understanding of the intent of the law and achieve clarity as to the administration of the new regulations. While we continue to engage in conversation on this issue, it appears that the regulation will not impact professional coaching in any meaningful way given the current determination of the law's language.

Conclusion

Citizen advocacy is important for you, your practice, your clients and your colleagues. ICF provides you with support and tools necessary to interact with policymakers and ensure that you have the most favorable atmosphere in which to practice your profession. The ICF Global community takes the ethics of professional coaching very seriously, and our robust system of professional self-governance ensures that ICF Members and Credential-holders meet high standards and that coaching consumers are well-protected. ICF leaders and staff are ready to assist ICF Chapters and individual members in addressing concerns about potential or actual regulation.

We hope that this handbook will be an additional resource for coaches in the European Union.



[coachingfederation.org](https://www.coachingfederation.org)