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Enlargement Countries

Republic of Albania

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Albania's legal framework sets out a generally good basis for the protection of fundamental rights. Significant achievement was made during the reporting period with the adoption of a new law on personal data protection in full alignment with the EU acquis, a new Law on Gender Equality, as well as the adoption of implementing legislation on the rights to persons belonging to national minorities. The enjoyment of media freedom and pluralism, of the right to property and of the rights of persons belonging to minorities remained problematic, however, progress was made in these areas at the end of 2025. The legal and institutional framework on the rights of persons with disabilities is incomplete. Implementation efforts need to intensify overall. Media independence and pluralism continued to be affected by the overlap of business and political interests, the lack of transparency on financing, the high ownership concentration, intimidation and precarious working conditions for journalists. A structured dialogue between Albanian institutions and media actors was launched in January 2025 to discuss key reforms to enhance freedom of expression, including media freedom and pluralism. Albania should further align with and implement the EU acquis on equality and non-discrimination including as regards sexual orientation and gender expression, ensure that the new Law on Gender Equality maintains a high level of ambition in line with EU standards, and demonstrate good implementation capacity of the law on personal data protection, implement effectively the National Agenda on Child Rights and complete the deinstitutionalisation of children.

The overall framework allows for generally free and fair elections. The parliamentary elections held on 11 May 2025 resulted in a fourth consecutive term for the incumbent party. The preliminary conclusions of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)/ Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) election observation mission noted that elections were competitive and professionally conducted, but identified some shortcomings, including the lack of a level playing field and abuse of public resources. The partial electoral reform amended the Electoral Code but failed to address a number of longstanding recommendations from the OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission. A comprehensive electoral reform is needed. Parliament can exercise its powers in a partially effective way, while public consultation processes remained limited. Concerns were noted regarding the work of the ad hoc parliamentary committee on deepening reforms for good governance, rule of law and anti-corruption. The EU integration process needs to be more inclusive, cross-party, and supported by effective consultation mechanisms. Civil society organisations (CSOs) operated in a partly enabling environment, facing challenges regarding registration requirements and limited public funding, along with an increase in negative narratives and online smear campaigns. For more information, please refer to the European Commission's Albania 2025 Report.

Albania ranked 80th globally on the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without Borders, 87th on the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law index, 91st on the Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International, and received the score of 68/100, indicating narrowed civic space on the Civicus tracking tool.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to monitor the entrenchment of democracy and respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights, with particular attention to access to justice, independence of media and freedom of expression, protection of minorities and persons in vulnerable situations, LGBTI persons, as well as registration of properties and transitional ownership rights. The EU also followed developments in the areas of citizenship rights, gender equality, right to life, prevention of and accountability for torture and ill-treatment in the prison systems, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

EU bilateral political engagement: Regular political dialogue continued in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, as well as in the dynamic context of accession negotiations and as part of the Reform Agenda implementation. These dialogues provided an opportunity to take stock of the progress that Albania made in the preparations for EU membership with a focus on rule of law aspects, including fundamental rights. Human rights and democracy remained a central focus of the political dialogue with the authorities. In the reporting period, all six clusters opened for negotiations.

EU financial engagement: The EU continued the implementation of a wide array of projects in the field of human rights and democracy. Political priorities were also implemented as part of the Reform Agenda. The funding allocation from the EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance 2021 – 2027 (IPA III) of EUR 80.6 million continued supporting actions on justice, consolidation of democracy including electoral cycles, and fundamental rights including gender equality, property rights, access to water, right to education and access to employment and training of young people. Through the Programme on Social Inclusion (EUR 70.65 million), the EU continued providing assistance to families in vulnerable situations, including Roma and Egyptian families and older persons. A contribution agreement (9.5 million) – EU for Property Rights, was signed with UNOPS to support a review of service delivery procedures, digitalisation of cadastral maps, initial property registrations and cadastral data corrections, and an integrity plan for state cadastre agency was adopted with EU for Good Governance support. Existing projects under the Civil Society Facility and Media Programme continued to support civil society organisations in environment, culture, food safety and consumer protection (EUR 3.2 million). The EU awarded a direct grant to support the National Resource Center for Civil Society Organisations in Albania (EUR 0.7 million). A call combining the Civil Society Facility and Media Programme (EUR 6 million) and NDICI Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy (EUR 1.2 million) was launched to support civil society and media actors, mostly in areas covered by the fundamentals cluster, including diversity, equality and inclusion, good governance, justice, freedom and security and gender equality and gender-based violence. Four projects were running under the NDICI Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy, supporting elections, human rights, transitional justice and media freedom including the media dialogue (EUR 1.35 million), and four new contracts were signed focusing on digital rights, transitional justice and democratic culture (EUR 1.25 million). Cooperation with the Council of Europe continued, including under the Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye – Phase III, with a total budget of EUR 5 million for Albania focusing on promoting equal treatment, freedom of expression and social inclusion. Six bilateral actions were implemented, to assist the upgrading the Central Election Commission's Electronic Platform on

Financial Monitoring and Reporting in the run-up to the May 2025 parliamentary elections, the drafting of the improved laws on conflict of interest and on establishing an asset recovery office. They also supported the relevant agencies in processing compensations for properties confiscated during the communist regime, and in implementing judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

Multilateral context: Cooperation with international human rights monitoring bodies was satisfactory but the follow-up of their recommendations needs to be improved. Albania is a party to the main international human rights instruments. However, the country has not signed the Optional Protocol to the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESC). Albania needs to develop a comprehensive monitoring and data collection system to assess the level of implementation of human rights legislation, policies, and strategies. Albania completed its fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR), supporting 239 out of 253 recommendations received. Albania continued to benefit from its observer status at the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA). Albania is currently a member of the UN Human Rights Council (2024-2026). There is regular close cooperation between the EU and Albania in multilateral human rights fora.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The legal and institutional framework for upholding human rights remained incomplete and requires further improvement. Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to lack a comprehensive policy framework, including countrywide strategies on human rights, non- discrimination and the protection of minorities. As a result, the level of human rights protection remains uneven across the country. The country needs to urgently adopt constitutional and electoral reforms to ensure that all citizens can effectively exercise their political rights, notably bring the country's Constitution into line with the Sejdić-Finci case law of the European Court of Human Rights. The Herzegovina-Neretva and Central Bosnia cantons continued to ignore the 2014 and 2021 rulings of the Federation entity Supreme Court, which require eliminating the practice of 'two schools under one roof' to ensure inclusive and non-discriminatory education for all students.

In March 2025, the Federation entity adopted a Law on protection from domestic violence and violence against women, and amended its criminal code in July 2025, improving alignment with the Istanbul Convention and the EU acquis. Notwithstanding, the institutional response to femicide remains insufficient. Political influence over public broadcasters persisted, and their financial sustainability was at risk, pending the adoption of a new law on the public broadcasting system. Political pressure, verbal attacks, intimidation and threats against journalists continued, and a countrywide network was set up to monitor these cases. In 2025 the functioning of democratic institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to be challenged by the persistent discriminatory elements within its constitutional structure, by the constant misuse of entity vetoes for political purposes (leading to inaction and delays in the work of the executive and Parliament), as well as by the increasing intensity of systematic attacks on the legal and constitutional order by the Republika Srpska entity. Parliamentary oversight over the executives remained weak. The executives continued having little capacity for coordination and policy planning. Civil society organisations operated in a constrained environment.

In February 2025, the Republika Srpska adopted a law targeting civil society groups as 'foreign agents', which undermined fundamental rights and was repealed by the Constitutional Court in May. Three more cantons (West Herzegovina, Central Bosnia, and Posavina) adopted legislation aiming to align

their framework on freedom of assembly with European standards. For more information, please refer to the European Commission's Bosnia and Herzegovina 2025 Report.

Bosnia and Herzegovina ranked 86th on the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without borders, 70th on the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law index, 109th on the Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International, and received the score of 57/100, indicating obstructed civic space on the Civicus tracking tool.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to closely monitor and support the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a core component of the EU integration process. Several of the fourteen key priorities set out in the 2019 Commission Opinion on the EU membership application of Bosnia and Herzegovina focus on fundamental rights. These priorities call on the country to eliminate constitutional and electoral discrimination, strengthen equality and non-discrimination frameworks, ensure the effective prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, guarantee freedom of expression and media freedom, reinforce the protection and social inclusion of persons and groups in vulnerable situations, and create an environment conducive to reconciliation, trust-building and social cohesion. The EU further emphasised the need for effective implementation of existing legal and institutional frameworks, stronger parliamentary oversight, and meaningful follow-up to recommendations from independent institutions and international human rights mechanisms.

EU bilateral political engagement: In line with the March 2024 European Council decision to open accession negotiations, the authorities have to bring back focus on taking all relevant steps set out in the Commission's recommendation of October 2022. The policy dialogue with the EU continued within the eighth cycle of sectoral subcommittees under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. Nevertheless, the Council of Ministers has taken no action to facilitate policy dialogue within the Stabilisation and Association Agreement bodies, in line with the Commission recommendations, leading to regular political blockades endangering the holding of technical subcommittees' meetings. The country is encouraged to seek observer status in the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights and should replicate the Agency's data collection methodology.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted its Reform Agenda under the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, which includes key commitments on judiciary and fundamental rights. EU financial support under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance continued to prioritise fundamental rights, the rule of law and democratic governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through targeted projects, the EU maintained support to the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, including activities related to monitoring, data collection and reporting on the situation and needs of persons in vulnerable situations, notably through the continued use and development of the Human Rights Database (EUR 0.28 million). EU funding continued to contribute to accounting for missing persons and to supporting and monitoring the processing of war crimes cases, reinforcing transitional justice and reconciliation efforts. A new EU-funded programme dedicated to addressing gender-based violence was launched in December 2025 (EUR 7.5 million). Support to civil society and independent media continued through the Civil Society and Media Facility (EUR 6 million). The Facility also further supported public authorities in strengthening mechanisms for structured dialogue and the inclusion of civil society in decision-making processes. Under the Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy (EUR 0.5 million), the EU continues to support initiatives addressing violence against women, promoting the equal enjoyment of human rights by LGBTI persons, advancing the rights of the child, supporting Roma women and girls, strengthening independent media and freedom

of expression. A mechanism was urgently put in place to address the challenges faced by CSOs considering restrictive proposals and the withdrawal of USAID funding (EUR 0.6 million). The EU is also providing assistance to strengthen citizens' awareness about their rights to access information and improve public access to information of public interest (EUR 0.15 million). In parallel, the EU – Council of Europe Horizontal Facility (Phase III) with EUR 4.5 million for Bosnia and Herzegovina financed activities aimed at strengthening human rights. Among several concrete deliverables, the EU-CoE Horizontal Facility supported a campaign against hate speech and violence in sport.

Multilateral context: The cooperation with international bodies that monitor human rights and the follow-up to their recommendations is insufficient. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to address the recommendations from the January 2025 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). The Council of Ministers is required to address the August 2019 decision of the UN Committee against Torture regarding providing redress to victims of wartime torture.

Republic of North Macedonia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the legal and institutional framework for upholding human rights was in place but needed to be improved. The country continued to meet its general obligations on fundamental rights, but legislation was not implemented in a systematic manner. A new Ombudsman and eight new deputy ombudspersons were still not elected. The Ombudsman's Office, the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, and the Personal Data Protection Agency continued to lack budgetary independence and funding. Gender-based hate speech and threats against women human rights defenders remained prevalent, on social media. A national body responsible for coordinating all policies related to implementation of the UN Convention on Child Rights and the Optional Protocols had not yet been established.

Overall, persons with disabilities continued to encounter significant forms of discrimination. The adoption of a national LGBTIQ+ equality strategy was still pending. North Macedonia made satisfactory progress on Roma inclusion. No progress was made on the protection of personal data. The overall situation, in particular living conditions in prisons remains appalling, although infrastructure was partially renovated and improved in several prison facilities. North Macedonia provides adequate legal guarantees on the freedom of expression. The enabling environment for the media's free, independent and professional operation needs to be improved, although some progress was achieved on the Law on media. The financial independence of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services improved, and the new members of its Council were elected by Parliament. Despite improved funding, the public service broadcaster continues to face significant challenges, particularly regarding its institutional autonomy. The framework for allocation of state advertising raised concerns about the potential misuse of public funds.

The functioning of democratic institutions was generally stable. According to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Election Observation Mission, the local elections were competitive. The election legislation provides a suitable framework for holding democratic elections. However, campaign rules, access to the media and distribution of state funding are not adequately regulated. Parliament exercised its powers in an overall effective way. However, political polarisation in Parliament persisted, delaying the adoption of important reforms and several long-overdue appointments. Parliament maintained a broad consensus on the implementation of the new rules of procedure. These rules had a positive effect on Parliament's operational efficiency; however, their

long-term impact has not yet been determined. Parliament continued to use shortened legislative procedures regularly. Civil society organisations generally operate in an overall enabling environment. The government adopted a decision for appointing members of the Council for Cooperation between Government and Civil Society. This development resulted in the Council's long-awaited reactivation, in line with the Commission's recommendations. For more information, please refer to the European Commission's North Macedonia 2025 Report.

North Macedonia ranked 42nd globally on the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without borders, 64th on the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law index, 84th on the corruption perceptions index of Transparency International, and received the score of 69/100, indicating narrowed civic space on the Civicus tracking tool.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to monitor human rights in North Macedonia within the framework of the EU accession negotiations. Key focus areas included freedom of expression and media, gender equality and combating gender-based violence, the work of the Ombudsman's Office, non-discrimination, the rights of LGBTI persons and of persons in vulnerable situations, Roma inclusion, freedom of assembly and association, minority rights, relations between communities, measures undertaken to prevent and ensure accountability for torture and ill-treatment within the prison system, the rights of the child, and the rights of persons with disabilities.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued regular political dialogue with North Macedonia, mainly in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The 19th meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Subcommittee on Justice, Freedom, and Security provided an opportunity to take stock of the progress that North Macedonia made in the preparations for EU membership, including on fundamental rights. The authorities of North Macedonia continued to work on the roadmaps on the rule of law and the functioning of democratic institutions, and the action plan on the protection of minorities, to advance and finalise the preparatory work related to the opening benchmarks for the fundamentals cluster.

EU financial engagement: Under the Reform and Growth Facility, North Macedonia benefits from a programmed allocation of EUR 148.8 million for rule of law and democracy issues, which includes the revision of the Electoral Code to incorporate recommendations from the OSCE/ODIHR. The country continued to benefit from funding under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance. EU assistance has been provided to support media reforms, professional journalism, and civic engagement (EUR 0.7 million). Further assistance focused on strengthening journalists' skills in investigative reporting and EU accession coverage (EUR 0.85 million).

The EU Support for Rule of Law project (EUR 10.2 million) strengthened rule of law by improving capacities in justice, law enforcement, anticorruption, and human rights protection sectors. With project support, the National Action Plan on the Rights of the Child (2025-2029) was adopted in August 2025. In November 2025, under the IPA III Civil Society Facility and Media Programme and the 'EU for Improved Health and Social Protection and Gender Equality' initiative, a new call for projects (EUR 3.4 million) was published to support civil society and media organisations in policymaking and advancing EU integration.

Projects under the NDICI Thematic Programme on Human Rights and Democracy (EUR 1.0 million) focused on protecting the rights of marginalised communities, prevention of drug use in schools, empowering energy-vulnerable citizens, reducing inequalities and safeguarding the human rights of

girls, women and LGBTI persons, and strengthening local initiatives. Progress was achieved in enhancing free legal aid and preventing cyberviolence against young women. TAIEX and the Council of Europe's Horizontal Facility support was provided to the Agency for Realisation of the Rights of Communities to develop a five-year action plan aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of communities.

Multilateral context: North Macedonia has ratified most international human rights instruments. In November 2024, the country ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents, also known as the Tromsø Convention, which applies as of March 2025. The country maintained a good reporting record with international and regional bodies like the UN, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, yet faced challenges in implementing and following up on recommendations, notably of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. North Macedonia has observer status in the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. There was a good cooperation between the EU and North Macedonia in multilateral human rights fora.

Georgia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Human rights were severely curtailed by repressive actions and laws that infringe upon fundamental rights, including equality and non-discrimination, the freedom of expression, assembly and association, as well as the right to privacy, family life, liberty and security. Ill-treatment of protest participants by law enforcement forces, in some cases amounting to torture or inhuman and degrading treatment, was widespread in 2025. No perpetrators were held accountable, fostering an environment of impunity. Cases of arbitrary detentions, excessive use of pre-trial detention and the disproportionately harsh sentencing of protesters and journalists raise concerns about the right to fair trial. Instances of physical assaults, sexual harassment, and threats of rape or death by law enforcement officials directed at women participating in demonstrations were reported. The new legislation, including amendments to the Law on broadcasting, the Foreign Agents Registration Act and the legislative package on family values and protection of minors, negatively affected the right to freedom of expression and the ability of the media to operate freely. Acts of intimidation, threats and verbal and physical assault, arbitrary detentions against journalists and media workers were widely reported. The state of democracy in Georgia was marked by significant backsliding. The Georgian authorities imposed repressive measures against civil society, media representatives and opposition leaders that severely undermine democratic decision-making and processes and effectively abolished civic participation and the system of checks and balances. By freezing the bank accounts of several CSOs, the justice system was used by the authorities as a tool of repression and political persecution, to deprive the organisations of essential financial resources and silence dissenting voices. Civil society and critical voices also faced intimidation, with hostile rhetoric, threats and violence becoming more prevalent. Political pluralism has been at risk as the ruling party seeks a Constitutional Court ban on several opposition parties. The politically motivated persecution against civil society and arrests of opposition leaders went against basic democratic values. For more information, please refer to the European Commission's Georgia 2025 Report.

Georgia ranked 114th on the 2025 World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders, 52nd on the 2025 World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index, 56th on Transparency International's 2025

Corruption Perceptions Index, and received a score of 34/100, indicating repressed civic space, on the CIVICUS Monitor.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU consistently urged the Georgian authorities to reverse the democratic backsliding, repeal repressive legislation, adopt democratic, comprehensive and sustainable reforms, in line with the core principles of European integration and the nine steps set out for candidate status. The EU called on the Georgian authorities to respect, protect and uphold the human rights of citizens, including the right to a fair trial, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and media freedom and pluralism, and to release those arbitrarily detained. These calls were also reiterated by the EU Council Presidency in December 2025, noting that the actions taken by the Georgian authorities fall short of the EU's expectations of a candidate country. The EU continued to assess Georgia's compliance with the visa liberalisation benchmarks. In December 2025 the Commission found that Georgia has further regressed in the areas of governance and fundamental rights and continues to be in breach of these benchmarks. The Commission has launched the procedure under the new visa suspension mechanism to suspend the exemption from the visa requirement for nationals of Georgia holding diplomatic, service and official passports.

EU bilateral political engagement: In June, October and December 2024 the European Council concluded that the Georgian government's actions have de facto led to a halt of the pre-accession process. There was no political dialogue between the EU and Georgia in 2025 due to the continued serious democratic backsliding by the Georgian authorities. The EU continued to downgrade bilateral contacts. The EU-Georgia Human Rights Dialogue has not taken place since June 2023.

EU financial engagement: As a result of the continued democratic backsliding, the EU continued to halt financial assistance directly benefiting Georgian authorities in 2025. In response to the shrinking of civic space and the deterioration of the human rights situation, EUR 24 million has been contracted for civil society and independent media since October 2024 under NDICI bilateral and thematic funding. Ongoing support focused on targeted support to CSOs and independent media, access to justice, rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality and combating gender-based violence, the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, child rights, the rights of LGBTI persons, confidence-building, and tackling disinformation, foreign interference and manipulation. The EU continued to support the Public Defender's Office to enhance the institutional capacities of the Ombudsman.

Georgian civil society, including human rights defenders, benefit also from an increased support through the regional Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility with EUR 10 million allocated for 2025-2027 and from regional programmes supporting human rights, civil society and independent media.

The EU-Council of Europe 'Partnership for Good Governance' PGG III was continued with reduced activities focusing on combating hate speech. Georgia continued to benefit from an EU co-funded project implemented by the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice supporting modernisation of court management in Georgia.

Multilateral context: Cooperation with the European Court of Human Rights and the implementation of its judgements is inadequate and currently there are 45 cases under enhanced supervision by the Committee of Ministers. The Georgian authorities did not invite an observation mission from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) in time to allow a meaningful observation of the municipal elections in October 2025. Moreover, Georgia failed to address any of the important OSCE/ODIHR recommendations from previous elections. Georgia remained an elected member of the

UN Human Rights Council (HRC) until end 2025. Special Procedures of the HRC called on Georgia to investigate the use of excessive force by police during demonstrations. While good cooperation in international fora is generally maintained, Georgia did not align with some international and EU initiatives.

Kosovo*

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the legal and institutional framework for the promotion, protection and enforcement of human rights was in place, but implementation still needed more effort. Kosovo appointed the head of the Agency for Gender Equality. Implementation of legislation safeguarding the rights of persons belonging to non-majority communities, including language rights, needed strengthening. Adoption of the Civil Code and amendments to the Law on freedom of religion remained pending, and the positions of the Language Commissioner as well as the Director of the Office for Community Affairs remained vacant. Regarding freedom of expression, the Constitutional Court annulled the Law on the Independent Media Commission (IMC), providing the authorities with clear guidance to ensure the prompt drafting of a new law. While the media landscape was pluralistic, it faced challenges related to transparency in media ownership and financial sustainability. The environment in northern Kosovo remained restrictive, fostering self-censorship among the public, media and civil society. The media environment in general remained polarised, and the IMC struggled to enforce its regulatory oversight due to persisting governance issues.

Another worrying issue was the inadequate response to electoral disinformation and foreign interference. While local fact-checking initiatives worked to debunk false information, their impact was limited, especially due to language constraints and lack of reach. Despite some efforts, Kosovo institutions, particularly the Central Election Commission (CEC), missed key opportunities to proactively counter disinformation. The functioning of democratic institutions faced some challenges. Disagreements, polarisation and lack of cooperation between political parties prevented significant progress on EU-related reforms. On 9 February 2025, Kosovo held the first parliamentary elections under the newly revised framework, which had been aligned with the EU Election Observation Mission's (EU EOM) recommendations in 2023. The EU EOM noted smooth conduct of the voting on the election day. While the campaign period was competitive, there were instances of harsh rhetoric, misuse of public resources, and socio- political pressure in Kosovo Serb majority areas. Following the parliamentary elections, the Assembly continuously failed to establish itself, which is a pre-condition for a government to be formed. Due to this political gridlock, the outgoing government has been in caretaker status since 23 March 2025, equipped with only limited executive functions. This impasse has undermined the functioning of democratic institutions and risks eroding public trust in the democratic processes. The first round of local elections of 12 October was peaceful, inclusive and competitive, with participation of all communities, despite attempts to politicise the work of the CEC. The early general elections on 28 December 2025 were inclusive and competitive despite the short timeline for their organisation and repeated attempt to politicise the work of the CEC. The full recount of votes that ensued outside the reporting period and following allegations of manipulation of preferential votes for candidates was a necessary step that protected electoral integrity. Civil society organisations (CSOs) operated in an overall enabling environment. They are active and diverse, participating in the design and monitoring of the EU-related reforms. However, they had trouble meaningfully contributing to the policymaking processes, as the consultation processes organised by the government were mostly a formal exercise. The phasing out of US development assistance laid

bare the level of CSOs' dependency on international donors' funding. For more information, please refer to the European Commission's Kosovo 2025 Report.

Kosovo ranked 99th on the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without borders, 59th on the WJP Rule of Law index, 76th on the corruption perceptions index of Transparency International, and received the score of 67/100, indicating narrowed civic space on the Civicus tracking tool.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to closely monitor human rights as part of Kosovo's European path. This included freedom of assembly and association, freedom of expression, the rights of persons in vulnerable situations including persons belonging to minorities, non-discrimination, child rights, rights of LGBTI persons, persons with disabilities, as well as gender equality.

EU bilateral political engagement: In 2025, the EU was implementing reversible measures vis-à-vis Kosovo. In May 2025, the EU started gradually lifting these measures in parallel with steps taken by Kosovo to de-escalate the tensions in the north. Following sustained de-escalation including the smooth and orderly transfer of local governance in the north in the aftermath of the last local elections, the EU is lifting all the remaining measures on Kosovo. The EU-facilitated Dialogue on normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia continued. Both Parties committed to fully implement all their respective obligations stemming from the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and its Implementation Annex reached in 2023. The regular policy dialogue based on the Stabilisation and Association Agreement was resumed. This included discussions through the Stabilisation and Association Subcommittees, such as the Subcommittee on Justice, Freedom and Security, as well as informal policy dialogue within the framework of the Reform and Growth Facility, in anticipation of its ratification.

EU financial engagement: EU funding for civil society was not affected by the EU measures vis-à-vis Kosovo, and Kosovo continued benefitting from ongoing assistance under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III). A project was implemented and finalised by UNICEF (EUR 2.2 million), contributing to strengthening Kosovo's child protection system. Under the Civil Society Facility and Media Programme, the EU's support was strongly focused on reinforcing the resilience, inclusiveness, and effectiveness of civil society organisations and independent media. The project addressed structural strengthening of civil society and media ecosystems and supported focused annual interventions aligned with strategic priorities, advancing LGBTI rights, public procurement transparency, and daily services for persons with disabilities (EUR 4.9 million). Collectively, this support contributed to a more resilient, rights-based, and participatory civil society and media landscape in Kosovo, strengthening democratic governance, social inclusion, and community-level service delivery. Moreover, the ongoing support under Civil Society Facility 2021 allocation (EUR 1.8 million) strengthened sustained civil society action in the areas of justice and rule of law, anti-discrimination and gender equality, media pluralism, environmental sustainability, and institutional accountability.

Under the NDICI Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy, in 2025 the EU's support was focused on gender equality, non-discrimination, social inclusion, children, youth, other vulnerable groups empowerment and transitional justice, including resolving the fate of missing persons from the war (EUR 1.2 million). Through the EU funded Council of Europe Horizontal Facility III for the Western Balkans and Türkiye, the EU supported the preparation of the Ombudsperson Institution's (OI) second annual report on the implementation of the Law on Protection from Discrimination. Further support was provided to the OI on artificial intelligence and non-discrimination in cooperation with civil society

organisations. Together, these actions (EUR 0.45 million) contributed to strengthening the legal framework, institutional capacity, and actual protection against discrimination.

Multilateral context: Kosovo continued its dialogue and cooperation with European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies, including UN bodies, the OSCE and Council of Europe, including through participation in most regional forums. The incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was pending. Kosovo's application for Council of Europe membership is awaiting a decision by its Committee of Ministers.

Montenegro

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, Montenegro's legislative and institutional framework for upholding human rights continued to be largely in place. However, more effort is needed to fully implement this framework and to ensure access to justice and enforcement of rights in administrative and judicial proceedings, particularly with respect to persons in vulnerable situations. In December 2025, the Parliament adopted a new law on anti-discrimination in line with the EU acquis and European standards. The most vulnerable groups in society (including Roma and Egyptians, persons with disabilities and LGBTI persons) continued to be subjected to discrimination, hate speech and hate crime.

Montenegro must effectively address all recommendations from the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment, the European Commission on Racism and Intolerance and the Group of Experts on Action against Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. The functioning of democratic institutions was generally stable. However, it suffered from recurrent challenges due to the polarised political situation and consequently, institutions remained vulnerable to political crisis and blockages. The government majority, made up of a diverse coalition of parties, was relatively stable despite occasional political tension. In July, the Parliament adopted amendments to the electoral legislative framework, partially addressing long-standing recommendations from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), including oversight of campaign finance and media, improving the integrity of election administration, increasing gender quota on electoral lists and introducing a single election day for local elections. No national elections took place. Local elections have taken place nearly every three months. Neither the elections in Kotor nor in Savnik have been completed.

Montenegro maintained its focus on the EU integration agenda, although the legislative EU alignment process on certain negotiation chapters slowed in early 2025, due to domestic political challenges. The parliament operated regularly, largely with consensus on key EU related reforms. However, following a controversial decision of the Parliament to unilaterally declare the retirement of a Constitutional Court judge in December 2024, an institutional and political crisis emerged, with the opposition blocking parliamentary proceedings for a few months, and raising concerns about the respect for the independence of the Constitutional Court and the principle of separation of powers enshrined in the Constitution. This decision was not in line with the procedure foreseen in the Constitution, as also stated by the Venice Commission in its June opinion. Civil Society organisations overall operate in an enabling environment. The involvement of civil society in policymaking is formalised, but at times formal and not consistently taking place. Further efforts remained necessary to ensure genuine and meaningful cooperation between the government and CSOs. For more information, refer to the European Commission's Montenegro 2025 Report.

Montenegro ranked 37th on the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without borders, 55th on the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law index, 65th on the Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International, and received the score of 77/100, indicating narrowed civic space on the Civicus tracking tool.

EU action - key focus areas: Following the achievement of the interim benchmarks, the EU's action in Montenegro continued to focus on the key areas described in the closing benchmarks on fundamental rights, as part of chapter 23 of the accession negotiations. They related to the alignment with the EU acquis and international standards on the strengthening of effective application of human rights, procedural safeguards, the protection of minorities and cultural rights, protection against discrimination, including racism, xenophobia and gender equality. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to closely monitor the situation of human rights in Montenegro within the framework of the EU accession negotiations under chapter 23 judiciary and fundamental rights. There was regular policy dialogue at political level, EU-funded projects as well as engagement with international organisations and civil society. Montenegro was participating in the Stabilisation and Association Process and continued to broadly implement its obligations under this agreement.

EU financial engagement: Montenegro benefits from EU support under the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, of which EUR 20.9 million have already been disbursed as a loan to the State budget. An EU-funded action (IPA III) of UNDP on confidence building in the Western Balkans supported Montenegrin authorities for drafting the War Crimes Investigation Strategy 2024-2027 and its Action Plan. Under the IPA III Civil Society and Media Facility, the EU provided support to community-led rural development and growth initiative with EUR 0.5 million and around EUR 1 million was allocated for strengthening youth networks and empowering youth in Montenegro.

Support to independent media and civic actors in Montenegro also received EUR 1 million for their activities until the end of 2027. Under the NDICI Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy, the EU continued supporting the electoral reform, prevention and combat of impunity and gender-based violence, as well as protection of journalists against violence, including online and capacity building of investigative journalism (EUR 1.07 million). In addition, a direct award of EUR 0.5 million for the prevention and fighting against gender-based violence was contracted in 2025, aiming to support women's organisations in Montenegro through sub-granting.

Under the NDICI Thematic Instrument on Human Rights and Democracy, the EU also provided support for independent and professional judiciary (EUR 0.15 million). Cooperation with the Council of Europe continued under the Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye – Phase III with EUR 5 million for Montenegro focusing on ensuring justice, fighting corruption and organised crime and promoting human rights, including diversity, equality, freedom of expression and social inclusion. The programme enabled the adoption of amendments to the Criminal Code in line with the Council of Europe recommendations on anti-discrimination and countering hate speech.

In the area of fighting corruption and economic crime, three sectoral risk assessments were completed, respectively on money laundering risks assessment associated with high-level corruption; money laundering risks assessment associated with use of cash and the informal economy and terrorist financing risk assessment involving the non-profit organisations and payment institutions. Amendments to the Law on Free Legal Aid were adopted, significantly improving access to justice for the most vulnerable categories of victims of criminal acts.

A significant step has been taken toward establishing a comprehensive system for the protection of victims' rights through the drafting of the first National Strategy on Victims' Rights in Montenegro, which was adopted on 25 December 2025. In the context of victim protection, Sentencing Guidelines in cases of sexual and gender-based violence, were also developed. With this support, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights finalised the new draft Law on Anti- Discrimination which the Parliament adopted in December. In addition, the action supported the Working Group, which prepared the draft Law on Legal Gender recognition.

Multilateral context: Montenegro continued to meet its international obligations on human rights and cooperated closely with the EU in multilateral human rights fora. The country continued its dialogue and cooperation with European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies, including the United Nations' bodies and the Council of Europe. Montenegro continued to fully align itself with EU statements on human rights in multilateral fora, including EU restrictive measures following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Montenegro continued to ensure good cooperation with the European Court of Human Rights. The country has ratified most key international human rights instruments. Montenegro has yet to ratify the 2014 Protocol to the International Labour Organization (ILO) 1930 Forced Labour Convention. Montenegro needs to improve its mechanisms for reporting to the UN human rights mechanisms and following up on their recommendations.

Republic of Moldova

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The legislative and institutional framework on fundamental rights is largely in place. Implementation of the national human rights action programme is ongoing. The cooperation with the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the implementation of its judgements need to be improved. Moldova appointed a Government Agent to the ECtHR but he resigned in December 2025. The implementation rate of the recommendations issued by the Equality Council and the People's Advocate and People's Advocate for Children's Rights is increasing but the institutions remain understaffed. The legal framework for the protection of personal data has been reinforced but the capacities of the data protection agency need to be improved. Detention conditions (overcrowding, inadequate medical services and ill-treatment) remained a concern, as did the treatment of persons with disabilities in specialised institutions.

New legislation strengthened legal protections against gender-based violence and criminalised stalking, forced marriage and digital abuse, in line with the Istanbul Convention. Efforts to combat gender-based violence should continue. Moldova amended the legal framework on freedom of expression, including the Audiovisual Media Services Code and new Criminal Code provisions enhancing the protection of journalists. The Media Subsidy Fund was put in place to support independent journalism. However, intimidation against journalists has increased, notably in the context of the parliamentary elections and disinformation campaigns. Further efforts are needed to extend ownership transparency to print and online media.

Moldova held parliamentary elections in September 2025, under new provisions of the Electoral code, which were well-managed, competitive and offered voters a clear choice among alternatives. The elections were marked by an unprecedented scale of Russian interference and disinformation. To address these issues, Moldova strengthened the Law on Combating Electoral Corruption, which needs to be brought in line with European standards. The Central Electoral Commission should be provided with adequate resources to function properly and for monitoring online campaigning. Parliament can

overall exercise its powers in an effective way. Further efforts are needed to increase parliamentary transparency, accountability, integrity and effectiveness. This includes ensuring the timely and comprehensive publication of activities, decisions and draft laws. Moldova should accelerate the adoption of the Code on the Organisation and Functioning of Parliament and of the Law on status, conduct and ethics of MPs. A regulation on Parliament's responsibilities concerning EU integration efforts is needed, particularly in relation to its oversight of the government.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) operate in an overall enabling environment in Moldova. Civil society is involved in decision making and in the government's preparations for the technical phase of the EU accession process. Efforts are needed to enhance the protection of human rights defenders. There has been limited progress in the implementation of the national programme for the development of CSOs 2024-2027. USAID funding cuts have further highlighted civil society's reliance on international donors, challenging its long-term sustainability. For more information, please refer to the European Commission's Moldova 2025 Report. In terms of gender equality, Moldova, with its 7th place in the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gender Gap index for 2025, moved up in the rankings from the previous year joining the top 10 countries worldwide. Moldova ranked 35th on the 2025 World Press Freedom (WPF) Index of Reporters Without Borders, 68th on the 2025 World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index, 80th on Transparency International's 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index, and received a score of 72/100, indicating narrowed civic space, on the CIVICUS Monitor.

EU action – key focus areas: In 2025, the EU continued to closely monitor the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights, with particular attention to the prevention of and accountability for torture and ill-treatment in the prison system, access to justice, the rights of persons in vulnerable situations, including persons with disabilities and persons belonging to minorities, as well as gender equality and women's empowerment. The EU followed closely developments related to the parliamentary elections as well as the right to freedom of expression during the electoral cycle, and Moldova's efforts to counter electoral corruption and hybrid interference. The EU actively supported civil society, independent and pluralistic media and the fight against disinformation.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged in a regular political dialogue with Moldova throughout 2025. In the context of accession negotiations, Moldova completed the analytical examination of the EU acquis (screening) in September. The Commission assessed all clusters, including the one on fundamentals, as ready to be opened. In December 2025, EU Member States provided a clear direction to move to technical negotiations with Moldova for clusters one, two and six, pending their formal opening by the Council. Dialogue between the EU and Moldova further intensified with the first ever EU-Moldova Summit on 4 July 2025, and within the framework of the Association Agreement. The Association Council took place in June 2025, followed by several subcommittee meetings in autumn 2025.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, the EU continued to provide financial support to reforms aimed at strengthening democracy, rule of law and human rights. The Moldova Growth Plan supports economic transformation and EU integration, including on the fundamentals, with EUR 1.9 billion support for 2025-2027, through the Reform and Growth Facility for Moldova, which was adopted in March 2025. Ongoing EU-funded projects supported the implementation of the justice reform and the vetting process in Moldova in line with European and international standards through projects amounting to EUR 15.2 million implemented by the OECD, the Dutch Centre for International Legal Cooperation and the Council of Europe (CoE). Activities funded included policy recommendations for the justice reform

strategy and increasing the capacity of key Moldovan institutions. In addition, Moldova benefitted from EU-funded technical expertise in the field of rule of law.

The NDICI regional programme, through a contribution of EUR 6.14 million for the entire region, continued to support the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights' project 'Building stronger democratic institutions in Eastern Partnership countries', which assisted the Parliament of Moldova in reviewing the draft Law on status, conduct and ethics of the Members of Parliament. The third phase (2023-2027) of the Regional Facility Partnership for Good Governance for Eastern Partnership countries, implemented by the Council of Europe, continued (total budget of EUR 19.3 million). It supported Moldova in fighting against discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes, to enhance the anti-money laundering and asset recovery regime, to further modernise court management, and to promote equality and women's access to justice.

Under the NDICI Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy, two projects implemented by the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE) and Cooperazione Internazionale Sud-Sud (CISS) aim to secure the integrity, the efficiency and independence of the Moldova justice system and to enhance the access to justice for vulnerable groups (EUR 0.9 million). As part of the NDICI Civil Society Facility, projects amounting to over EUR 4.6 million, and implemented by the Soros Foundation, Caritas Czech Republic as well as Expert-Grup, IPRE and FSM, supported local employment opportunities, access to nurseries for parents in vulnerable situations, better sanitation and hygiene facilities for students in rural schools as well as the consolidation of the consumer protection framework in Moldova. The EU also supported resilience and capacity of independent media and civil society organisations to monitor elections and promote democratic accountability mechanisms in Moldova under the actions for the Eastern Partnership region.

Multilateral context: In 2025, Moldova's cooperation with international human rights mechanisms, including the United Nations (UN) system and the Council of Europe (CoE), continued, although follow-up to recommendations requires further improvement. Moldova continued to align with international and EU initiatives in support of Ukraine and supported relevant resolutions of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), the Human Rights Council (HRC) and the CoE, among others. Continued engagement in UN fora, including the UNGA Third Committee and the HRC, as well as effective preparation and follow-up to Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations, remain important to further advance Moldova's human rights commitments. Moldova took over the presidency of the CoE's Council of Ministers in November 2025. Moldova maintained cooperation with the European Court of Human Rights, which delivered a significant number of judgments in 2025, pointing to persistent structural issues, notably in detention conditions and procedural rights. Several cases remain under enhanced supervision by the Committee of Ministers.

Republic of Serbia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, while Serbia's legislative and institutional framework for upholding fundamental rights was broadly in place, implementation of this framework needed to be improved as a matter of priority. Independent bodies have issued only little, or late, public reaction to human rights violations in the context of the protests. While freedom of assembly was generally ensured and protests allowed to take place, the safety of participants was not always guaranteed, and several violent incidents against demonstrators and journalists occurred, with reported cases of excessive use of force by the police. To date, only some perpetrators have been

prosecuted, while several others were pardoned from criminal prosecution by the President. Such incidents intensified over the summer.

The European Court of Human Rights issued an interim measure on the alleged use by the authorities of a sonic weapon for crowd control at demonstrations in Belgrade; there was no credible follow-up yet by the authorities which denied such use. Regarding freedom of expression, and although Serbia amended its media legislation to align further with the EU acquis and European standards, the environment for journalists, media professionals and outlets seriously worsened.

Recurrent statements by high-level officials on the work of journalists had a chilling effect on the freedom of expression. The number of attacks and cases of pressure increased in the course of 2025 compared to the same period of the previous year, including physical attacks, some of which were in the presence of police that did not respond. Cases have also been reported of the use of police force against journalists, of preventing media workers from reporting on the protests and of journalists being briefly detained. Cases brought by the prosecution services during the reporting period resulted in only one conviction and one deferred criminal prosecution. Cases of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) increasingly hindered the work of investigative media.

The media laws of 2023 have also been inconsistently implemented. In particular, the media regulator (REM) failed to fully exercise its mandate and serious concerns persisted regarding its independence in practice. The Parliament did not elect a new REM Council by the legal deadline of 4 November 2024 and, as a result, Serbia has been without the decision-making body of the media regulator since then. The process of selection has continued with international facilitation. Political and economic influence on the media, including on editorial policy, remained a source of serious concern. Parliament's effectiveness and oversight function remain hampered by the low frequency of sessions and the lack of genuine political debate. Public scrutiny and involvement in the legislative process were limited and debates continued to be marked by tensions between the ruling coalition and the opposition. Regarding the conduct of elections, tangible improvements and further reforms are needed. It is vital that all outstanding recommendations by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and the Council of Europe bodies are fully implemented, in a transparent and inclusive process and well ahead of any new elections.

As regards civil society organisations (CSOs) in Serbia, they operated in an increasingly difficult environment. Since the start of the protests, CSOs advocating for the rule of law have faced intensified verbal attacks and smear campaigns, including by high-level officials. Complaints were filed against the use of spyware targeting human rights defenders and journalists. SLAPPs increasingly hindered CSOs' work. Several foreign CSO representatives, including from EU Member States, were expelled from Serbia and some were subsequently banned from entering the country. In February 2025, the police searched the offices of four CSOs at the request of the Special Anti-Corruption Department of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade. To date, the searches have not resulted in any judicial proceedings, and they have been widely perceived as an act of pressure on civil society. Cooperation between the government and CSOs remained under strain. There is still significant scope to improve the transparency of public funding to civil society. For more information, please refer to the European Commission's Serbia 2025 Report.

Serbia ranked 96th globally on the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without borders and on the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law index, 116th on the corruption perceptions index of

Transparency International, and received the score of 38/100, indicating repressed civic space on the Civicus tracking tool.

EU action - key focus areas: The key focus areas in 2025 included elections, freedom of assembly, media freedom and freedom of expression including the process for appointing the new Council of the media regulator, human rights institutions (Ombudsman, Commissioner for the Protection of Equality and Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection) and the rights of persons belonging to minorities, including the Roma. The EU continued to focus on key areas described in the interim benchmarks of chapter 23 of the accession negotiations: judiciary and fundamental rights. As regards the latter, benchmarks related to the effective application of human rights, procedural safeguards, the rights of persons belonging to minorities and cultural rights, protection against racism and xenophobia and data protection.

EU bilateral political engagement: There is a regular policy and political dialogue, including in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. This dialogue is based on monitoring of the implementation of the action plan for chapter 23 in the framework of the EU accession negotiations in view of fulfilling interim benchmarks. Regular dialogue and contacts were maintained on the issue of election reform and the implementation of ODIHR recommendations.

EU financial engagement: Under the Reform and Growth Facility, Serbia may benefit from a programmed allocation of up to EUR 370 million in the fundamentals policy area, conditional on the fulfilment of steps, which includes addressing recommendations of OSCE/ODIHR and Council of Europe bodies on the electoral framework and enhancing freedom of expression by amending media to align with the EU acquis and European standards and ensuring its implementation. Serbia continued to benefit from funding under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).

In December 2025, under the IPA III Civil Society and Media Facility, EUR 7.4 million worth of grants were awarded to strengthen the capacity of CSOs, involving more than 60 organisations further empowering hundreds of local grass-roots organisations. These actions will address a wide range of issues such as rule of law and justice, anti-corruption, good governance and democracy, education, youth engagement, investigative journalism and media safety. Other IPA projects relevant for human rights protection include the project 'Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia III/EU4GE' (EUR 1.5 million) implemented by UN Women and which began in July 2025. Another project 'Promoting Children's Access to Justice in the Republic of Serbia' (EUR 1.7 million) implemented by UNICEF started in December 2025.

The NDICI Thematic Programme on Human Rights and Democracy continued to support the right of persons belonging to minorities, gender equality, rights of the child and human rights defenders with 3 new grants of EUR 1.6 million awarded in December 2025. Cooperation with the Council of Europe continued under the Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye – Phase III, focusing on support to justice encompassing human rights protection in relation to ECHR and ECtHR case law, human rights of detained and sentenced persons, fight against discrimination and protection of vulnerable groups including strengthening of anti-trafficking, quality education for all, promotion of diversity (comprising LGBTI persons and persons belonging to minorities) and freedom of expression.

Multilateral context: Serbia continued its dialogue and cooperation with European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies. The UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances issued its recommendations in April 2025, notably on the need to criminalise enforced disappearance

as an autonomous offense, revise penalties and statutes of limitations and ensure inclusivity and full reparation for all affected individuals. The Committee voiced its concern over lack of mutual judicial cooperation with Kosovo* and the classification of key military and police archives, hindering investigations. It recommended prioritising bilateral and multilateral efforts to elucidate missing persons cases.

During his visit in May 2025, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights urged the authorities to ensure transparency and thorough investigations into the Novi Sad tragedy as well as all allegations of violence against peaceful protesters, also calling for a balance to be struck between the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and the right to education. He also raised concerns over the deteriorating environment of CSOs, hate speech and the need to make progress in the field of transitional justice. The UN Sub-Committee for the Prevention of Torture urged Serbia to strengthen its national preventive mechanism and address shortcomings in criminal justice and social care. Serbia's alignment with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) remains low. Serbia continued to not align with the majority of restrictive measures against Russia and also did not align with a number of other EU restrictive measures. The EU expects Serbia to step up its efforts towards full alignment with EU CFSP positions and restrictive measures as a matter of utmost priority.

Republic of Türkiye

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the human rights situation in Türkiye deteriorated. The judiciary continued to be under the control of the executive, affecting its independence and compromising the quality of judicial outcomes. Türkiye still did not implement certain rulings of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the related judgments of its own Constitutional Court. Türkiye needs to address systematic issues such as judicial independence and judicial review mechanism. Investigations, prosecutions and convictions of journalists, writers, lawyers, academics, human rights defenders and other critical voices for alleged support for terrorism intensified. For the first time in many years, a sitting chair of a political party was prosecuted for his public speeches. In March 2025, the mayor of Istanbul and presidential candidate of the main opposition party was arrested along with many others, including elected officials, on charges of alleged corruption.

Türkiye still needs to align its anti-terror legislation and its implementation, as well as practices against terrorism, with European standards, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), ECtHR case law, the Venice Commission's recommendations, and the EU acquis and practices. Türkiye needs to ensure a political and legal environment that allows the judiciary to carry out its duties independently and impartially and effectively implement ECtHR jurisprudence. Türkiye needs to improve the legislative framework and its implementation to effectively protect women's rights and gender equality; to tackle all forms of racism and discrimination, including against LGBTI persons, and to ensure the protection of minorities; and to implement the ECtHR judgements as a matter of priority, including in the cases of Kavala vs Türkiye and Demirtaş v. Türkiye.

Serious concerns remained about freedom of expression. The implementation of criminal laws related to national security, anti-terrorism and the defamation laws continued contravening the ECHR and diverging from ECtHR case law, hindering freedom of expression. Türkiye needs to revise its criminal legislation, in particular the anti-terror law, the Criminal Code, the data protection law, the internet law, the disinformation law, the cybersecurity law, and the legal framework related to the Radio and

Television Supreme Council and the Internet Supervisory Authority, to bring them in line with European standards and ensure their implementation in a proportionate manner.

As regards freedom of assembly, Turkish authorities continued to impose bans on public gatherings and demonstrations based on vague, discretionary and often arbitrary criteria. Following the arrest of the Istanbul mayor, the International Women's Day and the Newroz celebrations in March 2025, mass detentions and arrests took place. Gender-based violence, discrimination and hate speech against non-Muslim minorities and against LGBTI persons are still a matter of serious concern. The highly centralised presidential system, which has seriously weakened Parliament's prerogatives and the separation of powers, remained in place. The system lacks effective checks and balances, and the tools needed to hold the government accountable beyond elections. Most regulatory authorities remain directly linked to the Presidency, and public administration is highly politicised. Local democracy was further weakened as elected opposition mayors were prosecuted and removed, with some being replaced by government-appointed trustees.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) continued to operate in a difficult and increasingly restrictive environment. The civic space had further shrunk due to sustained judicial and administrative pressures from the authorities, hindering the work of CSOs. Despite this, civil society continued to be vocal and participates actively in civic life, making crucial contributions in several areas. For more information, please refer to the European Commission's Türkiye 2025 Report. Türkiye ranked 159th globally on the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without borders, 118th on the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law index, 124th on the Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International, and received the score of 23/100, indicating repressed civic space on the Civicus tracking tool.

EU action - key focus areas: EU actions in Türkiye are focused on supporting civil society, with a strong emphasis on fundamental rights issues. The EU continued to support human rights defenders, refugees, persons belonging to minorities, access to justice, as well as freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and media pluralism, as well as combatting disinformation and false narratives.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to monitor closely and report on human rights violations and developments in Türkiye, raising its concerns in bilateral contacts with Turkish authorities. Policy and political dialogue as well as engagement with international organisations, various political actors and civil society continued. The EU-Türkiye High-Level Dialogues on Economy, Trade, Migration and Security, Climate and Science, Research, Technology and Innovation took place 2025, while the political dialogue at Political Directors' level took place in March.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, the EU continued the implementation of human rights and democracy related actions in Türkiye. Within the bilateral cooperation under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III), the EU programmed for 2025-2027 additional EUR 22.8 million to support civil society and to promote fundamental rights.

Under the Civil Society Facility and Media Facility, the EU allocated additional EUR 50 million for 2026 and 2027. Four new projects (EUR 17 million) were launched in 2025 to support human rights monitoring, access to justice, business and human rights and gender. Projects within the programme continued to support CSOs in the areas of environmental rights, green deal, climate change, disaster risk management, gender equality, supporting human rights defenders, empowerment of women and girls, rights of LGBTI persons, as well as through projects aimed at increasing advocacy capacities of human rights organisations.

Under the NDICI Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy, one new project for an overall amount of EUR 2.8 million was launched to strengthen civil society, diversity, inter-cultural dialogue and promote democratic values. In addition, 17 ongoing actions continued to support women's rights, rights of the child and rights of persons belonging to minorities, promotion of youth participation, access to justice and rights to fair trial, non-discrimination, combating impunity and human rights in the penitentiary system.

Cooperation under the EU-Council of Europe Horizontal Facility – phase III with EUR 3.25 million for Türkiye continued to provide capacity-building activities and fostering dialogue between public actors and civil society with satisfactory results in the areas of fight against corruption, economic and organised crime; promotion of anti-discrimination and protection of the right of persons in vulnerable situations; fostering women's access to justice and strengthening human rights in the context of migration. With the EUR 1.15 billion package adopted in December 2025, the EU stepped up support to Türkiye in meeting essential needs for refugees, strengthening its border management capacities and enhancing the protection response for sustainable voluntary returns to Syria.

Multilateral context: In 2025, the EU Delegations to the Council of Europe, to the UN and to the OSCE kept expressing on multiple occasions the EU's concerns over the human rights situation in Türkiye. The EU Delegations in Ankara and Strasbourg closely followed the developments related to the non-implementation of the ECtHR rulings and the infringement procedure against Türkiye for failing to release human rights defender Osman Kavala. Türkiye continued to accommodate the European Parliament Rapporteur for Türkiye who was granted authorisation by the Ministry of Justice to visit four prisoners, including Mr. Kavala and Mr. Demirtaş in 2025. Nonetheless, other delegations faced more difficult access.

Ukraine

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The government of Ukraine continued to show commitment to its obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, while Ukraine's human rights and the humanitarian situation remained in a state of crisis due to the full- scale Russian invasion since 2022. Attacks on civilian infrastructure further increased, leading to the highest civilian casualty rates since the start of the full-scale invasion. Millions of Ukrainians were still displaced. The situation in the temporarily occupied territories, where Russia imposes its own systems of governance and administration, in contravention with international law, and where international organisations, including the UN, documented widespread cases of gross violations of International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law by Russian armed forces, remained particularly concerning.

The introduction of martial law in Ukraine imposes temporary restrictions on citizens' rights and freedoms, but its application remained overall proportionate. Ukraine advanced the alignment of its legislation with the EU acquis and European and international human rights standards. In 2025 Ukraine became a State Party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Progress was achieved in areas such as protection of victims of crimes, strengthening the National Prevention Mechanism, starting to implement the Istanbul Convention and the rights of the child. In other policies such as data protection, hate speech and hate crimes, and registered partnerships, progress stalled. Also, further efforts are required in the implementation of international standards with respect to the absolute prohibition of torture and other ill treatments, including in the context of detention conditions in Ukraine.

Despite the constraints resulting from Russia's full-scale invasion, democratic institutions continued to function and civil society remained active. Ukraine's media landscape is overall pluralist and resilient in a difficult environment, while consistent follow-up on alleged cases of harassment and intimidation of journalists is not always ensured. Ukraine made some progress on freedom of expression, notably on the financial independence of the public broadcaster, transparency of media ownership and access to information for journalists. Cases of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) related to journalistic investigations remain an issue in Ukraine. A working group on developing effective mechanisms to counter SLAPPs was established in June 2025 and legislative work has begun to align with the EU acquis.

Despite Russia's war of aggression, Ukraine's government has continued to perform its functions in an effective way, prioritising security and defence. Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) can exercise its powers, including control of the executive and involvement in the legislative process, in a partially effective way due to the limitations imposed by martial law. A number of key recommendations from the latest election observation mission reports of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODHIR) have been implemented. The general framework remains overall conducive to the organisation of democratic elections, upon a future lifting of martial law, once circumstances allow. CSOs continued their activities in an overall enabling environment even under martial law. Legislation was adopted to strengthen the engagement and consultation of the public and CSOs in policymaking and decision-making processes at the central and sub-national government levels. Instances of alleged pressure on CSOs, anti-corruption activists and investigative journalists were reported. For more information, please refer to the European Commission's Ukraine 2025 Report.

Ukraine ranked 62nd on the 2025 World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders, 90th on the 2025 World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index, 104th on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, and received a score of 52/100, indicating narrowed civic space, on the CIVICUS Monitor.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, the EU's actions on human rights focused on accountability, war crimes documentation, promoting respect, protection and fulfilment of fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and of media, and promoting equality and non-discrimination. Through the European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) Ukraine, the EU also supported human-rights-based reform of the civilian security sector, including advice on legislation and policies, and building the capacity of law-enforcement and judicial actors to investigate and prosecute international crimes. Key EU-led public outreach events and communication campaigns focused on the support to civil society, capacity-building of journalists, visibility of Russian war crimes, countering anti-EU information manipulations, supporting war veterans, civilian detainees and returned children and advocating for inclusive society.

EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights continued to be on the agenda of the political dialogue between the EU and Ukraine, including numerous high-level visits to Ukraine involving EU Council Presidencies, the HRVP, and the European Commission. The EU-Ukraine Annual Human Rights Dialogue took place in June. In September, the newly appointed EU Special Representative for Human Rights visited Ukraine as one of the first actions in her new mandate, including in her capacity as Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group (ACA)'s Principal for the EU. The political dialogue intensified due to the EU accession process, leading to the closing of the screening in the area of 'Fundamentals' (Cluster 1) as well as the adoption of roadmaps for reforms in the fields of rule of law, public administration

and the functioning of democratic institutions, as well as an Action Plan on National Minorities. These developments, building on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, define the key priorities relating to fundamental rights in relation to Ukraine's EU accession process.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, the EU continued the implementation of human rights and democracy related actions in Ukraine and developed a strategic response to ensure continued funding to CSOs in key areas of EU policy, following the 2025 US funding cuts. A package of 20 emergency grants was launched during the year for a total of around EUR 24 million and, at the end of 2025, a call for proposals for NGOs has been launched under the Pillar III of the Ukraine Facility for an allocation of EUR 17 million. During the period, the EU was financing projects of CSOs working on gender equality, human rights defenders assistance, rights of the child and of those in vulnerable situations, including rights of LGBTI persons, along with supporting public policies in Ukraine. These accounted for more than EUR 112 million, of which EUR 11 million stem from the Ukraine Facility and EUR 101 million from NDICI CRISIS FPI and bilateral NDICI funding. The EU financial contribution of EUR 5 million to the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission to Ukraine of the OHCHR supported the continued monitoring and documenting on international human rights and international humanitarian law violations in Ukraine. In the field of accountability, the Global Rights Compliance project (EUR 3.7 million) and the PravoJustice project (EUR 1.2 million) funded by various NDICI instruments and programmes contributed to broader international efforts aimed at ensuring accountability for international crimes committed during the full-scale invasion. The Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy continued to support civil society actions on documentation and accountability of war crimes with EUR 1.6 million. The collaboration with the Council of Europe remained close in the context of the EU-funded Partnership for Good Governance III and cybercrime in the Eastern partnership region as well as through the Ukraine focused project on anti-discrimination and national minorities.

Multilateral context: Ukraine actively mobilised international bodies and organisations raising awareness about human rights violations committed by Russia. The EU supported Ukraine through various multilateral initiatives, including on accountability. This included ongoing support for the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine and the EU-US- UK Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group within which the EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) Ukraine appoints one of the Deputy Lead Coordinators. In the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group (ACA) framework, EUAM Ukraine and Prav Justice act as implementing partners providing capacity-building and strategic advice to the Office of the Prosecutor General and other law- enforcement bodies. The EU remained committed to support the establishment of the register of damages caused by Russia's aggression, contributing to efforts on a Claims Commission and compensation mechanism, and signed the convention to establish the Claims Commission on 16 December. The EU also supported the work to create a special tribunal for the crime of aggression as a part of the core group and encourages partner states to join the Enlarged Partial Agreement. Moreover, the EU supported the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, becoming a full member in September 2025, and the 'Bring Kids Back UA' initiative led by the Office of the President of Ukraine.

EEA/EFTA Countries and non-EU Western European Countries

Swiss Confederation

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Switzerland boasts a very high standard of human rights and democracy, supported by strong legal frameworks and an active civil society. Fundamental rights and freedoms are enshrined in the Federal Constitution, which also mandates the Federal Council to promote human rights and democracy worldwide. A significant institutional step was the establishment of the Swiss National Human Rights Institution in 2023. Several specialised federal bodies address equality and anti-discrimination, and civil society organisations operate freely. Despite this strong framework, gaps persist in areas such as gender equality, protection against discrimination, and the rights of migrants and minorities. Switzerland ranks 17th on the Global Gender Gap index of the World Economic Forum and 19th on the Women, Peace and Security global index by GIWPS.

Legal equality between women and men is well established, yet significant gender disparities remain. Women continue to earn less than men (12% in 2025) and are underrepresented in leadership positions. The Gender Equality Strategy 2030 aims to strengthen participation, reduce structural barriers to work-life balance, and combat discrimination. Additionally, domestic violence and violence against women remain serious concerns in Switzerland. In June 2025, in response to the rising number of femicides and growing public pressure, the Federal Government and cantons defined urgent measures to strengthen protection for women. These include closing gaps in shelters and emergency accommodation, enhancing professional training, and a systematic analysis of femicide cases. The 2025 Federal Council's second state report on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention noted a 6% increase in offences relating to domestic and gender-based violence between 2023 and 2024. Consequently, in November 2025, the government launched its first national prevention campaign against domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence. Led by the Federal Office for Gender Equality (FOGE) with cantons, municipalities, and civil society, the campaign targets victims, witnesses, and potential perpetrators, offering information and support. In terms of legislation, parliament also approved a provision criminalising stalking in 2025.

Switzerland has made significant progress in protecting the rights of LGBTI individuals, though challenges persist, particularly regarding hate crimes. The 2025 Hate Crime Report by Pink Cross documented 309 incidents targeting LGBTI individuals, (more than double the number recorded in 2023) with transgender individuals disproportionately affected. In response, the FOGE is developing a national action plan to address anti-LGBTI hate crimes and strengthen protection mechanisms.

Switzerland has robust legal protections against racial discrimination, including prohibitions on public hate speech, defamation, and expressions that violate human dignity based on ethnicity. Despite this, concerns remain about racial profiling by police and obstacles faced by asylum seekers and refugees in accessing medical care and legal remedies. In connection to police actions, including in response to some public protests, the 2025 CIVICUS Civic space tracker assessed the country as narrowed, compared to previous year. In December 2025, the Federal Council adopted its first national strategy against racism and antisemitism, mandated by parliament. The strategy, developed jointly with the cantons, aims to improve the reporting on racism and antisemitism, enhance protection, strengthen institutional prevention measures, and promote social engagement.

In February 2025, the Federal Council released a report on transnational repression affecting Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland. It documented intimidation and surveillance by actors linked to the People's Republic of China, including pressure to spy on community members and restrictions on exercising fundamental rights. The Federal Council recommends strengthening prevention, coordination, and awareness-raising within authorities to better protect affected persons.

Human trafficking continues to pose challenges, as Switzerland remains both a transit and destination country. In 2023, only 29 convictions resulted from 204 reported trafficking-related crimes. In November 2024, the Federal Department of Justice and Police tasked the federal police with developing a national strategy against organised crime, including human trafficking, to strengthen cross-cantonal cooperation and support the 2023-2027 National Action Plan against Human Trafficking.

The landmark 2024 KlimaSeniorinnen judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) continued to shape public debate. The court found Switzerland in violation of Articles 6 and 8 for failing to adopt effective measures to limit global warming to 1.5°C and for not adequately protecting vulnerable groups. The ruling set a precedent and underscored that climate inaction can constitute a human rights violation. Switzerland subsequently submitted a national action plan to the Council of Europe (CoE). In April 2025, UN experts urged Switzerland to step up efforts further.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU and Switzerland enjoy close and frequent cooperation within international institutions and the multilateral arena as regards human rights and democracy promotion (such as UN, CoE, OSCE). The EU and Switzerland often support each other's resolutions and statements in the UN Human Rights Council. The EU and Switzerland are also like-minded partners in the context of the UN General Assembly Third Committee.

EU bilateral political engagement: In general, Switzerland has good mechanisms in place to ensure the protection of human rights within its territory. The EU and Switzerland hold human rights consultations. A range of matters, including EU-Switzerland cooperation in multilateral fora, are addressed as part of these consultations.

EU financial engagement: Switzerland is not included in any operational projects or programmes funded by the EU's NDICI Global Europe thematic programme on human rights and democracy.

Multilateral context: The promotion of peace and human rights is a core priority of Swiss foreign policy, reflected in its Foreign Policy Strategy 2024-2027 and in the International Cooperation Strategy 2025-2028. The promotion of human rights in multilateral contexts is spearheaded by the Foreign Ministry's Peace and Human Rights Division, which deploys experts for bilateral and multilateral initiatives, international peace missions, and election observation efforts.

In 2025, Switzerland resumed membership in the UN Human Rights Council for a three-year term. Its stated priorities include abolition of the death penalty, prohibition of torture, protection of minorities and women's rights, and freedom of expression. Switzerland will also work to strengthen democratic institutions globally by promoting electoral standards, supporting peaceful protests, and addressing the human rights implications of new technologies. In September 2025 Switzerland outlined its priorities for chairing the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2026. One of its five priorities is promoting democracy, rule of law, and human rights.

Kingdom of Norway

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Norway is a strong supporter and promoter of human rights. Norway has ratified all the main UN conventions on human rights, and the protection of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights is strong domestically. In December 2025, Parliament approved the incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) into the Human Rights Act, set to take effect on 1 January 2026. Norway is considered as one of the most gender-equal countries globally, ranked third in the WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2025, and is also among highest ranking countries regarding rule of law and respect for fundamental rights: 2nd on the 2025 World Justice Project Rule of Law Index and 4th on 2025 Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. The promotion of human rights is a key component of Norway's foreign and humanitarian policy.

In Norway, there is also a healthy debate on many issues, including some criticisms. Examples encompass application of solitary confinement in prisons; concerns over cases of Child Protection Services; protection of indigenous people's rights and the use of coercive measures in mental health/prisons.

The Government launched its first Action Plan to combat harassment and discrimination of the Sámi (2025-2030) in January 2025. The plan was developed in close dialogue with the Sámi Parliament and civil society and aims to reduce discrimination and strengthen Sámi cultural and language rights. On 6 February 2025, Norway marked Sámi People's Day at the OSCE Permanent Council, commemorating the first pan-Sámi congress of 1917. Norway reaffirmed its commitment to the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL) 2022–2032, supporting the survival and revitalization of Indigenous languages, including Sámi. The statement emphasised the importance of promoting Sámi language rights and culture, along with increased visibility and awareness.

EU action – key focus areas: In Norway, the EU prioritises highlighting relevant EU and international initiatives (via social media, official institutions, schools, etc.), as well as providing targeted information to relevant Norwegian stakeholders. The Delegation also maintains contact with the Norwegian National Human Rights Institution and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee.

The EU Delegation in Oslo undertook several public diplomacy and information activities over the course of 2025. These included the continuous '#StandWithUkraine' campaign highlighting EU solidarity with Ukraine and updates on sanctions against Russia, as well as awareness-raising activities marking World Humanitarian Day, International Women's Day, the World Day Against the Death Penalty, Sami People's National Day, International Democracy Day and International Human Rights Day.

EU bilateral political engagement and their impact: Norway and the EU are close and like-minded partners on human rights, and cooperate extensively in multilateral fora (UN, Council of Europe, OSCE), where Norway is very active on human rights issues. The EU and Norway also cooperate locally on country-specific strategies around the world, including by undertaking joint statements, démarches and other diplomatic actions, together with some other like-minded partners. It is a priority to continue EU-Norway dialogues on human rights and multilateral affairs.

EU financial engagement and their impact: Norway is not included in any operational projects or programmes funded by the EU's NDICI Global Europe thematic programme on human rights and democracy.

Multilateral context: Norway is active on human rights issues in the multilateral context (UN, OSCE, CoE) and it often provides added value to the efforts of the EU and its Member States. Norway and the EU almost systematically coordinate their positions on human rights matters at the UN. Joint priorities include gender equality and women's rights, supporting civil society and human rights defenders, strengthening the role of UN human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council (HRC) and treaty bodies. EU and Norway are both strong advocates for climate action and environmental protection within the UN framework.

Norway participates actively in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, not only by submitting comprehensive national reports but also by engaging constructively with recommendations made during the reviews.

Norway is very active in the UN80 initiative, seeking to make sure the UN comes out stronger and more efficient. Norway's priorities at the 80th UN General Assembly focused on defending multilateralism, international law, and human rights amid growing global tension.

Iceland

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Iceland has long distinguished itself as a steadfast defender of human rights, maintaining close cooperation with the EU and with international organisations dedicated to advancing these principles.

Human rights and equality are key pillars to Iceland's foreign policy identity and its approach to international development, with a focus on gender equality; children and youth; LGBTI rights; as well as democracy and freedom of expression and media. Iceland's leadership in these areas has been recognised, e.g. through its 2025 ranking as the world's most gender equal country for the 16th consecutive year, third place on ILGA Europe's Rainbow Map, and first on the EU-funded TGEU Trans Rights Map. In January 2025, Iceland became a member of the UN Human Rights Council for the term 2025-2027.

In May 2025, the Icelandic Human Rights Institute began operations, with a main role to protect and promote human rights in Iceland, including through monitoring and advising on government policies as well as on the actions of regional and local authorities. The establishment of a national institute, in compliance with the UN Paris Principles, was a major recommendation of the 2011, 2016, and 2022 UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR).

Although Iceland has never published a comprehensive National Action Plan on Human Rights, work continued during 2025 on several action plans focusing on human rights and equality. Government National Action Plans regarding Gender Equality and LGBTQI+ Rights for 2026-2029 were introduced for parliamentary scrutiny and approval.

EU action – key focus areas: In 2025, the EU Delegation and the Missions of EU Member States in Iceland highlighted – through public diplomacy and outreach activities – the EU's work to advance human rights and equality both within Europe and globally. The Delegation prioritised deepening its

cooperation with Icelandic authorities and key human rights organisations in the country, including with regard to gender equality and LGBTI rights, while also promoting EU–Iceland collaboration on human rights matters in multilateral fora. The EU Delegation supported and actively participated in the Reykjavik Pride parade, marching together with representatives of other diplomatic missions under the banner 'Diplomats for Equality'. In line with the EU's commitment to disability inclusion, the EU Delegation, for the sixth consecutive year, contributed to improving accessibility and inclusion measures at the Pride parade by co-sponsoring a viewing/wheelchair ramp with other EU Member States' Missions. The EU Ambassador also published an op-ed in local media, reflecting on the importance of advancing equality and unity through Pride celebrations, and reaffirming the EU's commitment to upholding human rights.

The EU Delegation partnered with UN Women Iceland and the Icelandic Disability Alliance (ÖBÍ) to organise a human rights seminar on 'Women, Peace and Security in a Changing World' as well as a public event to mark the International Women's Day, and lent its support to Samtökin '78, the national LGBTI rights organisation, during its Annual Congress. In November, the EU Delegation took part in the 'Candlelight' walk against gender-based violence (GBV), organised by UN Women, while amplifying support for the #16days against GBV (25 November-10 December) through other public and social media activities, lighting the office with orange lights and flying an orange flag.

EU bilateral political engagement: Iceland is a close and like-minded partner of the European Union on human rights, and the two cooperate extensively across key multilateral arenas. This collaboration is particularly strong within the United Nations, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and other international platforms where both sides work together to advance shared human rights priorities.

EU financial engagement: Iceland is not included in any operational projects or programmes funded by the EU's NDICI Global Europe thematic programme on human rights and democracy.

Multilateral context: Iceland is a global frontrunner in the field of human rights and actively participates in relevant multilateral fora. In January 2025, Iceland began its second (though first full) term on the UN Human Rights Council (2025-2027), to which it was elected in October 2024. In February 2025, the Icelandic government published its objectives in the role, being: (1) human rights for all, (2) gender equality, (3) rights of the child, (4) rights of LGBTI persons, and (5) highlighting the relationship between human rights and the climate.

Principality of Liechtenstein

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Liechtenstein maintains a very high standard of human rights. The Liechtenstein Human Rights Association, (Verein für Menschenrechte, VMR, est. 2017) is responsible for protecting and promoting human rights in Liechtenstein. The government's Equal Opportunities Department supports this work by raising awareness, providing funding for counselling centres and civil society projects, and participating in legislative projects as well as in regional and international expert bodies.

In January 2024, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) entered into force for Liechtenstein, initiating a broad reform of disability policy to strengthen legal protection and inclusion. The VMR was designated as the independent Monitoring Office on Disability, while the Equal Opportunities Department coordinates implementation.

Liechtenstein ratified the Istanbul Convention in June 2021 and continues to strengthen prevention, protection, and prosecution mechanisms against gender-based and domestic violence. This includes closer cooperation with the police, public awareness work, and sustained funding for support structures including the Women's Shelter. In 2024, the government launched work on Liechtenstein's first national gender equality strategy. Further, it introduced paid parental leave, entering into force in 2026, which is seen as a significant step to advance equal opportunities.

Abortion remains illegal (except for life-threatening medical emergencies or cases of sexual violence), and the distribution of related public information is prohibited. Since 2015, abortions performed outside of Liechtenstein cannot be penalized under Liechtenstein law.

In January 2025, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) commended Liechtenstein's progress but encouraged further efforts to reduce persistent gender pay gaps (14.1% in 2022), improve data on gender-based violence, and increase women's political representation. An important milestone in 2025 was the appointment of Liechtenstein's first female Prime Minister, with the Deputy Prime Minister also being female. Following the February 2025 parliamentary elections, women now hold 32% of seats (growing from only 12% in 2021). The European Commission's 2025 gender equality report assessed the implementation of the EU gender equality acquis as satisfactory, although limited case law complicates the evaluation of enforcement.

Another significant development was the legalisation of same-sex marriage, which entered into force on 1 January 2025. Liechtenstein also advocates for the protection of LGBTI individuals in multilateral fora, e.g. through voluntary contributions to the Council of Europe (CoE). The urgent recommendation issued by the CoE's Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in 2018 to commission a study on the situation of LGBTI persons remains unimplemented.

Liechtenstein's legal framework guarantees equality and non-discrimination at constitutional and legislative level. Existing protections include criminal provisions against hate speech and discrimination, and the possibility for individuals to appeal to the State Court. However, Liechtenstein still lacks a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, despite recommendations by ECRI in 2024 and in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2018 and 2023.

In the field of anti-corruption, progress has been made but challenges remain. In 2022, the CoE's anti-corruption body GRECO noted very low compliance with its recommendations (1 of 16 implemented). By 2024, Liechtenstein had fully or satisfactorily implemented 6 of the recommendations, with further improvements ongoing. GRECO welcomed measures such as the adoption of a parliamentary code of conduct and strengthened integrity requirements for judges and prosecutors, while noting remaining gaps such as annual ethics training and additional safeguards related to prosecutorial dismissal.

In 2025, the CoE's expert group GRETA (Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings) identified continued shortcomings in victim identification and assistance in trafficking cases. It called for a comprehensive national action plan, strengthened multi-agency cooperation, and more proactive investigations, including regarding labour exploitation. Since September 2023, the National Police has served as the national reporting office for human trafficking.

It needs to be remembered that the country's administrative capacities are limited, given a population of around 40,000.

EU action - key focus areas: Liechtenstein is a like-minded partner of the EU. Cooperation in the field of human rights takes place in various multilateral fora (UN, Council of Europe, OSCE). Liechtenstein is a steadfast supporter of the International Criminal Court (ICC), including with regard to the investigations in Ukraine.

EU bilateral political engagement: In general, Liechtenstein has good mechanisms in place to ensure the protection of human rights within its territory.

EU financial engagement: Liechtenstein is not included in any operational projects or programmes funded by the EU's NDICI Global Europe thematic programme on human rights and democracy.

Multilateral context: Protection of human rights and the rule of law are amongst Liechtenstein's key foreign policy objectives. Liechtenstein focuses on the protection of human rights especially within the framework of multilateral cooperation, notably the UN, OSCE, and the CoE. Liechtenstein has been a strong supporter of the ICC's investigations in Ukraine and joined the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Register of Damage for Ukraine created in 2023, alongside the EU.

In 2020, Liechtenstein initiated the Veto Initiative, adopted by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in 2022. It enhances transparency and accountability, notably in the face of human rights abuses, by requiring the UNGA to convene automatically within 10 days whenever a veto is cast in the UN Security Council.

Liechtenstein has played a central role in advancing the Finance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAST) initiative, which is based at the UN University Center for Policy Research. The FAST initiative aims to put the financial sector at the centre of global efforts to end modern slavery and human trafficking. It remains one of the Principality's flagship initiatives in the multilateral context.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The UK maintained a robust rights framework, which ensured democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. In 2025, the UK Government continued to reaffirm its commitment to its Human Rights Act and to the European Convention of Human Rights, despite calls from opposition parties to leave the Convention. The Government has nurtured a political discourse strongly in support of international law. The UK ranked 14th on the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law index, 20th on the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without borders, and received the score of 60/100, indicating narrowed civic space on the Civicus tracking tool.

Human rights bodies have raised concerns regarding the UK Government's proposals regarding the right to peaceful protest. In September 2025, the House of Commons approved the Crime and Policing Bill, which included provisions for police to identify protesters and sets restrictions on protests near certain locations. In October, following public demonstrations related to international events, the Home Secretary proposed further measures to address repeat protests. The Government's designation of Palestine Action in July 2025 as a proscribed group following an incident at a military base is subject to ongoing legal challenge and criticism from UN rights experts. Rights groups have also expressed privacy-related concerns regarding the planned expansion of live facial recognition technology in law enforcement in public spaces.

The government introduced proposals to reform the asylum system. Measures under consideration include restrictions on citizenship for irregular arrivals, periodic reviews of asylum status, and changes to family reunification and work authorization policies. The government also announced plans to reduce support for asylum seekers and to accelerate certain deportation processes.

Regarding socio-economic rights, human rights bodies have noted advances, but also continued barriers to health services, in particular for persons with disabilities. Racist incidents, as well as hate crimes and violence against women and girls, continued to be a concern.

The Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 faced ongoing legal challenges. On 19 September, the UK and Irish Governments launched a new Framework on the Legacy of the Troubles. Subsequently, in October 2025, the UK Government introduced the Northern Ireland Troubles Bill in the House of Commons. If enacted, this Bill would repeal and replace most of the 2023 Act, restore halted inquests and establish new judge-led investigative and information-retrieval bodies with statutory Irish co-operation and ring-fenced victim support. The Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery would be replaced by a new Legacy Commission.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU and the UK enjoyed very close and regular cooperation within international institutions and multilateral fora regarding human rights and democracy promotion, in particular in the UN. The EU Delegation in London had regular contacts with UK civil society and promoted EU human rights priorities through social media campaigns, as well as by participating in outreach events, including London Pride, Diplomats for Equality events, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and Human Rights Day.

EU bilateral political engagement: At the first EU-UK Summit that took place in London on 19 May 2025, the parties reaffirmed in a Joint Statement their 'steadfast dedication to the rules based international order, with the United Nations (UN) at its core, and the fundamental tenets of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law.' The parties also reaffirmed that 'our shared commitment to multilateralism is vital' and expressed support for the implementation of the UN Pact for the Future and the UN Secretary-General's UN80 initiative. In September, the first strategic EU-UK strategic consultations on multilateralism took place in Brussels. Human rights issues, including in third countries, were touched upon during a range of other political consultations and sectoral policy dialogues as well.

EU financial engagement: There were no new EU projects or programmes related to human rights currently covering the UK, though the PeacePlus programme continued to support peace and prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. Certain European projects collaborated with UK-based human rights organisations.

Multilateral context: The UK remained firmly committed to multilateralism in 2025 and was eager to deepen cooperation with like-minded countries on human rights in a values-based, yet pragmatic, manner. In human rights fora, in particular the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee and the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), the EU and the UK continued to deepen their coordination. At the HRC, the UK led the renewal of the mandate for the Fact-Finding Mission on Sudan. The UK continued to support most EU-led initiatives in the HRC and UNGA, including often with coordinated outreach. The UK Government provided a written mid-term report to the HRC on the implementation of its

Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations, received during its last review in 2022, increasing the number of recommendations it supported from 135 to 152.

The UK has continued to sanction human rights abuses under its Human Rights Sanctions regime, which included 164 sanctioned individuals and entities as of 31 December 2025.

European Neighbourhood Policy

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the Algerian government maintained a political approach focused on social stability through a set of redistributive measures, including an increase in the national minimum wage, pension adjustments, and an extension of unemployment benefits. Backed by substantial public spending, these measures sought to support social cohesion, amid rising living costs, and the diversification of the economy.

At the same time, amendments to the Penal Code adopted between 2021 and 2024 continued to be used in 2025 for prosecuting activists, journalists, trade unionists, and human rights defenders, notably through the provisions under Article 87 bis. Arbitrary travel bans were also employed against perceived critics. Safeguards related to the right to fair trial and due process guarantees remained weak, and oversight mechanisms lacked independence. According to human rights defenders, there were still numerous prisoners of conscience in 2025. In November 2025, jailed Franco-Algerian author Boualem Sansal was granted presidential pardon, leading to his release and transfer abroad for medical treatment. His case had been the object of diplomatic engagement with Algeria. Overall, however, presidential pardons remained limited and selective.

Despite constitutional guarantees, freedom of expression and freedom of the media remained restricted. Algeria ranked 126th out of 180 countries in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, indicating significant constrains. The 2023 Information Law and certain Penal Code provisions were applied against journalists and commentators, contributing to a cautious media environment and self-censorship. In 2025, trade unions were particularly affected by imprisonments and legal actions taken against union leaders following strikes.

In 2025, some positive developments were recorded, including the lifting of Algeria's reservation to Article 15 §4 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, obligating the state to accord to women and men the same rights regarding freedom of movement and choice of residence and domicile. The authorities also set up a free national hotline to assist women victims of violence, offering information and guidance, although access to legal remedies remained complex. According to the association '*Feminicides Algérie'* (Femicides in Algeria), at least 37 cases of femicide were recorded in 2025. World Bank data indicate that female labour force participation, aged 15+ years old, remained low, at around 13.99% in 2024, despite relatively high educational attainment among women.

Freedom of religion and belief continued to face significant limitations, particularly affecting Christian and Ahmadi communities, with recurrent closures of places of worship and legal proceedings based on blasphemy and proselytism laws. LGBTI persons are still largely exposed to societal discrimination and consensual same-sex sexual acts remain criminalised. Sub-Saharan migrants continued to be

affected by the lack of a clear legal status and long-term protection frameworks. While voluntary return programmes were implemented by the authorities in cooperation with IOM, the government continued to collectively expel migrants, including children, to southern regions and there were reported cases of abandonment in desert areas facing life-threatening conditions near the Nigerien border, as documented by human rights organisations.

Algeria retains the death penalty. In 2025, public debate on the death penalty resurfaced following statements by judicial and political authorities suggesting a possible reconsideration of the *de facto* moratorium in place since 1993. Although no executions were carried out, such statements marked a concerning shift in official discourse.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, the EU continued to promote the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights in Algeria within the framework of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027. Priority areas included support for democratisation, governance and the rule of law, notably freedoms of expression, access to information, and peaceful assembly and association. The EU also focused on fostering an enabling environment for civil society by strengthening its participation in political, economic and social life. Additional priorities covered the promotion of gender equality, the fight against sexual and gender-based violence, and the empowerment and meaningful participation of women and youth, alongside efforts to prevent all forms of discrimination, violence and persecution, including on grounds of freedom of religion or belief, sexual orientation or gender identity.

EU bilateral political engagement: Respect for human rights and democratic principles, as enshrined in the Algerian Constitution, the EU-Algeria Association Agreement and the Partnership Priorities, remained a core element of EU-Algeria political dialogue. The EU closely monitored the human rights situation and regularly raised related issues with the Algerian authorities, including emblematic individual cases, notably at the level of the HRVP. Exchanges also took place with CSO's and human rights defenders. In parallel, the EU Delegation and EU Member States' (MS) diplomatic missions in Algiers organised several public events focusing on human rights and gender equality. These included, on 7 December, a film screening and debate on violence against women, combined with training for young journalists, as well as a panel discussion on 10 March, jointly organised with Sweden, addressing the challenges faced by women and mothers in the workplace.

EU financial engagement: The EU and its MS implemented several projects promoting human rights, rule of law and good governance. Amongst these, the 'AL MASSAR' project contributed to youth empowerment and participation in territorial development. Through the 'ADIL' programme, the EU supported the integration of gender and youth considerations into decentralisation reforms and local development planning. The EU also implemented two projects specifically focused on combating violence against children and adolescents. Refugee protection remained an integral component of EU-funded humanitarian assistance, with projects in five Sahrawi refugee camps in south-west Algeria amounting to EUR 9 million in 2025, implemented by UN agencies. Gender equality was streamlined in all EU-funded projects. While the EU did not implement a stand-alone programme dedicated to civic space, several EU-funded projects included components contributing to civil society capacity-building.

Multilateral context: The end of 2025 marked the completion of Algeria's three-year term on the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), as well as its two-year tenure as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. During the 58th session of the HRC, Algeria led the adoption of a resolution on the impact of anti-personnel mines on the enjoyment of human rights, presented with a transregional

group of co-sponsors. Algeria also regularly addressed situations of protracted conflict, raising concerns over violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territory, the humanitarian crisis in Sudan, and the situation in Western Sahara, reaffirming its support for the right to self-determination and the UN's role in conflict resolution. During the 59th and 60th sessions of the HRC, the voting patterns of Algeria and the EU never aligned on the proposals for resolution that were submitted to a vote. Algeria has ratified most major international human rights treaties – albeit with significant reservations to some treaties – but not yet signed the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. Algeria has not extended a standing invitation to UN Special procedures.

Republic of Armenia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, Armenia continued to advance its reform agenda in the justice sector and to strengthen the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights. Authorities pursue ambitious judicial, police, and constitutional reforms, but face some civil society criticism over the consistency and progress of the reforms. Civil society organizations also highlighted ineffective investigations into police abuse, in particular excessive use of force, lack of judicial independence, and excessive use of pre-trial detention in criminal proceedings.

Armenian civil society remains among the most vibrant in the region. Media pluralism is maintained despite a polarised environment. However, disinformation, foreign interference and hybrid threats increased ahead of the general elections in June 2026.

In the area of social rights, the Law on Universal Health Insurance entered into force on 1 January 2026, aiming to ensure equal and affordable access to healthcare. Authorities continued efforts to support the integration of more than 100,000 Karabakh Armenians. In 2025, the rent and utilities support scheme was replaced by targeted assistance measures, although pressures on housing, employment and social services persisted.

The adoption of the 2025-2028 Strategy and Action Plan for the Implementation of Gender Policy constituted a positive development, and the law on gender-based violence is in place, yet implementation on the ground should be enhanced. The Law on the Rights of the Child and the Child Protection System entered into force in November 2025. Civil society continues to challenge the disability assessment algorithm of the government and a Court of Appeal ruling narrowing the legal interpretation of discrimination on the grounds of disability. Progress is yet to be made on the adoption of comprehensive anti-discrimination and minority legislation.

The National Strategy for Human Rights Protection and the Action Plan (HRAP) 2023–2025 would have benefited from a more systematic monitoring, reporting, comprehensive impact assessment and sufficient state funding. In the justice sector, Armenia continued reforms aimed at improving integrity, accountability and efficiency, but concerns persist regarding transparency in judicial appointments and the effective implementation of integrity mechanisms. The government also announced its intention to establish an autonomous data protection agency.

The opposition and parts of civil society raised allegations of instrumentalization of the criminal justice system, which risks punishing dissent and undermining freedom of expression, also through a possible overuse of criminal law provisions concerning hooliganism. Similarly, strategic lawsuits against public

participation (SLAPPs) remain a concern, targeting journalists, environmental activists and human rights defenders. The extensive use of pre-trial detention persists, together with concerns regarding deaths in detention facilities, despite legislative amendments strengthening medical safeguards for persons deprived of liberty. With EU support, the Arbitration and Mediation Centre of Armenia was established in 2025, contributing to improved access to justice. Concerns also persisted regarding the treatment and conditions of Armenian military personnel, particularly non-combat deaths, despite a decrease in their overall number. Important steps have been taken to enhance the integrity and accountability of judges and prosecutors and to digitalise justice.

Armenia has substantially strengthened its anti-corruption framework by aligning with international standards, including GRECO and the OECD. The fifth National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2023–2026) provides a comprehensive framework, yet it remains insufficiently risk-based and lacks targeted measures for sectors with heightened corruption exposure, particularly public procurement.

EU action – key focus areas: The EU continued to assist Armenia in the implementation of the HRAP for 2023–2025 through policy dialogue and targeted assistance. The EU also provided humanitarian support and assisted the Armenian authorities in the socio-economic integration of Karabakh Armenians. Through a Team Europe approach, the EU and its Member States coordinated support in several areas, including socio-economic development in the Syunik region. The EU Mission in Armenia (EUMA) contributed to monitoring and reporting on developments in the border regions. In December 2025, the EU and Armenia adopted a Strategic Agenda for the EU-Armenia Partnership covering a wide range of areas, including democracy and the rule of law, justice reform and human rights.

EU bilateral political engagement: The Strategic Agenda for the EU-Armenia Partnership, concluded in December 2025, reaffirms that the EU and Armenia will work together to promote human rights. Human rights and fundamental freedoms also feature prominently among short-term and medium-term priorities of the Strategic Agenda. In November 2025, a Visa Liberalisation Action Plan was handed over by the Commission to the Armenian authorities featuring fundamental rights, including anti-discrimination, and the acquisition of citizenship, which creates a strong incentive for reforms in these areas.

The EU-Armenia human rights dialogue was held on 17 February 2025, providing a structured platform to discuss human rights and rule of law issues. The EU continued to support civil society through the Country Roadmap for Engagement (2021–2027). The EU-Armenia Civil Society Platform and the Young European Ambassadors continued their work in 2025.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, the EU maintained substantial financial engagement in Armenia, prioritising human rights, democratic governance, justice reform, social cohesion, and the socio-economic integration of Karabakh Armenians. EU assistance supported community-based social services, social protection, and sustainable livelihoods for displaced and host communities, particularly in Syunik and other affected regions, while addressing specific human rights vulnerabilities through rights-based service delivery, legal empowerment, and social inclusion. EU funding also advanced equality and access for persons with disabilities, mental health reform, gender equality and women's empowerment, labour rights protection, youth participation, and civil society capacity-building, alongside support for media quality, resilience, and countering disinformation. The EU remained the primary donor for justice sector reform, providing budget support and technical assistance to

strengthen judicial independence, integrity, accountability, and anti-corruption institutions, complemented by bilateral and regional support from EU Member States.

Multilateral context: In 2025, Armenia ratified two human rights instruments: the ILO Convention concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work, 2019 (No. 190) and the Oviedo Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (ETS No. 164). In December 2025, Armenia launched the digital tool of the Institutional Network for Monitoring and Reporting Accountability (AI-NEMRA), aimed at strengthening international human rights accountability mechanisms. Armenia aligned with a significant number of EU démarches concerning human rights.

Republic of Azerbaijan

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the human rights and democracy situation in Azerbaijan continued to present significant challenges. The overall governance environment remained restrictive, with limited space for independent civil society, constrained media freedom, and longstanding concerns regarding the independence of the judiciary. Legislative, administrative, and judicial frameworks continued to severely restrict the exercise of fundamental freedoms.

Civil society organisations operated under restrictive conditions. The 2017 Law on NGOs remained in force, with registration, reporting, and grant approval requirements continuing to limit the activities of independent organisations. The operating environment was further affected by the departure of several UN agencies, including UNDP and UNICEF, which reduced international monitoring and assistance capacity. Local organisations reported ongoing administrative pressure and increased scrutiny.

Serious concerns regarding the rule of law and judicial independence persisted. Courts continued to be perceived as lacking sufficient independence in politically sensitive cases. In 2025, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) delivered 39 judgments concerning Azerbaijan, finding violations in 38 cases, primarily related to fair trial rights, deprivation of liberty, and freedoms of expression and assembly. The Mammadli group of cases remained under enhanced supervision by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers. Azerbaijan's non-implementation of ECtHR judgments continued to affect its engagement within the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

The electoral framework remained unchanged, with no substantive reforms addressing long-standing recommendations by OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission.

Some developments were noted in specific policy areas. In July 2025, Azerbaijan criminalised child marriage. The authorities also adopted the 2026-2028 National Action Plan on Gender Equality and introduced amendments to the Law on Combating Corruption, including provisions on whistleblower protection and corruption risk management. The implementation of these measures remained so far uneven.

EU action – key focus areas: Protecting and empowering individuals: The EU continued to prioritise the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, with particular attention to persons in vulnerable situations, including women, children and individuals detained in politically sensitive cases. In its engagement with the authorities, the EU and its Member States promoted due process, access to justice and respect for fundamental freedoms, while continuing to support civil society, independent media and human rights defenders in a restrictive operating environment. The EU also encouraged

Azerbaijan to fulfil its international human rights obligations, including through the implementation of European Court of Human Rights judgments and continued engagement with the Council of Europe. Developments relating to digital rights, freedom of expression and media freedom were closely monitored, while coordination with EU Member States, international organisations and civil society partners remained central to ensuring coherent engagement and consistent messaging.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU maintained regular exchanges with Azerbaijani authorities throughout 2025. Engagement included contacts with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ombudsperson's Office, and the State Committee on Religious Associations. Discussions covered issues related to judicial reform, media freedom, treatment of detainees, rights of persons belonging to religious minorities, gender equality, and anti-corruption, as well as individual cases of persons detained or banned from exiting the country for exercising their fundamental rights.

Human rights considerations were also addressed within sectoral dialogues, including in the areas of governance, justice, and social policy. While dialogue channels remained open, progress on structural reforms was limited.

EU financial engagement (links between political priorities, programming and funding): The EU financial engagement in 2025 was aligned with priorities under the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy.

EU-funded programmes supported human rights monitoring, legal aid for persons in vulnerable situations, gender equality, rights of the child and independent media. Programming aimed to sustain engagement with civil society and human rights actors despite ongoing constraints.

Multilateral context: In 2025, the EU continued to address the human rights situation in Azerbaijan in multilateral fora. At the UN, the EU delivered statements during the 80th session of the UN General Assembly Third Committee, referring to issues related to civil society space, judicial independence, and media freedom. Cooperation with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights continued, including in preparation for Azerbaijan's upcoming Universal Periodic Review (2026-2027).

Within the Council of Europe, the EU supported mechanisms addressing the implementation of ECtHR judgments and maintained engagement with the Venice Commission and the Commissioner for Human Rights. In the OSCE, the EU and its Member States contributed to discussions on media freedom and electoral standards, including in relation to restrictions affecting ODIHR activities.

Republic of Belarus

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the human rights situation in Belarus remains of very high concern. Reports indicate that at least 1,254 people were sentenced to prison in politically motivated cases, out of which 643 people were convicted for having participated in protests. At the end of December 2025, Belarus had still more than 1,100 political prisoners arbitrarily detained. Some political prisoners are subjected to arbitrary punishment, including solitary confinement and prolonged incommunicado detentions. At least two political prisoners died while in detention in 2025. Around 360 persons were released throughout 2025, including prominent human rights defenders and political figures. The releases have raised serious human rights concerns, notably due to the forced deportation of some released individuals without valid identity documents and with an unclear legal status, leaving them in a situation of legal limbo and heightened vulnerability. Reports also point to

continued pressure and harassment against released individuals and their families, including restrictions on movement and threats of re-detention.

The 2025 presidential elections (26 January 2025) were accompanied by a widespread and systematic state-led campaign of repression, aimed at preventing and repressing any civic space and any actual or perceived dissent in the country. The control of the information space by the authorities and arbitrary use of force against civilians persist. The security sector was reinforced as part of the institutionalisation of repressive practices. Belarus remains the only country in Europe that retains the death penalty.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued its support to the victims of repression, civil society organisations and independent media. The EU also continued to support actions with a view to holding perpetrators of human rights violations accountable for their crimes. The EU Delegation in Minsk, in cooperation with Member States embassies and like-minded partners, engaged in several initiatives in support of political prisoners and their families. This included public awareness-raising campaigns as well as targeted official démarches with the Belarusian authorities. The EU and like-minded countries continued to observe politically motivated trials, despite very challenging circumstances. The EU also continued to support the International Accountability Platform for Belarus.

EU bilateral political engagement: In 2025, Belarus was high on the EU's agenda. The continuing repression and the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus were addressed by the Foreign Affairs Council in January and raised in numerous contacts with third countries. Additional restrictive measures were adopted in March. The EU held one meeting of the Consultative Group with Belarusian democratic forces and civil society in June 2025. Throughout the year, the EU, Member States, and like-minded partners held several meetings dedicated to the situation of political prisoners. The HR/VP and Commissioner Kos addressed the situation in the EP plenary on several occasions and held bilateral meetings with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. The EU high-level conference 'Building Foundations for Democratic change' on 8 December 2025 demonstrated the EU's solidarity and continued commitment to the Belarusian people.

EU financial engagement: In line with the Council Conclusions on Belarus of 2020 and 2024, the EU has redirected assistance from the Belarusian public authorities to non-state actors. Since 2020, EUR 200 million has been mobilised to support the people of Belarus, including EUR 67 million in support of human rights and civil society. EU assistance has aimed to preserve people's fundamental rights, contribute to long-term democratisation and deliver tangible benefits to the Belarusian people. It has been distributed across several sectors, including civil society, human rights, independent media, education, as well as culture and businesses in exile. The fourth annual Senior Officials' Meeting took place in October 2025, providing a forum for representatives of EU institutions, Member States and Belarusian civil society and democratic forces to assess the needs and coordinate assistance to the people of Belarus across the supported sectors, including in the human rights domain. The new EUR 30 million package of assistance announced in December 2025 will strengthen support for human rights, civil society, and independent media.

Multilateral context: The EU continued to raise the human rights violations in Belarus in international fora and support initiatives to promote accountability, including by leading efforts in the UN Human Rights Council to address the human rights situation in Belarus. The EU presented a resolution in March 2025 renewing the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Belarus and extending the mandate of the Group of Independent Experts, with view of ensuring continued

international monitoring of the situation in Belarus as well as recommendations on how to promote accountability for the violations and abuses in the country. The EU made several statements in the Council of Europe, the OSCE framework, and the UN General Assembly, condemning the ongoing human rights violations in Belarus.

Arab Republic of Egypt

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, Egypt's political and democratic landscape continued to face obstacles, despite some legislative movement and engagement in international fora. Egypt continues to face significant challenges in the domain of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights and providing accountability for violations and abuses. The National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) maintained its 'A status' by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), despite GANHRI's recommendation in 2024 advising a downgrade due to the Council's lack of independence and effectiveness. The GANHRI recommendations continue to be implemented by the NCHR.

In 2025, several announcements were made concerning the release of criminal and political detainees, including many in pre-trial detention. Nevertheless, arbitrary arrests continued, while the practice of 'recycling' detainees into new cases persisted. In some cases, travel bans, and asset freezes remained in place even after the release of human rights defenders. The situation of freedom of religion or belief remained precarious, and while some support was shown to the Coptic community, the broader economic condition of Egyptian Christians worsened, as observed by the annual report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom. Concerns about discrimination against religious minorities representing non-Abrahamic faiths, as well as against atheists, persisted. The Anti-Discrimination Commission, stipulated in the Egyptian Constitution, is yet to be established.

2025 witnessed the passing of significant legislative initiatives, including the Criminal Procedures Code, the Rental Law and the Labour Law. Moreover, efforts are underway concerning the Personal Status Law and the detailed bylaws pertaining to both the Labour Law and Asylum Law. Regarding the latter, Egypt worked to support refugees and asylum seekers amid pressure from regional conflicts. The transition arrangements between UNHCR and Egypt's new Standing Committee for Refugee Affairs remain unclear, with reports of increased criminalization and expulsion of migrants and refugees.

In the sphere of international human rights engagement, Egypt participated actively in its fourth UPR, receiving 343 recommendations and supporting 82% of them. Furthermore, Egypt secured a seat on the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) for the period 2026-2028, reflecting its growing engagement with international human rights frameworks. Meanwhile, genuine political participation was limited, a situation highlighted during the Senate and House of Representatives elections, which were marked by low turnout. Government-affiliated parties, along with allied parties beyond the governing coalition secured a two-thirds majority, which is sufficient to move forward with constitutional amendments. Progress on implementing the National Human Rights Strategy (NHRS) for 2021-2026 was limited due to the lack of a concrete action plan. Egypt continued to face significant human rights issues, particularly regarding pre-trial detention and the widespread application of the Terrorism Law.

Civicus classified civic space in Egypt as 'closed' in 2025, as the civic and political space continued to face restrictions. Restrictions on civic space, freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association as well as media freedom remain in place. Arbitrary detention, poor detention conditions and lack of unannounced monitoring visits to detention centres, torture, enforced disappearances,

transnational repression, including collective punishment and forms of kin punishment along with continued sentences to capital punishment. Press freedom continued to be compromised, with persistent blocking of websites and the close monitoring and prosecution of those expressing dissent on social media. Egypt ranked 170th out of 180 countries in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, indicating extreme restriction and little improvement from previous years. The country was also ranked 130th out of 182 in the 2025 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index.

The use of the death penalty remained a concern; however, official figures are unavailable. According to Amnesty International, Egypt ranks among the countries with the highest numbers of executions worldwide – currently number eight. Despite commitments detailed in the NHRS aiming to reduce the number of crimes punishable by death, little progress was reportedly made beyond procedural limitations, even after the acceptance of recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Consensual same-sex sexual acts remain criminalised, with reports of online entrapment of LGBTI individuals and the criminalization of social media content seen as contrary to traditional values.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued engaging with Egyptian authorities and civil society through diplomatic outreach, cooperation projects, and consultations. Key areas included supporting civil society, journalists, women's rights, tolerance, and protecting vulnerable groups including human rights defenders and refugees. The EU and its Member States continued to observe trials, despite access restrictions for diplomats.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU raised human rights issues throughout the year at all levels, including in the context of the implementation of the EU's Macro Financial Assistance programme for Egypt. Exchange on human rights took place inter alia at the Political Subcommittee in May, the Association Committee in September, the Leaders' Summit in October, and the visit of the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights in November.

EU financial engagement: The EU financed ten projects aimed at promoting human rights and supporting civil society initiatives with a focus on marginalised groups, migrants, and refugees. Collaborations with the OHCHR and NCHR enhanced the capacity-building efforts for over 100 national CSOs, directed health and education support, and advanced gender equality through women's leadership and protection from violence. Moreover, initiatives prioritised child protection, technical education for youth, and community development in informal settlements. In 2025, the EU supported the OECD and UNDP projects to strengthen governance and promote equitable development, whilst enhancing Egypt's commitment to human rights through various collaborative actions. Despite funding challenges, the need to bolster diverse CSOs remained crucial to meet socio-economic demands, with continued engagement and dialogues facilitated by the EU and its MS in Cairo.

Multilateral context: Egypt has ratified all major international human rights treaties – albeit some with significant reservations – but has not yet signed the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aimed at the abolition of the death penalty, nor the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture. In 2025, Egypt engaged with Geneva-based UN entities, most notably the UPR, and caught up with reporting to UN agencies, in line with the requirements of the international treaties it has acceded to. To date, all required reports have been submitted to OHCHR. Egypt has not issued a standing invitation to UN Special Procedures.

State of Israel

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Israel maintains democratic institutions, free press, and established checks and balances, yet civic space shrank amid legislative developments and pressures on accountability mechanisms. Civicus classified civic space in Israel as 'repressed' in 2025. Civil society faced constraints, and legislative developments raised concerns about the independence of the Supreme Court. Domestic human rights challenges remained uneven. For example, Palestinian/Arab citizens of Israel experienced disproportionate violence linked to organised crime, as well as several instances of de facto discrimination, Eritrean asylum seekers continued to face legal uncertainty, and foreign migrant workers remained vulnerable to exploitation. The proposed reintroduction of the death penalty for terrorism-related offences (passed into law in March 2026) also raised concerns regarding compliance with international human rights obligations. The human rights of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) with Israel as a duty bearer continued to deteriorate, in addition to increased violations of international humanitarian law and a severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza driven by restrictions to aid access. Israeli violations of international humanitarian law in Lebanon were also reported.

Israel's ranking in the 2025 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index fell by 2 places in comparison to 2024, ranking 35th out of 182. Freedom of expression deteriorated in 2025, due to increased political, legislative and security related constraints faced by independent Israeli media, resulting in Israel losing 11 places in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, moving to 112th place out of 180 countries.

EU action – key focus areas: The EU focused on five strategic priority areas: (1) Israel's responsibilities as an occupying power; (2) upholding democratic values; (3) combatting discrimination against the Palestinian/Arab minority; (4) rights and protection of persons in vulnerable situations; and (5) engagement with the UN. In 2025, the EU continuously engaged Israeli authorities on their human rights obligations under international human rights law, on international humanitarian law, and specifically on the need to facilitate humanitarian assistance to Gaza, while addressing the registration requirements of international NGOs delivering aid in the oPt. The EU Delegation in Tel Aviv also engaged in repeated démarches with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister's Office on detention practices, settler violence, and the situation of the Arab community living in Israel, and cooperated closely with relevant CSOs in the field and hosted briefings for the EU Human Rights Working Group on various topics, including punitive house demolitions, the impact of the war on Palestinian workers, and the implementation of Israel's UNRWA legislation.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU's bilateral engagement with Israel is guided by the EU-Israel Association Agreement, which stipulates that EU-Israel relations are based on respect for human rights and democratic principles. The EU and Israel held the thirteenth meeting of their Association Council on 24 February 2025 in Brussels. The EU engaged consistently with Israeli authorities on legislative and administrative measures affecting civil society, including the Associations Law and international NGO vetting procedures. Its Delegation used démarches, briefings, and structured consultations with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister's Office to ensure that EU concerns regarding transparency, procedural safeguards, and the protection of civic space were clearly communicated.

EU financial engagement: EU political engagement on human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Israel is directly supported by targeted funding under the EU Thematic Programme on Human Rights

and Democracy. In 2025, four projects entered implementation under this programme, following the award of EUR 1.9 million in grants in 2024. The projects, implemented by CSOs, focus on documenting human rights and IHL violations in Gaza and the West Bank, particularly addressing issues like settler violence, forced transfer, as well as the protection of Palestinian detainees from maltreatment. Other projects aim to safeguard freedom of protest and enhance civic participation, alongside fostering human rights and ethics in healthcare.

Multilateral context: In 2025, the multilateral landscape regarding Israel was defined by a deepening rift between the government and UN-led institutions. Israel withdrew its observer status from the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). The UN General Assembly continued its focus on the legal consequences of settler violence and the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The EU Delegation in Tel Aviv saw significant operational challenges for UN agencies on the ground, particularly following the implementation of domestic legislation targeting UNRWA's status and remained heavily engaged in tracking these developments, coordinating closely with the Office of the EU Representative (West Bank and Gaza Strip, UNRWA) to assess how these legal shifts impacted humanitarian delivery and the safety of international personnel. Israel has not issued a standing invitation to UN Special Procedures.

Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, Jordan continued efforts to advance the political modernisation agenda, including on women empowerment, yet challenges persist regarding the protection of the civic space, fundamental freedoms and rule of law. The Freedom House index raised Jordan's status from 'Not Free' to 'Partly Free', reflecting the more competitive legislative elections held in 2024, and the greater representation of political parties. An EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) positively assessed the elections. In parallel, following the discovery of an alleged plot by a Muslim Brotherhood (MB) linked cell in April 2025, the Jordanian government initiated a major crackdown on MB and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF). The Government enforced a 2020 ban on the MB and affiliated organisations, criminalising affiliation with it, and arresting at least one prominent Member of Parliament (MP), while the Independent Election Commission warned the IAF to address its alleged violations of the Political Parties Law. Following allegations of corruption, Municipal and Governorate Councils were dissolved in July 2025. Jordan ranked 56th out of 182 in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index. The date for new elections is yet to be set, pending the adoption of new legislation.

The Association Law continued to limit the freedom of CSO, which face uncertainty on the scope of tolerated actions, lack of transparency on foreign funding approvals, and interventions by authorities to modify their project plans. Civicus classified civic space in Jordan as 'repressed' in 2025. Freedom of expression deteriorated in 2025, resulting in Jordan losing 15 places in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, moving to 147th place out of 180 countries. Additionally, restriction of online freedom of expression continued. Twelve international news websites were banned, and many people were arrested for their social media posts under the 2023 Cybercrime Law. Administrative detention continued to be routinely used, allowing governors to temporarily detain people without judicial proceedings. It is also used on the grounds of protecting women from domestic violence.

Women's empowerment remains a high priority. Jordan continued to improve its overall score in the World Economic Forum 2025 Global Gender Gap Index. While women saw increased representation

in Parliament and measures were adopted in 2025 to promote female employment, women continued to face legal discrimination in personal status matters, gender-based violence and their participation in the labour market remains low.

Jordan is a regional leader on disability rights. In April 2025, it co-hosted together with Germany the Global Disability Summit, and it actively prepared and endorsed the 2025 Global Disability Summit 'Amman-Berlin Declaration', which called for countries to dedicate at least 15% of international development programmes implemented at country level to further disability inclusion. Even though homosexuality isn't criminalised, one of the few countries in the MENA region where it is not explicitly illegal, there are no laws that protect LGBTI people from discrimination in employment, housing, healthcare, or public services.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU actively promoted gender equality, with programmes ranging from awareness raising and economic empowerment to fighting gender-based violence. The EU and MS also aimed to support women participation in elections, the judiciary, and police departments. The EU worked with the government on its strategy of deinstitutionalisation of persons with disabilities, with the objective to transform the strong reliance of Jordan on care institutions for persons with disabilities into a system that promotes inclusiveness through independent living. In parallel, EU and Member States' (MS) programmes focused on inclusion of persons with disabilities in the school system, public life, electoral process and labour market. EU assistance to the justice sector aimed at improving the rule of law in Jordan, enhancing access to justice for all, improving fair trial guarantees and legal safeguards. The EU supported the strengthening of civil society including capacity development initiatives, activities and projects to empower marginalised groups and address pressing challenges. Particular attention was given to Syrian and Palestinian refugees. In line with the EU Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy, the EU and MS developed projects to strengthen the capacities of CSO in Jordan, particularly outside of the capital and provided training to empower civil society for advocacy on public policies. They were active in supporting women empowerment, in preventing gender-based violence, and in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU and Jordan highlighted the importance of human rights and democracy in the Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership, signed in January 2025. It refers to a shared commitment to democracy, rule of law, good governance, human rights, fundamental freedoms and non-discrimination. In September 2025, the EU-Jordan Subcommittee on Human Rights, Democratisation and Governance witnessed a high-level and active dialogue on these issues including on the implementation of the cybercrime legislation.

EU financial engagement: The EU continued to support Jordan's political modernisation agenda through the EUR 10 million programme called 'Support to Democratic reforms in Jordan', which runs until 2027. It focused on increasing the ability of political parties, strengthening the participation of women and youth, and building the capacities of democratic institutions in Jordan. The EU rule of law and access to justice programme, amounting to EUR 39 million for the period 2023-2026, continued to work towards improving fair trial guarantees, and rehabilitation of detainees and drug-addicted inmates. Several EU programmes promoted the rights of persons with disabilities with more than EUR 50 million, aimed at supporting deinstitutionalisation, access to services, rehabilitation and inclusion in schools and in public life. The EU education portfolio supported the quality and inclusiveness of Jordan's education system with a focus on inclusive education, specifically children with disabilities and refugees, with EUR 240 million in open commitments. Through the 'Accelerating Access to

Education Initiative', Germany provided EUR 22 million for additional funding to maintain education of refugee children in Jordan.

Multilateral context: At the 60th session of the HRC, Jordan co-sponsored the resolution on the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery and trafficking. Following its acceptance of 204 out of 279 recommendations, made during its fourth UPR in 2024, Jordan appointed a General Coordinator of the Government for Human Rights in charge of coordinating their implementation in 2025. While Jordan has a standing invitation to the HRC Special Procedures, no visit to Jordan took place in 2025.

Lebanese Republic

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In Lebanon the election of a President in January 2025, followed by the formation of a new government, enabled a political reset, reforms to restore state authority, a strengthening of the rule of law, and stabilisation of the economy. Municipal elections in June marked an important democratic milestone after repeated postponements. However, political threats persist and there are tensions tied to Hezbollah.

Fragile economic conditions, ongoing security instability, and the risk of renewed escalation, particularly south of the Litani river, worsened socio-economic and humanitarian challenges. Over 40% of the population lived in poverty, and 90% of refugee households faced extreme poverty. Basic public services remained constrained, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable. Bank depositors continued to face restricted access to savings due to the unresolved financial crisis. Corruption remained widespread despite high-profile cases being prosecuted, keeping public trust low. Structural reforms have not yet delivered tangible improvements.

Lebanon was ranked 153 out of 182 in the 2025 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index. Justice institutions operated under strain from underfunding, political interference, and capacity gaps, undermining access to justice. Pre-trial detainees accounted for 92% of all inmates, while the prison system suffers from severe overcrowding. However, the adoption of the Law on Judicial Independence as well as the improvement of conditions for the opening and continuation of high-profile investigations marked progress. Steps were taken towards the abolition of the death penalty and the ratification of several international treaties.

Civicus classified civic space in Lebanon as 'obstructed'. Freedom of expression deteriorated in 2025, resulting in Lebanon losing eight places in the 2025 RSF World Press Freedom Index, moving to a 132nd place out of 180 countries. A draft Media Law was prepared with stakeholders but awaits parliamentary adoption. Journalists and activists faced harassment and criminal defamation cases. Media ownership remained concentrated and politically polarised. Women, LGBTI persons, refugees, and migrants faced persistent discrimination. Consensual same-sex sexual acts remain criminalised. Socio-economic hardships increased vulnerabilities for children, persons with disabilities, and displaced populations. Gender inequality remained pronounced under sectarian personal status laws. Access to justice for gender-based violence survivors was limited, with NGOs filling the gap. The '*kafala*' (sponsorship) system continued to expose migrant domestic workers, mostly women, to exploitation. Lebanon hosted large refugee populations without a comprehensive legal framework. Anti-refugee rhetoric remained prevalent, raising concerns over pressures for returns to Syria. Palestinian refugees continued to face socio-economic and rights-related marginalisation.

EU action - key focus areas: In line with its country strategy, EU support prioritised access to justice, detention conditions, and legal safeguards, including legal aid, juvenile justice reform, and operationalisation of the National Human Rights Committee and National Preventive Mechanism. Action addressed child protection, GBV prevention, inclusive education, and migrant domestic worker protection, including reducing forced labour under the 'kafala' system. EU support also focused on electoral processes, democratic participation, and accountability institutions. Assistance contributed to successful municipal elections, enhanced election management capacity, and supported advocacy for electoral reform, women's political participation, and youth engagement. Regarding the global human rights system, the EU consistently advocated for Lebanon's adherence to international obligations, including non-refoulement, judicial independence, and accountability for serious violations. In the field of new technologies, the EU support included rights-based digitalisation of justice, safeguards in digital evidence, and initiatives addressing disinformation, online hate speech, and digital safety for journalists and HRDs. EU actions were coordinated with Member States, UN agencies, and other partners. Targeted grants supported civil society and human rights defenders, reinforcing local ownership, including through the 3RF and sectoral working groups.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU supported reforms on accountability, judicial independence, governance, and protection of vulnerable groups. In 2025, the EU Delegation maintained intensive dialogue with Lebanese counterparts. The Ninth EU-Lebanon Association Council in December reaffirmed the joint commitment to deepen the partnership. Human rights concerns were consistently raised, including access to justice, detention conditions, accountability, freedom of expression, refugee protection, and education. The EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights visited Lebanon in November 2025, including South Lebanon, to advance discussions on human rights, the rule of law, justice and accountability as well as the continued violations of international humanitarian law in Lebanon.

EU financial engagement: EU funding supported justice sector reform, judicial independence, freedom of speech, anti-corruption, public procurement reform, and merit-based recruitment. Targeted support improved legal aid, detention conditions, and juvenile justice, including opening the Warwar rehabilitation facility. Funding also supported media freedom, digital rights, electoral assistance, women's empowerment, child protection, and GBV prevention. Support continued for refugee protection, education, livelihoods, and social protection through UNHCR, UNRWA, and cross-border solutions, addressing immediate needs and long-term resilience.

Multilateral context: Lebanon remained engaged in multilateral human rights fora and is a party to many treaties, despite implementation gaps. The EU actively engaged Lebanon, including démarches at the 69th Commission on the Status of Women and the 80th UNGA Third Committee. The EUSR encouraged steps to abolish the death penalty, to ratify pending instruments including the Rome Statute, and to strengthen domestic accountability. Lebanon has a standing invitation to the HRC Special Procedures. The Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions visited Lebanon in 2025. The EU consulted extensively with local CSO in view of Lebanon's 2026 UPR review, supporting cooperation with the UN, while urging implementation of pending recommendations on enforced disappearances, detention conditions, and accountability.

State of Libya

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Persistent political and institutional fragmentation in Libya continued undermining the rule of law, enabling frequent violations and abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms and lack of accountability. Despite renewed efforts by the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) to propose a political roadmap towards government unification and national elections, divisions among Libyan actors and competition over institutional control have prevented meaningful progress. Key preconditions, notably the reconstitution of the High National Elections Commission (HNEC), remain unresolved, while parallel political initiatives promoted by some international actors have acquired relative momentum. At local level, successful municipal elections were held in the second half of 2025, resulting in the only democratically elected authorities with an up-to-date mandate across Libya.

Civic space continued to contract, as freedom of expression, association and assembly, media freedom, and civil society activity faced restrictions, through repressive legal and administrative measures, surveillance and intimidation. In 2025, Libya ranked 137th out of 180 countries in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, indicating significant constraints. In April 2025, the Internal Security Agency ordered the closure of several international NGOs for alleged involvement in 'hostile activities'. Human rights defenders and civil society actors continued to face harassment and threats, both online and physical. Women's rights remain severely constrained, and risks for women active in public life persist, as exemplified by the killing of blogger Khansa Al Mujahid in November 2025, following an online harassment campaign. Consensual same-sex sexual acts remain criminalised. Serious human rights and international humanitarian law violations continued to be documented across the country, as arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances remain widespread, with limited accountability. The discovery of several mass graves and unlawful detention facilities across the country underscored the scale of past and ongoing human rights violations and abuses. Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers remain among those most vulnerable, facing violence and human rights violations, including long-term arbitrary detention, inhumane detention conditions, torture, deprivation of food and water, forced labour, exploitation, sexual assault, trafficking and enforced disappearances. Continued collective expulsions, mass arrests and racial discrimination against migrants were reported.

The justice system remains divided and ineffective with systemic shortcomings allowing for violation of due process, and with judicial authority dependent on the cooperation of highly divided political and armed actors, allowing for widespread impunity. In May 2025, Libya accepted the ICC jurisdiction with respect to alleged crimes committed in its territory between 2011 and 2027, marking a significant development towards holding individuals responsible for the most serious crimes and reinvigorating cooperation with the ICC. Pursuant to ICC arrest warrants, Italian and German authorities arrested two senior officials involved in detention facilities management and suspected of crimes against humanity and war crimes, including murder, torture, rape and sexual violence, allegedly committed in Libya from February 2015 onwards. While one senior official is currently in ICC custody, the second one reportedly returned to Libya. Libya retains the death penalty. No executions have been carried out since 2010, but military and civilian courts continue to impose death sentences.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, the EU continued to promote the respect and protection of human rights in Libya through several projects. Key focus areas included strengthening democracy, rule of law and legitimate national institutions through institution building support. Another focus area was

addressing impunity and strengthening accountability for human rights and IHL violations. The EU also focused on strengthening human rights, including fundamental freedoms, the civic and political space, as well as the meaningful participation of Libyan women in political, economic and social life, and their representation in government positions. Finally, in 2025 the EU focused on enhancing the protection of IDPs, minorities, refugees, and asylum seekers, migrants and irregular migrants.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to support the UNSMIL facilitated political process, both through bilateral engagements and broader political consultations. At local level, joint statements in coordination with MS and UNSMIL raised concerns upon several cases of human rights violations. The EU Delegation coordinated a strategic dialogue with Libyan authorities to enhance human rights-compliant migration management, facilitate voluntary returns, and hosted the 'Migration Advocacy Talks'. The EU Delegation intensified its role in the yearly campaign '16 Days of Activism', with an event focused on ending digital violence against women. On International Human Rights Day, the Delegation hosted a high-level exchange on 'Human Rights and Dignity for All', with representatives of the Libyan civil society, Libyan officials and international partners.

EU financial engagement: In the area of institution building, the EU provided technical assistance to strengthen the integrity and transparency of Libyan institutions and support the HNEC capacities towards elections. The EU supported women's socio-economic integration through the establishment of vocational training centres and the rehabilitation of the Women's Police Training Centre. The promotion of youth-centred dialogue for peacebuilding and reintegration support for former combatants and war-effected people continued. The EU also delivered protection and life-saving assistance to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in detention centres, at disembarkation points and in urban areas through UN and international NGOs. EU funding also supported coordination, advocacy capacity and service delivery of Libyan CSO.

Multilateral context: Libya has ratified most major international human rights treaties, albeit with notable exceptions and reservations, including as regards the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, as well as severe implementation gaps. Libya is not a party to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol but is a party to the Organisation of the African Union Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Libya underwent its fourth UPR cycle on 11 November 2025 based on its national report, a compilation by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and stakeholders' inputs, stemming from civil society. A total of 280 recommendations were formulated, for Libya to address. A substantial part of the recommendations related to significant challenges, especially in areas of migration, human trafficking, gender-based violence, freedom of expression, arbitrary detention and the death penalty.

Kingdom of Morocco

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the Moroccan authorities pursued gradual institutional changes, particularly in the justice and social-protection sectors. The entry into force of the new Code of Criminal Procedure in December 2025 marked an important step, strengthening the rights of persons in police custody and tightening the conditions for pre-trial detention. However, certain provisions of the new Code raised concerns, notably the exclusivity granted to the Public Prosecutor to initiate proceedings in corruption cases. In parallel, Law 43/22 on alternative sentences entered into force, allowing Courts to substitute short prison terms with non-

custodial sanctions, in line with efforts to reduce prison overcrowding. At the same time, several major reforms remain pending, including the revised Penal Code, the Code of Civil Procedure and, notably, the long-awaited overhaul of the '*Moudawana*' Family Code, which is expected to introduce the prohibition of child marriage, stricter conditions for polygamy, and strengthened rights for divorced mothers.

The year was marked by nationwide 'GenZ 212' protests starting in late September, initially triggered by maternal deaths in a public hospital and calling for better access to healthcare, education and ending corruption. While many gatherings remained peaceful, human rights organisations reported the use of excessive and lethal force and arrests by law enforcement in a number of cities. Morocco registered an improvement in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, advancing nine places to 120th place out of 180 countries. Nevertheless, independent media and journalists as well social media commentators and activists continued to face significant pressure.

The social protection reform was further rolled out, with Law 58/23 providing millions of households with direct social aid every month. While the death penalty remains in place with 48 provisions authorising capital punishment, Morocco has observed a de facto moratorium since 1993. A royal pardon was granted on 30 July, at the occasion of Throne Day, which commuted 23 death sentences to life imprisonment. Consensual same-sex relations continue to be criminalised and can lead to imprisonment.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, the EU continued to promote respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights in Morocco in the context of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027. EU action in the country revolved around the following priorities: (1) rule of law, (2) civil society space and freedom of expression, (3) gender equality and women's rights, (4) children's rights, and (5) abolition of the death penalty.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU's bilateral engagement with Morocco is guided by the EU-Morocco Association Agreement, which stipulates that EU-Morocco relations are based on respect for human rights and democratic principles. The EU actively engaged in the international and local human rights campaigns to mark the Day against the Death Penalty on 10 October. The EU Delegation joined the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence 'Orange the World' campaign between 25 November and 10 December. Moreover, Human Rights Day was marked by a joint campaign with EU Member States on social media on 10 December.

EU financial engagement: Through the Human Rights Support programme, the EU provided capacity-building support to Morocco's National Human Rights Council in the field of protection of human rights and towards the abolition of the death penalty. On the rule of law, the EU launched four institutional twinning projects supporting key judicial institutions. The 'MA-JUST' programme implemented by the Council of Europe provided Moroccan judicial authorities with support in implementing Law 43/22 on alternative sentences, while strengthening capacities to handle cases of violence against women. The EU continued to provide civil society support through thematic programmes and the Strategic Support Programme for Civil Society, involving 40 Moroccan CSOs. The EU also supported various projects to improve gender mainstreaming in public policies, strengthening women's economic empowerment, and the fight against sexual and gender-based violence, in addition to initiatives in the area of children's rights.

Multilateral context: Morocco is a state party to all major UN conventions on human rights. For the period 2023-2025, Morocco was a member of the HRC, marking its third term. At the 60th session of the HRC, Morocco's positions only rarely converged with those of the EU. Notably, in October 2025, Morocco voted in favour of the resolution on the 'Question of the death penalty'. However, Morocco often voted differently from the EU position on resolutions that addressed human rights violations in third countries. In 2025, Morocco participated in the first 'World Congress on Enforced Disappearances' in Geneva, signalling its willingness to engage with UN mechanisms, notably the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances. On the sidelines of UNGA, Morocco hosted an event related to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, attended by several Foreign Ministers and the HRVP. The Moroccan Foreign Minister also participated in the fourth 'Ministerial Conference on feminist foreign policies' in Paris in October 2025.

Occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the situation in the oPt continued to deteriorate amid escalating violence, institutional fragility, and systemic repression. In Gaza, the aftermath of the 2023–2025 war left a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, with over 70,000 Palestinians killed since 2023 (according to the health authorities in Gaza), 1.9 million Palestinians displaced, and critical infrastructure destroyed. Among the dead were 29 journalists and 12 international health workers, with more than 100+ injured. Hamas, and other Palestinian armed groups have continued to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law in Gaza, gross violations and abuses of international human rights law, and atrocity crimes, including possible summary executions. The West Bank witnessed a sharp rise in settler violence and settlement expansion, with 238 Palestinians killed (including 60 children) by Israeli forces and settlers, alongside 7,100 forced displacements of Palestinians in Area C, due to demolitions and settler attacks. Around 10,000 Palestinians remained in Israeli prisons with documented ill-treatment and torture, and without ICRC's access since October 2023. The Palestinian Authority (PA) is responsible for arbitrary arrests, torture allegations, and crackdown on dissent. Israel continued to financially constrain the PA, eroding its ability to deliver essential services and exacerbating the already instable financial situation. Civic space shrank dramatically. Civicus classified civic space in oPt as 'repressed' in 2025. Democracy remained stagnant, with no elections since 2006. Meanwhile, women and youth faced heightened repression, with gender-based violence and student arrests rising, further eroding prospects for inclusive governance and political debate. Consensual same-sex acts are legal only in the West Bank while remaining illegal in Gaza.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, the EU prioritised five critical intervention areas in the occupied Palestinian territory, blending humanitarian aid, legal advocacy, and institutional support to address the worsening crisis. Protection of civilians and human rights defenders (HRDs) remained paramount: the EU provided legal aid and emergency grants to relevant organisations, while documenting violations against journalists. A second priority was combating housing, land, and property rights violations, challenging demolitions and settler-led displacements. Accountability and rule of law formed a third focus, with the EU engaging the PA on torture prevention, alignment with the UN Committee against Torture, and supporting the Palestinian Institute for International Humanitarian Law to strengthen IHL compliance. Finally, the EU supported expanded youth and women's political participation, aiming to counter gender-based repression and student arrests. Despite these efforts, operational challenges, including Israeli legislative barriers, PA financial instability, and shrinking civic

space, limited the EU's ability to contribute to systemic change, shifting focus toward short-term protection and advocacy.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued financial support to the PA, including payment of civil service salaries, and UNRWA. Publicly and privately, the EU raised concerns over many human rights issues, including settler violence, restrictions on access to religious sites in Jerusalem, and the PA's suspension of Al Jazeera. On the ground, EU Delegations monitored military court proceedings, documented demolitions in East Jerusalem and Area C, and assessed aid blockages in Gaza, coordinating closely with the Office of the European Union Representative in Jerusalem and UNRWA.

EU financial engagement: The EU maintained targeted financial engagement in the oPt, allocating EUR 202.5 million to address humanitarian, legal, and institutional crises, though disbursement faced significant operational constraints. Core funding prioritised Palestinian civil society organisations. The EU also disbursed EUR 52 million to UNRWA, including to support humanitarian response in Gaza. Smaller but strategic grants supported torture rehabilitation and youth/women's empowerment.

Multilateral context: The multilateral landscape in the oPt was defined by heightened international scrutiny. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion in October, urging Israel to lift restrictions on UNRWA and to facilitate humanitarian access to Gaza. Compliance remained incomplete, with aid deliveries still severely curtailed. Accountability mechanisms faced difficulties, including due to US sanctions against the International Criminal Court (ICC). The EU aligned its advocacy with ICJ rulings and UN resolutions, while providing technical support to the PA for treaty compliance. The EU referred to the situation in oPt in its statements under item 4 at the 58th and 60th sessions of the HRC and engaged in the Interactive Dialogues with the Special Rapporteur and with the Commission of Inquiry.

Western Sahara

The UN lists Western Sahara as a non-self-governing territory, whose status remains the object of a negotiation process conducted under the auspices of the UN. UNSC resolution 2797 (2025) reaffirmed its commitment to assist the parties to achieve a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution, taking as a basis Morocco's Autonomy Proposal, that is consistent with the UN Charter.

In September, the UNSG Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura, visited the refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria, to meet with the Sahrawi representatives ahead of his briefing to the UNSC. In its Resolution 2797, the UNSC extended the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) by one year until 31 October 2026.

This year's report of the UNSG on the situation in the region indicated that OHCHR continued to receive reports of shrinking civic space and restrictions on Sahrawis' rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly amid growing surveillance, harassment and intimidation. It also underlined that the humanitarian situation in the Sahrawi refugee camps near Tindouf remained dire, that the Sahrawi refugees were still dependent on humanitarian aid and that opportunities for self-reliance remained limited.

The EU continued to support the UN process, reaffirming its readiness to assist in facilitating the consultations between the parties, to support the efforts of the UNSG Personal Envoy, and to promote and protect human rights in Western Sahara.

Syrian Arab Republic

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: After the fall of Assad's regime in December 2024, Syria found itself at a crossroads. In 2025, significant political, security, socio-economic and humanitarian challenges impacted on the human rights and democracy situation in the country. Some positive steps were taken by the Syrian transitional government. These include the signing of the Constitutional Declaration, with specific articles on the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as provisions on inclusive participation and transitional justice. In May 2025, the National Commission for Transitional Justice and the National Commission for Missing Persons were established. In October 2025, 119 new members of the transitional People's Assembly were elected in indirect elections, although several components of Syrian society and women remain under-represented.

On 10 December, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), whose permanent office presence in Damascus was approved by the transitional government in 2025, held Syria's first-ever official celebration of International Human Rights Day in Damascus. Despite some restrictions, international human rights NGOs could visit Syria, though Civicus still classified civic space in Syria as 'closed' in 2025. Freedom of expression improved, and international journalists were allowed to work in the country, in sharp contrast with the situation under the former regime. Syria registered a modest improvement in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, advancing two places to 177th place out of 180 countries. Online hate speech, including against women, remains a major concern. Nevertheless, lack of capacity, financial constraints and a tendency to avoid antagonising the authorities limit this freedom especially for the local media. Maintaining order and protecting all Syrians, while advancing efforts towards stability, transitional justice and reconciliation, remained a challenge for the transitional government throughout the year. Syria ranked 172nd out of 182 countries in the 2025 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index.

The formation of the People's Assembly remained incomplete as no selection process was undertaken in the governorates of Hasaka, Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa and in the southern governorate of Sweida, and consequently, the interim President did not designate the remaining 70 members. Women and non-Sunni-Arab communities were underrepresented amongst the already selected incumbent members. The date for new elections is yet to be set, pending the adoption of new legislation. Unresolved tensions, the delay of transitional justice perspectives and a dire socio-economic situation contributed to periodical outbreaks of sectarian violence across the country, including in the coastal region in March (around 1400 casualties were reported), around Damascus in May and in Sweida in July (more than 1700 casualties reported). In June, a terrorist attack was perpetrated against Mar Elias church in Damascus. During 2025, several Da'esh attacks were reported across the country, with one killing two US soldiers.

In the coastal region and in the south, large-scale human rights violations and abuses were committed by all sides, including by forces who were or considered themselves as being close to the transitional government. In August, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria, which had access to conduct its work in the country, published a report documenting the widespread violations in the coastal region in March, including acts that likely amount to war crimes. A National Commission for Investigation and Fact-Finding to investigate the widespread violations that occurred in the coastal region in March, and a separate Investigation Committee to investigate the violence in Sweida province in July, were

formed. In November 2025, the first public trial for fourteen alleged perpetrators of violations in March, including both supporters of the former regime and current members of the security apparatus, took place.

At the same time, in the Northeast, no tangible progress on the implementation of the 10 March 2025 agreement between the government and the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), to integrate the SDF into state structures, was reported. Moreover, no progress was observed in the South, where Sweida remained isolated, outside governmental control and in a dire economic situation, with no clear perspective for the population in the province – and neither for the displaced Druze and Bedouin populations. In Quneitra, regular Israeli incursions, with violence against civilians, occurred. Consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised.

EU action - key focus areas: EU human rights policies and actions in 2025 were guided by the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020–2027 and by the Council Conclusions on Syria, adopted in June 2025. The latter outlines EU support for an inclusive and peaceful transition in Syria, where the human rights of all Syrians without any discrimination are upheld and a safe and enabling civic space is ensured. Key focus areas for EU action in 2025 included: inclusion of all Syrian components in public life justice and accountability, combating hate speech and disinformation, women's rights and reintegration in places of origin. In its outreach to the Syrian transitional government, the EU consistently raised the need for a peaceful and truly inclusive transition in the country. The EU also advocated for the approval of the establishment of a permanent presence in Damascus of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons calling for unrestricted access of its activities inside Syria. The EU also welcomed the establishment of the two independent Syrian Commissions for Transitional Justice and for the Missing, and expressed its willingness to support them in their challenging tasks. In May, the EU lifted economic sanctions on Syria, except those based on security grounds, with the aim to support the country's socio-economic recovery and reconstruction. In parallel, in May and June, the EU introduced new listings under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime for human rights violations and actions fuelling instability in Syria in the post-Assad era.

EU bilateral political engagement: Several EU-Syria high-level bilateral meetings were held in 2025, including between the Presidents of the European Council and Commission and Syria's interim President, as well as between the EU High Representative and Syria's Foreign Minister. High-level EU visits to Syria also took place, including by Commissioner Lahbib and Commissioner Šuica. In November, jointly with the Syrian transitional government and Syrian civil society, the EU organised the first ever 'Day of Dialogue' in Syria, gathering more than 500 representatives, with a large majority from Syrian CSOs, to discuss how to better support the transition in the country.

EU financial engagement: In March, the EU hosted the ninth Brussels Conference on Syria, which raised in total EUR 5.8 billion in pledges for Syria and its neighbours. In 2025, EU humanitarian funding inside Syria amounted to more than EUR 204 million. In 2025, the EU continued to provide support to the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) as part of its efforts to fight impunity so that all those responsible for war crimes or crimes against humanity can be held accountable. In addition, the EU continued to support the work of the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), with a focus on data collection among families of the missing. EU-funded projects also continued helping access to international justice mechanisms for survivors of international crimes and human rights violations, while backing efforts to monitor and report abuses inside Syria through human rights defenders and investigative journalism.

Multilateral context: Throughout 2025, the EU continued to call on the Syrian transitional government to ensure full access for UN bodies, including OHCHR and UN-mandated mechanisms, namely the Commission of Inquiry, the IIIM and the Independent Institution on Missing Persons (IIMP). The EU referred to the situation in Syria in its statements under item 2 at the 59th and 60th sessions of the UN Human Rights Council and engaged in the Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry. Syria does not have a standing invitation to the HRC Special Procedures.

Republic of Tunisia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and rule of law situation in Tunisia has continued to deteriorate, with repression of civic space and increased restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and assembly, lack of fair trial guarantees, use of arbitrary detention and administrative harassment and repression of civil society and independent media, including by arrests and prosecution of independent journalists, lawyers, human rights defenders, members of the opposition and civil society. The government has implemented decrees that allow for the prosecution of individuals for spreading 'false information' online, and several journalists and activists were arrested and convicted. Harsh sentences were issued against opposition figures, journalists, and activists, with many facing prison terms for peaceful criticism of the government. In 2025, Tunisia ranked 129th out of 180 countries in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, indicating significant constraints, a decline by 11 places compared to the previous year. The National Authority for Access to Information, an independent body established in 2016 to guarantee the right to access information, was shut down in August. In parallel, the use of counterterrorism laws to silence dissent has become a pattern, with systematic judicial abuses and violations of fair trial rights and due process guarantees. Criminalization of NGOs and human rights defenders for financial misconduct increased. The independence of the judiciary has been compromised. The repression towards civil society actors has continued. In 2025, over 20 CSOs were suspended and several NGO workers faced trials and convictions for their humanitarian work with migrants and refugees.

Additionally, Tunisian authorities intensified crackdowns on migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees, particularly those from sub-Saharan Africa. Tunisia lacks a national asylum system and the suspension of UNHCR registration of asylum-seekers remains in place. Human rights organisations reported serious human rights violations against migrations, asylum-seekers and refugees, including arbitrary arrests and detention, collective expulsions, ill-treatment, torture, and sexual violence. Throughout 2025, security forces dismantled makeshift camps, forcibly evicting thousands of migrants, leaving them without shelter or resources. Regarding the conditions of detention, reports raised the alarm on overcrowding, mistreatment of minorities, and institutionalised violence in prisons.

Social and environmental protests erupted nationwide, including in the southern city of Gabès, where environmental pollution and toxic gas leaks caused an acute health crisis. Consensual same-sex sexual acts remain criminalised. While Tunisia retains a generally strong legal framework for gender equality, implementation gaps, backsliding and persistent social and economic inequalities mark realities on the ground, and discrimination in inheritance rights remain. The EU expressed concern over the deteriorating human rights situation on various occasions, including during the sub-committee on democracy and human rights held in Tunis in July 2025. International human rights organisations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, condemned the government's actions,

through public statements and reports, yet the situation remained highly problematic. Tunisia retains the death penalty in law but is considered abolitionist in practice.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU took various actions to support human rights and democracy in Tunisia, in line with the five strands of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-27. These include: (1) Protecting and empowering individuals, (2) Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies, (3) Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy, (4) New technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges, (5) Delivering by working together.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU maintained a strong bilateral political engagement with Tunisia, including regular human rights and sectoral policy dialogues, including the sub-committee on democracy and human rights held in Tunis in July 2025. These dialogues provided a platform for the EU to raise concerns about the human rights situation, to promote democratic governance, rule of law and human rights as well as to raise individual cases of concern. The EU also supported the Tunisian government's efforts to implement democratic reforms, including the strengthening of institutions and the promotion of the rule of law.

EU financial engagement: The EU funded several projects in Tunisia with a focus on the promotion of human rights and the protection of women and girls from violence, through the 'SILA programme' with EUR 6.2 million for the period 2023-2026, as well as support to refugees and asylum seekers. The latter, through operational grants to UNHCR, provides assistance to migrants and vulnerable populations through the 'Massarat project' with EUR 5.6 million. The EU also supported initiatives aimed at promoting democratic governance, including support to and close collaboration with CSOs and human rights defenders. The EU has also focused on promoting the responsible use of technology, including the protection of online freedom of expression through the 'PAMT 2 programme', which provided support to public, private and associative media, strengthening media literacy.

Multilateral context: Tunisia is a state party to most international human rights treaties – albeit with significant reservations. While Tunisia has continued to vote in favour of the resolution on a Moratorium on the use of the Death Penalty ('moratorium resolution') since 2012, Tunisia has not ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. The EU has encouraged the government to implement the recommendations submitted during the UPR. The EU Delegation carried out the periodic démarches on the EU priorities during the 69th session of the UN Committee on the Status of Women and the 80th session of the UN Third Committee. In March 2025, the Tunisian government decided to withdraw its declaration under Article 34(6) of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, allowing individuals and NGOs with observer status before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to directly bring cases against Tunisia before the African Court.

Russia and Central Asia

Republic of Kazakhstan

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy situation in Kazakhstan in 2025 presented a mixed picture, with announced political and institutional reforms coexisting with entrenched structural constraints. The proposed transition to a unicameral parliament via a constitutional reform to be adopted by referendum, is presented as part of the broader concept

of building a 'Fair Kazakhstan' and strengthening a 'listening state'. Judicial reform has deepened with the formal separation of cassation from the Supreme Court, while implementation of legislative measures aimed at strengthening protection against gender-based violence continued. At the same time, the country experienced a noticeable shrinkage of civic space, with regulatory, administrative, and legislative measures affecting civil society organisations, independent media, political activists, and minority groups. Expanded oversight of NGOs, growing pressure on journalists, continued restrictions on peaceful assemblies and the adoption of broadly interpretable legislation on freedom of expression contributed to the overall climate of legal uncertainty and self-censorship. The rights of LGBTI persons are at risk to be affected, with the adoption of a law banning propaganda of 'non traditional sexual relations' at the end of the year.

EU action - key focus areas: The five strands of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-24 continued to drive the action of the EU and its Member States in Kazakhstan. The EU pursued the implementation of the country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society Organisations in Kazakhstan in 2025, covering the period until 2027. The Roadmap reflects all the lessons learned from past engagement with civil society organisations in Kazakhstan, and takes into account the political changes that happened since January 2022. The EU focused inter alia on UPR follow-up, concerns over media freedom, freedom of association, protection of human rights defenders, freedom of peaceful assembly, torture prevention, anti-discrimination and the protection of vulnerable persons, as well as combatting sexual and gender-based violence. While acknowledging the continued reform process in Kazakhstan, the EU underlined the importance of its effective implementation with the active participation of civil society. The EU supported joint human rights campaigns, including on women's rights and LGBTI rights.

EU bilateral political engagement: The annual human rights dialogue and the Justice and Home Affairs subcommittee are part of the EU's structured dialogue with Kazakhstan, provided for by the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. In 2025, they were held in Brussels in March. Human rights and democracy-related topics were also discussed at the EU-Kazakhstan Cooperation Committee in June 2025, and the EU-Kazakhstan Cooperation Council in December 2025, co-chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security. Building on the positive experience from previous years, the EU Ambassador and ambassadors of EU Member States held regular dialogues with the Ministry of Justice on human rights and democracy. It provided a useful platform for human rights advocacy and raising both systemic and ad hoc issues. Furthermore, the EU Delegation together with the EU Member States and like-minded countries consistently raised human rights issues and encouraged Kazakhstan to further implement reforms based on international commitments.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, the EU Delegation managed seven bilateral human rights projects under the human rights and democracy thematic programme, totalling EUR 4.8 million in EU funding. These projects aim to: 1) improve human rights protection quality in Western Kazakhstan, 2) contribute to the eradication of torture, 3) promote human rights and the rule of law and address challenges in Kazakhstan's criminal justice system, 4) promote accountability and good governance practices, 5) defend rights to accessible housing, 6) support personal data protection, and 7) enhance the implementation of UN human rights commitments. The projects contribute to developing and institutionalising interactions between civil society and public authorities, positively impacting the development of democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights in Kazakhstan.

Multilateral context: Kazakhstan underwent its fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2025, with the EU and like-minded countries actively engaging in the process. The UPR Working Group's report on Kazakhstan was adopted, with the country accepting 259 out of 294 recommendations. The EU also engaged in multilateral fora, such as the UN Human Rights Council, to promote human rights and democracy in Kazakhstan.

Throughout 2025, the EU Delegation (in some cases with like-minded countries) presented several démarches to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan on numerous human rights related issues.

Kyrgyz Republic

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, human rights in Kyrgyzstan continued to deteriorate, with increasing concerns regarding civil society restrictions, freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, media, good governance, torture prevention and discrimination of minorities. Civil society organisations and journalists faced increasing pressure, particularly due to the Law on Mass Media, adopted in August 2025, which mandates registration for all media outlets and caps foreign ownership at 35%. Kyrgyzstan's media environment was marked by growing state control, exemplified by restrictive laws and seemingly politically motivated prosecutions of media workers. The closure of the National Torture Prevention Centre, now under the Ombudsperson’s Office, raised questions about torture prevention capabilities and autonomy of the institution. Corruption remained a serious concern despite the adoption of the Anti-Corruption Strategy 2025-2030, seemingly applied selectively. National minorities continued to face employment and education discrimination. The new Law on Religion stifles freedom of religion or belief and intensifies discrimination against religious communities. Discrimination against LGBTI persons remained widespread. Domestic violence reports rose, potentially reflecting improved law enforcement responses and increased trust in legal processes. As a positive development, the Constitutional Court rejected the proposal to reintroduce capital punishment for severe crimes against women and children following substantial public opposition.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU prioritised the implementation of the 2021-2025 Gender Equality Action Plan (GAP III) in its external action. High-level EU officials raised key human rights issues with Kyrgyz authorities. The EU supported the Ombudsman Office and promoted torture prevention efforts. It maintained robust dialogue with civil society and human rights defenders to prepare, among others, for the annual human rights dialogue. In development cooperation, EU-funded projects focused on democracy, judicial reform, anti-discrimination, and human rights, notably supporting the establishment of a more professional, independent, accountable and transparent court system through the ’Rule of Law in the Kyrgyz Republic’ project. Further, the EU enhanced efforts against gender-based violence, supported gender equality and women's empowerment and contributed to the empowerment of youth organisations. The EU supported the adoption of the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2020-2030 and the development of its Action Plan. The EU Generalised System of Preference Plus (GSP+) monitoring continued assessing the implementation of core international conventions related to human rights, good governance, labour rights and environment, to which Kyrgyzstan has committed as a GSP+ beneficiary.

EU bilateral political engagement: The promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms are an integral part of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, signed on 25 June 2024, and GSP+. The EU persistently voiced concerns at all levels regarding Kyrgyzstan's

worsening human rights situation, highlighting the ongoing suppression of freedom of expression, media freedom, and civil society restrictions. The EU issued statements on political developments in the country, emphasising the need for adherence to national legislation, international commitments, and citizens' democratic rights, including a tweet by the EUSR for Human Rights expressing concern about the arrests preceding the parliamentary elections of 30 November. In close cooperation with the UN and like-minded partners, the EU continued to urge Kyrgyzstan to implement its international obligations related to human rights, labour rights and good governance. Notably, the EU advocated against the adoption of legislation further limiting the space for civil society and media freedom.

EU financial engagement: EU programming and financial engagement on human rights continued in 2025 through a comprehensive approach to advancing gender equality, youth empowerment, democratic governance, and human rights-based justice reform in the Kyrgyz Republic. Across projects, vulnerable young women and women with disabilities were supported through economic empowerment, skills development, and access to employment; civil society and youth organisations were strengthened to influence policy, promote human rights, and challenge harmful social norms; and media professionals nationwide were equipped with gender-sensitive journalism skills, inclusive language practices, and digital tools. Initiatives further enhanced youth participation in digital governance, increased digital literacy at the local level, and built the capacities of duty bearers and rights holders to implement international human rights standards. Efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls focused on leadership development, institutionalisation of zero-tolerance community models, and the digitisation of gender-based violence knowledge. In parallel, the 'Just4All' project supported significant criminal justice reforms, notably the strengthening and digitalisation of the probation system, expansion of non-custodial measures, development of rehabilitation programmes, and establishment of modern probation infrastructure.

Multilateral context: The EU worked closely with the UN and other like-minded partners. Cooperation with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) remained intensive. Monitoring under the GSP+ continued as an ongoing process, through which the EU, assesses Kyrgyzstan's implementation of 27 core international conventions. The EU maintained regular diplomatic engagement through démarches on EU priorities and initiatives, including in the framework of the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee and the UN Human Rights Council. Cooperation with OHCHR was particularly close, focusing on joint action related to draft legislation on non-governmental organisations and media, as well as the monitoring of court cases involving journalists. On several occasions, the EU and its partners jointly raised concerns with the authorities regarding a range of human rights issues. A key advocacy priority in 2025 was successful opposition to the reintroduction of the death penalty.

Russian Federation

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Russia has further deteriorated in 2025. UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation Mariana Katzarova stated in her report on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation that it constituted a 'seismic decline'. The efforts of the Russian authorities to further dismantle civil and political rights were reinforced by Russia's withdrawal from the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The number of political prisoners in Russia has continued to increase significantly. According to prominent human rights bodies there were around 1200-1800 persons considered political prisoners at the end

of 2025. However, the real (unofficial) number of political prisoners in Russia could well exceed 3000 persons. As in the previous years since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the laws on 'discrediting' the Russian armed forces and spreading 'fakes' about them were used to stifle dissent against the war. Furthermore, the authorities have been using a broad and deliberately distorted interpretation of the criminal law on extremism, state treason, and terrorism for political persecution.

The authorities used existing legislation, including, inter alia, the 'foreign agent' law and the 'undesirable organisations' law, to stifle any dissent and to stigmatise opponents of the current regime. As of the end of 2025, 1,125 individuals or entities had been listed, while restrictions on 'foreign agents' had been substantially strengthened. The Office of the Prosecutor General recognised 103 foreign and international non-governmental organisations as 'undesirable' in 2025, bringing the total number to 290. The designation of 'terrorists and extremists' has been extensively used as a form of political and legal pressure with 250-300 persons added every month. There are currently over 19,000 individuals on the list. Amendments made in July 2025 greatly expanded the criteria for listing individuals in the register, often bypassing the need for a final conviction.

The authorities have also intensified the crackdown on online communication platforms, including encrypted messengers and social media. Almost every major messaging service was either disrupted or blocked altogether in 2025. With the introduction of the national messenger Max, the aim is to make it the only platform practically available for public communication, including the business and governmental sectors. Since September 2025, all new smartphones and tablets sold in Russia must have Max pre-installed by law. Use of Virtual Private Networks (VPN) is now considered an aggravating circumstance in criminal convictions. In addition, there are administrative fines for advertising VPN services. The World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders ranked Russia at 171 out of 180 countries, falling nine places this year.

Throughout 2025, the restrictions against dissenting citizens were strengthened, with foreign agents subject to a 30% income tax (compared to the standard 13-15%) and by restoring the right of the FSB to operate its own pre-trial detention centres for persons accused of state security crimes (espionage, extremism, terrorism, treason, etc.).

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine negatively affected the situation of Indigenous Peoples and ethnic minorities. Many of their organisations have been outlawed or stigmatised with labels of 'foreign agents', 'undesirable organisations', 'extremists', or 'terrorists'. Individuals belonging to minorities are more likely to be drafted to the Russian army, and subsequently killed or injured, than ethnic Russians.

The right of the FSB to operate its own pre-trial detention centres for persons accused of state security crimes (espionage, extremism, terrorism, treason, etc.) was restored in 2025. In addition, the FSB got the authority to directly request mobile operators to suspend services for specific subscribers, allegedly to protect citizens and the state from security threats. Numerous Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war are held in arbitrary detention on the territory of the Russian Federation and are subjected to widespread torture and ill-treatment.

EU action - key focus areas: Support for Russian independent media, civil society, and human rights defenders inside and outside Russia is crucial and constitutes one of the key elements of the EU's war-time approach to Russia. In the absence of a human rights dialogue and other political contacts with Russian authorities, the EU has frequently consulted with Russian civil society organisations,

international organisations and like-minded countries with regard to the situation of human rights in Russia. Public awareness, keeping the situation on the agenda in international human rights fora and trial observation are important EU actions. The EU Delegation has also coordinated Member State participation and communicated on various commemoration events, such as the death of Alexey Navalny, the assassination of Boris Nemtsov and the Day of Remembrance of Victims of Political Repression.

EU bilateral political engagement: As a response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU has suspended all bilateral engagement with Russia. The sanctions regime in view of the situation in Russia is used to address human rights violations and abuses as well as repression of civil society and democratic opposition. Currently, there are 62 individuals and one entity listed. The majority of those are members of the judiciary involved in politically motivated trials. The second most prominent category are penitentiary officials linked to the mistreatment of prisoners. At the same time, the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime (EUGHSR) includes listings in connection to numerous grave human rights violations in Russia, namely Vladimir Kara-Murza's case, human rights abuses in Chechnya and the misuse of facial recognition technology by Moscow authorities.

The EU continued raising concerns over the human rights situation, undue restrictions on civil society, legislative developments and individual cases using public statements and social media.

EU financial engagement: Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, all activities with Russian state-linked entities were suspended. The EU continues to support Russian civil society, human rights defenders and independent media inside and outside Russia, since they are a crucial channel to Russian audience.

Multilateral context: In 2025, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) continued to examine the human rights situation in Russia. On 7 October, the HRC passed a resolution on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation A/HRC/RES/60/21, expressing grave concerns with the continued significant deterioration of the situation of human rights in Russia and renewed the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation for another year. On 22 September, the Special Rapporteur presented the detailed report on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation to the HRC (A/HRC/60/59). On 27 October, she presented her report, 'Rule of fear: silencing dissent and anti-war expression in the Russian Federation in the name of national security' (A/80/382), to the UN General Assembly.

Republic of Tajikistan

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the human rights situation in Tajikistan remained difficult. International observers noted restrictions affecting journalists' safety, freedom of expression, and freedom of association, as well as concerns related to the protection of vulnerable groups of population, including women and refugees. Civic space and access to information of public interest were limited, while independent media, journalists, and human rights defenders faced detention and lengthy prison sentences. According to Human Rights Watch, at least seven journalists were imprisoned on charges related to their reporting or protest coverage, and several writers received prison sentences for publishing critical material. Frequent violations of fair trial guarantees were noted. Concerns about torture and ill-treatment in detention persisted.

Forced deportations of Afghan refugees raised serious non-refoulement concerns. Prominent human rights activists continued to be incarcerated. For example, lawyer Buzurgmehr Yorov was serving a 23-

year sentence for defending opposition figures. Pamiri activists and journalists remained detained, often labelled as 'extremists' or criminals.

In 2025, international monitors rated Tajikistan as 'Not Free', and the World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders ranked it 153rd out of 180 countries.

The National Strategy for the Human Rights Protection, extending until 2038, and its 2023–2025 Action Plan were implemented through coordination, training, and dialogue. Some improvements were observed in coordination mechanisms addressing gender-based violence, capacity building in the justice and penitentiary sector, and police involvement. However, legal frameworks and accountability mechanisms remained incomplete, and tangible outcomes in key civil and political rights were lacking. Tajikistan retains the death penalty in law, but is considered abolitionist in practice.

EU action – key focus areas: Throughout 2025, the EU closely monitored human rights developments in Tajikistan and engaged in political dialogues with national authorities, as well as cooperation with civil society and international organisations. Key EU focus areas of engagement included advancing the implementation of the National Strategy for Human Rights Protection until 2038, especially in the area of freedom of expression, support to civil society and human rights defenders, as well as the promotion of gender equality, women's rights, access to justice, and youth. In a Team Europe spirit, the EU advocated for criminalisation of domestic violence and for transparent trials, including openness towards international observation. The EU, its Member States and likeminded partners conducted joint démarches on prominent human rights cases, including on the detention of journalists and the disruption of the event organised on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day. The EU supported trainings for journalists and youth with the aim of building their competences and resilience against information manipulation and online radicalisation.

EU bilateral political engagement: The annual EU-Tajikistan Human Rights Dialogue took place in Brussels on 17 October 2025. The issues discussed included women's rights and non-discrimination, the prevention of torture and penitentiary reform, freedom of expression and civic space, as well as the situation of minorities in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO). The EU recognised some progress in the drafting of human rights legislation, stressing that effective implementation is critical for genuine improvement in human rights protection. Human rights aspects discussions in relation to Tajikistan's GSP+ application continued to indicate limited willingness in addressing key human rights issues. In July 2025, the EU and Tajikistan initialled the negotiated text of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA), which will provide another platform for engaging on human rights issues with the Tajik authorities.

EU financial engagement: Under the current multi-annual programming period (NDICI 2021-27), a total of EUR 11.87 million is allocated to Tajikistan through the human rights and democracy thematic programme and the civil society organisations thematic programme. The EU-adopted Civil Society Organisations (CSO) Roadmap for Tajikistan for 2023-2027 serves as a strategic tool to engage meaningfully and continuously with local civil society and to ensure complementarity between initiatives supporting civil society. Within this framework, the EU maintained robust support in Tajikistan through a total of 18 EU-funded projects – ongoing, contracted and completed – in 2025. These projects focused primarily on human rights, gender equality, and the strengthening of civil society. For instance, the project, 'EU-UN Support to the States in Central Asia for their Citizens Returned from Conflict Zones', implemented by UNICEF and aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, concluded its second phase on 30 September 2025.

Multilateral context: In November 2025, the EU and its Member State representatives delivered a Team Europe démarche concerning EU priorities at the 79th session of UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee, seeking Tajikistan's support for defending the universality of human rights as an essential foundation for building peaceful and prosperous societies.

The situation of Afghan refugees remained an ongoing concern, following UNHCR reports of mass deportations raising serious questions regarding compliance with international non-refoulement obligations and protection standards. UN human rights officials have warned that forced returns create a multifaceted human rights crisis and have urged Tajikistan to cease forcible returns of refugees and asylum seekers.

In 2025, Tajikistan was a country under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council, whose session is scheduled for November 2026.

Turkmenistan

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the overall human rights situation in Turkmenistan remained difficult, with a score of 1/100 (not free) in Freedom House's Freedom in the World index. As regards individual rights, restrictions persisted on the freedom of movement (internal and external), together with violations of freedom of expression and media, as well as association and assembly. Concerns remained regarding restrictions to freedom of religion or belief; the situation of the LGBTI community (i.a. consensual sex between men remained criminalised; cases of violence based on sexual orientation of the victims were reported); and cases of torture and ill-treatment in prisons. Some improvements were noted in places of detention, in addressing gender equality and gender-based violence, and in cooperation with the ILO on eradicating forced labour. Becoming the second country globally (after Kyrgyzstan) to eliminate all known cases of statelessness, Turkmenistan reportedly continued the practice of refusing to issue passports to Turkmen citizens abroad, which implied the risk of statelessness. Turkmenistan continued to implement the second National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2021-2025, and in September 2025, Turkmenistan's Interdepartmental Commission on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law held consultative meetings with UNFPA and national partners to draft a new National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2026–2030. During 2025, Turkmenistan, with the support from UNDP and OHCHR, developed a new National Action Plan on Human Rights (NHRAP) for 2026-2030, declaring that it has been aligned with recommendations from its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and other consultation processes. However, no implementation plan for the UPR has been developed. In January 2025, the President approved the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking for 2025-2029.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued promoting a global system for human rights and democracy support. The EU and its Member States continued supporting capacity building of Turkmen authorities to implement international human rights conventions and domestic legislation. A number of workshops, seminars, trainings and events were organised through regional and bilateral programmes, within the existing framework which necessitates government approval for all actions. The areas included child rights; judicial and penitentiary systems; environmental and participation-related rights; media literacy; and the ethical use of artificial intelligence. The EU continued its actions in supporting civil society and human rights defenders, including journalists. Diplomatic action was taken in a number of individual cases.

The EU-funded Civil Society Facility in Central Asia is advancing human rights implementation in the region through structured mechanisms like the Youth Sounding Board (YSB) (established in Turkmenistan in mid-2025) and Thematic Working Groups (TWGs), which prioritize inclusive dialogue and evidence-based advocacy. The YSB ensures youth representation in policy processes, with a majority of members in Turkmenistan being female, and focuses on issues such as governance, climate justice, and gender equality. The local YSB actively cooperated with the EU Delegation in 2025.

Gender equality and women's rights were at the core of the EU action in Turkmenistan. Targeted actions were held on the occasion of global campaigns (dedicated to International Women's Day; Breast Cancer Awareness Month; the International Day of the Girl Child; 16 Days against Gender-Based Violence Campaign; Human Rights Day).

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU voiced its concerns about individual cases through accessible diplomatic means, including Notes Verbales and démarches. Human rights were raised during, in preparation for and following bilateral engagements, including in the framework of the annual Joint Committee meeting and the human rights dialogue. Human rights concerns were also raised by the European Parliament and the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, as well as by Commissioner Síkela and HRVP Kallas, during their meetings at the highest levels, held in Ashgabat in 2025.

EU financial engagement:

The protection and promotion of human rights, with particular emphasis on the rights of women, children, and persons with disabilities, has been mainstreamed across all projects that the EU implements in Turkmenistan, both at bilateral and regional level.

As an example, the CSO project implemented with the Union of Economists conducted an analysis of gender legislation in Turkmenistan and developed recommendations to improve legislation that is planned to be submitted to the government. The recommendations, based on analysis and the results of a survey of women entrepreneurs (328 respondents), propose clarifying gender equality provisions in legislation and introducing targeted measures in key laws on employment, education, entrepreneurship, taxation, and state governance. They also emphasise the need to provide women with greater access to training, advisory support, and incentives, and to improve coordination among state institutions, with particular attention to women in the regions.

Multilateral context:

Turkmenistan maintained a low level of engagement with multilateral human rights institutions. Turkmenistan has never been a member of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and is not active as an observer. Turkmenistan participated in the OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in October 2025. The UN OHCHR plan of deployment of an expatriate human rights officer to Turkmenistan would be a commendable development, in case a funding solution is found. The démarches on human rights included topics in relation to the HRC, the UNGA Third Committee. The EU continued encouraging Turkmenistan to seek the advice of specialised international bodies, and to involve civil society in the process of reforms in a meaningful way.

Republic of Uzbekistan

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the human rights and democracy situation in Uzbekistan continued to steadily deteriorate, with backsliding occurring in nearly every

area and the government deprioritising and disengaging from human rights topics. This was reflected in international rankings such as the RSF World Press Freedom Index (148th out of 180), WJP Rule of Law Index (81st out of 143) and TI Corruption Perception Index (124th out of 182). Despite formal reforms, restrictions on civic and political rights were documented. Authorities continued to suppress freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, targeting journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders through legal action and imprisonment under broadly defined criminal provisions. Lawyers faced licence suspensions and intimidation. The situation of human rights defenders (HRDs) and of civil society organisations (CSOs) remained challenging. Restrictions on funding and registration remain in place and limit NGO activities.

Uzbekistan did not show progress in implementing OSCE/ODIHR recommendations following the 2023 constitutional referendum and presidential elections, the 2024 parliamentary elections, or recommendations from the UN Universal Periodic Review and the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing. Several new laws were criticised by international HRDs, notably laws criminalising the disclosure of closed court information, increasing NGO reporting obligations on foreign funding, and the required notification of foreign travel.

Some positive developments occurred in environmental protection and social policy. Uzbekistan acceded to the Aarhus Convention and adopted ad-hoc measures to improve air quality. A strategy 'On the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence 2026-2030' was adopted. Positive reforms relating to gender equality included abolishing the reconciliation period in divorce proceedings, progress in reducing maternal mortality, and improving parliamentary representation of women. These topics enjoy strong political backing, which opens the possibility for further improvements.

The situation with regard to freedom of the media has deteriorated in 2025. At least three prominent female journalists were targeted, and several high-level journalists remain in detention. Serious concerns remained regarding torture and ill-treatment in detention, despite a new law mandating early health checks for detainees. Uzbekistan has not acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). Same-sex relations remained criminalised, with documented convictions. Members of the LGBTI community face intimidation and stigmatisation, abuse by law enforcement, and forced anal examinations. Forced evictions and land grabbing were identified as new concerns. Uzbekistan is witnessing unprecedented large-scale urban renewal projects in which entire neighbourhoods are demolished without proper consultations or compensations. Evictions are accompanied by intimidation, prosecution, and detention of HRDs and activists. Despite official promises, the full report on the July 2022 protests in Karakalpakstan was not made public in 2025. The leader of the protest, Davletmurat Tazhimuratov, remains in prison in conditions that his lawyer described as psychological and physical torture.

EU action - key focus areas: Protecting and empowering individuals: The EU Delegation addressed serious human rights violations through diplomatic engagements, including a joint EU/UK/US request to visit imprisoned activist Davletmurat Tazhimuratov. The Delegation observed court hearings of HRDs and used its social media to support individual HRDs.

Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies: The EU Delegation supported the national authorities' reform agendas via regular exchanges and participation in and co-funding of official events such as the Civil Society Week and Anti-Corruption Forum. The EU supported the participation of Uzbek CSOs in various events, such as the Fergana Peace Forum.

Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy: The second GSP+ monitoring mission in March 2025 assessed the implementation of 27 UN conventions by Uzbekistan. The mission included one-week long consultations with CSOs, like-minded partners, UN agencies, and the government.

New technologies: To mark World Press Freedom Day, the EU co-organised the third National Media Forum, which engaged 62 Uzbek media professionals on the topic of 'Media 3.0: Digital Challenges and Freedom of Expression'. The EU-funded project, 'Digital Detectives' trained youth and young journalists in factchecking and countering disinformation.

Delivering by working together: The EU Delegation continued its cooperation with EU MS, like-minded countries, including UK, CH, US, and the OHCHR, broadening this cooperation by inviting IFIs to several events.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Delegation regularly engaged with Uzbek authorities through political and sectoral dialogues, raising individual cases and systemic issues relating to human rights. It also maintained close contacts with civil society and advocated for their inclusion in international events.

EU financial engagement: EU financial engagement aligned political priorities with funding instruments. For 2025-2027, Uzbekistan mobilised EUR 2.2 million under the CSO thematic programme and EUR 1.8 million under the human rights and democracy thematic programme. Projects supported gender equality, legal empowerment, media literacy, digital rights and anti-corruption. The implementation of some projects was challenged by registration delays and funding blockages by the Ministry of Justice. Thanks in part to EU-funded projects on anti-corruption, amounting to a total of EUR 6 million, the government's engagement with the media and civil society on anti-corruption issues has increased.

Multilateral context: The EU Delegation cooperated with EU Member States and partners (notably FR, DE, UK, CH, OHCHR). In December 2025, EU and partners organised a joint International Human Rights Day conference on urban transformation and adequate housing. Uzbekistan continued to be scrutinised in multilateral fora, including the UN Human Rights Council and GSP+ processes, with persistent concerns over civic space, torture, discrimination, and forced evictions.

Africa

Republic of Angola

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Angola continues to face challenges in democratic governance. Local elections remain postponed *sine die*. Socio-economic rights continue to suffer from slow economic recovery. Not enough is done to cushion the social impact of austerity measures. This results in serious inequalities and severe pressure on health, food and quality-of-life indicators. Extreme poverty has increased and, according to the UN estimates, now affects over one third of Angolans.

Implementation of the Angolan National Strategy for Human Rights (adopted in 2020) advanced. An assessment of its implementation by the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights showed positive results, with over 90% of the actions undertaken and objectives met. The assessment also showed an increased awareness of human rights amongst the population. Efforts to staff, finance, and operationalise the

network of Local Human Rights Committees continued, with 124 out of 164 municipal committees and all 18 provincial committees operational so far.

Freedom of assembly and expression remained an issue, particularly as regards public protests and demonstrations. In July 2025, a one-third increase in diesel prices triggered a wave of protests throughout the country, with at least 30 people killed, nearly 200 injured, and over 1.200 arrested according to official figures. Security forces used tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition to disperse demonstrators; independent monitors, including UN OHCHR, pointed to an excessive use of force and arbitrary arrests, calling for prompt and impartial investigations.

Throughout 2025, concerns also continued about the shrinking space for civil society, notably regarding the discussion and implementation of legislation potentially increasing restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly. This included namely the Law on National Security (granting sweeping powers over the media, civil society and communication platforms) and the Law on Crimes of Vandalism of Public Goods and Services (with prison sentences up to 25 years for protest-related 'vandalism'), adopted and in effect since 2024, as well as the draft law on the status of Civil Society Organizations.

While the media environment in Angola remained characterised by limited pluralism and inclusiveness, Angola's position in the annual World Press Index improved in 2025, moving from 104th/180 in 2024 to 100th/180 in 2025. In September, a general strike called by the Sindicato dos Jornalistas de Angola (SJA) was suspended by a court ahead of its start, on the grounds that it would violate citizens' 'right to be informed'.

Despite increasing female representation in politics, gender inequalities and gender-based violence remained a source of concern, especially in rural areas. The children's rights situation is dire with 40% of children facing chronic malnutrition and young people suffering from high levels of unemployment and a low level of education. Although Angola decriminalised same-sex conduct in the new Penal Code (Law No. 38/20), the LGBTI community continues to face discrimination.

EU action - key focus areas: The protection and promotion of human rights and the fight against inequality form the basis of all EU actions in Angola. The Multiannual Indicative Programme for the period 2021-2027 identifies governance, fundamental rights and access to justice and protection of vulnerable groups as priority areas. The EU also supports important judicial and public administration reforms as well as the expansion of the national social protection system in line with the principle of 'leaving no one behind'.

The thematic budget line dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy (under the NDICI/Global Europe thematic programme) complements the bilateral cooperation envelope with specific actions in favour of persons in vulnerable situations. Key areas of cooperation in 2025 included actions on freedom of the press, gender and women's rights, sexual and reproductive rights, rights of the child, democracy and citizen participation as well as the preparation of an action on justice and governance.

EU bilateral political engagement: The most recent human rights dialogue between the Minister of Justice and Human Rights and EU Heads of Mission took place on 14 March 2024. The human rights working group and dialogue could not be convened in 2025.

The EU promoted dialogues on youth and sustainable development and maintained a constant engagement with human rights defenders and civil society organisations, whether in a group or individually. Public-diplomacy activities related to human rights included communication via social media of global campaigns such as the 16 Days of activism against Gender-Based Violence, and the Second National Conference on Freedom of the Press.

EU financial engagement: EU-funded human rights projects have been successfully implemented in 2025. Key objectives included: freedom of expression and media; economic and social inclusion of persons with disabilities; fight against gender-based violence; protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

PASCAL (Project to Support Civil Society and Local Government in Angola) is a concrete example of EU's promotion of human rights, citizen participation and democratic governance at local level. PASCAL supports a new model of dialogue and participation between government and civil society, following a bottom-up approach.

Multilateral context: During its 4th UPR cycle in 2025, Angola accepted 209 and noted 74 recommendations. Among the main areas of concern raised at the UPR were freedom of expression, assembly and association, judicial processes and due process rights, civic space and protection of LGBTI.

On 14 October 2025, Angola was re-elected to the UN Human Rights Council for 2026-2028 (179 votes in favour, 2 abstentions). On that occasion, Angola expressed its intention to contribute to the reinforcement of multilateral human rights structures and mechanisms with an emphasis on cooperation with the OHCHR, including treaty bodies, to the promotion and implementation of the international treaties to which it is a party, and to intensify the defence of the rights of vulnerable people. Angola has made efforts to cooperate with UN bodies in order to promote human rights, including by engaging with several UN special procedure mandate holders. To date, Angola has not yet ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court or the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Republic of Benin

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2025 was dominated by the leadup to the 2026 elections: parliamentary and communal elections on 11 January 2026 and presidential elections on 12 April 2026. While the incumbent President did not seek a third mandate, discussions on the implications of the tightening of the Electoral Code in March 2024 were frequent throughout the year. Moreover, towards the end of the year the news was dominated by an unexpected, controversial and far-reaching revision of the Constitution, adopted on 15 November 2025 by the National Assembly and promulgated on 17 December 2025 by President Patrice Talon. This revision created a Senate composed of largely unelected members, lengthened political mandates from five to seven years, and established a political truce between each election. Some observers considered this move as a way for

President Talon, who will be an ex officio member of this institution, to retain influence in the country's political life beyond May 2026. Finally, Beninese democracy was left reeling in the wake of a foiled coup attempt on 7 December 2025, when a group of putschists tried to overthrow the government and establish a military regime. The security situation in northern Benin continued to deteriorate in 2025, with increasing spillover from Sahel-based armed groups. In April 2025, a major attack against security forces in the north, attributed to jihadist groups, resulted in significant casualties and underscored the growing security challenges facing the country.

A key challenge remains the lack of independence of the judicial system, particularly in financial and tax matters, which critics consider is often used to intimidate or even neutralize opponents. Restrictions to civic space and freedom of expression remain. 2025 was marked by the adoption in July of Law No 2025-19, a law on associations and foundations adopted with very little consultation. This new law, which aims at modernising a 1901 colonial law, enshrines freedom of association but imposes new requirements, possibly raising questions for smaller associations. The High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication (HAAC) maintained pressure on the media with the publication of several decisions to withdraw press cards or to ban broadcasting. In this context, several journalists were targeted by the judiciary over the past year (Comlan Hugues Sossoukpè, Ali Moumoudi and Frère Hounvi), raising concerns among international observers about the exercise of freedom of expression and due process guarantees Benin has regressed in the 2025 RSF ranking (from 89 out of 180 in 2024 to 92 out of 180 in 2025). I

Conditions in police stations and prisons remain very poor due to overpopulation, poor sanitation, lack of water and limited access to medical treatments, among others. Authorities have committed to improving this situation, but they lack resources and face serious challenges in deploying civil servants to the northern parts of the countries, which are affected by growing insecurity . Since 2021, children's and women's rights as well as good governance have seen positive developments. Legislative progress was made on women's rights and gender equality. However, women are still exposed to various forms of discrimination and inequality, both in their professional and personal lives. LGBTI persons continue to face social stigma and limited public visibility. Lastly, Benin's education and health sectors still face serious challenges as well.

EU action - key focus areas: Strategic priorities under the human rights and democracy country strategy were revised in January 2025. These priorities include: the fight against inequalities – including women's, children's and minority rights; reinforcement of civic and political space and promotion of inclusive, participatory, representative decision making, namely in the areas of freedom of the press, speech, opinion, assembly, space for civil society and access to information; and accountability of strong and democratic public institutions – including the fight against corruption.

EU bilateral political engagement: 2025 saw a dense EU bilateral political engagement that confirmed the closeness and trust established between the EU and Benin. The HRVP held a call with Benin's Foreign Minister in March 2025. A visit of the Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs (on behalf of the HRVP) and of the EUSR for the Sahel in April 2025 provided the occasion for several high-level meetings on, among others, the promotion of human rights and democracy. That month, the EEAS also organised a seminar for civil society and journalists to strengthen resilience against FIMI. There was no Partnership Dialogue in 2025, due to the pre-electoral context and first-ever general elections to be held in 2026.

The EU and Member States individually take part in the technical financial partners (PTF) sectorial groups. EU maintains a regular dialogue with Beninese CSOs, notably on the promotion of human rights, political and civic freedoms, gender equality, LGBTI rights, and children's rights. Capacity constraints and governance challenges within parts of Beninese civil society continue to affect the effectiveness and sustainability of EU support.

EU financial engagement: EU financial engagement in Benin, in line with the co-operation priorities listed above, covers also a project to support women's and girls' participation and leadership in Benin, as well as a programme to support state-civil society dialogue, including a specific objective on LGBTI CSOs (funded by Luxembourg). Under the human rights and democracy thematic programme of NDICI-Global Europe, two projects reached their end in 2025: support to the role of civil society in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, and support to the pacification of electoral processes. Two other projects are still ongoing: one on local state actors' accountability on the implementation of civil status reforms, and another on relations between civil society and media.

Multilateral context: Benin is a member of the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2025-2027. Benin is widely aligned with the EU on the global multilateral agenda. Benin supports multilateralism, peaceful resolution of conflict and a principled position on the peaceful resolution of conflicts, including on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. However, there has been a slight inflection since the beginning of 2025: regarding Ukraine, Benin has abstained or practised an empty chair policy when voting in UN bodies.

Republic of Botswana

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Botswana's elections in 2024 marked a significant political change, as the nation transitioned to a new government after 58 years under the same ruling party. This transition was conducted in a peaceful and organised manner, reflecting the strength of Botswana's democratic institutions and traditions. Human rights and fundamental freedoms are generally respected in the country. The new government has shown a commitment to advancing the rights of minorities, including those of the San people.

However, issues remain regarding transparency in public procurement and allegations of corruption, which impact governance effectiveness. Botswana ranks 41st out of 182 countries on Transparency International's global Corruption Perceptions Index. Concerns related to the rights of refugees and asylum seekers remain. Challenges also exist in relation to trust in law enforcement, incidents of police violence, and declining media freedom.

Following Zimbabwe's abolition of the death penalty in December 2024, Botswana remains the only nation still applying capital punishment within the Southern African Development Community (SADC). No executions have taken place since 2021, although there is no official moratorium in place. Gender-based violence and broader gender inequality, including underrepresentation in political spheres, continue to be significant issues. Statistics indicate an increase in murder, rape, and defilement cases, with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reporting that over 67% of women have experienced abuse. Recent amendments to the Penal Code aim to impose stricter penalties for sexual offences, yet certain discriminatory customary laws perdure unchallenged.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, the EU Delegation, in conjunction with EU Member States, continued to promote the main dates of the international human rights calendar, including the World Day against the Death Penalty, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and International Human Rights Day. The EU actively supported LGBTI rights and participated in the Gaborone Pride March; engaged in gender-based violence prevention dialogues and promoted gender equality. Its efforts fostered media capacity and democracy through fact-checking initiatives and strengthened local organisations to combat gender-based violence.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engages the Botswana Government on human rights. The 2025 Partnership Dialogue took place in June and addressed a broad range of issues from the EU-Botswana partnership and trade, to regional and multilateral issues. The 2024 general elections, human rights and the death penalty were discussed in an open and constructive atmosphere. The EU, along with other development partners, continues to offer support to the government in the implementation of the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC).

EU financial engagement: Five thematic projects for CSOs for a total amount of EUR 780,000 continued in 2025. These include a project called 'Think Twice!' to strengthen the capacity of CSOs active in the field of sexual education and gender equality, through educational theatre and drama in the district of Ghanzi. Two other projects on strengthening CSOs' institutional and operational capacity to respond to gender inequalities and violence will strive to improve gender equality and contribute to the prevention of gender-based violence at local level in different districts of the country. In parallel, the INTERPARES programme provided capacity-building support to the National Parliament of Botswana, including extensive roundtables/training on Human-Wildlife Coexistence and on Parliaments' Legislative Powers: from Pre-legislative Scrutiny to Oversight & Effective Public Consultations.

Multilateral context: Botswana has ratified or acceded to most of the main international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and Convention against Torture (CAT), but not the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW). As part of a more proactive approach concerning the human rights of minorities, including the San people, the government has indicated its intention to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (Convention 169).

Burkina Faso

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, Burkina Faso experienced serious human rights violations committed by both armed terrorist groups and state forces or their proxies. Although data from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) indicate a decrease in confirmed cases in 2025 compared to 2024, this trend remains difficult to interpret. The massacres of Fulani people (reportedly more than 130 civilians) in March 2025 in Solenzo by the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP), followed by mass killings in reprisal by the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), resulting in reports of nearly one hundred deaths, illustrate the spiral of violence and the state's inability to protect its population. The overall security

and humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate in 2025, with large parts of the territory affected by insecurity, internal displacement and limited access to basic services.

At the same time, the political and civic space has shrunk considerably: political parties have been suspended, while arbitrary arrests and forced recruitment of opponents into the ranks of the VDP have been reported. Authorities also maintained restrictions on the media and information space, including suspensions of outlets and limitations on access to information, particularly on security-related issues.

On the legislative front, 2025 was marked by discussions on the proposed reinstatement of the death penalty for certain crimes (treason, terrorism, espionage) in the new Penal Code, which had not yet been adopted by the Transitional Legislative Assembly (ALT) as of end-2025, as well as by the adoption of a new Personal and Family Code. The latter includes some positive developments: the legal age of marriage is raised to 18 for both sexes, the age of majority is lowered to 18, and religious and customary marriages can be registered to have civil effect. However, it also includes provisions that criminalise LGBTI relations.

The reform of the legal framework for NGOs has strengthened state control over local and international civil society, potentially limiting humanitarian action and freedom of association. Law No. 011-2025/ALT on freedom of association, promulgated in July 2025, establishes strict requirements regarding governance, financial transparency, and the fight against money laundering. It also introduces measures that could conflict with the rules applied by some partners in deploying their support, such as the requirements for positions of responsibility to be held by Burkinabè citizens and for NGOs' bank accounts to be held at the Treasury Deposit Bank. Finally, humanitarian NGOs must now obtain prior authorization for any data collection, evaluation, or study within the national territory, which significantly delays the deployment of their support, which is primarily intended to address urgent needs.

At the end of October 2025, the ALT adopted a bill dissolving the Independent National Electoral Commission.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to focus on the priorities of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights & Democracy (2020-2027), including security, human rights and international humanitarian law; access to justice; women’s leadership; combatting gender-based violence; and strengthening civil society and the media.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to engage on human rights throughout the year, mainly through its partnership with the OHCHR and the National Commission for Human Rights.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, the EU supported a range of actions to promote human rights, strengthen civil society and enhance access to justice in Burkina Faso. Through its partnership with the OHCHR, the EU contributed to capacity-building efforts for both community-based security actors and civil society, including on human rights and international humanitarian law. It also supported initiatives aimed at empowering women and combating gender-based violence, notably through leadership programmes and awareness-raising activities. In parallel, the EU invested in strengthening the media and information environment, including through support to journalists and actions addressing disinformation and media literacy. Further efforts focused on reinforcing civil society’s role in public

policy monitoring and adaptation to new regulatory frameworks. Finally, the EU contributed to improving access to justice through targeted support to legal aid initiatives and mobile court mechanisms.

Multilateral context: In March 2025, the UN Human Rights Committee concluded its consideration of the second periodic report of Burkina Faso regarding the implementation of the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, with Committee Experts commending electoral quotas promoting women's representation. They also raised issues concerning impunity for alleged human rights violations committed by the Homeland Defence Volunteers, and the potential reinstatement of the death penalty.

In September 2025, Burkina Faso, along with Mali and Niger, announced its intention to withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Republic of Burundi

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The situation of human rights and democracy in Burundi remains a significant concern, still requiring comprehensive structural reforms. 2025 was marked by the shrinking civic, media and political space. The legislative and communal elections held on 5 June 2025 were marred by widespread repression, both during the pre-election phase and on the election day itself.

Burundi's socio-political and security landscape remained significantly affected by the ongoing conflict in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The armed conflict in the DRC contributed to regional instability, with Burundi's armed forces presence in the DRC, based on a bilateral agreement, further exacerbating tensions and posing potential risks to national stability. This fraught context also impacted refugee movements, resulting in a significant influx of Congolese refugees into Burundi, while Burundian refugees in the DRC faced violence and forced displacement. A first wave of around 80,000 refugees from eastern DRC entered Burundi in February when the rebel group M23 seized the cities of Goma and Bukavu, and a further 101,000 arrived in Burundi in December 2025 when the M23 suddenly advanced south to nearby Uvira. The Burundian authorities granted prima facie status of refugee to all coming from the DRC. These numbers largely exceed the capacity of the authorities and humanitarian aid organisations, leaving refugees in dire living conditions and vulnerable to rights violations.

Burundian civil society continued to grapple with significant challenges. Civil society organisations and human rights defenders faced pressure and restrictions, hindering their ability to fulfil their role in oversight and democratic debate. Civicus classified civic space in Burundi as 'repressed'. The media remained under pressure, with increasing constraints on freedom of expression and assembly, particularly intensified during the electoral period. Reporters without Borders ranked Burundi 125th out of 180 countries Burundi's already fragile economic situation was further complicated by corruption and economic malpractice. A particularly troubling development is the prevalence of arbitrary arrests and detentions, often conducted unlawfully and, in some cases, resembling kidnappings that lead to forced disappearances.

EU's action - key focus areas: In 2025, EU action focused on five areas: i) support to the reform of the justice sector; ii) women's rights and the elimination of violence against women; iii) children's rights; iv) freedom of expression and regulation and capacity-building in the media sector; v) strengthening the democratic culture and the rule of law.

EU bilateral political engagement: Since 2021, bilateral exchanges on human rights with the Government and stakeholders have intensified. Due to the electoral period, the EU-Burundi Partnership Dialogue did not take place in 2025. The EU maintained an autonomous restrictive measures regime in place in view of the situation in Burundi, while the entry restriction concerning one person was lifted.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, the EU funded human rights and democracy related actions in Burundi, amounting to a total of close to EUR 46 million, focused on the priorities mentioned above. Key initiatives included the initiation in May of a project designed to empower the media and facilitate informed voter decisions in Burundi ahead of the 2025 and 2027 elections; the launch of a new project for children's rights to improve children access to protection, to healthcare, to nutrition, to education and to WASH services through empowering families, strengthening community structures, and engaging with key institutions; and the preparation of a EUR 18 million gender action. This programme will seek to durably improve access to basic services, especially education and reproductive and sexual health, for teenage girls in Burundi.

Concerning the justice sector, the renovation of the Ngozi men prison was completed in 2025 thanks to the EU support, resulting in a substantial improvement of the prisoners' living conditions. Furthermore, the EU helped set up judiciary clinics and free legal assistance in several provinces, thereby bringing legal assistance closer to the communities and addressing 2,981 cases, mainly benefitting the most vulnerable population.

The main component of the EU's democratic governance programme is a project titled 'Action for a Holistic Electoral Approach for Democracy (AHEAD)', designed to reinforce democratic governance and foster social cohesion in the context of the 2025 and 2027 elections in Burundi. Signed at the end of 2024, this project has been instrumental in fortifying national electoral observation mechanisms, preventing electoral conflicts and providing technical support to the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) and to the National Independent Human Rights Commission (CNIDH). It will continue to do so all the way through to the 2027 presidential elections.

Multilateral framework: Burundi is a party to several key international human rights instruments. The country withdrew from the International Criminal Court (ICC)'s Rome Statute in October 2017. Burundi is a member of the Human Rights Council (HRC) for the 2024-2027 term, however, so far Burundi has not released any voluntary pledges regarding its membership.

Based on a resolution proposed by the EU, the HRC extended by one year the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi, Mr Fortuné Gaetan Zongo. The Burundian government continued to refuse any cooperation with the UN Special Rapporteur. He has not been granted access to the country since the beginning of his mandate. The reopening of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) also remains an open question.

The EU carried out formal démarches on human rights and democracy issues to request support for its initiatives in UN fora.

Republic of Cabo Verde

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The year 2025 was a landmark year for human rights in Cabo Verde, coinciding with 50 years of national independence, 50 years of UN presence in the country, and 30 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. These milestones provided a unique opportunity to highlight progress, reflect on ongoing challenges, and reinforce the commitment to human rights and gender equality.

Cabo Verde has built a strong reputation for respecting human rights, supported by stable democratic institutions, rule of law, and constitutional guarantees of fundamental freedoms. Cabo Verde ranks 30th in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index. Rule of law and justice reforms are ongoing, with modernization efforts, new courts, digitalization, and increased investment. Healthcare access continues to improve, with infrastructure investments and continued progress in service provision. Gender equality shows significant progress (ranking 1st in West Africa on the Women, Business and Law Index, and 37th globally on the Gender Parity Index).

However, implementation gaps persist in the gender equality area, where issues such as teenage pregnancy, unpaid care burdens, and economic disparities remain significant. Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a major concern, although no GBV-related deaths were officially reported in 2025. LGBTI rights are comparatively progressive for the region, but anti-discrimination legislation, including against LGBTI persons, remains pending and social stigma persists. Child sexual abuse and trafficking also remain serious concerns. Although complaints have decreased compared to the previous year, which may reflect the impact of prevention and awareness efforts, persistent stigma and under-reporting call for a cautious interpretation of this positive trend. The backlog of unresolved sexual crime cases increased, indicating ongoing delays in processing and adjudicating these sensitive matters. Detention conditions remain challenging, particularly due to resource shortages and overcrowding (despite recent expansions in prison capacity). The incarceration rate remains high (366 per 100,000 inhabitants).

EU action - key focus areas: Key focus areas included social inclusion, including expanded social protection through cash transfer schemes for the most vulnerable; child rights protection by combating abuse, exploitation, and child labour; gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and improved public services, such as water and sanitation access in Praia's disadvantaged areas.

Over the last three years (2023, 2024 and 2025), the EU led dialogues to prevent and combat sexual violence and abuse of women and children, involving government institutions, parliament, civil society, media, and international partners. Dialogues reviewed legal and policy challenges, assessed progress, identified gaps, and strengthened coordinated action for child protection.

EU bilateral political engagement: The final communique issued after the Ministerial Meeting of 31 January 2025 confirmed the commitment of both the EU and Cabo Verde to human rights and

democracy. Gender is a crosscutting priority in all political and policy dialogues between the EU and Cabo Verde.

As in previous years, the EU Delegation's public diplomacy and communication activities gave special attention to human rights issues, in particular gender-based violence. During the 2025 '16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence' campaign, the EU Delegation ensured that the EU's voice was heard by disseminating targeted posts across its social media channels. This event, organised in collaboration with the UN to celebrate the 77th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was one of the main events in 2025 and a true success story. The EU Delegation contributed financially to this event by funding one of the prizes awarded during the ceremony (best social media reportage).

EU financial engagement: The EU continued to support social inclusion, child protection, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls through a range of programmes and initiatives. In January 2025, the EU launched the three-year *Djunta Mon* project (EUR 370,000), aimed at preventing and combating sexual abuse of children and adolescents on the islands of Santiago and Fogo, while strengthening cooperation between public institutions and civil society organisations. In addition, EU-funded sustainable tourism projects in Santo Antão, São Vicente, Fogo and Brava incorporated measures to prevent the sexual exploitation of children. The EU also supported dialogue and awareness-raising initiatives involving public institutions, parliament, civil society, media and international partners to strengthen efforts to prevent and combat sexual violence and abuse against women and children.

Multilateral context: Cabo Verde is a party to most international and regional human rights conventions. Although it faces challenges with its reporting obligations, the country is endeavouring to improve its compliance with reporting requirements.

During the 83rd ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR, 2-22 May 2025) in Banjul, a report was launched about human rights defenders (HRDs) in African island states, including Cabo Verde. The event provided a platform to facilitate dialogue between authorities and NGOs regarding the situation of HRDs and to draw regional attention to the specific challenges faced by these island countries. It also helped to increase the visibility of HRDs and strengthen their institutional recognition.

Republic of Cameroon

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, a presidential election year in Cameroon, the situation of human rights and democracy was marked by a clear deterioration. The space for opposition of political actors and civil society shrank markedly. The government did not ensure an inclusive, fair, transparent and credible election. The authorities responded to widespread post-electoral protests with lethal force and mass arrests of citizens, and no investigation or prosecution of the responsible security forces took place. The death in custody of influential political figure Anicet Ekane sparked significant outcry within both the national public opinion and the international community. Many NGOs continue to call for increased efforts by the authorities to ensure that allegations of human rights violations are systematically investigated to prevent impunity.

Press freedom remained a challenge, with Reporters Without Borders ranking Cameroon 131st in the Press Freedom Index. After almost three years of procedural work, in 2025 the judicial authorities opened the trial proceedings into the January 2023 murder of journalist Martinez Zogo. The circumstances of the murder of the journalist and priest Jean-Jacques Ola Bebe remain unclear. Intimidation and harassment of media professionals continue. in April 2025, the European Parliament (EP) condemned systematic violations of journalists' human rights by the Cameroonian authorities and called on them to ensure press freedom. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) demanded the release of imprisoned journalists and an end to military trials for civilians as well as to the misuse of terrorism and 'fake news' charges against journalists. Since 2017, hundreds of arbitrary arrests and detentions have reportedly taken place, particularly in the context of post-election demonstrations or in the fight against terrorist groups such as Boko Haram in the Far North region and separatist armed groups in the predominantly English-speaking North-West and South-West regions.

As these security crises persist, human rights violations continue – including extrajudicial killings, sexual violence and abductions – mainly against civilians. Several proven arbitrary detentions and cases of torture and inhuman treatment inflicted on lawyers, artists and other members of civil society confirm the continuous restriction of civic space. Independent journalists, lawyers and human rights defenders were particularly exposed during the electoral period. Five prominent NGOs active in the field of governance and democracy, suspended in 2024, could not yet resume their activities. LGBTI persons were victims of discrimination and under constant social and public pressure. The country continued to face systemic weaknesses in terms of protecting the most vulnerable groups, notably women, children, LGBTI persons and displaced persons.

EU action: key focus areas: The EU focused on five key political and operational strategic priorities: (1) abolition of death penalty, eradication of torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, and fair access to justice; (2) protection, conflict prevention and crisis/conflict resolution; (3) gender equality, women's rights and non-discrimination, including as regards to sexual orientation; (4) strengthening civic and democratic spaces, good governance and accountability, transparency and fight against corruption; (5) green deal, business and human rights.

EU bilateral political engagement: In 2025, the EU continued to be actively engaged with the Cameroonian authorities, political actors and civil society on human rights and democratic governance issues. On these issues, the EU held consultations with the government and relevant institutions (including the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Women's Empowerment, the National Commission for Human Rights, and the National Electoral Body), political players, civil society organisations and UN agencies. One of the main topics discussed was the implementation of the recommendations made in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) held in November 2023. Key issues debated included the protection of human rights defenders, freedoms of press, expression and association, eradication of torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, fair access to justice, respect for rule of law, gender equality and non-discrimination towards LGBTI persons.

The EU organised events in Cameroon with the objective to advocate for the abolition of the death penalty: the inclusion of capital punishment in the Law on the Suppression of Acts of Terrorism, coupled with the absence of formal abolition in the Penal Code, creates significant uncertainty about

the government's position. The EU carried out formal démarches and outreach action on human rights and democracy issues to request support for its initiatives in UN fora.

EU financial engagement: The EU has remained committed to reinforcing the promotion of civic and democratic space, good governance (including decentralisation) and transparency. Three illustrative examples of EU financial engagement in 2025: an EU project, in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Germany) and Un Monde Avenir (France), supported the role of civil society in the organisation of credible and transparent elections (EUR 3,685 million), resulting in the enrolment of thousands of people in the voter register. An EU project in partnership with Search for Common Ground (Belgium) was designed to increase CSOs' operational capabilities to assist Cameroon's national institutions in the implementation of the recommendations in the context of the 2023 UPR (EUR 460,000). Another EU-funded project (EUR 900,000, in partnership with Associazione Centro Orientamento Educativo (Italy), aimed at improving good governance in the area of justice and detention conditions, with the participation of civil society in many regions of Cameroon, was ongoing in 2025).

Multilateral context: Although Cameroon is a party to several key international human rights treaties, it is not yet a party to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (aimed at the abolition of the death penalty), nor the African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMW).

The latest UPR took place in November 2023 and Cameroon received 291 recommendations. The most prominent topics raised therein were women's and children's rights, refugees, persons with disabilities, LGBTI, ethnic and indigenous minorities, and the security situation in the North-West and South-West regions of the country. A large number of the remaining recommendations related to the right to health, the right to education, as well as freedom of expression and the protection of journalists and other members of civil society.

In 2025, in most of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) votes on human rights issues, the Cameroonian position differed from the EU position. A joint EU-IOM initiative was launched in 2025, to promote the protection and reintegration of migrants (supported by the EU's Emergency Trust Fund for Africa). In December 2025, a new partnership agreement was signed with the UNCHR to support social cohesion and sustainable solutions for the refugees from Nigeria in Cameroon. A new partnership of the EU with IOM/UNICEF was launched in September 2025 to promote collective action on complex security and development challenges which Cameroon is confronted with, including aspects related to disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-associates of Boko Haram.

Central African Republic

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the human rights situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) remained fragile and concerning, characterised by persistent insecurity, legal tensions, and continued questions on the inclusiveness and credibility of the political process. While structural challenges persisted, several developments nevertheless suggested potential openings for gradual stabilisation.

Civicus classified civic space in the country as 'repressed,' as civic and political space continued to face restrictions, with reported instances of intimidation of opposition figures and civil society actors, including the arrests of Dominique Désiré Erenon and two brothers of former Prime Minister Henri-Marie Dondra, as well as judicial proceedings against political actors such as Maître Crépin Mboli-Goumba. Journalists were reportedly arrested on several occasions and later released, while certain peaceful civil society demonstrations (including the march in support of the victims of the Barthélémy Boganda Lycée tragedy) were prohibited. According to Reporters Without Borders, the Central African Republic ranked 72nd out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Press Index. Concerns were also raised regarding pressures on humanitarian actors, notably in relation to the case of Belgian-Portuguese citizen Joseph Martin Figueira, arrested in May 2024 and sentenced in November 2025 to ten years of hard labour.

In the lead-up to the elections of 28 December 2025, the opposition denounced a political deadlock and expressed concerns regarding amendments to the Electoral Code and the absence of prior political dialogue with the authorities. These factors contributed to reduced confidence in the electoral process, despite the fact that voting generally took place in accordance with the applicable legal framework and within an overall calm security environment.

Serious human rights violations continued to be reported, including gender-based violence, mass displacements, child recruitment by armed groups, attacks against civilians, and the presence of mines and explosive devices in certain areas. The monthly reports of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR (MINUSCA) continued to document these abuses. In this context, MINUSCA remained a key stabilising actor, although ongoing discussions regarding its mandate and budget have raised concerns about the potential implications of any future reduction in its presence.

The international community continues to underline the need for sustained support to democratic institutions and inclusive governance in order to ensure a peaceful post-electoral environment. Partners further acknowledge that a deterioration of peace in the Central African Republic would have wider regional repercussions at a time when several neighbouring states face relative instability and displacement trends remain elevated.

EU action – key focus areas: In 2025, the EU continued its strategy on human rights and democracy through strengthened dialogue with the Central African government, with funding focused on elections and institutional strengthening, as well as support to civil society for the defence of human rights. The implementation of the EU Strategy on human rights and democracy in the Central African Republic is carried out within the framework of its Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (extended until 2027) and the Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2021–2027.

The key priorities focused on (i) Support to governance and the rule of law; (ii) Strengthening civil society and political participation; (iii) Combating sexual and gender-based violence; (iv) Support to human rights defenders; (v) Security and humanitarian situation.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued advocating for greater respect for human rights in the country, in particular on the occasion of the Partnership Dialogue held on 29 0ctober 2025, and through engagement with civil society and stakeholders.

The EU remained the leading partner in coordination and implementation of the Justice Sector Policy adopted in December 2019 by the CAR Government. Both EU CSDP missions, the EU Advisory Mission (EUAM RCA) and the EU Training Mission (EUTM RCA) implemented activities to foster EU values, promote EU action and expose violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Under its global human rights sanction regime, the EU continued to apply a series of restrictive measures to several individuals and entities linked to the Wagner group involved in human rights abuses in CAR.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, the EU Delegation managed a portfolio valued at approximately EUR 25 million. This investment supports civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and the Special Criminal Court (SCC) over a span of 36 months.

The EU, along with several individual states — including Switzerland — has been bolstering the SCC through the secondment of magistrates. This war crimes court, also supported by the United Nations (MINUSCA), is integrated within the domestic justice system, comprising both national and international staff. Since the inception of its activities in 2015, the EU has played a vital role in supporting this institution. The Court's mandate extends until 2028, with plans to conduct three significant trials in 2026/27. One of the foremost challenges the Court faces is to ensure that it can fulfil its mandate until the end, given the uncertain funding for MINUSCA for the years 2026-2027 and beyond.

Multilateral context: The Central African Republic is a party to multiple key human rights treaties. It has not ratified the 2nd Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) for the abolition of the death penalty.

The Central African Republic's stance in UN fora did not match the EU's human rights priorities.

Republic of Chad

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy situation in Chad remained problematic in 2025. Structural deficiencies were exacerbated by tensions stemming from the transition that ended in early 2025 with the installation of the newly elected parliament. On 3 October 2025, the President finalised constitutional changes, approved by the pro-government parliament elected in boycotted 2024 legislative polls, removing presidential terms and extending terms from five to seven years. This raises concerns given that the current President assumed power in 2021 after the death of his father, who ruled Chad for three decades.

On 9 August 2025, Succès Masra, former Prime Minister and leader of Chad's main opposition party was condemned to 20 years in prison for spreading racist and xenophobic messages and of complicity in murder tied to intercommunity conflict. The accusations and trial have been criticised as political. Civil society continued to face repression and harassment, and there is no specific legal framework that protects civil society organizations from state interference. Freedom House classified Chad as 'not free', while Civicus assessed civic space as 'repressed', reflecting a general climate of repression. The legal framework for freedom of peaceful assembly remains restrictive, and demonstrations were

banned in 2025. According to the World Press Freedom Press Index, Chad ranks 108th out of 180 countries, falling 12 places compared with 2024.

The enjoyment of social and economic rights (notably access to healthcare and education) remained limited. Local conflicts, mostly between pastoralists and farmers but also for access to mining resources, continued during the year. Insecurity remained widespread, including kidnappings for ransom in southern provinces of the country. Furthermore, Boko Haram's operations in the Lake Chad area brought numerous human rights violations. Extra-judicial actions of the Chadian intelligence services are common practice. Chad hosted over 1,5 million refugees and asylum seekers from the region (a number rapidly increasing due to the conflict in Sudan). Chad also had more than 225,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs). Malnutrition is widespread.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, the EU focused on: (1) transition to democracy; (2) civic education and literacy; (3) fight against impunity; (4) reform of the security forces; (5) governance of natural resources; (6) freedom of expression; (7) vulnerable groups (including LGBTI persons); (8) human rights defenders and civil society organisations.

EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights were included in bilateral political exchanges (including by the EU Special Representative for the Sahel). A formal partnership dialogue took place in October 2025. The EU repeatedly shared with authorities its expectations that the transition be peaceful and that a transfer to civilian-led, democratic government and return to constitutional rule be accomplished as soon as possible, while respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. The EU also actively engaged with civil society, including human rights defenders.

The EU continued its advocacy efforts to ensure respect of human rights by the Chadian forces overall, and in particular by those engaged in the Multinational Joint Task force in the Lake Chad Basin.

EU financial engagement: The EU's specific human rights-related activities totalled approximately EUR 3.8 million and addressed LGBTI rights, citizen participation and dialogue, women's rights, access to justice, the protection of children, the National Human Rights Commission and the management of land rights (often linked to local conflicts).

Multilateral context: Chad is a party to most key human rights treaties, but not to the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture (UNCAT), the Second Optional Protocol aiming at the abolition of the death penalty or the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED). Chad completed its ban on the death penalty in 2020. In UN fora Chad's priorities on human rights overall did not match the EU's.

Union of the Comoros

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The overall situation of human rights and democracy in the Union of Comoros remains of concern. Human rights infringements relate to restriction of freedom of assembly, expression, and movement, human trafficking, arbitrary arrests, and the general weakness of the judiciary. Food security is also a point of concern, with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) considering that approximately a third of the Comorian population

experiences food insecurity. According to Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2025* report, Comoros remained classified as 'Partly Free', with a score of 42/100.

The Comorian Parliament on 26 December 2025 concluded deliberations about revising the Information Code, affirming protection for journalists' sources. The overhaul aimed to modernise the 2021 code by incorporating online and social media platforms into its framework, and seeks to allay criticism that it was previously too restrictive. This was welcomed by the International Federation of Journalists and the Federation of African Journalists.

The judicial system is perceived as slow, corrupt, and lacking independence. Efforts were made in the field of detention conditions through the opening of new detention centres. Gender-based violence (GBV) against women and minors remains a major issue. Laws criminalize consensual same-sex relationship between adults. Comoros retains the death penalty but has had a de facto moratorium since 1997.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, key focus areas of EU action related to the empowerment of women, GBV, and civil society. Ambitious communication activities have promoted the EU's values, including human rights, throughout the year, among others through a campaign on women's and children's rights. Human rights are consistently present in the EU's social media and cultural activities, such as the European Film Festival.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU made various official representations to the authorities on the issue of human rights. Women's rights are central to EU action in Comoros, based on the strategic gender action plan for the promotion of equality between men and women, established in a participatory process. A roadmap for civil society guides EU action to promote civil society in the country.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, the EU financially supported several projects in the area of human rights, including support to civil society organisations (EUR 400.000); improvement of detention conditions (EUR 440.000); strengthening media and information quality (EUR 350.000); support to domestic election observation (EUR 310.000); and support to women, youth and civil society (EUR 3.850.000); protection of vulnerable migrants (EUR 0.445 million).

Multilateral context: The EU regularly raises human rights issues concerning Comoros, especially regarding freedom of expression, human trafficking, death penalty, and GBV, with UN representatives at regional and international level. Possible synergies are being explored in the framework of EU projects.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and governance situation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remained highly concerning, notably due to the intensification of the conflict in eastern DRC. The escalation of hostilities resulted in mass displacement, thousands of causalities, and human rights and international humanitarian law violations, including sexual violence by armed groups. The DRC ranked as the fifth most fragile country worldwide in the Fragile States Index 2024. Despite some improvements of the framework for

protection of human rights in previous years (such as legislative acts on human rights defenders, persons living with disabilities, protection and reparation of victims of conflict-related sexual violence, gender-based violence, or the penitentiary system), 2025 has seen a continuous backsliding in the rule of law and respect of human rights. The suspension of the moratorium on the death penalty, decided by the government on 9 February 2024, was maintained and led to more than 200 individuals reportedly being sentenced to death in 2025, without any executions having been carried out. Other negative trends include restrictions to fundamental freedoms and civic space, an increase in hate speech, arbitrary detention of human rights defenders and opposition figures, the use of torture, and alarming overcrowding in penitentiary centres.

In eastern DRC insecurity and conflict persisted, with serious human rights abuses allegedly committed by armed groups and government forces. These included sexual and gender-based violence, massacres, and recruitment of child soldiers.

According to the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance, the DRC currently ranks 48th out of 54 countries with a score of 32.8/100, below the African average (49.3), showing notable declines in Security & Safety, Absence of Armed Conflict, Freedom of Association & Assembly, and Absence of Violence against Civilians, indicating persistent instability and governance challenges. The Civicus Monitor rated civic space in the DRC as 'repressed', noting severe restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, and highlighting a deterioration of political and civil rights alongside systemic barriers to accountability and participation. According to the World Press Freedom Index, DRC ranked 133rd out of 180 countries, falling 10 places compared to 2024.

In 2024, the continuous military expansion of the M23 in North Kivu led to an additional 2 million of internally displaced people (IDPs), elevating the overall number of IDPs in the DRC to 7.3 million at the end of 2024. By December 2025, approximately 7.8 million people were internally displaced, mostly in North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri. Many IDPs were repeatedly forced to flee and to rely on host communities. This severely restricted access to basic services, including food, healthcare, and education, with 28 million facing acute hunger, according to Integration Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) data. Especially women, children and people with disabilities found themselves increasingly exposed.

EU action - key focus areas: During the reporting period, the EU's priorities continued to focus on: (1) Promotion of the freedom of expression, assembly and association; (2) Promotion of the democratic system as set out in the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the participation of women in political life; (3) Promotion and entrenchment of a fair and easily accessible justice system including the fight against impunity, in particular for those implicated in sexual violence; (4) Promotion of gender equality, particularly in public life, and respect for women's rights, especially for the survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

EU bilateral political engagement: In 2025, the EU Delegation pursued a broad range of political and operational initiatives to advance human rights and democratic governance. The EU Delegation raised human rights issues in its interactions with the government and engaged in trial observation in selected human rights cases, in cooperation and coordination with EU Member States and like-minded non-EU countries on the ground.

The EU maintained a regime of restrictive measures against individuals involved in human rights violations in the country.

EU financial engagement: The EU continued to provide financial support to human rights and democracy-related programmes and projects in the DRC. The EU Delegation provided financial and technical support to key programmes such as Restore 2 (fight against torture), PARP III (police reform), PARJ II (justice reform) and transitional justice. All actions under these programmes aimed to support human rights defenders, transitional justice, accountability for mass crimes, elections, and Sub-National Coordination Offices (SCOs). In addition, the EU Delegation launched the defence reform programme '*Unis pour la paix et la sécurité*' to strengthen security-sector governance.

The EU Delegation's local protection mechanism, covering the entire national territory, provided direct protection to human rights defenders (HRDs). The programme documents human rights violations, including torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and offers advocacy, judicial, and physical support to victims. As a result, human rights defenders have reported increased security in their working environment. The prominent human rights defender, Sakharov and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr. Mukwege's protection was enhanced following the EU's political and financial support.

The EU's multiannual project '*Unis pour la démocratie – des medias citoyens et engagés pour la culture démocratique en RDC*' (EUR 2 million) contributed positively to shaping the media environment during the elections. The EU Delegation continued to implement a Transitional Justice project (EUR 1.3 million), which provides cross-cutting support (legal, judicial, psycho-social) for victims of international crimes (war crimes and crimes against humanity).

In 2025, the EU remained actively engaged in promoting gender equality and in strengthening women's rights in the provinces of Kasai, Ituri and South Kivu through the project '*Unis pour l'égalité du genre*', which adopts a holistic, survivor-centred approach, providing comprehensive care to survivors of GBV, supporting their economic reintegration and promoting resilience of vulnerable women and youth. EU support to the Panzi Foundation enabled medical, socio-psychological, legal and economic assistance for victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

Multilateral: The DRC is a party to various key international human rights treaties. The country was elected as a member to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) for 2025–2027. The HRC ended the country mandate for the International Team of Experts and established a fact-finding mission on serious human rights violations in North and South Kivu. The HRC also adopted the final report of the DRC's 4th Universal Periodic Review (UPR), as well as resolutions on the human rights situation in eastern DRC, including on technical assistance and capacity-building.

Republic of the Congo

Overall human rights situation: The human rights and democracy situation in the Republic of the Congo remained problematic. There were reports of reduced space for the opposition as well as serious violations of human rights, including enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions and arrests. Civicus classified civic space in the Republic of Congo as 'restricted', with civil society actors having faced intimidation and arrests. Torture, especially in police stations and prisons, remained widespread. Conditions of pre-trial detention continued to fall short of international standards.

Media freedom remains limited. According to Reporters without Borders, the country ranked 71st out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index, with journalists facing pressure, and a regulatory environment that encouraged self-censorship. Economic and social rights deteriorated, due to a lack of investment in the social sector. Corruption remained a major obstacle to good governance. The country lacks an independent judicial system. Violence against women remained a serious challenge. National legislation does not criminalize sexual minorities, but no efforts were made to protect them against discrimination. Same-sex marriage is not allowed. Human rights defenders who denounced the significant increase in cases of torture and summary executions have received serious threats, and journalists refrain from reporting on the situation for fear of repercussions.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, the EU focused its action on the effective functioning of institutions and monitoring mechanisms for democratic political life and human rights; good governance, respect for the rule of law and the implementation of the necessary reforms in different areas; citizen participation in decision-making and oversight of governance, including through strengthening the role of civil society and local authorities; as well as improving the situation of vulnerable populations, including Indigenous Peoples, and gender equality.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged with a wide range of stakeholders on human rights, including the Government, human rights defenders (HRDs), CSOs, universities and media, with a particular focus on youth.

EU financial engagement: The 9 projects, for an amount of 4,175,745 EUR financed through the NDICI thematic program on Human Rights and Democracy, made satisfactory progress in their implementation in 2025. These projects cover a variety of topics such as the rights of Indigenous Peoples, children's rights and the fundamental rights of people in detention. In addition, the NDICI-HR 2025 made possible to support a project aimed at promoting inclusive governance and strengthening the rights of local and indigenous communities around the Odzala-Kokoua and Nouabale -Ndoki parks. Eight projects funded by the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities instrument (OSC-AL) for a total amount of 6,344,628 EUR successfully continued in 2025. Their areas of work included the support of CSO for the dissemination of the recommendations of the fourth cycle of Congo's Universal Periodic Review UPR) that took place in January 2024. Through the bilateral NDICI envelope, the EU is also supporting civil society's contribution to gender equality for an inclusive economic and social development (EUR 5 million). Furthermore, the 'Police +' project (EUR 5 million), aimed at improving respect for human rights by the police in pilot police stations, continues making progress. The EU, in the context of promoting social and economic rights, supported the informal private sector through projects targeting local economic initiatives. Assistance was also provided to support the implementation of protection measures for HRDs.

Multilateral context: The EU carried out formal démarches on human rights and democracy issues to request support from the Republic of the Congo for EU initiatives in UN fora - for example to promote common positions within the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

The Republic of the Congo is a party to several key human rights treaties, but it has not ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) or the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) aimed at abolishing the death penalty (despite having abolished the death penalty in 2015).

With a view to promoting the follow-up to the recommendations emanating from the fourth cycle of Congo's UPR in 2024, the EU approved funding to support the effective implementation of the Ministry of Justice's action plan. Despite this commitment, the sectoral justice dialogue has not been held since 2023. Reports from civil society groups signalled the low level of implementation of the recommendations from the previous UPR in 2018.

Republic of Côte d'Ivoire

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2025 was marked by the preparations and conduct of presidential elections (October 2025) and legislative elections (December 2025), which constituted an important test for the country's democracy and respect for human rights. The exclusion of key opposition figures, the deployment of an important security apparatus, numerous arrests and a prolonged ban on public demonstrations negatively affected voter turnout, the credibility of the institutions, and freedom of speech. Under this enforced calm, the 2025 elections were more peaceful than those of previous years. Still, at least 11 deaths were reported. The elections resulted in the re-election of President Ouattara (incumbent since 2010) and his party (Rally of the Republicans).

Several structural issues persisted, such as prison overcrowding, corruption, migration pressures, and limited access to basic social services (despite ongoing reforms). Inequalities based on gender and access to resources also remained significant. Civil society organisations (CSOs) face challenges related to coordination, capacity and financing.

Corruption and financial crime remained major challenges. Despite improvements highlighted in 2024 (from 87th to 69th place), Côte d'Ivoire recorded a slight decline in 2025, ranking 76th with a score of 43/100 in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index. Following the decision by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in 2024 to include Côte d'Ivoire in its grey list, the EU listed the country among high-risk third countries in relation to anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing frameworks.

EU action - key focus areas: EU action focuses on tackling child labour, trafficking and forced labour; improving detention conditions and preventing torture; combating gender-based violence; strengthening the rule of law, judicial independence and electoral integrity; reinforcing the role of civil society; promoting equality and non-discrimination; improving access to public services, including through digitalisation; and supporting freedom of expression while addressing disinformation and hate speech.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU actively promoted youth engagement in the electoral processes, supported efforts to improve prison conditions and judicial procedures, and advocated for various human rights initiatives. Key achievements in which EU support proved instrumental included the improvement of legal structures for civil society and the establishment of digital platforms for judicial document access.

EU financial engagement: EU cooperation focused on three main areas: technical and vocational education and training, social protection and migration; sustainable and inclusive economic growth, including support to the business environment, agriculture and the low-carbon transition; and democratic governance, peace and security, including digital governance. In 2025, the EU also

implemented a range of projects supporting electoral processes, including assistance to civil society and national institutions, capacity-building for local observers, awareness-raising campaigns and early warning mechanisms aimed at preventing electoral violence.

Multilateral context: Côte d'Ivoire is a member of the UN Human Rights Council (2024-2026) and has ratified most international and regional human rights instruments. The Government has adopted policies to combat child labour and trafficking in human beings, and this year finalised the ratification procedure for the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on the abolition of the death penalty.

However, implementation and reporting remain areas for improvement. Legislative gaps persist, including the absence of specific provisions on compensation for victims of torture. The establishment of a national preventive mechanism against torture, foreseen for March 2024, was not yet completed by end-2025.

Côte d'Ivoire's last Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in May 2024 resulted in 226 recommendations, focusing on judicial reform, anti-corruption measures, access to justice, and the protection of fundamental freedoms.

Republic of Djibouti

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: According to the World Press Freedom Index, Djibouti's performance on freedom of expression further deteriorated throughout 2025; it is ranked 168th out of 180 countries assessed (with a very low score of 25.36 – nearly 5 points less than in 2024). In the Freedom House evaluation (Freedom in the World Index), Djibouti received the same score as in 2024 (24 points – 5 out of 40 in the area of political rights and 19 out of 60 in terms of civil rights), which translates into a 150th place out of 193 countries. The Economist Democracy Index places the country as 132nd out of 167 overall, marking a small improvement (2 places higher than in 2024 but with a similar score of 2.70). V-Dem Democracy Index keeps the Djiboutian score rather low (0,250), granting it 134th place out of 179 countries screened in 2025.

Nevertheless, Djibouti continues to be one of very few stable countries in an otherwise troubled region. Djibouti should also be commended for taking care of a large refugee and migrant population, which is estimated at 220,000 persons at least – out of a population of 1.1 million. However, trafficking of migrants remains a problem. A governance system seeks to keep critical balance between two main ethnic groups: Somali Issa and Afars. Positive developments have been observed in the areas of gender equality and mainstreaming disability, as well as in improving access to basic services for citizens. Amidst commendable legal changes, an explicit ban on female genital mutilation (FGM) was inscribed directly in the amended Constitution.

Over 2025, the democracy and human rights situation was impacted by the run-up to the presidential elections in April 2026. In November 2025, constitutional amendments were adopted that allowed incumbent President Ismail Omar Guelleh (IOG) to run again, lifting the age threshold of 75 for presidential candidates. Additional constitutional provisions requiring candidates to have resided in Djibouti for the preceding 5 years effectively excluded opposition candidates based abroad from running. Although Djibouti officially has a multiparty system, the process for registering political parties

is opaque and certain parties seem to be explicitly prohibited from participating in elections. The activities of the political opposition, human rights defenders and civil society continued to be largely restricted, and actions against opponents of the ruling party became much more pronounced in 2025.

Despite constitutional provisions, freedom of expression is curtailed and journalists tend to exert self-censorship. Djibouti's media landscape is almost exclusively limited to state-owned media. The internet is deliberately being slowed down to restrict access to social media, which are one of few places of free expression and access to information. Individuals are subject to arrest for posting critical content about the government online. These instances have reportedly been on the rise in 2025. Local human rights groups do not operate freely, and are, at times, subject to harassment by the authorities. Individual activists can face arrest for their work. The Constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, but this provision is not always respected in practice. The judiciary remains dependent on the executive. Both the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Council are politically nominated. The latter institution oversees the organisation of the elections.

Security forces frequently make arrests without court approval and conduct lengthy pre-trial detentions, sometimes lasting years. Allegations of politically motivated prosecutions are common. Prison conditions are poor, with pre-trial and convicted prisoners often held together due to shortage of adequate facilities. In the heated pre-electoral period before the popular vote scheduled for April 2026, repression resumed, with whistle-blowers providing new evidence of intimidation, disappearances and tortures.

EU action - key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020–2027, the EU continued to support access to basic services, the protection of refugees and migrants, women's rights and gender equality, and good governance.

Key EU-supported programmes contributed to improving access to drinking water and sanitation, including through investments in renewable energy-based water production and waste management. The EU also continued to support the implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), strengthening migration governance, protection services for migrants, refugees and victims of trafficking, and support for host communities in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Support to women and girls remained a priority. Through the FEMFI programme, the EU strengthened the capacities of the Ministry of Women and Families and supported literacy, vocational training, family planning and protection services, including efforts to prevent female genital mutilation (FGM). Building on these efforts, a dedicated EU action to combat FGM was approved in 2025. The EU also supported digital governance reforms aimed at improving public service delivery, administrative responsiveness and relations between citizens and public institutions.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU and Djibouti regularly discuss the human rights situation (also regarding migrants), as well as opportunities for cooperation. Throughout 2025, high-level political engagement with Djibouti continued, including a bilateral meeting with the HRVP on 21 May, in the margins of the EU-AU Ministerial in Brussels, several other engagements at Ministerial level and the annual Partnership Dialogue on 29 May 2025. With a view to strengthening civil society, the EU Delegation continued to establish a more structured dialogue with civil society organisations.

EU financial engagement: Specific financial engagement in the area of human rights exceeds EUR 2 million, mostly aimed at encouraging democratic governance and an inclusive and equitable civic culture. This comes on top of other projects and programmes with a clear human rights component – as outlined above.

Multilateral context: Djibouti's human rights situation was examined before the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) as part of its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycle in 2023. Major concerns tabled in this peer review revolved around the freedom of expression and freedom of the press; the freedom of association and peaceful assembly; freedom of belief; the independence of the national human rights commission; human trafficking; discrimination against women and girls; gender-based violence (GBV) and FGM in particular; and discrimination of persons with disabilities. On 25 March 2024, during the 55th session of the HRC, Djibouti informed the Council of its decision to accept 228 out of the 269 UPR recommendations it had received. Nevertheless, their actual implementation slowed down throughout 2025, despite a series of dedicated seminars held to expedite implementation.

Also, a significant number of recommendations concerning the ratification of international conventions were simply 'noted' by the Djiboutian authorities, who rejected the 32 recommendations asking the State to ratify one or several of these instruments. The human rights treaties thus rejected include the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances (ICPPED), the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT). Djibouti also noted recommendations pertaining to the 'prohibition of discrimination based on gender, gender identity or sexual orientation'. In concrete terms, Djibouti announced that it would take no steps towards implementing these recommendations.

Republic of Equatorial Guinea

Overall human rights situation: The overall human rights and democracy situation in Equatorial Guinea remained extremely problematic, showing little improvement. During its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) adopted in April 2025, Equatorial Guinea received recommendations mainly urging it to combat torture and arbitrary detention, expand civic and political freedoms, protect human rights defenders, strengthen gender equality and address gender-based violence, ratify key international human rights treaties, and improve prison conditions and the rule of law.

The Equatoguinean authorities continue to face accusations of systemic human rights violations and abuses, political and civic oppression, and high levels of corruption. Civic and political space remain highly restricted, with limited space for civil society and opposition parties to operate freely. Freedom of expression, association and assembly were severely curtailed. Human rights defenders regularly face intimidation, harassment and reprisals. In addition, the procedures to register civil society organisations remain burdensome. Press freedom is also restricted, with the World Press Freedom Index ranking the country 118th among 180 countries. Reports indicated that torture and ill-treatment, especially in prisons, remained widespread. Prisons continued to be overcrowded, and incarceration conditions remained harsh, with inadequate access to food, sanitation and health care. Lack of equality between women and men remained a major challenge in all aspects of social, cultural, economic and political life. Gender-based violence continued to be a serious concern.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU focused on the full abolition of the death penalty (which was banned from the Criminal Code in 2022 but remains theoretically applicable under military law); eradication of torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment; fair access to justice for victims of human rights violations; the opening of civic and democratic spaces; good governance and accountability; transparency and fight against corruption; fight against social inequalities and discrimination; and promotion of gender equality and LGBTI rights.

EU bilateral political engagement: Equatorial Guinea has not signed the Samoa Agreement and was not a party to the revised Cotonou Agreement either. Consequently, with Equatorial Guinea the EU does not have a regular political dialogue based on these agreements. Nonetheless, the EU has been closely following the political, social and economic situation in Equatorial Guinea and systematically raises human rights and governance issues in high-level exchanges with the authorities. The EU and Equatorial Guinea held a partnership dialogue in March 2025, where human rights issues were discussed.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, new projects were launched under the NDICI human rights and democracy thematic programme (approximately EUR 1.2 million) to work on empowering civil society in Equatorial Guinea in women's rights and female survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and on promoting the rule of law and gender equality. The country continued benefiting from around EUR 700,000 in EU projects aimed at promoting gender equality and assistance to human rights defenders (HRDs) and other vulnerable groups.

Two existing projects – financed through the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities Thematic Programme (EUR 2 million) – made progress in strengthening the capacities of CSOs as development agents, and in promoting gender equality and providing women and girls in situations of violence or vulnerability with care resources.

Multilateral context: Equatorial Guinea is a party to some key international human rights treaties. However, the country is not a party to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), nor to the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court (ICC). It has not ratified the Protocol on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights nor the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

Equatorial Guinea’s last UPR was in April 2025, during which the country received 326 recommendations, accepting 240 of these. The recommendations included ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (UNCAT) and the International Convention for the Protection of all persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED); to accept requests from the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to visit Equatorial Guinea; to improve conditions of detention in the country's prisons and to take all necessary measures to guarantee that journalists, civil society and HRDs can exercise their right to the freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

Equatorial Guinea’s priorities on human rights in UN fora did not match the EU’s priorities.

State of Eritrea

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Eritrea's human rights situation remains largely unchanged. It ranks at the very bottom of the World Press Freedom index (180/180) and has maintained the score of 3/100 in the Freedom in the World report. The government's focus on maintaining stability and strict control over the population results in a lack of basic freedoms, such as freedom of press and opinion or respect of *Habeas Corpus*. The death penalty remains in place in Eritrea, although there have been no executions since 1989. International organizations, including the United Nations Special Rapporteur, as well as human rights NGOs and the EU called on Eritrea to improve its human rights record. Whilst declaring itself open to discussion on human rights, the government decries criticism as driven by hostile external forces, and has yet to follow through with tangible engagement.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU Delegation works with and provides support to CSOs through grants under thematic budget lines for CSOs and for Human Rights and Democracy, and the Global DeSIRA initiative. Among these projects, one is dedicated to human rights issues, three support children (health sector) and one is aimed at women's empowerment. The remaining projects are in support of people with disabilities (hard of hearing, visually and intellectually impaired).

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU is strongly committed to human rights in Eritrea. Between Eritrea and the EU, there is, for the time being, neither a general political dialogue nor a dedicated human rights dialogue. Exchanges on human rights mainly take place at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva. Restrictive measures on the National Security Agency and its head – which the EU Council imposed in March 2021 under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime – were renewed in December 2025.

EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation continued to manage 12 projects (grants) for a total value of EUR 8.3 million under thematic budget lines CSO and Human rights and democracy, the global DeSIRA initiative and the Technical Cooperation Facility (TCF). One audit contract covering two projects was signed before the end of 2025. Under the regional TCF, one service contract for public diplomacy is ongoing. In June 2025, the Call for Proposals to support the *Education and Health sectors in Eritrea* was launched. The contract, worth EUR 580,000, was signed in December 2025.

Multilateral context: In May 2025, a report from the UN Special Rapporteur (SR) on the situation of Human Rights in Eritrea was submitted to the 56th session of the HRC. According to the UNSR, the human rights situation in Eritrea remains critical; the indefinite national service has profound human rights impacts that permeate all aspects of life in Eritrea and continues to push thousands to flee the country; the authorities continue to suppress fundamental freedoms, including through widespread and systematic arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance of dissenting voices. According to the UNSR, Eritrea's repression extends beyond its borders, encompassing the diaspora. Reports from EU Member States on this issue vary, hence the issue appears to warrant further study in a forthcoming HRC session. Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers face deteriorating conditions, marked by regional conflicts and increasingly adverse asylum and migration policies in key transit and destination countries.

Eritrea's engagement in international human rights bodies principally concerns UN mechanisms, and is marred by continuous tensions with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea. Eritrea participated in the Enhanced Interactive Dialogue at the 58th session of the UN HRC in February 2025, followed by the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur at the 59th session in June 2025. During the June Dialogue, the Eritrean delegation rejected the SR's report as politicised. In July 2025, despite Eritrea's opposition, the HRC adopted a resolution extending the mandate of the Special Rapporteur for one additional year.

Eritrea was also reviewed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in January 2025, which issued negative concluding observations. In October 2025, its human rights situation was again discussed at the UN General Assembly Third Committee, where the EU called on Eritrea to engage constructively, and at the 85th session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, where Eritrea delivered a national statement claiming progress made. Of note is the fact that in November 2025, a delegation of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) visited Asmara to provide inter-ministerial training on human rights. Overall, Eritrea's participation in human rights meetings in 2025 reflected a persistent pattern of formal presence combined with political confrontation and limited substantive cooperation.

In January 2025, Eritrea acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with the treaty entering into force in February 2025.

Kingdom of Eswatini

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Whilst the 2023 assassination of human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko – still unresolved – represented a culmination in the row of killings during and after civil unrest in 2021, Eswatini appeared outwardly stable in 2025.

The political environment remains broadly repressive. Political parties are banned under the 1973 King's Proclamation, and elections of individual Members of Parliament (MPs) serve mainly to legitimize government authority – embedded strongly in a traditional model of governance. Repressive laws like the Suppression of Terrorism Act and the Public Order Act are used to contain and deter dissent, with over 20 activists, arrested in 2023, still jailed without bail. The CIVICUS Monitor classifies Eswatini as a 'closed' civic space, where fundamental freedoms exist in name only. The authorities have since 2024 eased certain restrictions, such as the one on public assembly and trade union action but intervene forcefully to contain any perceived political challenge to the system of 'monarchical democracy'.

The death penalty remains in place, but Eswatini is considered abolitionist in practice.

Traditional leaders continue to resist human rights as a 'Western imposition'. Human rights institutions remain weak. After 16 years of neglect, the Commission for Human Rights and Public Administration was finally staffed in 2025, but until the Human Rights Commission Bill – submitted in 2025 – will enter into force, the Commission does not have a clear mandate, independence or funds.

The government has been working on a draft NGO-bill since 2023, arguing that a more formal legal framework for non-for-profit organisations is needed, also to address issues of tax-fraud and money-laundering. An initial draft, which is awaiting Cabinet approval, has raised strong concerns among civil

society organisations, who suspect another attempt by authorities to reduce civic space and to replace the current CSO umbrella organisation CANGO with a government-controlled body.

Gender-based violence (GBV) persists at pandemic levels. The government recognises this as a priority, yet struggles to identify a strategy and sufficient funds to combat it. Despite the Children's Protection and Welfare Act of 2012, children are frequent victims of abuse and crime. In 2025 there has even been a resurgence of ritual child killings. Marginalised groups continue to face discrimination. Notably LGBTI persons remain discriminated and socially ostracised, with a strong pushback against their rights from certain traditional leaders and evangelical churches, but also from parts of government. Any attempts to promote formal recognition of NGOs active in this sphere have been rejected. At the same time, the LGBTI community and activists do not face open harassment as long as they respect certain invisible boundaries.

Media freedom remains restricted. State-owned or controlled outlets dominate the landscape, while independent journalism faces both economic challenges and strong pushback by authorities. The 2025 acquisition of the privately owned Times of Eswatini by a businessman linked to the establishment raised further concerns about editorial independence. On the positive side, implementation of the new Broadcasting Act, which started in 2025, could potentially broaden the scope for audio visual media.

The judicial system remains politicised. The Legal Aid Bill was adopted in 2025 but risks being ineffective due to funding shortages and increased government discretion over case approvals. Restricting legal aid to government-approved cases, rather than objective, independent legal advice, risks undermining access to justice. The 2026 UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) may provide an opportunity for accountability. Without meaningful reforms, Eswatini's fragile stability risks unravelling into further violence.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, the EU engaged in high-level dialogues with Eswatini's leadership, and also systematically liaised with civil society and local media to address human rights concerns, including through the implementation of the Human Rights & Democracy Country Strategy. The focus was on protecting human rights defenders, expanding civic and political space, and ensuring accountability for violations.

EU bilateral political engagement: In October 2025, during the 2nd EU-Eswatini Partnership Dialogue under the Samoa Agreement, discussions covered political reforms, human rights, gender-based violence, and the rule of law. In the run-up to the Dialogue, the EU consulted civil society organisations and human rights institutions in view of generating a possibly complete assessment of the country's progress on democracy and fundamental freedoms.

EU financial engagement: The EU supported a range of projects aimed at promoting education, social inclusion, gender equality and the rights of vulnerable groups. These included the *Back to School* project, implemented by UNICEF and local NGOs, which improved access to education for children and young persons with disabilities; *Hlonipheka: Thriving for Dignity*, implemented in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which supported survivors of gender-based violence and promoted awareness of disability rights; and *Khetsimphilo – Choose Life*, led by the Finnish Red Cross, which focused on mental health and gender equality for vulnerable groups. The EU also supported the *Youth and Women Empowerment & Support (YES)* and *Civil Society in Action* projects, which

strengthened social inclusion and enhanced the capacity of civil society organisations, including through support for the preparation of a shadow report to the UN.

Through public diplomacy, the EU Ambassador promoted media freedom, gender equality, and children's rights, while the Delegation supported refugees, organised youth-focused events, and engaged in GBV awareness campaigns.

Multilateral context: In 2025, Eswatini took on significant regional and international roles, serving as Chair of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) and as a member of the African Union's Peace and Security Council. These positions reflect Eswatini's commitment to fostering dialogue and cooperation on the global stage. Eswatini was also elected as incoming chair of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Organ on Politics, Defense and Security.

In line with its long-standing foreign-policy principle of being a 'friend to all, enemy to none', Eswatini has maintained a neutral stance in international conflicts. This approach was evident in its abstention from voting on UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions related to the conflict in Ukraine, including the resolution of 24 February 2025. Similarly, Eswatini has not issued any official statements regarding the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy landscape in Ethiopia in 2025 continued to be shaped by the legacy of the conflict in northern Ethiopia, with ongoing extensive fighting in the Afar and Amhara regions, and ongoing instability in Oromia and other regions. While the November 2022 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement has brought a fragile peace to the Tigray region, it opened new fronts in the Amhara region and enhanced tensions with Eritrea. Furthermore, delays in measures to ensure disarmament, transitional justice and accountability persisted. This undermined stability at large. The federal government's efforts to centralise authority amid ethnic tensions and armed insurgencies further strained democratic institutions and compromised the respect for human rights.

This said, there was significant progress with the National Dialogue. A policy and roadmap for Transitional Justice were developed, which the government approved. In addition, there were significant changes in the leadership of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission.

However, serious concerns remain, particularly in conflict-affected areas. Continued presence in northern Ethiopia of Eritrean forces and clashes involving government troops, regional militias and armed groups led to violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), caused civilian casualties and displacement, and restricted humanitarian access. Transitional justice processes stalled, and calls for accountability – including for attacks on humanitarian workers – went largely unaddressed. Civic space continued to shrink, as journalists, opposition figures, CSOs and activists faced harassment, detention, or exile. Internet shutdowns and other digital restrictions limited free expression. Gender-based violence (GBV) in conflict zones remained a critical issue, with limited legal protection and access to comprehensive services for survivors. Persons from the LGBTI community are still criminalised. Additionally, forced evictions linked to urban projects like Addis Ababa's 'corridor development' and illegal gold mining in the Tigray region – associated with human trafficking and environmental damage

– further compounded social and economic challenges. Ethiopia ranked 145th out of 180 countries on the World Press Freedom index and was assessed with a score of 18/100 (not free) by Freedom in the World, down from 20 the year before.

The death penalty remains in place in Ethiopia, although no executions have taken place since 2007.

Ethiopia's stability and democratic progress depend on addressing accountability gaps, restoring civic freedoms, peacebuilding, humanitarian aid, and governance reforms. Inclusive dialogue with the EU and other international partners should be fostered.

EU action – key focus areas: In 2025, the EU's engagement with Ethiopia focused on conflict prevention, peacebuilding and accountability, including support for transitional justice, mediation and dialogue, disarmament, and reconciliation efforts. The EU also provided humanitarian assistance and supported resilience-building measures to address food insecurity and internal displacement. Efforts to strengthen democratic governance and civic space included support for independent media, human rights defenders and electoral reforms. The EU continued to promote the protection of human rights, with particular attention to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), the rights of the child and the protection of minorities. In addition, the EU supported economic governance and anti-corruption efforts, including through assistance to the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (FEACC) and public financial management reforms.

EU bilateral political engagement: Even though there was no EU-Ethiopia Strategic Dialogue in 2025, the EU ensured that Human Rights and Democracy remained at the top of the agenda in all high-level engagements, which included high-level visits focusing on peace implementation, humanitarian access, and governance reforms. The EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa conducted multiple visits, engaging with the African Union (AU) and IGAD on regional stability.

EU financial engagement: The EU's Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2024–2027 for Ethiopia prioritises: Peacebuilding and resilience (EUR 63 million), Social Cohesion, National Dialogue, and DDR core tasks (economic reintegration mainstreamed across the sections). In 2025, the EU allocated substantial funding across multiple sectors in Ethiopia to address humanitarian, governance, and development challenges. A EUR 90 million humanitarian aid package targeted crisis-hit regions like Tigray, Amhara, and drought-affected areas, while EUR 43 million was earmarked for governance, rule of law, and gender equality initiatives, including transitional justice and democratic reforms. Civil society received EUR 20 million to bolster human rights defenders, independent media, and women's rights organisations. Basic services in conflict zones were prioritised with EUR 55.5 million for healthcare (infrastructure, training, and equipment) and EUR 31.5 million for education (school rehabilitation, early learning, and feeding programmes). Gender-based violence (GBV) survivors in Tigray, Amhara, and Afar were supported with EUR 8 million for health, legal, and livelihood assistance, while EUR 40 million aided internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities through WASH, livelihood, and protection programmes. New 2025 initiatives included EUR 14 million to strengthen Ethiopia's National Election Board and civil society election oversight, EUR 6.6 million for institutional capacity-building on gender, and a EUR 10 million digital rights fund to combat surveillance and internet shutdowns. Additional programmes focused on returnee reintegration (EUR 25 million), Sudanese and South Sudanese refugees (EUR 10 million), and conflict prevention (EUR 16 million via the Foreign Policy Instrument) targeting Tigray, Amhara, Somali, Oromia, and Benishangul-Gumuz,

alongside support for transitional justice and media sector development, including journalist protection. The initiatives also advanced agendas on women, youth, peace, and security.

Multilateral context: Within multilateral frameworks, Ethiopia's human rights and democratic governance challenges have remained a focus of scrutiny. At the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), the EU delivered statements with approximately 45 like-minded countries, particularly regarding the situation in the Tigray, Amhara, and Oromia regions. Ethiopia underwent its fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2025, receiving recommendations on accountability for conflict-related abuses, press freedom, and judicial independence, though implementation has been uneven.

The African Union (AU) has played a central role in resolving the conflict in Northern Ethiopia, particularly by facilitating the peace process that led to the Pretoria Agreement. It has also deployed the AU's Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mission (AU-MVCM) in Mekele. However, AU contributions have been constrained by political divisions and limited inclusivity.

Meanwhile, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has faced challenges in reporting due to disagreements with the Ethiopian government over findings. While Ethiopia was re-elected to the HRC (2025–2027), concerns persist over its domestic human rights record, including restrictions on civic space, delayed justice for victims, and ongoing conflicts. International partners, including the EU, US, and AU, continue to urge greater transparency, accountability, and adherence to international human rights obligations.

Gabonese Republic

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In Gabon, which underwent a political transition following the August 2023 coup d'état, the overall human rights and democracy situation remained concerning, despite some positive developments. Questions remain over the depth of political and democratic reforms. Media freedom has shown some improvement, with the World Freedom Press Index moving the country from the 56th rank in 2024 to 41st place in 2025. The country's Communication Code contains restrictions that hinder journalistic independence, including a ban on individuals residing abroad managing media outlets in Gabon. Despite this, opposition-linked newspapers were able to publish on any subject of their choice, including criticism of the government and President. Civicus classified civic space as 'obstructed'.

A new electoral code was adopted in January. Presidential, legislative and senatorial elections took place in accordance with the transition calendar. The new constitution (adopted in November 2024) bans, among other things, same-sex marriage, but stopped short of criminalization of homosexuality. Ill-treatment, poor food and health conditions in prisons remained a challenge, despite ongoing efforts to improve detention conditions. The phenomenon of ritual crimes – the abduction and murder of children and women – continued, despite the adoption in 2020 of a law targeting crimes related to organ removal. Legislation to protect women against all forms of violence and discrimination and to advance gender equality has been in place since September 2021. Still, women represent 90% of the victims of sexual violence and 83% of the victims of economic violence. Only few services provide medical, psychological and judicial care for victims, such as the Centre for Victims of Violence. Despite legal provisions on quotas, women continued to be under-represented in the public and private sector. Concerns remain regarding the rights of women, children, disabled persons and minorities. As part of

the fight against corruption, the 'Task Force on Internal and External Debt', reactivated in 2024, continued its work, but concerns about the extrajudicial nature of its modus operandi persist. Gabon hosted approximately 259 refugees and asylum seekers.

EU action – key focus areas: In 2025, the EU focused its action on democracy and governance; promotion of gender equality, women and children's rights, including the fight against all forms of sexual and gender-based violence against women, girls and children; and the improvement of prisoners' conditions. The EU also supported actions aimed at strengthening civil society and at ensuring credible, inclusive and transparent elections, freedom of expression and association, and the enjoyment of all political rights.

EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights and democracy issues were addressed in regular exchanges with the authorities and stakeholders. The EU carried out formal démarches to request Gabon's support for its initiatives on human rights and democracy issues in UN fora.

EU financial engagement: EU support for the political transition included capacity-building of institutions, civil society and the media to enable an environment conducive to peaceful and inclusive elections (EUR 2 million). In 2025 a contract was signed to support a new project on democratic governance (EUR 600,000). An EU action under the human rights and democracy thematic programme supported the improvement of prisoners' conditions (EUR 500,000). Implementation continued of existing projects to combat all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, including the improvement of care for victims and the protection of children (EUR 1.05 million).

Multilateral context: Gabon is a party to almost all key human rights treaties. It has not yet ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW). Gabon abolished the death penalty in 2010. On UN votes on human rights issues, Gabon usually aligns itself with the position of the African Group, on both country and thematic resolutions. These did not always match the EU's priorities.

The Republic of The Gambia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Ahead of the 2026 presidential election, the country is at a turning point of the democratic consolidation process that started in 2017, after two decades of dictatorship. The Gambia presents a mixed picture. The country has undergone a successful democratic transition allowing the civic space to grow and human rights standards to improve. A full electoral cycle was completed in line with democratic standards. According to Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2025* report, The Gambia remained classified as "Partly Free", with a score of 50/100.

In July 2025, the National Assembly rejected for a second time a draft constitution that suggested the perspective of a regime reducing checks and balances, undermining the separation of powers, limiting financial oversight on the government and facilitating political appointees. However, the current legislative framework continues to allow the government to restrict freedom of peaceful assembly and to constrain the development of civic space. While freedom of expression is generally respected, cases of restrictions on freedom of speech and of the media have been reported, and the police regularly invokes the need to protect public order as motivation for denying authorisation for demonstrations.

The transitional justice reform advances steadily but at a slow pace. Two important bills were adopted in 2024: the Special Accountability Mechanism Bill and the Special Prosecutors Office Bill, creating the legal framework to investigate and prosecute crimes committed under the Yahya Jammeh regime. Former President Jammeh publicly raised the possibility of his return to The Gambia in November 2025, citing the AU-UN-ECOWAS agreement of 2017 and the Constitution as the political-legal basis allowing him to come back, but eventually refrained from acting on this intention. The government is currently working with international partners to secure funding and finalize the recruitment of key personnel for a special tribunal to prosecute perpetrators of human rights violations in The Gambia between July 1994 and January 2017. The political polarisation between the ruling party NPP and its allies, and the main opposition party UDP, remains significant, particularly since President Barrow unveiled his intention to run for a third mandate in 2026. In September 2025, the National Assembly passed the Election Bill 2025 after a third reading. The bill has sparked debate, particularly regarding the exclusion of diaspora voting rights and increased registration fees for political parties.

The 2015 ban on female genital mutilation (FGM) remains in place despite a 2024 reversal attempt, but the Supreme Court is currently hearing a landmark case aimed at overturning it, brought by a group of religious leaders. Prison and detention conditions in The Gambia can still be inhuman and degrading, falling short of international standards. The combination of numerous corruption cases and other governance concerns has given rise to regular demonstrations; these have taken place monthly for several months in a row and were often met with a heavy hand by the police. The government allowed publication of the National Audit reports for the years 2021, 2022 and 2023, in which numerous cases of financial mismanagement, misuse of funds and potential corruption were disclosed. The Gambia Anti-Corruption Commission – newly established under the Anti-Corruption Act of 2024 – comprises a chairperson and two commissioners, whose nominations the National Assembly confirmed in December 2025.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU overall development portfolio is fully in line with the priority strands of action of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights & Democracy (2020-2027), in particular on protecting and empowering individuals, especially young people and women; and on building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies, through significant support to the three key reforms underpinning democratic consolidation since 2017: constitutional, transitional justice and security sector reforms.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU actively engages with the Gambian authorities on the human rights situation on the occasion of its periodic partnership dialogues, as well as through diplomatic démarches and outreach, often with individual EU Member States. In parallel, the EU engages locally with the main civil society organisations, the local authorities and institutional actors such as the National Human Rights Commission, in support of a positive agenda on human rights across the country.

EU financial engagement: The EU allocation for The Gambia for the period 2021-2024 was EUR 119 million, which represents one of the highest amounts per capita of EU intervention in Africa. The 2025-2027 allocation is EUR 74 million. In the field of human rights and democracy, EU support focuses on strengthening democratic institutions, justice and governance, security sector reform, and civil society engagement. Key interventions include the EU-UNDP GREAT initiative, which promotes access to justice, reconciliation and local governance, and the CODE project, which supports core democratic institutions such as the National Assembly, the National Human Rights Commission and the Gambia

Press Union, including on human rights protection and media freedom. Security sector reform programmes, implemented with partners such as GIZ and DCAF, focus on civilian oversight, combating gender-based violence and improving policing capacities. EU budget support is aligned with the commitments of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) White Paper, incentivising implementation. Additional actions include support to mediation and conflict prevention, strengthening civil society oversight of public policies, and promoting disability inclusion through targeted partnerships with organisations of persons with disabilities.

Multilateral context: There is a close cooperation between The Gambia and the EU on the international stage in support of a global system for human rights, democracy and a rules-based international order and effective multilateralism with the UN at its core. The Gambia is a very active member of the UN Human Rights Council. Its current mandate covers the 2025-2027 term.

Under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), The Gambia should act on abolishing the death penalty, in line with its stated intentions and the UPR 2019 recommendations to that effect. In fact, despite the establishment of an official moratorium on executions, and the country's accession to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, courts continued to hand down death sentences, although the trend in 2025 is towards the full abolition of the practice by commutations. Under the UPR mechanism, several countries, including African countries, recommend The Gambia to intensify the application of the 2015 and 2016 laws that criminalize child marriage and FGM.

Republic of Ghana

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Ghana remains generally strong, both by law and in practice. According to the 2025 Freedom in the World Index, Ghana remains one of the few countries in sub-Saharan African classified as 'free', with a score of 80/100.

In multilateral fora Ghana demonstrates commitment to human rights. Over the past years, developments at policy level have been notable, including the creation of a Human Rights Parliament Committee, and the adoption of the Affirmative Action Act in 2024. However, implementation is often slow and underfunded. Challenges persist, including with regard to child labour, particularly in the informal sector; high levels of violence against women and gaps in the protection of women's rights; discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity; marginalisation of certain communities, including the Fulbe; and a highly politicised media landscape, partly linked to political ownership of media outlets. Public and political debate continued around draft legislation relating to the rights of LGBTI persons.

Corruption remains a persistent challenge, due to weak law enforcement and fragile state institutions, despite a slight improvement in 2025 (one point increase compared to 2024 in the Transparency International index).

EU action - key focus areas: The EU supports Ghana within several priority sectors, including the protection of children's rights; the promotion of non-discrimination, including on grounds of gender,

disability and sexual orientation; the strengthening of freedom of expression and of the media; and improved access to justice and institutional reform.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU is actively engaged in promoting human rights and democracy in Ghana. The EU-Ghana partnership includes regular political dialogue in which human rights issues are embedded. The EU also holds a dedicated annual dialogue with the CSO community.

The EU has supported a wide range of campaigns and events to commemorate International Women's Day, World Press Freedom Day, World Day against Death Penalty and International Day for the elimination of violence against women. The EU also supported a youth podcast highlighting human rights, peace and security.

EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation, in close cooperation with one Member State (Germany), launched a EUR 12.7 million project entitled 'Strengthening the Rule of Law and Fight Against Corruption in Ghana', aimed at strengthening democratic accountability and empowering civil society and media.

Multilateral context: 2025 was the second of Ghana's 3-year membership of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). Ghana's priorities included the rights of the child; the rights of women and girls; the rights of persons with disabilities; human rights in conflict situations; and business and human rights. At the HRC, Ghana was broadly aligned with EU positions on a number of resolutions, including on the death penalty and Ukraine.

While Ghana is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the country has yet to sign the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, which aims to abolish the death penalty.

Republic of Guinea

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Guinea has revitalised its national inter-ministerial mechanism for reporting and monitoring human rights recommendations. However, numerous human rights violations persist, including violations of political rights, children's rights, and women's rights. The country ranks 117th out of 143 states in the 2025 Rule of Law Index and 103rd out of 183 countries in the World Press Freedom Index. Women in Guinea face significant challenges, including forced and early marriages, domestic violence, and female genital mutilation – all of which remain widespread.

Throughout the transition, the Guinean military junta maintained significant control over civic space, making 2025 particularly tense. Security forces restricted demonstrations and targeted opposition figures. Civil society organizations faced intimidation and were threatened with dissolution, while some of their members were arrested. Independent media faced significant restrictions, including the suspension of several private channels since late 2024 – a trend which intensified in the lead-up to the 2025 presidential elections and the 2026 parliamentary elections, hindering public debate and contributing to disinformation.

Reports persist of persons critical of the regime or their family members experiencing enforced disappearances. The EU continued to closely follow these cases, particularly in liaison with the local

Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and raised concerns with the authorities.

The presidential elections on 28 December 2025 marked an important step towards a return to constitutional order in Guinea. The election was observed by regional organisations, including the African Union and ECOWAS. While the vote took place in a generally calm environment, the EU raised concerns about the inclusiveness and transparency of the electoral process.

A presidential decree was issued on 26 March 2025, establishing a compensation scheme for victims of the 28 September 2009 massacre. However, the decree raised concerns among victims and organizations, as it does not target all civil parties in the case. Furthermore, developments related to accountability for past crimes, including judicial proceedings and executive measures, raised concerns regarding the fight against impunity and the rule of law. For instance, General Mamadi Doumbouya granted a presidential pardon to Moussa Dadis Camara, despite his conviction for crimes against humanity.

EU action - key focus areas: EU priorities include promoting fundamental freedoms and strengthening civic and political space; promoting an enabling and safe environment for civil society; protecting individuals, ending inequality, discrimination and exclusion; promoting democratic, accountable and transparent institutions; strengthening the links between human rights and the environment; strengthening economic, social and labour rights; encouraging health promotion; and strengthening a participatory, rights-based approach to conflict prevention and crisis resolution.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU actively promotes respect for the rule of law and fundamental rights in Guinea. The EU publicly expressed its concern over the shrinking of civic space and the disappearance of activists and officially engages the Guinean authorities on those matters. In October 2025 the EU renewed its restrictive measures taken against the perpetrators of the 2009 massacre at the Stade du 28-Septembre, such as Moussa Dadis Camara and Colonel Claude Pivi.

EU financial engagement: EU financial engagement in Guinea focused on promoting human rights, supporting the transition process and strengthening governance. For the period 2024-2027, the EU funds programmes aimed at combating gender-based violence, addressing impunity and supporting survivors, while continuing its support to the fight against human trafficking and migrant smuggling. It also promoted women's economic empowerment and gender-responsive public financial management. Support was provided to the rehabilitation of detention facilities, notably in Conakry, and to strengthening key transition actors, including institutions, political parties and civil society. Through programmes such as SOCIDYP, the EU supported civil society capacity-building and local initiatives across the country. Additional actions focussed on migration management and reintegration, border governance, and the digitalisation of civil registration systems, contributing to improved public administration and service delivery.

Multilateral context: At the 49th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in April 2025, Guinea accepted 246 out of 257 recommendations. The country was commended for progress in strengthening the legal framework for human rights. However, Guinea did not accept several recommendations concerning the protection of LGBTI persons and the adoption of comprehensive

legislation against discrimination and violence, in particular affecting women, the LGBTI community, and people living with HIV/AIDS.

Republic of Guinea-Bissau

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Guinea-Bissau remains a fragile country, where most people live on less than two euros per day, facing significant challenges that hinder both the improvement of living conditions and the full enjoyment of human rights. The country has experienced frequent political instability since independence in 1974 including at least five coups d'état and more than a dozen attempted coups, with the military continuing to play a particularly strong role in the country's political life. Multiple political crises have followed the 1998 civil war. In 2025, another coup d'état took place.

On 26 November 2025, the military seized power, overthrowing President Sissoco Embaló and suspending the electoral process, just one day before the release of the results of the 23 November 2025 presidential and legislative elections. The elections had been reported as peaceful by the ECOWAS Election Observation Mission, as well as the African Union and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries missions. The AU suspended Guinea-Bissau and ECOWAS froze its membership. Key opposition figures were persecuted, with 10 arbitrarily arrested. Others went into hiding. The EU called for a swift return to constitutional order, the resumption of the electoral process, the release of all arbitrarily detained persons and the respect of fundamental rights.

Freedom of the media remained a concern, with several radio stations and other outlets at risk of closure, notably due to the pressure over the renewal and cost of operating licences. This, together with statements by political actors targeting journalists, has increased self-censorship and weakened independent journalism. Other significant human rights concerns include reports of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; poor prison conditions; arbitrary arrests and detentions; challenges to judicial independence; corruption; impunity for violence against women and girls; human trafficking; and the worst forms of child labour.

EU action - key focus areas: EU action in Guinea-Bissau focused on protecting and empowering individuals, strengthening civic space and promoting inclusive development. Support to civil society remained central, including efforts to prevent and combat gender-based violence, child and forced marriage, human trafficking and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, through a holistic approach combining legal, psychosocial and economic support. The EU also promoted the rights of vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, children and LGBTI persons, while supporting access to health services and justice, particularly in remote areas. In parallel, the EU contributed to strengthening democratic governance and human rights systems, including through support to media freedom, human rights education and initiatives addressing radicalisation and violent extremism. Efforts also focused on digital inclusion and governance, including e-governance systems, civil registration and telemedicine, to improve access to services and participation.

EU bilateral political engagement: In May 2025, the EU and Guinea-Bissau held a formal political/partnership dialogue for the first time in over a decade. This dialogue saw the participation of eight members of the Bissau-Guinean government, including the Prime Minister, and an EU delegation that included representatives of 11 EU Member States. The dialogue addressed, among others, human

rights issues such as gender-based violence, justice, freedom of speech and of assembly, as well as health and education.

Additionally, the EU and Guinea-Bissau hold frequent formal dialogues on fisheries policy, the bilateral Fisheries Partnership Agreement being the EU's third biggest fisheries agreement in the world. In these regular discussions – most notably the yearly Joint Committee Meetings – human rights in the sector are also discussed.

EU financial engagement: Under the Multiannual Indicative Programme (2021–2027), the EU allocates EUR 25 million to support human rights, democracy and good governance in Guinea-Bissau, with a focus on strengthening the security and justice sectors, promoting transparent economic governance, supporting electoral processes and reinforcing democratic institutions. In 2025, EU-funded actions included improving inclusive access to justice through cooperation with UNDP, bridging formal and traditional justice systems and expanding legal aid for vulnerable groups. Gender equality was mainstreamed across programmes, notably through vocational training and political leadership initiatives aimed at increasing women's participation in public life. The EU also supported efforts to combat gender-based violence and harmful practices, including community-based initiatives and policy development. Additional interventions promoted freedom of expression and media independence, while broader programmes contributed to governance reform, service delivery and social inclusion.

Multilateral context: The EU Delegation actively worked with local representations of EU Member States and the UN family. Guinea-Bissau is a signatory to eight core international human rights instruments.

In 2025, Guinea-Bissau had its Universal Periodic Review (UPR), with the focus mainly on: (i) justice and rule of law; (ii) governance and institutions; (iii) health and social services; (iv) food security; (v) education and children's rights and (vi) gender and women's rights. A total of 224 recommendations were issued, with Guinea-Bissau supporting the vast majority.

Republic of Kenya

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Kenya continues to be widely perceived as a peaceful and functional democracy, characterised by relatively strong and stable institutions. However, following the deterioration observed in 2024 – notably in the government's response to the Gen-Z demonstrations – democratic governance and the human rights situation remained under strain in 2025. Allegations of excessive use of force by security services, including unlawful killings, abductions and enforced disappearances, have persisted and progress in ensuring accountability has been limited. Concerns remain regarding continued patterns of intimidation and surveillance of activists and government critics. These developments further underscored the broader trend of eroding respect for the 2010 Constitution and its progressive Bill of Rights. Kenya retains a robust legal and institutional framework. However, oversight and accountability institutions continue to face structural challenges, including insufficient funding, limited technical capacity and allegations of political interference. This has remained a subject of public debate. Efforts to advance judicial reform and improve access to justice have continued, but resource constraints and case backlogs persist.

Kenya retains the death penalty, but is considered abolitionist in practice (with a moratorium in place), as the last execution was in 1987.

Kenya maintains one of Africa's most active media environments and a vibrant civil society. Nonetheless, harassment, intimidation and arbitrary arrests of journalists, human rights defenders (HRDs) and youth activists continued to be reported in 2025 with greater frequency. Media stakeholders report ongoing political and commercial pressure contributing to self-censorship. Civil society organisations have raised concerns about increased regulatory scrutiny and administrative obstacles affecting their operations. Instances of violence and threats against HRDs have remained a concern, particularly for those documenting police conduct and corruption.

Corruption and perceptions of impunity at national and county levels continue to undermine public trust in institutions. While anti-corruption bodies have pursued investigations and high-profile cases, prosecutions and convictions remain limited, and enforcement gaps persist. Although no judiciary process was initiated, the Kenyan Government appointed a panel of experts on ''Compensation of Victims of Human Rights Violation's to initiate monetary compensation for the victims of the 2024-25 Genz-demonstrations. Public perception remains critical, as the monetary compensation comes without justice.

Sexual and gender-based violence, including numerous and increasing cases of femicide, remains a serious concern, both offline and online. Although the authorities have taken steps to strengthen prevention and response mechanisms, implementation gaps, underreporting and limited victim support services continue to hinder effective protection and access to justice for survivors.

Kenya maintains a restrictive legal and social environment for LGBTI persons. Provisions of the Penal Code criminalising consensual same-sex relations remain in force, contributing to stigma, discrimination and barriers to access to services. Civil society organisations advocating for equality and non-discrimination continue to operate in a challenging environment.

Overall, while Kenya's democratic institutions remain resilient, persistent governance deficits, limited accountability for human rights violations and pressures on civic space continue to pose significant challenges to the full realisation of constitutional rights and freedoms. Kenya ranks 117th out of 180 countries on the World Press Freedom index and was given a score of 51/100 (partly free) on the Freedom in the World index. Furthermore, Kenya dropped two points on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index from 32/100 in 2024 to 30/100 in 2025, trailing behind regional peers like Rwanda (ranked 58th) and Tanzania (ranked 40th).

EU action – key focus areas: In 2025, the EU focused its human rights engagement with Kenya on the following thematic areas: justice and security sector reforms; democratic governance, elections, transparency and accountability; civil society enabling environment and human rights defenders.

EU bilateral political engagement: In 2025, the EU continued to engage actively with the Government of Kenya, notably through the EU-Kenya Strategic Dialogue, which remained the central platform for political engagement and cooperation. Building on the visit of the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights in 2024, the EU sustained its engagement with Kenyan authorities on issues related to accountability, civic space, electoral reforms and the protection of fundamental freedoms. In

February 2025, the EU deployed an Election Follow-up Mission to engage on the state of electoral reforms ahead of the general elections of August 2027, although only one recommendation was addressed. Furthermore, an Electoral Violence Risk Assessment was carried out in October 2025, which found substantial risk of violence in run-up to the election. The EU and Kenya also continued their joint sectoral consultations on security and defence, addressing regional stability, counterterrorism, prevention of violent extremism and maritime security, as well as the human rights dimension of police and security operations. High-level bilateral meetings and visits between Kenyan government representatives and EU institutions and Member States took place throughout the year. Engagement included exchanges with EU Commissioners, as well as Heads of State or Government and Ministers of EU Member States. These interactions reaffirmed the strategic nature of the EU-Kenya partnership.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, the EU continued to implement the Multiannual Indicative Programme 2021-2027 for Kenya in which 'Leaving no one Behind' and 'Democratic and Economic Governance' feature as priority areas. 2025 was largely a year of consolidating and launching the activities for the numerous contracts agreed and signed in 2024. New activities signed in 2025 concern the support to devolution, complementing the Performance Management contract signed in 2024; a EUR 1.5 million grant was awarded to the Commission for Revenue Allocation, notably supporting the county governments to raise the revenue which is due to them. A technical assistance activity worth EUR 2 million accompanies the institution in this effort.

Two further programmes were signed with civil society organisations: a EUR 1.5 million project engaging young people in the policy design around the twin digital and green energy transitions, as well as a EUR 1 million project on responsible business conduct in the Kenya agriculture sector. Furthermore, the PASEDE budget support programme in support of public finance management (PFM) was extended by 12 months. This allowed the use of undisbursed funds from previous years and focused the disbursement entirely on advancing with the electronic procurement agenda over a 1-year period. The government's e-procurement process seeks to strengthen procurement and reduce corruption possibilities.

Multilateral context: Throughout 2025, Kenya was a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), opening new avenues of collaboration with the EU and its Member States on human rights-related issues in this forum. In May 2025, Kenya underwent its 4th cycle Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which brought out challenges related to corruption, security force brutality, and implementation gaps in areas like female genital mutilation, healthcare, and minority rights. Kenya received 339 recommendations from 122 countries. Kenyan and international NGOs participated actively in the preparation of shadow reports, which consistently raised concerns about police accountability and the deterioration of freedom of assembly and social rights. Under the Special Procedures of the HRC, two Special Rapporteur visits have been requested. A visit of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions in 2025 has not yet been accepted by government, while a visit of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of assembly was agreed for 2026. Kenya agreed to expand the OHCHR presence in the country, upgrading a technical office to a fully-fledged country office for which the representative was formally accredited in October 2025.

Kingdom of Lesotho

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Whilst the 2022 elections had ushered in a government dedicated to reform, demonstrating commitment to legislative improvements and increased transparency, slow progress on key changes, including the challenge of the passed 10th amendment on constitutional reform in Court has eroded public trust.

Lesotho's democratic progress in 2025 continues to encounter challenges related to governance structures. The conduct of security forces during operations in rural areas elicited observations regarding human rights. The Ombudsman in their report of March 2025 expressed significant concerns supported by photographic evidence and, among others, recommended the establishment of an independent Military Ombudsman. Following this, the Ombudsman faced retaliation, including security withdrawal and public harassment. New reports later in the year revealed continued abuses, including military raids and civilian torture.

Judicial independence and efficiency continue to need strengthening, as is evidenced by concerning cases like the suspension of the Director of Public Prosecutions, which remains subject to legal scrutiny.

Prison overcrowding, excessive pre-trial detention, and high murder rates – among the world's worst – highlight systemic challenges. At the same time, it is recognised that the police are taking clear steps to ensure security and order. Gender-based violence (GBV) remains pervasive, with some reports indicating that over 80% of women have experienced abuse. While legal reforms (e.g. the 2024 Inheritance Act and 2022 Domestic Violence Act) aim to protect women, implementation is spotty and customary law hinders progress. The 2025 Child Protection Amendment, which criminalised child marriage, included regressive provisions on intersex surgeries, sparking LGBTI backlash.

Lesotho retains the death penalty, but there have been no executions since 1995.

According to Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index 2025, Lesotho ranked 107th out of 180 countries, a marked improvement from 122nd in 2024. Media freedom nevertheless remained challenged, as seen in the 2025 Lesotho Times raid, where the editor was arbitrarily arrested and his phones seized without a warrant. Instances such as this underscore the delicate balance between security and freedom of expression. Meanwhile, constitutional developments, notably the Tenth Constitutional Amendment (August 2025), present progressive steps, while navigating interpretations and applications within the legal framework. Human trafficking remains a concern, with Lesotho retaining Tier-2 status due to limited victim support and corruption risks.

Civil society remains active but constrained, for example there is a ruling that bans legal practitioners working for NGOs to represent clients in court. The revival of constitutional reform offers hope, but legal disputes risk causing delays. Without stronger political will, Lesotho's democratic progress will continue to be halting despite EU and international engagement, while human rights violations are likely to persist.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU's engagement in Lesotho focuses on three core priorities: supporting national reforms, strengthening the justice system, and promoting transitional justice. Despite delays in constitutional amendments, the EU continues to advocate for institutional reforms

through high-level policy dialogues. A key priority is improving access to justice, particularly for vulnerable groups, while also empowering civil society to advocate for gender equality, human rights, and democratic governance. Additionally, the EU, in collaboration with the African Union, supports transitional-justice initiatives aiming to foster peace, reconciliation, and accountability in line with regional goals.

EU bilateral political engagement: In 2025, the EU Delegation in Lesotho intensified its public diplomacy and strategic engagement, reinforcing cooperation with the government, civil society, and international partners. A highlight was the annual EU-Lesotho Partnership Dialogue in May to discuss critical issues such as national reforms, electoral integrity, human rights violations, and gender-based violence (GBV). This dialogue underscored the EU's ongoing concerns about human rights abuses by security forces; a recurring issue raised in previous engagements. Alongside policy discussions, the EU launched the #JusticeForAll campaign during the 16 Days of Activism Against GBV (November–December 2025), amplifying awareness of human rights, justice, and gender equality through public outreach. These initiatives reflect the EU's broader commitment to supporting Lesotho's national reform process, strengthening democratic governance, and promoting inclusive development, while addressing persistent challenges in human rights protection and security sector accountability.

EU financial engagement: The 'Inclusive Lesotho' programme enhances democratic participation and electoral integrity by strengthening citizen engagement and supporting the Independent Electoral Commission. This initiative seeks to build public trust in Lesotho's institutions and promote inclusive governance, particularly for marginalised communities.

Through the '*Metsi a Lesotho*' programme, the EU improves access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in rural communities, schools, and clinics. The initiative prioritises gender-inclusive and disability-accessible infrastructure, such as wheelchair-friendly facilities, to ensure equitable access for all. The EU also provides technical support to advance water sector reforms and digitalization, preparing Lesotho for its accession to the UN Water Convention in 2026.

The EU further supports social inclusion and youth empowerment through programmes like 'Equitable Lesotho', which focuses on early childhood development and data-driven policymaking, and the 'Lesotho Youth Power Hub', which engages young people - especially girls, youth with disabilities, and rural communities - in governance and decision-making. Gender equality remains a cross-cutting theme, with ongoing efforts to align EU programmes with national priorities and civil society needs, ensuring a rights-based and inclusive approach to development in Lesotho.

Multilateral context: In 2025, Lesotho maintained its active participation in multilateral organizations, including the United Nations, African Union, Commonwealth, and SADC, demonstrating its commitment to international cooperation. As a signatory to core human rights treaties, Lesotho has yet to ratify several key instruments, such as the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR on the abolition of the death penalty, and the Migrant Workers Convention. During the 2025 Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Lesotho accepted 230 of 247 recommendations, including calls to strengthen the Human Rights Commission, combat human trafficking, and improve maternal and child health. While the UN Human Rights Council acknowledged progress in health and education, it urged Lesotho to abolish the death penalty and enhance protections for civil society. Notably, Lesotho shifted its position on the UNGA resolution for a death

penalty moratorium, voting against it in 2024 after previously abstaining, despite being a de facto abolitionist since 1995.

Lesotho's efforts to combat human trafficking led to its upgrade to Tier 2 in the 2025 US Trafficking in Persons Report, though challenges remain in securing convictions and protecting migrant workers from exploitation. The UN Committee on Migrant Workers recommended stronger safeguards for migrants, aligning with SDG Target 5.2. However, Lesotho did not ratify any new human rights conventions in 2025, leaving gaps in its legal framework for human rights protection.

Republic of Liberia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Liberia remains a fragile country, marked by low human development, widespread poverty and inequality, weak public services and infrastructure, and significant governance challenges. The country ranks 177th out of 191 countries on the UN Human Development Index. While classified as 'partly free', with a score of 64/100 in the Freedom in the World 2025 Index, corruption, impunity and violence against women remain major concerns.

Liberia's peaceful 2023 elections contributed to democratic stability. Fundamental rights and the rule of law are generally recognised, despite serious shortcomings in implementation. In 2025, steps were taken towards accountability for past crimes, including the submission of draft legislation to establish a War and Economic Crimes Court and a Special Anti-Corruption Court.

The justice system continues to face structural challenges, including the coexistence of formal and customary systems. Harmful practices such as trial by ordeal ('*sassywood*') persist despite being prohibited. In September 2025, President Joseph Boakai pledged to ban such practices, and a draft law is under consultation.

Women's rights remain one of the major human rights challenges, with high levels of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage and teenage pregnancies. In October 2025, Liberia adopted a Gender-Responsive Foreign Policy (GRFP) Roadmap, aimed at mainstreaming gender equality and women's rights into its diplomacy and external cooperation. The situation for the LGBTI community in Liberia remained challenging, marked by ongoing criminalization and widespread social stigma.

Persons with disabilities continued to face significant barriers, including stigma and limited access to services, notably in mental health, where public provision is lacking. Available estimates conservatively suggest that around 15% of the population lives with a disability, broadly in line with the global average, but with a higher incidence of conflict-related disabilities following the civil wars (1989-1997 and 1999-2003).

Human rights defenders (HRDs) continued to operate in a challenging environment without specific legal protection, and were exposed to harassment, intimidation, and violence. A draft National Human rights Defenders Policy was submitted to the Government in October 2025.

Liberia has a relatively longstanding tradition of freedom of expression and press freedom. This notwithstanding, political interference through media ownership and content, combined with limited

regulatory capacity and professional training, continued to affect media independence, contributing to self-censorship and the spread of disinformation.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU's key focus areas included gender equality and women's rights; transparent, inclusive, credible and peaceful electoral processes; rule of law, transitional justice, access to justice and prison conditions; non-discrimination; support to Human Rights Defenders and civil society organizations; and business and human rights.

EU bilateral political engagement: The issues of good governance, accountability and transparency, as well as human rights (the fight against SGBV, FGM, and the death penalty), were included in the agenda of the 13th EU-Liberia partnership dialogue in May 2025, and were also addressed during the Follow-up Technical Working Group meeting in December. The EU continued to support democracy and human rights priorities through the Human Rights and Democracy thematic programme under NDICI-Global Europe. Individual EU Member States similarly supported human rights and democracy, either through specific projects or by ensuring human rights concerns were taken into account in other programmes.

EU financial engagement: The EU supports the Government of Liberia, the National Elections Commission (NEC), and the legislature in strengthening democratic governance and promoting a more inclusive and participatory democracy. In 2025, the EU also continued to engage publicly and through its programmes on human rights, gender equality and the fight against SGBV and FGM.

Multilateral context: Liberia secured a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC) for the 2026–2027 term. In doing so, it is expected to leverage its position to promote its declared priorities such as women, peace and security; youth, peace and security; climate justice; and UNSC reform.

Although the death penalty has been under de facto moratorium since 2000, full legal abolition was one of the main recurrent recommendations during the 4th Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Liberia at the UN Human Rights Council in 2025. Liberia reaffirmed its commitment to abolition, but domestic legal abolition remains pending, including through the adoption of relevant legislation by the House of Representatives.

Republic of Madagascar

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025 Madagascar declined in several international indices, reflecting challenges in media freedom, corruption perception, and human development. Reporters Without Borders ranked the country 113th in its Press Freedom Index, down from 100th, highlighting issues in the media landscape such as polarisation and susceptibility to misinformation and external influence. Transparency International ranked Madagascar 148th out of 180 countries in its Corruption Perception Index. Additionally, the UNDP's Human Development Report ranked Madagascar 183rd out of 193 nations. The government led by Andry Rajoelina has continued to utilise repressive laws, particularly the ordinance n°60-082 from 13 August 1960, to limit rights to peaceful assembly and association

Autumn 2025 brought a significant turning point. On 25 September, after months of spontaneous manifestations against water and electricity cuts, a demonstration initiated by Generation Z youths via social media faced disproportionate repression. The initially peaceful protests continued and the UN

High Commissioner for Human Rights condemned the increasing repression. A breakthrough occurred on 11 October when army officers expressed support for the demonstrators and put an end to the repression. According to the UN, the protests and related looting resulted in 25 deaths and 235 injuries in three weeks. On 14 October, the National Assembly voted by a two-third majority to impeach President Rajoelina. The High Constitutional Court declared a presidential vacancy as Rajoelina had left the country two days before. The Court appointed Colonel Michael Randrianirina, the spokesperson for the mutineers, to act as Head of State. Randrianirina initially announced the dissolution of almost all state institutions but reversed this decision two days later. Madagascar was meanwhile suspended from the African Union. A new government, comprising 10 women and 19 men (mostly civilians), was appointed. Colonel Randrianirina, along with the four officers who seized power with him, retained the privileges of a head of state.

On the legal front, an incoherent picture started to emerge. Under the new government, freedom of expression and assembly increased and legal action against individuals suspected of corruption was launched. At the same time, convicts serving time for serious crimes such as drug trafficking and fraud were irregularly released. People previously exiled under controversial convictions returned without issue, while several searches and arrests of figures from the former regime occurred outside legal frameworks. And human rights defenders prosecuted under the former regime continued to be prosecuted under the new government. Many key sectors of human rights remain challenged, including harsh prison conditions and persistent socio-economic inequalities affecting access to basic services such as health, education, and justice.

In December, the Parliament adopted a law on the protection of people with albinism, which provides for special protective measures. A draft law on public information (LAICP), adopted by the Council of Ministers in December 2025, is still awaiting parliamentary approval. It aims to enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen participation by making public information accessible.

EU action - key focus areas: Human rights are a key component of EU engagement in Madagascar. This is reflected in the Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP)'s first priority: governance and human development. EU action aims to build a resilient, inclusive and democratic society via support to institutions and civil society, including in the context of the legislative and municipal elections.

EU bilateral political engagement: Upholding human rights is an essential element of the EU's political dialogue with Madagascar. Human rights issues have also been highlighted during several meetings with the Malagasy authorities and civil society throughout the year.

EU financial engagement: The EU is supportive of initiatives pertaining to the human rights agenda under the NDICI Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP) as well as via budget lines dedicated to civil society organisations. Projects are funded in areas such as active citizenship, elections, freedom of expression, protection of journalists, the fight against corruption, gender equality, gender-based violence, social protection and child labour.

Multilateral context: The EU worked with various like-minded actors via co-ordinated or joint meetings and démarches on elections and other issues related to human rights.

Madagascar has ratified most of the main international human rights instruments. Madagascar is a signatory to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. Throughout 2025, the EU continued to cooperate with the UN agencies represented in Madagascar.

Madagascar underwent its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2025. Madagascar received 235 recommendations, of which 204 were accepted, 28 were noted (rejected), and 3 were partially accepted and noted.

The Malagasy authorities particularly adhered to the recommendations suggesting respect for the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, and to cease using intimidation tactics, arbitrary detention, and harassment to suppress these rights. However, in the final document they indicated that they would implement these commitments 'progressively'.

Republic of Malawi

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2025 was a pivotal year for democracy in Malawi, with the Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Elections (held in September 2025) dominating the public debate. Voting on Election Day was straightforward, and the transfer of power was smooth. The newly elected President, Prof. Peter Arthur Mutharika, vowed to improve the country's economic situation and to fight corruption, appointing a well-respected legal practitioner as interim Director-General of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) in his first weeks in office.

Upon an invitation from the authorities, the EU deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM), which in December 2025 presented its final report and detailed recommendations to bolster the electoral process further. The EOM concluded that the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) had conducted the process efficiently. Competition had been pluralistic, and campaigning largely peaceful, with election results accepted by all contenders. Whilst the electoral process bore testimony to the strength of democracy in Malawi, women's participation and equity in campaigning should be enhanced.

Civic space is generally considered to be quite open. The promulgation of laws such as the 2024 NGO Act and subsequent operational guidelines introduced in February 2025 has elicited questions on the far-reaching powers granted to the state, e.g. full disclosure of administrative and financial records of all organisations and discretionary powers to suspend CSOs.

Continued economic hardship – magnified by climate change, and rapid population growth – continue to exert pressure on Malawi's limited public resources. Services such as education and healthcare remain strained. The President at his inauguration in October 2025 announced plans to implement free secondary education to help increase the number of children that complete full school education.

The government purchased maize at the end of 2025 to address food insecurity affecting some 4 million Malawians. Efforts are underway to diversify and commercialise the agricultural sector in view of preventing such food insecurity in the future and helping economic growth. Similar actions are planned to unlock other sectors of the economy such as energy and mining. The new administration also aims to boost decentralisation of decision-making processes.

The EU continues to monitor the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Malawi, notably in the Dzaleka refugee camp, where budgetary constraints (partly due to reduced international funding) have caused a deterioration of living conditions.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy for Malawi has six overarching priorities: i) corruption; ii) vulnerable groups; iii) access to justice; iv) treatment and punishment of prisoners; v) civil society organisations; vi) freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

EU bilateral political engagement: In the margins of the EU-Malawi Partnership Dialogue in May 2025, a CSO dialogue was convened, covering anti-corruption and election preparedness.

The EU has engaged with authorities on the Operational Guidelines to the 2024 NGO Act that were introduced in February 2025. The aim was to ensure independence and freedom for local and international NGOs. The EU, together with other actors in the international community, held several dialogue sessions with the NGO Regulatory Authority (NGORA) to discuss implementation of the provisions and help ensure overall transparency and accountability in resource use, while maintaining the quality of projects across all sectors. The EU-Malawi Youth Sounding Board (YSB) proved very useful in fostering greater interaction and engagement between the EU Delegation and civil society.

During the first five months of the year, the EU-funded *Phungu-Wanga* ('My Parliamentarian') project, implemented by Save the Children, ran a primary schools competition across three districts of Balaka, Mchinji and Rumphi. The competition focused on general governance, civic and human rights topics, enhancing learners' knowledge in the field and encouraging active participation in local development debates from an early age.

EU financial engagement: The EU continued to support democratic governance, accountability and human rights in Malawi through a range of programmes. The EUR 22 million PFEM-Tikuze programme, implemented jointly with Germany, supported public financial management reforms and anti-corruption institutions. Electoral support remained a priority through the EUR 9.5 million Malawi Electoral Support Project, which strengthened the capacity of the Malawi Electoral Commission, security institutions and electoral dispute-resolution mechanisms ahead of the 2025 elections. The EU also supported civic and voter education through the EUR 3.5 million NICE Public Trust programme.

Gender equality and social inclusion remained central areas of engagement. Through a EUR 3.5 million gender-transformative programme, the EU supported women's political participation and efforts to prevent electoral violence. The EUR 21.5 million Social Protection for Gender Empowerment (SP-GEAR) programme promoted social protection, economic empowerment and financial inclusion for vulnerable women and girls.

The EU also supported access to justice, human rights and institutional accountability through the EUR 17 million Chilungamo II programme, including support to the Ombudsman's Office and the Malawi Human Rights Commission. Additional actions focused on refugee and migrant rights, prison reform, legal aid and parliamentary engagement, including initiatives aimed at strengthening civic participation and human rights awareness.

Multilateral context: Throughout the year, the EU and Malawi further strengthened their coordination and cooperation in all matters related to international human rights. Malawi maintained its positive track record in matters relating to national human rights fora and upholding a multilateral rules-based international order. Having been re-elected in 2023 to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) for the 2024-2027 term, the country maintained a progressive stance on various UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee resolutions.

Malawi underwent its 4th Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in November 2025. The country highlighted achievements on issues such as legal reforms on prisons, persons with disabilities, child labour, and expanded access to education and social protection. The reviewing States praised this progress, especially the 2025 democratic elections, plans for free secondary education, death sentence resentencing, and action plans on child marriage and trafficking. At the same time, they invited Malawi to strengthen its efforts towards abolition of the death penalty (a de facto moratorium remains in place), to review its legislation on refugees and asylum seekers as well as its legal and practical safeguards against child marriage, child labour and human trafficking.

Republic of Mali

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the human rights and democracy situation in Mali deteriorated considerably. Civic space was further restricted, and executive powers became increasingly concentrated. Grave human rights violations, reportedly perpetrated by the Malian Armed Forces and by the Russian paramilitary group Africa Corps (successor to the Wagner Group), were widely condemned, particularly due to their impact on civilians, particularly women, children, and internally displaced persons. The central and northern regions (Mopti, Bandiagara, Gao, Timbuktu, Ménaka) remained the most affected by these violations. According to the CIVICUS Monitor, civic space in Mali remained classified as "closed" in 2025.

In 2025, Mali was still in a prolonged political transition. On 3 July 2025, the National Transitional Council amended the National Transitional Charter, granting the Head of the Transition, General Assimi Goïta, a five-year presidential term, renewable 'as many times as necessary', under conditions defined by the authorities. This amendment further strengthened the executive branch and military authorities, thereby weakening the separation of powers.

In May 2025, the authorities dissolved all political parties and organizations of a political nature, making any organised political activity increasingly constrained and risky. Political actors, activists, and former public officials were reportedly subject to prosecution, arrest or restrictive administrative measures. In this repressive context, several opposition figures were arrested, including former Prime Ministers Moussa Mara and Choguel Kokalla Maïga.

Freedom of expression and of the media continued to be under serious pressure. In November 2025, the High Authority for Communication suspended three local radio stations, and several journalists were arrested.

Furthermore, Mali's announcement to withdraw from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in September 2025 marked a major turning point in the erosion of the country's commitment to international justice. If confirmed, the withdrawal would end the ICC's jurisdiction to

prosecute crimes committed on Malian territory, reducing international avenues of recourse for victims of serious human rights violations and weakening mechanisms for combating impunity.

Despite this context, some progress was made on reparations for victims of the 2012 crisis and subsequent armed conflict, including victims of serious human rights violations. The Reparations Management Authority for Victims of Crisis (AGRV) announced the effective commencement of the first reparations under the 2025-2026 Government Action Program, although implementation remained limited by the end of 2025.

It is also important to note the role of the National Human Rights Commission, which operates in line with the Paris Principles and plays a significant role in denouncing, through its statements, violations and abuses of human rights, or failures to protect them. For example, in its statement regarding the suspension of political activity on 30 July 2025, it reiterated that 'the freedoms of association, assembly, opinion, expression, and the press are fundamental rights that cannot be restricted except under the conditions provided by law and constitute the essence of a democratic state that respects human rights.'

Mali retains the death penalty, although no executions have taken place since 1980.

EU action - key focus areas: In line with the priorities of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy (2020- 2027), EU action in Mali focused on the defence of fundamental rights, with particular attention to vulnerable groups, such as women and children.

EU bilateral political engagement: In light of the complex situation in Mali, EU bilateral political engagement related to human rights and democracy was conducted through discreet contacts with the authorities and civil society actors.

EU financial engagement: EU financial engagement in Mali focused on supporting the rule of law, protecting vulnerable groups and strengthening civil society in a highly constrained environment. EU support contributed to efforts to combat impunity and promote fundamental freedoms, including through capacity-building for civil society actors and awareness-raising among decision makers. The EU also supported initiatives promoting women's rights and gender equality, notably through programmes addressing sexual and reproductive health and rights, and prevention of gender-based violence and harmful practices. In parallel, EU-funded actions aimed to strengthen the protection of children, including by improving access to justice for vulnerable children and supporting initiatives targeting street children and internally displaced persons. These efforts were implemented in a context of limited operating space and significant security constraints.

Multilateral context: In Mali, the authorities increasingly adopt a sovereign approach to international relations, emphasising the principles of independence, self-reliance, and non-interference. In this complex context, which has affected engagement with multilateral mechanisms, the UN has repeatedly raised strong concerns about the human rights situation. On 16 May 2025, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, called on the Malian authorities to repeal the decree banning political parties and to fully restore political rights.

Furthermore, on 9 September 2025, experts from the UN Human Rights Council called for the disclosure of the fate of journalist and activist El Bachir Thiam, who had disappeared in May, and

denounced the tightening repression of civil society, human rights defenders, and political opponents. They demanded his immediate and unconditional release, raising strong concerns about enforced disappearances as an increasingly used tool of repression.

Islamic Republic of Mauritania

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: For his second term (2024-2029), President Ghazouani stated his intention to continue a policy of social and political appeasement, as well as structural reforms, particularly in the fight against corruption. Preparations for a national dialogue were launched in 2025, with a view to initiating inclusive consultations with the opposition. The landmark trial of former President Aziz (2008-2019) reached a decisive stage, with his final conviction, upheld by the Supreme Court in November 2025, to a 15-year prison sentence for corruption-related offences and illicit enrichment.

Despite the Mauritanian authorities' stated willingness to honour their international human rights commitments, the human rights environment became more restrictive in 2025, with reports of arrests and police harassment of human rights activists, whistleblowers, and political opponents, and the adoption as well as implementation of controversial legal frameworks, including on political parties and migration. A large-scale campaign against irregular migration reportedly led to more than 50,000 expulsions and allegations of police abuses, prompting strong reactions from civil society and concerns from international human rights actors.

Human rights violations persisted, including structural limitations on women's rights, restrictions on freedom of expression, challenges faced by human rights defenders, poor prison conditions, corruption, violence against women and girls, discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, and the persistence of slavery-like practices. Mauritania retains the death penalty, but is considered abolitionist in practice. Mauritania strove to implement the recommendations from its last Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2021. However, the authorities considered two recommendations (respectively concerning the death penalty and the rights of LGBTI persons) incompatible with national Sharia-based law.

Economic and financial governance remains fragile. In the 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index, Mauritania ranked 130th out of 180 countries, with a score of 30/100, reflecting limited progress compared to previous years. In 2025, the government took steps to strengthen its anti-corruption framework, including through draft legislation broadening the grounds for corruption charges, introducing a mandatory asset-declaration requirement for government members, and establishing a National Anti-Corruption Authority.

While civil society faces challenges of linguistic fragmentation (French-speaking/Arabic-speaking) and limited funding, one notable positive institutional development deserves highlighting: the Commission for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society (CDHAHRSC), created in 2023, continued to contribute to strengthening dialogue between the State, civil society organizations, and partners.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU focused on eight priority areas: promotion and protection of women’s rights, promotion of non-discrimination and equality, improvement of migration governance,

promotion of citizen participation, support for the rule of law and the proper administration of justice, strengthening of economic and social rights, support for civil society and national human rights institutions, and promotion of media independence and pluralism and the fight against disinformation.

EU bilateral political engagement: In 2025, the EU continued to support and promote human rights through public diplomacy actions and strategic communication efforts. The political dialogue held in February provided an opportunity at the highest level to review the human rights situation in Mauritania, reiterate the EU's priorities and reaffirm the EU's readiness to support efforts undertaken by the authorities in the area of human rights.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, EU financial engagement in Mauritania focused on gender equality, social cohesion, migration governance, citizen participation, rule of law and economic and social rights. The EU signed an MoU with the Ministry of Social Action, Children and the Family to strengthen coordination on gender equality and continued to support implementation with national and international partners. It also contributed to social cohesion through the Integrated Territorial Approach in Hodh El Chargui, which hosts a large number of Malian refugees. In the field of migration, EU support focused on the national migration management strategy, action against migrant smuggling and capacity building for Mauritanian security forces, while maintaining attention to human rights safeguards. The EU also launched a Youth Sounding Board to strengthen youth participation in public policy. In response to the recommendations of the 2024 EU Election Expert Mission, the EU supported a project implemented by ECES to improve the electoral legal framework, reinforce the neutrality of institutions, and strengthen the capacities of the Press and Broadcasting High Authority (HAPA) and the National Human Rights Commission. Finally, the EU, France and Germany advanced the 'Succeeding together in Mauritania' programme, supporting employment, entrepreneurship and technical and vocational training for Mauritanians and legally settled migrants.

Multilateral context: The UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Migrants, Gehad Madi, visited Mauritania at the invitation of the authorities in September 2025. His preliminary observations included recommendations on the protection of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

The government cooperated with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and other humanitarian organizations to provide protection and assistance to displaced persons, refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, vulnerable migrants, and other persons in precarious situations. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) maintains a good working relationship with the authorities and was actively engaged in 2025 – including with EU support – particularly with regard to prison visits, monitoring sensitive human rights cases, following up on allegations of slavery, police violence or torture, and providing assistance to migrants.

Republic of Mauritius

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The Republic of Mauritius remains overall a safe and stable country. The 2025 African Country Instability Risk Index (ACIRI) classifies the island at the top of the chart with only 17% risk of danger. V-Dem classifies Mauritius as an electoral autocracy, although it suggests the 2024 election could be indicative of a democratisation process. One notes the peaceful handover of power, and the stable functioning of the parliament, under an absolute majority

of the ruling coalition government. The government announced in its 2025-2029 program a reform of the electoral system, proposing more proportional representation, the promotion of women, ethnic diversity, party financing, as well establishing a Constitutional Review Commission. Moreover, the government launched wide public consultations on the strategic direction the country should take. In 2025, however, none of the reforms have been brought to parliament.

Regarding corruption, money laundering and financing terrorism, Mauritius has not yet taken legislative action to strengthen their fight against financial crimes. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2025, Mauritius ranked 61st out of 182 countries, unchanged from 2024. This attests to the absence of progress. However, the Financial Crimes Commission had some high-profile cases on money laundering under investigation, with links to the Mauritian off- and onshore financial services sector.

The Global Gender Gap Report 2025 of the World Economic Forum pointed out the low representation of women in ministerial functions – amounting to 8% – whereas their enrolment in tertiary employment is equivalent to their male counterparts. In 2025, 29 femicides were recorded, which led the government to start the development of a Domestic Abuse Bill, which would include femicide as a criminal offence.

From July 2024 to July 2025, the Ombudsperson Office for Children's Rights assured that 59% of the 333 cases registered had been resolved, while 41% were under investigation and progressing. Additionally, the Ministry of Family Welfare in its annual report declared that 283 children had benefitted from rehabilitative services and were successfully reintegrated into mainstream society, while 29 children were placed in foster families. Combined, these data demonstrate the Mauritian government's clear interest in the protection of children's rights.

Mauritius has not changed its non-recognition of same-sex marriage, although it maintains the possibility of children's adoption.

In the 2025 report on human trafficking of the US Department of State, Mauritius' ranking remained at Tier 2. While the US acknowledges the government's increasing efforts, the report points out the inadequacy of protection services for adult trafficking victims and the lack of governmental assistance for victims, especially as regards psychological trauma.

In May 2025, the Parliament of Mauritius passed the Constitution (Amendment) Act 2025, which included the repeal of Section 7(2) of the Constitution, reaffirming the country's position against torture and inhuman treatment, in line with international human rights standards. Nevertheless, several prisoners have been reported by the media to have suffered various attacks and some were even killed during their incarceration, for example in the Melrose prison in early December 2025, which the Independent Police Complaints Commission was said to be investigating.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU is Mauritius' main partner in the protection of human rights and democracy. The EU supported social reintegration of young people in cooperation with two NGOs, namely Fondation Espoir Développement Beachcomber and La Maison Familiale de Réinsertion. The EU mobilised an expert to assist the Ministry for Gender Equality and Family Welfare in implementing

the National Gender Policy (2022–2030). Likewise, the EU assisted Mauritius in launching consultations and drafting policy for the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Women Commissioner in September 2025.

The EU supported a Regulation update in January 2025 aimed at providing an additional remuneration to every worker who earns a monthly basic wage or salary of up to 50,000 rupees.

On Anti-Corruption Day (December 2025), the EU Ambassador publicly called for countering corruption, highlighting EU's collaboration with Transparency Mauritius and public bodies such as the Financial Crimes Commission.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU and Mauritius held regular dialogues – often involving individual EU Member States – to discuss topics of mutual concern, including regional stability in the Indian Ocean, human rights and governance. In April 2025, EU and Mauritius held their first partnership dialogue under the new Samoa Agreement, reaffirming a joint commitment to enhancing cooperation and the respect of human rights in the face of global instability.

EU financial engagement: The EU's Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) budget for Mauritius between 2021-2027 is EUR 8 million.

Multilateral context: Mauritius is a likeminded country on many international issues and generally aligns with EU positions in multilateral fora. Mauritius is an ally in support of an international rules-based order with the UN as its core. The EU and Mauritius regularly exchange on regional and international matters of common interest, including on matters occurring in the context of the South African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the African Union. On 14 October 2025, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) elected Mauritius as a member of the Human Rights Council (HRC) for the term 2026-2028.

Republic of Mozambique

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Mozambique's human rights situation remained deeply concerning in early 2025. Violence in the wake of the disputed October 2024 elections persisted into the new year, only gradually diminishing after President Chapo's inauguration on 15 January. Security forces cracked down on the widespread protests with excessive use of force. Civil society groups documented at least 400 deaths, 3,000 injuries, and over 4,000 arbitrary detentions, with reports of indiscriminate shootings, ill-treatment in detention, and enforced disappearances, mostly of opposition supporters. These figures have not been confirmed by the authorities. According to the CIVICUS Monitor, civic space in Mozambique remained classified as 'repressed' in 2025.

In 2025, the insurgency in Cabo Delgado worsened, causing the displacement of hundreds of thousands of persons and disrupting humanitarian aid. By April 2025, 609,000 people remained displaced across the northern provinces, with women and children making up 80% of those affected. Civilians faced arbitrary executions and kidnappings (including the abduction of at least 120 children in early 2025). School closure increased the risk of child recruitment and exploitation, while women and girls faced heightened threats of sexual and gender-based violence. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) hampered mobility and heightened insecurity. Humanitarian access remained constrained. Climate disasters, including cyclones Chido (2024), Dikeledi (January 2025), and Jude (March 2025),

compounded the already dire situation in conflict-ridden areas, causing the displacement of more communities.

Faced with the cumulative impact of political repression, armed conflict, climate crises, and institutional fragility, authorities have acknowledged the need to restore trust in public institutions, underscoring the urgent need to achieve lasting stability through accountability, inclusive governance, and strengthened human rights protection. Following a political compromise in March 2025, a National Inclusive Dialogue to address the post-election tensions was launched. By mid-2025, reports of human rights incidents were decreasing in frequency but concerns on accountability persisted; no convictions have been reported, with a dysfunctional justice system failing to investigate violations or protect witnesses.

The implementing regulation of the 2024 Law on Disability Rights remained pending, de facto limiting the law's practical effect throughout 2025.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, the EU continued to monitor human rights developments in Mozambique closely, with a heightened focus on conflict-affected areas, in particular the northern province of Cabo Delgado. The EU Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM), which in September 2024 had replaced the EU Military Training Mission, played a crucial role in delivering training in human rights and international humanitarian law. In addition, the EU has continued to integrate human rights into its partnership/cooperation programmes, promoting inclusive development with a particular focus on the rights of women, children and persons with disabilities. This support translated into financial assistance, facilitating capacity-building programmes and protection measures for activists facing risks. The EU continued to focus on key areas such as peace building and good governance. There was also a particular focus on fighting gender-based violence.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged with the government of Mozambique during the third Mozambique-EU Human Rights Dialogue, held in Maputo on 29 October 2025. Discussions centered on progress in implementing recommendations from the most recent previous Dialogue (held in 2022), while also addressing factors hindering implementation of the country's human rights commitments. Key topics included accountability for post-electoral violence, protection of human rights defenders, gender equality, women's and children's rights and the inclusion of vulnerable groups – with particular attention for the ongoing Inclusive National Dialogue. The Mozambican side explicitly requested EU support in areas such as a counter-terrorism strategy aligned with human rights and international humanitarian law, a regulation on the rights of persons with disabilities, the fight against femicide and domestic violence, and reinforcement of capabilities for independent investigation and witness protection.

In 2025, the EU held two Partnership Dialogues with Mozambique: one in Maputo in June and another in Pemba, Cabo Delgado, in November. In Maputo, the EU emphasised the importance of safeguarding human rights, political freedoms, and inclusive governance, particularly in light of the post-election context. A joint communiqué was issued, in which the Government of Mozambique reaffirmed its commitment to advancing reforms towards national unity, sustainable development, and respect for human rights and political liberties. Both sides agreed to continue cooperating on regional peace and security.

In January 2025, the EU Election Observation Mission presented its final report on the 2024 elections, highlighting challenges such as post-electoral violence, limitations on freedom of assembly, unequal access to media and irregularities in vote counting. The EU encouraged the Mozambican authorities to implement priority recommendations from the report aimed at enhancing the integrity, transparency, and inclusiveness of the electoral process. The EU furthermore continued its discreet diplomacy to encourage stakeholders to overcome the post-electoral crisis. This added value to the National Inclusive Dialogue. The EU also encouraged the authorities to recognize peaceful demonstrations as legitimate expressions of civic participation, stressing that security responses must be proportional and accountability mechanisms effective.

The EU Delegation engaged in several public events with CSOs promoting human rights and democratic institutions, but also with vulnerable groups. The EU Delegation also supported youth empowerment in Mozambique. The EU Youth Sounding Board (YSB) attended national and international youth events (Youth Summit 2025, Africa-Europe Youth Academy launch event and advisory board). Through public outreach and awareness campaigns tailored to the local audience, the EU highlighted its work both in Mozambique and globally. The EU Delegation continued to resort to social media messaging on key dates such as International Democracy Day, Press Freedom Day, the 16-Days Campaign Against GBV, Human Rights Day, International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, etc.

EU financial engagement: The EU remained committed to protecting people affected by armed violence, including vast numbers of internally displaced persons and their host communities. The EU contributed over EUR 38.7 million in humanitarian assistance to help address the Cabo Delgado crisis in 2024 and 2025, with a focus on the most pressing needs such as critical access to food, water and sanitation, shelter, health, nutrition and protection services. Gender continued to be a cross-cutting priority in EU action. The EU addressed Business and Human Rights through its project Cidadania Activa.

The EU has also continued to promote environmental sustainability through specific projects and programmes (e.g. PROMOVE Biodiversity programme, WCS illegal trade in wildlife, GUARD wildlife, NaturAfrica Southern Africa). It also contributed to expanding civil society engagement on environmental and climate action, while cooperating with the Mozambican Government to improve its legal framework, ensuring alignment with international environmental standards and global commitments.

Multilateral context: Mozambique remained actively engaged in key UN and African Union fora, where it consistently advocated for the integration of human rights principles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. In 2025, Mozambique's engagement with multilateral human rights mechanisms, particularly the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), continued to be an important focus. While Mozambique's legal framework generally aligns with international standards, the country struggles to translate these laws into tangible improvements.

Republic of Namibia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: While in 2025 Namibia reconfirmed its democratic resilience, persistent challenges remained. Following President Geingob’s death on 4

February 2024, the transition of power to interim President Mbumba was orderly until the November elections. On 21 March 2025 Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah became Namibia's first woman president. Namibia ranks 8th in the 2025 global Gender Gap Index (81.1%). Women hold 42.3% of parliamentary seats and 60% of cabinet positions, thanks to the SWAPO Party's 'Zebra Policy' gender quotas.

In the World Press Freedom Index, Namibia ranks 2nd in Africa (after South Africa) and 28th globally. However, while journalists operate with some degree of freedom, state control and economic pressures threaten media independence and quality of journalism. According to the OECD, Namibia is one of the wealthiest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and qualifies as an upper-middle income economy. The World Bank reclassified Namibia as lower-middle income due to stagnant growth and higher-than-expected population figures. While official unemployment remains at 36.9%, real estimates are higher than 50%. The informal sector (26.5% of GDP), whilst comprising 58% of the workers, lacks social protection.

Namibia qualifies as the second most unequal country globally (after South Africa), with a Gini Index of 59.1. Over 17.2% of households are categorised as poor or severely poor. Moreover, women and girls in the country are still vulnerable and fall victim to violence and discrimination. Real economic growth slowed to 1.7% in 2025 (from 3.8% in 2024), hampered by declining income from the Southern African Customs Union and diamond mining as well as by drought. The 2024-2025 severe drought (related to El Nino) reduced agricultural output by 40%, caused livestock losses of 30% and food insecurity for one-third of the population.

Recovery began in mid-2025, but climate vulnerability persists and rampant youth unemployment, poverty and social inequality continue to be key challenges. The high inequality rate takes a toll on Namibian children. According to UNICEF, on average 51.3% of Namibian children live in multidimensional poverty (vs. 37.4% of adults and a national average of 43.3%). Rural areas are worst affected. Issuance of the long-awaited White Paper on Indigenous Peoples – pending since 2021 – could help strengthen protection. In 2024, Parliament passed the Civil Registration and Identification Bill to legalise undocumented children (0.1% of the population) and the Cybercrime Bill (fast-tracked for 2026) to combat online child exploitation. However, while such legislation is readily passed, implementation is often lacking.

In June 2024, the High Court ruled that laws criminalising same-sex acts between men were unconstitutional and invalid. The government has appealed this ruling to the Supreme Court. Additionally, the Marriage Act was signed into law in October 2024 defining marriage as between a man and a woman. While not yet formally enacted by the minister, this new law contradicts a 2023 Supreme Court ruling recognising foreign same-sex marriages. Two 2023 bills designed to criminalise same-sex marriages and the promotion of such marriages, including those performed abroad, lapsed unsigned with the previous parliamentary session. But 6 LGBTI persons were killed in 2024, reflecting rising violence. A 2025 study found 49% of Namibians oppose LGBTI rights (down from 64% in 2019/20), with younger, educated cohorts showing greater tolerance. The Combating of Discrimination and Hate Speech Bill (drafted in 2021) remains pending.

The topic of corruption continues to be critical: the perpetually delayed judicial investigations into the Fishrot scandal (2018–ongoing) pushed Namibia down 7 places in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (from 52nd to 59th out of 180). President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah

declared corruption ‘treason’ in March 2025, but as public demands for reform grow, legal proceedings remain slow.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to support human rights and democracy in Namibia through cooperation programmes in the following strategic priority areas: (i) promotion of good governance and accountability, directly relevant to the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights; (ii) promotion of women's rights, including combatting gender-based violence; (iii) promotion of children's rights; (iv) promotion of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, with special attention to Indigenous Peoples and LGBTI persons; (v) strengthening of the democratic political system, in particular the Parliament, as well as civil society’s role and capacities.

The EU and individual EU Member States in Namibia carried out public diplomacy activities to promote specific human rights issues.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Delegation engages regularly with the Minister of Justice, Minister of Gender, and Ombudsman to monitor the implementation of the country’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR), including LGBTI rights and gender-based violence.

EU financial engagement: Key initiatives include the ‘Namibia Needs Me’ (NNM) project, which enhances youth civic engagement through education and digital platforms, and the ‘Enhancing Participatory Democracy in Namibia’ (EPDN) programme, which promotes parliamentary transparency via an online bill-tracking system and MP training. The Good Governance/Anti-Corruption initiative, in partnership with UNDP, strengthens the Anti-Corruption Commission and supports CSOs in tackling corruption. To amplify marginalised voices, the ‘New Voices, New Narratives’ project deployed a mobile dialogue trailer for rural outreach and trained CSOs in advocacy. Gender equality and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention efforts include expanding CSO training and community coordination. The ‘Empowering the San’ project trains San paralegals and conducts workshops on rights, health, and education. The ‘Right to Learn’ initiative updates early childhood education standards, trains 300 educators, and expands school meal programmes. Environmental projects, such as ‘Building Stronger Natural Resource-Based CSOs’, help communities address mining and green hydrogen impacts, while ‘Leveraging Community-led CSOs’ empowers youth and women in rural areas.

Multilateral context: Namibia actively supports the multilateral system, sponsoring several thematic resolutions such as the fight against racism. Namibia co-facilitated the UN Summit of the Future (September 2025), advocating for UN Security Council reform and climate action. A supporter of the Paris Agreement, Namibia aims to decarbonise by 2030. It supports South Africa’s International Court of Justice (ICJ) genocide case against Israel but remains neutral on Ukraine, however expressing sympathy with Russia for its historic role in Namibia.

The country has engaged with the UN human rights system through the submission of its national report ahead of its 2026 Universal Periodic Review (UPR), thereby fulfilling its core multilateral reporting obligation. This engagement confirms Namibia’s continued participation in multilateral human rights mechanisms and provides a formal basis for dialogue with UN Member States in the forthcoming UPR session. Namibia’s 2021 UPR had highlighted persistent challenges in sexual and gender-based violence, LGBTI rights, indigenous inclusion, and prison conditions. While Namibia is

active in its UPR process, its Minister of Justice has vocally defended the government's position on LGBTI issues.

Republic of Niger

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Niger's primary challenge remains insecurity, with armed and terrorist groups posing a significant threat to both civilian populations and security forces across several regions.

Since the coup d'état of 26 July 2023, the 2010 Constitution has remained suspended and has been replaced by the Charter of the Refoundation, which was adopted on 26 March 2025 and granted constitutional value without a referendum. The Charter raises concerns regarding the protection of fundamental rights, notably due to the absence of references to key international human rights instruments. In 2025, Niger announced its intention to withdraw from the International Criminal Court, alongside Mali and Burkina Faso. While this withdrawal had not taken legal effect by the end of the year, it raised concerns regarding the future of international accountability mechanisms.

Over the course of 2025, progress was made in establishing transitional institutions following the dissolution of democratic institutions after the 2023 coup d'état. However, by the end of 2025, the foreseen National Observatory for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms had yet to be set up. Civic space remained significantly restricted, with the suspension of several national and international NGOs and continued limitations on access to detention facilities for human rights organisations. Freedom of expression and of the media remained under severe strain with the toughening of the Cybercrime Act since June 2024, which reintroduced prison sentences for offences of defamation, insults and dissemination of data that could disturb public order or undermine human dignity. At the same time, the suspension of the Press House (2024) and restrictions on international media further constrained the information space. Several journalists, including Deutsche Welle's correspondent, were arrested in 2025, contributing to a climate of self-censorship. Radio France Internationale and France 24 were suspended, as well as, temporarily, the BBC. According to Reporters Without Borders, Niger ranked 83rd out of 180 countries in the 2025 Press Freedom Index, reflecting a 'problematic' media environment.

Finally, security-related measures, including the national register of persons suspected of involvement in terrorism-related activities (FPGE), remained in force in 2025, although no cases of nationality deprivation were reported. Niger retains the death penalty, although no executions have taken place since 1976.

EU action - key focus areas: Cooperation between the EU and Niger has been largely suspended since the coup of 26 July 2023, including on human rights and the rule of law. However, selected projects in support of civil society have continued, in line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2027). These projects notably focused on the protection and empowerment of individuals; building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies; promoting a global system for human rights and democracy; new technologies: exploiting opportunities and addressing challenges; and acting together.

EU bilateral political engagement: Political dialogue with Niger has been suspended since the coup d'état of 26 July 2023, thus preventing any high-level exchange of views on human rights issues. Informal contacts at the local level were nevertheless maintained with the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, EU financial engagement in Niger focused on supporting civil society in a context of restricted political space. Through programmes such as PASOC IV, the EU strengthened the institutional and operational capacities of civil society organisations, including through financial support for local initiatives addressing accountability, food security governance, budget transparency, women's rights and youth participation. The EU also supported the inclusion of persons with disabilities through targeted initiatives aimed at improving access to basic services and strengthening the role of representative organisations. In addition, EU-funded actions promoted transparency and democratic oversight of public finances, with a view to increasing investment in key social sectors such as education, health and food security, including through improved management of revenues from extractive industries.

Multilateral context: EU démarches in the framework of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee were conducted and generally well-received by the Nigerien authorities, as for example on the resolution on the return of Ukrainian children. However, Niger has increasingly aligned its voting positions with those of the Alliance of Sahel States. Over the course of 2025, Niger was actively preparing for the 4th cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) before the UN Human Rights Council, due in 2026. The authorities, through the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, have been open to cooperation.

Federal Republic of Nigeria

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Nigeria is Africa's largest multi-ethnic and multi-religious democracy, with an estimated population of about 237.5 million people in 2025. Four uninterrupted decades of civilian rule have entrenched elections, competitive party politics and a broad architecture of constitutional rights. Yet persistent insecurity, corruption, weak institutions and uneven access to justice mean that many Nigerians do not experience these guarantees as effective protections in their daily lives. Civic space, media freedom and accountability mechanisms exist in law but are often constrained in practice by harassment, impunity and limited state capacity. Approximately 60% of the population, roughly 140 million people, live below the poverty line.

Nigeria's civil society – with its NGOs, professional bodies, faith groups, media networks, academia, cultural and human rights organisations – remains among Africa's most vociferous and institutionalised. Youth advocacy programmes and civic tech- projects show young Nigerians actively tracking promises, demanding accountability and engaging leaders on governance and human rights. However, surveys also highlight low trust in institutions, frustration with unemployment and poor public services, and a sense that leaders ignore young people's voices.

The 'NHRC @ 30 Civil Society & Human Rights Defenders Forum and Human Rights Expo' was convened on the 8December 2025, in Abuja. Organised by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in partnership with the EU Delegation, the Forum served as a crucial stock-taking and forward-looking platform, evaluating the state of human rights in Nigeria across the three decades since the NHRC's

establishment. Participants observed that cybercrime and defamation laws are increasingly deployed to intimidate journalists, contributing to Nigeria's decline to the 122nd rank out of 180 countries in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index. Gender inequality persisted at alarming levels. One-third of Nigerian women were reported to experience physical or sexual violence; around 40% of girls were married before 18; and women held less than 6% of elected positions nationwide. Violence against LGBTI persons continued, particularly in the North, driven by the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (2014) and discriminatory enforcement. Children continued to face abandonment, abuse, trafficking and school attacks, pushing millions out of education entirely. Nigeria maintained the death penalty, although a de facto moratorium on executions remained in place at the federal level. While no known judicial executions have taken place since December 2016, courts continued to hand down death sentences.

EU action - key focus areas: EU action in Nigeria focuses on strengthening democratic governance, rule of law and human rights. This includes support to electoral reform and follow-up to the 2023 elections through the EU Electoral Follow-up Mission and the EU Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria programme, as well as efforts to improve the independence of electoral institutions and the integrity of electoral processes. Support to the rule of law focuses on justice reform, anti-corruption and access to justice, including through programmes such as RoLAC. The EU also promotes gender equality and women's political participation, supports services for survivors of gender-based violence, and contributes to addressing prison overcrowding and strengthening legal aid systems. Additional priorities include support to civil society and media freedom, digital governance and rights, youth participation and employment, and humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations, including internally displaced persons. A Team Europe approach underpins coordination across EU institutions, Member States and partners.

EU bilateral political engagement: EU bilateral high-level political engagement took various forms, including through structured ministerial and senior-official- dialogues that addressed governance, security and shared strategic interests. Within this framework, the EU and Nigeria regularly discuss human rights and democracy issues, linking concerns about civic space, rule of law and electoral integrity to broader cooperation on peace and regional stability. Sectoral policy dialogues, including on trade, investment, green transition, migration and development, complement these political channels and are anchored in multi-annual programming that ties EU financial support to agreed reform priorities. Regular contacts between the EU Delegation, Nigerian authorities and civil society allow human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, gender equality and minority protection, to be raised systematically alongside economic and security issues.

EU financial engagement: EU financial engagement with Nigeria tied funding directly to agreed political priorities through multi-annual programmes focused on governance, sustainable growth and social investment. It used Global Gateway and country packages to link support for democracy, rule of law and human rights to budget lines for elections, justice reform and civic participation. Major envelopes for digital transformation, climate-resilient infrastructure, health and education were programmed to reinforce Nigeria's reform agenda while advancing EU objectives on stability, green transition and inclusion. Flagship investments in the digital economy and connectivity, combined with technical assistance and skills initiatives, translated dialogue on diversification and youth employment into concrete projects. European financial institutions and private investors were mobilised alongside

EU grants to create blended finance that amplifies the impact of these political and policy commitments.

Multilateral context: Nigeria continued to engage with UN human rights processes, including follow-up- to its 4th Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the UN Human Rights Council, where it accepted UPR recommendations on accountability, civic space and non-discrimination. Its regular presence in the UN General Assembly Third Committee and cooperation with treaty bodies and special procedures kept issues such as freedom of religion or belief, protection of civilians and counterterrorism practices on the agenda, providing structured opportunities for EU Member States to engage. Regionally, Nigeria remained an important interlocutor within the framework of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, whose 2021-2025 strategic plan stresses state cooperation and implementation, offering another platform where EU and Nigeria can converge around support for monitoring and reform.

Republic of Rwanda

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy situation in Rwanda remained challenging. Rwanda maintains a strong performance on governance, justice and anti-corruption, while continuing to score in the lowest global indices for political rights, civic space, and media freedom. Rwanda continued to perform well on social and economic indicators, in particular on poverty eradication and food security, while the inequality gap is on the rise. Its performance in the fight against corruption is above the global average. In the Transparency International Index, Rwanda scores 58/100, 41st in the world and third in Africa. According to the World Justice Project (WJP)'s rule of law index, Rwanda ranks 39th out of 142 worldwide, and 1st among 'Sub-Saharan African Countries'. Finally, in the Mo Ibrahim Ranking of African countries' governance, Rwanda ranks in the top quintile.

At the same time, Rwanda is ranked low in international indices measuring political rights and freedom of speech and overall democratic governance. In 2025, Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders decreased Rwanda's scores for political rights and press freedom respectively compared to 2024. Rwanda was classified as 'not free' by Freedom House and its press freedom as being in a 'very serious situation', ranking the country 146th out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index. Civicus classified civic space in Rwanda as 'repressed' signalling that fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly, and association remain heavily restricted. President Kagame has been in control of the country since 2000 and was re-elected for a fourth term in July 2024, securing 99.18% of the vote.

National unity, in the face of the memory of genocide, is prioritised over political plurality and freedom of expression. In June 2025, a prominent political figure, Victoire Ingabire, was arrested on charges of, amongst others, inciting public disorder and creating a criminal organisation. While her trial focused on procedural elements, it prompted significant international reactions, including a resolution by the European Parliament calling for her immediate and unconditional release.

The government continued to face allegations of human rights violations, including arbitrary detentions, the use of inhuman or degrading treatment, and torture in detention facilities. At the same time, Rwanda continues to focus on judicial reforms to reduce the backlog of cases, the reform of the correctional services and prevent overcrowding of prisons.

A revised NGO law, which tightened government control over non-governmental organizations, raised significant concerns about its impact on freedom of association and civic space. The media landscape in Rwanda remained restrictive, with limited press freedom and concerns about the safety of journalists. Many of the nearly 8,000 evangelical churches and religious organizations remained closed, citing safety and financial difficulties, for failing to comply with the law that regulates places of worship.

The legal framework addressing women's rights in Rwanda is generally positive, and in 2025 Rwanda expanded access to abortion and contraceptives. Rwanda also remains the country with the highest representation of women in Parliament. However, gender-based violence and discriminatory social practices have remained a challenge, especially in rural areas. Rwanda is one of the few countries in East Africa that does not criminalize consensual same-sex relations. While the provisions to protect LGBTI individuals from discrimination are implicit as all citizens enjoy the same rights, including non-discrimination in access to health, barriers driven by stigma remain. Rwanda hosts around 135,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi, who enjoy the right to work, move and settle freely. In 2025, the government adopted a progressive Refugee Sustainable Graduation strategy. It continues to host an Emergency Transit Mechanism for the evacuation and processing of asylum seekers from Libya pending resettlement, with a capacity of around 700 persons at a time.

EU action – key focus areas: The EU focused on six areas, namely non-discrimination and protection of marginalised groups; women's rights and the elimination of violence against women; access to food and the fight against child malnutrition; freedom of expression, regulation and capacity-building in the media sector; freedom of association and promoting an enabling environment for civil society and citizen participation; respect for human rights in the justice system.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to engage the Rwandan government on human rights, criminal justice and political issues within the framework of regular political exchanges, a specific dialogue on justice and human rights (with the Minister of Justice), projects involving the judicial sector, the National Human Rights Commission and CSOs as well as public diplomacy. In November 2025, the EU and Rwanda held the partnership dialogue in the framework of the Samoa Agreement, addressing various topics such as the NGO law, torture in prisons, press freedom and the preparation of Rwanda's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) 2026. The EU and Member States also monitored specific cases of politically motivated detentions, such as the case of opposition figure Victoire Ingabire. The EU carried out formal démarches on human rights and democracy issues to request support for its initiatives in UN fora. The EU also engaged with CSOs through programming, political dialogue, and direct support for civic space initiatives.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, the EU signed three new projects with CSOs, totalling EUR 7 million. The projects aim to support the reconciliation journey, including rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners, extending access to public infrastructure for adversely affected citizens and environmental and social justice. The EU and Rwanda continued to implement a EUR 19.5 million programme focused on Justice and Accountability, aimed at improving the access to and delivery of timely justice, the reduction of the backlog of cases, and the modernization of the justice system. The Justice programme also supports the National Commission for Human Rights, which is the National Preventive Mechanism under the Optional Protocol of the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT). The justice programme also has a component dedicated to reconciliation, voice and accountability, working with civil society organizations.

Multilateral context: Rwanda is a party to most key UN Human Rights Conventions, with the exception of the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and most optional protocols. Rwanda cooperated and followed up closely on genocide cases in foreign jurisdictions, as well as the last pending cases before the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, including the Kayishema and Kabuga cases. The EU advocated for Rwanda to engage with the special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council and engaged with the government and CSOs ahead of Rwanda's submission of its fourth national report under the UPR.

Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy situation in São Tomé and Príncipe remains overall good. Progress has been made with regard to the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission. The draft law was finalised in November 2025. The incidents surrounding the November 2022 coup attempt that had resulted in the unlawful detainment, torture and death of four individuals contrast with São Tomé and Príncipe's image as a model democracy in Central Africa with a peaceful transition of power. No progress has been made in the trials of the soldiers involved in the coup attempt by the military tribunal established in November 2023.

Civil society in São Tomé and Príncipe operates in a relatively enabling environment, with the country classified as 'open' by the Civicus monitor. In 2025, efforts to advance the electoral reform agenda continued, with a focus on improving the voter register and developing a legislative framework to establish a permanent electoral commission, in line with the recommendations of the 2022 EU Election Observation Mission (EOM). In December 2025, the government extended an invitation to the EU to observe the 2026 elections.

However, several key issues continued to pose significant challenges, including the rights of women and children, corruption, access to justice, judicial independence, prison conditions, and access to healthcare and safe drinking water.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, the EU focused on the following priorities: strengthening the human rights framework; promoting rule of law and improving access to justice, the quality and independence of the justice system; promoting economic, social and cultural rights; supporting democracy and good governance, including the integrity of electoral processes; rights of the child; women's rights and non-discrimination on the basis of gender; and environmental rights.

EU bilateral political engagement: The regular EU-São Tomé and Príncipe partnership dialogue held in October 2025 addressed human rights and democracy, including the follow-up of the recommendations of the 2022 EU EOM.

EU financial engagement: Team Europe (EU/Portugal) continued to support governance projects on justice, gender-based violence and electoral reform. The EU's engagement in support of the judicial sector reform, including review of the legal and regulatory framework and the improvement of access to justice, amounted to EUR 2 million (of which EUR 1.2 million from the EU). EU support to combat gender-based violence, including victim care, amounted to EUR 2.75 million (of which EUR 2.4 million

from the EU). Projects to support gender equality and strengthen the role of CSOs in line with the recommendations of the 2022 election observation mission were implemented with an EU contribution of EUR 600,000. Moreover, the EU supported activities to improve the voter registry and the legal framework for establishing a permanent electoral commission.

Multilateral context: São Tomé and Príncipe is a party to most of the key human rights treaties. It has not yet signed the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED). It abolished the death penalty in 1990. São Tomé and Príncipe overall converged with the EU on human rights issues in UN fora. The EU carried out formal démarches to request the country's support for its initiatives at the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly Third Committee on human rights and democracy issues.

Republic of Senegal

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Senegal is widely regarded as one of West Africa's most stable democracies, with a long history of political pluralism, active citizen participation, and generally peaceful political competition. The overall human rights situation in the country remained largely constructive, although socio-cultural norms continued to pose challenges, particularly concerning the rights of women, girls, and children.

While restrictions on freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly have eased in recent years, concerns remained about the impact of fiscal audits and administrative procedures on political pluralism, as well as on the sustainability of certain media outlets. In terms of freedom of association, the landscape of civil society organizations remained diverse and active. Demonstrations generally received authorization and were conducted in a peaceful manner.

In August 2025, the National Assembly passed laws on the protection of whistleblowers and access to public information. If effectively implemented, these laws have the potential to enhance transparency and accountability. At the time of writing, the justice system was undergoing reforms aimed at strengthening its independence and improving access to justice, even though public confidence remained affected by the legacy of past political tensions.

Despite a relatively advanced legislative framework in some areas, women's rights continued to be hindered by socio-economic disparities, regional differences, and persistent discriminatory norms and practices. Gender-based violence remained widespread, and sexual and reproductive health and rights continued to be particularly sensitive issues. While some surveys indicated a gradual decline in female genital mutilation (FGM) at the national level, the practice remained prevalent in certain communities.

Regarding women's political participation, Senegal made progress at the national level, thanks in part to the 2010 parity law, which ensures that women hold 41% of the seats in the National Assembly. However, female representation in local governments remained significantly lower. Economically, women continued to face structural inequalities, particularly in rural areas and the informal sector, with limited access to land, finance, and formal employment.

The long-awaited Children's Code, first drafted in 2016, still had not been adopted by the end of 2025. Some of its most protective elements, such as the prohibition of corporal punishment and the explicit

ban on the forced begging of children, have been particularly contentious in public debate. The situation of *talibé* children remained a major concern, as tens of thousands enrolled in Koranic schools (*daaras*) continued to live in precarious conditions, sent to the streets to beg.

Issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity remained highly sensitive. Same-sex sexual relations are criminalised under Article 319 of the Penal Code, and successive governments, including the current one, have reaffirmed their stance on maintaining this provision. Organisations dedicated to the protection of LGBTI rights continued to face significant challenges in obtaining legal recognition and operating openly.

EU action - key focus areas: EU action focused on promoting the rights of women and girls; the rights of the child; civic and political freedoms and civil society space; rule of law, justice, anti-corruption and anti-money laundering; trafficking in human beings; and non-discrimination, in particular with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU actively engaged with Senegalese authorities on human rights issues during its regular partnership dialogues. Since 2023, the EU has also fostered a structured and regular dialogue with civil society, providing a platform for organizations to voice their concerns and proposals. This dialogue ensures that civil society's input is integrated into policy discussions and EU programming. In 2025, the EU hosted two additional structured dialogues with civil society.

EU financial engagement: EU financial engagement in Senegal focused on promoting human rights, strengthening civil society and supporting governance reforms. The EU supported initiatives advancing women's and girls' rights, including through advocacy and programmes linked to the Gender Action Plan III, as well as actions to combat gender-based violence. It also promoted children's rights, including through support to civil society initiatives addressing the situation of *talibé* children and advocating for the adoption of the Children's Code and reforms of *daaras*. The EU contributed to strengthening civil society capacities and safeguarding civic space, notably through programmes such as the *Programme d'appui à la société civile* (PASC), and supported follow-up to the recommendations of the 2024 EU Electoral Observation Mission (EOM). In parallel, the EU supported addressing governance challenges, including anti-corruption and anti-money laundering efforts, building on Senegal's removal from the Financial Action Task Force grey list in 2024 and the development of a new national Anti-Money Laundering/Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) strategy for 2025-2029. The EU also contributed to combating trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling through regional programmes implemented with international partners, using a human-rights-based approach. Given the sensitivity of issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity, engagement in this area was primarily conducted through discreet diplomacy.

Multilateral context: Senegal continued to maintain a largely neutral or non-aligned stance in multilateral negotiations, frequently abstaining in UN votes. The EU continued to conduct a constructive dialogue with the Senegalese authorities, deepening the mutual understanding of respective positions and priorities. Senegal remained an important and influential multilateral actor in the region and continued to value constructive engagement with the EU.

Republic of Seychelles

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Seychelles continues to lead in Africa in terms of good governance, rule of law, and the promotion of human rights. Seychelles' performance in good governance is commended by international think tanks and other renowned institutions. In 2025, Seychelles was considered the least corrupt country in Africa, ranking 24th out of 180 in the International Corruption Index, ahead of many developed countries. Similarly, it ranked first in overall governance in the Mo Ibrahim Index. The V-dem Report recognised Seychelles' progress towards democratization since 2024 and attributes its success to significant achievements in terms of administrative impartiality, judiciary independence, and respect of democratic values. The World Press Freedom Index indicated that, although Seychelles dropped eight places in comparison to 2024 – falling from 37 to 45 – attacks on press liberty are rare and interest in independent journalism remains high.

In September 2025, Dr Patrick Herminie became the 6th President of the Republic, following peaceful and democratic presidential and parliamentary elections, which helped Seychelles gain a score of 80/100 on the Freedom in the World Index 2025, thanks to its respect of political rights and civil liberties. The peaceful and orderly handover of power confirmed the advanced stage of Seychelles democratic processes and maturity. President Herminie already emphasised his engagement towards human rights in his political program, stressing the need to ensure liberty, to further national reconciliation and national unity, and to alleviate poverty. He also engaged with the Seychelles Human Rights Commission in November 2025 to reaffirm his government's position on the preservation of Human Rights.

The Anti-Corruption Commission Seychelles (ACCS) reaffirmed the nation's goal to tackle corruption. The government program of the first hundred days highlighted the fight against corruption, and reinforcement of the judiciary and law enforcement.

In terms of gender equality, President Herminie Cabinet of Ministers counts 8 female Ministers – amounting to 57% of the cabinet – while women secured 27% of Parliamentary seats in the elections. The Afrobarometer 2025 study shows women and men to have equitable access in terms of education, the percentages of post-secondary education being even slightly higher for women at 49%, with men at 47%. Education therefore is not prone to gender discrimination. However, women are more exposed to discrimination barriers in their professional advancement. Violence against women was at the core of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) of May 2025, which discussed a possible review of the Domestic Violence Act 2020 and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Model Law. On the other hand, no progress was made to ensure sustainable operations of a domestic violence shelter (originally co-funded by the EU in 2023).

Children rights appear to be upheld in Seychelles although recent trustworthy statistics are lacking. The new government has nevertheless repeated its attachment to supporting young voices as the President's party United Seychelles hosted a youth general conference in March 2025. The Institute of Early Childhood Development (IECD) remains classified as a Category 2 Centre for Early Childhood Care and Education under the UNESCO standards.

Seychelles has also given particular attention to persons with disabilities, the framework for whose protection is currently being aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In fact, the Speaker of the National Assembly recalled in December 2025 the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and reaffirmed the government's ambition to strengthen accessibility in communities, workplaces and public services and respond better to the aspirations and needs of persons with disabilities. President Herminie also announced the construction of a modern and fully accessible centre for children with special needs. This new facility is meant to bring together education, therapy and care services.

In terms of human trafficking, Seychelles maintains its position in Tier 1 of the United States Trafficking in Persons report. Nevertheless, the report noted that the government had not formally allocated dedicated funds to the Trafficking in Persons Fund and that for the fourth consecutive year it had failed to adopt a national action plan. In addition, delays in granting victims official status resulted in some victims being unable timely to access emergency shelter and services. In October 2025, the Ministry for Homeland Security and Civil Affairs announced the forthcoming completion of important legislative reforms, including amendments to existing immigration and employment laws, and introduction of the Smuggling of Migrants Bill. These measures should further reinforce the country's legal framework, ensuring both stronger safeguards for potential victims and stricter accountability for traffickers.

With regard to LGBTI rights, Seychelles has not legally recognised same-sex marriage, nor does it permit homosexual couples to adopt.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU-Seychelles partnership is based on a strong commitment to promoting shared values and common interests, including democracy, rule of law, accountability and a rules-based global order with the UN at its core. Civil society is a key partner. The EU has a regular dialogue with NGOs and provides them with support in the areas of good governance, women's rights and the fight against drug abuse.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Delegation sent congratulations on the peaceful handover of power and the good conduct of the elections in October 2025. When meeting the new leadership, the EU Ambassador emphasised the importance of the continued upholding of human rights and underlined that the EU-Seychelles partnership is based on shared values of peace, prosperity and sustainable development.

The EU also launched Calls for Proposals for projects aimed at strengthening the capacities of civil society organisations in Seychelles, with a focus on combating and preventing drug abuse as well as violence, particularly among vulnerable groups.

EU financial engagement: Despite its high-income status, Seychelles was allocated a bilateral envelope under the NDICI-Global Europe instrument, in consideration of the impact of the pandemic on the country's economy, which heavily relies on tourism, and the vulnerability linked to its status of Small Island Developing State. The regional project 'Anti Money Laundering - Counter Financing of Terrorism in Eastern, Southern, Central Africa and Yemen' includes Seychelles as a key partner.

Multilateral context: Seychelles and the EU are committed to promoting multilateralism with the UN at its core and agree on the need to reform the UN system. Seychelles is an active member of various

regional organisations, including the SADC, IOC, IOTC, COMESA and African Union. Similarly, Seychelles actively participates in international conferences of multilateral organisations and entertains good relations with major international powers. Seychelles is a member of the Global Alliance for Torture Free Trade, whose objective is to end trade in goods used for capital punishment and torture. The EU and Seychelles continue working together at continental and regional level in order to promote peace and stability in Africa.

Republic of Sierra Leone

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The political environment in Sierra Leone is marked by polarisation between the government and the opposition, which was exacerbated by the elections of 2023. On 18 October 2023, a National Unity Agreement was signed between the government and the opposition with the objective to generate a political reform process. While 2025 saw modest progress in terms of technical and administrative preliminary reforms, substantial change remained limited. Sierra Leone continued to face severe socio-economic difficulties, high youth unemployment, a challenging business environment, food insecurity, and limited access to basic social services. These conditions contributed to a very low Human Development Index, ranking 184 out of 193 countries. In 2025, the political and socio-economic context remained fragile, with high levels of food insecurity (77%), child stunting (26%) and limited access to basic sanitation (16%) and basic water services (58%). Disenfranchised youth, especially in urban areas, continued to be affected by a drug-use crisis, including '*kush'* and Tamadol abuse.

Sierra Leone's commitment to international human rights instruments continued to be critical in shaping the human rights situation in the country. Throughout the year, Sierra Leone leveraged its UN Security Council (UNSC) non-permanent membership, concluded in December 2025, to strengthen its regional and global diplomatic footprint. As Chair of the ECOWAS Authority, President Bio urged Guinea-Bissau's military authorities to release political prisoners and restore a credible roadmap toward free and fair elections.

Freedom of assembly suffered occasional limitations. In October 2025, police stopped a planned women's empowerment meeting in Freetown, aimed at preparing for a female presidential or vice-presidential candidate in the 2028 elections. Sierra Leone's media landscape remained relatively open and diverse, tolerating criticism of government and political leadership. According to Reporters Without Borders, the country ranked 56th out of 180 countries in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index, although it noted further legal reforms would be needed to strengthen the protection of journalists.

Gender equality remained a significant concern, with women facing systemic barriers in political participation and access to resources, despite legislative frameworks aimed at promoting women's rights. Effective implementation of key laws, such as the 2024 Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2024), remained challenging, particularly in rural areas. Female genital mutilation (FGM) remained a critical issue, with Sierra Leone having one of the highest prevalence rates in the world (89.6%). While the 2025 revision of the Child Rights Act (CRA) represented a welcome step towards aligning national laws with international frameworks, it did not address FGM. On 8 July 2025, the ECOWAS Court of Justice held Sierra Leone responsible for failing to protect the rights of Kadijatu Allieu, who had been subjected to FGM ten years prior. In September 2025, police arrested two women for allegedly participating in a same-sex marriage ceremony.

EU action - key focus areas: EU priorities included gender equality and women's rights; promotion of the rights and role of children and youth; combatting poverty and social exclusion, notably through agriculture and food security initiatives but also by improving access to finance; supporting the role of public authorities in adopting and ensuring compliance with environmental regulations aimed at securing a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment; prevention and fight against corruption; integrity of electoral processes; parliamentary strengthening; civil society oversight and accountability functions; improving access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy.

EU bilateral political engagement: During the second EU-Sierra Leone Partnership Dialogue under the Samoa Agreement in December 2025 discussions focused on global and regional issues, good governance and political reforms, human rights and gender equality. The EU expressed appreciation for Sierra Leone's strong engagement in the multilateral arena (UNSC membership; Chair of ECOWAS Authority).

EU financial engagement: EU financial engagement in Sierra Leone focused on gender equality, youth empowerment, poverty reduction, environmental protection, public governance and electoral reform. In 2025, the EU supported the finalisation and launch of the Spotlight Initiative to combat violence against women and girls, as well as work on youth rights and empowerment, including Sierra Leone's first 'Status of Youth' report. EU programmes also contributed to poverty reduction and social inclusion, with attention to marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities. The EU continued to engage on environmental protection and climate change coordination, anti-corruption and public finance management, including support to district councils and procurement reforms. It also supported technical and administrative efforts to implement the 80 Tripartite Committee recommendations on electoral reform, which featured prominently in the 2025 EU-Sierra Leone Partnership Dialogue.

Multilateral context: The international community's role in monitoring and advocating for human rights in Sierra Leone remains critical. The EU enjoys a privileged position, with the annual Political Partnership Dialogue attracting attendance at the highest level. Human rights and fundamental freedoms figure prominently on the agenda.

Federal Republic of Somalia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Somalia remains deeply concerning, despite some progress in advancing basic women's rights. In 2025, the federal parliament approved the establishment of the Independent National Human Rights Commission (INHRC) as an autonomous oversight body, marking an important institutional step forward. In parallel, the federal government adopted a Human Rights Transition Plan for 2025-2026, conceived as a binding framework and aligned with the provisions of UN Human Rights Council (HRC) Resolution HRC60/L.14. The transition plan outlines the operational responsibilities of the federal government during the transition period, beginning by concluding the mandate of the UN Independent Expert on Human Rights in Somalia in October 2025 and culminating in the phased withdrawal of the Human Rights and Protection Group of the United Nations Transition Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS HRPG) by October 2026. A central element of the plan is the strengthened role foreseen for the INHRC in assuming key human rights monitoring and protection functions.

These political and security processes continue to take place in a strained human rights environment: a protracted conflict with al-Shabaab across large parts of the country and a challenging transition towards a universal suffrage (the One Person One Vote (OPOV) electoral model was piloted in late 2025 during district elections in Mogadishu, Benadir). Civilian casualties resulting from armed conflict remain high, while conflict-related sexual violence and restrictions on freedom of expression persist. Somalia retains the death penalty and continues to carry out executions in violation of international law norms and standards. Somalia is rated 'not free' with 8/100 points in the Freedom in the World index, while the World Press Freedom index ranks the country at 136th place out of 180.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, human rights issues remained a regular component of bilateral and multilateral engagements with Somali authorities and other relevant stakeholders. Matters related to media freedom, the situation of journalists, and legislative developments, including the Sexual Offences Bill and the establishment of the Independent National Human Rights Commission, were among the issues addressed. EU priorities were also reflected through financial support to a range of development initiatives, for example capacity-building efforts aimed at strengthening respect for human rights within Somali security institutions. In parallel, the EU Delegation supported civil society organisations active in the promotion of human rights and media freedom.

Given the presence of three CSDP missions (EUCAP-Somalia, EUTM-Somalia, EUNAVFOR Atalanta) in or working around Somali territory, EU actions in the field of human rights were conducted throughout the year in a comprehensive approach, with the missions regularly carrying out training on respect for human rights, international law and international humanitarian law.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged with the federal government of Somalia on inclusive democratisation based on the Somalia-EU Joint Operational Roadmap priorities.

EU financial engagement: The main tool through which human rights issues are addressed is the Human Rights and Democracy thematic programme.

Multilateral context: In October, the HRC endorsed a resolution recognising the Somali authority to manage its human rights obligations and ending the mandate of the Independent Expert on Human Rights in Somalia. As part of the resolution, OHCHR will take over human rights monitoring and reporting from the Independent Expert. Subsequently, the federal parliament approved the establishment of the INHRC serving as an independent oversight body.

In 2025, the Somali National Army and Somali Police force were delisted from the UN Secretary-General's annual report for recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. However, these entities remain listed for other grave violations against children. In early October 2025, the federal parliament lower house ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The Charter obliges Somalia to align its laws and policies to protect children's rights, as well as ending abuses such as child marriage. However, the Somali government, citing considerations related to Islamic law and the Somali constitution, has announced five reservations to the Charter, including on child marriages and the definition of a child as a person below the age of 18 years.

Somalia is not a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Republic of South Africa

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The situation of human rights and democracy in South Africa remained complex in 2025, influenced by both external geopolitical factors and internal structural dynamics. Amid some positive developments, key challenges persisted, especially in relation to poverty, crime, corruption, service delivery, gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) and xenophobia.

South Africa remains among the most unequal countries in the world. Perceived corruption is worsening, and commissions of inquiry were set up in response to allegations about political interference and corruption in the criminal justice system. According to the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index 2025, South Africa ranked 60th out of 143 countries, reflecting strengths in constitutional governance and fundamental rights alongside continuing challenges related to crime, corruption and access to justice.

There are indications in 2025 that reforms driven by the Government of National Unity and linked to the realisation of socio-economic human rights have started to yield results in 2025 – including an improved growth trajectory and the first credit rating upgrade in nearly two decades. Importantly, South Africa continues to enjoy a well-established culture of investigative journalism, with an improving press freedom index score.

While SGBV remains pervasive, the Government recognises the phenomenon as a national disaster. Sexual and gender minorities continue to experience violence and discrimination, as highlighted by the killing of the world's first openly gay imam, Muhsin Hendricks, in a possible hate crime. South Africa's murder and violent crime rates are amongst the highest globally, but no factual data support allegations by the United States administration as to a supposed 'genocide' against white farmers. Xenophobia remains a challenge: in a climate of hostility, immigrants are often blamed for taking scarce jobs.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to support gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including through its chairmanship of the Gender Development Partners Group and ongoing support to the implementation of the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF). Through the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) Budget Support Programme and additional funding implemented with UNICEF, UNESCO and local partners, the EU supported efforts to prevent GBVF, particularly in the education sector. The EU also supported initiatives promoting the rights of LGBTI persons, including local Pride events.

The EU continued to support human rights defenders, freedom of expression and digital rights through the NDICI Human Rights thematic programme, including projects focusing on child labour, human rights defenders, journalists and digital security. Support also continued for initiatives promoting whistleblower protection and accountability.

The Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) remained a flagship area of engagement. As part of the International Partners Group, the EU continued to support a just and inclusive green transition, including through skills development and employment initiatives for communities affected by the

transition away from coal. The EU also supported initiatives aimed at improving the enjoyment of socio-economic rights, including access to basic services in vulnerable communities.

The EU further supported democratic governance and accountability through its long-standing cooperation with the South African Parliament under the Enhancing Legislative Oversight Programme (ELOP), aimed at strengthening parliamentary oversight, public participation and legislative capacity.

EU bilateral political engagement: 2025 was a momentous year for Team Europe-South Africa relations, including as concerns human rights. At the 8th South Africa-EU Summit in March, leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the strategic partnership as based on shared values of democracy, human rights, equality and sovereignty, to the universality and indivisibility of human rights, and to strengthening the UN human rights system.

EU financial engagement: In October, a Team Europe Global Gateway investment package worth nearly EUR 12 billion was announced, aimed at the just energy transition, sustainable infrastructure, digital connectivity and the pharmaceutical value chain. The Global Gateway 360 approach of creating an enabling environment for sustainable and quality investments promotes high social, environmental and governance standards, and enhances respect for human rights, the rule of law, and democracy.

Beyond the Global Gateway, the EU contributed nearly EUR 178 million to ongoing projects under the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). These included support for gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence through the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) programme and initiatives implemented with UNICEF, UNESCO and local partners; projects promoting the rights of LGBTI persons, human rights defenders, journalists and digital security; and actions supporting whistleblower protection, socio-economic rights and access to basic services. The EU also continued its support to democratic accountability and parliamentary oversight through the Enhancing Legislative Oversight Programme (ELOP).

Multilateral context: A defining achievement was South Africa's successful G20 Presidency, which advanced social and economic human rights issues related to the theme of 'equality, diversity and sustainability'.

South Africa and the EU maintain constructive cooperation in promoting democracy and human rights at the international level. South Africa was elected for a second, consecutive term (2026-2028) as a member of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). South Africa and EU Member States in the HRC aligned on 11 out of 18 votes at the 60th session, the best among the 13 African HRC members.

While South Africa again abstained from the vote on the annual HRC resolution on the human rights situation in Ukraine, they voted for the UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution on Ukraine, reaffirming a commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and for the EU-facilitated UNGA resolution on the 'Return of Ukrainian children'.

South Africa continued its genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice.

Republic of South Sudan

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: South Sudan – in a transitional period that was extended until December 2026 – continues to face delays in critical democratic processes, including the adoption of a permanent constitution and preparations for the country's first elections. While first technical steps were made, such as the establishment of the National Elections Commission and preliminary voter registration frameworks, major political disputes and logistical hurdles persist. The Transitional National Legislative Assembly and Council of States remain operational, but legislative progress on human rights protections is slow, with enforcement gaps exacerbating violations.

Civic space remains restricted, with journalists, activists, and opposition figures facing harassment, arbitrary detention, and violence. The National Security Service retains sweeping powers, including warrantless arrests, undermining judicial independence. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) persists as a systemic issue, with limited accountability for perpetrators. While some high-profile cases have been prosecuted, partly due to international pressure, most survivors lack access to justice or support services. Children's rights saw marginal improvements in 2024, but 2025 has witnessed a resurgence in violations, including recruitment by armed groups and child marriage, despite advocacy by faith-based organisations like the South Sudan Council of Churches. South Sudan retains the death penalty, with the latest execution having been recorded in 2021.

Economic, social, and cultural rights remain underprioritised. Public investment in healthcare, education, and social services is insufficient, with over 70% of the population lacking reliable access to basic services. Climate-induced displacement and intercommunal violence further strain humanitarian conditions, particularly in the Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile states.

South Sudan ranked 109th out of 180 countries on the 2025 World Press Freedom index, and ranked at the bottom of the Freedom in the World 2025 report with a score of only 1 out of 100.

EU action – key focus areas: In 2025, the EU prioritised judiciary reform by supporting transitional justice mechanisms, including constitutional drafting assistance, and by collaborating with the yet-to-be-operationalised African Union Hybrid Court to tackle impunity, while also building legal capacity to monitor violations, particularly in conflict-affected regions. On gender-based violence, expanded survivor support programmes (e.g. counselling, legal aid, and reintegration) were piloted in Juba and Bentiu, alongside advocacy for CEDAW's domestication and women's political participation through candidate quotas, with added efforts to combat human trafficking near the Ugandan and Sudanese borders. To uphold freedom of expression, the EU provided journalist safety training, condemned crackdowns like the suspension of The City Review, and pushed for media law reforms, while supporting digital rights protection for activists facing surveillance. Meanwhile, civil society faced growing restrictions, prompting EU emergency grants for particularly exposed human rights defenders (HRDs), awareness campaigns on the UN Declaration on HRDs, and monitoring of shrinking civic space, evidenced for example by the 2025 closure of three NGOs under national security pretexts.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to support the implementation of the peace agreement in South Sudan, including through financial and technical assistance to the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC). Progress remained hindered by delays in troop

cantonment and recurrent intercommunal violence. In 2025, the EU allocated EUR 5 million to support election preparedness, including civic education and the training of election observers.

The EU also continued its dialogue with the South Sudanese authorities on human rights issues. It urged South Sudan to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), to implement a moratorium on the death penalty following the execution of four individuals in 2025 after trials that reportedly failed to meet international standards, and to cooperate fully with the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan. The EU also called for the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Restrictive measures under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime remained in place. While no new listings were adopted in 2025, asset freezes continued to apply to four officials linked to serious human rights violations.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, the EU committed EUR 28 million to support human rights, democratic governance and the rule of law in South Sudan. This included EUR 15 million for governance and rule-of-law initiatives, including support to the National Constitutional Review Commission; EUR 8 million for the prevention of gender-based violence and support to survivors, implemented through the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and local women's organisations; and EUR 5 million for election-related activities, subject to measurable progress on inclusive political participation.

Multilateral context: At the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), South Sudan remained under Item 2 (country-specific resolutions) and Item 10 (technical assistance) in 2025. The Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan renewed its mandate, citing 'no substantial improvement' in accountability. Its 2025 report highlighted escalating violence in Upper Nile, including mass displacements and sexual violence as a weapon of war, as well as political repression, such as the detention of opposition leader Peter Biar Ajak for 'incitement.'

In a conference room paper in September entitled 'Plundering a Nation: how rampant corruption unleashed a human rights crisis in South Sudan', the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan examined patterns and instances of human rights abuses associated with corruption and related crimes, with special attention to South Sudan's obligations under the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

No UN Treaties were ratified in 2025, but the government submitted a delayed report to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, acknowledging failures in service delivery.

Republic of the Sudan

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2025 marked the third year of fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and their affiliated armed groups, with more than 150,000 people killed in that conflict since the beginning. Sudan continued to face one of the world's largest food crises, with more than 28 million people requiring food and livelihood assistance and more than two thirds of the population requiring humanitarian assistance. Over 14 million people, approximately one-third of Sudan's population, have been

displaced. The United Nations has called it the world's largest displacement crisis and it is currently the largest humanitarian crisis globally.

2025 witnessed a serious escalation in blatant and widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Gross violations accumulated, particularly in Darfur, in the framework of RSF's attack on and capturing of El Fasher city at the end of October 2025. The list is dire: mass killings, abductions and forced detentions; sexual violence against women and girls; mass displacement and blocked humanitarian corridors exposing civilians to severe hunger; extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances; indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas causing casualties and targeted assassinations of emergency room workers.

The war has had a devastating impact on the civilian population and, with the atrocities committed, underscored the need for accountability and humanitarian assistance. The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan (FFM), mandated by the UN Human Rights Council, published its report 'Sudan: a War of Atrocities' in September 2025. The report documents violations of international human rights and humanitarian law by both the SAF and the RSF, with most of these violations clearly qualifying as war crimes. In addition, actions attributed to the RSF may amount to crimes against humanity, including persecution and extermination. Reports point to systematic and deliberate attacks against civilians and essential infrastructure such as hospitals, markets, and water and food systems, as well as forced displacement, sexual and gender-based violence, torture, and other serious violations. The RSF have allegedly carried out large-scale attacks targeting communities on ethnic and gender grounds, notably against the Masalit community in Al Geneina (West Darfur), and against Fur and Zaghawa communities following the takeover of El Fasher (North Darfur) in October 2025. Intercommunal tensions have further intensified in the aftermath of the seizure of El Fasher, compounded by the country's current de facto territorial fragmentation.

Both belligerents have imposed broad internet shutdowns and curtailed the freedoms of information and expression through attacks on the media, journalists and human rights defenders. Both have obstructed access to humanitarian assistance. The country scored only 1/100 on the Freedom in the World tracker, while ranking 156/180 in the RSF press freedom index.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU's engagement in Sudan continued to be shaped by the conflict that erupted in April 2023, which interrupted plans to re-engage with a civilian-led transitional government. Despite the challenging operating environment, the EU continued to support civil society organisations and UN agencies working on human rights, adopting a flexible approach to ensure the continuity of assistance.

Key initiatives included the EUR 10 million 'Supporting Democratic Transformation and Social Cohesion by Enhancing the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Sudan' project, which contributed to the promotion of human rights, social cohesion and democratic transformation, including support to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Sudan. The EU also continued to support access to justice and the rule of law through a EUR 5 million programme aimed at improving legal aid services for vulnerable groups, including women, children and persons with disabilities.

In addition, the EU provided support through the Human Rights and Democracy thematic programme under NDICI-Global Europe, focusing on accountability and the fight against impunity, women's rights and gender-based violence, transitional justice and the protection of human rights.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU has consistently called for immediate ceasefire, the protection of civilians, humanitarian access and the resumption of the transition to civilian rule.

The EU maintained four packages of restrictive measures on individuals and entities involved in activities undermining the stability and political transition of Sudan from 2024, and added two in 2025, namely: Council Decision (CFSP) 2025/1481 of 18 July 2025, restrictive measures against two individuals and two entities of the RSF and the SAF; and Council Decision (CFSP) 2025/2369 of 20 November 2025, restrictive measures against one individual of the RSF. Designated individuals and entities are subject to an asset freeze. EU persons and entities are forbidden from making funds, financial assets or economic resources available to them. In addition, individuals are subject to a travel ban in the EU.

EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation engaged with CSOs, human rights organisations, women's organisations and HRDs throughout the year. Consultations and networking events were organised with key stakeholders. A 'Socio-economic integration of children and young people and the rights of groups at risk in displacement affected communities in Sudan' programme formulated in 2025 will provide EUR 20 million for enhancing human rights protection and social and economic re-integration of vulnerable groups, such as single household women, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) survivors, unaccompanied minors, children otherwise at risk and persons with disabilities in displacement-affected communities.

Multilateral context: In addition to the contract agreement with the OHCHR, the EU supports all UN mandates and positions related to investigations into human rights violations, such as the mandate of the Designated Independent Expert in Sudan, the International Independent Fact-Finding Mission and the UN Secretary-General's personal envoy for Sudan. In the context of combating impunity, Sudan is regarded as a key political anchor for the EU's global support to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

United Republic of Tanzania

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the human rights situation in Tanzania deteriorated, largely due to state-led repression before and after the general elections on 29 October 2025. International observers and UN experts have denounced systematic violations, including escalating violence, digital blackout, crackdown on freedom of expression and the systematic silencing of political dissent. Tanzania retains the death penalty, although the country is considered abolitionist in practice. This year Tanzania fell 7 points to a score of 28 in the Freedom of the World tracker, and was ranked 95th out of 180 countries on the RSF press freedom index.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, the EU continued to prioritise the promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, with particular attention to human rights defenders, youth empowerment, women's rights and gender equality. Through political engagement, cultural activities and support to civil society, the EU promoted inclusive participation and democratic values.

The EU supported initiatives on the rule of law, anti-corruption, legal aid and democratic governance, while strengthening support to civil society throughout the electoral cycle surrounding the 2025 general elections. In coordination with EU Member States and like-minded partners, the EU also supported domestic election observation and peace monitoring efforts and conducted a Diplomatic Watch during the elections.

In partnership with UN agencies, including UN Women and UNICEF, the EU promoted gender equality, addressed gender-based violence and supported the rights of vulnerable and marginalised groups. Sectoral dialogues and joint advocacy efforts also encouraged compliance with international human rights obligations.

The EU continued to support digitalisation, media freedom and data protection through the NDICI programme and civil society partners, while advocating for a rights-based approach to digital governance. Developments surrounding the 2025 elections, including internet shutdowns, highlighted the need for stronger safeguards for digital rights and independent oversight. The EU and EU Member States also continued to promote human rights and democracy through joint advocacy, support for due process and engagement with youth through the Youth Sounding Board.

EU bilateral political engagement: The HRVP issued statements in November 2025 and December 2025. Additionally, the European Parliament adopted resolutions condemning Tanzania's deteriorating human rights situation and the politically motivated treason trial of opposition leader Tundu Lissu. In February 2025, the European Parliament's Committee on Development (DEVE) visited Tanzania and met with the Minister responsible for gender.

EU financial engagement: Gender equality and women's empowerment remained a key EU priority in Tanzania. In 2025, the EUR 90 million 'Gender Transformative Action in Tanzania: Breaking the Glass Ceiling' programme continued to support the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) by strengthening national systems and financing for gender equality.

The EU also supported anti-corruption efforts through the EUR 2 million 'Building Sustainable Anti-Corruption Action in Tanzania' project, which aimed to strengthen the detection, investigation and prosecution of corruption and organised crime. In addition, the EUR 5 million 'Improving Access to Justice for Women through Legal Aid' project expanded access to justice and gender-responsive legal aid services for women, girls and marginalised groups.

Through the EUR 20 million 'Productive Social Safety Net' programme, the EU continued to promote women's economic empowerment, including through support to savings and investment groups and capacity building in financial management and digital tools.

Multilateral context: Tanzania has ratified key international and regional human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the International Labour Organization (ILO) ILO Convention 182, but has not signed the UN Convention against Torture (UNCAT) or the Optional Protocols to the ICCPR. In 2025, the EU Delegation engaged with the government to advance UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee priorities, and

supported civil society in monitoring Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations. However, Tanzania's reporting to international bodies was delayed.

Togolese Republic

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Following the constitutional reform adopted in 2024, Togo completed its transition to the Fifth Republic in May 2025, moving from a presidential to a parliamentary system and eliminating direct presidential elections. While the authorities maintained a formal institutional framework and political stability in a tense regional context, the reform raised concerns regarding democratic alternation, checks and balances, and the concentration of executive power – all against the backdrop of tightening restriction on civic space. The opposition contested these constitutional changes and called for demonstrations that the government mostly refused to authorize and dispersed or prevented. Civic space and freedom of expression were significantly curtailed, with activists, artists and human rights defenders arrested, notably during demonstrations in June 2025.

Conditions in prisons across the country did not significantly improve. Multiple international and regional organizations, as well as the European Parliament (EP), called on the Togolese authorities to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. In September 2025, the EP adopted a resolution calling for the release of Abdoul Aziz Goma, a dual Irish-Togolese citizen. At the end of 2025, the government granted a presidential pardon to over 1,500 prisoners, and conditionally released dozens of others, including Mr. Goma.

In the 2025 World Press Freedom Index, Togo moved down from 113th place in 2024 to 121st in 2025. Independent media were occasionally shut down. Activities of CSOs became more tightly regulated, notably since the entry into force in October 2024 of a decree requiring NGOs to align their activities with the government's development priorities and to notify local officials of their activities. The terrorist threat in the northern part of the country required an increase of military presence in border areas, which contributed to further restrictions.

EU action - key focus areas: EU action focused on improving social cohesion and local democracy in the North; promoting freedom of expression, including through the promotion of access to quality information, as key elements of democracy; supporting reinforcement of the rule of law and governance; promoting freedom of association of workers, labour rights and corporate social responsibility; and promoting human rights and human rights defenders.

EU bilateral political engagement: Relations between the EU and Togo are generally good. In April 2025, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia, accompanied by the EU Special Representative for the Sahel, visited Togo on behalf of the HRVP. The visit included a courtesy meeting with President Faure Gnassingbé. The President of the European Council Antonio Costa met with President Gnassingbé during a formal visit to Côte d'Ivoire. On 25 April 2025, representatives of the EU and Member States held the 3rd Partnership Dialogue with the Togolese Republic. The Dialogue addressed sensitive issues, including human rights and security cooperation. The EU Delegation regularly addressed human rights and democracy in public interventions, including on International Women's Day and Human Rights Day.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, EU-funded projects in Togo focused on strengthening civic engagement and social cohesion, particularly in the northern Savanes region. Actions supported the meaningful participation of young people and women in public life, aiming to contribute to the prevention of violent extremism and reinforced community resilience. Additional initiatives promoted women's participation and representation in Togo's political, social and economic spheres, while also aiming to strengthen freedom of expression and freedom of association. Implementing partners included Plan International Togo, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the PANOS Institute and the Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement (CCFD). These actions were financed under the human rights and democracy thematic programme (NDICI-Global Europe) and the budget lines of the service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI). For the 2021-2027 programming period, EU support for democracy, human rights and civil society in Togo amounts to EUR 10 million.

Multilateral context: In promoting human rights and democracy, the EU Delegation and Member States' embassies work together to build constructive political dialogue with Togolese authorities and other stakeholders in the framework of the Samoa agreement. Coordination of international engagement in Togo is mainly ensured by the 'Group of Five' (G5), which includes, besides the EU Delegation, the missions of Germany, France, the United States, and the UN coordination mechanism. In 2025, discussions were held under the aegis of UNHCR and other UN agencies to address the situation of refugees and displaced persons in the North. Togo's last UPR took place in January 2022; its next review is scheduled for 2026.

Republic of Uganda

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, Uganda's human rights and democracy situation was impacted by the pre-electoral period ahead of the January 2026 general elections. Legislative and administrative measures, combined with an expanded role for security institutions, continued to restrict political and civic space. A landmark Supreme Court ruling in January declared military trials of civilians unconstitutional; Parliament subsequently adopted an amendment to the UPDF Act reintroducing limited civilian jurisdiction for military courts under defined circumstances, a move contested by the Uganda Law Society. Opposition activities faced heightened security interventions, with disruptions of rallies, large-scale arrests, and documented use of force. Media freedom deteriorated, with journalists harassed and equipment confiscated. LGBTI persons remained exposed to discrimination following the partial upholding of the Anti-Homosexuality Act, while environmental human rights defenders continued to face arrests and intimidation around oil-related projects.

Uganda's rank in the World Press Freedom index fell 15 places to 143rd. In the Freedom in the World tracker, the country scored 33/100 (not free).

EU action – key focus areas: Education remained one of the largest EU investments in Uganda, delivered through the Team Europe flagship 'Gender for Development Uganda' (G4DU) initiative (EU/Belgium/Germany/The Netherlands), which supported over 200 schools, trained more than 1,200 teachers, and reached nearly 100,000 adolescents with sexual and reproductive health services.

The EU and individual Member States pursued strong engagement on civic and political space as the situation continued to deteriorate ahead of elections, with financial support provided to human rights

defenders. As regards unlawful detentions, the EU Delegation provided legal assistance to LGBTI persons and organisations through strategic litigation funding, addressing 284 cases and benefitting 378 persons.

The EU continued to promote respect for land and environmental rights, monitoring the impact of oil and gas projects and supporting 111,297 households in securing land rights. Through the Civil Society in Uganda Support Programme II (CUSP II) (EU/DE), a National Civil Society Convention brought together over 500 stakeholders, and the 8th National Youth Parliament generated policy recommendations submitted to Parliament.

On digital rights, CIPESA convened a National Business and Digital Rights Policy Dialogue and developed a digital rights toolkit for businesses, while one Member State (Austria) supported the HerSafeNet referral pathway against technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

EU bilateral political engagement: In 2025, the EU Delegation and Member States' representations maintained structured engagement with Ugandan authorities on human rights and democracy, including with the Uganda Human Rights Commission, the Electoral Commission, and security forces in the context of electoral preparations. Ireland convened a regional dialogue in Eastern Uganda, bringing together civil society, the NGO Bureau, and district leaders to discuss the regulatory framework for CSOs, widely considered overly restrictive. The EU engaged government officials and private companies on human rights compliance in the oil and gas sector. Concerns raised bilaterally regarding the deteriorating media environment and the use of force during opposition events by several EU Member States were met with a heightened political sensitivity of bilateral relations in the pre-electoral period.

EU financial engagement: EU programming in 2025 reflected five priority areas. The G4DU flagship (approx. EUR 85 million, EU/Belgium/Germany/The Netherlands) anchored investment in education, gender-based violence, and sexual and reproductive health. The Advancing Respect for Human Rights by Businesses in Uganda project (EUR 5 million, EU/Enabel), in its second year of implementation, documented 331 business-related human rights cases across oil, sugar, floriculture, and fisheries sectors. CUSP II (EU/Germany) continued to fund civil society capacity, youth engagement, and media support through Deutsche Welle Akademie, with an additional envelope allocated in September to upscale support to local radio stations ahead of the 2026 elections. The Sustainable Business for Uganda (SB4U) Team Europe Initiative supported the Uganda–EU Business Insights Forum, facilitating partnerships in agricultural technology and sustainable mining.

Multilateral context: Uganda's multilateral engagement on human rights in 2025 continued to be shaped by its chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement (2024–2027) and the residual visibility from its 2024 G77 Presidency. In UN Geneva-based fora and in and around the UN General Assembly, Uganda maintained a development-centred narrative emphasising sovereignty and structural global inequalities. However, international scrutiny intensified markedly: the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights publicly expressed concern over the crackdown on opposition actors and the media, citing arbitrary arrests, disproportionate use of force, and allegations of torture – a notable escalation from previous years. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights issued statements cautioning against internet shutdowns and restrictions on media freedom ahead of elections. The Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI)'s re-accreditation review of the

Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) attracted renewed international scrutiny as to its independence and effectiveness, particularly on politically sensitive issues.

Republic of Zambia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Zambia remained a stable democracy in 2025. However, political and social polarisation persisted and increased. In January, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression noted that human rights in Zambia were at a crossroads. While welcoming positive steps, including the adoption of the Access to Information Act and the decriminalisation of defamation of the President, the Rapporteur highlighted ongoing concerns regarding selective application of laws, restrictive provisions on criminal libel, sedition, insult, hate speech, and cybercrime, pressures on independent media, online disinformation and the independence of key institutions, including the judiciary, the Independent Broadcasting Authority, the Electoral Commission and the Human Rights Commission.

Civil society and the political opposition also raised concerns around the freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. It is reported that the delay in reviewing the Public Order Act has allowed police to continue withholding permissions for political rallies. Cases of targeted harassment or arrests of opposition leaders or journalists have been reported, although freedom of the media has improved under the current Government. This said, the revision of cyber-security and cyber-crime bills in 2025 increased self-censorship among media actors.

Access to justice was still a concern for most Zambians, often due to lack of awareness, financial resources and access to legal services. This situation leads to extreme delays in the dispensation of justice. In January 2025, President Hichilema called for the integration of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in the criminal justice system to expedite the resolution of cases and address the backlog in courts.

Rights of women and girls continued to be restricted, with a high prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence and under-age marriage. Women experienced significant challenges in participation in the political, social and economic spheres. The constitutional review of December 2025 introduced dedicated seats in the national assembly for women, youth and people living with disability. Sexual and reproductive health and rights remained a key issue, reflected in the country's alarmingly high adolescent pregnancy rate. The human rights of LGBTI persons have been highly politicised and, consequently, highly sensitive to address. Consensual same-sex relations continue to be criminalised in the Penal Code. The rights of persons with disabilities remained restricted regarding access to basic social services. The Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities remains insufficiently funded.

In April 2025, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief observed that, while Zambia was celebrated for its openness and social cohesion, freedom of religion or belief remained unevenly applied and narrowly interpreted, resulting in limited protections and risks of indirect discrimination, particularly for minority faith communities.

Corruption remains a structural problem in Zambia that permeates all sectors of society, severely hindering good governance, business environment and citizens' access to services. This includes systemic challenges such as unresolved corruption cases, unfulfilled governance reforms, inadequate

budget allocation to oversight and investigative institutions, and transparency issues in public procurement. Zambia's Corruption Perception Index score decreased by 2 points in 2025, from 39/100 in 2024 to 37/100, and its rank fell by 7 places from 92/180 in 2024 to 99/182 in 2025.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU human rights and democracy policy priorities in Zambia are: the enhancement of good governance practices, including the fight against corruption, improved civic and political rights, and natural resource management; the promotion of a fair, independent and efficient justice system, including the fight against impunity, the right to a fair trial, the rights of persons in detention, and the abolition of the death penalty (completed). In addition, the advancement of women's and girls' rights, including sexual and reproductive health rights and the fight against sexual and gender-based violence; the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights, including for children and their right to good education and good health; and the promotion of an environment of non-discrimination, with a focus on the rights of marginalised groups. Environmental justice, improved management of natural resources, and business and human rights have become increasingly prominent under the implementation of the Global Gateway 360 degrees approach.

EU bilateral political engagement: In 2025, human rights and democracy issues continued to feature prominently in political and policy dialogues with the government, civil society and other key stakeholders. The Zambia-EU Partnership Dialogue took place in April 2025, covering a wide range of bilateral and multilateral issues, including governance, rule of law, human rights and gender equality. The EU also engaged regularly with human rights defenders, civil society actors, media organisations and oversight institutions. The EU Delegation joined several international human rights campaigns.

EU financial engagement: All Global Gateway Flagship initiatives include support to good governance. In addition, the EU and individual Member States continued funding specific actions in support of human rights and democracy. These include: (i) the Enabling Access to Justice, Civil Society Participation and Transparency (EnACT) programme to provide legal aid; (ii) the new democracy support project with the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES) 'Strengthening Democracy and Electoral Governance in Zambia' (PRO DEM Zambia); this 3-year programme with a EUR 5 million budget is intended to support state institutions (ECZ, National Assembly of Zambia, the Judiciary, Human Rights Commission) and civil society actors; (iii) support measures to strengthen the capacity of media and citizens' voices in view of protecting democracy; (iv) support to CSOs through targeted call for proposals; (v) sector-specific programmes supporting private sector development, skills and entrepreneurship, such as ENTERPRISE Zambia 2.0 - Boost Agriculture Market Access Programme in Zambia or Nexus Water Energy Zambia (NEWZA); all of these include strong components on women empowerment, access to services, access to funding and economic opportunities.

Multilateral context: In 2025, Zambia was particularly active in multilateral engagement, notably in the field of UN reform and financing for development. Zambia actively supported the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4), held in Seville in June-July. Zambia also co-hosted several high-level side events at the 80th UNGA Session in New York, including one on operationalising a Non-Creditors' Platform. In addition, Zambia co-organised with Finland the Least Developed Countries Future Forum 2025 in Lusaka in April. In August, Zambia hosted the United Nations NAP Expo 2025, pursuant to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. In October, the Digital Government Africa Summit 2025 was held in Lusaka. In November, Zambia hosted the 2nd

Electoral Integrity Summit in Africa. At the African Union, Zambia continues to champion the campaign to end child marriage.

Republic of Zimbabwe

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the World Justice Project (WJP) ranked Zimbabwe 124th out of 143 countries, highlighting persistent challenges in corruption, fundamental rights, and criminal justice, reflecting ongoing difficulties with the rule of law.

Efforts to consolidate governmental power, such as constitutional amendments extending the Presidential mandate, have led to increased restrictions on opposition parties, civic space, and the media.

The amended Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Act, enacted on 11 April 2025, is considered as disproportionately increasing government control over civil society, limiting freedoms of association and assembly. Disruption of opposition gatherings, and increased surveillance and criminalisation of dissent have further shrunk civic space, fostering self-censorship among journalists. Human rights monitoring organisations continue to report violations, primarily involving security forces and ruling-party militants. Electoral recommendations from the EU Electoral Observation Mission (EOM) and other electoral missions have largely remained unaddressed. Additional concerns include land evictions and environmental damage linked to the mining sector.

Despite these challenges, legislative progress has also occurred. Notable recent advances include the Abolition of the Death Penalty Act (2024) and the Persons with Disabilities Act (2025), the latter aligning with UN standards and providing rights such as free legal aid. The Whistleblowers and Witness Protection Bill was approved by Cabinet in late 2025 and is awaiting parliamentary debate in 2026. Gender equality initiatives include the establishment of a National Gender Machinery and the appointment of Gender Equality Directors in ministries, enhancing engagement with civil society organisations (CSOs). While positive collaboration with women's rights organisations is noted, challenges remain, including sexual violence, limited access to sexual health services, and child marriage. Same-sex consensual acts remain criminalised.

Efforts toward historical reconciliation continued. Community hearings addressing the 1980s Gukurahundi atrocities initiated in August 2024 and continued throughout 2025.

Economically, Zimbabwe faces macroeconomic instability and energy shortages, though signs of stabilisation and growth emerged in 2025, due to tighter monetary policy, improved climatic conditions, and high gold prices. Zimbabwe and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are finalising an agreement to deploy an IMF Staff-Monitored Programme, aimed at supporting macroeconomic reforms.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU and individual EU Member States maintain ongoing engagements with civil society in Zimbabwe, including CSOs promoting fundamental freedoms, and provide support for projects that monitor and document human rights violations, ensure access to legal services, promote gender equality, and strengthen women's economic empowerment. Capacity-building

initiatives have also targeted civic dialogue and local peace structures. The EU also supported the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC).

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU co-chairs, alongside the Ministry of Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, the governance track within the Structured Dialogue on Arrears Clearance and Debt Resolution, a government-led initiative to alleviate Zimbabwe's unsustainable debt. This governance track covers human rights, justice delivery, transparency, anti-corruption, electoral reforms, peace, unity, and reconciliation. Roundtables around these issues have provided platforms for candid discussions among government representatives, the diplomatic community, and civil society, although discussions remain largely technical. The EU has promoted inclusive participation, ensuring that CSOs can actively engage in these dialogues.

EU financial engagement: EU action in Zimbabwe supports civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Funding is directed to a wide range of CSOs working on human rights and democracy, through both bilateral and joint initiatives with individual EU Member States. However, overall donor support for democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe has declined. This reduction, combined with an increasingly restrictive operating environment and intimidation, has severely impacted several CSOs, forcing staff reductions or threatening organisational closure.

Multilateral context: Zimbabwe participates in multilateral organisations such as SADC, the AU, and the UN. From August 2024 to August 2025, Zimbabwe chaired SADC. The country regularly reports on human rights to UN and AU Commissions but has not ratified several key international treaties, including the Convention Against Torture (CAT) and the International Covenant on the Protection of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICPPED).

During the March 2025 review of Zimbabwe's implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the UN Human Rights Committee acknowledged legislative, institutional and policy measures aimed at improving human rights and accountable governance. Positive developments included the abolition of the death penalty (2024), enhanced protections for children, and legislation addressing early marriage, domestic violence, sexual offences, and anti-corruption. Persistent concerns remain regarding impunity, unaddressed post-2018 electoral violence, criminalisation of same-sex relationships, and inadequate safeguards for detainees. Zimbabwe was requested to report back by March 2028 on measures to uphold freedoms of expression and association.

In September 2025, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights observed that, while measures had been taken to protect migrant workers' rights in 2024, improvements were needed regarding domestic application of the Covenant, the effectiveness of the national human rights institution, and the protection of journalists, human rights defenders and trade unionists from threats, harassment and assaults.

Arabian Peninsula

Kingdom of Bahrain

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Bahrain is ruled by a hereditary monarchy. Its bicameral legislature, the National Assembly, consists of the directly elected, 40-seat Council of Representatives and the royal-appointed, 40-seat Consultative 'Shura' Council. Enactment of any legislation requires concurrence by the King, but a veto can be overridden by a 2/3 majority vote of both chambers. Following the previous elections, King Hamad appointed several women and members of minority communities to the '*Shura*' Council. It is a noteworthy development because women, as well as members from the Jewish and Christian minority groups, have difficulties in winning seats at the Council of Representatives. Despite these difficulties, women currently hold 8 seats in the Council of Representatives. Political parties continue to be banned, and political participation takes place within a restricted legal and political framework. Throughout 2025 Bahrain continued to make progress on social and economic rights, and other selected human rights themes, including women's and girls' empowerment, freedom of religion or belief and interfaith dialogue.

Nevertheless, certain human rights practices remained unchanged. Areas of particular concern include the authorities' response to political opposition, restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, treatment of detainees including cases of torture and mistreatment, as well as poor prison conditions. Thirteen prominent human rights defenders and opposition figures have been serving lengthy prison terms since their arrest in 2011 for their roles in pro-democracy demonstrations, with two EU citizens among them. There have been no executions in Bahrain since 2019. However, the death penalty remains a punishment for most serious crimes (premeditated murder), but also for drug-related crimes or sex-related offences if these are leading to murder.

In view of these concerns, the National human rights mechanisms *(*the National Institute for Human Rights, the Ombudsman in the Ministry of the Interior, the Prisoners and Detainees Rights Commission, the Special Investigation Unit and the Office of the Inspector General of the National Intelligence Agency*)* continued to consolidate the promotion and protection of human rights, and awareness raising, while questions regarding their functional independence persist. Their specific activities focused on conducting investigations on complaints of violations, as well as improving prisoners' living conditions, monitoring prisons, detention centres, juvenile care centres, hospitals and psychiatric clinics, assessing the treatment received. Encouraging progress was made with regards to advancing alternative sentencing and open prison conditions.

For the eighth consecutive year, Bahrain ranked in the top tier of the US Department of State's 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report, reflecting the adoption of concrete and effective measures. Bahrain's reform landscape was also marked by the enactment of the 'Press and Electronic Media Law', replacing earlier press legislation. The law constituted a step forward in reforming and modernising media regulation. The law removed custodial sentences for publication-related offences, replacing them with financial penalties. It also expanded administrative powers to suspend media outlets or restrict content on grounds related to national security, public order, or public morals. Nevertheless, criticism remained that it could be used to further restrict online speech and enhance government control over media. Bahrain ranked 157th out of 180 countries in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, a notable improvement compared to 2024's Index where Bahrain ranked 173rd.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU and Member States worked closely throughout 2025 to monitor the human rights situation in the country, including as a follow up to the eighth EU-Bahrain human rights dialogue in December 2024. Areas of close monitoring included human rights practice, justice and accountability, as well as the rule of law. With a focus on protecting and empowering individuals, the EU Delegation engaged with local academia on women's and girls' empowerment. This included organising events intended to support the rights of women and girls, and to advance their active participation in shaping future resilient societies including two flagship events. In 2025, the EU encouraged continued expansion of democratic space and alignment with international standards. The EU encouraged Bahraini authorities to safeguard the freedom of expression, both offline and online, and invited authorities to oppose any legislation prohibiting freedom of expression, as well as to condemn intimidation.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged in periodic bilateral exchanges with the Legal Affairs and Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and with the National Institute for Human Rights. The latter covered human rights-related aspects, with an emphasis on the abolition of the death penalty, ensuring freedom of speech, freedom of association, fair treatment for prisoners and detainees, and improving prison conditions. The EU repeatedly addressed the cases of dual EU citizens imprisoned in Bahrain or convicted by the Bahraini law. Overall, the exchanges revealed progress in the Bahraini approach and action, although some issues persist, including the death penalty, which is strictly regulated by *Sharia* law.

EU financial engagement: Under the FPI-funded project 'Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach', women's and girls' empowerment, as well as freedom of religion and belief, remained key priorities for local outreach and engagement. A 'Women and Society Conference' followed by a launch of the 'Women in Sustainability Toolkit' were organised to promote and consolidate women's and girls' empowerment. On 28-30 October 2025, in Brussels, the EU, together with the King Hamad Global Centre for Coexistence and Tolerance, organised the third edition of the conference on 'Freedom of Religion & Belief: The Practice of Promoting Coexistence' which stood out as a notable success under the project. With opening remarks delivered by the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights, the conference provided a constructive platform for open exchange between the Bahraini authorities and the EU, contributing to strengthening political dialogue on sensitive issues related to coexistence, religious freedoms, and social inclusion.

Multilateral context: In early November 2025, Bahrain underwent, the mid-term review of its implementation of the 2022 UPR recommendations for the 2022-2027 cycle. In this context, the Government of Bahrain reported to the UN Human Rights Council, highlighting progress in selected areas, including women's empowerment, access to education and healthcare, labour protection, freedom of religion or belief, and the functioning of national human rights institutions. At the same time, human rights defenders noted that implementation remained uneven, with limited progress reported in areas related to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, political participation, detention practices and accountability.

Republic of Iraq

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Despite regional tensions and conflicts, Iraq managed to maintain a good level of internal security and stability in 2025. The government continued its reform agenda and made progress in improving service delivery, with positive and tangible impact

on citizens. In November 2025, federal parliamentary elections took place in all of Iraq and the vote proceeded smoothly, and mostly peacefully. Despite some progress, significant human rights challenges persist. The Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights remains dysfunctional, as its Board of Commissioners, which was dissolved in 2021, has not yet been reappointed. CSOs and activists continued to report a restricted civic space, as they are frequently targeted by lawsuits and administrative obstacles, often based on unclear grounds, limiting their ability to operate. Human rights defenders, journalists and activists continued to report both online and physical threats and harassment, both in federal Iraq and in the Kurdistan Region. Iraq ranked 155th out of 180 countries in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, down two places since 2024.

Gender equality remained a concern across Iraq in 2025. The Penal Code continued to enable impunity for male violence against women, as it exempts offenders who commit rape from prosecution, if they marry their victim. Additionally, the Penal Code continued to stipulate that male perpetrators could invoke 'honour'' as a mitigating circumstance for homicide. A long-discussed law on domestic violence has been pending in Parliament for years, without any tangible progress. The amendment to the 1959 Personal Status Law and the adoption of a Shia religious code, to rule on personal status matters, continue to raise serious concerns regarding its impact on women's and girls' rights. Child marriage continues to be widespread in the country. Consenting same-sex sexual acts remain criminalised, and sexual minorities are targets of widespread societal hostility. The legislative framework and negative public attitude towards the topic make it very difficult for local CSO to advocate for LGBTI rights.

The Iraqi Government showed some commitment to increase the rights and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in social and economic life, adopting a new 'National Disability Inclusion Strategy for Children and Young Persons with Disabilities 2026-2030' in December 2025. Despite some progress, persons with disabilities still face significant obstacles to access their rights, including their political rights. The Government of Iraq showed political will to end displacement in the country, with around one million people remaining internally displaced. In 2025, Iraq achieved remarkable progress in the repatriation of its nationals from camps in northeast Syria. However, many returnees, especially single women heading households and their children, face substantial barriers that hinder their reintegration in areas of return. The death penalty continues to be applied, with serious concerns about due process and fair trial guarantees of defendants. In 2025, Iraq featured amongst the top five states worldwide with the highest number of executions.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU´s human rights policy in Iraq focused on strengthening governance and the rule of law, including fair trial, dignified detention conditions, and the abolition of the death penalty, along with advocating for women's and children's rights, gender equality, and rights of minorities. Cooperation programmes supported socioeconomic reforms, including access to quality education. The EU´s human rights policy continued to focus on strengthening democratic institutions and fighting against corruption. The EU supported actions to foster freedom of expression, encouraging political participation, and empowering CSOs. Upon the request of Iraq, the EU supported the democratic process by deploying an Election Expert Mission for technical monitoring of the parliamentary elections in November 2025. The EU consistently advocated for Iraq to adhere to the core tenets of international human rights law, and to comply with international conventions that Iraq has ratified. The EU continued to support actions to build societies' resilience to harmful online content, including disinformation and hate speech, while safeguarding freedom of expression and fostering peace through social media. The European Union Advisory Mission to Iraq continued to work

with the Government of Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government to mainstream human rights principles within the civilian security sector.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged in political dialogue on human rights throughout 2025 with both the Federal Government and the Kurdish Regional Government. Human rights were discussed during the Iraq-EU Cooperation Committee held in Baghdad in September 2025, and during the fourth Iraq-EU Cooperation Council held in Luxembourg, on 19 October 2025. Throughout the year, the EU held regular meetings with CSOs promoting human rights and with human rights defenders across the country.

EU financial engagement: Actions focused on improving detention conditions, including enhancing the treatment of juveniles deprived of their liberty. Projects implemented with local partners continued to provide support to human rights defenders throughout 2025. The EU also funded capacity-building projects for CSOs to foster an environment conducive to active citizenship and political participation, and to support free and fair elections in preparation of the parliamentary elections that took place in November 2025.

In 2025, the EU remained fully committed to strengthening the Government's capacity to guarantee economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to education, through its cooperation portfolio of national reform programmes. The EU continued to reinforce actions mainstreaming the empowerment of women across all programmes. In 2025, the EU continued to fund projects aimed at supporting justice initiatives that combat corruption, public finance management and financial sector reform. In 2025, the EU supported the mainstreaming of human rights within the security sector. The EU also supported reintegration of IDPs and returnees, through projects increasing access to civic documentation, access to basic services for children and national reconciliation.

Multilateral context: Iraq is a state party to eight out of the nine core international human rights treaties, all except the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. Yet it has not implemented all of them, and it maintains significant reservations. In January 2025, Iraq underwent a fourth cycle review by the UPR. It supported 181 out of the 263 recommendations received. Iraq was elected as a member of the UN Human Rights Council for the term 2026–2028. The EU engaged in political dialogue with the Iraqi authorities to discuss mutual human rights priorities in UN fora, including at the UNGA Third Committee.

State of Kuwait

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Kuwait has had an elected Parliament since 1962 and a relatively open political system, rather unique among Gulf countries. However, following a May 2024 royal decree, the Parliament was dissolved, and key elements of the 1962 Constitution were suspended for up to four years. Freedom House has downgraded the country's rating from 'partially free' to 'not free'.

Kuwait accelerated executions with 17 individuals executed in 2025. The recently amended legislation extended the death penalty to drug trafficking related crimes, in contravention of international law. Since 2024, Kuwaiti citizenship was revoked for more than 50 000 individuals. Most affected are divorced, widowed and currently naturalised foreign wives of Kuwaiti men. In 2025, Kuwait witnessed some progress on women's rights. Article 153 of the penal code, on reduced sentences for honour killings, was abolished. In addition, the marriage age was raised to 18 years old. However, Kuwaiti laws continued to restrict women's rights in marriage, divorce, child custody, and nationality. Although a

domestic violence protection law was introduced in 2020, it maintains significant gaps, lacking penalties for domestic violence and excluding various relationship contexts from its protection.

The '*kafala'*(sponsorship) system has not been abolished, thus continuing to raise concerns on the exploitation and abuse of migrant workers, particularly in the case of domestic workers. The UN Human Rights Committee welcomed several measures taken to reduce the control of employers over workers, such as the requirement for employers to transfer wages to employees' bank accounts, and the decision to allow workers to change jobs without the employer's consent under certain conditions.

Kuwait supported recommendations to ensure non-discriminatory access to essential services for its '*Bidoon*' population, while continuing to deny them access to nationality, resulting in their statelessness. The constitution guarantees the right to peaceful assembly, but it prohibits non-citizens and *Bidoons* from holding peaceful gatherings and protests. The negative trend concerning rights of LGBTI persons continued and consensual same-sex sexual acts are still criminalised. Kuwait ranked 128 out of 180 countries in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index. While the Constitution supports free expression, the penal code and cybercrimes law enable the prosecution of those held responsible for criticising the government or Islam.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU took various actions to support human rights and democracy in Kuwait, in line with the five strands of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-27. The EU Delegation organised a networking event with Kuwaiti women activists in March 2025, which coincided with International Women's Day. The EU supported activities to raise awareness about the legal rights of migrant workers, by cooperating with the winner of the 2023 Chaillot Prize, the Kuwaiti Society for Human Rights. The EU worked closely with Member States, likeminded countries and international organisations to encourage further advancement of human rights in the country, mainly in the field of women's empowerment in business and decision-making positions.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU encouraged Kuwait to continue further alignment with international human rights law, particularly with regard to rule of law and civil and political rights, including freedom of expression, assembly and association. The EU continued to call on Kuwait to accelerate the process of ratification of core international human rights covenants.

EU Financial engagement: The EU 'Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach' Facility and the Press and Information funds were utilised to finance human rights related projects.

Multilateral context: In 2025, Kuwait was a member of the UN Human Rights Council, having been elected for the 2024-2026 term. It also underwent the UPR process. Kuwait received 290 recommendations, of which it fully accepted 206, partially accepted 4 and took note of 80. These figures reflect Kuwait's commitment to responding positively to as many actionable recommendations as possible. Its national plans took into account recommendations with respect to developing legislation and institutions, modernising the system for freedom of opinion and expression, combating trafficking in persons and protecting migrant workers, empowering women, promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and advancing economic and social rights, within the framework of Kuwait Vision 2035. It took note of recommendations relating to the constitution and sources of legislation, such as accession to protocols and agreements, particularly with regard to the death penalty, as well as questions relating to nationality insofar as Kuwait considers these fall within the sovereignty of the State.

Sultanate of Oman

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Oman is a hereditary monarchy with limited elected representation and no legal framework for political parties or organised opposition. In 2025, civic space remained restricted, with laws and practices limiting freedoms of expression, association and assembly. The human rights situation remained broadly stable, with limited progress in selected socio-economic areas and an ongoing emphasis on sovereignty and social cohesion.

Oman promulgated a new Anti-Human Trafficking Law, bringing domestic rules closer to international norms and strengthening victim protection and cooperation, and acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Oman also adopted a Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to promote equality, inclusion, accessibility, non-discrimination and full participation in public and economic life. Discriminatory provisions in legislation, notably on inheritance, divorce, child custody and nationality, persisted despite steps to strengthen women's empowerment. The death penalty remained in place for murder and several other offences, including drug trafficking, piracy and treason, with death sentences requiring court unanimity and final approval by the Sultan; no executions were publicly reported in 2025. Freedom of religion or belief is constitutionally protected but faces practical limitations considering societal norms and restrictions affecting minority faith practices. The 2024 Media Law explicitly covers digital media and requires licensing, including for news accounts on social media. Political rights remain the most sensitive area. Media space remains tightly constrained, with reporting largely aligned to official narratives and limited scope for independent scrutiny. Oman nonetheless recorded a modest improvement in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, rising three places to 134th out of 180. Labour and social protection reforms remain central to Vision 2040. Consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised.

EU action - key focus areas: Throughout 2025, the EU closely followed developments in Oman's human rights situation, with particular attention to the death penalty, freedom of expression, women's rights and labour rights. The EU continued to encourage Oman to adopt a moratorium on capital punishment as a step towards abolition. Alongside this, sectoral engagement provided additional channels to pursue rights-related issues in practice, including through the EU-Oman Senior Officials' Meeting in Brussels (6 May 2025) and cooperation on socio-economic governance and implementation. The EU continued to engage with the ILO on opportunities to support further improvements in labour and social rights in Oman. This included support to ILO capacity-building linked to the operationalisation of Oman's Social Protection Law, notably an ILO training workshop hosted in Muscat on monitoring and evaluation of social protection systems.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Delegation maintained regular exchanges with the local EU Presidency and resident EU Heads of Mission, coordinating EU positions on human rights issues and engaging the authorities in Muscat. High-level political contacts continued in 2025, notably through the 5th EU-Oman High-level Political Dialogue in Muscat on 29 May 2025, sustaining a regular channel for exchanges on regional developments and the bilateral agenda

EU financial engagement: Under the EU-funded project on 'Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation, and Outreach', youth empowerment remained a priority. Initiatives focused on inclusive education programmes that promote gender balance and diversity. The EU co-funded the ILO STREAM project on social protection for migrant workers and their families along the South Asia-Gulf corridor.

In Oman, it supported work on legal frameworks and policy dialogue, access to benefits, and cross-border cooperation.

Multilateral context: Oman's engagement in multilateral human rights fora remained cautious but constructive. It continued to cooperate with UN mechanisms and maintained a generally positive record of engagement in the UPR process. Oman accepted over 80% of recommendations from its previous UPR and presented the Fourth National Report at the UN Human Rights Council in late 2025. In October 2025, Oman acceded to the ICCPR. This step commits Oman to uphold internationally agreed standards on civil and political rights and signals a deepening engagement with global human rights norms.

State of Qatar

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Qatar is an absolute monarchy, with the Emir exercising executive authority, supported by the Council of Ministers and a *Shura* Council, whose members are again fully appointed by the Emir following the 2024 constitutional referendum (which passed with 90.6% approval), marking a formal retreat from the limited legislative elections introduced in 2021 and reducing avenues for direct citizen participation, advising on legislation. The newly appointed *Shura* Council includes three females out of 49 members, one more than in the previous session. Qatar continued to advance its reform agenda on human rights. Following the 2024 launch of the Third Strategic Plan 2024-2030 by the National Human Rights Committee, in 2025 Qatar held consultations for its National Human Rights Action Plan for 2026-2030, becoming the second country in the Gulf region to adopt such a framework.

Additional efforts by the authorities towards the dismantling of the most problematic aspects of the '*kafala*' (sponsorship) system contributed to enhance migrants' working conditions. As acknowledged by the ILO, 2025 showed that there is a broad acceptance of the legislation on the minimum wage, on occupational heat stress, and on the removal of exit permits. Despite this progress, implementation gaps persist, especially in relation to instances of employer retaliation against workers attempting to exercise their rights and access to justice, as well as continued request for a 'No-Objection Certificate' to change jobs, although banned by law. However, the number of cases decreased substantially in the last years. The minimum wage has remained stagnant since 2021 despite high living costs, and the penalisation of 'absconding' (leaving an employer without permission) continues to be used by employers as a retaliatory tool.

Qatar continued to enhance women's participation in economic and political arenas. According to 2025 World Bank figures, Qatari women's economic participation is one of the highest in the Arab world, with the labour force participation rate at about 63% of women aged 15 and above. Recent reforms primarily benefit Qatari women and, to some extent, mothers of Qatari children, including reduction of working hours, expanded maternity leaves and a single-person housing allowance. These measures do not benefit expat women. Although Qatar has not yet announced plans to grant full citizenship to the children of Qatari mothers and non-Qatari fathers, these children receive non-expiring Qatari residency identification documents. Over the past four years, Qatar has risen from the 97th to 70th position in Georgetown Institute's Women, Peace and Security index. Yet, the country still faces major challenges in addressing broader gender issues, with cases of women still being subjected to male guardianship laws.

Renewed concerns were raised for freedom of religion or belief during 2025. In a prominent case for the Baha'i community, Remy Rowhani, a Qatari Baha'i dignitary, was sentenced to five years in prison on 13 August for promoting a doctrine or ideology that 'casts doubt on the foundations and teachings of Islam'. However, on 30 September, Qatar's court of appeal reversed Mr Rowhani's conviction, and he was subsequently released. In 2025, Qatar continued its positive trend on the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, climbing five places to 79th out of out of 180 countries. However, broad legal definitions within the Cybercrime Prevention Law and the Penal Code regarding 'violating social values' or 'instigating public opinion' continue to foster a climate of self-censorship, particularly online. Consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised. The death penalty remains legal under Qatari law and is prescribed for a range of offences. Death sentences are rarely imposed and even more rarely carried out.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU Delegation in Doha continued to engage with Qatar on human rights issues, organising events and collaborations with both governmental and non-governmental partners to promote discussions on specific topics including fundamental rights, labour rights, women's rights, the rights of vulnerable groups, and digital rights. For example, on 24 and 25 November the EU Delegation organised the second edition of its European Youth Short Film Festival, with the first day fully dedicated to the theme: 'Women in Focus: Empowerment Through Storytelling'. The EU has also raised thematic and individual cases of concern with the local authorities. During the Qatar Corporate Social Responsibility Summit, held from 28-30 April, the EU Delegation contributed to the organisation of a workshop on 'Maximising Decent Work in Sustainability Strategies: From Planning to Impact,' and facilitated two sessions, one on 'Environmental Due Diligence' and the other on 'Human Rights Due Diligence'. The EU engaged actively with Qatari authorities to promote EU priorities at relevant UN fora, especially at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), where Qatar is a member, as well as during relevant international events. As a follow up to the sixth EU-Qatar Human Rights Dialogue, held on 9 November 2024, the EU Delegation co-organised a workshop on 'Regulatory Frameworks and Practices in the Digital Age: Lessons from Qatar and the EU' in collaboration with the Public Prosecution of Qatar, with support from the Ministry of Interior and participation from EU Member States. The seventh EU-Qatar Human Rights Dialogue took place in Doha in December 2025.

EU bilateral political engagement: The seventh EU-Qatar human rights dialogue, held on in Doha on 4 December, enabled constructive discussions on EU priorities, including women's empowerment, LGBTI rights, the rights of persons with disabilities, labour rights, human trafficking, digital rights, respect of the rule of law, freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief. In line with Qatar's domestic efforts to improve its legislative framework on human rights and strengthen its collaboration with international organisations on this matter, especially the ILO, Qatar displayed a willingness to enhance its human rights record and benefit from the EU's experience.

EU financial engagement: The 'EU Outreach Facility for the Gulf' and the EU's Press and Information budget were utilised to finance human rights-related projects.

Multilateral context: Qatar was re-elected as a member of the HRC for the 2025-2027 period. During the EU-Qatar human rights dialogue, the EU raised the topic of cooperation in United Nations human rights fora, encouraging better coordination on possible thematic alliances. During 2025, Qatar did not enter nor ratify any new UN human rights treaties.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is the de facto ruler, while King Salman holds ultimate authority over the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. The Consultative Council is appointed and advisory only. In 2025, social liberalisation under Vision 2030 continued, including expanded women's rights and growing entertainment options, but strong cultural conservatism and restrictions on political freedoms persist. In January 2025, authorities released several imprisoned activists and dissidents, though many remain subject to long travel bans. Political rights and freedoms of expression remain highly restricted, with no independent media and strict monitoring of journalists. In 2025, Saudi Arabia ranked 162nd out of 180 countries in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index (compared to 168th in 2024). Women's workforce participation rose to 37% in 2025, exceeding the Vision 2030 target. Mixed-gender concerts and sporting events have become common. Consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised.

The death penalty was increasingly used for non-lethal crimes, including drug-related offenses. In 2025, Saudi Arabia carried out at least 356 executions, the highest annual total on record, prompting widespread international concern, particularly in cases involving individuals convicted for offences committed while they were minors. Marginalized groups remained over-represented among those executed.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU Delegation, with Member States and like-minded partners, monitored three trial hearings of women's rights activist Manahel Al-Otaibi. The EU also urged Saudi Arabia to restore the moratorium on drug-related executions and commute death sentences for crimes committed as minors. The EU encouraged continued expansion of civic space and alignment with international standards in Saudi Arabia. The EU urged Saudi Arabia to ratify the pending main UN human rights Conventions such as ICCPR. In 2025, the ILO opened an office in Saudi Arabia to enhance cooperation with the authorities on labour rights. In this context, the EU Delegation met on several occasions with ILO to discuss opportunities to collaborate on the enhancement of labour rights in Saudi Arabia. The EU continued to raise concerns about broad restrictions under Saudi Arabia's Anti-Terrorism and Anti-Cybercrime Laws. In line with the spirit of Team Europe initiatives, MS contributed to events promoting EU human rights priorities locally.

EU bilateral political engagement: On 17 November 2025, the EU and Saudi Arabia held their fifth human rights dialogue in Brussels, co-chaired by the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights and the President of Saudi Arabia's Human Rights Commission. Exchanges on individual cases also took place. Locally, the EU Delegation and Member State Ambassadors regularly raised human rights issues with Saudi interlocutors. In addition, human rights issues concerns, including on individual cases, were regularly raised in contacts with Saudi high officials at all levels. The EU Delegation also awarded the Alwaleed Philanthropies with the 2025 Chaillot Prize, honouring the organisation's work to promote human rights and protect the rights of vulnerable groups.

EU financial engagement: Under the EU funded programme 'Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach', women empowerment and human rights remained one of the priorities. Partnering with the Arab Institute for Women's Empowerment, the EU Delegation launched the 'Saudi Women on Boards' training programme in Riyadh. The programme aims at increasing women's participation and representation in senior decision-making roles. In 2025, the EU co-funded ILO project

STREAM – 'Extending Social Protection to migrant workers and their families in the South Asia-Gulf Corridor' – also began in Saudi Arabia, aimed at strengthening legal frameworks, policy dialogue, access to benefits and cross-border cooperation.

Multilateral context: The fifth EU-Saudi Arabia human rights dialogue in Brussels on 17 November 2025 provided an opportunity to exchange views on international human rights law and cooperation in multilateral fora. Throughout 2025, Saudi Arabia chaired the Commission on the Status of Women, taking a prominent role in shaping discussions on gender equality and women's rights. The UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons visited Saudi Arabia in April 2025, at the invitation of the Saudi Government.

United Arab Emirates

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The UAE is a federation of seven emirates, with Abu Dhabi's ruler serving as President and Dubai's ruler as Prime Minister. The Federal National Council, with 40 members, has limited legislative power. Half of its members are elected, by a restricted electorate and by law, female Members must occupy 50% of the Council's seats.

In 2025, the UAE continued to emphasise progress on women's rights and socio-economic development. Given the country's multicultural concept of tolerance and coexistence, religious and expatriate communities can practice their religion or belief. Recent legislation progressively strengthened women's rights, including protection against sexual harassment, the right to emergency abortion and against domestic violence; it also codified equal pay and conditions in the workplace. The UAE decriminalised consensual relationships outside of marriage and strengthened protection of children born out of wedlock.

On the rights of migrant workers, the '*kafala*' (sponsorship) system remained in place. However, the UAE have made some progress regarding labour standards, notably following the adoption of Federal Law Number 10 of 2017 and the 2022 'domestic workers law' aimed at improving working conditions for domestic workers and protecting them from abuse by guaranteeing the right to retain personal documents and passports. Domestic workers are not covered by the country's unemployment insurance scheme. In January 2025, UAE has expanded mandatory health insurance scheme for all workers in the UAE, including domestic workers. The UAE also continued the Wages Protection System (WPS) which in 2025 covered 98.8% private-sector employees and increased the penalty for private-sector companies that do not comply.

Civil and political rights, as well as political pluralism, continued to be restricted. Although the UAE Constitution formally guarantees free speech, fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression, remained curbed in 2025. The new media regulatory framework, including the Media Law of 2023, the 2025 Media Council resolution and the '20 content standards' approved in 2025, further consolidated the state oversight of the media landscape and digital platforms. Taken together, these instruments expanded the authorities' regulatory and enforcement powers, including the ability to prosecute individuals and/or censor local or foreign media, critical of the ruling families, religion, economy or government policies. Consequently, the UAE ranked 164th out of 180 countries in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, dropping four places compared to the previous years. Nearly all public and on-line spaces remained closely monitored.

Cases of imprisonment of political dissidents and human rights activists continued to be recorded. The 'UAE94' and the 'UAE84' trials have resulted in convictions and long prison sentences for dozens of

activists, lawyers and human rights defenders. Concretely, appeals lodged by several defendants were rejected in March 2025. Cases of torture and other inhuman treatment were also reported by international NGOs. Consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised. The death penalty continued to be prescribed for a range of serious offences, including drug trafficking. In 2025, three Indian nationals were executed on charges of murder.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU contributed to the promotion of human rights by engaging with UAE partners in the following areas: The EU Delegation, in partnership with universities across the UAE, organised six Career Talks focusing on women's empowerment across various sectors, such as technology, aviation, engineering and humanitarian assistance. The EU actively engaged with UAE authorities to promote EU priorities at relevant UN fora, including on the status of women and on human rights priorities ahead of UNGA.

EU bilateral political engagement: The 13th EU-UAE human rights dialogue took place in Abu Dhabi on 17 December 2025. The discussion included freedom of expression and association, rule of law and the death penalty, human rights in the digital sphere, labour rights, women rights and trafficking in persons. The EU encouraged the UAE to continue further alignment of their legislation with international human rights law, particularly in the area of civil and political rights, as well as labour rights.

EU financial engagement: Under EU funded programme 'Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach', the EU Delegation organised events in cooperation with the UAE's civil society and academia. The EU also co-funded the ILO project 'STREAM', which seeks to extend social protection to migrant workers and their families in the South Asia-Gulf Corridor. Concretely in the UAE, the project contributed to strengthening legal frameworks, policy dialogue, access to social protection benefits, and cross-border cooperation.

Multilateral context: The EU and UAE engaged in dialogue and consultation regarding human rights issues in multilateral fora to seek greater convergence of positions. The EU carried out several démarches including the EU's thematic, country and regional priorities at the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly. The UAE did not sign any major international covenants in 2025. The UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls and the Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation, and sexual abuse of children visited the UAE in 2025.

Republic of Yemen

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Yemen further deteriorated in 2025. In the Houthi-controlled areas, repression further increased. Civic space has shrunk to unprecedented levels. In November, the Specialised Criminal Court in Sana'a sentenced 17 defendants to death by firing squad in a public square, on charges described by the group as 'collaborating with the British and American enemy and the Israeli entity,' following a trial that lasted only two weeks.

The Houthis continued their campaign targeting international organisations and NGOs resulting in arrests and seizure of property, impacting the delivery of humanitarian assistance. On 18 December, the Houthis detained 10 additional UN employees, after storming their homes in Sanaa, bringing the total number of UN detained personnel to 69. The situation also worsened in areas controlled by the Government of Yemen. 2025 saw the introduction of Houthi-inspired measures, such as the '*mahram*'

policy (male guardianship) for women and the introduction of very strict requirements for CSO to operate.

Cases of arrests of journalists and persons criticising authorities were documented. Harassment of journalists and media workers by politically affiliated actors persisted. Yemen ranked 154th out of 180 countries in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index (compared to 156th in 2024). In addition, people protesting for better public services were detained, sometimes held incommunicado.

The crisis that took place in the governorate of Hadramawt at the end of 2025 led to further reports of violations of human rights, first and foremost by the Southern Transitional Council. Allegations included village sieges, arbitrary arrests and detentions, summary executions, and displacement linked to military operations.

The situation of marginalised groups, including the '*Muhamasheen'*, religious minorities such as the 'Baha'i, disabled youth and children, migrants and LGBTI, remained a source of concern. They continued to face discrimination in their daily life and significant barriers to employment and livelihood opportunities. Migrant sea crossings continued between the Horn of Africa and Yemen, one of the most dangerous migration routes. African migrants continued to face abuses in Yemen and killings of migrants at the Saudi border were reported.

Although Yemen continues to be ranked as one of the worst countries for women, due to the systemic discrimination and pervasive violence they face, the situation of gender equality suffered additional, major setbacks. 2025 witnessed the first political assassination of a woman in public office in Yemen. Iftihan Al Mashhari, Director of the Cleaning and Improvement Fund in Taiz, held a leadership position and challenged corruption in a sector historically controlled by male patronage networks. She was killed on 18 September. This attack sent a chilling message to other women in Yemen. Consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU closely monitored the impact of armed conflict on civilians and on civil and political rights, including via regular exchanges with the office of OHCHR in Aden. The EU Delegation continued supporting interventions aimed at enhancing individual capacities and integration into daily socio-economic life, for example, providing EUR 1,125,000 through the 'LIFT: Life-changing Interventions for Females to Thrive' project, implemented by Stichting ZOA, which aims at enhancing women's and girls' rights, and facilitating their inclusion at all levels of society. In 2025, the EU Delegation remained committed to streamlining human rights and democracy in all its activities. Additionally, the EU Delegation co-financed EUR 947,608 for an intervention aimed at supporting media and freedom of expression. The project, 'Resilient Media for Democratic Progress in Yemen', is implemented by International Media Support. The EU Delegation co-financed EUR 710,000 for, 'Yemen: Protecting and Expanding Civil Society Space', implemented by OHCHR to enhance the engagement of civil society actors for human rights promotion and greater accountability for violations.

The EU also supported access to new technologies in general, and with a particular attention to the good use of technology for all, and the protection against harassment for the women and girls. It continued supporting the action 'Empowering Yemeni Young Women and Adolescent Girls Through Access to Digital Economy', implemented by Stichting War Child and co-financed by the EU Delegation with EUR 1 million. Its general objective is that by 2027, young women and adolescent girls from Al

Mukalla district are positively and confidently contributing to the digital economy in Yemen and beyond.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Delegation in Yemen continued its engagement with the Government of Yemen and CSOs, having regular exchanges with many of them, including during numerous country visits. To mark the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the EU Delegation launched a campaign to reaffirm its support for the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in Yemen, where women continue to lead peacebuilding and recovery efforts in the face of one of the world's longest and most complex crises. By sharing real stories from Yemeni women, showcasing the impact of EU-funded programmes, and amplifying the EU's policy commitments, the campaign promoted inclusive peace efforts, and gave greater visibility to women leaders and peacebuilders across the country. The EU Delegation also provided political support to EU Member State initiatives in the field of human rights, for example an initiative on transitional justice led by the Netherlands.

EU financial engagement: In preparing for the 2026 human rights and democracy call for proposals the EU Delegation organised consultations with several organisations in May 2025, identifying the most pressing priorities. In October, the EU Delegation partnered with Wahj Hub to finance a documentary on the life of Iftihan Al Mashhari. The documentary includes interviews with family, friends, colleagues, and civil society partners, archival photos, speeches, and footage of her public work, as well as testimonies reflecting her courage, principles, and community impact.

Multilateral context: Yemen remained severely underreported compared to other conflict contexts. There is no Human Rights Council (HRC)-mandated investigative mechanism or Special Rapporteur mandate holder on Yemen. During the 60th session of the HRC, the EU supported the inclusion of an interactive dialogue to be held on the situation in Yemen as well as a mandate to OHCHR to report on the situation of human rights in the country. To this end, the EU conducted targeted outreach. While the EU welcomed the continuation of OHCHR technical assistance, the resolution supporting this remained fundamentally unbalanced and substandard for item 10 resolutions.

Asia

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: More than four years into Taliban rule, Afghanistan's human rights situation remains among the most restrictive worldwide, with governance driven by decrees and informal measures enforced through the Taliban's interpretation of Sharia and uneven local implementation. Afghanistan continues to rank last globally in the Women, Peace and Security Index. The overall human rights trajectory remains downward and marked by exclusion, repression and enforced ideological conformity, disproportionately affecting women and girls, minorities, media actors, political voices, and perceived dissenters.

The ban on girls' education beyond grade six has remained in place for over four years. Additional restrictions are in place to prevent women from pursuing certain careers and attending medical education institutes. According to the Women, Peace and Security Index, average years of schooling for girls have now declined to only 1.2 years. Educational options available to adolescent girls and women are limited to online learning, religious (madrasa) education or private skills courses, all of

which remain constrained in scale, accessibility and geographic coverage. The Taliban have offered no clear or consistent justification for the continued ban on girls' education, variously calling it temporary, cultural, or due to financial constraints or unexplained 'other circumstances'. Meanwhile, improved security has coincided with higher primary-school attendance for girls than before the August 2021 takeover.

Women's participation in the workforce is severely restricted but not entirely prohibited, with notable differences in implementation by local authorities. Some women continue to work in limited public and private roles, including in health and education, as well as in some service-related functions such as airports and public institutions, often subject to local permissions and restrictions. Despite a formal ban on women working for NGOs, reports indicate limited and inconsistent flexibility at the local level. Since September 2025, national female staff employed by the UN have been prevented from accessing UN premises.

The de facto authorities have intensified restrictions on independent media through regulations, controls and enforcement practices that significantly limit freedom of expression and access to information. According to the Afghanistan Journalists Centre, media rights violations–including threats, closures and arrests– increased by approximately 13% in 2025. In 2025, an estimated 470 media outlets remained operational nationwide, operating under significantly constrained conditions. Independent reporting, investigative journalism, foreign broadcasts and cultural programming have been curtailed or suspended. Engagement with foreign or diaspora media has in several cases led to journalists' detention on collaboration charges, often without transparent judicial proceedings. Criticism of the de facto authorities is prohibited, with journalists reporting pressure to produce 'positive' coverage. Censorship has also expanded to print media through a joint ministerial mechanism reviewing and removing publications deemed 'deviant.'

Afghanistan's current governance model is characterised by highly centralised authority and enforced loyalty, leaving little space for pluralism, opposition, or participatory political processes. Political parties and organised political activity have been largely dismantled inside the country. By 2025, political engagement predominantly takes place in the framework of closed-door negotiations, in exile, informal networks, or private settings, while even limited expressions of political opinion inside the country carry risks of surveillance, detention and violence. Cultural identity is increasingly framed through a narrow and very specific religious interpretation, with limited tolerance for ethnic, linguistic or cultural diversity.

Public corporal punishment continues to be regularly reported. In 2025, more than 1,000 individuals, both men and women, were publicly flogged for a range of alleged offences including immoral activity, adultery, theft and drug-related charges, with sentencing left to judicial discretion. 12 public executions have been reported since August 2021, including six in 2025 alone. Credible reporting further indicates the continued occurrence of extrajudicial killings. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continues to monitor and document cases involving killings, torture, and detention of former security officials and personnel associated with the previous government, despite the official amnesty in place.

EU action - key focus areas: In line with the European Council Conclusions adopted in September 2021 and reconfirmed in March 2023, the EU continued to fund projects supporting Afghan human rights defenders and the media in 2025. The promotion and protection of the full enjoyment of rights of women and girls were addressed as both a core focus and a cross-cutting priority across EU funded

projects. Specific initiatives placed women's rights at their centre, with the objective of enabling more Afghan women and girls to live lives free from violence and to improve access to gender-based violence prevention and response services.

EU bilateral political engagement: As the situation in Afghanistan remains fragile, including due to over 2 million forced returns of Afghans mainly from Iran and Pakistan in 2025, the EU continues to apply its policy of non-recognition of the Taliban de facto authorities, consistent with the approach of its international partners. The EU Delegation in Kabul ensures the EU's sole presence on behalf of its Member States. In accordance with the 2021 and 2023 Council Conclusions, the EU in Afghanistan engages with the de facto authorities to address issues of concern, in particular human rights. In particular, the EU uses its presence in Kabul to facilitate outreach to women. Moreover, the EU Special Envoy for Afghanistan visits the country regularly and engages with Afghan civil society organisations both inside Afghanistan and in the diaspora, consistently raising the issue of human rights, particularly women's and girls', in public statements and in interactions with the de facto authorities.

EU financial engagement: Since August 2021, the EU has provided EUR 1.9 billion in humanitarian, basic needs and livelihoods support through a nexus approach via the UN, humanitarian partners and CSOs. Assistance is delivered through meaningful participation of women with a 'by-women-for-women' and 'do-no-harm' approach. In 2025, the EU allocated EUR 181 million for humanitarian aid, EUR 83 million for resilience building and EUR 38.5 million to address large-scale returns from Pakistan and Iran.

Multilateral context: The EU continued to support UNAMA, the UN-led Doha process and the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan, which was renewed for one year in October 2025. At the same time, the Human Rights Council approved unanimously a new independent, non-time-limited investigative mechanism to collect, preserve and prepare evidence of serious violations in Afghanistan, covering acts by the Taliban, Republic-era forces and international troops. The EU acted as penholder for the resolution.

People's Republic of Bangladesh

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Following the July/August 2024 popular uprising, Bangladesh has experienced significant political change and embarked on an ambitious reform process, which has led to improvements in the human rights situation. The interim government presented a new draft National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Ordinance in September, to enhance the NHRC's independence, inclusivity, and accountability, aligning its mandate with the Paris Principles. Furthermore, the interim government adopted a heavily revised Labour Act in November, significantly enhancing labour rights and freedom of association. These reforms remain subject to approval by the incoming Parliament. There has not been any progress yet on the long-awaited Anti-Discrimination Act. According to the CIVICUS Monitor, civic space in Bangladesh remained classified as 'obstructed' in 2025.

2025 was a year of continuing political transition and change. Some restrictions of the political and civic space continued in 2025 in spite of the improved situation overall. Several artists and activists from religious minorities were arrested on blasphemy-related charges. Media freedom improved under the interim government, but some concerns remained. Criticism of certain groups, including the student movement, Islamist organisations and the army, was discouraged or met with demonstrations

that had a chilling effect on freedom of expression. In some cases, the revised Anti-Terrorism legislation was used, as was the case for the temporary ban of activities by the Bangladesh Awami League (AL) – the country's former ruling. AL's registration was also suspended and barred from participating in the February 2026 elections. Thousands of AL supporters are believed to have been arrested over the past year, but the exact numbers are unknown. In certain cases, members of the former ruling party and persons deemed sympathetic to its cause, including several journalists and minority representatives, have faced judicial harassment, arbitrary detentions, denial of bail, mob violence, and other violations of their rights. Following the fatal shooting of a student leader in December, two leading media organisations were attacked by a mob, setting their offices ablaze, due to their alleged 'pro-Indian' views and perceived sympathy for the former ruling party.

Longstanding human rights issues are the criminalisation of same-sex sexual activity (LGBTI rights), as well as the discrimination of Indigenous Peoples and marginalised groups such as Dalits. The challenging humanitarian situation in the Rohingya refugee camps also persisted.

Women's rights have come under pressure due to deficiencies in law enforcement and greater influence of religious conservative groups after the 2024 popular uprising.

Bangladesh retains the death penalty, but no executions were carried out in 2025. However, new legislation on enforced disappearances and human trafficking introduced the death penalty for certain offences. Former Prime Minister Hasina and former Home Minister Khan were sentenced to death in absentia by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), a Bangladesh Court originally created to deal with events linked to the 1971 War of Independence. The criminal proceedings before the ICT, which did not fully meet international standards, highlighted a broader concern: despite several positive reforms to increase the independence of the judiciary, the criminal justice system continued to face due process concerns.

EU action - key focus areas: Throughout 2025, the EU continued to play an active role in promoting and defending human rights in Bangladesh by engaging in a range of diplomatic and public initiatives. The EU continued to support human rights defenders at risk, including through the ProtectDefenders.eu mechanism. The EU continued to promote digital rights. Public diplomacy and partner exchanges on press freedom and information integrity also continued in 2025.

EU bilateral political engagement: In 2025, the EU continued to engage with Bangladesh and the interim government on human rights on all levels. The EU Delegation undertook extensive outreach with the interim government, as well as employers' and workers' representatives, to encourage amendments to the labour law. The political transition continued to dominate the political scene as did the next parliamentary election and the referendum on reforms which were scheduled for February 2026. In December 2025, an EU Election Observation Mission was deployed to Bangladesh to observe the February 2026 parliamentary elections. The negotiations on a new Partnership and Cooperation agreement between the EU and Bangladesh continued. In September 2025, a delegation of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights visited Bangladesh.

EU financial engagement: Throughout 2025, the EU intensified engagement with the Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC), political stakeholders and civil society as the country moved towards national elections in early 2026. In August 2025, the EU announced an assistance package of over EUR 4 million to support election preparations in line with international standards. A Team Europe Initiative

on Decent Work, a joint programme (EUR 23 million) co-funded by the EU, DK, NL and SE, was officially launched in June 2024, and the implementation of it continued in 2025. Under the EUR 10 million Financing Agreement between the EU and the Government of Bangladesh, two complementary initiatives are being implemented, aiming to end sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in public spaces, workplaces and tertiary educational institutions. Also supported was the right to education for all primary school aged children in 2025 and the right to a healthy environment

Multilateral context: Bangladesh concluded its three-year membership of the UN Human Rights Council in December 2025 and continued to engage with the EU on various thematic and country-specific resolutions, including on Myanmar in the UN General Assembly and UN Human Rights Council. Bangladesh acceded to the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) and signed an Memoradum of Understanding with the OHCHR to establish a country office in Dhaka in July. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited Bangladesh in March. UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, visited Bangladesh in August. In November, Bangladesh ratified ILO conventions 155, 187, and 190.

Kingdom of Bhutan

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Bhutan continues to face some challenges especially regarding civic space, the protection of media pluralism, the advancement of gender equality and the rights of some minorities. However, Bhutan has made significant efforts in formulating policies and regulations to promote gender equality and improve women's sexual and reproductive health. Bhutan also continues to make important progress in reducing maternal and infant mortality and expanding education. When it comes to the representation of women in politics currently only two women are represented in Parliament, illustrating the need for further steps to encourage women's participation in the political domain. Women are also underrepresented in the business sector, particularly in medium and large enterprises. The Royal Civil Service Commission recently reported a decline in the share of female civil servants, especially in the highest ranks. Bhutan ranked 119th in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index of 2025, improving from 124 out of 146 countries in 2024. Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a serious concern for the Bhutanese authorities, who in 2025 put forward a National Strategy built on four pillars: Response, Prevention, Enabling Environment, and Data and Evidence and a Framework to eliminate GBV. Bhutan has recognised LGBTI rights and decriminalised same-sex relations in 2020. Buddhism is central to the cultural and political identity of the Kingdom and in practice is akin to the State's religion. The Constitution recognises Buddhism as the state's 'spiritual heritage', acknowledges freedom of religion and bans any form of discrimination based on religious belief.

The state of Bhutan's media freedom remains a concern. Bhutan was ranked 152nd out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' 2025 World Press Freedom Index. Factors include the financial struggle of independent/private media, access to public information, and self-censorship out of fear for reprisal, legal consequences or management pressure. Following Reporters Without Borders' call to improve media freedoms in Bhutan, the Royal Government recently appointed media spokespersons in each Ministry. Another recommendation included the establishment of a Media Endowment Fund to support independent journalism.

The situation of some minorities remains a concern, particularly that of the Nepali-speaking community known as '*Lhotshampas*' ('people of the south'), many of whom continue to reside in Nepali refugee camps without a clear legal status. Concerns also persist regarding an estimated 30 members of the Lhotshampa minority who reportedly remain detained in Bhutan since the 1990s for having participated in protests advocating democratic rights and minority recognition.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU is the main donor for CSO support in the country. In terms of capacity-building of CSOs in Bhutan, 5 projects are ongoing and collaborate with the two Chambers of Parliament (for a total amount of EUR 3.5 million). EU-supported projects also contribute to strengthening media capacities.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU and Bhutan do not have a dedicated Human Rights Dialogue. However, human rights issues feature prominently in the EU-Bhutan Annual Consultations, which cover the full range of EU-Bhutan relations. The most recent consultations took place in Thimphu in April 2025. The EU and Bhutan enjoy a very constructive and dynamic diplomatic relationship, characterised by frequent official contacts. The Prime Minister of Bhutan visited Brussels in January 2025 and met with senior representatives of the EU institutions. In October 2025, the 8th EU-Bhutan Inter-Parliamentary Dialogue took place in Brussels, with the participation of the Speaker of the Bhutanese Parliament and other Bhutanese parliamentarians.

EU financial engagement: The project entitled 'Strengthening people-centric and inclusive access to justice in Bhutan', funded under the Human Rights and Democracy thematic programme (EUR 1 million), implemented by UNDP, began in January 2025. It has already significantly improved coordination among the justice sector agencies in Bhutan and successfully developed a blueprint to integrate digital case management across eleven justice sector agencies. The project is also contributing directly to Bhutan's international human rights commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) through legislative alignment, reporting, disability audits and capacity building and tangible budgetary allocations by local governments for disability-inclusive infrastructure. In addition, five ongoing CSO projects focussing on building capacities of CSOs, parliamentarians, and media for rights-based governance, inclusive development and participation in policy-making are being implemented with a total budget of EUR 3.5 million.

Multilateral context: Bhutan has ratified three out of the nine international human rights conventions: CEDAW, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) along with two of its optional protocols, and the CRPD. In 2023, Bhutan acceded to the Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (TOC) and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. Bhutan is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) or other UN human rights treaties. It is not a member of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Brunei Darussalam

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Freedom of religion or belief remains limited, with Shafi'i Islam as the official religion, and restrictions to the practice of other religions (or other Islamic theologies). Whereas proselytising to Islam is encouraged and supported, it is forbidden to convert to non-Islamic faiths (apostasy), which is punishable by death under the Sharia Penal Code

(SPC). New places of worship other than Islamic ones are not registered, and the renovation of existing ones face nearly insurmountable hurdles.

Since the entry into force of the Sharia Penal Code (SPC) in 2019, Brunei has had a dual criminal law system based on the Common Law (Penal Code of 1951) and Sharia Law. Whereas the SPC foresees capital punishment or corporal punishment for crimes such as adultery, extramarital sex or LGBTI relations, the Common Law allows for extenuating circumstances for women, men over 50, ill people and persons sentenced to death. In practice, no amputation for theft has been reported, and whereas the whipping of men is enforced on a regular basis, no women are whipped. While both the Common Law and the SPC contain death penalty provisions, Brunei remains a de facto abolitionist country. No executions to have been reported since 1996. A moratorium on the use of the death penalty has been in place since May 2019, when the Sultan extended the de facto moratorium that already existed in the Common Law to the one under the SPC.

Any analysis of human rights issues including civil and political rights is hampered by the lack of reliable data and the absence of a national human rights institute. The last democratic elections were in 1965. Elections are held at the village-level, where only men can be elected. The Legislative Council comprises solely appointed or ex-officio members with a consultative role, since legislative powers were transferred in full to the Sultan in 1984. The latter serves as the Head of State, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Finance and Defence. The country of 455,858 inhabitants has been under a state of emergency since 1962, which restricts freedoms of assembly and expression, while granting the Sultan the right to pass legislation without review. Brunei has no political opposition, and its civic space is limited. While no evidence has been found of the existence of political prisoners, 'administrative detention' without trial or charge does occur.

Brunei is ranked 97th out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index 2025 (vs. 117 in 2024). National legislation restricts press freedom and silences criticism of the Sultan, the Government and the country's official religion. The largest media are state-run. While authorities monitor online speech, Brunei has an active online community. There are restrictions to freedom of association (e.g. the activities of non-governmental organisations can be suspended at any time for any reason), and freedom of assembly (e.g. strikes are illegal). According to the Freedom in the World Index 2025, Brunei scored 27 out of 100 (down from 28 in 2024) – i.e. 'not free'.

Brunei has several laws in place to fight trafficking in human beings (e.g. the Women and Girl Protection Act, the 2019 Prevention of People Smuggling Order and the 2019 Anti-Trafficking in Person Order). It ratified the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons in January 2020, adopted a National Action Plan and created an inter-agency anti-trafficking committee. The enforcement of regulations continues to be a challenge. In 2024, the U.S. State Department's Trafficking in Persons Report maintained Brunei at Tier 3 (out of 3), citing reduced efforts to identify and protect trafficking victims and failure to appropriately address many trafficking cases.

In March 2023, the Government announced the drafting of the country's first-ever National Action Plan (NAP) on Women. At the time of writing, the NAP has not been released yet. Other challenges remain. Brunei's Islamic Law tends to disadvantage women in areas such as divorce and child custody. The SPC criminalises 'indecent behaviour' and makes abortion a capital offence. Bruneian legislation denies women the right to confer their nationality to their children. Citizenship is derived through descent, and that is the father's prerogative only. There are an estimated 20,000 stateless persons,

categorised into stateless permanent residents and stateless persons without legal status, with varying degrees of rights and benefits. The number of citizenships granted has increased over the last years with 2,748 citizenships granted in 2023 and nearly 1,000 in April 2024. In 2024, the government updated permanent resident application guidelines, including adjustments to marriage duration and age restrictions.

EU action - key focus areas: There is no structured dialogue on human rights with Brunei. In July 2025, the EEAS Deputy Managing Director of the Asia and Pacific Department and the Indo-Pacific Special Envoy, accompanied by the EU Ambassador and EEAS officials, visited Brunei to discuss the resumption of negotiations for a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), trade cooperation, and regional affairs. The EU Delegation visited again on 8-9 December 2025 and met with a wide range of interlocutors, in line with Brunei's role as EU Country Coordinator within ASEAN (2024-2027).

EU bilateral political engagement: Bilateral relations are limited given that the negotiations for a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) remain on hold. The EU Delegation located in Jakarta continues to follow developments on the ground, in close cooperation with the two EU Member States who have in-country missions (France and Germany). Public diplomacy activities in six thematic areas have been carried out under the EU-Brunei Partnership Facility, which was renewed in 2025 for an additional three years (2025-2028) as the EU's main instrument to maintain visibility and policy engagement with Brunei. In 2025, a number of public diplomacy activities in the realms of higher education and the energy transition were carried out under the EU-Brunei Partnership Facility (2023-2024, renewed until 2025).

Multilateral context: Brunei has ratified several key human rights conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Even though in 2019 the Sultan had publicly committed to ratifying the Convention against Torture (UNCAT), Brunei had not yet done so at the end of 2024. In 2023, Brunei ratified the ILO Forced Labour Convention. Ahead of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Brunei submitted 5 pledges on human rights protection and promotion. In November 2024, Brunei underwent its Universal Periodic Review (UPR). During the March 2025 adoption session, Brunei rejected recommendations to ratify the ICCPR, establish an independent national human rights institution, and adopt legislation protecting freedom of expression, assembly, and association. The government accepted 159 other recommendations, primarily in areas such as women's rights, children's rights, and disability rights.

Kingdom of Cambodia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2025 marked the second year of ruling for Prime Minister Hun Manet, after succeeding Hun Sen – his father – who held the position for nearly 40 years. As underlined by the 2025 UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, harassment continues against journalists, members of the opposition and of non-governmental organisations critical towards the authorities, with dozens of political dissidents, human rights and environmental activists being detained, prosecuted and/or imprisoned.

Crackdown on political opponents has in fact intensified. Cambodia ranked third to last out of 143 countries on the 2025 World Justice Project Rule of Law Index. In January 2025, Lim Kimya – a Franco-

Cambodian opposition politician – was assassinated in Bangkok and the Cambodian authorities refused to locate and extradite two suspects. Five months later, Rong Chhun – senior adviser to the opposition Nation Power Party (NPP) and prominent labour activist – was sentenced to four years of prison on charges of incitement to disturb social security and was permanently stripped of his rights to vote and stand for election. His incarceration followed the imprisonment of Sun Chanthy – former NPP's President – in 2024. The government's crackdown on political opponents continued with the approval, in July 2025, of a constitutional amendment allowing authorities to strip citizenship from individuals accused of 'betraying the nation'.

Regarding media freedom, 2025 saw further deterioration in journalists' working conditions and safety. Cambodia ranked lower in the World Press Freedom Index, published by Reporters without Borders, ranking 161st of 180 countries in 2025, compared to 151 in 2024 and 147 in 2023. In November 2025, the Ministry of Information issued a decree creating a centralised licensing framework to manage entry into the profession. Instead of going through the civil process outlined in the Press Law, journalists increasingly faced criminal charges for offenses such as incitement and defamation. In 2025, independent media reported dozens of cases of harassment towards journalists, including legal action, intimidation as well as physical assaults. Five media licenses were also revoked in the same period. Perpetrators ranged from local, provincial and national-level authorities. Arbitrary arrests targeting journalists also intensified. In May 2025, environmental journalist Ouk Mao was arrested for his reporting on illegal logging and deforestation in the Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary, facing charges of incitement and public defamation. The outbreak of the border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia has also coincided with a marked increase in pressure on journalists, with two arrested for reporting on the border conflict.

Cambodia is a global hub for scamming operations where cybercrime and human trafficking take place at an industrial scale. Weak law enforcement resulted in Cambodia being ranked at the lowest tier in the latest US Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. A US-funded report from May 2025 estimated that scamming activities in Cambodia generate between USD 12.5 and USD 19 billion annually, equivalent to as much as 60% of GDP and that over 150,000 people are active in the scam industry. The US and UK have imposed coordinated sanctions on Cambodia-linked scam networks, particularly targeting the Prince Group and its chairman Chen Zhi, accusing them of operating large-scale 'scam centres' in Cambodia and across Southeast Asia. Although Cambodia established a dedicated task force to combat scamming operations and has intensified its crackdown on scam centres since July 2025, there is currently little evidence of a sustained and sincere change in the lax enforcement as scam operations continue to adapt their strategies and diversify their methods.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2020, the EU temporarily and partially withdrew the tariff preferences granted to Cambodia under the EU's 'Everything But Arms' trade scheme due to serious and systematic violations of human rights enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). This decision remained in place in 2025. On 13 November 2025, the European Parliament identified Cambodia as a perpetrator of transnational repression in its resolution on 'addressing transnational repression of human rights defenders'. In line with the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027, EU activities focused on the protection and empowerment of individuals, notably in the context of political and civil rights. The EU Delegation and EU Member States continued to engage with the Government and with diverse civil society actors, and monitored a significant number of court hearings of human rights defenders, politicians and activists.

In July 2025, as part of a response to the negative trends faced by Human Rights Organisations combined with the USAID stop funding order, the EU decided to provide direct support to a group of 9 CSOs. Separately, in response to the border conflict with Thailand, the EU provided €700,000 in emergency humanitarian funding to support displaced people.

EU bilateral political engagement: In 2025, high-level political contacts between Cambodia and the EU continued. European Council President António Costa met PM Hun Manet in June 2025, and HRVP Kallas met Deputy PM Sok Chenda Sophea in October 2025. On both occasions, the EU passed messages of concern on human rights. The EU Delegation maintained contacts with a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including political parties, NGOs, CSOs, the business sector and trade unions. The EU also published a statement related to the clashes on the Cambodian-Thailand conflict. In December 2025, HRVP Kallas had phone calls with Foreign Ministers of Cambodia and Thailand and offered the EU's support to the ceasefire.

EU financial engagement: The EU continued to support human rights and democracy in Cambodia through its cooperation instruments by applying a rights-based approach and mainstreaming human rights through all priority areas of intervention. In 2025, the EU managed 22 grants addressing a broad range of human rights issues including freedom of expression, labour rights and decent work, protection of land ownership and the traditional rights of forest and fishing communities, and in support of farmers' organisations and networks of CSOs, and support to human rights defenders. The EU also provided humanitarian aid for civilians affected by conflict at Cambodia-Thailand border. Support to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is ongoing.

Multilateral context: During 2025, the EU continued to underline its key concerns at the UN Human Rights Council including through EU statements and participation in the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia on 3 October 2025.

People's Republic of China

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the human rights situation in China did not show any meaningful signs of systemic improvement, including regarding its obligations under international and national law to respect, protect and fulfil human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. Pervasive surveillance and control measures continued to affect civil society and citizens. Criminal law provisions continued to be used to limit and punish the exercise of freedom of expression and association. Instances of transnational repression targeting activists and Chinese diaspora communities abroad (including through surveillance, intimidation and threats against family members) were increasingly reported during 2025. Restrictions on freedom of religion or belief further tightened in 2025 with increasing sensitivity surrounding religious activity conducted through digital platforms. During the year, independent reporting and documentation of sensitive issues continued to be banned or punished. According to the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index 2025, China ranked 92nd out of 143 countries.

Despite China's ratification of ILO conventions on forced labour in 2022, reporting about state-imposed forced labour and labour transfer schemes in Xinjiang and Tibet continued. These reports refer also to broader patterns of coercive governance and restrictions on fundamental rights. In Tibet, the protection of cultural and linguistic rights and the preservation of identity continued to deteriorate, with boarding school policies raising concerns regarding their compatibility with international human

rights standards. In parallel, large-scale infrastructure and hydropower planning continued to raise concerns regarding impacts on local communities and cultural and environmental assets.

The death penalty continued to be applied in a non-transparent manner, while fair trial guarantees and protection from torture and other ill-treatment remained inadequate.

EU action - key focus areas: The European Council conclusions on China (30 June 2023), confirming that the EU remains firmly committed to the promotion of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in China, remained valid. In 2025, most of the EU's actions were strongly focused on the protection and empowerment of individuals. In 2025, the EU continued to regularly address, bilaterally with the Chinese authorities, through public communications and within relevant UN fora, individual cases involving human rights defenders (HRDs) and journalists. Through EEAS spokesperson statements, EU Delegation communications and in the UN Human Rights Council, the EU drew attention to emblematic cases, relevant anniversaries and called for the unconditional release of detained HRDs who were merely exercising their fundamental freedoms. EU diplomats in China continued efforts to monitor relevant court proceedings, but access remained restricted.

The EU Delegation in China and EU Member States marked key international human rights days as anchor points for public outreach and strategic communication to highlight EU priorities, to maintain public attention on sensitive issues and to signal sustained engagements despite operational constraints. The diversity week 2025 was a particularly creative and meaningful endeavour supporting LGBTI rights in a restrictive environment, in a Team Europe approach. It focused specifically on resilience, visibility and solidarity.

On Human Rights Day in December 2025, the EU Delegation issued a comprehensive statement reiterating its concerns regarding the human rights situation in China and released a video. On International Woman's Day, and in the context of the Beijing+30 anniversary, the EU Delegation organised several events together with Member States. Other activities focused on World Press Freedom Day or internet freedom.

The listings under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, including the China-related listings linked to serious human rights violations and abuses in Xinjiang, were prolonged as part of the EU's annual rollover of the regime's listings on 4 December 2025, extending them until 8 December 2026.

EU bilateral political engagement: The 40th session of the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue was held in Brussels in June and was preceded by a field visit to South Tyrol in Italy, which provided an opportunity for open exchanges on the protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities and the preservation of cultural identity, including through multilingual education. The dialogue focused on recent human rights developments, with the EU reiterating serious concerns about restrictions on fundamental freedoms, rule of law and due process, labour and minority rights, transparency of the death penalty, and transnational repression while raising emblematic individual cases and urging greater compliance with international obligations, and both sides agreeing to continue dialogue. Human rights were regularly raised, at different levels, in bilateral engagements with Chinese authorities.

EU financial engagement: The EU continued to implement several projects on human rights in China, while taking into account the growing restrictions affecting foreign-funded civil society activities. The

projects continued to focus on a wide array of social topics, including death penalty, the rights of women and LGBTI persons, child sexual abuse, the situation of migrant workers, as well as enhancing access to justice for persons with disabilities and victims of domestic violence, and supporting the rule of law. Other projects funded by the EU included for example 'Effective Multilateralism in China towards Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals' to strengthen effective multilateral cooperation and strengthening the application of international norms, standards and best practices.

Multilateral context: Multilateral engagement remained a central pillar of the EU's human rights and democracy engagement with China in 2025. The EU and its Member States continued to use multilateral fora to raise concerns, defend international human rights law, norms and standards, and counter efforts to dilute the universality and integrity of the international human rights framework.

In January 2025, in its Council Conclusions on EU Priorities in UN Human Rights Fora and in September 2025 in its Item 4 statement at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC60), the EU again urged China to comply with its national and international obligations. In October, the EU delivered its omnibus statement on the human rights situation and reiterated its concerns about China raised at the UN Human Rights Council, calling on China to fulfil its international obligations.

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Since the imposition of the National Security Law (NSL) in June 2020, the political and human rights situation in Hong Kong has deteriorated drastically. At least 365 people have been arrested under the NSL and other national security legislation. Most independent media outlets were forced to close and many civil society organisations disbanded. Extensive changes to electoral laws have made it de facto impossible for pro-democracy groups to contest elections. According to Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index 2025, Hong Kong ranked 140th out of 180 countries, reflecting the continued deterioration of media freedom since the introduction of the National Security Law. These developments have severely undermined Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong, which were supposed to be guaranteed until at least 2047.

This trend continued in 2025: the government adopted subsidiary legislation introducing five additional offences related to the work of the Office for Safeguarding National Security, an authority created by the 2020 National Security Law directly answering to the Central Government. Trials brought against pro-democracy activists, advocates and politicians included that of media entrepreneur and pro-democracy advocate Jimmy Lai, who was convicted on national security and sedition charges on 15 December 2025. Prominent activist Joshua Wong was newly charged with conspiring to collude with foreign forces" under the NSL while serving a jail term of 4 years and 8 months. Appeal hearings involving 13 of the 47 pro-democracy activists commonly referred to as the Hong Kong 47 took place in July. 2025 also saw the first extraterritorial application of the NSL involving an EU citizen. In July, the Hong Kong government issued arrest warrants with bounties against 15 overseas activists, including a Swedish national residing in Germany.

In the run-up to the Legislative Council election on 7 December, several incumbent lawmakers aged over 70 and/or considered as too critical did not seek re-election, reportedly under pressure from Beijing. The Democratic Party, once the largest pro-democracy political group in the Legislative Council, and the League of Social Democrats, disbanded under heavy political pressure. Several civil society

groups disbanded, including the Hong Kong Unison, China Labour Bulletin, the Riders' Rights Concern Group and the Society for Protection of the Harbour.

2025 saw a mixed picture on LGBTI rights: On 10 September, the Legislative Council voted down the Same-sex Relationships Bill that would have established an alternative framework recognising homosexual partnerships. On the other hand, the Hong Kong judiciary issued several rulings that helped advance equal treatment for LGBTI persons. Some community events, such as the Rainbow Festival and Pride Bazaar, took place although organisers faced restrictions in some cases. Other community events, such as the large-scale Pink Dot event, did not take place due to political pressure.

In sum, in 2025 pressures continued on Hong Kong's autonomy under the 'One Country Two Systems' principle and on the fundamental freedoms guaranteed under the Hong Kong Basic Law, in accordance with international legal obligations by the Hong Kong SAR and the People's Republic of China.

EU action - key focus areas: In line with the 2020 Council Conclusions on Hong Kong, the EU Office and EU Member States regularly observed national security trials and continued to monitor developments affecting fundamental rights and freedoms. In September 2025, the European Commission and the High Representative published the 27th annual report on developments in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

The EU Office also supported initiatives promoting equality and non-discrimination, including events related to the rights of LGBTI persons and gender equality. Public diplomacy efforts included activities marking International Women's Day and support for civil society initiatives.

Throughout 2025, the EU publicly expressed concerns regarding the narrowing of civic space and the continued erosion of rights and freedoms in Hong Kong, including through statements on the fifth anniversary of the National Security Law, the issuance of extraterritorial arrest warrants involving an EU citizen, and the verdict in the Jimmy Lai case.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Office continued to hold regular meetings with the Hong Kong authorities, including the Chief Executive, during which it conveyed concerns about the deterioration of democracy and human rights in Hong Kong and the implementation of the national security legislation. The EU Office was also in regular contact with the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China. The EU raised its concerns about the erosion of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong during the 40th EU-China Human Rights Dialogue in June 2025.

EU financial engagement: The EU Office maintained regular contacts with civil society groups working on a range of topics. The EU continued to explore pragmatic ways to enhance its engagement and support for civil society, in line with the 2020 Council Conclusions, and considering practical limitations on the ground.

Multilateral context: The EU expressed its concerns about the erosion of democracy and fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong in the Item 4 statement on situations that require the Human Rights Council's attention. During the UN General Assembly, the EU underlined its concerns about developments in Hong Kong in the Omnibus Statement read at the Third Committee.

Macao Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Macao is a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, a status that implies a high degree of autonomy under the principle of 'one country, two systems'. However, an ongoing focus on 'patriotism' and on national security since 2019 has further eroded fundamental freedoms and narrowed the limited space for political pluralism.

2025 saw the arrest of pro-democracy lawmaker Sunny Au for allegedly 'colluding with foreign forces' in the first-ever application of Macao's national security legislation since it came into force in 2009. Sunny Au has since been held in pre-trial detention. In the run-up to the Legislative Assembly on 14 September, the Electoral Affairs Commission disqualified twelve candidates, including a then incumbent lawmaker, for failing to uphold the Basic Law and bear allegiance to the Macao SAR. The Chair of the Commission explained that the disqualification decision was made based on 'review opinions' from the city's national security committee, which includes mainland officials from the Central Government Liaison Office in Macao. The labour rights group Macau People Power cancelled a planned Labour Day demonstration due to 'pressure' from the police. Independent media outlet 'All About Macau' announced the cessation of its operations amid 'increasing pressure and risk' and criminal investigations against three of its reporters. Some space for advocacy to advance LGBTI rights remains: the 3rd Macao International Queer Film Festival took place between 30 May and 21 June.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued monitoring signs of closing civic space and democratic backsliding, in close contact with the Consulate General of Portugal, based in Macao. In July and November, the EU Office organised two field trips to foster exchanges with political and civil society stakeholders in Macao and to raise human rights concerns with local officials.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Office maintains regular dialogue with the Macao Government and the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC in Macao. The Head of Office met with the new Chief Executive, Sam Hou Fai, who was sworn in in December 2024, in June 2025. Macao's Secretary for Economy and Finance, Tai Kin Ip, visited Brussels in March and met with European Commission and EEAS officials.

EU financial engagement: There was no EU financial engagement in Macao.

Multilateral context: Macao is a party to international treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) but generally plays a very limited role in multilateral fora. In February, the Central and Macao Governments submitted their regular report to the UN Committee Against Torture with a six-year delay.

Taiwan

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Taiwan is a democracy with a system of governance based on the rule of law and respect of fundamental freedoms. The human rights situation is one of the most advanced in Asia. In terms of LGBTI rights, Taiwan is considered a pioneer in the region, being the first in Asia to legalise same-sex marriage in 2019. Protections for civil liberties are generally robust. Elections and referenda are held in a fair and transparent manner, with the most recent presidential and legislative elections held on 13 January 2024. Some issues of concern remain, such as the slow progress towards the abolition of the death penalty, underscored by the execution

carried out in 2025, and the lack of a transparent legal framework for refugees as well as poor working conditions of migrant workers – including migrant fishers, factory and women care workers. Migrant offshore fishermen and domestic workers are not protected under the Labour Standard Act. While some improvements have been made under the Action Plan for Fisheries and Human Rights, discrimination and debt bondage remain common, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) continue to report cases of excessive work hours and docked payment, as well as abusing working and living conditions.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU and Member States present in Taipei identified the following priorities: promoting Taiwan's compliance with international human rights law, including by developing its human rights institutional framework and domestic legislation to protect refugees; improving the human rights situation and working conditions of migrant workers; promoting the abolition of death penalty in Taiwan, including working towards a moratorium on executions and towards sensitising public opinion and judicial practitioners; supporting independent and pluralistic media and the fight against disinformation; and supporting and protecting human rights defenders in the region, including by contributing to the safety and protection of journalist and media workers.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU-Taiwan Human Rights Consultations took place in March 2025. The European Economic and Trade Office (EETO) maintains close contact with all key human rights and democracy CSOs in Taiwan, as well as with activists and government officials. In addition to visiting CSOs, the Office has hosted consultation meetings and thematic roundtables with civil society to exchange views and ideas on the key human rights priorities and to communicate on the EU's human rights priorities.

On the death penalty, the government's current policy is to 'reduce death sentences' and 'carry out executions with prudence'—a retreat from the previous goal of its 'gradual abolition.' On 16 January 2025, the Taiwanese government executed Huang Lin-kai, who was convicted of murdering two people. It was the first execution carried out since April 2020, as well as the first one since the Constitutional Court on 20 September 2024 ruled that the death penalty was partially constitutional when restricted to the most serious crimes and when adherence to due process was ensured. The EEAS released a statement encouraging Taiwan to apply and maintain a de facto moratorium, and to pursue a consistent policy towards the full abolition of the death penalty in Taiwan, a message that the EU reiterated to Taiwan in the EU-Taiwan Human Rights Dialogue in March.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, the EETO organised, promoted and supported events and initiatives on the identified human rights priorities, together with some of the EU Member States. Activities on human rights and democracy continued to be organised. Besides marking Human Rights Day, activities covered the following areas: promotion of the abolition of the death penalty; rights of migrant workers, press freedom; countering disinformation and promoting media literacy, promotion of LGBTI rights as well as gender equality. These activities resulted in increased public awareness and enhanced exchanges between the EU and Taiwan, both with NGOs and with the Taiwanese authorities

Multilateral context: Although Taiwan is not a member of the United Nations, it has voluntarily adopted five human rights treaties by incorporating them into domestic law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC) and the

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The government regularly publishes implementation reports, followed by parallel reports prepared by civil society organisations, and invites a panel of international experts to conduct reviews and give recommendations.

The third review of the implementation of ICCPR and ICESCR involving international experts and CSOs was completed in May 2022. In the same year, Taiwan reviewed its implementation of CEDAW, CRC and CRPD following the same procedures. Before leaving the United Nations in 1971, the government had signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), although this convention was not actively implemented in the beginning. In 2022, the Executive Yuan released the first implementation report of the ICERD, followed by independent review reports released by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and CSOs. The first review of the ICERD by a panel of independent experts was conducted in April 2024.

Republic of India

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, several UN bodies and civil society organisations expressed concern over the shrinking civil space in India. India was again rated 'Partly Free' by Freedom House; it ranked 151st in the World Press Freedom Index 2025, up from 159th in 2024, but down from 134th in 2015.

The broader civil society movement in India continues to be affected by the 2020 amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Act (FCRA), regulating the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contributions by individuals, NGOs and not-for-profit organisations. In 2025, several CSOs had to shut down after their FCRA licenses were cancelled or not renewed.

In terms of gender equality, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2025 ranked India 131st out of 148 countries – two spots lower than in 2024. The report noted slight improvements in economic participation and education but highlighted that significant gaps persist particularly in health (on this, India ranked 147th out of 148) and political representation (women's representation in parliament fell from 14.3% in 2019 to 13.8% in 2025). Persistent gender-based violence at home and in public places is among the major challenges. As for LGBTI rights, in January, the Supreme Court rejected review petitions challenging its 2023 decision that declined to legalise same-sex marriage, arguing that it is for the legislative power to decide on the subject.

There have been reports of discrimination and violence against religious minorities. Whilst this relates primarily to Muslims, Christians have also been targeted. Violence against members of marginalised communities, in particular Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), remains an issue of concern in India.

India recorded 54 shutdowns in the country in 2025, down from 64 in 2024 – but still among the highest numbers in the world. 2025 saw a record number of online content takedown orders by the government.

While executions are rare, India retains the death penalty under various legislations. As of late 2025, there were 574 persons on death row in India, the highest number since 2016.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU Delegation funded projects under the Human Rights & Democracy thematic programme and the CSO programme in line with the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and

Democracy 2020-2027. Focus areas for EU action in India included supporting women's empowerment and digital inclusion, combating forced labour and promoting business and human rights.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Delegation together with EU Member States regularly engaged with the government on human rights related issues. The Human Rights Dialogue took place on 8 January 2025 with frank and constructive exchanges on several issues, including freedom of expression (online and offline), rights of persons belonging to minorities, freedom of religion or belief, and individual cases of human rights defenders. The two sides committed to reconvene in 2026. Senior EU officials visiting India exchanged with human rights activists and defenders as well as with political party representatives, reflecting the different parts of the civic and political spectrum of Indian democracy. In 2025, the EU Delegation frequently organised, together with EU Member States, meetings with civil society representatives covering different spheres of human rights.

EU financial engagement: Projects are funded by the EU Delegation as well as directly by Headquarters. For instance, in 2025 the EU and UN Women continued to fund their joint project Women Empower India (WE India), a 3.5-year USD 2.78-million initiative that aims to create an enabling environment for economic and social rights for women and girls across the country. India is also part of a number of multi-country projects.

Multilateral context: In 2025, UN Special Rapporteurs issued two statements on India: a first in June, demanding authorities to stop the practice of 'house demolitions as a punitive measure against individuals accused of criminal conduct'; a second in November relating to alleged human rights violations while investigating the April terrorist attack in Pahalgam (Jammu & Kashmir). Moreover, during his Global Update to the Human Rights Council in March, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk expressed concern over the Indian government's "use of restrictive laws and harassment against human rights defenders and independent journalists (…) including in Kashmir" and he called "for stepped-up efforts to address violence and displacement in Manipur, based on dialogue, peacebuilding and human rights". He referred to India in September, highlighting cases of deportations of Rohingya by land and sea. In 2025, the UN-affiliated Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions downgraded the status of India's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) from A to B. On 14 October 2025, India, which had already been a member during the 2023-2025 term, was elected to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) for the 2026–2028 term.

Republic of Indonesia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Indonesia is the third largest democracy in the world, with a high voter turnout in elections, exceeding 80%. It continues to enjoy a pluralistic media landscape and a vibrant civil society. Following the 2024 elections, the government prioritised institutional reforms in the areas of governance, public services, social justice and anti-corruption, as well as child nutrition through a free meals programme. Some decisions around austerity measures or the occupation by armed forces personnel of civilian administration posts sparked protests in August. Human rights organisations have questioned the excessive use of force in the handling of these protests, which resulted in 12 deaths linked to security force response and the destruction of property through arson propagated by unidentified individuals. The President has announced an investigation into alleged police misconduct and established a committee tasked with police reform.

Concerns continued to persist around freedom of expression, with cases of intimidation, harassment and physical assault of critical journalists and bloggers. According to Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index 2025, Indonesia ranked 127th out of 180 countries, compared to 111th in 2024. Digital attacks on independent media outlets are recurrent. The Press Council launched the National Press Safety Mechanism in June, but impunity of perpetrators continues. Civil society actors have increasingly warned of shrinking civic space, widening accountability gaps and the human rights implications of some governance and legal decisions. Amendments to the new Criminal Code introduced significant changes, including the expansion of legal recognition of sexual violence in line with the 2022 Law on Sexual Violence Crimes, as well as explicit recognition of marital rape and broader definitions of physical, psychological and sexual harm. Capital punishment remains in national law, although a de facto moratorium continues and no executions have taken place since 2016. The Code allows for death sentences to be commuted to life imprisonment and reduced to a fixed-term sentence for good behaviour over a ten-year probationary period. Provisions related to morality, cohabitation, consensual sexual relations outside marriage and blasphemy continue to raise fears that enforcement could further restrict privacy, limit freedom of expression, freedom of belief or non-belief, and expand avenues for criminalisation of same-sex relationships. The revised Criminal Procedure Code adopted in November 2025 expands police and prosecutorial powers further, including the use of surveillance, warrant-free action in urgent circumstances and greater discretion during investigations.

Internal displacement is a growing concern in Indonesia's Papua region, where the number of displaced persons due to armed conflict is estimated to more than 100,000. Violence and human rights violations – including clashes between Indonesian security forces and pro-independence armed groups, civilian casualties, displacement and restrictions on independent reporting and access – continue to be reported in the region.

Indonesia continues to host refugees and asylum seekers, primarily from Afghanistan and Myanmar. UNHCR and IOM estimate that 12,000 to 13,000 individuals are in the country, including around 2,800 Rohingya following new arrivals by sea in 2024-2025. Indonesia is not a party to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention but maintains domestic mechanisms for refugee protection and continues to uphold the principle of non-refoulement.

Aceh, twenty years after the 2005 Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding, is widely regarded as a key example of conflict resolution through dialogue, having consolidated a largely sustained peace and enabled local political participation. However, civil society organisations and observers continue to flag persisting gaps, including uneven fulfilment of peace commitments, unresolved past violations and concerns over renewed securitisation and shrinking civic space in some areas.

Concerns remain for religious minorities, non-believers, women, LGBTI persons, human rights defenders and journalists. The Culture Minister's plan to rewrite official national history has raised concerns about possible minimisation of past violence, including the mass rapes of Chinese Indonesian women in the late 1990s. LGBTI persons continue to be exposed to discrimination, facing 48 local by-laws that restrict their rights. There are however limited but visible examples of social acceptance in some specific sectors, such as the media and creative industries reflecting a complex and uneven social landscape.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU maintains engagement with Indonesian authorities, civil society and international partners on key priorities with a particular focus on freedom of expression, freedom

of religion or belief, the prevention of gender-based violence and online gender-based violence, and the protection of vulnerable groups (including LGBTI persons). Support to human rights defenders and independent oversight mechanisms remained a cross-cutting priority. The EU's outreach included structured dialogue and thematic diplomacy, with targeted public diplomacy actions, such as support to the 9th edition of the 100% Manusia Film Festival that promotes diversity and human rights, and to the accompanying photo exhibition 'Lost Childhood' on the impact of conflict on children. The 16 Days of Activism against gender violence also featured EU cooperation with civil society and government partners, in coordination with regional and international partners, with a focus on combating online gender-based violence and promoting safer digital spaces.

EU bilateral political engagement: As a deliverable of the 2024 EU-Indonesia Human Rights Dialogue, the EU and the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs co-hosted a bilateral Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue in November. The dialogue brought together religious leaders, academics, civil-society representatives and policymakers from both sides to exchange practices on peaceful coexistence, gender equality and environmental stewardship, highlighting the constructive role religions can play in promoting social cohesion and human rights.

EU financial engagement: The EU continued to work closely with Indonesian civil society through 14 projects valued over EUR 22 million. The focus was on women's rights (including the fight against sexual and gender-based violence), protection of human rights defenders, prevention of torture and other ill-treatment, freedom of expression, access to justice, sustainable and rights-based development, and the strengthening of civil society organisations in Indonesia. Through regional and multi-country projects, the EU also supported projects to protect the rights of Indonesian migrant workers (particularly women and those working in fisheries), support to independent media and freedom of expression, as well as initiatives to empower youth and media in promoting responsible businesses. In parallel, EU Member States continued to support a wide range of additional initiatives in these areas through their respective bilateral programmes.

Multilateral context: A member of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2024-2026 term, Indonesia assumed the body's presidency in 2026. At regional level, in October 2025 Indonesia participated in the 6th ASEAN-EU Policy Dialogue on Human Rights in Kuala Lumpur. The Policy Dialogue was held back-to-back with the 4th ASEAN-EU CSO Forum, which brought up concerns around shrinking civic space, freedoms of expression and assembly, business and human rights, climate and environmental rights, access to justice and protection of human rights defenders.

While an active UN member, Indonesia often follows the lines of the Asia-Pacific States, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the G77 and China, and has not co-sponsored any EU-led resolution. Indonesia's positions at the UN General Assembly's Third Committee are not aligned with the EU's.

Islamic Republic of Iran

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the human rights situation in Iran continued to be extremely poor. The use of death penalty increased significantly in recent years, with at least 1,500 people executed in 2025, the highest number in the world. Capital punishment was also used as a response to domestic dissent. Human rights, including the freedom of expression and assembly, were severely curtailed. Human rights defenders, civil activists, journalist, artists and

lawyers, faced intimidation, threats, violence, and detention. Iran continued to rank 176th out of 180 countries in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index. Those detained were held in degrading conditions without access to adequate medical care. Some ethnic and religious minorities faced intimidation, arrests and restrictions on their human rights. Widespread discrimination against women and girls persisted. Arbitrary arrests of EU citizens and EU-Iran dual citizens by Iran, with a view to achieving political gains, continued to be an issue of concern. Since 2011, the EU has targeted restrictive measures in place sanctioning individuals and entities responsible for human rights abuses and violations in Iran. Several EU citizens remained on death row.

EU action - key focus areas: In line with EU Council Conclusions of December 2022, human rights continued to be a crucial component of the EU's comprehensive policy approach towards Iran. Both in its diplomatic contacts with Iran and in multilateral fora, the EU continued to address human rights issues, including individual cases. The EU addressed the use of death penalty, including against protesters, dissidents and juvenile offenders, further restrictions on human rights, especially on freedom of expression and assembly, human rights restrictions and intimidations for ethnic and religious minorities, widespread discrimination against women and girls, degrading detention conditions and lack of access to adequate medical care, restrictions on communications, and Iran's disregard for its international human rights obligations, including the ICCPR and the UNCRC, to both of which Iran is a party.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU used its direct channels with the Iranian authorities, calling on Iran to ensure respect for the human rights of all Iranians, including all ethnic and religious minorities, and to pursue a consistent policy towards the abolition of the death penalty. In particular, the EU strongly condemned the use of the death penalty to suppress domestic dissent and urged Iran to release all individuals unjustly detained for exercising their freedom of expression, including Nobel peace prize laureate Narges Mohammadi. The EU continued to support efforts by Member States with active consular cases in Iran. The bilateral political engagement complemented other EU tools to call on Iran to improve the human rights situation and to assist the accountability mechanisms.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, the EU has allocated EUR 10 million in humanitarian aid, specifically to support vulnerable Afghan refugees and their host communities in Iran. In implementing the projects, the EU always takes into account its human rights commitments.

Multilateral context: The EU remained a strong advocate for the UN accountability mechanisms and continued to call on Iran to allow free and unhindered access to the country for UN mandate holders. As in previous years, the EU supported the resolution on the human rights situation in Iran tabled by Canada during the UNGA Third Committee.

Japan

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Japan continued to play an important role in promoting fundamental values and upholding international human rights commitments, including through active engagement in multilateral fora such as the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee and the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). According to Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2025* report, Japan remained classified as 'Free', with a score of 96/100.

At the domestic level, progress was observed in several areas, notably child welfare reforms, aspects of criminal justice related to rehabilitation, and increased policy attention to business and human

rights. However, challenges remained concerning the rights of sexual minorities, gender equality, detention conditions, and the rights of migrants and refugees. The death penalty remains in the Criminal Code, and in June 2025, Japan carried out its first execution in nearly three years.

EU action – key focus areas: In 2025, the EU's action on human rights and democracy in Japan focused on: (i) the rights of sexual minorities/LGBTI; (ii) the rights of the child; (iii) the criminal justice system, including the death penalty and prisoners' rights; (vi) gender equality and women's empowerment; and (vi) business and human rights. These priorities were aligned with the five strands of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020–2027, contributing to the protection and empowerment of individuals, the promotion of resilient and inclusive societies, and the strengthening of a global system for human rights and democracy. The EU's actions were implemented through close coordination between the EU Delegation and Member States' embassies, engagement with Japanese authorities and parliamentarians, and cooperation with civil society organisations. Activities reflected a Team Europe approach and were informed by regular exchanges with stakeholders.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU maintained active bilateral engagement with Japan on human rights in 2025, including Human Rights consultations in February 2025, and regular exchanges with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, other relevant Ministries, Diet members, and civil society organisations. Human rights issues were also addressed in the context of broader political and sectoral dialogues and through coordination in multilateral fora. The EU Delegation and Member State embassies continued to advocate for the abolition of the death penalty and to express concern following the resumption of executions, including through joint statements and participation in expert-level and public events.

The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment remained a central pillar of the EU engagement. The EU Delegation co-organised a high-level seminar marking International Women's Day at the Japanese Diet, bringing together Japanese and European parliamentarians, policymakers, and experts. Member States organised a wide range of complementary initiatives addressing women's leadership, workplace equality, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Support for the rights of LGBTI persons continued through public diplomacy, including Team Europe participation in Tokyo Pride, coordinated messaging, and engagement with Japanese authorities. The EU and Member State activities also addressed children's rights, including joint custody issues, and maintained exchanges on migrant and refugee rights with non-governmental organizations. On business and human rights, the EU Delegation engaged with Japanese counterparts on responsible business conduct and corporate sustainability, including exchanges on human rights due diligence and supply chain responsibility.

EU financial engagement: EU support continued to prioritise cooperation with civil society organisations, expert networks, and parliamentary stakeholders, ensuring coherence between policy dialogue, advocacy, and concrete activities on the ground focusing on gender equality, LGBTI rights, and public diplomacy actions linked to international human rights days and campaigns. EU financial engagement in 2025 included a seminar on the occasion of the 2025 International Women's Day (EUR 32,600, from the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Support Facility), and the EU's participation in the Tokyo Rainbow Pride 2025 (EUR 7,000, from the EU Delegation budget).

Multilateral context: The EU and Japan maintained close coordination in multilateral human rights fora throughout 2025. Regular consultations took place ahead of sessions of the HRC and the UNGA

Third Committee, and the EU Delegation and Member States' embassies conducted joint démarches with the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Japan continued to support or co-sponsor most EU-led and priority resolutions, reflecting shared commitments to multilateralism, the rules-based international order, and the promotion of universal human rights.

Republic of Korea

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Following the short-lived imposition of martial law in December 2024, former President Yoon was impeached in April 2025. The presidential election convened on 3 June led to the victory of the progressive candidate, Lee Jae Myung. This demonstrated the country's democratic resilience and the effective functioning of its democratic institutions.

Overall, the Republic of Korea (RoK) remains a dynamic democracy, which features separation of powers, fair and free elections, peaceful transitions of power, and a vibrant civil society. The country generally guarantees a high level of protection for human rights, fundamental civil and political liberties, and freedom of expression or belief. However, this does not go without challenges: social minorities and socially disadvantaged groups remained marginalised to various degrees. A comprehensive anti-discrimination law is yet to be passed despite several attempts since 2006. Several human rights concerns persist including on gender equality (including societal problems of misogyny and a significant gender wage gap, with the RoK ranking 101st on the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gender Gap index); rights of LGBTI persons; older persons (who continue to experience the highest poverty rate among OECD countries, alongside the effects of the peak wage system, which reduces salaries for employees in their mid-to-late 50s); persons with disabilities and migrant workers. The long-awaited constitutional review of the death penalty remains pending. No executions have been carried out since December 1997; there were 59 prisoners on death row in 2025.

The country ranked 19th on the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law index and 61st on the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without Borders. It also received a score of 73/100 from the CIVICUS Monitor, corresponding to a classification of 'narrowed' civic space.

EU action - key focus areas: Marking the day against the death penalty, the EU Ambassador together with the EU Member States' Ambassadors took a collective picture posted on social media reaffirming the EU's opposition to the death penalty. Ambassadors of the EU and EU Member States jointly marked the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (#IDAHOT), reaffirming strong commitment to respect, protect and fulfil the full and equal enjoyment of human rights of LGBTI persons. The EU Delegation, together with several Member States, participated in the Seoul Queer Culture Festival. Along with other CSOs, the EU Delegation invited the Solidarity Against Disability Discrimination to a roundtable in November 2025 to engage with civil society organisations (CSOs) and explore further possible joint activities. The EU Delegation co-hosted the 5th ASEM Forum on the Human Rights of Older Persons 2025 with the ASEM Global Aging Center on the 'Human Rights of Older Persons: Present and Future' on 20 August 2025.

Building on the EU-Republic of Korea Security and Defence partnership, the EU Delegation organised a conference on 7 March 2025 focusing on Women in Security and Defence. To mark International

Women's Day, the EU Delegation participated in the event hosted by 'I AM A MOTHER' Association in Seoul to discuss hope and vision for the future generation based on the wisdom and experience of mothers. The EU Ambassador gave a lecture to members of the Women's Committee of the Rebuilding Korea Party in April at the National Assembly. Together with several EU Member States, the EU Delegation took part in the 2025 Parenting Together Photo Contest to promote the value of co-parenting together with the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. In November, the EU Delegation produced a short video clip/picture with Ambassadors from EU Member States for the 'Orange the World' campaign for the 'International Day to end violence against women'.

In cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the French Embassy in Seoul, the EU Delegation co-hosted an expert meeting to discuss the role and responsibilities of states, business and civil society for embedding digital rights in the AI ecosystem. The EU Delegation also organised a follow up event on regulatory developments, standards and guidelines on rights-respecting business conduct in AI in September together with OHCHR and OECD. The EU Ambassador gave welcoming remarks at the UN Women conference on the Intersection of AI and Gender in August. In September, the EU Delegation also co-hosted with the National Human Rights Commission the 2025 International Human Rights Conference on 'New Technologies and Human Rights - Opportunities and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence'.

Marking Human Rights Day, with the support of the OHCHR Seoul Office, the EU Delegation organised a successful event to reaffirm the continuing relevance of human rights in today's societies.

EU bilateral political engagement: The sixth EU-RoK consultations on human rights took place on 23 January 2025. The visit of the FEMM Committee of the European Parliament in October 2025 was an opportunity to organise meetings and events about women in the RoK and in the DPRK, as well as showcasing the EU action on gender issues.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, a new EU-Korea Public and Cultural Diplomacy project was launched to support the EU Delegation's public diplomacy outreach in Korea, with a budget of EUR 3 million for four years. In 2025, the project contributed to the implementation of the EU Delegation's Human Rights and Democracy Strategy for Korea, by supporting the organisation of several events, including the EU Delegation's events to mark the 2025 International Women's Day and the 2025 International Human Rights Day.

Multilateral context: The EU and the RoK cooperate closely in human rights fora. The RoK upholds human rights as one of its core foreign policy principles and has actively participated in the international community's efforts to promote and protect human rights around the world. As a state party to seven core international human rights treaties, the RoK is striving to implement the provisions of the relevant conventions at national level through partnerships with various stakeholders. Furthermore, the RoK was re-elected to the HRC for the 2025-2027 term. Its priority areas of engagement include women's rights, the protection and promotion of rights of vulnerable groups, country-specific human rights situations such as in North Korea, and the frontier of human rights issues (new and emerging digital technologies and human rights, local governments and human rights).

The RoK committed under its Free Trade Agreement with the EU to ratify and implement the Fundamental Conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The RoK has not yet ratified the ILO Convention No 105 on forced labour.

The EU and Member States delivered several démarches in support of EU priorities ahead of the sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), HRC, and UN General Assembly (UNGA), including the UNGA resolution on the return of Ukrainian children.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) remained dire in 2025. There were no indications that the government engaged in constructive action to address the findings of the International Commission of Inquiry's conclusions in 2014 that 'systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations have been and are being committed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, its institutions and officials. In many instances, the violations of human rights found by the commission constitute crimes against humanity'. An OHCHR report published in September 2025, assessing DPRK human rights developments over the past 10 years, reflected that the situation has further degraded and that the population continues to suffer brutal repression, fear and deprivation.

The government continued to maintain power through arbitrary detention and imprisonment, torture, executions, enforced disappearances, and forced labour. DPRK retains the death penalty and is believed to continue to carry out executions extensively, although access to information is restricted. Basic liberties – such as freedom of thought, conscience, religion, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, and freedom of movement – continued to be systematically denied. According to Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index 2025, the DPRK ranked 179th out of 180 countries, reflecting the near-total absence of independent media and severe restrictions on access to information. Significant border restrictions originally imposed in response to Covid-19 remained in place. The number of defectors in 2025 fell slightly compared to 2024, remaining still much lower relative to pre-pandemic levels.

The government of the DPRK refused to engage with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK and continued to limit engagement with other UN human rights bodies and mechanisms. Meanwhile, the country gradually increased its diplomatic engagement with a limited number of partners on a selective basis. Outside observers expressed concern that border restrictions, the suppression of market activity and impediments to international humanitarian assistance, together with the long-term effects of poor economic policies, resulted in significant humanitarian issues. The dire human rights situation was aggravated by the fact that the DPRK continued to divert its resources into illegal nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles programmes – and into military support for Russia's illegal war against Ukraine – rather than towards the welfare of its own people.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU addressed the above areas of concern through resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and the UN General Assembly (UNGA). The EU was closely involved in the organisation of the UNGA high-level plenary meeting on 20 May 2025. Frequent exchanges took place between the EU and the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as well as like-minded international partners. The European Parliament held two dedicated hearings on DPRK human rights issues in 2025 with the participation of the UN special rapporteur, human rights activists and the EEAS. The EU Delegation in the Republic of Korea also continued to engage with local authorities and support the work of civil societies in promoting human rights in the DPRK by participating in and co-hosting local events (e.g. Briefing on 'Made in China' report with NKHR in April

2025; organised with the support of OHCHR for the Human Rights Day conference with North Korean defectors). Under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, the EU renewed restrictive measures against three DPRK officials and two DPRK entities responsible for serious human rights violations.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU maintained limited contact with the DPRK authorities through diplomatic channels.

EU financial engagement: It was not possible to implement development or humanitarian assistance projects in the DPRK as international humanitarian staff is barred from entering the country.

Multilateral context: As per previous years, the EU initiated country-specific resolutions on the DPRK human rights situation at the HRC and the UNGA. Despite increasing polarisation in general at multilateral level, both resolutions in 2025 were successfully adopted by consensus, helping to maintain international attention on the situation.

HRC Resolution 58/17 (April 2025) stressed the need to follow up on recommendations from the report of the Commission of Inquiry. It expressed deep concern over the systematic, widespread, and gross human rights violations and over the exacerbation of the humanitarian situation. It renewed the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on DPRK human rights and requested the High Commissioner to continue strengthening, institutionalising and further advancing work on accountability. It also contained updated and stronger language on issues such as border restrictions, enforced or involuntary disappearances and arbitrary detention, forced labour, and the rights of children.

UNGA Resolution A/RES/80/220 (November 2025) expressed deep concern regarding the grave human rights situation in the DPRK, the pervasive culture of impunity, and the lack of accountability for human rights violations and abuses. It condemned the long-standing and ongoing systematic, widespread and gross violations of human rights and expressed its very serious concern about numerous human rights violations of both political and civil and social, economic, and cultural rights. It reiterated calls for cooperation with UN mechanisms. It also streamlined certain sections of the text while retaining all core elements and introducing new or strengthened references on issues such as the September 2025 OHCHR report, freedom of movement, corruption, the death penalty, and forced labour. It called on the DPRK to reopen its borders to facilitate access of humanitarian staff on the ground.

The EU was also closely involved in the organisation of the UNGA high-level plenary meeting on DPRK human rights on 20 May 2025 (which was a deliverable resulting from the December 2024 UNGA resolution on DPRK human rights). This high-level plenary meeting involved high-level speakers from the UN and UN Member States and featured testimonies by civil society representatives and other experts, to address the human rights abuses and violations being committed in the DPRK, and to maintain the spotlight on the issue.

Lao People's Democratic Republic

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The overall situation of human rights and democracy in Laos remained largely unchanged. Although Laos slightly improved its rank in the World Press Freedom Index from 153rd in 2024 to 150th out of 180 countries in 2025, freedoms of expression and association remained limited. A government reorganisation saw the transfer of responsibility for media issues and oversight of civil society organisations to different organs of the Lao People's

Revolutionary Party, consolidating Party control over information, media and civil society. In October, the entry into force of Decree No. 536 on Non-Profit Associations increased centralisation of oversight over CSOs and funding controls. Human rights defenders operate in a climate of self-censorship.

The death penalty remains on the statute books but has not been applied since 1989. Freedom of Religion or Belief remains limited through government control and discriminatory practices, with Christian minorities facing the most serious challenges. Child labour remains widespread, with an estimated 80% of children engaged in some form of economic activity. Poverty, school dropouts and limited access to education are the primary drivers. Early marriage and adolescent childbearing remain prevalent in rural areas. Commercial sexual exploitation of children persists, with child prostitution and trafficking remaining prevalent. Poverty and limited law enforcement capacity have also contributed to the growth of child sex tourism.

Women and girls in rural areas continue to be targeted by traffickers recruiting or abducting them through false promises of employment or marriage. Laos is a generally tolerant society towards the LGBTI community. The Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone in Bokeo province has gained notoriety as a sanctuary for illegal activities such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, and cyber fraud. Lao authorities have worked with law enforcement from Vietnam and China, leading to the arrest and deportation of thousands of scammers. Following inspections in December, the authorities have stated that no scam operations remained active, which the EU Delegation has not been able to verify independently.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU's work on human rights and democracy in Laos focused on the following areas: supporting civil society; fighting disinformation; advancing gender equality; strengthening the rule of law; bolstering the fight against corruption; promoting the linkage between business and human rights; and strengthening the legislature.

EU bilateral political engagement: The 14th EU-Laos Human Rights Dialogue took place on 13 June. Several follow-up actions were agreed as reflected in a joint press statement. The Dialogue was preceded by a joint seminar on the death penalty, bringing together more than 50 participants from Lao government Ministries, the judiciary, academic institutions, UN agencies, the International Commission Against the Death Penalty, and CSOs. In a context where the death penalty remains a sensitive issue, this marked an important milestone in constructive engagement on legal frameworks, international practice and human rights considerations. As an active participant in the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), Laos also participated in the 6th ASEAN-EU Human Rights Policy Dialogue in October 2025.

The EU continued to co-chair the Sub-Sector Working Group on the Rule of Law, contributing to Laos' Governance Sector Working Group, a policy dialogue forum between the Lao government and development partners, which played a key role in informing the 10th National Economic Social Development Plan 2026-2030. The EU also co-chaired the Education Sector Working Group, positively influencing important decisions such as an increase in education spending in the 2026 budget.

EU financial engagement: EU support for governance continued primarily through the *Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and the Rule of Law* (CEGGA) programme, co-funded by the European Union, Germany and Switzerland, which was extended to 2026 with an additional EU contribution of EUR 1.5 million. The programme supported citizen engagement, parliamentary

capacity building, rule-of-law training and access to justice, including through legal awareness activities and support to local dispute-resolution mechanisms.

Promoting an enabling environment for civil society remained a key priority. Under the Human Rights and Democracy and Civil Society thematic programmes, the EU supported initiatives on child labour, human trafficking, community empowerment, education and environmental protection. Additional projects promoted women's economic empowerment, decent work, labour rights and responsible business practices, while regional programmes continued to support independent media and journalists.

Multilateral context: The final report of Lao PDR's 4th Cycle Universal Periodic Review (UPR) was adopted in September. Lao PDR fully supported 189 recommendations, partially supported 7, which noted concerns in areas such as the death penalty, indigenous peoples' rights, gender identity and international human rights treaties, and noted 61, mainly concerning the protection of critics and journalists, investigating enforced disappearances, and repealing restrictive association and cybercrime laws. In September, Laos received the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' concluding observations on its initial report. The Committee acknowledged progress in poverty reduction, education, and healthcare, while highlighting concerns on rural-urban inequalities, access to water and sanitation, labour rights and social protection, environmental degradation, impacts of large-scale infrastructure projects on vulnerable communities, the situation of human rights defenders and civic space. UN Special Procedures Joint Allegation Letters were sent concerning enforced disappearances, intimidation and extrajudicial executions in relation to seven human rights defenders (LAO 2.2025) and possible instances of transnational repression (LAO 3.2025). At the time of writing, the Lao government had not responded.

Malaysia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Reforms on corruption and governance continued into the third year of the current government. A key legislative proposal included the separation of the roles of Attorney General and Public Prosecutor. Authorities reviewed the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act and the Peaceful Assembly Act following relevant court rulings, and pursued investigations and prosecutions in cases of enforced disappearance with renewed vigour. The November 2025 High Court ruling in the case of social activists Raymond Koh and Amri Che Mat, who disappeared in late 2016 and early 2017, reinvigorated the debate on police reform, and on Malaysia ratifying the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED). According to the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index 2025, Malaysia ranked 56th out of 143 countries.

Positive judiciary developments are contrasted by continued overreach of security forces, as well as some regression on civic freedoms, religious freedom, and the rights of LGBTI persons. Security-force overreach was heavily criticised when 60 masked officers assaulted 107 detainees at Taiping Prison on 17 January. A landmark ruling on enforced disappearances of 5 November found abuse of state power by security forces and awarded significant damages.

Malaysia passed a Citizenship Act to acknowledge the rights of children born to Malaysian mothers abroad. Together with the creation of a Media Council, these were welcome developments.

Following the 2023 abolition of the mandatory death penalty, the government announced a comprehensive study on full abolition for 2026. 97 individuals remain on death row. On 12 August 2025, Malaysia launched its first five-year National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights. The plan addresses labour, environmental issues, and vulnerable groups, emphasising responsible business conduct and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

In July, the Federal Court ruled section 9(5) of the Peaceful Assembly Act as unconstitutional, a win for freedom of assembly. Enforcement practices such as punitive policing, police violence at protests, and arrests of human rights defenders, nevertheless, continue. Religious freedom is increasingly contested, with state religious authorities exerting extensive control and intensifying religious and moral policing. In June, the Court of Appeal overturned a 2014 fatwa declaring the civil society organisation Sisters in Islam 'deviant'. Nonetheless, a high-ranking public figure subsequently stated that the organisation should no longer use 'Islam' in its name. The increased use of caning under religious laws and in schools has become a subject of public discussion.

LGBTI rights have deteriorated. Over 307 individuals were arrested in 2025 under federal and state syariah laws targeting sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression. Anti-LGBTI campaigns and raids framed through religion and public morality increased. State syariah provisions criminalising gender expression have made trans-women especially vulnerable to arrest in public and private spaces, reversing previous judicial protections. While the government's upcoming national registration system could improve access to services, refugees continue to be viewed through a security lens.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU maintains engagement with Malaysian authorities, civil society and international partners on key priorities with a particular focus on institutional reform, the death penalty, business and human rights, support to independent media, access to information and fight against disinformation, gender equality, girls' and women's rights, non-discrimination, including as regards sexual orientation and human rights defenders, and rights of indigenous communities. The EU Delegation and Member States organised workshops for improving standard-setting and human rights mainstreaming in legislative reforms, supported policy dialogues, organised debriefs with human rights organisations, trainings and capacity-building workshops, and strengthened legal clinics, among others. They also strengthened the work of the Malaysia's Human Rights Commission (SUHAKAM), Members of Parliament, journalists and media associations, civil society, grassroots and youth advocates, and Ministries, such as the Ministry of Human Resources on e.g. forced labour. The EU Delegation and EU Member States continued to attend prominent court hearings.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Delegation and Member States continued to engage with a number of Ministries, Members of Parliament, and SUHAKAM on i.a. legal developments pertaining to online safety and digital rights in the context of a new project on information ecosystems and data governance. 'Team Europe' continued its exchanges and sharing of best practices on institutional reform, accountability and access to justice, such as briefing the Parliamentary Select Committee on Human Rights, Elections and Institutional Reforms and an inter-agency meeting on the Prison Reform Blueprint as well as working with the Malaysia Prisons Department. Following the resurgence of caning in Malaysia and ongoing debates on corporal punishment, Denmark organised a closed-door High-Level Dialogue on Torture Prevention to advance Malaysia's Accession to the UN Convention Against Torture. A highlight of political engagement was the visit of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights to Malaysia in October 2025.

EU financial engagement: The EU provided financial support to civil society organisations, think tanks, media representatives, and SUHAKAM. On institutional reform, the EU Delegation works with Pusat Komas and the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs through two four-year grants (~EUR 500,000/ EUR 600,000 respectively). On empowering indigenous communities to enjoy their rights, the EU works with PACOS TRUST with a 3-year grant (~EUR 610,000). On safeguarding online safety and the integrity of the information ecosystem in Malaysia, the EU works with Article 19 and the Committee of Independent Journalists on a 4-year project (~EUR 1,300,000). With ILO and UNICEF, the EU supported access to education and training opportunities and reducing child labour on plantations in Sabah. Regional projects promoted fair and sustainable employment in the fishing industries and improved working and living conditions for migrant workers, creating safe migration pathways, ensuring decent work for women and children migrants and addressing trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling. The Agents of Change project supported youth work throughout Malaysia's ASEAN Chairship, and convened a youth workshop at the 4th ASEAN Youth Dialogue.

Multilateral context: Malaysia's multilateral action centred around its ASEAN Chairship in 2025. It stewarded the adoption of the ASEAN Declaration on the Right to a Safe, Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment, and the ASEAN Declaration on Promoting the Right to Development and the Right to Peace Towards Realising Inclusive and Sustainable Development. The EU Delegation leveraged Malaysia's ASEAN Chairship to strengthen advocacy by supporting the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum, facilitating the discussion of key human rights issues by 500 CSO representatives from across the region. Malaysia also hosted the EU-ASEAN Policy Dialogue on Human Rights in October. The visit of EU Special Representative for Human Rights Kajsa Ollongren on this occasion allowed for in-depth conversations with Malaysian CSOs and other counterparts on human rights in Malaysia.

Republic of Maldives

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2025 was marked by continuing challenges regarding freedom of expression and independent media, judicial independence and a growing trend towards consolidation of executive power. According to Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2025* report, the Maldives remained classified as 'Partly Free', with a score of 43/100.

Several pieces of legislation prompted human rights concerns, including the Prevention of Gang and Other Serious Offences Act, ratified in May 2025; the 16th Amendment to the Decentralization Act, ratified in August 2025; the Public Referendum Bill, ratified in September 2025 and the controversial Maldives Media and Broadcasting Regulation Bill, ratified in September 2025.

In February 2025, the Parliament passed an amendment to the Judicature Act that provided for the Supreme Court (SC) bench to be reduced from 7 to 5 justices, and 3 justices of the SC were suspended. The opaque proceedings regarding the suspension and eventual removal of 2 justices (while a third resigned in protest), were widely seen as a cause for concern by domestic and international actors.

On 6 December, President Muizzu ratified the Third Amendment to the Drugs Act (Act No. 17/2011), bringing about significant changes to the governance framework surrounding narcotics. Most notably, the recent amendment widens the death penalty, in contravention with international law, to include trafficking. However, the Maldives observes a de facto moratorium and the last known execution took place in 1954.

An EU Follow-up Mission (EFM) was deployed to the Maldives in November 2025 to assess the implementation of the 2023 EU Election Observation Mission (EOM)'s recommendations. Of the 20 recommendations made by the EOM to improve future electoral processes (inclusion, transparency in political finance, and the participation of women), many have not yet been implemented.

In 2025, the Maldives was developing a comprehensive child rights policy and was also finalising a 20-year National Development Plan, under which key child protection priorities were being addressed.

EU action - key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027, the EU's action in the Maldives was focused on supporting the rule of law, accountability, the fair administration of justice; promoting fundamental freedoms, media development and space for civil society and human rights defenders; promoting gender equality and women's rights; promoting human rights, transparency, accountability and environmental justice in business practices; and providing support to strengthening economic, social, cultural and labour rights.

EU bilateral political engagement: Political dialogue took place on an ad-hoc basis, including during the visit of the Head of Delegation Ambassador Moreno to Male in August 2025, and the high-level meetings in the margins of the 4th EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum in Brussels (November 2025), attended by Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Khaleel. The meetings have been used to explore avenues to deepen cooperation.

EU financial engagement: Promoting the rule of law, security and fighting corruption is one of the two priorities under the EU-Maldives Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) for 2021-2027. The EU supports the justice sector under this priority; the 'Accountability and Integrity Matters (AIM)' project addresses access to justice and the fight against gender-based violence.

In addition, human rights and fundamental freedoms were supported through a thematic programme. The CSO-implemented initiative, 'Strengthening Civic Space to Resist Disinformation and Harmful Narratives in Sri Lanka and the Maldives' (2023–2025), led by International Media Support, seeks to reinforce civic space and counter disinformation and harmful narratives in both countries.

Multilateral context: The Maldives' third term (2023-2025) as a member of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) came to an end in 2025. The country also served as one of the HRC's Vice-Presidents until the end of 2025, representing the Asia-Pacific Group. The Maldives continued to play an important role in the discussion on the human rights impact of climate change. Together with Malta and Cyprus, it was a member of the core group that led negotiations on the HRC60 resolution on sea-level rise, which co-sponsored by nine EU Member States and adopted without a vote. The Maldives also played a leading role in coordinating Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) within the HRC and, together with Zambia, co-hosted pledging efforts for the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support LDCs and SIDS.

The Maldives underwent its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in November 2025. Recommendations included the ratification of the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), aimed at the abolition of the death penalty; the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons; as well as a number of International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions. Additional recommendations called on the Maldives to withdraw its reservations to the ICCPR, the

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Other recommendations included strengthening the National Human Rights Institution in line with the Paris Principles, adopting anti-discrimination legislation, maintaining the moratorium on death penalty, improving prison conditions, strengthening safeguards against torture, narrowing the definition of terrorism to avoid disproportionate restrictions on fundamental freedoms, and ensuring media freedom.

Mongolia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2025 saw a political crisis within the Mongolian People's Party. In June, after weeks of public demonstrations and anger over his alleged corruption and inability to tackle inflation, Prime Minister Oyun-Erdene Luvsannamsrai was ousted by Parliament, and replaced by Zandanshatar Gombojav, a former Speaker. In 2025, civic activism remained high, with major demonstrations taking place, including in the first half of the year the 'Resignation Is Easy' protest calling for the Prime Minister's dismissal. Adding to this, later in the year, doctors and teachers went on strike advocating wage increases. Social media pointed out corruption, human rights violations and abuse. Mongolia continued implementing its 2023 National Action Plan on the protection of human rights and the prevention of abuses by business operations. According to the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index 2025, Mongolia ranked 67th out of 143 countries.

Women's political participation has significantly improved through legal reforms, particularly the introduction of gender quotas, leading to a record number of women in parliament (25.4% post-2024 elections). Yet, women face pressure in social media and are often targeted by senior male politicians in the public debate. Mongolia's revisions of several laws in recent years, including anti-discrimination statutes of labour law, aim to improve inclusivity and legal protection, including of LGBTI persons. In 2025, the LGBTI community has however continued to face marginalisation and stigmatisation, particularly outside the capital, due to the lack of proper implementation of existing laws.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU and its Member States focused on empowering and protecting individuals, building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies and promoting a global system for human rights and democracy. EU action included support to gender equality and the prevention of abuses caused by business. Concerning gender equality, the EU continued to support gender-sensitive budgeting in 2025. On the prevention of abuses from business activities, UNDP continued to successfully implement an EU-funded project to train public officials and inform private businesses. The efficiency of the judiciary remained a core EU development cooperation priority.

EU bilateral political engagement: The European Union and Mongolia held the seventh Human Rights Dialogue on 2 April in Ulaanbaatar. Discussions focused on media freedom, including the protection of journalists and media workers and the fight against disinformation and hate speech; fundamental freedoms, including freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of assembly; gender equality, including political participation of women, as well as gender-based violence; rights of the child; judicial reforms; as well as the adverse effects that climate change and environmental degradation, including air pollution, have on the full enjoyment of human rights. The Human Rights Dialogue was preceded by a meeting of the Development Cooperation Working Group (3 April) and followed by the EU-Mongolia Joint Committee in Ulaanbaatar (4 April), and the Trade and Investment Subcommittee (online on 8 April).

In 2025, the EU Delegation engaged in several human rights' public diplomacy activities. Together with EU Member States, likeminded partners, UN Agencies, local businesses and local politicians the EU partook in the 16 days campaign against gender-based violence through publishing posts in social media.

EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation supported the organisation of the biennial National Human Rights Forum opened by the Mongolian President and the EU Ambassador.

In 2025, with EU support, gender mainstreaming was advanced at both national and sub-national levels through the systematic strengthening of gender equality capacity, in close cooperation with the Secretariat of the National Committee on Gender Equality.

Under the Civil Society Organisations' thematic programme, the Delegation implemented projects focusing on digital inclusion; advocacy for accountability, transparency and public awareness; youth environmental and cultural awareness.

Multilateral context: In November Mongolia went through its Universal Periodic Review. It received 223 recommendations and is currently preparing its reply. Mongolia has an open invitation to UN human rights Special Procedures. Mongolia does not support country-specific resolutions in the framework of the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly. It has kept the same voting patterns in 2025.

Myanmar/Burma

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: As active conflict continued across most of Myanmar, the year was marked by an increase in indiscriminate violence against civilians (including a 30% surge in airstrikes compared to 2024) and the further closure of political and civic space. In 2025, Myanmar ranked 138th out of 143 countries in terms of rule of law and respect for fundamental rights (World Justice Project Index). According to the ACLED Conflict Severity Index, it remained the second most violent country in the world and the country experiencing the most fragmented conflict. Freedom House continued to rank Myanmar, together with China, among the world's most restrictive environments for internet freedom.

In July, the regime ended the State of Emergency and transferred authority to a nominal caretaker body (the State Security and Peace Commission), while preserving all power within the military leadership. This led to a highly controversial electoral process, scheduled in three phases between December 2025 and January 2026, amidst active conflict, systemic repression, opposition actors being banned or detained, and large areas remaining outside government control. A central component of the junta's repression was the Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections, enacted in July 2025, which criminalised activities perceived as interfering with the electoral process. The elections also led to a sharp regression in freedom of expression and digital rights, notably through a restrictive Cybersecurity Law and widespread internet shutdowns. The military regime also expanded its technology-driven surveillance infrastructure, including the Person Scrutinization and Monitoring System, which integrates facial recognition, biometric IDs and AI monitoring to track citizens' movements in real time, and was used to identify and detain regime critics.

Arbitrary arrests continued in 2025, with more than 2,000 people arrested on political grounds according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, bringing the total number of political prisoners to at least 22,670. Torture leading to death during interrogation and killings in detention remained commonplace. Prisons also suffered from serious overcrowding, and prisoners lacked access to basic services. While the junta carried out three mass pardons in 2025, releasing almost 14,000 persons and dropping the charges against an additional 5,580 individuals, only about 1,000 were political prisoners (mostly because their sentences were close to completion). Death sentences continued to be handed out, but there were no reports of executions in 2025.

Forced displacement remained an important concern, with around 3.6 million people internally displaced and 22 million requiring humanitarian assistance (compounded by the 7.7 magnitude earthquake which struck Central Myanmar in March 2025). In 2025, for the third consecutive year, military airstrikes against civilian targets increased significantly, while the number of landmine victims doubled compared to 2024, leaving Myanmar with the highest number worldwide. Resistance groups also committed targeted killings of civilians. In 2025, the UN recorded 169 civilians killed by resistance groups, accused of working for or informing the military. At the same time, the military Conscription Law, enacted in February 2024, led to increasing coercive recruitment practices throughout the year, with conscription-related abductions reportedly rising by approximately 25% in 2025. Forced enlistment was also reported amongst the Rohingya population in Rakhine State and in the refugee camps in Bangladesh. More generally, high levels of violence in Rakhine state continued to place the Rohingya in a highly vulnerable position, at risk of being instrumentalised by various parties to the conflict. In October, the Arakan Army invited the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Myanmar to visit northern Rakhine, but prevailing conditions did not allow the visit to take place.

The upward trend in grave violations against children continued, with Myanmar being the only state in the world listed in the 2025 UN annual report on children in armed conflict for all five types of grave violations against children. The year also saw reports of a sharp increase in conflict-related sexual violence, including the continued and systematic use of rape and other forms of sexual violence during military operations, as well as in detention and interrogation centres. LGBTI persons remained highly vulnerable, facing criminalisation, harassment, exclusion from humanitarian assistance, and lack of legal protection. Regarding freedom of association and peaceful assembly, in June 2025 the ILO invoked Article 33 of its Constitution (for only the third time in its history), in response to Myanmar's persistent and systematic violations of Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour.

EU action - key focus areas: Despite a challenging operating environment, the EU continued in 2025 to prioritise support for human rights and democracy through dedicated funding and the implementation of several projects. Key areas of intervention included support to the justice sector, notably through legal aid centres; efforts to address inequalities, discrimination, and exclusion, including targeted support to the LGBTI community and actions to prevent and respond to gender-based violence; protection of human rights defenders; reinforcement of economic, social, cultural, and labour rights; promotion of accountability and transitional justice; conflict prevention and resolution initiatives; and support to independent and pluralistic media.

The EU Delegation led an important outreach effort which led to the release of three high-profile labour rights defenders in October 2025, including a member of the ILO's constituents, the General

Secretary of the Myanmar Industries, Craft and Services Trade Union Federation. The Delegation mobilised all available high-level channels (including within the military, business and religious communities), and secured a rare prison visit to one of the detainees in February 2025. The EU also mobilised legal and material support for the detainees, and supported measures to guarantee their safety following release.

EU bilateral political engagement: In 2025, the Council of the EU extended the EU's restrictive measures on Myanmar. To date, 106 individuals and 22 entities remain subject to EU sanctions. Other EU restrictive measures remain in place: the embargo on arms and equipment and export restrictions on equipment for monitoring communications which might be used for internal repression, the export ban on dual-use goods for use by the military and border guard police, and the prohibition of military training and cooperation with the military. The EU Delegation continued its active engagement with local and international human rights CSOs. The EU Special Envoy for Myanmar engaged with a wide range of stakeholders in the pro-democracy movement, with Myanmar's neighbours and the wider region and closely collaborated with other Special Envoys for Myanmar, in particular the UN and ASEAN Envoys.

EU financial engagement: Since the 2021 coup, the EU continues its strict policy to channel all cooperation exclusively through civil society, international NGOs and UN agencies. All support to government remained suspended. In 2025, the EU allocated EUR 46 million in humanitarian funding to the crisis in Myanmar.

Multilateral context: The EU continued to be active in UN fora and led the resolution on the human rights situation in Myanmar at the UN Human Rights Council, while co-sponsoring the resolution on the situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar at the UN General Assembly Third Committee. The EU also collaborated closely with the ILO in view of the Article 33 procedure on Myanmar's violations of Convention 87 on Freedom of Association in Myanmar. The EU and its Member States continued their financial and political support to the International Investigative Mechanism on Myanmar to bolster investigations into allegations of international crimes and violations of international law.

Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Nepal's political landscape in 2025 underwent a major shift following the September 2025 mass youth-led protests demanding accountability, an end to corruption, and the lifting of a social media ban. The government collapsed, and an interim government was formed with a 6-month timeframe focused on organising a general election.

The Social Media (Use & Regulation) Bill, 2081 (2025) – at the heart of the Gen-Z protests – has since been withdrawn by the interim government. A draft Bill on Association and Organisation (2025), which would consolidate three existing laws under a new, more centralised regime, continues to raise concern among civil society organisations (CSOs) about autonomy, excessive oversight, and a securitised approach to civil society. The Anti-Money Laundering (AML) guidelines being developed by the Social Welfare Council could further restrict CSOs, especially smaller or grassroots ones, through added reporting burdens. According to the CIVICUS Monitor, civic space in Nepal remained classified as 'obstructed' in 2025.

Transitional Justice (TJ) remains a critical and sensitive pillar of Nepal's post-conflict democratic transition. Although formal mechanisms are in place, progress has been slow. In May 2025, the reconstitution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons provided a renewed opportunity to move the process forward. The new appointments have brought some optimism, but victims' groups and civil society actors argue that the appointment process was insufficiently consultative and lacked meaningful avenues for victims — particularly women, Dalits, and conflict-affected marginalised groups — to contribute to defining the commissions' mandates and priorities. These groups continue to advocate for a victim-centred, inclusive, and transparent approach, emphasising the need for truth-seeking, accountability, reparations, and guarantees of non-recurrence. In the meantime, the new TJ Commissions have recorded approximately 12,000 additional cases including approximately 4,000 cases of conflict-related sexual violence. The Commissions are waiting for the government's approval of their work procedures to proceed with 'truth seeking' evidence gathering operations.

While Nepal's constitutional and legal frameworks guarantee non-discrimination and social inclusion, there is a risk that marginalised voices — including women, Dalits and LGBTI persons – could be excluded in the current reform debates. Women continue to face gender inequality, gender-based violence, limited economic opportunities, and weak access to justice despite constitutional guarantees and a national gender equality policy adopted in 2022, which requires further implementation at federal, provincial, and local levels. LGBTI communities face stigma and barriers in employment, education, healthcare, and political participation, despite progressive constitutional and judicial recognition of their rights. Policy frameworks increasingly acknowledge sexual and gender minorities. Despite the momentum of the September protests, women and minorities continue to be under-represented at the political level, whether as candidates or in leadership positions.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU supported access to justice, the fight against impunity, the protection of human rights defenders, and the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, including through support to National Action Plan II on UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 and assistance to the National Human Rights Commission. The EU also promoted socioeconomic rights and inclusion, with a particular focus on gender equality, combating gender-based violence, women's empowerment, and access to basic services, including through cooperation with Finland and Germany in the areas of water, sanitation, energy, agriculture, nutrition and education.

Support to civil society remained a key priority. Through dedicated funding and partnerships with national and international organisations, the EU promoted the participation of marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities and LGBTI persons, strengthened civic space, freedom of expression and independent media, and supported Nepal's implementation of its national and international human rights commitments. Ongoing support to federalism, good governance and youth engagement further contributed to strengthening the rule of law and democratic participation.

EU bilateral political engagement: While the EU does not have a Human Rights Dialogue with Nepal, issues related to human rights, good governance and democracy are extensively addressed in the annual Joint Commission (the last Joint Commission was held on 28 November 2025). The EU Delegation together with EU Member States regularly follow up with the government on issues of main concern.

EU financial engagement: At the close of 2025, the EU Delegation Nepal had a portfolio of EUR 4.5 million dedicated to human rights, including a contract with provisions for TJ support. The EU Delegation's portfolio with dedicated support to CSOs amounted to EUR 8 million, while the gender-specific and rights-focussed project has a budget of EUR 15 million. Moreover, the EU Delegation has a human rights-sensitive budget support and projects in education (EUR 52.5 million), nutrition (EUR 25 million), water and sanitation (EUR 10.5 million), as well as energy (EUR 30 million) and other green areas, comprising climate change resilience and circular economy (EUR 30 million).

Multilateral context: The Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions' accreditation review for Nepal's NHRC took place in March 2025, which recommended retaining the NHRC's 'A' status accreditation. Nepal holds an elected seat on the UN Economic and Social Council for the 2024–2026 term and the Nepali Permanent Representative in New York was elected President for 2026 Session, beginning from August 2025. Nepal chairs the Global Coordination Bureau of the Least Developed Countries) for 2023–2026.

Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Pakistan's fragile political structure, including the complex federal set-up and imbalances between provinces, as well as the role of the military in politics and the economy, continue to constitute a significant challenge to the country's development and realization of human rights. Pakistan's government consolidated its position by capitalising on the sentiment generated by the May confrontation with India. The latest constitutional amendments introduced to improve the work of the judiciary have been criticised by UN human rights mechanisms for weakening its independence. At the same time, the justice system continues to face a chronic backlog due to the low judge-to-population ratio. According to Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2025* report, Pakistan remained classified as 'Partly Free', with a score of 37/100.

The overall human rights situation deteriorated in 2025, particularly with regard to freedom of expression and media, the right to peaceful protest, access to information, and freedom of religion. The practice of enforced disappearances continued together with torture, extrajudicial killings, silencing human rights defenders, journalists and dissenters, in a context of overall shrinking civic space. There was not any progress toward legal accountability or criminalisation of related human rights violations. While steps have been taken to reduce its scope, capital punishment remains in place for 29 offences, including crimes that do not meet the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)'s threshold of 'most serious crimes'. A de facto moratorium on executions has been in effect since 2019.

Despite existing legal safeguards, religious minorities continued to face serious protection risks, including hate speech, blasphemy accusations and incidents of mob violence. Members of the Ahmadi community were particularly affected, facing violent attacks and discriminatory practices without accountability for perpetrators. Forced conversions of women and girls from Christian and Hindu communities continued to be reported, often linked to child marriages. Christians remain disproportionately affected by bonded and hazardous labour and by the misuse of blasphemy-related laws. In 2025, there were reports of a further increase in fabricated or coordinated blasphemy accusations, including through online activity, affecting over 400 persons, primarily young men. Although some were acquitted, many accused individuals faced prolonged detention and serious

security risks. Overall, the Pakistani State's response was largely reactive, with limited evidence of systemic reforms.

Despite some legislative progress, women's social, political, and economic empowerment in Pakistan remains limited. Pakistan ranked last in the Global Gender Gap Report 2025, with persistent discrimination in wages and career advancement. Gender-based violence, including so-called honour killings, remains widespread and underreported, with continued barriers to justice. Child marriage legislation was adopted in 2025 in Islamabad Capital Territory and Balochistan. Child labour persists, with an estimated 7 million children engaged in informal and exploitative work.

Civic space and fundamental freedoms remain constrained by regulatory pressure on civil society and increasing interference in the media. In 2025, journalists and human rights defenders reported heightened self-censorship, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and expanded surveillance. Government influence over media regulators and security-driven restrictions on dissent continued. Internet restrictions worsened, with at least 68 outages recorded nationwide. Amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) further expanded authorities' powers to police online content under vague disinformation provisions, leading to a rise in arrests.

At the same time, some positive institutional developments were recorded. Special courts under the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act became operational, provincial legislation strengthened controls on corrosive substances, and the mandate of the National Commission on the Status of Women was expanded. A Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals was established, access to social media was restored in May after a prolonged ban. Pakistan ratified three ILO conventions addressing forced labour, labour statistics and maritime workers' rights.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU addressed human rights issues through engagement with government and other key stakeholders, civil society organisations and human rights activists. The EU continued its outreach to Pakistani government officials regarding the persecution of minorities under blasphemy laws and the restrictions on freedom of expression. The EU supported programmes in the fields of civic space protection, media capacity-building and digital rights to strengthen human rights advocacy, safeguard journalists and promote media literacy. These programmes entailed training workshops, institutional partnerships, advocacy campaigns and exchange programmes, including study visits for Pakistani journalists to Brussels. On the World Day Against the Death Penalty, the EU financed an event highlighting the intersection of the death penalty and torture, reinforcing calls for abolition. The EU also continued to support the Asma Jahangir Conference on human rights, which was postponed to February 2026.

EU bilateral political engagement: In January, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights visited Pakistan to engage government, civil society and religious leaders on blasphemy law abuses, enforced disappearances, press freedom curbs and violence against women and minorities. The GSP+ Monitoring Mission, conducted in November in Islamabad and Karachi, closely examined Pakistan's compliance with the scheme's 27 international conventions, with a particular focus on labour rights, freedom of association, gender equality and the protection of religious minorities. The EU-Pakistan Joint Commission in December provided a platform for discussions on human rights, democracy and governance, assessing Pakistan's progress on its international commitments.

EU financial engagement: The EU continued supporting two projects: 'Human Rights in Pakistan II' and 'Deliver Justice', both implemented by UNDP. The former focuses on enhancing the fulfilment of human rights in Pakistan through effective institutions and private sector involvement, the latter on access to justice and improving people-centred justice. The EU also supported the project of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan to enhance human rights protection for the most vulnerable. The EU also supported a project by Justice Project Pakistan aimed at increasing compliance with human rights standards and protecting vulnerable prisoners. Finally, the EU supported projects to promote human rights protection and promotion in the areas of criminal justice systems; freedom of religion or belief; business and human rights, as well as freedom of expression.

Multilateral context: In October, Pakistan was elected to the UN Human Rights Council for the 2026-2028 term. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights condemned Pakistan's constitutional amendments as undermining judicial independence. UN Special Procedures issued 16 communications on Pakistan in 2025. The Committee against Torture and the Committee on the Rights of the Child prepared Pakistan's periodic reviews.

Republic of the Philippines

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the human rights situation in the Philippines remained complex, with positive developments but ongoing challenges. According to Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2025 report, the Philippines remained classified as 'Partly Free', with a score of 58/100. The current administration has engaged constructively with international partners, including by undertaking to publish a mid-term report on actions taken to implement the recommendations received during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Strong public commitments to human rights have been backed up by the publication of the 4th National Human Rights Action Plan and the adoption of Executive Order 97, giving stronger legal force to labour rights. However, concerns remain over the implementation of these policies across all levels of the administration.

Human rights defenders continue to face harassment, and laws such as the Anti-Terrorism Act and the Terrorist Financing Suppression Act are sometimes misused. Impunity and lack of accountability for human rights violations remain issues to be tackled. Accountability for the crimes committed under the drug war of the previous administration is still lacking, and security forces reportedly continue to use the practice of red tagging to harass and intimidate human rights defenders and legitimate civil society organisations, despite a Supreme Court ruling acknowledging it threatens the right to life, liberty and security. While media freedom has improved, there continue to be cases of attacks on journalists.

Cases of enforced disappearances still occur, and civil society is sometimes subject to verbal, legal and physical harassment. Many human rights violations in the Philippines seem to be the result of persistent impunity and lack of accountability, as well as a slow justice system. This is reflected in the very low conviction rate for the extrajudicial killings committed under the former administration. For example, no convictions have yet been made in the case of the murder of Spanish citizen Diego Bello six years after the events.

Policies have been put in place to protect Freedom of Religion or Belief, including in the Muslim-majority Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. Socio-economic human rights also remain a significant challenge in the Philippines, with large segments of the population facing

persistent poverty, inequality, and limited access to essential services. The administration is taking steps to tackle the deeply entrenched corruption in the Philippine bureaucracy. They are also addressing matters related to flood control issues, including by establishing the Independent Commission for Infrastructure.

The death penalty has remained abolished since 2006.

EU action – key areas: The EU's action in the Philippines in 2025 focused on promoting good governance, rule of law, human rights, accountability, strengthening civic and democratic space, supporting freedom of expression, advancing the rights of the child, and eliminating inequalities and discrimination, in line with the EU Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy, which has been extended until 2027.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU maintained regular political dialogue with the Philippine authorities on human rights and democracy throughout 2025, including through the EU-Philippines Subcommittee on Good Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights which met in Brussels in October 2025. Discussions focused on accountability for human rights violations, the rule of law, civic space, and the need to ensure that policy commitments are effectively implemented in practice. The EU continued to raise concerns related to impunity, attacks against journalists and human rights defenders, and the use of legislation affecting civic freedoms, also by raising individual cases. Cooperation with the EU to combat Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) also increased during 2025.

High-level engagement reinforced these messages, including through the visit of HRVP Kaja Kallas, who met government counterparts and civil society representatives in Manila in June 2025. The EU also facilitated exchanges between the Philippines' institutions and EU bodies, including contacts with the Commission on Human Rights. Through these engagements, the EU underlined that respect for human rights remains an integral part of bilateral relations, while recognising the positive steps taken by the authorities alongside continuing challenges.

EU financial engagement: The EU continued to combine political engagement with targeted financial support, notably in justice reform. Support to civil society organisations remained a core element of EU action, with funding and regular dialogue aimed at strengthening advocacy, protecting human rights defenders, and preserving space for independent media. Particular attention was paid to freedom of expression, media safety and disinformation, as well as to child protection, including efforts to combat online sexual exploitation of children. Overall, EU action sought to reinforce existing legal and institutional frameworks while addressing persistent weaknesses in enforcement and accountability.

EU financial engagement in the justice sector reform was notably through the 'Enabling Justice and Rule of Law in the Philippines' programme, which supports institutional strengthening, anti-corruption efforts, and improved coordination among justice actors, with attention to inclusive and gender responsive justice. The EU has prioritised fostering structured dialogue between civil society and the government, ensuring that women's organisations and gender advocates are meaningfully represented. EU-funded programmes in the Philippines have made significant progress in mainstreaming gender equality. In addition, EU initiatives promote an open-government approach by

engaging civil society organisations, women leaders, and youth representatives in policy dialogue and joint activities with public authorities.

Multilateral context: The Philippines continued to engage constructively with the international community, including the UN, on human rights. Delivering on its pledges made during the 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the Philippines established a training institute for forensic science and investigation in June 2025, published its fourth National Human Rights Action Plan was published in July 2025, and established a Human Rights Coordinating Council, whose most recent meeting in October 2025 was attended by the EU Delegation and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

In February 2025, the Philippines was reviewed by the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which expressed concerns over threats to human rights defenders and marginalised groups. The Philippines has yet to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. While enforced disappearances have been criminalised since 2012, no convictions have yet been made under this law.

Republic of Singapore

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: While Singapore is characterised by sound governance and low corruption, concerns persist over its continued use of the death penalty and restrictions on freedom of expression and association. Seventeen executions were carried out in 2025, all but two for drug offences. Two Malaysian nationals were executed on these grounds in October and November. This marked the highest annual number in over 20 years. Access to justice for death row inmates has been further restricted since the entry into force of the Post-Appeal Applications in Capital Cases Act in June 2024, which tightened the rules for late stage appeals in death penalty cases. Corporal punishment in the form of caning continues to be enforced for both criminal and administrative offences. In November 2025, Singapore amended its criminal law to introduce caning as an additional penalty for scammers. Singapore has not ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT).

Freedom of expression remains restricted. Singapore has yet to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Singapore ranked 123rd out of 180 countries in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders. Under the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act (FICA), social media operators can be ordered to remove access to accounts. FICA also allows the government to label individuals and organisations as Politically Significant Persons, which then become subject to strict reporting requirements for donations. Under the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), in effect since 2019, any Singaporean minister can request that information deemed 'false' be corrected or removed from the internet. As of November 2025, 178 'correction directions' were issued. Websites that have repeatedly been found to publish 'online falsehoods' can be labelled Declared Online Locations (DOL) and prohibited from earning a profit from their activities. The list of 17 such cases includes the news websites The Online Citizen Asia and Gutzy Asia, as well as the social media accounts of opposition politician Kenneth Jayaretnam and the anti-death penalty group Transformative Justice Collective (TJC since December 2024). TJC subsequently announced the suspension of most of its online activities until 2027.

Under the Public Order Act (POA), a police permit is required for any public assembly of one or more persons. Permits for assemblies that advocate 'political causes of other countries' will not be granted. In consequence, public gatherings relating to the conflict in the Middle East were outlawed. Three activists accused of staging an 'illegal procession' to the presidential palace in support of Gaza were acquitted in October 2025.

Migrant workers in Singapore, which constitute a significant portion of the workforce, particularly in construction and domestic work, continued to face numerous challenges. Over 400,000 migrant workers are transported to work on the backs of goods vehicles (lorries) every day, a practice that has raised persistent safety concerns. Female migrant workers employed as live-in helpers face an elevated risk of trafficking or abuse.

The Singapore government continued to implement measures to improve gender equality and equal opportunities in the workplace, including through the 2025 Workplace Fairness Act. It places new obligations on employers to offer fundamental protections against discrimination but does not cover discrimination based on sexual orientation. Singapore's LGBTI community continued to advocate for greater recognition and rights, with the annual 'Pink Dot' rally gathering several thousand participants in June 2025.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to focus its attention and activities on fostering freedom of expression, assembly, association and political participation; advocacy against the use of the death penalty; promoting the protection of migrant and LGBTI rights; the ratification of international human rights conventions and ILO conventions; and monitoring the impact of new technologies on human rights. Gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the EU's activities which are implemented in a Team Europe spirit together with EU Member States and, to the extent possible, with civil society.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Delegation to Singapore, together with EU Member States, carried out a number of démarches and political outreach on human rights-related topics to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Continuing its longstanding advocacy, the EU and its Member States, together with Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, issued joint statements before or after an execution and raised the issue in its bilateral contacts with the Singaporean government, including at the annual Senior Officials Meeting in October 2025.

The EU Delegation held its annual EU Human Rights Day Seminar, presenting European perspectives on diverse human rights challenges and provided a space for local activists and academics to discuss human rights issues. In 2025, the seminar focused on risks and biases in artificial intelligence, and inclusive access to technology.

Labour issues, including Singapore's pending ratification of three fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), are discussed in the context of the implementation of the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA) Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapter. The 3rd EU-Singapore TSD Board Meeting and Public Stakeholders' Forum took place in April 2025.

EU financial engagement: Financing of civil society organisations by foreign entities remains prohibited in Singapore. The EU Delegation's activities consisted of monitoring and reporting, coordinating closely with EU Member States and international partners, as well as organising meetings and events with

local members of civil society. This included supporting discussions in preparation of Singapore's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2026.

Multilateral context: Singapore remains like-minded in supporting the rules-based international order and multilateralism, and votes mostly in line with EU positions at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee. In the regional context, Singapore remains an active contributor to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. However, it has still to ratify five major human rights conventions (International Covenant on Civil and Political Right, International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights, Convention Against Torture, International Convention on the Protection of Rights of Migrants and the Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances) and three fundamental ILO conventions (C87, C111, C105). Singapore continues to lead the retentionist camp on the use of the death penalty at the UNGA Third Committee.

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: During the first year of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's administration and the NPP government's tenure, the democratic environment has improved. Substantial efforts have been undertaken to recover from the severe economic crisis. However, economic stability remains fragile, and the devastating Cyclone Ditwah, which struck the country in late November 2025, undermined the pace of economic recovery efforts.

On 6 May, Local Council elections took place, and voting was carried out across all districts without any major incidents of violence or disruption. Voter turnout stood at 61.88%. The ruling party secured the largest share of seats nationally, although no single party achieved a clear majority in many councils, resulting in hung councils and the need for coalition negotiations. Although there was a mandatory 25% quota for women's representation, the number of local councils without female representatives has risen. This demonstrates the persistent challenges to women's representation in politics and decision-making. Provincial elections are considerably overdue, having been postponed for several years, since the last elections held in 2014.

The government has undertaken a robust anti-corruption campaign to restore people's trust in key institutions. The Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) became more active in 2025, securing notable convictions for bribery and corruption. New legislation, including the Proceeds of Crime Act, was introduced to align domestic norms with international standards. Though positive strides were made, a number of challenges, such as delays in case processing, remain pervasive.

The trajectory of reconciliation remained mixed, as key reconciliation mechanisms remained largely stalled. The releases of land held by the military remain limited and reports of land disputes persist. Announced initiatives include steps towards the establishment of an Independent Prosecutor's Office, and the reported development of the National Action Plan on Reconciliation and Co-existence. The Government continues to rely on the repressive Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), notably with continuing detentions in 2025 primarily targeting organised crime. A draft law – the Protection of the State from Terrorism Act (PSTA) – to replace the PTA (a commitment taken by Sri Lanka since 2017) has been prepared by a committee and published in December 2025 for public consultation, and a new law is still to be adopted. Alongside some improvements, the UN and other stakeholders have highlighted several problematic elements in this draft PSTA. While the

openness to broad public consultations is welcome, it remains to be seen whether the final legislation will be brought into line with international standards. A multi-agency committee was established to review the controversial Online Safety Act. Press freedom in Sri Lanka remained under strain despite a modest improvement in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index, where the country ranked 139th out of 180 countries.

Whilst there is more openness from the new government towards civil society, many NGOs continue to express concerns at being marginalised in the work on key legislation. Some NGOs, particularly in the North, engaged in activities on sensitive topics, reported being subject to scrutiny and intimidation. The registration, operation and funding of civil society organisations remain impacted by increasing administrative and legal requirements.

EU action - key focus areas: Inclusive and Peaceful Society is one of the priority areas for EU action. It includes support to democracy, the rule of law, and access to justice; promoting space for civil society, human rights defenders and media; supporting the rights of minorities for an inclusive and peaceful society; promoting gender equality and women's rights, as well as labour rights and environmental rights in business.

EU bilateral political engagement: The 8th EU-Sri Lanka Working Group on Rule of Law, Governance, and Human Rights was held on 5 May 2025 in Colombo, back-to-back with the EU GSP+ monitoring mission. It was the occasion to reinforce messages on the need for tangible progress in implementing key outstanding commitments in the areas of human rights, labour rights and rule of law.

EU financial engagement: Promoting an inclusive and peaceful society is one of the two priorities under the EU-Sri Lanka Multiannual Indicative Plan (MIP) for 2021-2027. Under this priority, support is provided to the sectors of justice, reconciliation and social cohesion. Various projects were concluded such as the 'Strengthening Social Cohesion and Peace in Sri Lanka (SCOPE)' and the 'Strengthening Transformation, Reconciliation and Inclusive Democratic Engagement (STRIDE)' project. The Justice Reform (JURE) project continues to promote judicial independence and a more responsive justice system. In addition, Sri Lanka has benefitted from allocations under Global Europe's Human Rights and Democracy Programme.

Multilateral context: The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who visited Sri Lanka in June 2025, stressed that 'momentum of change' following the elections must translate into concrete steps.

The EU supported resolution 60/1 of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) on Sri Lanka, which was consensually adopted on 6 October. It extends for another two years the mandate of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on evidence-gathering for civil war human rights violations and monitoring of Sri Lanka human rights situation. The government stressed its commitment to establishing the truth through domestic mechanisms.

The UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances reviewed Sri Lanka in September and issued its report in October. It acknowledged Sri Lanka's positive steps, such as ratifying the Convention, integrating it into national law, and establishing the Office on Missing Persons (OMP). However, it was concerned about the lack of progress on alleged enforced disappearances.

Kingdom of Thailand

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2025 was a year of political transition. In August, the Constitutional Court dismissed Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, the leader of the Pheu Thai Party on allegations of serious ethics breach. The leader of the Bhum Jai Thai Party Anutin Charnvirakul succeeded her in office. Parliament was subsequently dissolved on 12 December and general elections scheduled on 8 February 2026.

As part of its human rights agenda, Thailand launched its first National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (2025–2027). It also enacted the Protection and Promotion of the Way of Life of Ethnic Groups Act along with a scheme for permanent residency and Thai citizenship for long-term immigrants. A Cabinet resolution also allowed for Myanmar displaced persons along the Thai-Myanmar border to apply for work permits. In January 2025, Thailand became the first country in Southeast Asia to recognise same-sex marriage. It also enacted legislation expanding the criminal definition of sexual harassment and extended maternity leave

Over the course of the year, civil society organisations reported convictions of political activists and politicians with lengthy jail sentences under the lèse-majesté law while an amnesty bill lapsed following the Parliament's dissolution. CSOs have also denounced the deportation of foreign political activists (such as detained Uyghurs to China) as well as the extradition of a Vietnamese religious activist.

Thailand ranked 85th out of 180 countries in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters without Borders, up from 87th in 2024. Strategic lawsuits against public participation, intimidation and surveillance reportedly continued targeting Human Rights Defenders (HRDs). Under Thai law, 60 offences still carry the death penalty, including for drug-related crimes. While hundreds of inmates remain on death row, there has been no known executions since 2018.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued efforts to strengthen the protection of civil and political rights, to promote the business and human rights agenda, and to ensure protecting human rights defenders, forcibly displaced and marginalised groups or individuals in vulnerable situations. The EU ensured a human rights-based approach to development through EU-funded projects and programmes, which included capacity-building to government officials, civil society and HRDs. The EU continued regular dialogue with interlocutors in the government, civil society, HRDs, the business sector, and also worked with UN agencies. The EU conducted démarches, public diplomacy campaigns, and diplomatic briefings. The EU Delegation together with the diplomatic community regularly conducted diplomatic trial observations. The EU Delegation organised a human rights art exhibition to raise rights awareness as well as an art competition on the death penalty for undergraduate students. The EU remained committed to supporting resilient, inclusive and democratic societies by providing capacity-building for and assistance to non-Thais, marginalised groups and individuals in vulnerable situations, as well as promoting gender equality and engagement with youth. The EU worked with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and civil society on providing humanitarian assistance and advocacy for Myanmar and other asylum seekers in Thailand. A gender-targeted action was implemented on girls and youth in view of harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges arising from new technologies.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU and Thailand exchanged on political and human rights issues at the inaugural meeting of the EU-Thailand Joint Committee as well as the Specialised Working Groups on Sustainable Development and Green Transition and on Human Rights and Governance under the EU-Thailand Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. The EU Delegation and Member States' Embassies continued to regularly engage with the relevant authorities. The EU Delegation engaged with relevant Ministries at the working level to enhance cooperation on human rights. In particular, the EU Delegation engaged with the Ministry of Justice to enhance cooperation on the business and human rights agenda. The EU Delegation also engaged with the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security to enhance cooperation on gender equality, women's empowerment, promotion of migrant workers' rights and the rights of persons in vulnerable situations.

EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation continued to support the promotion and protection of human rights through cooperation with government institutions, civil society organisations and UN agencies, notably the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the International Labour Organization (ILO), UN Women, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and UNHCR. Key areas of engagement included strengthening compliance with international human rights standards, promoting responsible business conduct and labour rights, protecting migrant workers, and advancing the rights of women, children and persons with disabilities.

The EU also continued to support displaced persons from Myanmar through six projects, including one implemented by UNHCR and five by civil society organisations, with a combined value of EUR 12 million. In addition, a new refugee programme (EUR 15 million) was launched to support Thailand and other partners in implementing the Cabinet resolution granting the right to work to Myanmar displaced persons living in the shelters. Additional actions focused on digital rights, the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and the protection of marginalised communities and vulnerable children and youth in the Southern Border Provinces.

Multilateral context: The EU Delegation worked with EU Member States and other Embassies and international organisations, including UN agencies and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), to discuss human rights and democracy issues with government counterparts. The EU Delegation and EU Member States conducted démarches and outreach with Thai authorities on the rules-based international order and UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions, notably ahead of sessions at the UNGA Third Committee and the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), on topics such as the death penalty, freedom of religion or belief, the rights of the child, the human rights situation in Myanmar and in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as well as country-specific resolutions on Afghanistan, Belarus, Burundi, Russia, Sudan and Ukraine. The Embassy of Poland and the EU Delegation led a multilateral action to mark three years of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2025. Thailand was elected a member of the UN HRC for the term 2025-2027.

Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Timor-Leste is notable within the Indo-Pacific region for its relatively robust democratic governance and commendable human rights record. Having emerged from years of foreign occupation and conflict, the nation's contemporary political identity has been forged through a shared dedication to self-determination, democracy, and the respect for human rights. Timor-Leste has established a pluralistic political system characterised by regular and

competitive elections, peaceful transitions of power, and a constitution that secures fundamental rights and freedoms.

The country has ratified eight of the nine core UN human rights treaties and has taken measures to align its domestic legislation with international standards. Crucial independent oversight bodies, such as the Office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights and Justice, and the Anti-Corruption Commission, play significant roles in promoting accountability, addressing maladministration, and investigating violations of human rights. Civil society organisations are active and make meaningful contributions to public discourse, policy development, and human rights monitoring.

Freedom of expression and media freedom are typically respected, allowing journalists to operate without systematic oppression. Nonetheless, isolated cases of legal pressure, political interference, and self-censorship suggest that further strengthening of safeguards for media independence is necessary. Although the judiciary is constitutionally independent, issues such as limited capacity, case backlogs, and inadequate resources continue to impede access to justice, especially in rural regions.

Despite these comparatively strong legal and institutional frameworks, the implementation of policies remains inconsistent. Socio-economic disparities, high youth unemployment, and insufficient public investment in human development present structural challenges to inclusive growth and the fulfilment of economic and social rights. Although corruption is addressed through institutional mechanisms, it persists in undermining public trust and the delivery of services.

Violence against women and children is among the most urgent human rights issues, with domestic and gender-based violence enduring despite existing legal protections and awareness campaigns. Discrimination and social exclusion also affect marginalised groups, including individuals with disabilities and members of the LGBTI community, particularly regarding access to public services, employment and justice.

In summary, Timor-Leste demonstrates a strong normative commitment to democracy and human rights, serving as a positive example within Southeast Asia. Continued advancement will depend on enhancing institutional capacity, addressing social and economic inequalities, tackling corruption, and ensuring that legal protections lead to meaningful improvements in the everyday lives of all citizens.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, the European Union's engagement with human rights and democracy in Timor-Leste was closely aligned with the five strategic pillars of its 2020–2027 Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy. The EU's assistance concentrated on advocating for the rights of women, children, and individuals with disabilities through various initiatives such as awareness campaigns, capacity-building efforts, advocacy, legal aid, vocational training, and schemes for economic empowerment. Simultaneously, the EU emphasised the need to bolster local civil society, empowering organisations to take the lead in initiatives, serve vulnerable groups more effectively, and oversee the implementation of public policies, including participation in multilateral human rights reporting.

Acknowledging the increasing significance of technology, EU programmes advocated for digital literacy and responsible online behaviour, particularly aiding Timorese youths to navigate digital environments safely and constructively. Furthermore, following Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN, the EU promoted

civil society participation in regional dialogue platforms, ensuring that national Human Rights priorities were represented and advanced within wider regional fora.

EU bilateral political engagement: Timor-Leste and the European Union (EU) conducted their second Partnership Dialogue under Article 3 of the Samoa Agreement, signed on 15th February 2024. This Dialogue underscored mutual values such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and the support for a multilateral system with the United Nations at its centre, as well as a rules-based international order. The European Union and Timor-Leste reviewed the advancements achieved in executing the recommendations set forth by the EU Election Observation Missions. In addition, structured dialogues with Civil Society Organisations took place in 2025, which included peer review and learning sessions, further fostering collaboration and mutual understanding.

EU financial engagement: Financial engagement continues to align political priorities with targeted programming and strategic funding, reinforcing democratic governance, inclusion, and protection of fundamental rights. In 2025, the EU launched a major children's rights and inclusion programme focused on dismantling discrimination, preventing violence, and promoting gender equality and social inclusion. Three new grants were contracted with civil society organisations to strengthen good governance, empower vulnerable communities, and enhance public policy monitoring at national and local levels, reflecting a political commitment to civic space and accountability.

Multilateral context: Although Timor-Leste is not presently a member of the UN Human Rights Council, it actively participates in Council sessions and undergoes the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. The government expressed its aspiration to pursue Council membership for the 2024–2026 term but decided to suspend its candidacy in favour of regional consensus, supporting ASEAN candidate Indonesia. During the adoption of its most recent (third) UPR outcome at the Human Rights Council session in July 2022, Timor-Leste received 194 recommendations, endorsing 186. These recommendations span a wide array of topics, including improvements to the legal and institutional framework, civil and political rights, economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as women's rights and the rights of other vulnerable groups.

Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN in 2025 offers a platform for regional influence, although ASEAN's consensus-driven approach may limit its capacity for regional human rights advocacy. In recent years, Timor-Leste has taken a principled stance concerning Myanmar's human rights crisis, which elicited diplomatic protests from Myanmar. Conversely, it has adopted a more cautious and low-profile position regarding reported abuses in Papua, aligning more closely with ASEAN's principle of non-interference.

Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, Vietnam's human rights and democracy situation saw further improvements on economic and social rights including in terms of poverty, improving social services and education, and promoting gender equality. At the same time, concerns remained about continued restrictions on civil and political rights, particularly concerning freedom of expression, association, and assembly, as well as an increase in transnational repression in Southeast Asia and Europe.

Vietnam removed capital punishment for eight offenses, including most economic crimes and some national security offenses, but the death penalty in Vietnam remains applicable for 10 specific crimes, including 'high treason'.

Over 160 political prisoners have been reported, including bloggers and activists facing arrest and conviction on charges that relate to national security concerns. The Communist Party of Vietnam maintains strong control over media and political discourse. The restructuring of provincial and ministerial governance led to further securitization of the state, increasing the crackdown on dissenters with activists being arrested and convicted in closed trials. The government has tightened measures against any form of protest or dissent, especially concerning ethnic and religious minorities, attributing crackdowns to 'national unity' and 'colour revolution' threats. In terms of press freedom, Vietnam ranked 173rd out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) 2025 World Press Freedom Index, while Freedom House rated Vietnam as 'Not Free' with a score of 20. Human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society organizations faced mounting pressure, while laws offering sweeping authority against dissidents were continually enacted. There are increasing reports of acts of transnational repression against Vietnamese human rights defenders abroad.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to prioritise the protection of human rights defenders, including through political engagement with the authorities and the use of the Human Rights Defenders Emergency Fund. The EU regularly raised concerns regarding freedom of expression, arbitrary detention, conditions of detention and restrictions on civic space, while calling for greater respect for fundamental freedoms and the release of individuals detained for the peaceful exercise of their rights.

In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, the EU supported labour rights, gender equality and inclusive development, including through engagement on labour reforms under the EU–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) and initiatives promoting women's empowerment. The EU also continued to advocate for the ratification and effective implementation of international human rights and labour standards, including the International Labour (ILO) Convention No. 87.

The EU remained engaged in multilateral human rights fora and continued to promote freedom of expression online and offline, media freedom and an open civic space. Cooperation with civil society organisations and other partners remained an important component of EU engagement, including through support for ongoing human rights, labour rights and gender equality initiatives.

EU bilateral political engagement: EU-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue was held in Hanoi in July with pointed discussions on civil and political rights. The EU continued expressing concern about arbitrary arrests and the shrinking space for civil society. Human rights continue to be mentioned at every opportunity with Viet Nam.

EU financial engagement: With projects such as the EU Justice and Legal Empowerment Programme II (EU JULE II), the EU worked collaboratively with Vietnamese legal institutions offering technical assistance and strategic advocacy on human rights obligations. Financial support focused on the revision of labour rights under the EVFTA, alongside the empowerment of local civil society organisations.

Multilateral context: In 2025, Vietnam was re-elected for a third term as member of the Human Rights Council (2026-2028). The EU remained committed to leveraging multilateral diplomacy for advocating human rights improvements in Vietnam. Engagement with UN treaty bodies like the UN Human Rights Committee in July 2025 added international scrutiny to Vietnam's practices and calls to safeguard human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Oceania

Commonwealth of Australia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Australia demonstrated a strong overall commitment to human rights and democracy in 2025. The federal elections of May 2025 showed again the strength of the democratic system and vigour of open and free political debate in the country. Positive developments in promoting human rights included legislation to protect children from online threats by restricting access to social media for persons under sixteen. The government continued efforts to narrow the gap in expected life outcomes for First Nations people and other Australians. The state of Victoria enacted legislation to establish the first democratically elected First Peoples' Assembly, while the High Court ruled that native title amounted to property rights. However, the country does not have a constitutional Bill of Rights or Human Rights Act.

Externally, the country was pro-active in promoting cooperation on human rights at the multilateral level and in addressing situations in specific countries of concern, including Iran, Myanmar, the DPRK and Afghanistan. The government nominated a Special Envoy for International Human Rights tasked with promoting abolition of the death penalty and ensuring the rights of children, persons with disabilities and LGBTI persons. Australia also has an Ambassador for Gender Equality.

The terrorist attack at Bondi Beach in December 2025 highlighted existing concerns about increasing incidents of anti-semitism and other risks to social cohesion, including anti-Muslim hatred and the rise of extremist political organisations. The Parliament subsequently adopted new legislation to address the spread of hatred and extremism, including anti-semitism. Information indicating that the Iranian government had sponsored anti-semitism related arson attacks underlined concerns about attempts at transnational repression of certain ethnic groups and dissidents from other countries living in Australia.

While the government continues efforts to 'narrow the gap' in expected life outcomes for First Nation's people compared to the rest of the population, significant differences remain in many areas. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention commended safeguards against arbitrary detention while noting concerns about the disproportional rate of First Nations' women held in legal detention, the incarceration of children under the age of 14 and the mandatory detention of people with irregular visa status.

Some lawyers and refugee organisations criticised the 2025 agreement with Nauru to resettle several hundred non-Australian citizens who have completed prison sentences in Australia, but who cannot be returned to their countries of origin. The UN Human Rights Committee ruled that Australia remained responsible for asylum seekers redirected or transferred to offshore processing facilities in Nauru via a 2013 agreement.

Australia remained ranked 11th out of 126 countries on the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law index. It moved from 39th to 29th out of 180 on the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without Borders. The Civicus Tracking Tool again scored Australia at 80/100, placing it just inside the second highest category "Narrowed Civic Space".

EU action - key focus areas: EU action focussed on working with Australia in multilateral human rights fora and exchanges on addressing the situations in specific countries. In Australia, the EU Delegation and Member States supported multilateral cooperation goals. As Team Europe, they also worked with local partners to focus on preventing discrimination notably on grounds of gender, sexual orientation and racial origin. Team Europe encouraged engagement with the democratic process, including through addressing disinformation and supporting high quality journalism. The EU Delegation maintained regular dialogues on technology and human rights, notably about the social media ban for people under sixteen. The Delegation and EU Member States combined the promotion of European culture with expressions of respect for the culture and traditions of First Nations people.

EU bilateral political engagement: High-level political engagement increased during the year, including at the leaders-level and via the HRVP. The annual EU-Australia Human Rights Consultations served as the primary channel of interaction on multilateral and external human rights matters complemented by extensive actions and outreach to Australian stakeholders in the country led by the EU Delegation and Member States' Embassies.

EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation sponsored the EU Qantas Journalism Awards with the laureate travelling to European capitals to analyse hybrid threats from Russia. The Delegation also supported the Human Rights Commission Young Person Award to promote participation and activism amongst young people and an event with other missions to address domestic violence in migrant communities. Funding was provided to support the exhibition, 'Loving' (photographs showing men in love from the 1850s to 1950s) in several Australian cities, including the opening ceremony with the Governor General of Australia.

Multilateral context: Australia was aligned with most EU positions in UN human rights fora. This included efforts to ensure the UN80 reform process did not negatively impact the human rights pillar, the renewal of key mandates including independent experts on the protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. Australia worked with the EU on resolutions related to Eritrea, Afghanistan, Myanmar and the DPRK (the latter presented jointly by the EU and Australia in the UN Human Rights Council) and in supporting abolition of the death penalty.

Republic of Fiji

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, the Coalition Government led since 2022 by Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka embarked on reviewing selected legislation and implement institutional reforms, including the Code of Conduct Bill 2025, the Access to Information Bill and the review of the Information Act 2018, the Accountability and Transparency Commission Bill 2025, and the review of the Police Act 1965, aimed at promoting transparency, accountability and integrity within Fiji's political and governance system.

The Government also undertook a constitutional review process to amend the 2013 Constitution. Following the Supreme Court's opinion issued in September 2025 upon request of the Government,

constitutional amendments now require a 2/3 parliamentary majority (reduced from 3/4) and a national referendum involving a simple majority (instead of 3/4 of registered voters). The subsequent National Referendum Bill 2025 was tabled in Parliament in December 2025. The Government announced that the next general elections will be held after the constitutional review.

At the local level, municipal elections for 13 city and town councils, previously anticipated for 2025, did not take place. The Government approved the Electoral (Local Government Elections) Regulations 2025 setting out voting procedures and candidate nominations for local elections, now earmarked for the last quarter of 2026.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in January 2025 to promote healing and closure for survivors of human rights violations and contribute to national reconciliation. The EU supported Fiji in fostering national reconciliation by financing the TRC Chair and providing capacity-building support to the TRC.

Fiji has abolished the death penalty and ratified all core human rights instruments. Despite positive developments, and alongside Fiji's active multilateral engagement on human rights, several human rights challenges persist in the country, including the effective prevention of and response to gender-based violence (GBV), discrimination and human rights compliance by law enforcement personnel. Data released by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre indicated that, between January and October 2025, 63% of reported victims experienced domestic violence. Issues that further impact women's development include low representation of women in formal sector employment, women's health and women's equal representation at all levels of government and civil society. As of 2025, only 10.9% of seats in Parliament are held by women, less than in the previous Parliament.

Fiji continued the implementation of its National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls 2023-2028, the first one in the Pacific, and adopted the National Action Plan for Women's Economic Empowerment 2024-2029. Fiji also launched its National Disability Policy (2025-2035) advancing initiatives aimed at strengthening the rights and inclusions of persons with disabilities. Fiji has made continuous progress in terms of corruption control since 2010, ranking 49th out of 182 countries in the 2025 Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.

The Constitution provides for freedoms of expression, press, peaceful assembly and association, which may, however, be restricted by legislation. Thus, Fiji civic space remains rated as 'narrowed' by the global civil society alliance CIVICUS.

EU action – key focus areas: EU action continued to promote access to justice and human rights, including gender equality, and supported CSOs in various areas of activity. Fiji also benefits from several initiatives promoting human rights, gender equality and addressing GBV, supporting economic rights, climate change adaptation and mitigation and improving the management of natural resources.

EU bilateral political engagement: Issues related to human rights, including gender equality and combating gender violence, as well as rule of law and democracy were addressed during the Partnership Dialogue between the EU and Fiji held in Brussels on 20 November 2025. In 2025, the EU continued to carry out démarches and outreach, inviting Fiji to support EU human rights initiatives and priorities at the UN level.

EU financial engagement: The EU supports the Government in implementing the Climate Change Act through a budget support programme of EUR 12.8 million. The programme targets social inclusion and human development, gender, and human rights, democracy and governance. It also supports the implementation of the Gender Action Plan III, notably its key thematic area 'Addressing challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by the green transition and the digital transformation'. The EU launched the project 'A Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Approach to Combatting Impunity for Sexual Offences', led by Medical Services Pacific, which aims to end impunity for sexual offenses through increased awareness and accountability for human rights violations through a strengthened, functional and supported reporting system. Under the same Call for Proposals 'Fighting against impunity in Fiji', at the end of 2025, Fijian NGO Dialogue Fiji was awarded a EUR 400,000 contract ('The IMPACT Initiative: From Impunity to Accountability') to address the pervasive culture of impunity for human rights violations. In 2025, Rotary Pacific Water for Life Foundation signed a contract (EUR 540 000) under the Call for Proposals supporting civil society organisations as actors of development and governance in the Pacific. Fiji also benefits from the regional programme 'Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls – Phase II' for which the EU allocated EUR 8.25 million.

Multilateral context: Fiji completed its fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in January 2025. Fiji received 209 recommendations and accepted 181, while noting 28 of them. Recommendations related to civic space included calling for safeguarding freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association, reviewing or repealing legislation identified as potentially restrictive, including provisions in the Public Order Act and the Crime Act. In July 2025, the Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) issued concluding observations on Fiji, raising issues related to the protection of human rights defenders. Fiji hosted the Asia Pacific Forum's 30th Annual General Meeting in November 2025 highlighting Fiji's commitment to human rights principles. The Ocean of Peace Declaration, championed by Fiji and adopted by Pacific Leaders in September 2025, includes commitments to upholding and promoting human rights, highlighting the nexus of human rights and climate change.

Republic of Kiribati

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Since its independence from the UK in 1979, Kiribati has maintained a stable and democratic government. Kiribati is a constitutional parliamentary democracy with a multi-party system in place. Elections have been regular, and are reportedly free, peaceful and well-administered and the courts can review disputed results. Political parties generally do not follow fixed ideologies or formal platforms, and political affiliations are influenced by geography and tribal ties. According to Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2025* report, Kiribati remained classified as 'Free', with a score of 89/100.

The country held its last parliamentary and presidential elections in August and October 2024 respectively. Incumbent President Taneti Maamau was re-elected for a third four-year term. The elections were reportedly conducted in an orderly manner, but foreign insights were few as there is no foreign media represented in Kiribati. Foreign partners were advised to avoid any missions to the country during the pre-election period.

The judiciary has been considered generally independent and free from government influence. Overall, the human rights situation in Kiribati seemed to have remained stable in 2025, but little data is available and information from the ground is scarce.

Human rights challenges persist, notably violence against women, including spousal abuse and child abuse which remain serious concerns despite national legislation condemning them. Recent amendments and community-based initiatives, including amendments to the Family Peace Act 2014 and local violence-prevention programmes, sought to strengthen protection for women and children. Women's empowerment programmes and tackling gender-based violence had also been systematically integrated into the country's development plans.

The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of race or origin. However, the law does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or social status. Consensual sex between males is criminalised, but there were no reports of prosecutions. Women's participation in political life remains low.

Kiribati has yet to establish a National Human Rights' Institution in compliance with the Paris Principles.

EU action – key focus areas: Regional programmes implemented in Kiribati focus on the eradication of domestic and gender-based violence. Other key areas are aimed at upholding and promoting citizens' protections as well as of building inclusive, resilient and democratic societies, as well as improving access to safe water

EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights and gender equality are promoted through policy dialogue and financial instruments. The EU is committed to supporting government and non-state actor efforts to reduce gender-based violence. In 2025, the EU continued to carry out démarches and outreach, inviting Kiribati to support EU human rights initiatives and priorities at the UN level.

EU financial engagement: In 2025, Kiribati continued benefitting from the EU-funded regional initiative promoting gender equality and the fight against GBV that started in January 2024. The Pacific Partnership also facilitated access to services for survivors of violence against women in Kiribati to continue through adaptation of national reporting and referral pathways. In addition, the School-Community Engagement (SCE) component of Pacific Partnership aims to strengthen collaboration between schools, families, and communities to support student learning and wellbeing. In Kiribati, the SCE component strengthened school and community engagement by establishing and enhancing parent and student clubs, supporting the development of school policies, and continuing implementation of the SCE Checklist.

Multilateral context: Kiribati's fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) took place in April 2025. Of the 183 recommendations received, Kiribati accepted 120 and noted 63. Kiribati supported recommendations relating to equality and non-discrimination, human rights and the environment, good governance, and the participation of women in political and public life. Noted recommendations involved those requiring structural changes or commitments beyond the country's limited capacities.

In September 2025, Kiribati opened its Permanent Mission in Geneva to strengthen its engagement with the UN system. Kiribati is also a key ally, together with other Pacific Islands Countries, in the fight against climate change.

Republic of the Marshall Islands

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Regular democratic elections, combined with an independent judiciary and media, ensure that basic human rights are respected in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). According to Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2025* report, the Marshall Islands remained classified as 'Free', with a score of 93/100. The Marshall Islands voted in a general election on 20 November 2023 to elect members of the Nitijela (Parliament) as well as for referenda on eight proposed constitutional amendments, six of which were approved in April 2025 — including establishing an Office of the Ombudsman to investigate high-level corruption and fraud. Dr Hilda C. Heine, re-elected President in 2024 by Parliament, is the only woman head of state in the Pacific region. The Marshall Islands are viewed as a promoter of and leader on human rights in the Pacific region, especially regarding climate change and nuclear justice.

In 2025, RMI continued working towards having a fully operational National Human Rights Institution compliant with Paris Principles by December 2030. Current human rights and democracy concerns in RMI include gender-based and domestic violence, corruption, child abuse, the rights of prisoners and detainees and human trafficking. The National Anti-Human Trafficking Taskforce began implementing its five-year plan on prevention, protection and prosecution measures following Cabinet's endorsement of its National Action Plan (2025-2030). RMI continues efforts to integrate human rights into national development through social protection programs, food security initiatives, and targeted support for marginalised populations.

EU action – key focus areas: EU actions focus inter alia on the elimination and prevention of violence against women and girls, supporting CSO engagement with the government on policy dialogue and governance as well as providing access to clean and safe water on all the outer islands of the Marshall Islands. The EU also supports RMI in setting up a competent authority to enable the export of RMI fisheries products to the EU.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to work closely with RMI in promoting and upholding human rights in 2025. The EU carried out démarches and outreach to RMI to support EU human rights initiatives and priorities, including at the UN level.

EU financial engagement: Through different financial instruments, the EU supported efforts to strengthen human rights, gender equality and increased participation of women in decision making. RMI benefits from the EU-funded regional initiative promoting gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence. The Pacific Partnership Social Citizenship Education (SCE) component is implemented by the Pacific Community (SPC), in partnership with the National Public School System, and piloted across 12 schools in Majuro, Wotje and Jaluit. It emphasises social rights and obligations necessary to be part of, and to enjoy equal opportunities, benefits, and status in a community. The EU also provides a EUR 6 million funding under the NDICI-Global Europe instrument to provide access to safe water on the outer islands of RMI. The EU remains committed to supporting and raising awareness for civil society and non-state actors in the Marshall Islands as a key component in implementing of the regional roadmap for CSOs in the Pacific. The EU works closely with government and civil society actors, as well as other regional organisations and donor partners in the Marshall Islands to this end.

Multilateral context: The Marshall Islands is one of the most active countries among the Pacific islands in terms of participation in core international human rights treaties. To date, RMI is a State Party to

eight of the nine core international human rights instruments, as well as one Optional Protocol. RMI continues to advance women's participation in governance, policymaking, and leadership roles. It endorsed the Regional Gender Equality Framework for the Micronesian Islands Forum in June 2025, affirming its commitment to regional cooperation on women's rights and empowerment.

The Marshall Islands underwent their fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in November 2025 and received 223 recommendations. RMI was commended on progress toward establishing a National Human Rights Institute (NHRI), reforms targeting human trafficking and corruption, and achievements in education. RMI was recommended to strengthen protections against gender-based violence and discrimination, improve support for migrants and workers, expand health and education services in remote atolls, as well as advance gender equality, including women's participation in public life.

The Marshall Islands have continuously raised the issue of the consequences of the US nuclear legacy, linking it with RMI's high rates of cancer. The Marshall Islands are a particularly active and vocal participant in climate change negotiations, being a strong partner for the EU in climate action in international fora, in particular the UN and the IMO. RMI was elected to the UN Human Rights Council 2025-2027 for the second time serving as the only current Pacific member, with climate change and nuclear justice as its top priorities.

Federated States of Micronesia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Regular democratic elections, combined with an independent judiciary and media ensure that basic human rights are respected in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). According to Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2025* report, the Federated States of Micronesia remained classified as 'Free', with a score of 92/100. FSM's latest election was held on 4 March 2025 to elect 10 members of the unicameral national Congress that are held on two-year terms (8 of them were re-elected), out of 14 seats in total. Four seats are held on four-year terms, including the seat of the President. These four are not up for re-election until 2027. FSM's judiciaries are independent, and civil liberties are generally respected.

The legislative framework assures women's equal rights in FSM, including with regard to property ownership and employment. FSM's National Constitution, as well as the four state constitutions, all prohibit sexual discrimination. Despite this, socio-economic discrimination and violence against women continue to be the most prevalent human rights problems the country faces, with no national legislation criminalising spousal rape. Cultural factors in the male-dominated society limit women's representation in government and politics.

In July 2025, FSM's first woman Lieutenant Governor Herolyn Movick was sworn in marking the first time a woman was elected to an executive position at both State and national level. FSM successfully convened its 10th National Women's Conference in October 2025 with heads of state delegations signing an Outcomes Document outlining recommendations on empowering women through culture, women's economic empowerment, health and gender-based violence.

FSM remains a source country for human trafficking, including forced labour and sex trafficking. Climate change continues to present significant human rights issues in FSM, particularly for women. As a country with many low-lying atolls, FSM is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change,

notably sea-level rise, changing weather patterns and increased frequency and intensity of storms and disasters.

An independent National Human Rights Institution in line with the Paris Principles has not been established.

EU action – key focus areas: EU actions focus, inter alia, on supporting the ratification of or accession to the remaining core human rights instruments, promoting gender equality and women's rights, and supporting the engagement of CSOs in FSM society. Through the EU flagship regional ocean programme, EU intervention in FSM also addressed labour rights, gender and human rights in the fisheries sector. Upholding and promoting citizens' protections and rights in these areas is in line with the EU's objective of protecting and empowering individuals as well as of building inclusive and democratic societies. EU intervention in FSM also focuses on providing access to clean and safe water.

EU bilateral political engagement: Through policy dialogues and a number of different financial instruments, the EU continues to promote the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights, gender equality and the increased participation of women in decision making. The EU remains committed to supporting and raising awareness of civil society and non-state actors in FSM as an essential element of implementing the regional roadmap for CSOs in the Pacific. The EU works closely with government and civil society actors, as well as other regional organisations and donor partners to this end. Raising better public awareness about human rights and providing education on rights and responsibilities can contribute to a culture of respect for human rights in FSM. In 2025, the EU carried out démarches and outreach inviting FSM to support EU human rights initiatives and priorities, including at the UN level.

EU financial engagement: A EUR 14.2 million EU-funded 'Sustainable Energy and Accompanying Measures' programme combines different components with the overall objective to enable FSM citizens to utilize affordable, reliable and environmentally sound energy. The NGO component provides a EUR 1 million grant to support increasing the participation of women and CSOs in the energy sector to enhance participation of non-state actors in policy dialogue, monitoring national programmes, economic reforms and public finance management with a particular emphasis on climate change, sustainable energy and environmental conservation. Specific focus is being given to increase the empowerment and capacity of women in the island communities of Chuuk through solar engineer training and livelihood skills. This will lead to increased participation of these women in community decision-making, in particular on gender issues. The action 'Strengthening Water and Sanitation Governance in in the Federated States of Micronesia' aims to support the Government in developing and implementing a cohesive package of policy, institutional, regulatory and financial reform, aimed at driving measurable progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 targets of universal access to safe and resilient drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.

Multilateral context: FSM is a party to only three of the nine core international human rights instruments, as well as two optional protocols. FSM is not a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) but is a party to the 2000 UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol. In June 2025, FSM hosted a country visit by the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights.

Republic of Nauru

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Nauru, the world's smallest republic with a population of about 12,500 people, gained its independence in 1968. It has a long history of political instability, with nearly 20 different governments ruling the country over the last decade. Nauru does not have formal political parties. In October 2025, Nauru held parliamentary elections with 19 MPs elected and David Adeang re-elected as President unopposed. A concurrent referendum on extending the parliamentary term from three to four years was rejected by voters. The next elections are expected in 2028. According to Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2025* report, Nauru remained classified as 'Free', with a score of 75/100.

The Nauruan Parliament has passed the Human Rights Commission Act 2025 and has undertaken legislative reforms in line with national human rights priorities including the Health and Medical Services Act 2025, and the Nauru Police Force Act 2025.

The government's capacity to ratify and implement international human rights treaties remains constrained by financial and administrative capacity considerations, as well as the reporting burden. Nauru has not established a National Human Rights Institute (NHRI) in line with the Paris Principles.

Nauru continues to host the Nauru Regional Processing Centre, an Australian offshore immigration facility.

Domestic violence, poverty and limited women's representation in Parliament remain the most serious impediments for progress in the area of women's rights in Nauru. Eliminating domestic violence is a national priority. The Department of Women and Social Development Affairs, established in 2020, coordinates, monitors and provides advisory services on gender equality and social development. Key frameworks include the Action Plan for National Gender Equality Policies (2025-2030), and Nauru's National Women's Policy (2024-2034), which aligns with the country's National Sustainable Development Strategy and prioritises women in leadership, sexual reproductive health, women's economic empowerment and ending gender-based violence.

Freedom of expression and media freedom remain a concern. Under the 'Crimes Act 2016', criminal charges can be evoked for defamation, punishable with up to three years in prison. Several newspapers ceased activities in the past decade, and currently there are only government-operated media and information outlets.

Climate change has become an important human rights issue in Nauru. As the climate crisis in the Pacific further escalates, Nauru citizens may experience reduced access to water, food and other basic services.

EU action – key focus areas: The EU no longer provides bilateral support to Nauru under the new programming cycle.

EU bilateral political engagement: During 2025, the EU consistently reached out to the Nauru government via démarches in order to foster support for the EU's human rights priorities and initiatives at the UN and other international fora.

EU financial engagement: The EU no longer provides bilateral support to Nauru under the new programming cycle. However, Nauru remains eligible to participate in regional programmes, such as a new Public Finance Management, Oversight and Accountability programme, Pacific – European Union Waste Management Programme (PacWaste Plus, finalised in July 2025), Kiwa Initiative (regional projects MiCOAST and POLFN), Pacific Biodiversity and Sustainable Land-Seascapes, Biodiversity and Protected Area Management (BIOPAMA II), SWITCH-Asia, Pacific EU Marine Partnership programme, BSRP II – Building Safety and Resilience in the Pacific, Climate Services and Related Applications Programme, and activities of the Regional Pacific Nationally Determined Contribution Hub.

Multilateral context: Nauru is a key ally, together with other Pacific Islands Countries, in the fight against climate change. The country remains one of few nations worldwide to recognise the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.

New Zealand

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, New Zealand maintained its high rankings in international assessments on human rights and democracy. New Zealand is among the most gender-equal countries globally, ranking fifth in the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2025, and is also among the highest-ranking countries regarding the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights: ranking fifth on the 2025 World Justice Project Rule of Law Index and fourth on the 2025 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index.

Concerning gender-based and domestic violence, New Zealand highlighted ongoing efforts, such as the National Strategy for the Elimination of Family and Sexual Violence and work undertaken by the Ministry for Māori Development to address systemic disparities faced by Māori women and girls. Furthermore, in November 2025, the Bill defining stalking as a crime under New Zealand law received Royal Assent.

On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in September 2025 the Disability Minister has re-established the Ministerial Disability Leadership Group to drive action for disabled people across government and to oversee the work to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommendations. Furthermore, the Government announced changes to how Disability support funding is allocated, allowing disabled people to have more flexibility on how they receive their care.

Regarding youth rights, an Act of Parliament was passed in June amending the oversight of children in foster care and reinstating the dedicated positions of Children's Commissioner and the Independent Children's Monitor responsible for children's welfare. Marking one year on from the public apology to survivors of abuse and neglect in care, the Government allocated an additional $2.7 million for a second round of the Survivor Support and Recognition Fund.

The Māori population continued to be significantly overrepresented in New Zealand's prison system, comprising approximately 52% of the incarcerated population despite representing only about 17% of the national population.

In November 2025 the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by its States

parties, concluded its consideration of the combined twenty-third and twenty-fourth periodic reports of New Zealand. The Committee noted New Zealand's use of special measures to address structural inequalities affecting Māori people, refugees, Pacific and migrant communities, while emphasising that such measures should not be conflated with the protection of Indigenous Peoples' rights.

EU action - key focus areas: EU efforts focused on sharing best practices, raising awareness, and fostering meaningful policy dialogue. The EU and New Zealand continued to display sound synergies in the UN system.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Delegation in Wellington together with Member States engaged in multiple outreach efforts with New Zealand authorities. The cooperation in support of human rights was also discussed during the EU-New Zealand Joint Committee in September. The Committee agreed to hold the next consultations on Human Rights in 2026. The EU Delegation in Wellington continued to promote EU policies and positions through social media and participated to various events dedicated to equality and inclusion.

EU financial engagement: There is no EU financial engagement in New Zealand.

Multilateral context: New Zealand continued to engage actively in international human rights fora. In 2025, New Zealand co-led a significant UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee resolution with Mexico on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, focusing on diverse barriers to rights, inclusion in crises, and legal capacity, aiming for rights-based responses for persons with disabilities. In September 2025, the EU Delegation in Wellington conducted outreach on UNGA80 and on support for the UNGA Resolution on the Return of Ukrainian children.

New Zealand submitted its 5th Periodic Report under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESC) in March 2025, with the Committee's response expected in 2027 before an examination in 2028. From 13 to 25 September, the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture conducted its second visit to New Zealand to assess the country's measures to protect people deprived of liberty from torture and ill-treatment. In October, New Zealand reimposed sanctions on Iran for human rights violation.

Republic of Palau

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Basic human rights are generally respected in Palau, with regular democratic elections, combined with an independent judiciary and media, and no substantial reports of irregularities. Following the general elections on 5 November 2024, President Surangel Whipps Jr. was re-elected for a second term. According to the CIVICUS Monitor, civic space in Palau remained classified as 'open' in 2025.

Although Palauan society is matriarchal and matrilineal, women continue to be under-represented at higher levels of public life and the civil service. Women have close to equal status in public and private sector employment, education as well as in public participation. Sexual harassment and rape, including spousal rape, is illegal in Palau and punishable by fine, imprisonment or both. Domestic violence is a criminal offence, but there is still a level of reluctance for victims to involve law enforcement due to cultural and societal pressures. There are no laws addressing sexual orientation and gender identity. Same-sex sexual activity was decriminalised in 2014.

Palau's Penal Code includes trafficking and child exploitation offences. The government continues efforts to combat human trafficking. However, persistent challenges include limited prosecutions and gaps in victim identification, particularly among foreign workers. The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implements the law effectively.

In December 2025, the United States and Palau signed a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the transfer of third-country nationals with no known criminal histories to Palau in exchange for support to address the needs of relevant Palau public services. Palau's national legislation does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status and there is no formally established system for providing protection to refugees in Palau.

Climate change continues to stand as a major human rights issue in Palau. While the Office of the Ombudsman reviews complaints and reports to the Parliament, and a Reporting Committee on UN Conventions on Human Rights was set up, the establishment of a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) in line with the Paris Principles, as recommended during Palau's previous Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycles, is still in progress.

EU action – key focus areas: Human rights and democracy concerns in Palau include gender inequality and gender-based violence. EU actions focus inter alia on supporting the ratification of or accession to the remaining core human rights instruments, promoting gender equality and women's rights, and supporting CSOs engagement with the Government on policy dialogue and governance.

EU bilateral political engagement: In 2025, the EU carried out démarches and outreach inviting Palau to support EU human rights initiatives and priorities, including at the UN level.

EU financial engagement: The EU remains committed to supporting and raising awareness of civil society and non-state actors in Palau as a key component in implementing of the regional roadmap for CSOs in the Pacific. The EU works closely with Government and civil society actors, as well as other regional organisations and donor partners in Palau, to this end. Palau also benefits from the EU's regional flagship programme on oceans (the Pacific EU Marine Partnership). Streamlining activities with a gender, social inclusion and a human rights-based approach is a key aspect of the programme. Activities include for example, targeted gender trainings and workshops for fisheries professionals. Gender assessments of the tuna fisheries sector were conducted to inform policy while also highlighting women's roles in food security along the food supply chains.

Multilateral context: Palau underwent its third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in May 2021. Palau received 142 recommendations, of which it supported 67 and noted 75. Recommendations pointed to challenges such as participation in international human rights treaties, human trafficking, addressing gender discrimination, GBV and women's rights, establishing an NHRI, the human rights implications of climate change as well as the rights of children, including their access to health and education.

Palau has only acceded to two of the nine core human rights instruments, despite having signed – but not ratified – all seven others in 2011. Palau is a party to the 2000 UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol. Palau is not a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Independent State of Papua New Guinea

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Papua New Guinea (PNG) is a parliamentary democracy of an estimated 11 million inhabitants, which celebrated 50 years of independence in 2025. The laws and Constitution are largely protective of human rights, and the government has ambitious strategies. However, weak institutional capacity, weak law and order structures and high levels of corruption continue to affect the implementation of human rights laws and policies. A significant development occurred in 2025 with the endorsement of a Human Rights Strategy that provides, as a next step, for a Human Rights Policy and the establishment of a Human Rights Commission. The EU supported this process.

Tribal conflict remains a persistent feature of PNG's social landscape, particularly in Enga, Hela, and the Southern Highlands provinces. In August 2025, for example, tribal riots in Wapenamanda, Mount Hagen, Enga, and Morobe caused numerous fatalities and injuries. In recent years the proliferation of firearms, use of hired fighters, and weak security presence have intensified violence. The ratio of military and police forces to population is very low.

Gender inequality, violence against women and children, and sorcery-related violence continue to affect the human rights parameters of the country. The Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE), including gender-based violence (GBV), was re-established in 2022, with a broad mandate to inquire into issues related to GEWE and GBV and to report back to the Parliament. The Committee is regularly active.

Papua New Guinea repealed the death penalty in 2022, but it has not yet ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which would formalise this commitment internationally.

Democratic governance has faced challenges. The 2017 and 2022 national elections were marked by irregularities, violence and intimidation. Long overdue local level elections took place in 2025 with occasional violence and claims of irregularities. None of the five key recommendations of the 2022 EU Election Expert Mission have been implemented to date. Preparations have started for the 2027 national elections.

Since taking office in 2019, Prime Minister Marape has initiated governance and public-sector reforms - including freedom of information and whistleblower protection laws, the establishment of an Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), stronger public procurement rules, improved debt transparency, and steps toward modernising public financial management. In 2025, the ICAC Commissioner and two Deputy Commissioners were replaced in the context of mutual corruption accusations.

In the Transparency International Corruptions Perception Index 2025, PNG ranked 142nd out of 182 countries, compared to 127th place in 2024.

Freedom of media is generally ensured; however, the media sector suffers from limited resources and capacity. There are reports of self-censorship. During a 24-hour period in March 2025, the government ordered the temporary shutdown of Facebook based on the Counter-Terrorism Act 2024.

EU action - key focus areas: EU focuses on human rights promotion, the fight against gender-based violence, the promotion of good governance including the fight against corruption, as well as support to civil society. The EU also supports the Bougainville Peace Agreement process.

EU bilateral political engagement: Bilateral contacts on human rights issues are frequent; human rights, democracy and governance were on the agenda of past political dialogues and of the 1st Partnership Dialogue held on 12 February 2026 under the Samoa Agreement.

EU financial engagement: The EU continued to support Papua New Guinea's efforts to strengthen the rule of law, improve governance and combat corruption, notably through the EU–PNG Partnership for Good Governance programme (P4GG). In September 2025, a financing agreement was signed for the new PNG State and Resilience Building Contract (EUR 25.6 million, 2025–2027), supporting governance, justice sector reform, anti-corruption efforts and gender-responsive institutions.

The first year of implementation of the Soim Wokabout/Referral Pathways programme focused on strengthening the enforcement of legislation and policies addressing gender-based violence. In addition, the EU signed a new grant to strengthen the institutional and operational capacities of civil society organisations and support their participation in public policy dialogue and national development processes. The EU also continued to support the Bougainville Peace Process, including through contributions to the UN Moderator's mission.

Multilateral context: PNG is a long-standing promoter of multilateralism, which was recently confirmed in its Foreign Policy White Paper. PNG received the visit of UN Secretary-General Guterres in September 2025, ahead of its 50th independence anniversary. PNG advocates for UN reform to make the UN more representative. In February 2025, PNG voted in favour of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. PNG is engaged globally on climate change related issues. In June 2025, it signed the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement, pending ratification. In 2025, PNG adopted its new Domestic Disability Services Bill that implements the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Independent State of Samoa

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in the Independent State of Samoa remains broadly stable and there are no systematic abuses. Samoa's government generally respects and enforces human rights provisions of the country's Constitution and legislative framework and is committed to continuing improving human rights standards. According to the CIVICUS Monitor, civic space in Samoa remained classified as 'open' in 2025. At the same time, Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index 2025 ranked Samoa 44th out of 180 countries, down from 22nd in 2024, reflecting growing concerns regarding media freedom.

A traditional system of governance co-exists with democratic processes in Samoa, affecting the participation of women in politics and public decision-making. While there is universal suffrage for all Samoan citizens aged 21 and above, still only chiefs of villages (*matai*) may contest the elections. The number of women holding the title of *matai* is low but rising. The election of Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa as Samoa's first woman Prime Minister in 2021 represented a significant milestone for women's political representation. Parliament continues to be supported through a constitutional mechanism guaranteeing a minimum quota of 10% women representation. Following a snap general election held

in August 2025, La'aulialemalietoa Polataivao Schmidt, leader of the FAST party, was sworn in as Prime Minister on 16 September 2025.

Physical and sexual violence against women and girls, discrimination, and gender inequalities remain the most significant human rights concerns in Samoa. However, there is political will in the country to advance national action to end domestic violence. Consenting relationships between adults of the same sex remain criminalised in Samoa, although there are no reports of the law being enforced. Social attitudes differ in respect of the transgender community. Violence against children, generally tolerated as a form of discipline, is another human rights concern. Child labour also needs further regulation due to reported cases of children working as street vendors. Access and rights for persons with disabilities in Samoa are not yet fully realised in practice, with individuals experiencing disabilities linked to mental health facing significant gaps in support and services.

Samoa is the only Pacific Island State that has an 'A Status' National Human Rights Institution (Office of the Ombudsman) under the Paris Principles.

Climate change has also become a serious human rights issue in Samoa, as it threatens the effective enjoyment of a range of human rights including those to life, water and sanitation, food, health, housing, self-determination, culture and development.

Challenges to implement Samoa's human rights obligations include lack of resources, limited data and statistics, insufficient capacity and technical assistance in progressing the work required, especially when conducting legislative compliance reviews, coordination challenges, legislative reforms, as well as the implementation and enforcement of human rights obligations.

EU Action – key focus areas: Through dialogue with the Government and non-state actors, such as CSOs, in conjunction with various financial instruments, the EU has been promoting and advocating human rights, gender equality and prevention of violence against women and girls, as well as strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations. Samoa benefits from several initiatives promoting gender equality and addressing gender-based violence, supporting economic rights, climate change adaptation and mitigation and improving the management of natural resources.

EU bilateral political engagement: The Samoa Agreement was signed in Samoa in November 2023, which further strengthened the excellent relations between the EU and Samoa. In 2025, the EU continued to carry out démarches and outreach, inviting Samoa to support EU human rights initiatives and priorities, including at the UN level.

EU financial engagement: Samoa's priority sector for support is Water Resilience and Climate Change Adaptation. This initiative is implemented through an ongoing sector budget support, with an allocation of EUR 13.5 million to improve access to sustainable, safe, and affordable water, along with enhanced sanitation and hygiene services. Samoa also benefits from projects on water resource management and hygiene. The EU has been supporting an enabling environment for an independent and vibrant civil society. Several projects aimed at supporting capacity building and development of civil society include Nofotane Samoa Social Enterprise project, implemented by Samoa Victim Support Group; Initiative on Empowerment of Civil Society in Democratic Samoa, implemented by International Institute for Democracy Electoral Assistance (Sweden); and Our Future Is Now. The Pacific Partnership (Phase II – EUR 8 million) through the NDICI-Global Europe instrument is financing a four-year

programme to reduce rates and acceptance of violence against women and girls at country and regional levels. Through this programme, technical assistance was provided to support the implementation of the Pola Puipui National Prevention Framework. In partnership with the Ministry of Women and GBV trainings were organised.

Multilateral context: Samoa is a party to six of the nine core international human rights instruments and has accepted the individual complaints procedure under the Children's Rights Convention (CRC) Committee and has acceded to the two Optional Protocols to the CRC on children in armed conflict and the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Samoa has extended a standing invitation to the special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council and has an outstanding visit request by the UN Special Repporteur (UNSR) on the right to development. Samoa received a visit of the UNSR on toxics and human rights in 2024, with recommendations published in July 2025 including calls to ratify the remaining international human rights treaties, in particular the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and its Optional Protocol, and to strengthen the participation of women's committees and youth groups in the development of environmental laws and policies.

Samoa underwent its third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in November 2021. Samoa received 145 recommendations and accepted 112 of them. Samoa was commended on progress made to improve the rights of persons of disabilities, the rights of women, children, fa'afafine and fa'atama (fluid gender roles), and Indigenous Peoples' cultural, political and economic rights. Samoa's attention was drawn to strengthening efforts in the elimination of GBV, protection and safety of children, upholding media freedom and ratifying the three remaining core human rights conventions.

Solomon Islands

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Solomon Islands is a constitutional monarchy with King Charles III as Head of State and a unicameral Parliament. Since the end of the ethnic and tribal violence of the period 1999-2003, elections in Solomon Islands have been regular, free, peaceful and well-administered, allowing the participation of international observers, with transparent and credible voting and counting. The latest general elections were held on 17 April 2024. PM Jeremiah Manele retains his majority despite political pressures and attempted no-confidence motions in 2025.

The overall human rights situation in Solomon Islands remains stable and there are no systematic abuses. Implementation of international human rights commitments remains challenging, particularly in remote and outer islands, where enforcement mechanisms are still developing and public institutions face limited technical, human, and financial capacity.

Corruption is a serious concern. In the Transparency International Annual Corruption Perception Index for 2025, Solomon Islands ranked 73rd out of 182 countries While the law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, it is implemented inconsistently. The Constitution provides for an independent Office of the Ombudsman with power to subpoena and investigate complaints of official abuse, mistreatment, or unfair treatment, but the Office lacks resources and its effectiveness is limited.

Climate change continues to be an important human rights issue: as the climate crisis in the Pacific further escalates, Solomon Islands may soon start experiencing reduced access to water, sanitation,

food, health and other basic services. Rising sea levels are forcing internal relocation of indigenous communities. The Government has developed Planned Relocation Guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures to support their implementation.

Physical and sexual violence against women and girls, discrimination, and gender inequality remain significant human rights concerns in Solomon Islands. Although no laws limit participation of women and members of minorities in the political process, traditional attitudes regarding male dominance and customary familial roles have hampered women's participation in political life and affect access to employment. Same-sex sexual activity remains criminalised.

In February 2025, Solomon Islands co-hosted a workshop with UN Women, focusing on developing a National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, emphasising the necessity of inclusion and diversity, particularly for women with disabilities.

In July 2025, the Government launched the Child and Family Welfare System Multi-Sectoral Implementation Plan 2025-2030 in collaboration with UNICEF, aimed at strengthening child protection and improving family well-being through coordinated efforts across health, education, and social welfare sectors.

EU action – key focus areas: EU actions focus inter alia on supporting the ratification of, or accession to the remaining core human rights instruments, promoting gender equality and women's rights, and supporting CSO engagement with government on policy dialogue and governance. The EU's engagement has also been supporting electoral processes, Public Finance Management and macro-economic stability as well as local governance with a specific focus on basic social services (e.g. health, education) delivery and climate resilience.

EU bilateral political engagement: The first Partnership Dialogue under the Samoa Agreement was held in February 2025 in Brussels, focusing on issues of mutual interest for the EU and Solomon Islands, such as human rights, the rule of law, the fight against climate change, biodiversity loss and protection of the seas. In 2025, the EU continued to carry out démarches and outreach, inviting Solomon Islands to support EU human rights initiatives and priorities, including at the UN level. The EU is committed to supporting government and non-state actor efforts to reduce gender-based violence. Regarding the fight against corruption, the EU manages an on-going Budget Support programme involving vigilant monitoring of government spending, in particular the Constituency Development Funds.

EU financial engagement: Solomon Islands benefits from the second phase of the regional programme 'Pacific Partnership to End Violence against Women and Girls' for which the EU allocated EUR 8.25 million. The action has been strengthening the capacity of non-state actors to advocate for gender equality as well as their ability to engage in the monitoring of gender equality and commitments to address gender-based violence. The Programme supports the development of a results framework for the Family Protection Act, along with provincial and national consultations for the National Prevention Strategy, and initiated the development of national safe-house guidelines to be finalised in 2026. The gender-based violence referral pathways for labour mobility cases have also been finalised. The two-year (2023-2025) 'Strengthening the Electoral Cycle in the Solomon Islands Phase III' project (EU contribution: EUR 5.5 million) focused on enhancing inclusive, informed and transparent electoral processes, including through accountable and effective electoral institutions. Under the global thematic programme on Human Rights and Democracy, the EU phased out the multi-country Pacific

Digital Democracy Initiative: this action (EUR 1.4 million) contributed to advancing participatory digitalisation processes in four target countries – Fiji, FSM, Solomon Islands and Tonga – in order to harness Information and Communication Technologies for more inclusive, rights-based democracy and development.

Multilateral context: Solomon Islands completed its third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in May 2021. Solomon Islands received 160 recommendations and accepted 106 of them. Following up on the recommendations of the UN Country Team, Solomon Islands ratified two out of three Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (August 2022) and on children in armed conflict (20 January 2023), as well as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (22 June 2023). In 2025, follow-up on accepted UPR recommendations continued, notably in the areas of children's rights, disability inclusion, and gender equality, although implementation challenges remain.

Kingdom of Tonga

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Tonga is a Kingdom with a highly stratified patriarchal system. The King retains important powers, including the authority to veto legislation, dissolve the parliament, and appoint judicial officials. The Privy Council facilitates a continuing political role for the monarch. Tonga is a young democracy (the youngest in the Pacific) with democratic elections only since 2010. According to Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2025* report, Tonga remained classified as 'Free', with a score of 80/100.

Tonga's Constitution provides for the protection of certain fundamental rights and freedoms. The Constitution and its revisions do not specifically guarantee women equal rights to men. While there is no discriminatory legislation concerning participation of women in politics, traditional systems and cultural factors limit the participation of women in political processes and local government. In November 2021, Tonga elected an all-male Parliament, which remained in place until the general elections of November 2025. The elections resulted in the return of several incumbent members and the election of new representatives, including one woman. Following the elections, a new Prime Minister, Lord Fatafehi Fakafānua was elected by Parliament in December 2025.

While the education level of women in Tonga is very high, this is not translated into the workforce and the way families view the roles of women. However, Tonga continues to engage in initiatives promoting further inclusion such as the Practice Parliament for Women 2025, which trained women to advocate for policy changes, emphasising their vital role in governance, health and education.

Corruption and abuse of office are serious problems in Tonga despite government efforts to control it. Following the appointment of Tonga's first anti-corruption commissioner in 2024, the Whistleblower Protection Bill was passed in 2025.

The level of domestic violence remains a serious human rights issue in Tonga and has been identified by the Government as a major impediment to gender equality. There is a political will in the country to address the problem. The Family Protection Act 2013 recognises domestic violence as a legal offence and provides legal framework for preventing domestic violence. In 2022, Tonga adopted a changed definition for rape allowing for a more comprehensive definition to include marital rape, rape between

partners. In 2025, Tongan Government worked closely with Tonga Police and community services promoting an environment where every woman is free from all forms of violence and abuse.

The Constitution guarantees freedom of press and there are independent media outlets in Tonga. There is however a record of lawsuits by politicians against media outlets, exposing them to the risk of heavy damages. In May 2020, the Government passed regulations with vague restrictions on publishing 'sensitive information', which remain in force.

The legal status of same-sex relationships is not recognised in Tonga and consenting same-sex relationships between adults remain criminalised, although there are no reports of the law being enforced. There is a de facto moratorium on the application of the death penalty since 1982. Tonga does not have a National Human Rights Institution. The Ombudsman's office is empowered to investigate any decision, act or omission by government services or relevant organisations.

Climate change has also become a serious human rights issue in Tonga, as it threatens the effective enjoyment of a range of human rights including those to life, water and sanitation, food, health, housing, self-determination, culture and development.

EU action – key focus areas: The EU continues assisting Tonga to tackle root causes of violence against women and girls, providing support to civil society, encouraging Tonga to accede to the key international human rights instruments and help addressing the adverse impact of climate change. EU provides support to energy sector under the current budget support programme.

EU bilateral political engagement: In the area of human rights, the EU urges Tonga to formally abolish the death penalty, accede to the Rome Statute and core human rights conventions, and to decriminalise same-sex relations. In 2025, the EU continued to carry out démarches and outreach, inviting Tonga to support EU human rights initiatives and priorities, including at the UN level.

EU financial engagement: Through the support to the energy sector in Tonga programme, the EU contributes to the Tonga's sustainable and inclusive low carbon development. Tonga benefits from many regional programmes, including on plastic waste, which is expected to generate improved economic, social, health and environmental benefits to the people of Tonga. The Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls – Phase II tackles root causes of gender inequality and violence against women in the Pacific. In Tonga this programme, inter alia, provides support to the Women's Affairs and Gender Equality Division to develop a national referral pathway and standard operating procedures to guide multisector service provision to women and girls who experienced violence, and offers technical and financial support to national crisis centres and hotlines. Thematic programmes such as the Pacific Digital Democracy project, established a strong commitment to digital rights by enhancing and strengthening the government and civil society participation to safety online, battle disinformation and hate speech and promote e-government. Under the CSO programme, a new project started in 2024 in Tonga, the Climate and WASH resilience community project, implemented by Live and Learn Tonga aiming to build governance and resilience at community level and mitigate negative impacts of climate change on human rights. Through the flagship ocean programme, Tonga also benefits from the regional Pacific-EU Marine Partnership addressing crosscutting themes such as gender, labour rights and social inclusion in the fisheries sector.

Multilateral context: Overall, the level of ratification of key human rights conventions remains very low. Tonga is only a party to the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the Children's Rights Convention (CRC). Tonga's report to the ICERD Committee has been due since 2001. In 2018, Tonga submitted its first report to the Committee of the CRC; the second one has been due since 2023.

Tonga signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007 but has not yet ratified it. In February 2020, Tonga acceded to the UN Convention against Corruption. In August 2020, Tonga ratified the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Tonga is not a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Tonga's fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) was completed in May 2023. The Tongan government received a total of 173 recommendations, accepting 110 of them. Many recommendations pertained to the ratification and accession to international human rights instruments, cooperation with human rights mechanisms, and requests for technical assistance. Despite the challenges given the limited capacity and resources, Tonga committed to continuing its efforts to enhance the human rights situation both at national and community levels.

Tuvalu

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Tuvalu is a constitutional monarchy. King Charles III is the Head of State. The country held its last four-yearly election to Parliament on 26 January 2024. Tuvalu has approximately 6,000 eligible voters and does not face serious governance issues; however, a frequent use of parliamentary votes of no confidence is a cause of instability.

There have been no reports of violations of human rights in Tuvalu in recent years, including 2025. Human rights are respected, the rule of law is sound, and the principles of good governance are generally adhered to. According to Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2025* report, Tuvalu remained classified as 'Free', with a score of 93/100. The National Human Rights Institution Act 2017 created an independent rights body by giving the Ombudsman power to receive complaints and initiate inquiries into human rights issues, as well as undertake activities to promote awareness of fundamental human rights. Tuvalu has become the first Pacific country to launch a National Action Plan on Human Rights, developed with the support of the EU, Australia and the Pacific Community, which continued to guide implementation efforts in 2025.

However, a few areas of concern remain, in particular high levels of gender-based violence. Although Tuvalu's legislation does not prohibit discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation, consensual same-sex relations remain criminalised under the Penal Code. At the same time, there are no reports of law enforcement.

Gender-based violence is rooted in traditional behavioural norms of a patriarchal society and often remains unreported due to a 'culture of silence'. Tuvalu has a normative framework in place against violence against women and a specialised 'Domestic Violence Unit' has been established within the police. However, the level of gender-based, sexual and domestic violence remained elevated in 2025. The Government established a Family Protection Fund to support victims of violence and arranged a system of psychological support. Tuvalu has also adopted legislation prohibiting corporal punishment. Women's rights and gender equality continue to be areas that would benefit from further

improvement, including in the areas of employment discrimination, land inheritance aspects or local governance arrangements. In the January 2024 elections, no woman was elected to the Parliament, and women remained unrepresented in 2025.

In Tuvalu, there is no private or independent media. The Tuvalu Media Department, under the Office of the Prime Minister, continues to operate as the only media outlet in the country.

Tuvalu is one of the most environmentally fragile countries in the Pacific. An adverse impact of climate change is affecting human rights such as the right to life, development, food, health, housing, water and sanitation. As one of the countries in the Pacific at risk of disappearing due to the rise in sea levels, Tuvalu actively promotes discussions about statehood. In September 2023, Tuvalu enshrined a new definition of statehood in its Constitution. A world-first, the Constitution asserts the State of Tuvalu will continue to exist, even if its landmass disappears under rising sea levels. The Falepili Union with Australia, which entered into force in August 2024, supports Tuvalu's human mobility, offering 280 visas annually to Tuvaluans who wish to live, work, study or visit Australia in response to the climate crisis threatening the island nation. The first group arrived in Australia in December 2025.

EU action – key focus areas: The EU continues assisting Tuvalu to tackle root causes of violence against women and girls, providing support to civil society, encouraging Tuvalu to accede to key international human rights instruments and helping to address the adverse impact of climate change.

EU bilateral political engagement: During 2025, the EU carried out démarches and outreach, inviting Tuvalu to support human rights initiatives, Ukraine and other EU priorities, including at the UN level.

With climate change and human rights inextricably linked in the Pacific region, the EU Delegation to the Pacific continues to actively promote climate resilience and action in its interactions with Tuvalu, including at the multilateral level.

EU financial engagement: Awareness-raising and support to civil society and non-state actors were essential elements for the implementation of the regional roadmap for CSOs in the Pacific. One of the past focal areas for EU assistance to Tuvalu was environmental protection, more specifically waste management. The civil society support component of the programme included measures to support CSOs to actively engage in the programme and promote its sustainability. Current EU cooperation is focused on the Tuvalu Coconut Sector Rehabilitation Programme and the development of the vegetable sector. This assistance has a budget of EUR 4.5 million, supporting resilience in economic activities and ecosystems. From a human rights-based perspective, the action finances activities that contribute to reducing social imbalances, by providing food security and new employment opportunities to rural communities. Tuvalu became a focus country under the regional programme 'Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls', launched in November 2018 and ended in December 2023. The programme brought together governments, CSOs, communities and other partners to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and girls and increase access to quality response services for survivors. This support continued in 2024 with the launch of the second phase of the project.

Multilateral context: There is limited administrative capacity which creates constraints with regard to reporting requirements under UN instruments. Tuvalu's report to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee, due since March 2019, was

submitted in January 2025, with the Committee issuing Concluding Observations in July 2025, urging Tuvalu to implement stronger measures, abolish school expulsions for pregnant teens, and address non-consensual sterilisations of disabled women, while acknowledging efforts in climate advocacy.

Tuvalu is a party to four core international human rights instruments, regarding discrimination against women, the rights of the child, rights of persons with disabilities and torture. Tuvalu is not a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Tuvalu underwent its fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in November 2023. Recommendations focused largely on increasing the accession to core human rights treaties, a prohibition against discrimination based on gender, disability and sexual orientation, implementing policies aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change, taking into consideration a focus on human rights, decriminalising of homosexuality and improving access to health care. Tuvalu's government received a total of 167 recommendations and accepted 84 of them, stating that noted recommendations do not align to the sensitivities and accessibility of Tuvalu's context.

Republic of Vanuatu

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: A snap election took place on 16 January 2025, following the dissolution of Parliament in late 2024. On 11 February, the Parliament elected Jotham Napat, a former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs as Prime Minister.

No women were elected to Parliament in Vanuatu between 2008 and 2022, which made Vanuatu one of few countries in the world without a single woman Member of Parliament until Julia King was elected in 2022. While King lost her seat in the January 2025 elections, another woman, Marie Louise Milne, secured a seat, maintaining the gender representation at one out of 52 MPs.

Societal discrimination and violence against women continue to be significant human rights concern in Vanuatu. Although no laws limit the participation of women and members of minorities in the political process, traditional attitudes regarding male dominance and customary familial roles continue to hamper women's participation in political life and affect access to employment.

While consensual same-sex activity is legal in Vanuatu, LGBTI persons face legal challenges and discrimination. Following an amendment to the Marriage Act to ban same-sex marriage, adopted in 2024, discussions are ongoing to also amend the Constitution of Vanuatu.

Implementation of the human rights instruments to which the country is party is hampered by lack of adequate enforcement mechanisms and limited technical, human and economic capacity within public institutions – especially on outer lying remote islands. The independent judiciary constitutes a balancing element. Corruption remains an endemic problem, given the close ties between politicians and the business community. In Transparency International's Annual Corruption Perception Index, Vanuatu slightly dropped in 2025 by 3 points, ranking 63rd out of 182 countries.

EU action – key focus areas: Through the bilateral Budget Support and Technical Assistance programme on value chains, the EU supports efforts to advance human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and an accountable and effective public administration. In addition, support to CSOs aims to have a positive impact on food security and gender

equality. EU actions in Vanuatu focus on preventing gender-based violence, promoting climate actions and managing natural resources.

EU bilateral political engagement: Vanuatu is a partner of the EU on climate change, disaster risk reduction and ocean governance, and it is the third largest aid recipient in the region. In 2025, the EU continued to carry out démarches and outreach, inviting Vanuatu to support EU human rights initiatives and priorities, including at the UN level.

EU financial engagement: The Vanuatu Civil Society Organisations Support and Technical Cooperation Facility Programme continued to support civil society organisations through a EUR 4.5 million envelope aimed at strengthening institutional capacity, food security and the economic empowerment of women. Vanuatu also benefited from a regional initiative on gender equality and the elimination of gender-based violence (PPEVAWG Phase II), implemented by UN Women and the Pacific Community with EU support. Activities in 2025 focused on strengthening safeguarding measures, promoting gender-responsive policies and supporting post-earthquake recovery efforts. Through regional climate resilience and education programmes, including PAC CCI and the Climate Resilient Sheltering Schools initiative, the EU continued to support inclusive, climate-resilient education, disaster preparedness and the protection of vulnerable groups, particularly women, girls and persons with disabilities.

Multilateral context: Climate change continues to be a serious human rights issue in Vanuatu. The country continued to be at the forefront of international action in this regard. Spearheaded by Vanuatu, a landmark advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) was issued on 23 July 2025, declaring climate change an 'urgent and existential threat' to humanity – a development widely regarded as a historic victory for Vanuatu and the region.

Vanuatu completed its fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in May 2024. Out of 209 recommendations received, Vanuatu supported 169, including on the establishment of a National Human Rights Insitute (NHRI) compliant with the Paris Principles and the prevention of discrimination and violence against women and girls. Vanuatu noted 40 recommendations, of which three related to protecting freedom of expression and nine to the rights of LGBTI persons.

The Americas

Antigua and Barbuda

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Antigua and Barbuda is a multiparty parliamentary democracy upholding civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. It operates under the rule of law with strong democratic institutions. According to Freedom House's 2025 report, Antigua and Barbuda remained classified as 'Free'. Incidents of gender-based violence and domestic violence, mostly affecting women and girls, as well as between same-sex partners and violence against LGBTI persons, remained a concern in Antigua and Barbuda. The significant underreporting of incidents can be attributed to social stigma and community pressure, victim blaming, lack of confidentiality and fear of reprisal. Child abuse remained a challenge in the forms of sexual abuse, neglect and abandonment, verbal abuse, and physical punishment. Corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool in schools remained legal in Antigua and Barbuda, although not commonly enforced. A significant development was the July 2022 court ruling that struck down provisions criminalising consensual same-sex relations. Crime

rates increased in the last year. The country's only prison suffered from substantial overcrowding and did not meet UN standards. Prevalent across the Eastern Caribbean, the administration of justice in Antigua and Barbuda and in particular the backlog of cases remained a concern. Antigua and Barbuda retains the death penalty, although no executions have been carried out since 1991.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU priorities continued to focus on the following areas: democratic governance and the rule of law; domestic and gender-based violence; the death penalty; discrimination and violence against LGBTI persons; and child abuse. The EU Delegation participated in the international 16 Days of Activism campaign against Gender-based Violence through a campaign on all social media platforms used by the Delegation. It entailed messages against violence.

EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights matters were regularly discussed in meetings with national authorities and civil society organisations in Antigua and Barbuda.

EU financial engagement: To combat discrimination against the LGBTI community, the EU Delegation is financing a project ('Caribbean LGBTIQ+ Initiative for Promoting Solidarity Outcomes – CALIPSO') of the LGBTIQ+ sub-regional umbrella Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality (ECADE), aimed at building a stronger LGBTI civil society in all seven countries of the Eastern Caribbean. The EU Delegation is funding eight beneficiary countries and the ECSC under the Partnership of the Caribbean and the EU on Justice (PACE Justice) Regional Programme, aiming to assist efforts towards reducing the worryingly high number of criminal case backlogs. The project is implemented by UNDP. '

Multilateral context: The EU Delegation carried out formal démarches on human rights issues over the course of 2025. EU Member States were involved in the démarches when and where possible.

Argentine Republic

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Argentina is a representative democracy with competitive elections and plural political landscape. Freedom of association and civil rights remain legally protected although repression of protests has increased. Civicus classified civic space in Argentina as 'obstructed' in 2025. The government's policies and economic reforms have brought the poverty rates down to 31.6 %, the lowest since 2018. This decline is largely linked to falling inflation and some wage recovery. Following the 2024 closure of the Ministry of Women, Gender, and Diversity and of the Argentinian anti-discrimination agency (INADI) in 2025, the government downgraded the Secretariat of Human Rights (part of the Ministry of Justice) to an under-secretariat, substantially reducing its personnel. According to the World Press Freedom Index, Argentina ranked 87th out of 180 countries in 2025, a drop of 21 places compared to 2024. Argentina's commitment to memory, truth, and justice in relation to the legacies of the 1976-1983 military dictatorship has faced some political and institutional pressure. Femicides in Argentina continued to rise in 2025. Meanwhile the government continued to dismantle a range of social programs and institutional structures aimed at protecting women, gender equality, and victims of gender-based violence, as part of a broader dismantling of policies and institutions addressing gender inequality. The number of persons in detention continued to increase, with high rates of pre-trial detention, leading to overcrowding. The UN Committee against Torture acknowledged improvements in training of prison monitors, while raising concerns about reports of ill-treatment in detention.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU priorities continued to focus, in line with the five strands of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-27, on the following areas: (i) democratic governance and institutional strengthening; (ii) gender issues: the fight against violence and for equality; (iii) children's rights and protection; (iv) building a more equal society free of any type of discrimination against minorities or vulnerable groups; (v) environmental rights and the right to live in a healthy and sustainable environment; and (vi) new technologies / digitalization, including media freedom.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued its broad political engagement with both state and non-state actors on human rights issues. The annual EU-Argentina local Human Rights Dialogue was to take place in 2025 and is scheduled for the second half of 2026.

EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation continued to oversee the implementation of numerous human rights projects including challenges relating to digitalization, which play a central role in the EU Human Rights agenda in Argentina. In total, the EU Delegation´s portfolio of human rights projects amounted to approximately EUR 7 million. Projects aim to reduce the gender gap in technology by promoting a systemic change in educational systems and support girls to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics; support capacity-building for member and leaders of trade union leaders, and advocacy for regulatory reform aimed at improving work conditions; support an interdisciplinary laboratory of biomechanics adapted for people with motor disabilities wishing to acquire technical training; increase the participation of civil society in public decision-making through dialogue between authorities and civil society organisations; and support a network of five Argentinian and four European universities to exchange best practices on promoting digitalisation, including in university courses. In a Team Europe spirit numerous additional activities have been financed through EU Members States.

Multilateral context: Argentina has mostly continued to align with the positions of the US and Israel, including by voting against human rights related resolutions that in the past were adopted by consensus in the UNGA Third Committee. This included Argentina's vote against the joint EU-GRULAC resolution on the Rights of the Child and resolutions on the human rights of migrants, people with disabilities, and torture. In August 2025, the government decided that Argentina would not be a candidate to join the UN Human Rights Council and terminated Argentina's longstanding co-chairmanship of the LGBTI Core Group in New York. At its November 2025 session, the Committee against Torture examined Argentina's seventh periodic report under the Convention against Torture, commended the State for training prison monitors but pressed Argentina on concerns about excessive police force against protesters, reports of torture and ill-treatment in detention, severe prison overcrowding, and possible backsliding on human rights commitments.

Commonwealth of the Bahamas

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Democratic governance in The Bahamas remains robust, evidenced by the successful conduct of free, fair, and transparent elections. On corruption, The Bahamas achieved a notable ranking of 29 out of 180 countries in Transparency International's index, signifying ongoing efforts to tackle corruption. The Bahamas upholds effective anti-trafficking standards. LGBTI individuals and migrants, particularly those without legal documentation, are at significant risk of facing discrimination and violence. The Bahamas retains the

death penalty. The tabled Smuggling of Migrants Bill 2025 aims to strengthen border security and international cooperation to prevent and combat migrant smuggling and establish measures for the protection of smuggled migrants. The Government of The Bahamas announced that major labour reforms were being prepared for public consultation. This includes updates to the Employment Act, Industrial Relations Act, Public Service Act, and General Orders, including longer maternity leave, new paternity and mental-health leave, stronger protections for casual workers, improved anti-harassment rules, and updated workplace health and safety standards.

EU action – key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027, the EU closely monitored human rights issues, with a focus on undocumented migrants, women's rights and gender equality.

EU bilateral political engagement: The Bahamas and the EU held their 8th Political Dialogue in October 2025. Delegates' deliberations included exchanges on the political partnership, cooperation in multilateral fora, economic cooperation, human rights, environmental cooperation and peace and security.

EU financial engagement: While the Bahamas as a high-income country is no longer eligible for bilateral ODA, it continues to receive the benefit of various regional programmes, some of which focus on human rights issues, such as improving access to healthcare and energy following Hurricane Dorian in 2019.

Multilateral context: The first Caribbean office of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, established in The Bahamas in 2024, completed in 2025 its first year of operation, guided by the overall goal of fostering a culture of rights-based governance across the region. At the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly held in September 2025 the Prime Minister Philip Davis called for immediate action on climate change, a two-state solution in Palestine and made the case for The Bahamas' bid to become a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

Barbados

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Barbados is a multiparty parliamentary democracy upholding civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. It operates under the rule of law with strong democratic institutions. According to Freedom House's 2025 report, Barbados remained classified as 'Free', with a score of 94/100. The administration of justice in Barbados, particularly the persistent backlog of cases, continues to be a concern. Likewise, crime rates and the trafficking of small arms in the region remain pressing issues. The death penalty remains in place in Barbados. Other crosscutting human rights challenges pertain mainly but not exclusively to instances of LGBTI rights, domestic and gender-based violence (GBV), and child abuse. In December 2025, Barbados appointed its first Human Rights Commissioner, Kerryann Ifill, marking a significant step in strengthening the country's human rights framework.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU priorities continued to focus on the following areas: democratic governance and the rule of law; domestic and gender-based violence; the death; penalty; discrimination and violence against LGBTI people; and child abuse. In November 2025, in the context of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, the EU Delegation organised the Red Shoes Project in Barbados for a second consecutive year, following the strong resonance of the initiative in

2024. The project adapted a public art concept by a Mexican artist, featuring donated, used shoes painted red to represent women whose lives were lost to gender-based violence. Once again, the initiative generated exceptional engagement from both institutional partners and the wider public. A broad coalition of stakeholders – including the Government of Barbados, local universities, multiple diplomatic missions, and international organisations – joined the project, bringing the total number of partners to 13 (excluding the EU). The installation was exhibited at the Barbados Museum, a central and publicly accessible venue, accompanied by EU-produced explanatory signage contextualising both the global dimensions of gender-based violence and the objectives of the project. Public feedback underscored that the installation created a rare and accessible space for dialogue on an issue that is widespread but often insufficiently discussed. The opening event at the Barbados Museum combined institutional engagement with cultural expression, featuring a locally produced theatre performance by recent graduate actors based on a contemporary Barbadian femicide case. The event brought together a wide range of national stakeholders and fostered substantive exchanges, underscoring a shared commitment to addressing gender-based violence. To extend outreach to younger audiences, the theatre performance and guided visits to the exhibition were subsequently adapted and delivered to secondary schools. These sessions were followed by moderated discussions with students, focusing on identifying early warning signs, subtle forms of abuse, and the progression of violence depicted in the play. In coordination with the Ministry of Education, social workers were present to support students given the sensitivity of the subject matter. The project was supported by a coordinated communication effort, including social-media outreach and a joint wrap-up video disseminated by all partners.

EU bilateral political engagement: Human Rights matters were regularly discussed in meetings with national authorities and civil society organisations in Barbados.

EU financial engagement: To combat discrimination against the LGBTI community, the EU Delegation is financing a project ('Caribbean LGBTIQ+ Initiative for Promoting Solidarity Outcomes – CALIPSO') of the LGBTIQ+ sub-regional umbrella Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality (ECADE), aimed at building a stronger LGBTI civil society in all seven countries of the Eastern Caribbean. The EU Delegation is funding eight beneficiary countries and the ECSC under the Partnership of the Caribbean and the EU on Justice (PACE Justice) Regional Programme, aiming to assist efforts towards reducing the worryingly high number of criminal case backlogs. The project is implemented by UNDP. Under the Human Rights and Democracy Programme, the EU is also providing a grant to a charity from Barbados providing alternative economic empowerment opportunities to female sex workers.

Multilateral context: The EU Delegation carried out formal démarches on human rights issues over the course of 2025. EU Member States were involved in the démarches when and where possible.

Belize

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In the March 2025 general election, the People's United Party (PUP) won a strong mandate, securing 26 of 31 seats. According to Freedom House's 2025 report, Belize remained classified as 'Free', with a score of 88/100. While elections were competitive and orderly, concerns persist about campaign financing regulation and transparency, as well as around electoral boundaries and a pending electoral redistricting exercise. Public security remains a priority; despite a modest decline in major crimes, gang violence continues, particularly in

Belize City. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) noted in its 2025 Annual Report the continued use of states of emergency in Belize and their impact on persons' fundamental rights and freedoms, including their rights to expression, association and personal liberty. States of emergency to address insecurity have generated debate, with concerns over due process and police powers, intensified by the proposed Thirteenth Amendment Bill 2025. Human rights challenges persist for vulnerable groups, including gender inequality and violence, the low representation of women in Parliament (18%), and the continued impasse over the Equal Opportunities Bill, which has been stalled since 2020 and would prohibit discrimination on 22 demographic and social grounds, including sexual orientation, with protection of LGBTI rights remaining the principal point of contention. Indigenous rights see uneven progress; despite Maya customary land rights affirmations, effective implementation is hindered due to the absence of relevant legislation. Constitutional reform has not progressed following several extensions by Government of the review timeline for the People's Constitution Commission's report, but transparency and fundamental rights protection concerns remain.

EU action – key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, EU engagement in Belize focused on citizen security, institutional accountability, democratic governance, gender equality, indigenous rights, civil society strengthening, and the progressive abolition of the death penalty. Priority areas included support for peaceful conflict resolution in the Belize–Guatemala adjacency zone pending the longstanding resolution of the territorial dispute at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), strengthening civil society participation in democratic processes, advancing human rights education and youth engagement, supporting the establishment of a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) in line with the Paris Principles, promoting the rights of indigenous people and the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and supporting the justice sector reform with a focus on addressing the criminal justice backlog. The EU also continued to promote gender equality and the protection of vulnerable groups, while maintaining principled advocacy against the death penalty.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU maintained an active political and human rights dialogue with Belize throughout 2025. The annual EU–Belize Partnership Dialogue, held on 19 May 2025, served as the main platform for discussions on democracy, human rights, security, governance reform, and development cooperation. Human rights concerns, including emergency powers, constitutional reform, indigenous land rights, and gender-based violence, were consistently raised. The EU Delegation also maintained regular contact with civil society, academia, and independent institutions. Civil society engagement was further strengthened through the second EU Civil Society Virtual Dialogue held on 29 April 2025. This dialogue provided structured input from Belizean civil society on constitutional reform, human rights, environmental protection, and youth inclusion, and contributed directly to shaping EU policy positions and programming priorities.

EU financial engagement: Key interventions included a three-year grant supporting the OAS special mandate in the Belize–Guatemala adjacency zone. The EU also supported CSO-led initiatives, the establishment of Community Hubs in vulnerable areas of Stann Creek and Toledo districts. Democratic governance and institutional strengthening were supported through landmark funding to the Belize Network of NGOs (BNN), enabling it to function effectively as a national civil society umbrella organisation. Support to youth and academic engagement on human rights was launched in partnership with the University of Belize, fostering research, advocacy, and public dialogue. An action focused on indigenous rights was underway to develop specialized trainings on FPIC for government personnel, indigenous communities and CSOs. By the end of 2025, the EU was finalising a contribution

agreement with UNDP, in cooperation with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), to support the establishment of a National Human Rights Institution through the transformation of the Office of the Ombudsman. This initiative represents a major structural investment in Belize's human rights architecture.

Multilateral context: Belize remained engaged in the multilateral human rights system. The EU and its Member States coordinated positions and carried out joint démarches in relation to country-specific resolutions at the 80th session of the UNGA Third Committee. Belize's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) outcomes continued to guide EU advocacy, following the country's review in January 2024 and the adoption of its UPR outcome at the UN Human Rights Council in July 2024. The EU consistently promoted effective multilateralism, the rules-based international order, and peaceful dispute resolution. Through public diplomacy, strategic communication, and sustained multilateral engagement, the EU reinforced its role as a committed partner to Belize in advancing human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

Plurinational State of Bolivia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The 2025 general and presidential elections were held in a competitive but peaceful political environment. The campaign demonstrated genuine competition among contestants, with the freedoms of expression, assembly and association upheld. As required by law, women's representation in the legislative assembly reached a historic high of over 50%. Nevertheless, many women candidates continued to face political harassment and violence. The elected Bolivian government is committed to the defence of human rights and democracy. Challenges include a lack of institutional capacity, coupled with the country's profound economic and financial crisis. Civil society organisations in Bolivia operate under certain constraints, with the country receiving an 'obstructed' rating from Civicus monitor in 2025. In the 2025 World Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders ranked Bolivia 93rd out of 180 countries, highlighting continued constraints on press freedom. Femicide rates in Bolivia are among the highest in the region, with 81 cases in 2025. Access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence is limited by institutional weaknesses, insufficient resources, and fragmented mandates. In 2025, Bolivia adopted a law prohibiting child marriage and early unions without exception, aligning with international standards. The justice system continued to struggle with long-standing operational deficiencies, including underfunding, a shortage of personnel, and transparency issues. Overcrowding in prisons remained significant, with detainees awaiting trial constituting an important share of the incarcerated population. Civil society organisations and the national Ombudsman continued to document cases of ill-treatment in detention facilities. Although Bolivia's legal system protects LGBTI rights, the community continued to face cases of stigmatisation, discrimination and violence, particularly against transexual persons. Human trafficking continued to be a serious concern affecting both Bolivian nationals and migrants in transit. Independent media continued to be constrained by reliance on advertising revenue largely provided by the public sector, making them vulnerable to economic pressures.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU focussed its action on promoting the rule of law and access to justice, supporting democratic institutions and electoral integrity, and advancing economic, social and environmental rights. Particular attention was given to the elimination of gender-based violence,

democracy and political rights, the rights of indigenous peoples, and the promotion of the rights of LGBTI persons.

EU bilateral political engagement: The 9th EU-Bolivia High-level Dialogue took place in Brussels on 30 January 2025. Bolivia requested continued EU support for its reforms in governance, rule of law, justice and human rights. Upon Bolivia's invitation, the EU deployed an Electoral Observation Mission to Bolivia in 2025. The mission's presence and reporting were seen across Bolivian society as a key factor in the transparency of the elections and the legitimacy of its results. In the framework of the GSP+ monitoring, the EU maintained exchanges with the Bolivian authorities on the implementation of international conventions related to human rights, labour rights, environmental protection and good governance.

EU financial engagement: The EU's support for the judicial system included an initiative managed by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), with a budget of EUR 2 million. The EU also carried out an innovative, multisectoral programme with a budget of EUR 3.44 million, aimed at combatting gender-based violence across 94 rural and peripheral municipalities, implemented by UN Women. France directly funded several projects aiming to strengthen gender equality in Bolivia, including a programme with a budget of EUR 450,000 supporting 14 local civil society organisations aiming to improve civic participation by women and reduce gender-based violence. A regional human rights project (NDICI) was implemented in Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador for EUR 1.5 million to promote human rights and environmental protection in the mining sector. Through the EU-Sweden environmental initiative, Sweden supported civil society via the programme Alliance for the Environmental and Territorial Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia for EUR 1.3 million.

Multilateral context: Due to outstanding financial arrears, Bolivia's voting rights at the UNGA were temporarily restricted; however, under UNGA Resolution 80/2 adopted in October 2025, Bolivia was authorised to vote until the end of the 80th session of the General Assembly. During the 80th session of the UNGA Third Committee, Bolivia did not support EU-led resolutions or priorities that required a recorded vote. During the 60th session of the HRC, Bolivia did not endorse several EU priorities, including those concerning Russia and Burundi. The new administration, inaugurated in November, signalled an intention to review Bolivia's foreign policy. Bolivia underwent its UPR in January 2025. The review addressed a range of issues, including rule of law, access to justice, gender-based violence, rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the protection of fundamental freedoms. Bolivia accepted 254 recommendations of the 275 received.

Federative Republic of Brazil

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Brazil's government maintained a strong commitment to the human rights agenda. The federal government advanced important legislative and policy initiatives, including accelerated Indigenous land demarcation, expanded protections for children online, racial equality measures, police reform ordinances, and the continued consolidation of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples, alongside socioeconomic improvements such as reduced poverty and food insecurity. Structural inequality and violence remained a challenge: police killings remained high and disproportionately affected Black Brazilians, including reports of the deadliest police operation in the country's history; femicide and violence against LGBTI persons reached high levels despite legal safeguards; and Indigenous Peoples and environmental defenders continued to

face cases of violence, land conflicts and environmental degradation, exacerbated by the weakening of environmental licensing under the 'Devastation Bill'. Some public security challenges persisted, with reports about criminal groups expanding their territorial influence, particularly among poorer and Black communities. Former President Bolsonaro was convicted for attempting to undermine democracy in a context marked by deeper polarisation. Brazil actively promoted civil society inclusion through its 2025 Presidency of COP30 and BRICS. Civic space remained contested, with the Civicus Monitor classifying Brazil as 'obstructed' in 2025. In spite of recent improvements, press freedom remained challenging, with Reporters Without Borders ranking Brazil 63rd out of 180 countries (up from 82nd in 2024) in its 2025 World Press Freedom Index.

EU action - key focus areas: Democracy and human rights remained a political priority for the EU and EU Member States in Brazil. Based on the 2007 Strategic Partnership, the EU and Brazil continued regular exchanges on human rights, both at bilateral and multilateral levels, including through the 13th EU-Brazil Human Rights High-Level Dialogue (HRD) in November 2025 in Brussels, co-chaired by the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights, and preceded by a civil society seminar in Brazil, which enabled in-depth exchanges on shared challenges and priorities. As a follow-up to the HRD the EUSR engaged in a policy exchange on the protection of the rights of LGBTI persons with Brazil's National Secretary for LGBTIQA persons. The EU funded projects to strengthen good governance through civil society action in areas such as transparency, social participation and climate justice, and supported efforts to update the legal framework governing civil society organisations. Significant emphasis was placed on non-discrimination, with initiatives promoting gender equality, Indigenous women's participation in decision-making, the protection of Afro-descendant human rights defenders, and structured dialogues on LGBTI policies and women's political participation, including exchanges with EU institutions. The EU also supported human rights defenders, particularly Indigenous and environmental activists in the context of COP30, through capacity-building, protection measures and efforts to address impunity. In the area of business and human rights, the EU engaged Brazilian stakeholders at all levels on EU regulations, notably the EU Deforestation Regulation, and facilitated civil society dialogue on the EU-Mercosur Agreement. Finally, the EU advanced digital rights and inclusion by funding projects on digital governance, access to the internet and countering disinformation, alongside extending the EllaLink cable to improve connectivity in underserved regions.

EU bilateral political engagement: In November 2025, the EU-Brazil Human Rights High-level Dialogue took place in Brussels, co-chaired by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights. The Dialogue covered the complete array of human rights issues and was preceded by a civil society consultation.

EU financial engagement: The EU's financial engagement in Brazil focused on funding concrete projects across several human rights priority areas. This included financing five projects to promote the rule of law and good governance through civil society action in areas such as socio-economic development, sanitation, transparency, public governance, social participation and climate justice; one project supporting the development of a new regulatory framework for civil society organisations; and four projects addressing non-discrimination, notably gender equality, Indigenous women's participation, women's organisations, anti-racism initiatives and the protection of Afro-descendant (Quilombola) human rights defenders. The EU also funded projects benefiting human rights defenders, with a strong emphasis on Indigenous and environmental activists, focusing on capacity-building, protection of at-risk individuals and tackling impunity. In addition, five EU-funded projects addressed digital technologies and human rights, supporting digital inclusion, access to the internet, digital

governance, the use of ICT and countering disinformation. Under the EU's regional programmes, El PAcCTO 2.0 continued activities with Brazilian justice and security institutions to strengthen the EU-LAC dialogue on justice and security and started a new work strand on the protection of indigenous communities. Through EUROFRONT, Brazilian authorities strengthened their cooperation with neighbouring countries and Europe against the traffic of human beings and the illicit trafficking of migrants. COPOLAD fostered development-oriented drug policies.

Multilateral context: Brazil continued to serve on the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) for its sixth term (2024-2026) and is running for re-election for the 2027-2029 term. As part of GRULAC, Brazil remained a reliable EU partner at the HRC, voting in favour of most EU-led thematic resolutions, while co-sponsoring the EU-led resolution on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and the joint EU-GRULAC biennial resolutions on the rights of the child. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) issued in 2025 one significant judgement against Brazil, holding the country responsible for arbitrary detention, torture, and extrajudicial killing during the military dictatorship, as well as for the failure to investigate and punish those responsible. The Court ordered Brazil to provide reparations, ensure accountability, and adopt measures guaranteeing truth, justice, and non-repetition.

Canada

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Canada continued to uphold a strong human rights record and maintained its reputation as a global advocate for human rights. The government maintained priorities centred on reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and the protection of individuals from discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, race, religion, age, or ethnicity. However, some challenges remained. A decade after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report, Indigenous organisations underline that only 13 of the 94 Calls to Action have been completed, with no progress recorded over the past year. Canada's Auditor General 2025 report highlights continued long-term drinking water advisories in First Nations communities, with several communities still living without reliable access to safe drinking water: although the number has fallen from 60 to 35 since 2021, nine advisories have persisted for over a decade. Overall, the Auditor General deems progress on Indigenous services 'unsatisfactory'. Civil society groups have also raised issues regarding Bill C-2, the 'Strong Borders Act', cautioning that, if passed, it may restrict access to asylum procedures by making it harder for those arriving from the United States to have claims reviewed, and that it could bar individuals who have been in Canada for more than a year from seeking refugee status. Concerns also persist about the Temporary Foreign Worker Programme. Although migrant workers are, in principle, entitled to protections comparable to those of Canadian workers, tied visas often limit their ability to exercise key rights, including access to fair working conditions, adequate housing, and healthcare. This dependency on employers heightens the risk of labour exploitation. Canada ranked 13th on the 2025 World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index, 16th on the 2025 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, and 32nd in the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2025. It has a high score of 82/100 on the Civic Space Monitor by Civicus, indicating open civic space.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU Delegation engaged in a series of human rights panels, cultural activities, and public dialogues in collaboration with community organisations and local leaders in Toronto, Montréal, and Ottawa. In June, the Delegation co-organised a human rights roundtable with Pride Toronto. In July, it partnered with CINEMANIA and Fierté Montréal on a cultural event examining

the experiences of coming out in rural and regional communities across Québec and the European Union. In August, the Delegation hosted a panel on the EU's LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy (2026-2030), featuring an expert from the EU's Protect Defenders initiative at the ÉGIDES International LGBTQI Francophone Conference. In addition, the EU Delegation also hosted at its premises a roundtable on legal discrimination and how to tackle it in the margins of the Prisme Conference, an annual event focused on LGBTQ2S+ legal issues, diversity, and inclusion within the legal profession. The event kicked off with opening remarks from the EU Ambassador and brought together LGBTI organisations from Canada, UK, Australia, Switzerland, US and four EU Member States (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland).

A cooperation agreement was signed at the EU Delegation between the EU, Canada, Australia and US associations. For Human Rights Day 2025, the EU Delegation, together with the Embassy of the Netherlands, the Embassy of Austria, and the Austrian Cultural Forum, and in partnership with Dignity Network Canada, the Montreal Institute for Global Security (MIGS), and Mila – Quebec Artificial Intelligence Institute, convened a high-level discussion on the nexus between human rights and emerging technologies. Funded by FPI, this event marked the second edition of the EU–Canada Human Rights Platform, launched in 2025. This year's programme focused on Human Rights and New Digital Technologies, offering a forum for dialogue among civil society, government representatives, diaspora communities, Indigenous Peoples, and EU partners. The discussion aimed to examine current challenges, highlight lived experiences, and identify opportunities to deepen cooperation on human rights, digital governance, and AI-related issues. The event centred on three thematic panels: Digital Transnational Repression, Indigenous Peoples and the Future of AI, and Online Speech and Digital Equality. Through its support of Pride events in Canada or the organisation of the 2025 EU-Canada Human Rights event, the EU Delegation consistently engages Member States in its human rights initiative. For the 2025 edition of the EU-Canada Human Rights event, the Netherlands and Austria partnered with the EU Delegation.

EU bilateral political engagement: At the EU-Canada Summit in June 2025, leaders agreed to continue to be key partners in promoting democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, gender equality and the rule of law globally. They agreed to take further action to ensure respect for the rights of women and girls, and to end to all forms of discrimination, including against LGBTI persons. The joint declaration following the EU-Canada Joint Ministerial Committee meeting in November 2025 underscored that Canada and the EU will continue to champion universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, both at home and abroad, as pillars of resilience against authoritarianism and all forms of extremism and as essential to building a more inclusive and secure international system.

EU financial engagement: Given the nature of the EU-Canada partnership, cooperation on human rights and democracy is pursued primarily through political dialogue, multilateral engagement and thematic cooperation rather than through dedicated EU financial assistance programmes.

Multilateral context: In November 2025, the EU Delegation, together with Member States, delivered a démarche in support of EU priorities at the 80th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee. The exchange confirmed the strongly likeminded approach by Canada and the EU on the agenda of the Third Committee. In December 2025, the EU Delegation took part in the first G7 Tabletop Exercise, organised by Canada and focused on Transnational Repression. The event brought together representatives from G7 countries, in addition to Australia, New Zealand, and the Netherlands. Though

not specifically focused on human rights, the event also touched on the human rights implications of Transnational Repression on affected diaspora communities and their families in their home countries.

Republic of Chile

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: General elections took place on 16 November, with the second round of the presidential vote held on 14 December. The elections were well organised, orderly, and peaceful. Chile remained among the regional leaders in rankings for democracy, freedom of expression, and electoral integrity, although its World Press Freedom Index ranking fell by 17 places to 69th out of 180 countries in 2025. Civic space experienced pressures, with the Civicus Monitor classifying Chile as 'narrowed' in 2025. The government demonstrated a consistent commitment to respect, promote, and protect human rights, with a particular emphasis on vulnerable groups and gender equality. Reforms advanced during the period included changes to the pension system to improve current and future payouts, strengthening caregiving to establish it as a formal pillar of social protection, and creating a new Ministry of Public Security to focus on challenges related to organised crime and border security. Chile, however, continued to face high levels of social and economic inequality, characterised by uneven distribution of wealth and disparities in access to education, healthcare, and social mobility. Despite the government's strong focus on gender-sensitive policies, significant employment and income gaps persisted between men and women. In April 2025, the government's Commission for Peace and Understanding submitted a report with 21 recommendations to address indigenous land restitution in line with ILO Convention 169. Migrant workers continued to face challenges due to high levels of informality, precarious housing, barriers to accessing public services, and a growing anti-immigrant sentiment. A proposed reform of the legal framework for citizen participation, based on a nationwide consultative process, aims to strengthen citizen engagement in public policy making and reinforce Civil Society Councils.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy 2021-2027 for Chile priorities are: (1) Strengthening institutional framework of human rights, rule of law and accountability; (2) Supporting the rights of groups in vulnerable situations, including: (a) Women and girls, (b) Children and adolescents, (c) Indigenous peoples, (d) LGBTI, (e) Migrants, and (f) HR Defenders; (3) Economic, social, cultural rights; (4) HR and business; and (5) Strengthening access to information and fight against disinformation and corruption.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to engage with Chilean stakeholders, including the Government, human rights institutions and civil society organisations. The first EU-Chile Dialogue on Security and Defence was held in June and included discussions on human rights, as did the first Joint Council under the new EU-Chile Advanced Framework Agreement (AFA) in November. The 14th EU-Chile Human Rights Dialogue was held in December, with an opening message by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, and discussed a range of issues of mutual interest. The EU also engaged with national authorities (the Minister of Justice and Human Rights, the Vice-Minister of Human Rights, the Director of the Specialised Protection Service for Children), independent state agencies (the Office of the Comptroller General, the Director of the National Institute for Human Rights, the Director of the Children's Ombudsman) and international organisations (OHCHR, UNHCR, IOM). The EU Delegation organised meetings with Chilean and international CSOs on issues related to the Human Rights Dialogue's agenda, and continued to support the Commission for Peace and Understanding.

EU financial engagement: To strengthen the human rights protection framework in Chile, the EU implemented cooperation activities with the Congress (via IDEA International) and civil society groups working to make the legislative process more accessible to citizens. The EU supported vulnerable groups through targeted political dialogue and cooperation initiatives, and organised campaigns around the International Day for the Elderly, Children's Rights, the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and Human Rights. For children's rights, the EU facilitated local dialogues through partnerships with the Specialised Child Protection Service and civil society and launched the FPI-funded project 'Territorio Joven' to protect vulnerable youth from violence. On Indigenous Peoples' rights, the EU supported civil society activities to increase indigenous participation in the work of the Commission for Peace and Understanding. The EU supported the rights of migrant women in the agricultural sector via a civil society project and provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Women for Chile's Integrated Information System on Gender-Based Violence. The EU supported Chile's fight against disinformation through a regional FPI project promoting media literacy and fact-checking, producing the 'Gato Encerrado' podcast series, addressing disinformation in elections, hate speech and gender-based violence. On digital matters, the Digital Convergence Initiative strengthened data interoperability in elderly care programmes, and the EU-LAC Digital Alliance supported development of inclusive policies on artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. The EU promoted responsible business conduct through the second edition of a regional project implemented by the ILO, OHCHR and OECD, supporting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Latin America. Activities in Chile included events on responsible business conduct insights and agricultural supply chains, with particular focus on mining and agriculture sectors aligned with international standards. The EU also supported female innovation through AL-INVEST and UN bodies and funded a civil society organisation in its advocacy for human and environmental rights within Chile's business sector.

Multilateral context: Chile continued to be a like-minded partner in the multilateral system and coordinated closely with the EU in UN fora. At the Human Rights Council (HRC60), where Chile was re-elected for the 2026-2028 term, Chile voted with the EU on about 89% of votes and 95% of agenda issues. Chile also regularly coordinated with the EU on human rights issues in other multilateral contexts, including the UNGA Third Committee, the Commission on the Status of Women, and environmental fora including in the context of COP, the Escazu Agreement and its Protocol related to environmental defenders. Chile remained a staunch EU ally on gender equality, non-discrimination and LGBTI rights. Chile was vocal in its support of the UNSG and the ICC, and played an active role at the UN in the promotion of human rights in Latin America including in Venezuela and Nicaragua.

Republic of Colombia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Colombia continued to demonstrate its institutional commitment to human rights, democracy and peace, including through sustained engagement with the UN system, the implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement, and policy initiatives aimed at protecting persons in vulnerable situation. The government maintained dialogue with international and national human rights mechanisms and advanced reforms in areas such as transitional justice, protection of human rights defenders, and prevention of child recruitment by illegal armed groups. At the same time, 2025 was characterised by severe human rights challenges and a deterioration of the security situation in several regions. UN reporting indicates that nearly one million people were affected by armed violence in 2025, with forced displacement and confinement disproportionately impacting Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant communities. Violence against

Human Rights Defenders remained pervasive, despite measures by the government to improve protection. The UN also documented 121 cases of forced recruitment of children by illegal armed groups and persisting violence against human rights defenders. Political violence also increased ahead of the 2026 legislative and presidential elections. Civic space was classified as 'repressed' by the Civicus monitor, while the country ranked 115th out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index. In parallel, reductions in international cooperation funding affected the operational capacity of several international actors present in Colombia, including the OHCHR and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The security around protests improved compared to the serious violations recorded in 2021, and the government continued to advance prevention and protection policies. 2025 also marked a milestone for transitional justice, as the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) issued its first restorative sentences against former FARC commanders for more than 21,000 kidnappings, and against former members of the military for 127 extrajudicial executions.

EU action – key focus areas: EU action continued to focus on seven priority areas: prevention of violence against social and environmental leaders, human rights defenders and trade unionists; gender equality and women's empowerment; protection of the rights of LGBTI persons; protection of Indigenous, Afro-descendant and other vulnerable populations; protection of migrants' rights; human rights in the context of peacebuilding and conflict prevention; and democratic and human rights empowerment for sustainable development.

EU bilateral political engagement: The 16th EU-Colombia Human Rights Dialogue took place on 1 December in Brussels, co-chaired by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights (EUSR), who addressed issues including Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), the protection of human rights defenders as well as human rights and drug policy. The EUSR also held bilateral exchanges with Colombia's Minister for Foreign Affairs. Human Rights issues were also addressed in numerous other bilateral contacts, including during bilateral meetings with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the High-Level Political Dialogue held on 27 June in Brussels, and the third Colombia-EU Dialogue on Drugs held in Santa Marta Colombia on 7 November. The human rights situation in Colombia was also addressed in numerous meetings of the EU Delegation and the EU Heads of Mission with the participation of Government figures and HRDs. The EU Special Envoy for the Peace Process in Colombia also engaged Colombian authorities on human rights issues, including during his visits to the country.

EU financial engagement: The EU provided substantial support to protect human rights defenders, social leaders and victims, combining political engagement with targeted funding. EU-funded projects aimed inter alia at supporting the JEP's investigations, prosecutions and outreach with a gender and restorative justice focus; addressing child recruitment by armed groups in Guaviare, Cauca, Valle del Cauca and Chocó; strengthening protection and empowerment of HRDs, and enhancing victims' engagement with the JEP. A significant share of EU funding targeted women, LGBTI, Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. Additional support was made available for women-led peacebuilding, environmental initiatives and youth resilience in vulnerable territories.

Multilateral context: The EU worked closely with the United Nations in Colombia, particularly with the OHCHR, as well as with the UN Verification Mission in Colombia and the OAS Mission to Support the Peace Process (MAPP/OAS), facilitating joint support to communities in remote and conflict-affected areas. Colombia is a strong, and largely likeminded partner, in multilateral fora. In 2025 cooperation was especially close in the UN Human Rights Council, of which Colombia was member. To consolidate

this cooperation, the EU Delegation and EU Member States carried out various démarches and engagements with Colombian counterparts throughout the year.

Republic of Costa Rica

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Costa Rica remained a regional reference for democratic stability, underpinned by strong institutions, an independent judiciary and a credible electoral system. Nevertheless, 2025 saw increased institutional tensions, particularly between the executive and electoral authorities in the run-up to the 2026 general elections. While governance remained largely rule-based, there is an emerging concern regarding risks to civic space, press freedom, and institutional checks and balances. Gender equality indicators remained strong by regional standards, yet labour market participation gaps and high levels of gender-based violence including femicides persisted, with 2025 marking one of the most violent years for women in over a decade. Costa Rica remained a leading, progressive, and generally LGBTI friendly destination in Central America. However, the advancement of LGBTI rights continued to face challenges in the form of institutional resistance. Indigenous Peoples continued to face structural barriers to land rights and socio-economic inclusion. Crime and insecurity worsened significantly, with homicide levels nearing record highs, largely linked to organised crime and drug trafficking routes. According to Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index 2025, Costa Rica ranked 36th out of 180 countries, making it the highest-ranked country in Latin America - despite a slight decline compared to 2024.

EU action – key focus areas: The EU maintained a comprehensive engagement on human rights and democracy, combining political dialogue, civil society support, thematic programming, and regional cooperation. Key priorities included civic space, gender equality, migration, labour rights, freedom of expression, Indigenous and Afro-Costa Rican rights. Security and justice cooperation significantly expanded notably through political engagement and coordination with EU Member States, backed by regional programmes. Civil society support remained central while migration cooperation intensified.

EU bilateral political engagement: Political engagement remained active and structured, notably through the 8th Round of EU-Costa Rica Bilateral Consultations, reaffirming the privileged partnership and alignment on democracy, human rights, and multilateral cooperation. For the first time the Consultations included a dedicated chapter on security cooperation. Other high-level engagement included Commissioner Síkela's September 2025 visit. The establishment of the EU-Central America Inter-Parliamentary Committee in San José with the participation of a delegation of 11 Members of the European Parliament created a vital democratic oversight mechanism for the EU-Central America Association Agreement. The EU actively supported a range of civil society initiatives to strengthen democratic resilience ahead of the 2026 general elections, including backing an inter-party manifesto on values and integrity during the campaign, supporting fact-checking initiatives and efforts against disinformation, and supporting youth's participation in the electoral process. The EU also maintained its traditional support to the Diversity March and celebrated the 7th edition of the Annual EU Gender Equality Award, giving recognition to an NGO with 38 years' experience contributing to the prevention of gender-based violence and promoting leadership and economic autonomy of girls, adolescents and young women.

EU financial engagement: EU financial engagement was substantial and diversified, combining national, regional, and thematic instruments. The EU-funded FPI project (2 million EUR) supporting the

Alliance for Development in Democracy (ADD)—a regional initiative including Costa Rica, Panama, the Dominican Republic, and Ecuador—contributed to strengthening democratic foundations through independent media, access to information, and combating disinformation. Key actions in 2025 focused on online gender-based violence and support to journalists in exile. A new FPI project (1 million EUR) on Youth, Peace and Security in Central America also started its activities in 2025, supporting young peacebuilders in strengthening social cohesion, preventing violence, and enhancing youth participation in conflict-prevention and peace processes in the region under the broader EU Youth, Peace and Security agenda. 5 CSO projects under the two thematic instruments (civil society and human rights and democracy) for a total of 2.3 M EUR were ongoing in 2025. The projects ranged from protection and promotion of Afro-Costa Rican and Indigenous Peoples' rights to freedom of press. In December 2025, the EU Delegation launched a new Call for proposals (EUR 2.16 M) with two priority areas: 1. Active participation of civil society in Global Gateway sectors: Towards an inclusive green and digital transition, and 2. Promotion of human rights and inclusive democracy. Migration is a key area of cooperation with Costa Rica and an increasingly significant area of international engagement, particularly in light of evolving dynamics in Nicaragua and South America. The EU Delegation closely monitors the implementation of several projects aimed at protecting human rights defenders, as well as improving access for migrants in vulnerable situations to comprehensive healthcare services and decent employment opportunities. Regional programmes such as EL PACCTO 2.0, COPOLAD III, and SEACOP, addressed crime while integrating human rights components, including women's rights in the penitentiary establishments, access to justice, prison reform, and Indigenous rights. The EU also continued implementing the Gender Action Plan III, highlighting women's rights and intersectional approaches.

Multilateral context: Costa Rica is traditionally a staunch supporter of multilateralism, international law, and values-based diplomacy. Costa Rica remained an active and visible multilateral actor in 2025, particularly on environmental governance, ocean protection, and democracy. As member of the HRC, Costa Rica and the EU regularly supported country and thematic resolutions aimed at improving human rights compliance around the world. At the same time, in 2025 Costa Rica adopted a more selective approach to the 2030 Agenda through a national decree narrowing its formal commitment to the SDGs, now only working towards those aligned with national priorities. While this marked a departure from its traditionally comprehensive multilateral stance, the country continued operational engagement on specific SDGs, including energy transition and sustainable trade initiatives.

Republic of Cuba

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Cuba's human rights situation remained very concerning and with limited progress as rising civic demands were met by a state that continues to suppress political pluralism and restrict fundamental freedoms. Social advances, such as in gender equality, childcare, and legal reforms like the Civil Registry Law and the Code of Childhood, Infancy, and Youth, coexist with persistent restrictions on fundamental rights, particularly freedoms of expression, association, assembly, and movement. The death penalty remains in law in Cuba, although no executions have taken place since 2003. Economic hardship, natural crises, the United States (US) embargo, and Cuba's State Sponsor of Terrorism designation by the US, including their extraterritorial effects, continue to undermine living standards, modernisation, and public services. Restrictions on local human rights defenders, journalists, academics, artists, critical voices, limit pluralism. Civic space in Cuba remained classified as 'closed' by the CIVICUS Monitor in 2025. Ongoing imprisonment of

peaceful protesters, harsh detention conditions, harassment, arbitrary arrests, and travel restrictions remain critical challenges. While the 2019 Constitution and 2022 Criminal Code introduced some human rights protections, key norms await implementation, and the Social Communication Law is used to suppress dissent and criminalise international funding. The Law of Associative Forms, scheduled for July 2025, remains under work. The reform to the Civil Registry Law allowing transgender persons to change the gender marker on their identity documents without requiring surgery or a court order, is a positive step, although bureaucratic barriers and persistent structural discrimination persist. The July 2025 Code of Childhood, Infancy, and Youth modernises Cuba's legal framework advancing child protection, youth participation, sexual and reproductive rights, while critics caution that state control and limited resources may constrain its practical impact.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU maintained comprehensive engagement on human rights and democracy, combining political dialogue, civil society support, thematic programming, and regional cooperation. Key areas of engagement included the promotion of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, including the de jure abolition of the death penalty, strengthening governance and child-protection systems, and fostering civil society pluralism by empowering women, youth, intellectuals, journalists, and entrepreneurs. Initiatives aimed at advancing inclusion and equal opportunities through diplomacy focused on non-discrimination, safety, and the rights of various vulnerable groups. The EU engaged actively with societal actors, including NGOs and civil society organisations, as well as with independent activists and families of detained protesters. Public diplomacy initiatives included workshops on gender equality, campaigns against gender-based violence, support for artists, and various cultural and educational events. The EU enhanced resilience and inclusion by promoting human rights, governance, economic modernisation, and the UN SDGs, with a focus on women's empowerment and disaster preparedness. The strengthening of MSMEs and private actors in economic modernisation and biotechnology was a priority linked to the Global Gateway and the Cuba-EU Roadmap 2025. The EU collaborated actively to launch the National Drug Observatory in Cuba, establishing an inter-institutional, rights-based mechanism to collect and analyse drug-policy data, run an early warning system, and strengthen technical cooperation.

EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights and democracy remained central to the EU's engagement with Cuba under the PDCA. The EU closely monitored developments, drawing on information from a broad range of governmental and non-governmental actors within and outside the country, and raised specific concerns and reported violations directly with the Cuban authorities, including directors of the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Justice Ministry, and the Attorney-General's Office. The EU Spokesperson issued a statement on the reimprisonment of prominent opposition figures. The EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights met regularly with Cuban civil society and raised awareness about the situation of political prisoners.

EU financial engagement: The Country-Level Implementation Plan (CLIP) of the EU's Gender Action Plan III, implemented mainly through civil society, continued providing a platform for expanding dialogue on sensitive issues such as gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health. These concerns grew increasingly strong in contexts of disaster following the impact of Hurricane Melissa on Cuba's eastern provinces, entailing the EU's humanitarian response and the mobilisation of additional resources, which will in turn reinforce and expand structured dialogue with national authorities and civil society actors. In addition, targeted interventions focused on food security, youth, disabilities and cultural heritage preservation.

Multilateral context: Cuba is member of UN Human Rights Council (HRC). On 29 October, the UNGA adopted a resolution calling for an end to the US embargo on Cuba by a vote of 165 in favour, 7 against and 12 abstained. The UN Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures, Alena Douhan, visited Cuba (11–21 November) to assess the human rights impact of sanctions and to formulate recommendations. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled that 49 people jailed after the 11 July 2021 protests were arbitrarily detained for political reasons and urged Cuba to release, exonerate, compensate them, and conduct independent investigations. The EU carried out démarches on different multilateral issues, particularly ahead of the HRC and UNGA sessions. Significant outreach towards Cuban authorities was carried out in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Commonwealth of Dominica

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Dominica is a multiparty parliamentary democracy upholding civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. It operates under the rule of law with strong democratic institutions. According to Freedom House's 2025 report, Dominica remained classified as 'Free', with a score of 92/100. While same-sex conduct was decriminalised in 2024, discrimination against LGBTI persons persists. The administration of justice in Dominica and in particular the backlog of cases remains a concern. Other crosscutting human rights challenges pertain mainly, but not exclusively, to domestic and gender-based violence, child abuse and an increasing occurrence of gun violence. The death penalty remains on the books in Domenica although no executions have taken place since 1986.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU priorities continued to focus on the following areas: democratic governance and the rule of law; domestic and gender-based violence; the death penalty; discrimination and violence against LGBTI people; and child abuse. The EU Delegation participated in the international 16 Days of Activism campaign against Gender-based Violence through a campaign on all social media platforms used by the Delegation. It entailed messages against violence.

EU bilateral political engagement: Human Rights matters were regularly discussed in meetings with national authorities and civil society organisations in Dominica.

EU financial engagement: To combat discrimination against the LGBTI community, the EU Delegation is financing a project ('Caribbean LGBTIQ+ Initiative for Promoting Solidarity Outcomes – CALIPSO') of the LGBTIQ+ sub-regional umbrella Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality (ECADE), aimed at building a stronger LGBTI civil society in all seven countries of the Eastern Caribbean. The EU Delegation is funding eight beneficiary countries and the ECSC under the Partnership of the Caribbean and the EU on Justice (PACE Justice) Regional Programme, aiming to assist efforts towards reducing the worryingly high number of criminal case backlogs. The project is implemented by UNDP.

Multilateral context: The EU Delegation carried out formal démarches on human rights issues over the course of 2025. EU Member States were involved in the démarches when and where possible.

Dominican Republic

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The Dominican Republic enjoys a stable political and macroeconomic environment, with notable advancements in human rights through the

establishment of a new Ministry of Justice and a Vice-Ministry for Human Rights. This reform aims to alleviate administrative pressures previously placed on the Public Prosecutor's Office. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2025, the Dominican Republic scored 37/100 and ranked 99th out of 180 countries, improving from 36/100 and 104th place in 2024, although it remained below the regional average. Comprehensive reforms are underway, focusing on police training, regular evaluations, and improving prison conditions, addressing issues like overcrowding, preventive detentions, lack of gender separation, and limited healthcare access. Gender-based violence remains a significant concern despite efforts towards female economic and political empowerment. The rate of femicides remained unchanged in 2025, positioning the Dominican Republic with one of the highest femicide rate in the region. The Dominican Republic is highly affected by the multidimensional crisis in neighbouring Haiti. Rising levels of violence in Haiti have prompted the authorities to step up border controls and announce the deportation of 10,000 irregular migrants per week. NGOs continue to report arbitrary arrests, mistreatment of migrants in detention and instances of deportation of vulnerable people. In response to these claims, the Dominican Republic has strengthened capacities of the police and immigration authorities, including in the field of human rights, and has strengthened the fight against human trafficking by updating legislation and establishing a specialised Prosecutor's Office. Business representatives in sectors dependent on Haitian labour, are also pleading for devising legal pathways for migration through work permits, among others by using biometric data, in a context where many Haitian citizens do not receive IDs by their country of origin.

EU action - key focus areas: In the area of human rights, the EU focused mainly on the rights of persons in vulnerable situations. It promoted women's rights, including economic empowerment and the elimination of gender-based violence, and supports the political participation of women and youth. The EU also worked to protect migrants' rights, including safeguards for deportees and access to healthcare, as well as the rights and social reintegration of detainees. Strengthening civil society organisations and supporting human rights defenders remained a cross-cutting priority.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to monitor, promote and support human rights through dialogue and public diplomacy events. Human rights, including the assessment of possible joint action, were regularly addressed in dialogues with several line Ministries. The shared values between the EU and the Dominican Republic were a central theme in several panel discussions at universities and during the EU Delegation's 'Open Day' in May 2025.

EU financial engagement: Actions included capacity-building of CSOs and Human Rights Defenders, the promotion of women's rights, fighting gender-based violence and supporting youth, labour and environmental rights. The EU programme on fighting gender violence (C-PREV), prepared a monitoring system of gender violence and training. The programme also supported the update of the National School for Equality's virtual platform and tools to support the preparation of comprehensive legislation on gender violence. A virtual course on the prevention of family violence has been prepared, including specific software adaptations to allow access for women with disabilities. DG ECHO provided humanitarian assistance to asylum seekers and refugees as well as vulnerable people from Haitian origin, especially unaccompanied or separated children and their families. The programmes were implemented by UNHCR, UNICEF and Plan International.

Multilateral context: The EU and the Dominican Republic are like-minded partners in human rights and democracy. Regular coordination was ensured in multilateral fora, including in the context of the Dominican Republic's membership of the UN HRC.

Republic of Ecuador

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: An EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) was deployed for the general elections on 9 February and the second round of the presidential vote on 13 April. The EU EOM found it to be a transparent and well-organised election that disproved fraud narratives spread by the two main political forces during the campaign. Ecuador experienced unprecedented violence in 2025, recording a homicide rate of 51 per 100,000 amid clashes between organised crime and security forces. The government's deployment of the military in response to criminal violence led to reports of human rights violations, including cases of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detention, ill-treatment, and enforced disappearances. Prison violence remained pervasive, with over 70 recorded inmate deaths. Violence against women and children remained high, with 59 femicides recorded up to September 2025. The government's use of executive orders and fast-tracking of legislation, some of which introduced restrictions on fundamental freedoms, provoked frictions with the Constitutional Court. A new 'social transparency' law imposed onerous administrative and reporting obligations on NGOs, including some of those funded by the EU or Member States. CSO activities were disrupted by the closure of bank accounts of some CSOs. Civic space was rated as 'obstructed' by the Civicus Monitor. The situation of human rights defenders became more challenging, while indigenous communities continued to face pressure from extractive projects. The use of force by security forces in response to September 2025 protests against fuel subsidy cuts left three dead and at least 296 injured. Concerns over media freedom have grown, with reports of increasing attacks on journalists and media. Ecuador was ranked 94th out of 180 countries by the World Press Freedom Index.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU in Ecuador had eight priorities in 2025: (1) Supporting Human Rights Defenders; (2) Gender equality and women's rights; (3) Promoting non-discrimination; (4) Fighting impunity and improving quality and access to justice; (5) Supporting independent media, access to information and the fight against disinformation; (6) Business and Human Rights; (7) Integrity of electoral processes; (8) Civil society in oversight and accountability.

EU bilateral political engagement: Throughout 2025, the EU continued to engage with all relevant stakeholders, including the government, human rights institutions and civil society organisations. The fifth EU-Ecuador Human Rights Dialogue took place on 15 October 2025, during a period of significant social unrest triggered by protests following the elimination of the diesel subsidies. The EU expressed its concerns over the militarization of the security response to organised crime, as well as the deteriorating human rights situation in prisons. The EU emphasised the imperative of protecting human rights defenders, including environmental defenders. The EU supported the creation of working groups to investigate human rights violations and strengthen safeguards for defenders and journalists. The EU also emphasised the importance of dialogue with indigenous, afro-descendant, and vulnerable communities.

EU financial engagement: Supporting Human Rights Defenders: EUR 1,582,006 contribution to the regional project 'Gold Alliance: Andean experience of defending human rights against mining activity'

implemented in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia to sensitise about the impact of mining on local communities. EUR 601,544 contribution to a project in collaboration with the Ecuador Ombudsman to protect human rights defenders. EUR 842,450 project to protect the Yasuni indigenous population. EUR 407,219 contribution to Fundación Maquita for the action '*Mitigación de Riesgos Ambientales y Alimentarios basados en Ecosistemas Agroecológicos Resilientes*' in support of sustainable development in Bolivar province of this territory. EUR 395,676 euros support to the Nina Muyu project for sustainable development in the territories of the Karanki and Kayambi indigenous nationalities. Gender equality and women's rights: Ongoing implementation (through June 2026) of Spotlight Initiative 2.0 with focus on promotion of human rights of women and children who are victims of violence, with EU contribution of EUR 1,000,000. Promoting non-discrimination: Ongoing implementation of 30-month project for the protection of voluntary isolated indigenous populations. Fighting impunity and improving quality and access to justice: EU contribution of EUR 1,542,000 to projects with Tejiendo Justicias and Acción Ecológica to promote access to justice. EUR 2.500.000 contribution to EU program 'SERPAZ' with components on penitentiary security, reform of the penitentiary system, and technical assistance in the penitentiary sector. Supporting independent media, access to information and the fight against disinformation: EUR 1,500 support for the organization of workshops on disinformation and migration for World Press Freedom Day. Business and Human Rights: EU support for the preparation of Ecuador's National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, as part of EUR 1,000,000 regional project Responsible Business Conduct in Latin America and the Caribbean. Integrity of electoral processes: EU contribution of EUR 800,000 to UNDP support for the democratic process in Ecuador, including the 2025 elections and referendum. EU contribution of EUR 1,000,000 to project implemented by civil society organizations in support of the democratic process throughout 2025. Civil society in oversight and accountability: EUR 14,246,420 for various projects in support of strengthening CSO capacity to participate in the public policy process in areas including natural resource management, education, disability inclusion, youth, and rural development.

Multilateral context: Ecuador continued to broadly support multilateralism and the rules-based international order. It engaged actively in various multilateral fora in support of human rights, and was elected as a member of the UN Human Rights Council by a vote in the UN General Assembly. Ecuador participated in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), presenting its national report and engaging with international experts on issues such as freedom of expression, judicial independence, and equality. Ecuador presented a progress report before the UN Human Rights Committee as part of a dialogue on compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Civil society organizations complemented reporting by Ecuador's authorities by submitting parallel reports to committees such as the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), highlighting various challenges. Ecuador postponed a visit of UN experts on the rights of peasants originally scheduled for 4-14 November 2025 to the second half of 2026. This group is part of the UN Special Procedures mechanisms that promote compliance with international human rights treaties and conventions.

Republic of El Salvador

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: El Salvador experienced historically low homicide rates, while democratic governance, the rule of law, and civic space continued to face significant challenges. The prolonged State of Exception continued to entail extraordinary security

measures, maintaining high detention rates amidst allegations of arbitrary detention, due-process violations, limited judicial oversight, and deaths in custody. Constitutional changes in July 2025 allowed indefinite presidential re-election and further strengthened executive authority. Following the 2021 replacement of judges of the Constitutional Chamber and the absolute majority held by the New Ideas party in the Legislative Assembly, additional reforms were widely seen as further weakening institutional checks and balances.

International democracy indices continued to classify El Salvador as a hybrid regime, while independent assessments highlighted continued challenges related to political rights, civic liberties and institutional checks and balances. Civic space narrowed as the Foreign Agents Law introduced restrictive requirements on organisations with foreign funding, including mandatory registration and a 30% tax on political activities, which civil society organisations argued would significantly reduce their operational capacity. Reports indicated increasing self-censorship among journalists and the closure or relocation of several media outlets amid growing pressures and limited protections. Reforms of the Criminal Code raised concerns as minors could face adult prosecution for gang-related offences, raising concerns regarding compliance with international child-rights standards. Gender inequality and gender-based violence remained significant concerns, while impunity for crimes against women and LGBTI persons continued to be reported. Environmental concerns remained following the lifting of the mining ban and the approval of large-scale extractive projects, which raised concerns regarding consultation processes and environmental oversight.

EU action – key focus areas: EU action in El Salvador remained guided by the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, focusing on protecting and empowering individuals, particularly women, children, youth, LGBTI persons and human rights defenders; promoting resilient, inclusive and democratic societies; safeguarding freedom of expression and civic participation; addressing the human rights implications of security policies and new technologies; delivering through a coordinated Team Europe approach.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged with Salvadoran authorities through sustained political dialogue and diplomatic channels, public diplomacy and coordinated outreach, consistently underlining the importance of due process, proportionality and rule of law as essential to the long-term sustainability of security gains. In June 2025, the EEAS issued a spokesperson statement highlighting concern on the Foreign Agents Law and the detention of several human rights defenders. In November 2025, the Foreign Minister of Luxembourg visited El Salvador on behalf of the HRVP. During his meetings with the authorities, including the Foreign Minister, he raised prominently human rights issues such as the state of exception, detention conditions and civic space. Close coordination was maintained with Member States, international partners and the UN system, alongside regular dialogue with civil society, journalists and human rights defenders. EU engagement sought to preserve channels of dialogue on sensitive issues, including detention conditions, juvenile justice, civic space and gender equality, while closely monitoring the cumulative impact of legislative and institutional reforms on democratic governance.

EU financial engagement: Under the Human Rights and Democracy (HR&D) and Civil Society Organisations (CSO) thematic programs, a total of €10 million was dedicated to projects focused on several critical pillars of social justice and civic engagement: (i) safeguarding individuals advocating for human rights and environmental protection; (ii) advancing the rights of women and youth while

promoting equality and inclusion for LGBTI, (iii) providing essential psychosocial support to minors detained under the state of emergency; and (iv) strengthening civil society's capacity to engage in dialogue with local authorities and enhancing overall public participation. The EU committed EUR 18 million to three strategic pillars aimed at advancing women's rights, health, and economic independence in El Salvador: (i) Cihuat Mujer (EUR 4 million), focused on strengthening protection mechanisms for women's rights; (ii) Cihuat Niñas (EUR 4 million), a community-based approach targeting adolescent pregnancy; (iii) Women's Economic Empowerment (EUR 10 million), targeting women in the poorest regions to build self-confidence and provide vocational training/small business support. The project Prudencia (EUR 1.6 million) aimed to foster civic participation at local level. The Good Financial Governance Project (EUR 5.5 million) promoted more efficient, sustainable and transparent public finances, encouraging green finances with a gender focus. The project AGUSTINE (EUR 17.7 million) aimed to prevent social violence by improving and diversifying education pathways, integrating psychosocial support and emotional well-being, strengthening life skills and productive capacities, and supporting schools in implementing Equality and Prevention of Sexual Violence Plans.

Multilateral context: El Salvador's engagement with multilateral fora in 2025 remained selective. Participation in the first EU-Central America Association Council represented a positive step in maintaining political dialogue, although representation at major international and regional events, including at the UNGA 80th session and the EU-CELAC Summit, remained limited. At the same time, El Salvador accepted 150 out of 228 recommendations following its UPR. Accepted recommendations included access to lawyers and family contact for detainees, improving detention conditions in line with the Mandela Rules, and the protection of human rights defenders and journalists.

Grenada

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Grenada is a multiparty parliamentary democracy upholding civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. It operates under the rule of law with strong democratic institutions. According to Freedom House's 2025 report, Grenada remained classified as 'Free', with a score of 89/100. Prevalent across the Eastern Caribbean, the administration of justice in Grenada remains a concern. In 2025, Grenada continued to address case backlogs, including a Criminal Backlog Symposium to develop practical strategies and an implementation roadmap. The death penalty remains in place in Grenada. Other crosscutting human rights challenges pertain mainly but not exclusively to LGBTI rights, domestic and gender-based violence. Child abuse remains a challenge in the forms of sexual abuse, neglect/abandonment, verbal abuse, physical punishment and family dysfunction. Child protection featured prominently in policy discussions and legislative initiatives in 2025. During the year, the Government advanced amendments to the Marriage Act aimed at prohibiting child marriage and launched a review of its social protection system and legislation.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU Delegation participated in the international 16 Days of Activism campaign against Gender-based Violence through a campaign on all social media platforms used by the Delegation which entailed messages against violence.

EU bilateral political engagement: Human Rights matters were regularly discussed in meetings with national authorities and civil society organisations in Grenada.

EU financial engagement: To combat discrimination against the LGBTI community the EU Delegation is financing a project ('Caribbean LGBTIQ+ Initiative for Promoting Solidarity Outcomes – CALIPSO') of the LGBTIQ+ sub-regional umbrella Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality (ECADE), aimed at building a stronger LGBTI civil society in all seven countries in the Eastern Caribbean. Under the 2024 EU Human Rights and Democracy Call for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, the EU is supporting a Grenada-based foundation protecting children in their first 1,000 days.

Multilateral context: The EU Delegation carried out formal démarches on human rights issues over the course of 2025. EU Member States were involved in the démarches when and where possible.

Republic of Guatemala

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Guatemala´s government is committed to democratic governance, a positive human rights agenda and social inclusion. In 2025, Guatemala adopted a long-overdue national policy for the protection of human rights defenders and continued regular dialogue with indigenous authorities. Despite the strong human rights commitment, positive developments were limited due to widespread corruption and continuous cases of instrumentalization of the justice system spearheaded by the Public Prosecutor's Office (Ministerio Público, MP).

The persistent attempts to overturn the 2023 election results and the initiation of multiple accusations against legitimately elected and appointed authorities, journalists, indigenous leaders, students, and former justice operators contributed to fragile institutions and lack of credibility of the justice sector. Attacks against journalists and human rights defenders persisted, driven by threats, digital violence and judicial harassment. In addition, high rates of femicide, thousands of reported cases of sexual violence, and limited progress in implementing gender policies continued to impact women in Guatemala. Children's rights were severely impacted by chronic and acute malnutrition, while the number of adolescent pregnancies remained high.

The penitentiary system faced extreme overcrowding, and transitional justice was stagnant. A fragmented Congress, legislative initiatives, and the approaching 2026 renewal of key institutions (Supreme Electoral Tribunal, Constitutional Court, Attorney General, Comptroller General) contributed further to the polarisation and challenges of Guatemala's democratic landscape. Guatemala remained classified as 'Partly Free' in Freedom House's 2025 report.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU's engagement in Guatemala is grounded in a longstanding partnership, framed by cooperation under bilateral and regional instruments, including development cooperation and political dialogue. The key areas of support continued to be geared towards civil society organisations defending environmental rights, indigenous rights, women's rights, and business and human rights; reinforcing civic space, participatory decision-making processes and youth participation in the public sphere; strengthening governance and justice systems through support to institutional transparency, anti-corruption reforms, and capacity-building for public administration, including in the fight against organised crime; promoting inclusive development, especially measures that enable equal access to essential services and economic opportunities; enhancing public administration effectiveness, including e-governance and financial management systems; fostering accountability and respect for the rule of law.

EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights, the rule of law and the protection of human rights defenders are regularly part of bilateral political dialogue. This includes meetings with all state authorities, civil society and the private sector. The EU Special Representative for Human Rights visited Guatemala in February 2025, stressing the importance of protecting human rights defenders and Indigenous Peoples' rights, as well as strengthening Guatemala's democratic institutions, including those involved in upholding the rule of law. The EU Delegation, in coordination with EU Member States, attended various judicial hearings of cases involving criminalised justice operators and transitional justice. Moreover, the EU Ambassadors visited journalist José Rubén Zamora, former prosecutor Stuardo Campo and indigenous leaders Luis Pacheco and Héctor Chaclán in prison.

EU financial engagement: Under the NDICI Multiannual Indicative Programme 2021-2027, the EU allocated EUR 193 million in grant-based bilateral cooperation to Guatemala, complemented by thematic and regional programmes. During the 2024-2025 period, the EU allocated EUR 9.4 million to support State institutions in the implementation of public policies and strategies aimed at strengthening territorial governance, the rule of law and access to justice, with particular attention to groups in situations of vulnerability, as well as enhancing digital security. EU support under thematic programmes, notably the NDICI-HR and NDICI-CSO, contributed to strengthening the role of civil society as a key actor in democratic governance. These actions enabled civil society organisations to enhance the social audit of public administration, contributed to open government reforms, protected civic space and human rights defenders, and reinforced the organisational capacities of indigenous and ancestral authorities. EU-funded initiatives also promoted women's and youth political and economic participation and supported the engagement of the private sector in sustainable investment, in line with social and environmental due diligence principles in the context of the Global Gateway Investment Agenda. Through regional programmes such as EL PAcCTO, the EU supported anti-corruption efforts as well as policy reforms related to the fight against organised crime.

Multilateral context: Guatemala is largely a like-minded partner when it comes to the defence of democracy and human rights (i.a. with regard to its voting behaviour in UN bodies). The EU maintained its open dialogue with the government to discuss human rights issues relevant to multilateral fora, i.a. through démarches and outreach. Guatemala participated in the UN Human Rights Council processes.

Cooperative Republic of Guyana

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Guyana continued to strengthen as a parliamentary democracy, marked by the successful and peaceful September 2025 General Elections. The EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) praised the efficiency of the process ('*The 2025 elections showed important improvements in the way voting and counting were conducted, and Guyanese citizens once again demonstrated their commitment to democratic participation'')*. It also highlighted systemic inequalities, specifically the 'undue advantage of incumbency' and a lack of robust campaign finance regulations. Guyana is undergoing a 'historical economic transition', fuelled by oil proceeds, concentrating on massive infrastructure and housing development projects. These economic gains are contrasted by a persistent public perception of corruption. This led to a decline in Guyana's standing in the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, where it fell to the 80th place. Guyana's 2025 Universal Periodic Review noted challenges: a) Gender-based and domestic violence b) Child abuse and homophobia; c) Colonial era laws, including regarding death penalty and the criminalisation of same-sex relations. A notable improvement in the Global Gender Gap Index, ranking 31st globally, is

attributed to the 2024 Family Violence Act. Political parties are increasingly committing to LGBTI rights, although religious lobbies continue to exert some influence. Guyana is recognised as a leader in Indigenous rights, leveraging carbon credit revenues to fund over 1,000 community projects. In 2025, Guyana ranked 73rd out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index, improving from 77th in 2024.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU deployed an EOM for the September elections. The EU has been a key partner in tackling Gender-Based Violence. A November 2025 national conference on gender equality specifically highlighted the successful partnership with the EU, particularly through the Spotlight Initiative. This initiative has been credited with supporting the new Family Violence Act and helping the country make a significant leap in the Global Gender Gap Index. The EU's long-term Forest Partnership with Guyana, which includes a €5 million grant, is directly aimed at supporting indigenous peoples and local communities. This project links the protection of their land and cultural rights with sustainable economic opportunities and climate policy. In July 2025, the EU launched a specific call for proposals, 'Support to Civil Society Organisations in Guyana,' to strengthen the capacity of local CSOs to participate in policy dialogue and promote good governance. The following project was selected: 'Voices for equality, youth and women driving human rights and democracy in Guyana', to be implemented by a local NGO 'Merundoi' (EUR 200,000 grant). For the 16 days of activism the EU Delegation organised two events at the EU residence with over 100 participants, using the work of 17 Guyanese artists to communicate on the matter. The vernissage called 'Becoming' was, according to the Minister of Culture who took part, the first event of this kind in Guyana. It was possible to gather donations for organisations promoting indigenous women rights in the remote Rupununi region. The activity was also an opportunity to review with the Minister of Social Services the work carried out under the Spotlight programme. The first EU Run was dedicated to the International day of people with disabilities. The event was attended by over 200 people and helped raise donations for the Blind Cricketer's association and awareness on the importance of streamlining the issue of access in the development projects that are taking place in the fastest growing economy in the world.

EU bilateral political engagement: The 10th Guyana-European Partnership Dialogue took place on 9 December. Parties reaffirmed the critical importance of this Dialogue as a valuable platform for consultation, strengthening bilateral cooperation, and supporting multilateralism within a rules-based international order anchored by the UN Charter. They emphasised their shared commitment to fostering global peace and security, advancing sustainable development, and promoting democratic governance.

EU financial engagement: The EU used its Team Europe branding to launch projects, communicating its priority of a broad-based, sustainable partnership with Guyana. In February 2025, the EU announced an EUR 8.9 million investment to support pharmaceutical production in the Caribbean, an initiative launched with a joint declaration by Guyana, Barbados and Lithuania, in a partnership on health security and economic resilience.

Multilateral context: At the end of December, Guyana concluded its two-year term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC), after holding the UNSC presidency in June. During that time, Guyana championed issues linking climate change and food security to global peace, holding a high-level open debate on 'Poverty, underdevelopment and conflict.' During 2025, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and key Ambassadors (United States, United Kingdom, Canada, EU, and

France) held monthly lunches to discuss ongoing items on the UNSC agenda. In December 2024, Guyana joined 17 other Latin American and Caribbean countries in launching the Alliance for Security, Justice, and Development.

Republic of Haiti

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Since late 2022, Haiti has been embroiled in a severe political and institutional crisis marked by the absence of a functioning parliament since January 2022, no elected local representatives since 2020, and initially a single-headed executive led by the Prime Minister. A transitional government was implemented in March 2024, featuring a 9-member Transitional Presidential Council (TPC) and an interim Prime Minister. Despite these changes, the TPC failed to restore security or facilitate elections. Its mandate ended on 7 February 2026. Civic space in Haiti remained classified as 'closed' by the CIVICUS Monitor in 2025. Efforts by Haitian security forces and an international mission led by Kenya have had limited success; armed gangs still dominate 80-90% of Port-au-Prince and are expanding into neighbouring areas. Violence has heavily impacted civilians, resulting in mass displacement and significant casualties, with 4,384 fatalities reported from January to September 2025. The use of explosive drones in security operations has raised concerns. Observers fear increasing impunity and a legal vacuum, particularly following a December 2025 decree perceived as protecting former officials from prosecution for misappropriation. The health system is nearing collapse, and over half the population faces acute food insecurity. Vulnerable groups, including displaced persons, women, and youth, face exploitation and rights abuses amid widespread instability. Haiti has 1.4 million internally displaced persons.

EU action - key focus areas: EU action in Haiti focused on protecting and empowering individuals in a context characterised by widespread violence, displacement and institutional erosion. EU-supported actions prioritised access to justice and protection for victims of human rights violations, including women and girls affected by sexual violence, IDPs, persons in prolonged pre-trial detention and persons at risk of statelessness. Support to judicial actors and to human rights defenders contributed to strengthening safeguards and accountability mechanisms in highly constrained operating conditions. Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies remained a guiding objective of EU engagement. EU action supported the integration of human rights standards within policing and justice institutions, including through measures addressing violence against women and gender equality. At the same time, support to CSOs contributed to reinforcing social cohesion, community resilience and citizen engagement at local level, particularly in areas affected by violence and displacement. EU engagement also contributed to strengthening participatory governance through support to civil society initiatives working on transparency, accountability and citizen oversight, including in relation to electoral processes. These actions aimed to preserve civic space and sustain societal capacities for participation and dialogue despite prolonged political uncertainty and insecurity. In line with its emphasis on inclusion and prevention, the EU continued to prioritise youth empowerment and socio-economic rights. EU-supported initiatives promoted youth participation, income generation and community-based approaches to violence reduction in marginalised urban and rural communities.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Delegation to Haiti witnessed human rights abuses during field visits to prisons, IDP camps and reception centres for forced returnees, human rights concerns were regularly raised by the EU Head of Delegation during encounters with government authorities.

Building on similar events in preceding years, the EU Delegation hosted four frank and open discussions with Haitian civil society on human rights, youth and the situation of the LGBTI community in Haiti.

EU financial engagement: The OHCHR programme continued with an EU contribution of EUR 3 million, supporting specialised judicial units, including those addressing sexual crimes and trafficking, promoting endogenous non-judicial conflict-resolution mechanisms, and accompanying new human rights defenders. In December 2025, the EU launched the project 'Access to justice and protection of rights in contexts of displacement, detention and statelessness', implemented by the UN Human Rights Office with an allocation of EUR 1.39 million, targeting IDPs, detainees in prolonged pre-trial detention and persons at risk of statelessness. The EU also continued its EUR 3 million contribution to the Basket Fund in support of the Haitian National Police, implemented by UNDP and UNODC, which includes a strong human rights component. This covers support to the *Unité de lutte contre les crimes sexuels*, human rights and EVAWG training for police officers, measures to promote a more gender-balanced police force, and infrastructure improvements facilitating the deployment of female recruits. Support to civil society was further strengthened through a EUR 4 million micro-grant facility supporting local and emerging CSOs. The EU maintained its focus on youth empowerment and violence reduction through a EUR 4 million project supporting youth integration and community violence reduction in Port-au-Prince, complemented by the 'AKA – Ann Kanpe Ansanm' project with an EU contribution of EUR 3 million. Several projects concluded in 2025, including initiatives supporting the release and reintegration of persons in prolonged pre-trial detention, youth-led change in the *Haut Nord-Ouest*, and civil society engagement in electoral processes.

Multilateral context: Pursuant to Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution 55/24, the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights regularly provided updates on the situation of human rights in Haiti. The Multinational Security Support (MSS) Mission, which reached a force deployment of 1,000 police officers in 2025, made progress in implementing the UN Compliance Framework and launching a Complaints and Reporting Mechanism to prevent, investigate, and report violations. According to resolution 2793, it is intended to establish a robust compliance mechanism for the new UNSC-authorised Gang Suppression Force, building on the compliance mechanism created under the MSS Mission.

Republic of Honduras

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: On 30 November 2025, Honduras held general elections with high voter turnout, which were observed by an EU Election Observation Mission (EOM). The mission assessed the elections as generally well-organised and competitive despite challenges such as political polarisation. The EU congratulated President-elect Nasry Asfura on his victory. The overall human rights and democracy situation in Honduras remained broadly unchanged. The country continued to face deep-rooted challenges related to corruption, institutional weakness and high levels of violence, compounded by bureaucratic inefficiencies and limited capacity for effective policy implementation. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2025, Honduras ranked 157th out of 180 countries (no change compared to 2024).

The situation of vulnerable groups, notably women and girls, LGBTI persons, Indigenous Peoples, journalists and human rights defenders, remained a source of serious concern. The killing of environmental and territorial defenders continued to illustrate the severe and persistent risks faced

by those protecting land and natural resources. Despite political commitments, the Escazú Agreement, which strengthens environmental protection and safeguards the rights of defenders, had yet to be ratified. Socio-economic conditions showed only modest improvement. Extreme poverty declined slightly from 40% to 38.3%, while violence remained a defining feature of the national context. At the same time, the homicide rate, estimated at 19.14 per 100 000 inhabitants in 2025, reached its lowest level in three decades. This positive trend did not, however, translate into improved security for all. Targeted violence continued to disproportionately affect specific groups: by October 2025, 225 women had been killed since the start of the year, while LGBTI persons and human rights defenders remained exposed to threats and lethal attacks. In the context of an electoral year, civil society organisations reported an increase in political violence ahead of the November 2025 elections. Incidents included threats, intimidation, smear campaigns and physical aggression, with women candidates particularly affected by political violence and exclusion within party structures. These developments underscored persistent challenges to democratic participation and highlighted the need to strengthen protection mechanisms, accountability and inclusive governance.

EU action - key focus areas: EU action focused on strengthening the rule of law, expanding access to justice and fostering meaningful citizen participation in governance. Particular attention was paid to groups at heightened risk of discrimination, including women and girls, LGBTI persons, Afro-Honduran communities, youth and human rights defenders. EU initiatives supported civic education, citizen oversight and advocacy for gender-responsive reforms, while accompanying national efforts to improve justice sector compliance with international human rights standards. Given the electoral context, the EU placed particular emphasis on inclusive and transparent democratic processes, encouraging participation by first-time voters and under-represented groups. In parallel, EU cooperation addressed the growing role of digital transformation by promoting the responsible use of new technologies to enhance transparency, civic engagement and early risk detection, while encouraging safeguards against misuse. Throughout, the EU worked closely with national institutions, local authorities, civil society organisations and regional partners to ensure local ownership and sustainability of reforms. Together with the Embassies of Spain, Germany and France, the EU awarded a prize to the Committee for Freedom of Expression (C-LIBRE), in recognition of its significant contribution to the defence of freedom of expression. In an electoral year, this initiative sent a clear Team Europe signal in support of democratic principles and of those defending the right to inform and be informed.

EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights remained a cross-cutting priority in EU political engagement. The EU maintained regular dialogue with national authorities and civil society to monitor developments, promote protection measures for individuals and communities at risk and encourage accountability for violations. Particular attention was given to land and environmental rights, the safety of journalists and defenders and the situation of vulnerable groups. Where appropriate, the EU facilitated engagement with regional and international human rights mechanisms to reinforce protection frameworks.

Political engagement was complemented by sectoral dialogues on justice reform, transparency in public administration, citizen participation and gender equality. Exchanges with legislative, judicial and oversight institutions, as well as with networks representing women, youth and community organisations, helped ensure that reform agendas reflected inclusive perspectives and international standards.

EU financial engagement: The EU continued to support democratic governance and human rights through targeted cooperation. In 2025, funding focused on electoral integrity (EuroElect-H, EUR 10 million), access to justice and alignment with international human rights standards (Iurisdiké, EUR 8 million), and civil society initiatives promoting transparency and anti-corruption at local level (EUR 2.95 million). EU support also advanced gender equality and inclusion, strengthening the rights and leadership of Indigenous, rural and cooperative women, and promoting LGBTI rights through justice sector reforms and regional inclusion initiatives. Indigenous and Afro-Honduran communities benefited from programmes supporting territorial rights, environmental governance and access to justice, alongside engagement on land tenure and forest governance through the VPA/FLEGT process and regional forest programmes. Additional EU funding supported the protection of human rights defenders, social and economic inclusion and youth participation. In 2025, the EU laid the groundwork for the mobilisation of new financial resources for the defence of human rights in Honduras in 2026, building on the updated Roadmap of priorities and the structured Global Gateway dialogue with civil society.

Multilateral context: Honduras and the EU occasionally diverged in their voting patterns within the HRC. Notably, Honduras abstained from votes to extend the mandates of the UN investigative mechanism on Nicaragua and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela. Under the auspices of the HRC, Honduras underwent its UPR, receiving 243 recommendations, particularly related to the rule of law, the autonomy and independence of electoral institutions, the fight against corruption and impunity, the functioning of the justice system and the role of security forces.

Jamaica

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Jamaica continues to uphold democratic stability with peaceful power transitions through competitive elections. According to Freedom House's 2025 report, Jamaica remained classified as 'Free', with a score of 80/100. The latest general elections in September 2025 saw the ruling party win a third term, albeit with a reduced majority, securing 35 of 63 parliamentary seats. Hurricane Melissa, a category 5 storm in October 2025, highlighted Jamaica's social, economic, and climate vulnerabilities, especially in rural areas, causing damage equivalent to 41 percent of the country's 2024 GDP and disproportionately affecting poorer communities due to inadequate housing and infrastructure. Jamaica reported a historic 42.5 percent reduction in murders in 2025, the lowest in over thirty years, though concerns have risen over a 60 percent increase in police-involved killings (based on figures compiled from the Independent Commission of Investigations (INDECOM) and the police), prompting calls for accountability and the adoption of body-worn cameras. Gender-based violence remains a significant issue, affecting around 40 percent of women despite existing protective legislation. Discrimination against LGBTI individuals persists, with same-sex sexual activity still prohibited, though enforcement is not evident recently. Additionally, the death penalty remains legally recognised but not practised since 1988 due to a de facto moratorium. Jamaica continues efforts to address gender-based violence through its National Strategic Action Plan.

EU action-key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-27, the EU continues to advance human rights and democracy in Jamaica, working in collaboration with the government, civil society organisations, the private sector and the UN. Throughout 2025,

numerous initiatives supported citizen security, youth empowerment and engagement, community resilience and violence prevention, advancement of gender equality, youth inclusion protection of vulnerable groups, and promotion of digital transformation and inclusion, as well as human rights and democracy. The EU Delegation continues to support civil society organisations to bolster their capacity to participate in matters of governance and domestic policy through research and advocacy.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU and Jamaica engaged in bilateral discussions throughout the year with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, along with other key ministers. The strength of this bilateral partnership was demonstrated by high-level participation at the annual Europe Day celebration and in the aftermath of Hurricane Melissa when the EU and its Member States quickly delivered goods, supplies and services valued at over USD 12 million to assist the most affected communities. Additionally, EU Commissioner Hadja Lahbib visited Jamaica within days after the hurricane and expressed the EU's unwavering solidarity with Jamaica and pledged continued support to help communities recover and rebuild. The EU Delegation maintains continuous dialogue with local stakeholders on human rights issues. Likewise, Member States consistently raise human rights issues with their high-level government partners during meetings. The EU and its Member States provided critical services related to connectivity, emergency electricity services for key areas and health support in the form of two field hospitals to serve the most affected segment of the population at the epicentre of the destruction from the storm, at a time when the country's emergency services were unable to respond immediately. The Delegation carried out multiple démarches to seek support for EU priorities.

EU financial engagement: Numerous EU-funded projects were implemented in 2025 promoting economic, social, cultural and environmental rights. There was a focus on citizen security, enhancing connectivity, modernising critical infrastructure and protecting the rights of vulnerable groups, including LGBTI community members, youth, people in violence prone communities and rural populations with emphasis on building resilience to climate change. Support was also given to the government's health system strengthening programme.

Multilateral context: Jamaica has been an active member of the UN for 63 years and continues to reiterate its commitment to the principles of the UN Charter. Its membership in other international organisations such as the Commonwealth, partnership with the EU as well as its alliance with other small developing states and engagement in CARICOM, reflects a strong commitment to multilateralism and its capacity to address global challenges, particularly for Small Island Developing States like Jamaica, dealing with cross border issues such as illicit drugs and arms trafficking and climate change. Jamaica has demonstrated leadership in climate action and has committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. Jamaica also implemented its national adaptation plan with specific measures to build resilience across key sectors. Jamaica has led and participated in efforts to restore peace and constitutional order in Haiti. The country underwent its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in November 2025, where it received 237 recommendations.

United Mexican States

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Mexico is a multiparty presidential democracy with a federal system composed of 32 federal entities. There is a vibrant political debate with freedom of speech and the capacity for citizens to politically participate in local, state, and federal elections. According to Freedom House's 2025 report, Mexico remained classified as 'partly free', with

a score of 59/100, reflecting ongoing challenges related to organised crime, corruption and violence. Inequality is a challenge and the rate of informal employment is high, but the Government has adopted social and economic measures to promote economic rights, lifting more than 5 million people out of poverty. Indigenous communities are vulnerable, a situation that may improve following the constitutional reforms on the rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted in 2024. The Government has also made gender equality a key priority with constitutional reforms and the creation of a Ministry for Women. Organised crime is widespread across the country, representing the most serious challenge for human rights in Mexico. Around 130,000 people are officially reported disappeared. The homicide rates have decreased considerably in the last 3 years, although extortion and violence, including murder, still face high rates of impunity. The 2025 judicial elections following the constitutional reform meant that Mexico is the first country to elect all its judges by popular vote, a measure adopted to give new legitimacy to the judiciary, but which has raised concerns on judicial independence. There is a complex institutional setup, both at federal and state level, to protect journalists and human rights defenders, as they are often exposed to threats of violence.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to work with Mexican authorities and CSOs to advance human rights. The EU Delegation, together with the Embassies of EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland, maintained support for human rights defenders through the initiative *#ProtejamosSusVoces* (Let Us Protect Their Voices). In December, it organised a two-day workshop to provide beneficiaries with practical tools and networking opportunities. The EU engaged regularly with federal and state authorities, CSOs and international partners, in particular UN OHCHR and UNHCR. The EU Special Representative for Human Rights (EUSR), Kajsa Ollongren, visited Mexico City and Zacatecas to co-chair the 13th Human Rights Dialogue and participate in the 11th Civil Society Seminar, positively engaging with federal and local authorities, as well as civil society. Human rights issues were also raised during other high-level visits, including an EU Heads of Mission visit to Tabasco and Chiapas in October, and meetings with CSOs during visits by EU institutions, such as the 14 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) attending the EU–Mexico Joint Parliamentary Committee in Mexico City in October. In May, the Council's Working Party for Latin America and the Caribbean (COLAC) visited Mexico City and Oaxaca and engaged with Federal and State authorities and CSOs on human rights. The EU supported Mexican efforts to address enforced disappearances by offering financing technical assistance to the Local Search Commissions and Regional Centres for Human Identification. It also provided emergency grants for the protection of human rights defenders and journalists, and backed UN OHCHR in Mexico to strengthen prevention and protection policies and promote access to justice as a safeguard against attacks on human rights defenders and journalists. The EU also funded a labour integration project for migrants in Mexico, implemented by UNHCR, ILO and IOM, in partnership with Mexican private and public stakeholders, assisting tens of thousands of people and helping to match labour demand in different regions while regularising the status of migrants. The EU supported 10 ongoing projects, worth EUR 6.8 million, implemented by Mexican CSOs on freedom of expression and access to digital information, the search for disappeared persons, prevention of forced recruitment of children, arbitrary detention and torture, and support to human rights defenders and journalists. The EU Delegation, along with the Embassies of EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland, published local statements condemning the killing of two human rights defenders and a journalist. The EU Delegation and the French Embassy issued a joint local statement calling for protection of a human rights defender (HRD) that participates in #*ProtejamosSusVoces*. Alongside the French and Swiss embassies, UNESCO, and Reporters Without Borders, the EU Delegation co-presented the 7th Breach

Valdez Award for journalism and human rights, honouring journalists killed for their work and providing three EUR 8,000 prizes, as well as study visits to Europe.

EU bilateral political engagement: On 17 December, the 13th EU-Mexico High Level Human Rights Dialogue took place in Mexico City, co-chaired by the EUSR for Human Rights, Kajsa Ollongren, and the Vice-Minister for Human Rights and Multilateral Affairs Enrique Ochoa. On the previous day, EU and Mexican CSOs held the 11th Civil Society Seminar on Human Rights, attended by the EUSR and the Mexican government. The EUSR also met with Environment Minister Alicia Bárcena, State authorities in Zacatecas, and CSOs. In May, the Council's COLAC group met with the Federal Vice-Minister for Human Rights, Arturo Medina, as well as with the regional institutions for human rights of the State of Oaxaca.

EU financial engagement: The EU provided EUR 2.6 million for CSOs dedicated to preventing and combating gender-based violence (GBV). Via the El PACcTO programme, EU4DecentWork, and several initiatives with the Mexican government and CSOs, the EU has promoted security, justice, optimal management of public finance, medicine and vaccine regulation, job formalisation and decent work, notably for people on the move and other vulnerable categories. In October, the EU granted EUR 700,000 in humanitarian aid and provided Copernicus Emergency Management Service imagery following severe flooding in central and eastern Mexico.

Multilateral context: Mexico is a key like-minded partner in multilateral human rights fora, and a defender of the rules-based multilateral order and core principles of the UN Charter. At the Human Rights Council (HRC), Mexico and the EU shared positions in 90% of the resolutions considered in 2025. Mexico began its new term as member of the HRC in January 2025. During the HRC 59th session, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women commended Mexico's legislative advances and equal gender representation in political life, but expressed concern about issues including women's security, gender-based violence, access to justice, and intersectional forms of discrimination. Mexico sponsored the HRC resolution 58/14 on the Mandate of Special Rapporteur on human rights while countering terrorism, adopted by consensus. It also sponsored with Chile the HRC resolution 59/14 on the mandate of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls. Mexico actively promoted the UNGA Third Committee resolution 'Protection of migrants'. In the UNGA 11th Emergency Special Session on Ukraine, Mexico voted in favour of ES-11/7 on a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine, and ES-11/8 recognising Russia's 'full-scale invasion'.

Republic of Nicaragua

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Nicaragua remained extremely concerning. Civil and political rights were severely challenged due to the concentration of power within the Executive, reinforced by the last constitutional reform in 2024. Legislative changes sparked criticism over issues such as property rights, electoral pluralism, judicial transparency, statelessness, freedom of movement, and privacy. According to Freedom House's 2025 ranking, Nicaragua remained classified as 'Not Free'. Political dissent was repressed, leading to harassment, arrests, forced exile, and nationalisation of private property. Opposition groups continued to function clandestinely or from exile, with transnational human rights violations posing risks to opponents abroad. The number of political prisoners fluctuated between 47 and 77, primarily detained for political reasons, with some under house arrest and surveillance.

While the cancellation of NGOs' legal status slowed down it remained a serious concern (more than 6000 organisations and associations closed). Media and internet freedoms continued to be tightly controlled. Religious practice was permitted within state-defined limits, with alleged political content prohibited and worshiping monitored. Despite positive gender equality indicators, gender-based violence and discrimination persisted. Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities faced pressures from settlers and mining concessions. Social and economic rights improved with infrastructure expansion, universal healthcare, and citizen security, raising life expectancy. Education was widely accessible, though ideological indoctrination in schools remained a concern.

EU action – key focus areas: In line with the 2020-27 EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, the EU Delegation's actions focused on the following areas: protecting and empowering individuals and human rights defenders; protecting girls and women against violence and promoting gender equality; promoting the rights of indigenous peoples and the environment; supporting social and economic rights of the population's most vulnerable groups; building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies; resisting the rollback of freedom of expression and information.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Delegation consistently maintained its engagement on human rights, primarily through the promotion of public and cultural diplomacy initiatives. On the occasion of the EU and World Day against Death Penalty (abolished by Nicaragua), the EU Delegation had an op-ed published both by the main opposition media as well as by government outlets. Young Nicaraguan filmmakers were offered an opportunity to improve their skills and share their experiences, participating in the 'EuroCine Lab' workshop and competition, tackling key human rights themes such as gender equality. The latter was additionally advanced through the organisation of manifold events, including training, webinars, workshops and a forum, for the benefit of young women entrepreneurs. In the framework of the 'Climate Diplomacy Weeks', activities organised included planting initiatives, university lectures, publication of articles and a further op-ed by the EU Ambassador in the main media outlets and targeted social media outreach, contributing to highlight the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The EU Special Representative for Human Rights met with Nicaraguan civil society and independent media, and raised awareness about the situation of Indigenous political prisoners.

EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation, jointly with EU Member States, maintained an integrated approach while addressing human rights issues in the evolving challenging context, complementing diplomatic engagement with targeted support programmes financed through available budget lines. Within the framework of the thematic programmes and bilateral cooperation, ongoing projects continued and several new initiatives were launched including five new projects, aiming to: (i) promote economic empowerment and combat gender-based violence, with a particular focus on women and youth; (ii) support economic empowerment of women and young people through financial literacy and inclusion; (iii) provide psychosocial recovery and sexual and reproductive health services for girls, boys, adolescents and young people in situations of vulnerability; and (iv) foster economic empowerment through technological innovation. Despite an increasingly complex operational environment, the EU Delegation and its implementing partners remained fully committed to ensuring the continuity and relevance of EU support.

Multilateral context: The EU Delegation sustained its commitment to the promotion of rule-based multilateralism, providing inputs to the competent human rights bodies and voicing its concerns about

the human rights situation. National authorities maintained their stance, declining UN human rights mechanisms' requests for cooperation, and denying access to international and regional organisations as well as independent verification bodies, alleging bias and double standards. The mandate of the Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua was renewed in April 2025. However, the country's termination of cooperation with the OHCHR, in February 2025, followed shortly by the breaking of relations with FAO, ILO, IOM and UNESCO, curtailed human rights international oversight and accountability. Moreover, the interruption of cooperation with the UPR, preventing the adoption of the 2024 pending 4th cycle report that had been scheduled for March 2025 during the 58th HRC session, further hindered public scrutiny.

Republic of Panama

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Panama is a stable multiparty democracy that upholds civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. The country operates under the rule of law and maintains relatively strong democratic institutions. The Ombudsman's 2025 report highlighted ongoing challenges regarding access to essential services and protection for vulnerable groups. Despite legislative advances, gender-based violence and femicides persisted. A new cybercrime law in August 2025 addressed digital sexual offences. Social protests arose in response to social security reform, with a state of emergency declared in Bocas del to Toro province in June, suspending temporarily certain constitutional guarantees. The Supreme Court later rejected a habeas corpus petition for detained protestors. Migrant crossings through the Darien Gap dropped drastically, with the passage effectively closed, while Panama received deported individuals from the United States, facing criticism over conditions of detention. Corruption remained a concern among Panamanians, reflected by a score of 33/100 in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2025, in which Panama ranked 116th out of 180 countries (114th in 2024). Social inequalities continued to challenge Panama, particularly affecting rural and indigenous communities. It improved its World Press Freedom Index ranking, published by Reporters Without Borders, from 83rd in 2024 to 53rd in 2025, though journalists continue reporting targeting by legal action

EU action - key focus areas: The EU Delegation and EU Member States continued promoting democracy and advancing human rights, including women's empowerment, the fight against gender-based violence and support to vulnerable groups such as Indigenous communities. In pursuit of these goals, the EU and its Member States implemented communication campaigns to raise awareness of women's rights, aligning with key dates such as International Women's Day, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and the 16 Days of Activism. Through ongoing projects and targeted activities, the EU worked to promote democratic values and strengthen democratic institutions, notably within the framework of the project INTER PARES implemented by IDEA International. Furthermore, a series of activities was carried out in support of freedom of expression and pluralistic media, including exchanges with journalists and capacity-building seminars carried out within the framework of the project 'Support for the Alliance for Development in Democracy (ADD) in promoting independent and pluralistic media, access to information and the fight against disinformation'. The project also delivered a pioneer study on media freedom and freedom of expression in Panama, which provides an important basis for public discussion in this area.

EU bilateral political engagement: The relationship between the EU and Panama is founded on a shared commitment to democracy, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. The EU actively fosters

these values through engagement with Panamanian authorities, public diplomacy efforts, and communication activities, including social media campaigns and public interventions. The EU and Panama held in October 2025 in Brussels their second round of bilateral consultations. The EU Delegation maintained a strong collaborative relationship with relevant public institutions such as the Office of the Ombudsman, in order to enhance awareness of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Moreover, the EU Delegation continued to engage with UN agencies, civil society organisations and human rights defenders dedicated to advancing democracy and human rights.

EU financial engagement: The EU allocated an additional amount of EUR 500,000 under the thematic programmes for Human Rights and Democracy for the period 2025-2027. In June 2025, the Norwegian Refugee Council launched a project funded by FPI (EUR 2 million), aimed at increasing resilience and strengthening social cohesion of communities in the Darién province. DG ECHO funding in Panama totalled EUR 1,781,000 in 2025 and included the financing of UN agencies and international organisations to mitigate the suffering of people on the move and forcibly displaced families transiting via the Darién Gap and Colón Province. It also contributed to mitigating the impacts of La Villa River flooding via the support provided to IFRC and the Red Cross of Panama. The EU in Panama allocated more than EUR 14,000 to cultural and public diplomacy actions in support of gender equality, human rights and democracy.

Multilateral context: In 2025, Panama was aligned with the EU on key votes at the UNGA such as on the Resolution on the return of Ukrainian children; the Resolution on assistance to Palestinian refugees, as well as on the Human Rights Situation of Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories and the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. During the 4th UPR of Panama in November 2025, the country received a total of 263 recommendations, including from 12 EU Member States. In February 2025, the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights carried out a working visit to Panama, presenting its observations on the situation of people in the context of human mobility.

Republic of Paraguay

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2025, Paraguay continued to make progress in reducing poverty levels, reflecting a sustained improvement in living conditions, with a growing share of the population gaining access to income, employment, and basic services. In terms of security, a key priority for the current administration, notable advances included the integration of a human rights-based approach in law enforcement training, with a specific focus on gender perspectives, improvements in penitentiary system management, and strengthened anti-drug operations in border areas and at airports. Corruption and organised crime remained a concern, however, and law enforcement operations continued to confirm links between some politicians, judges, the police and organised crime, including regarding the trafficking of illicit drugs and of arms.
A growing anti-rights discourse within parts of the government and segments of society challenged the legitimacy of promoting gender equality and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The implementation of the 2024 Law on the Control, Transparency and Accountability of Non-Profit Organisations was seen by large parts of civil society as unconstitutional and unduly restrictive of civic space. The Civicus monitor rated civic space as 'obstructed'. Violence against women and girls, including sexual abuse, continued to be an important challenge. A bill aimed at eliminating the practice

of '*criadazgo*' (children of low-income families taken in by other families, often resulting in situations of abuse) was rejected in Parliament in 2025. Despite legal protections for Indigenous communities, concerns persisted regarding access to clean water, violations of land rights as well as the impact of agro-industrial projects on their livelihoods. While the press generally operates freely in Paraguay, a law on the protection of journalists and human rights defenders had still not been approved. The country ranked 84th out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index.

EU action - key focus areas: During 2025, and in line with the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027, as well as the Team Europe Gender Action Plan 2021-2025, the EU in Paraguay continued to focus its actions on governance, transparency, and security cooperation, as well as the promotion and protection of vulnerable groups, gender equality, and prevention of discrimination.

EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights were discussed during the EU-Paraguay Joint Committee that took place in Brussels in October 2025. Both parties agreed to continue collaborating in supporting multilateralism and human rights. Throughout the year, interlocutors from both sides also exchanged on specific human rights issues, such as priorities during the UNGA, agreeing on the importance to work together in support of human rights worldwide. Engagement with political actors, such as the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Women, confirmed our joint commitment in issues such as the fight against trafficking and promotion of women's rights. Implementation of the recommendations of the 2023 EU EOM (which assessed the overall conduct of voting as good and well-organised) is still lagging behind.

EU financial engagement: Regional EU security programmes continued to support citizen security, the rule of law and the fight against transnational organised crime through technical assistance, training and the exchange of best practices. Through programmes such as EL PAcCTO, EUROFRONT and COPOLAD, the EU supported reforms in areas including penitentiary management, anti-corruption efforts, border management, migration governance, drug policy and criminal justice cooperation. EU support also contributed to strengthening institutional capacities in the areas of money laundering, economic crime, environmental crime and identity fraud. A programme addressing gender-based violence, to the tune of EUR 4 million from the EU and EUR 1 million from Spain, continued to promote comprehensive protection for women against violence, involving both state and non-state actors. Other ongoing projects focused on access to justice, the human rights of detainees, prison management reform, child labour, combating misinformation and digital violence, and strengthening civil society and youth advocacy. A new thematic call for proposals was launched in 2025 on issues including criadazgo, digital violence, human rights, and the empowerment of civil society, Indigenous and peasant organisations, journalists, youth and women's networks.

Multilateral context: Cooperation in the multilateral arena continues to be broadly positive, and Paraguay has been consistently voting along the EU on matters connected to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, including on issues related to human rights. However, Paraguay is adopting a more restrictive stance on issues such as gender, the rights of the child, as well as the Agenda 2030 and right-based approaches in general. Paraguay's last UPR took place in 2021, during which it received 201 recommendations, out of which it accepted 186.

Republic of Peru

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: During 2025, human rights and democratic governance remained important topics of public discussion in Peru. New legislation strengthening the role of the Peruvian Agency for International Cooperation (APCI) introduced additional administrative requirements and prior-control mechanisms for civil society organisations receiving foreign funding, and restricted the use of such funding for administrative and judicial actions against the Peruvian state. Civic space remained constrained, with the Civicus Monitor classifying Peru as 'repressed' in 2025. In spite of some improvements in recent years, press freedom remained challenging, with Reporters Without Borders ranking Peru 130th out of 180 countries (down from 125th in 2024) in its 2025 World Press Freedom Index.

Congress adopted legislation granting broad amnesty to members of the military and police for crimes committed during the armed conflict between 1980 and 2000, potentially impacting accountability in cases involving serious human rights violations. The broader human rights context also continued to be shaped by ongoing investigations and accountability concerns relating to the deaths and injuries caused during the 2022-2023 protests. In 2025 further protests, including youth-led demonstrations, took place in several parts of the country, reflecting continued public discontent and raising concerns regarding the use of force and the protection of the right to peaceful assembly. Civil society organisations and UN special procedures criticised amendments to legislation on equal opportunities, notably changes removing the concept of 'gender' from the relevant legal framework. During the year, several legislative and political initiatives fuelled debate regarding institutional checks and balances, including measures affecting the independence of the judiciary and other accountability mechanisms.

Human rights defenders continued to play an important role in promoting and protecting fundamental rights, while in a number of cases facing security risks and pressures (particularly those working on environmental protection, natural resources, fundamental rights and gender equality). Peru continued to cooperate with international and regional human rights mechanisms. In its dialogue with the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Peruvian government reported progress in implementing the National Policy for Development and Social Inclusion 2030. Preparations for the 2026 general elections advanced, with electoral authorities continuing technical and organisational work aimed at ensuring the integrity and transparency of the electoral process. Following an invitation from the Peruvian authorities, the HRVP decided to deploy an EU Electoral Observation Mission (EOM).

EU action - key focus areas: EU action on human rights and democracy in Peru continued to focus on five priority areas: 1) democratic stability; 2) human rights defenders (particularly environmental defenders); 3) prevention of gender violence and discrimination (women and LGBTI persons); 4) economic and social rights (particularly indigenous peoples and migrants) and 5) media freedom and new technologies.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued its political engagement in the above-mentioned priority areas. Throughout the year, EU engaged with politicians and electoral authorities to assist in the preparations of the 2026 general elections. Following an invitation from the Peruvian Government to observe the elections, an EU Exploratory Mission (ExM) visited Peru between 21 October and 6 November 2025 to assess the conditions for the deployment of an EOM. The EU Delegation and Member States' Embassies engaged with CSO representatives on issues such as the protection of

human rights defenders and the legislative framework for promoting human rights. Several EU Member States as well as like-minded countries participated in an informal coordination space on democracy and human rights issues. The EU Delegation and various Member States organised dialogues on gender violence and discrimination through a local network for coordination on gender issues. Through contacts with government authorities, the EU was engaged to ensure the rights of migrants in Peru, especially of Venezuelan citizens. In terms of visibility campaigns, the EU focused its attention on World Press Freedom Day, International Women's Day, Human Rights Defenders Day and Human Rights Day, for which the EU supported a film festival organised by UNHCHR. The last formal human rights dialogue with Peruvian authorities took place in March 2023.

EU financial engagement: Strengthening democracy and human rights remained a key priority for the EU's financial engagement in Peru. Since 2022, the EU has been funding an action implemented by International IDEA (*'Consolidation of Peruvian Democracy'*) aimed at supporting the implementation of earlier EOM recommendations. In 2025, this action was extended to cover the electoral year and to support the government transition. In late 2025, a new FPI action implemented by UNDP was launched to enable Peru's electoral institutions to better respond to the challenges of the forthcoming electoral process. Peru was also one of seven countries covered by the FPI-funded Internal Mediation Projects aimed at peaceful management of conflicts in local communities. Three EU-funded projects aimed to support the work of human rights defenders, notably through support to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Several EU-funded projects aimed to contribut3 to the promotion of gender equality and the eradication of gender-based violence in Peru. A new contribution agreement was signed with the Spanish International Cooperation Agency for a EUR 2.3M action to adopt and strengthen policies and legislation for the prevention of gender discrimination and gender-based violence. Member States also supported initiatives aimed at strengthening CSOs and NGOs working to defend human rights. Several initiatives were aimed at supporting free press and independent journalism. Through the programme Peru Social, co-financed by the EU and a Member State, the EU worked with Peruvian institutions to formalize employment, improve social protection systems (health, social security), and integrate vulnerable populations, including migrants and refugees, with a focus on human rights and gender equality. Another important initiative organised by some EU Member States focused on improving health networks and access to healthcare for vulnerable populations.

Multilateral context: The EU Delegation delivered the annual démarche on the EU's priorities for the UN General Assembly (UNGA) session in 2025, including on the resolution regarding the death penalty. The EU continued to work closely with OHCHR in Lima.

Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The twin-island federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis is a multiparty parliamentary democracy upholding civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. It operates under the rule of law with strong democratic institutions. According to Freedom House's 2025 report, Saint Kitts and Nevis remained classified as 'Free'. St. Kitts and Nevis recorded a downfall in crime rates in 2025, compared to 2024. The administration of justice in St. Kitts and Nevis and in particular the backlog of cases remained a concern. Human rights continued to be generally respected, while structural challenges persisted in areas such as gender-based violence, LGBTI rights, child protection, and judicial efficiency. The death penalty remains in place in St. Kitts and Nevis.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to focus on democratic governance and the rule of law; domestic and gender-based violence; the death penalty; discrimination and violence against LGBTI persons; and child abuse. The EU Delegation participated in the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence through a campaign on all social media platforms used by the Delegation. It entailed messages against violence.

EU bilateral political engagement: Human Rights matters are regularly discussed in meetings with national authorities and civil society organisations in St. Kitts and Nevis.

EU financial engagement: To combat discrimination against the LGBTI community, the EU Delegation is financing a project ('Caribbean LGBTIQ+ Initiative for Promoting Solidarity Outcomes – CALIPSO') of the LGBTIQ+ sub-regional umbrella Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality (ECADE), aimed at building a stronger LGBTI civil society in all seven countries of the Eastern Caribbean. The EU Delegation is funding eight beneficiary countries and the ECSC under the Partnership of the Caribbean and the EU on Justice (PACE Justice) Regional Programme, aiming to assist efforts towards reducing the worryingly high number of criminal case backlogs. The project is implemented by UNDP.

Multilateral context: The EU Delegation carried out formal démarches on human rights issues over the course of 2025. EU Member States were involved in the démarches when and where possible.

Saint Lucia

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: St. Lucia is a multiparty parliamentary democracy that upholds civil liberties and fundamental freedoms and operates under the rule of law with functioning democratic institutions. According to Freedom House's 2025 report, Saint Lucia remained classified as 'Free'. The 2025 elections resulted in a second consecutive victory for the Saint Lucia Labour Party (SLP) under Prime Minister Pierre, which secured 14 of 17 seats in the House of Assembly. Women hold 11.7% of parliamentary seats. The death penalty remains in place, while other crosscutting human rights challenges include LGBTI rights, domestic and gender-based violence, and child abuse. On 29 July 2025, the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (ECSC) struck down criminal-code provisions penalising consensual same-sex intimacy, marking a key expansion of constitutional rights for the LGBTI community. However, prejudice and discrimination persisted, and the state took no steps toward anti-discrimination legislation.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU priorities continued to focus on the following areas: democratic governance and the rule of law; domestic and gender-based violence; the death penalty; discrimination and violence against LGBTI people; and child abuse. The EU Delegation participated in the international 16 Days of Activism campaign against Gender-based Violence through a campaign on all social media platforms used by the Delegation. It entailed messages against violence.

EU bilateral political engagement: Human Rights matters are regularly discussed in meetings with national authorities and civil society organisations in St. Lucia.

EU financial engagement: To combat discrimination against the LGBTI community the EU Delegation financed a project ('Caribbean LGBTIQ+ Initiative for Promoting Solidarity Outcomes – CALIPSO') of the LGBTIQ+ sub-regional umbrella Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality (ECADE), aimed at building a stronger LGBTI civil society in all seven countries of the Eastern Caribbean. The EU

Delegation is funding eight beneficiary countries and the ECSC under the Partnership of the Caribbean and the EU on Justice (PACE Justice) Regional Programme, aiming at assisting efforts towards reducing the worryingly high number of criminal case backlogs. The project was implemented by UNDP. A Saint Lucian non-profit organisation was supported by the EU through a 2024 EU Human Rights and Democracy grant for the training of specialised Independent Child Protection Advisors.

Multilateral context: The EU Delegation carried out formal démarches on human rights issues over the course of 2025. EU Member States were involved in the démarches when and where possible.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a multiparty parliamentary democracy that upholds civil liberties and fundamental freedoms and operates under the rule of law. According to Freedom House's 2025 report, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remained classified as 'Free'. In 2025, the country held free and fair elections that led to a historic change of government, ending Prime Minister Gonsalves' 24-year tenure. Voter turnout was 62%. Following the election, women held 2 of the 15 seats in the House of Assembly, and the government includes four women in ministerial roles. Persistent challenges remain in relation to gender-based violence, child protection, judicial delays, and the legal status of LGBTI persons, while rising crime levels continue to raise concerns. The impacts of Hurricane Beryl, together with underlying socioeconomic vulnerabilities, continued to affect the enjoyment of economic and social rights, particularly among vulnerable groups.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU Delegation participated in the international 16 Days of Activism campaign against Gender-based Violence through a campaign on all social media platforms used by the Delegation, which entailed messages against violence. The EU Delegation also financially supported the Hairouna Film Festival. The festival provided a platform for local artistic expression, skills development, and international cultural exchange.

EU bilateral political engagement: Human Rights matters were regularly discussed in bilateral meetings with national authorities and civil society organisations of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

EU financial engagement: To combat discrimination against the LGBTI community, the EU Delegation is financing a project ('Caribbean LGBTIQ+ Initiative for Promoting Solidarity Outcomes – CALIPSO') of the LGBTIQ+ sub-regional umbrella Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality (ECADE), aimed at building a stronger LGBTI civil society in all seven countries of the Eastern Caribbean.

Multilateral context: The EU Delegation carried out formal démarches on human rights issues over the course of 2025. EU Member States were involved in the démarches when and where possible.

Republic of Suriname

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Suriname maintains a generally favourable human rights environment, bolstered by the peaceful general elections on 25 May 2025. Conducted under a new national proportionality system, the elections were deemed well-organised by international observers, including CARICOM and an EU Election Monitoring Mission. This led to a

peaceful transition of power to a coalition led by the National Democratic Party (NDP). According to Freedom House's 2025 report, Suriname remained classified as 'Free'. Suriname remained a regional leader in certain social areas, such as the legal recognition of same-sex marriages performed abroad and the abolition of the death penalty. However, significant challenges persist: Suriname is still one of the few South American nations yet to legally recognise the collective land rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. A 2025 draft law sparked outrage, as critics argued it stripped away the principle of free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples in matters that concern them. Persistent concerns remained regarding gender-based violence, corruption, prison conditions, and drug trafficking. Despite these hurdles, the government continued to engage with UN human rights bodies, hosting a visit from the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent in early 2025 to further assess national progress. In July 2025, the government presented its second Voluntary National Review to the UN, featuring an LGBTI spotlight report on socio-economic inclusion and health. Significant human rights efforts included progress toward establishing an independent National Human Rights Institute, though civil society continues to advocate for full legislative oversight. A landmark court ruling protected 500 000 hectares of rainforest, mandating Indigenous and Maroon consent for land development.

EU action - key focus areas: An EU Election Monitoring Mission was deployed on Suriname's 2025 elections. These were declared credible, with the country successfully transitioning to a nationwide proportional representation system. The EU Roadmap for engagement with civil society in Suriname and EU Structured Dialogue framework with Civil Society were approved paving the way for enhanced cooperation with EU Member States that are active in Suriname.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU's 'Team Europe' diplomacy in Suriname focused on the European Green Deal, Global Gateway, and Democracy. Central initiatives included the 'Sustainable Forest Livelihoods Programme' and the EU Electoral Monitoring Mission for the May elections. The Netherlands leveraged Suriname's 50th Independence anniversary to strengthen bilateral ties, highlighted by Prime Minister Dick Schoof's visit and King Willem-Alexander's historic December state visit. They also supported the 'Makandra' programme to bolster the rule of law. France prioritised security and culture, emphasising Maroni River border cooperation, military aid, and the high visibility 'French Days' festival in Paramaribo.

EU financial engagement: The EU's engagement was driven by promoting environmental protection, sustainable natural resource management, climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction through a Team Europe approach, as well as collaborating with like-minded partners. At the request of the Government of Suriname, the EU provided through its Climate Facility a range of technical support in 2025 to assist the government in identifying the gaps, needs and priorities in the field of nature and climate change finance, mitigation and adaptation.

Multilateral context: Suriname reaffirmed its role as a principled proponent of multilateralism and human rights. This commitment is rooted in its alignment with EU values and its status as a signatory to major UN and OAS treaties. On 30 April 2025, the 'UN Suriname Annual Results Report 2024' was released, providing a detailed account of progress following the 2024 UN cooperation plan. Demonstrating its openness to international scrutiny, the government hosted the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent for an official visit between March and April 2025. Following

the May 2025 general elections, newly elected President Jennifer Geerlings-Simons shifted the nation's international focus. While the previous administration prioritised climate action, Geerlings-Simons used Suriname's 50th anniversary of Independence to advocate for systemic global change. Addressing the 80th UN General Assembly on 23 September 2025, she called for Multilateral Reform, a strong push for the expansion and modernization of the UN Security Council, as well as an appeal to member states to resolve the wars in Europe and Gaza through dialogue rather than force. Suriname pleaded for a return to the core principles of the UN Charter and also signalled a strategic shift toward deeper Latin American alignment. This was most visible on 26 September 2025, when the Surinamese delegation joined ten other regional nations in a coordinated walkout during Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's address. This act solidified Suriname's position within a vocal regional bloc, marking a definitive evolution in its foreign policy during its landmark jubilee year.

Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Trinidad and Tobago is a democratic multiparty state, consistently conducting elections as mandated by its Constitution. According to Freedom House's 2025 report, Trinidad and Tobago remained classified as 'Free'. However, national concerns remained regarding accountability, transparency, public sector efficiency, and justice administration. While the country's human rights record is generally positive, issues persisted concerning the death penalty, LGBTI rights, and prisoner rights. Challenges included high levels of gang-related violence, gender-based violence, and trafficking. The Government initiated programmes to support at-risk youth, change gender stereotypes, and improve services for survivors of violence against women, alongside enhancing the criminal justice system. In 2025, the Court of Appeal overturned a 2018 decision decriminalising same-sex relationships, potentially exposing consensual same-sex acts to criminal prosecution under the Sexual Offences Act. The death penalty remains part of criminal legislation, though not recently applied, with many held on remand. The Government has not yet ratified several international treaties and conventions, including instruments relating to the rights of migrants, refugees and persons with disabilities. In December 2025, Trinidad and Tobago expanded its Migrant Registration Framework, aiming to streamline legal documentation and integration processes for migrants, particularly Venezuelans, to regularise their status.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU Delegation continued to focus on its priorities from the Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy 2021-2027: the abolition of the death penalty; gender equality and women's rights; rights of the child; LGBTI rights; migrant and refugee rights; prisoners' rights; and the anti-corruption architecture.

EU bilateral political engagement: Seven strategic political and operational priorities from the Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy 2021-2024 were addressed through public diplomacy activities and information campaigns on the Delegation's communication platforms. The EU paid special attention to the position of women and the problem of violence against women in society. Apart from the EU-funded project under the 'Spotlight Initiative', implemented by the UN, the EU used other fora to warn about this cross-cutting social problem, and it organised public events in 2025 in the framework of the 16 Days of Activism.

EU financial engagement: Implementation of two grants to civil society organisations totalling EUR 500 000 continued in 2025. The projects supported two priorities of the European Union Delegation's Human Rights Strategy 2021–2027: the rights of migrants and refugees, and the rights of LGBTI persons. Activities focused on improving access to health, education and other essential services for migrants, while also promoting the economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights of LGBTI persons, particularly those in vulnerable situations. Support included advocacy, service provision, capacity building and efforts to combat discrimination. Additional priority areas were addressed through regional initiatives managed by INTPA, including the Partnership of the Caribbean and the European Union on Justice (PACE Justice) and EL PAcCTO (Europe Latin America Programme of Assistance against Transnational Organized Crime).

Multilateral context: The Trinidad and Tobago government stakeholders were engaged through the delivery of démarches encouraging the country to vote on several resolutions that relate to human rights. In September 2025, Port of Spain hosted the launch of the UNDP's 2025 Regional Human Development Report for Latin America and the Caribbean, an event attended by senior government officials, civil society and international partners. The report addressed challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean like climate change, inequality, and economic instability, proposing a roadmap for 'Resilient Human Development' to navigate crises through stronger social contracts and adaptable systems. Though regional in scope, hosting this high-level event demonstrated Trinidad and Tobago's role in shaping dialogues on human rights, inequality, resilience, and inclusive development in the region. In March 2025, Trinidad and Tobago became the first Caribbean nation to launch a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, a strategic framework aligned with UN Security Council Resolution 1325. The plan addresses the impact of armed violence, organised crime, and gender-based violence, with an emphasis on inclusivity, women's leadership, and community-based peacebuilding. This milestone was recognised by UN Women and international partners, highlighting the country's commitment to integrating gender perspectives into national peace and security strategies.

Eastern Republic of Uruguay

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Uruguay is a solid democracy with strong democratic institutions. Human rights defenders enjoy good legal and political environment conducive for their work. In 2025, the country upheld political rights and civil liberties and worked toward enhanced social inclusion. Civil society remained well organised, with over 70% of CSOs participating in a network or collective group. Civic space was classified as 'open' by the Civicus Monitor, while the country ranked 59th among 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index. Representation of women in politics is gradually increasing, reaching 30.8% in 2025. Domestic violence against women and girls remained a concern, as well as conditions in detention centres including deaths in custody, requiring a comprehensive penitentiary system reform. Uruguay has the highest incarceration rate in South America, at 456 per 100,000 inhabitants. The government is preparing a National Security Plan (2025-2035) to address increasing security concerns linked to organised crime and drug transit, mainly towards Europe. Discrimination against Afro-descendants, the LGBTI community, immigrants and other minorities persists in society, particularly in access to income, education, health and employment opportunities, which the National Gender Plan (2025-2030) aims to address. Although Uruguay has the lowest poverty rates in Latin America and the Caribbean, children remain the most vulnerable, prompting the government to prioritise child poverty in its budget law, placing childhood at the focus

of its agenda through school support programs, scholarships, and strengthened health care and employment policies, fulfilling campaign promises, despite the fiscal deficit.

EU action – key focus areas: The EU priorities focused on four priorities: (i) gender equality and women's rights; (ii) rights of the child; (iii) the situation of persons deprived of liberty and (iv) environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued its broad engagement with both state and non-state actors on human rights issues. The annual EU-Uruguay local level human rights dialogue was held in September 2025. The EU Delegation held preparatory meetings ahead of the EU-CELAC Summit in November 2025 covering the Summit's priorities. CSOs were invited in October 2025 to meet with the representatives of the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with Mercosur to discuss i.a. The promotion, protection and defence of the rights of children and adolescents.

EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation continued to oversee the implementation of numerous human rights projects. In total, the EU Delegation´s portfolio of ongoing projects on human rights and democracy amounted to EUR 5.62 million. EU-funded projects covered specific aims to combat all forms of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, to promote gender equality and combat discrimination, to increase political participation of women, to promote the protection of children from all forms of violence and neglect, to raise awareness of the situation of the persons deprived of liberty, encouraging their economic and social reintegration and strengthening the capacities of CSOs working in this area. Other projects covered promoting the protection and use of natural resources to support communities affected by environmental and climate change, while promoting active citizens' participation and access to environmental justice. In Team Europe spirit additional activities have been financed through EU Members States.

Multilateral context: Uruguay is a UN founding member deeply committed to multilateralism. It is also one of the world's largest per capita contributors to UN peacekeeping missions. Uruguay's positions generally align with those of the EU including in the context of the UNGA Third Committee. As a former member of the UN Human Rights Council (2019-2021), it confirmed its candidacy for a seat for the 2027-2030 term. Uruguay and the UN signed the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Uruguay 2026-2030. This agreement prioritises tackling child poverty and strengthening social cohesion, improving citizens' security and promoting inclusive and sustainable development through technology and innovation.

United States of America

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2025 saw a peaceful and orderly transition of power from one Presidential administration to another, with no widespread contestation of election results. Prior to leaving office, President Biden issued several pre-emptive pardons for his family members, congressional members involved with the House January 6th Committee, and others. Some of these pardons were condemned as an over-exertion of presidential power and an obstruction of the legal system.

Concerning the death penalty, the Trump Administration lifted the moratorium on federal executions, and the Department of Justice authorised at least 20 new capital prosecutions. In 2025 there were 47

executions in 11 states, representing the highest rate of executions since 2009. 23 new death sentences were imposed.
Throughout 2025, President Trump invoked emergency powers to deploy the National Guard to several states including California, Illinois, Oregon, and Tennessee, as well as the District of Columbia. On the rights of migrants and refugees, entry to the U.S. for migrants has been suspended since 22 January 2025. By the end of the year, the Trump Administration reported that 675,000 migrants had been deported and 2.2 million voluntarily chose to self-deport. According to data by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and analysed by civil society, 73% of migrants arrested by ICE were found to have no criminal conviction. While the government has placed a heavy political focus on migration enforcement and removal of those with no legal right to remain in the US, there have been reports of individuals being detained and even deported despite having legal status. One such case involved Kilmar Armando Abrego Garcia. The US refugee admission program was largely suspended and only 400 Afrikaners received asylum. The Administration detained 700 migrants at Guantánamo Bay who were transferred elsewhere by the end of the year. Concerning the rights of the child in particular, analysis of US government data by civil society indicates that on an average day ICE held around 170 children in detention, with this number going up to 400 on some days.

On women's rights, over 20 states either prohibited abortion outright with limited exceptions or maintained severe restrictions on the procedure. Although the US has closed 75.6% of its overall gender gap, gender inequality still exists including in wages where women earned roughly 83 ¢ for every dollar earned by men overall. Efforts to advance women's rights and gender equality abroad may face challenges due to the Administration's reinstatement of the Mexico City Policy (so-called Global Gag Rule) and the loss of U.S. foreign assistance on women's rights projects due to the closing of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), as funding has become more unpredictable and increases the vulnerability of those already most at risk. The administration rolled back measures protecting the rights of LGBTI persons, affecting their access to healthcare, housing, adoption and other services. At least 27 states have imposed restrictions on gender affirming healthcare for minors and 1,042 anti-LGBTI attacks or incidents of vandalism were reported in 47 states and the District of Columbia, marking a 5% increase from 2024.

Concerning freedom of expression and information, media access to government was restricted in a number of instances, combined with public attacks against journalists from senior political figures. Public media networks lost federal funding and the administration dismantled the US Agency for Global Media, which oversees the allocation of funds to US public broadcasters.

Regarding international criminal justice, the US imposed sanctions on the Chief Prosecutor, two deputy Prosecutors, and eight judges of the International Criminal Court, as well as a UN mandate holder and civil society organisations working with the Court, including EU citizens.

The US ranked 27th on the 2025 World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, 27th on the 2025 Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, 57th on the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders, and 42nd in the WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2025. It has a score of 56/100, indicating obstructed civic space, on the Civic Space Monitor by Civicus.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU and its Member States organised a full programme of activities to advance human rights goals, in line with the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2027). The EU remained one of the most engaged international actors (alongside like-minded states such as Switzerland) on advancing the abolition of the death penalty in the United States, with the active support of Member State embassies and consulates across the country. To commemorate Europe and World Day Against the Death Penalty, the EU Delegation co-hosted a panel on execution secrecy laws with the embassies of Germany and France. The EU Delegation organised several briefings for EU MS with civil society groups on capital punishment, immigration developments, antisemitism, and global democracy developments. The EU Delegation also met with numerous human rights defenders. In addition, the EU Delegation and EU Member States worked together on human rights through a variety of events that covered accountability for international crimes, LGBTI rights, and civic engagement/democracy promotion, among others.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU maintained an open dialogue with the US government on a range of human rights issues including antisemitism, the systematic unlawful deportation and forcible transfer by Russia of Ukrainian children, and freedom of religion or belief. Issues of concerns were also raised, as is the case for engagement between partners. The EU has consistently responded to unfounded US accusations of EU restrictions on freedom of expression, including via the Digital Services Act (DSA). The EU has also formally condemned the travel restrictions on five European individuals, including a former European Commissioner, and requested the reversal of these measures.

EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation promoted human rights by financially supporting a Europe and World Day Against the Death Penalty event in conjunction with the French and German Embassies. The Delegation also funded a report from an independent panel of experts on candidates for the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and an event to present the report in May 2025. Additionally, the EU Delegation organised participation in the World Pride Parade in Washington, DC that included over 200 marchers from the Delegation, 12 EU Member States, the European Parliament Liaison Office, and the European Investment Bank.

Multilateral context: The US withdrew from participating in the UN Human Rights Council for a second time (this time leaving the seat of an observer). The EU and US continued to engage in various UN fora including the UNGA Third Committee, though the US voted against many texts that had previously been adopted by consensus. The US did not participate in its UPR Session in November 2025 and its review has been postponed. The Trump Administration closed the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and funding cuts directly affected human rights and democracy support. The US State Department was restructured, including the Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) and International Organization Affairs (IO) bureaus. The US focus on natural rights' sparked concerns in civil society and human rights groups, on the grounds that it could undermine the universality of human rights and represent a setback for a number or rights, including the rights of LGBTI persons, women's rights and economic, social and cultural rights.

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Venezuela's human rights and democracy crisis persisted, exacerbated by political polarisation and institutional power concentration that weakened fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. The disputed July 2024 elections cast a long

shadow, with ongoing restrictions on civil and political rights. Independent monitors and the UN documented curbs on freedom of expression, assembly, and association, alongside arbitrary detentions, due process violations, and alleged torture, particularly targeting opposition figures, protesters (including minors), journalists, and human rights defenders. Security forces and pro-government groups were accused of excessive force during protests. Civicus Monitor classified Venezuela's civic space as 'repressed' in 2025, pointing to persistent limitations on freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Reporters Without Borders ranked Venezuela 160th out of 180 countries in its 2025 Index. While authorities engaged selectively with international human rights bodies and released some political prisoners - including foreign and dual EU citizens - later in the year, charges were not dropped, and impunity for past abuses endured. Judicial independence remained compromised, especially within the Supreme Court (TSJ). The economic and humanitarian crisis remained severe, with continued economic instability, hyperinflation and the bolívar's collapse severely limiting access to food, healthcare, transport, and education.

EU action - key focus areas: In 2025, the EU prioritised the protection of fundamental freedoms by reinforcing support to Venezuelan civil society and maintaining links to human rights defenders and international partners in an increasingly restrictive environment. EU programmes advanced economic, social, cultural and labour rights through targeted initiatives on good governance, environmental protection and culture. At the same time, the EU strengthened support for independent and pluralistic media to safeguard access to reliable information and counter disinformation amid shrinking civic space and reduced donor funding.

EU bilateral political engagement: No high-level political engagement by the EU with Venezuelan authorities took place in 2025. The EU Special Representative for Human Rights met frequently with civil society actors from Venezuela.

EU financial engagement: The EU's development assistance in Venezuela is explicitly aligned with its country human rights priorities, particularly the protection of human rights defenders, the prevention of gender-based violence, the promotion of civic space, and the strengthening of independent human rights monitoring. The EU continued in 2025 its dedicated support programmes for human rights defenders, including to strengthen the monitoring of the human rights situation and enable rapid responses in cases where defenders are at risk. The EU maintained its political and financial focus on safeguarding civic space and supporting Venezuelan civil society, through programmes that strengthen their operational capacity. Additionally, the EU's continued support to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)'s human rights monitoring of Venezuela, following their departure from the country in 2024, reflected the EU's clear political priority to ensure continued international oversight and independent reporting on the human rights situation in the country. Furthermore, EU-funded civil society projects continued to promote media freedom and counter disinformation, with the objective of guaranteeing the right to access accurate, transparent, and objective information. EU funding also continued to support the right to access basic services in several regions of the country, including the capital, contributing to social stability in a highly constrained operating environment.

Multilateral context: In 2025, the EU sustained its principled approach by extending restrictive measures and continuing to publicly advocate for respect for human rights, democratic standards and the rule of law. At the multilateral level, the UN system maintained close monitoring through the work

of OHCHR and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission, ensuring continued international scrutiny and documentation of violations. At the same time, the International Criminal Court continued its ongoing investigation into alleged crimes against humanity committed since at least 2017, while the International Labour Organisation maintained its supervisory procedures, including the follow-up to the Commission of Inquiry on violations of freedom of association, collective bargaining and social dialogue in Venezuela. Collectively, these efforts underscored the international community's sustained commitment to accountability, protection of fundamental rights and the pursuit of credible institutional pathways for dialogue and reform.