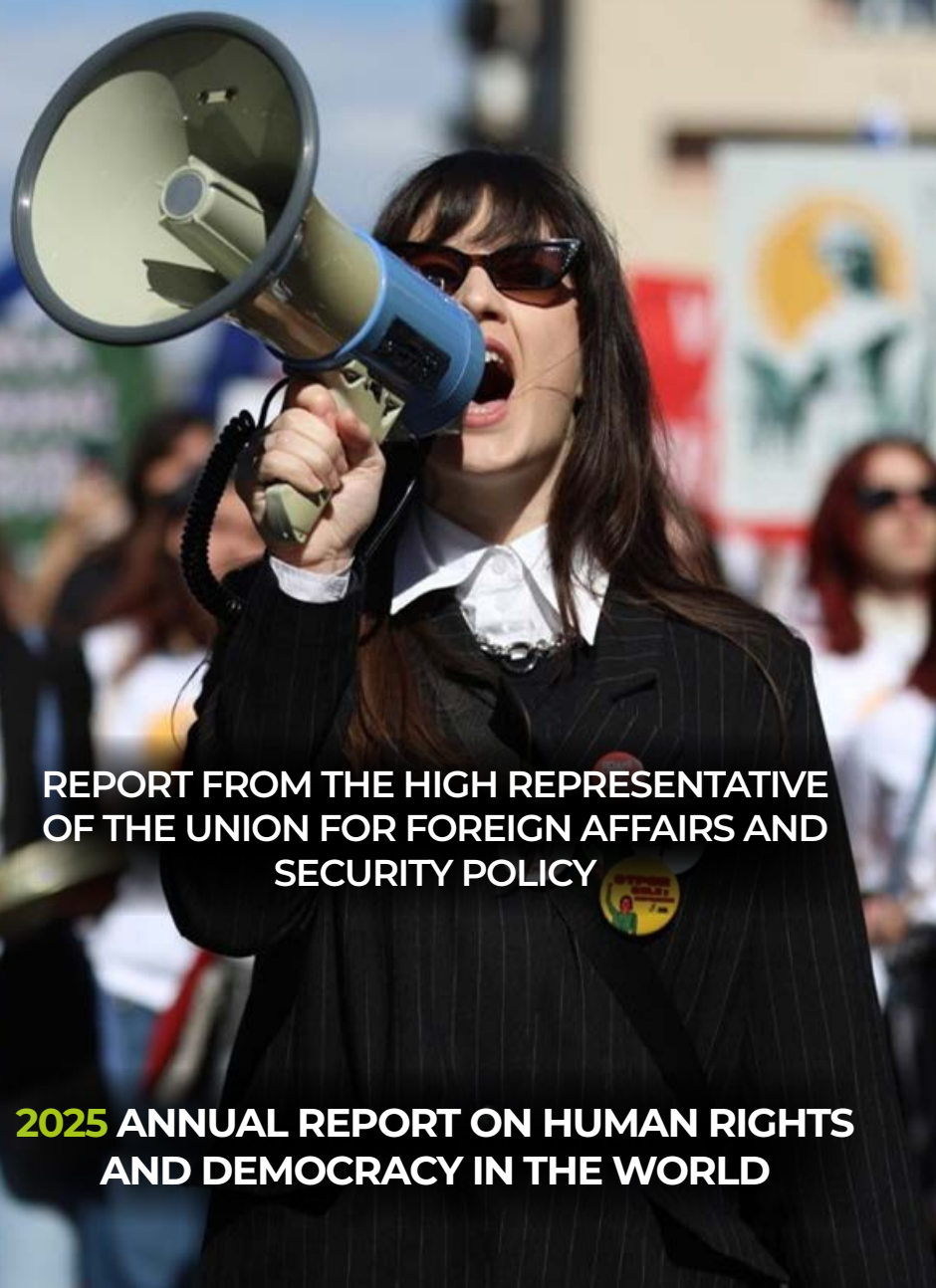




**REPORT FROM THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE UNION FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
SECURITY POLICY**

**2025 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS
AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD**

Photo front page
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*Atmosphere from International Women's
Day 2025 in Podgorica, Montenegro.*

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FOREWORD BY HIGH REPRESENTATIVE



Kaja KALLAS

High Representative
of the European Union
for Foreign Affairs and
Security Policy and
Vice-President of the
European Commission

The EU's work throughout 2025 remained grounded in our commitment to protect human rights and democracy. At the same time, the EU continues to move ahead, boldly where possible and incrementally when necessary. No amount of chaos or conflict will ever change the fact that human dignity, justice and accountability are the only path to peace and prosperity for all.

Human rights and democracy are in retreat worldwide. The backsliding of human rights and efforts to undermine democracies do not simply go hand-in-hand with the chaos and conflict we see around the world, they are the primary drivers of both. Moreover, attempts to undo years of democratic progress have become more brazen and better coordinated, often borrowing from the standard autocrats' playbook: deploy rampant disinformation and information manipulation, control the media, silence human rights defenders, and push back against gender equality, diversity and pluralism.

Amid these challenges, and as this report makes clear, the European Union remains a steady force for good in the world, not least because our interests and values – grounded in universal norms – are one and the same. That is why we are still the partner of choice for those who want to foster cooperation for human rights and democracy globally. This report contains many examples of our positive work that I hope can serve as inspiration to others.

Over the last year, the EU continued to defend human rights, not least by remaining a reliable partner for civil society around the world. Our 145 EU Delegations and all Member States' embassies continued to meet regularly with human rights defenders, monitoring trials of those arrested and visiting individuals in detention. Our human rights defenders mechanism – ProtectDefenders.eu – continued to provide material assistance and has helped more than 10,000 defenders this year. We also continued to lead the global movement towards abolition of the death penalty, including welcoming the positive steps taken by Kenya and Lebanon.

Regarding our efforts to protect democracy, the EU deployed seven more electoral observation missions in 2025. The EU also advanced economic and social rights around the world. Our partnership with the African Union on health and EU funding for local medicine manufacturing in Africa and Latin America are good examples of this.

Despite the pressure from a handful of actors and countries, we must not underestimate the continued support around the world for the rules-based international order we have in place. The vast majority of countries in the world are small and medium-sized and owe their survival to this system that exists to protect us all.

But we need to recognise where the system is falling short and put in the hard work to strengthen it. For example, peace never lasts without accountability. That is why the European Union has helped set up a Special Tribunal in order to prosecute those responsible for Russia's war of aggression, as well as a Claims Commission for the

Ukrainian people to register damages and seek compensation. In the UN Human Rights Council, we led efforts to create an international investigative mechanism for Afghanistan to seek justice for the victims of human rights violations. From Gaza to Sudan, the EU remains the top humanitarian donor worldwide. In the face of targeted attacks against the International Criminal Court, the EU's support remains just as strong. Justice is not a privilege for some but a right for all.

To quote Ales Bialiatski, Belorussian human rights defender and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, 'We need to stock up on patience, clench our teeth and continue our work'.

INTRODUCTION



The following pages describe EU action in a rapidly evolving world. 2025 introduced unfamiliar and unsettling challenges, reaching to the core of the universal human rights law and norms that form the basis of the Union's action on human rights and democracy. This year, the EU stood out for the constancy of its approach to human rights. The EU Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan 2021-2027 continued to provide steady guidance and orientation for all EU actors to deliver on human rights and

democracy in their external action. It is to this Plan that the High Representative's Annual Report on human rights and democracy in the world responds.

This report, rather than accounting exhaustively for each issue or intervention, shares stories and examples of the efforts and successes that the EU and EU Member States – in a Team Europe approach – have undertaken in 2025 to uphold human rights priorities across the planet. This year, too, the report reflects the steady convergence of internal EU policies with its external action, manifesting the universality of the values that the EU promotes at home and abroad. It illustrates that the EU's global leadership on human rights and democracy is rooted in the commitment of its institutions and Member States. Our partners expect this from us. Standing firm on human rights is integral to the EU's economic and geopolitical positioning.

The report is structured according to the Action Plan, beginning with the essential need to persist in **protecting and empowering individuals**, such as protecting civic space, human rights defenders, persons who are marginalised, those who face threats to their lives, dignity, fundamental freedoms or economic, social and cultural rights, and those who seek justice. It is here that we report on progress in death penalty abolition, the effectiveness of the ProtectDefenders.eu mechanism, raising the visibility of economic, social and cultural rights, and notable achievements in areas such as fighting racism, advancing women, peace and security (WPS) or child protection.

The second broad priority area focuses on **building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies** around the world, by supporting local and national institutions, improving and opening up decision-making, promoting pluralism, including in the media, and assisting countries to prevent conflicts and resolve crises. The report features

EU election observation missions, successes from the WYDE (Women and Youth Democratic Engagement) and TED (Team Europe Democracy) programmes, and key civilian missions in conflict zones.

Thirdly, **promoting a global system for human rights and democracy** highlights the EU's involvement in multilateral and regional cooperation as well as its tools for strengthening bilateral relations with third countries around human rights, and partnerships with important stakeholders from civil society to the private sector. Here we report on EU action on UN reform, efforts to promote international humanitarian law in some of the world's most challenging crisis situations, steps taken to protect civic space in countries around the world as well as in the EU, and landmark legislation on business and human rights.

No plan for human rights and democracy could persist through 2025 without attempting to **harness the opportunities and address the challenges of new technologies**, the fourth priority area. The report mentions varied activities focused on artificial intelligence, information integrity, internet shutdowns, and broader regulatory frameworks to reinforce human rights due diligence.

A final key priority looks at how the EU **delivers by working together**, with different kinds of partners and sectors, including through public diplomacy and communication. These include some uplifting and innovative moves to work with youth and the creative industries, as well as efforts to counter foreign information manipulation and interference worldwide and within the EU.

2025 brought innumerable small victories for human rights and democracy, from the many moves away from the death penalty, to the new generation rising to the challenge of public participation, online and in the streets, in GenZ movements across the globe. These show that **democracy, human rights and justice remain an**

aspiration and a source of hope. Several elections in 2025 resulted in peaceful transfers of power, demonstrating the resilience of democratic institutions.

The EU and its partners had to navigate significant change in the global cooperation landscape during 2025, not least the United States cutting much of its funding and political support for human rights and democracy around the world, including development assistance underpinning economic and social rights, and withdrawing from a number of UN entities. In the face of steeply mounting needs, in 2025 **the EU remained reliable and proactive** in its commitment to justice and accountability, universal human rights, and multilateral cooperation closely bound to the rules-based international order. We hope that these stories of the EU's continued efforts to respect, protect and fulfil human rights and promote and safeguard democratic principles can serve as inspiration for our partners around the world.

EU SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

In 2025, the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights continued to play a central role in advancing human rights and democracy in EU external action, promoting compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) and supporting international criminal justice. Acting under the authority of the High Representative, the EUSR contributed to strengthening the coherence, visibility and effectiveness of the EU's global human rights engagement, while supporting the implementation of the EU action plan on human rights and democracy.

The year marked a transition between mandate holders, from EUSR Olof Skoog to EUSR Kajsa Ollongren who assumed the mandate in June 2025, with both working to keep human rights at the centre of EU foreign and security policy against a challenging global backdrop.

During the first months of the year, EUSR Skoog visited South Asia and Central America. In **Pakistan**, he raised key human rights issues with authorities, including protection of religious minorities, the death penalty and civic space, linking these issues to Pakistan's

*Kajsa Ollongren, EU
Special Representative
(EUSR) for Human Rights.*



international commitments and the GSP+ framework, and also met with civil society and human rights defenders. In Guatemala, he focused on democratic governance, rule of law, protection of human rights defenders and corporate accountability during a period of political transition.

Since assuming the mandate in June 2025, EUSR Ollongren focused on accountability for violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, especially in the context of Russia's continued war of aggression against Ukraine. In September 2025, she travelled to Ukraine, meeting with Ukrainian authorities, civil society organisations and international partners to reinforce accountability for core international crimes and support for the domestic human rights reform agenda linked to Ukraine's EU candidate status. The EUSR assumed the role of EU Principal in the EU-US-UK Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group for **Ukraine**, contributing to international coordination and practical support for Ukraine's justice and accountability processes.



EUSR Ollongren at the Wall of Remembrance of the Fallen for Ukraine near Mykhailivska Square in Kyiv.

The EUSR also maintained engagement with **Russian** civil society actors in exile and continued to support international efforts to address violations committed by **Belarusian** authorities, including by maintaining links with democratic forces and advocating for the release of political prisoners.

Accountability and transitional justice also featured prominently in EUSR engagement on Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Sudan, through dialogue with United Nations mechanisms, regional organisations and civil society actors.

As regards major global crises, the EUSR stayed actively involved in addressing the war in **Gaza** and its regional spillover, maintaining contacts with Israeli and Palestinian stakeholders, civil society organisations and international partners, advocating respect for international humanitarian law, protection of civilians and accountability for violations. The EUSR's input informed discussions on the EU-Israel Association Agreement, supported the EU's humanitarian diplomacy efforts in Israel and strengthened the case for the European Commission's September 2025 proposals on the way forward. In **Lebanon**, the EUSR also shed light on violations of IHL and discussed domestic human rights issues. She also actively engaged on the transition in Syria.

In the broader **Middle East** region, the EUSR co-chaired the official human rights dialogue with Saudi Arabia, building on a deepening partnership in a spirit of mutual respect, while addressing areas of concern. In Egypt, the EUSR discussed the country's own human rights commitments. Ahead of the EU-Lebanon Association Council, the EUSR engaged on the rule of law, justice and accountability.

On **Asia**, the EUSR worked in coordination with UN mechanisms including the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar and the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan. In October, EUSR Ollongren co-chaired the sixth ASEAN-EU Human Rights Dialogue in Malaysia, engaging with regional stakeholders on access to justice, environmental rights, digital rights and responsible business conduct. The EUSR also addressed electoral processes in Bangladesh and discrimination against religious minorities in Pakistan.

In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, the EUSR engaged with various partners, including Kenya, and countries undergoing political transition, such as Ethiopia, while closely monitoring regional crises in Sudan, the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region. The EUSR co-chaired the 20th EU-AU Human Rights Dialogue, which reaffirmed shared commitments to human dignity, democracy and international law.

Across the **Americas**, the protection of human rights defenders featured prominently in the EUSR's engagements, including in the context of EU human rights dialogues with Brazil, Colombia and Mexico. During her visit to Mexico, EUSR Ollongren addressed enforced disappearances and the identification of missing persons, protection of environmental and Indigenous human rights defenders, and broader rule of law challenges. The EUSR exchanged with the United States, raising issues related to international criminal justice, support to multilateralism, freedom of religion or belief, and the sustainability of humanitarian and development aid globally.

In 2025, the EUSR intensified engagement to defend **effective multilateralism and reinforce partnerships with international organisations**, with human rights at the core of a strong United Nations system. She fostered close cooperation with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), including on crisis situations, and discussed with UN actors the importance of an adequately funded human rights pillar in the UN reforms. EUSR Ollongren played a visible role in defending the independence and integrity of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and worked closely with the Court, EU Member States, international partners and civil society to maintain unified support for international criminal justice.

The EUSR met with **civil society and human rights defenders** throughout 2025, whether in Brussels, during country missions or in multilateral forums. She raised individual cases of human rights defenders at risk, including journalists and those imprisoned, and prioritised meeting with victims' groups, giving specific attention to women human rights defenders and women's rights organisations, who are often targeted by gender-specific threats and hate speech. The EUSR nurtured connections with UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), international NGOs, and national human rights institutions to strengthen cooperation on the protection of civilians and promote compliance with international humanitarian law.

Through targeted public diplomacy, outreach and international engagement, the EUSR strengthened the visibility of EU human rights action. In coordination with EU institutions, Member States and delegations, the EUSR ensured consistent **human rights messaging** on key EU thematic priorities and reinforced the EU's commitment to human rights and IHL across regions.

01. PROTECTING AND EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS

Human rights lie at the heart of the EU's policies and actions, both within its borders and globally. They are universal, indivisible, and fundamental to human dignity in all circumstances. The Treaty on European Union stipulates that its action on the international scene must advance democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law in the wider world (Art 21 TEU). Within the EU, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, embedded in the Treaties, also guides EU policy development and provides coherence between internal and external human rights policies. In an evolving geopolitical environment, the EU remains a steadfast advocate for human rights across the world. Despite significant progress, challenges persist, including democratic backsliding and resistance to the universality and indivisibility of human rights and gender equality.

The EU's mission to defend and promote human rights is centred on the individuals who hold these rights. To uphold human rights and to eliminate inequalities and discrimination, the EU works to protect and empower individuals around the world, as discussed in the following chapters.

1.1 Protecting people and empowering individuals

THE DEATH PENALTY

Capital punishment is incompatible with the right to life and with human dignity. The EU is a leading political actor and the world's largest donor in the fight against the death penalty. The EU strongly

and unequivocally opposes the death penalty in all cases and in all circumstances. It neither deters violent crime nor contributes to the safety of our societies.

In 2025, **a majority of countries around the world continued to move away from the death penalty**. In February, the Parliament of Kenya set up a task force to review national legislation on capital punishment. In May, Grenada announced its intention to abolish the death penalty and to initiate a national consultation to gather public feedback, while Vietnam abolished the death penalty for eight crimes in June. In November, the government of Lebanon adopted a draft law for the abolition of the death penalty. In Indonesia, the entry into force of a new Penal Code in 2026 will allow death sentences to be commuted after 10 years of imprisonment. In Malaysia, where the mandatory death penalty was abolished two years ago, the number of people on death row was reduced by 90% through an extensive resentencing process and new sentencing discretion for the judiciary.

The number of **countries that carry out executions remained at an all-time low**, for the second year in a row, further isolating those that continue to make use of capital punishment. However, the total number of executions rose significantly worldwide, with a substantial increase in executions in Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia and the numbers also rising in Egypt, Singapore, Yemen and the United States. In China, it was estimated that the number of executions remained in the thousands, although the figures remain a state secret.

Civil society remains at the forefront of the global fight against the death penalty. The EU continued to strengthen partnerships with the aim of achieving global abolition in law and in practice. The cooperation between the EU and the **Global Consortium for Death Penalty Abolition** remained a key priority. The EU also supported the meeting of the 5th Regional Congress on the Death Penalty in East Asia in Tokyo in November 2025.



The 'Human Rights Day 2025 Art Exhibition: Voice for Rights', held from 8 to 12 December 2025 at the Jim Thompson Art Center in Bangkok, Thailand, showcased works by contemporary Thai artists alongside award-winning student artworks from an art competition that the EU Delegation had organised in October to mark the World Day against the Death Penalty.

© EU Delegation to Thailand

International law strictly limits the use of the death penalty. The EU continued to urge states that retain the death penalty to uphold international minimum standards and fully respect due process, abolishing mandatory death sentences and imposing the death penalty only for the most serious crimes, finding alternative sentences for drug-related offences, espionage, economic crimes, blasphemy and apostasy, consensual same-sex relations, adultery, and crimes committed by minors. The EU also urged states that still retain the death penalty to promote an open and democratic debate towards its full abolition, calling for improved transparency and access to accurate information on death penalty procedure, policy and practice. **Political and human rights dialogues** were among the most important instruments for the EU to raise concerns with countries that still carry out the death penalty in 2025.

The EU marked the World Day against the Death Penalty (10 October) through a **joint statement by the EU High Representative Kaja Kallas and Secretary-General of the Council of Europe Alain Beret**¹, calling on the few remaining States that still carry out death sentences to introduce a legal moratorium as a first step towards full abolition. EU delegations around the world marked the day with events, discussion seminars and art competitions, while EUSR Ollongren made a video statement underlining the global trend moving away from executions, despite an alarming increase in a small number of countries.



'The Merciful Redeemer of the Lotus Sins', first prize in the 'Voice for Rights' competition, reflects the idea that individuals who commit crimes should be given chance to live and repent. At the same time, it acknowledges the enduring harm experienced by victims.

Throughout 2025, the EUSR for Human Rights maintained focus on the global abolition of the death penalty, raising the EU's principled opposition in political dialogue with retentionist states and advocating for immediate safeguards like fair trial guarantees and clemency procedures as well as for moratoria and reductions in

¹ <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-and-world-day-against-death-penalty-joint-statement-high-representative-european-union-and-en>.

the scope of capital offences, as steps towards full abolition. EUSR Ollongren used **public diplomacy to keep international attention on abolition** at a time of renewed setbacks. She engaged directly with key civil society partners, including the Global Consortium for Death Penalty Abolition, to strengthen coordinated EU support for abolition efforts worldwide.

In 2025, the EU participated actively in discussions on capital punishment in **multilateral forums** such as the UN, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe (CoE). A top priority, the EU-supported October Human Rights Council resolution on the death penalty urged states to comply with international obligations, abolish mandatory death sentences, and restrict capital punishment to the most serious crimes involving intentional killings.



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'Ray of Hope', awarded second prize in the 'Voice for Rights' competition, expresses that justice should be grounded in fairness and equality, while questioning whether the death penalty constitutes true justice or merely a continuation of violence.

TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

Under international law, the ban on torture is absolute. It applies in war, in times of emergencies and even to states that have not signed the Convention against Torture, which celebrated its 40 years in 2025. Continued work towards the full eradication of torture is an EU priority.

While torture has long been associated with places of arrest and detention, in recent years attention has moved to police violence, including ill-treatment and torture, in the context of peaceful protests. On the **International Day in support of Victims of Torture** (26 June), High Representative Kallas issued a statement calling for accountability for all acts of excessive use of force, torture and other ill-treatment in contexts of citizens peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

Police brutality undermines democracy, erodes trust in institutions and the rule of law and fuels cycles of violence and unrest by reinforcing discrimination and exclusion. Trends towards heavier arms and technologically advanced law enforcement equipment also raise risks of abuse against protesters. The **EU Anti-Torture Regulation**, the world's first legally binding instrument regulating trade in torture-related goods, was amended in July 2025 to respond to the increase in torture and other ill-treatment in extra-custodial settings in many parts of the world. Nine new categories of goods have been added to the list of prohibited goods, and six have been added to the list of regulated goods. The latter now includes kinetic impact projectiles (KIPs, or 'rubber bullets'), whose reported misuse in protests in various countries caused serious injury and even death. In 2025, the Commission's second report reviewing the EU Anti-Torture Regulation confirmed that its implementation over the last five years was crucial in EU human rights-based trade controls.

The EU continued to champion the **Global Alliance on Torture-Free Trade** together with Argentina and Mongolia, as an important space to exchange information on best practices to end the trade in goods used for torture and capital punishment globally. Monaco and Andorra agreed to join the Alliance in 2025 (formalised in June 2026), bringing the number of members to 65.

The **adoption of the triennial resolution on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment** at the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly was a milestone, including a new element related to conflict-related sexual violence. The UNGA resolution calls on states to ensure that effective legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures are taken to prevent and respond to such acts.

In 2025, the EU continued to partner with civil society, including with the **United Against Torture Consortium (UATC)**, to ensure that torture and other ill-treatment, wherever it takes place, is documented, investigated, prosecuted and punished. Priority actions include enhancing torture prevention, and the redress and rehabilitation of survivors in over 100 countries across the world. Since its inception in 2023, UATC has supported 215 grassroots organisations and 12 341 victims of human rights violations and accompanied 7 443 persons with legal aid. UATC members convened the Global Week Against Torture between 23-26 June 2025 to mark the 40th anniversary of the UN Convention against Torture, advancing shared expertise, global solidarity and collective action and launching the Global Torture Index to annually assess the risk of torture and other ill treatment worldwide.

Continuing ratification of the **Convention against Torture and its Optional Protocol (OPCAT)** remained a priority for the EU. The EU welcomed the ratifications of the Optional Protocol by **Colombia** and **Bangladesh** and supported these changes through human rights dialogues, trial observations, prison visits, emergency grants for

at-risk human rights defenders and support to police reform. The absolute prohibition of torture continued as an anchor of the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences, which enhances access to the EU market, conditioned on upholding certain human and labour rights obligations.

The EUSR for Human Rights kept the absolute prohibition of torture high on the EU's agenda in bilateral engagement and through cooperation with specialised civil society actors working on documentation, prevention, accountability and rehabilitation. Urging cooperation with the UN system to support reforms in the criminal justice sector, the EUSR reinforced partnerships with key anti-torture actors and leading organisations in the global anti-torture movement, including the UATC, focusing on contexts where civic space is under pressure and where repression of dissent increases the risk of ill-treatment.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



María Irene Silva, a young Colombian human rights defender and leader of her community.

Throughout 2025, the protection of human rights defenders (HRDs) remained a top priority for the European Union. Guided by the EU guidelines on human rights defenders and the EU action plan on human rights and democracy, the EU continued to mobilise its wide range of tools including démarches, public diplomacy, communication campaigns and emergency funding to support those fighting for human rights, introducing further policy in November 2025 through the new EU strategy for civil society. The EU discussed HRD protection and raised individual cases of HRDs in **human rights dialogues, subcommittee meetings and multilateral forums**. EEAS headquarters and delegations regularly used public diplomacy to support HRDs and/or to draw attention to individual cases, as in China², or to shrinking space for civil society, for instance in Georgia³. Global support for HRDs was voiced by High Representative Kaja Kallas at the EU-NGO Human Rights Forum in December 2025⁴, as well as by the EEAS Secretary-General on World NGO Day⁵ in February 2025.

The EU continued to **engage frequently with HRDs** across the world. EU delegations and Member States' embassies met with human rights defenders, monitored trials when allowed, and visited human rights defenders in detention. Meetings between EU diplomats and human rights defenders have become an established practice in many countries. Some delegations maintained or introduced prizes for human rights defenders (e.g. Brazil⁶, Honduras⁷, Uganda⁸,

2 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/eu-statement-hrc60-item-4-general-debate-human-rights-situations-require-council%E2%80%99s-attention_en?s=62.

3 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_25_945.

4 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/opening-remarks-high-representativevice-president-kaja-kallas-26th-eu-ngo-human-rights-forum_en.

5 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/world-ngo-day-statement-eeas-secretary-general-bel%C3%A9n-mart%C3%ADnez-carbonell_en.

6 <https://x.com/UEnoBrasil/status/1920795894288425347>.

7 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/honduras/la-uni%C3%B3n-europea-espa%C3%B1a-alemania-y-francia-otorgan-el-premio-europa-de-derechos-humanos-en-honduras-0_es.

8 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/uganda/eu-human-rights-defenders-award-2025-%E2%80%93-three-shortlisted-nominees-announced_en.

Gulf Cooperation Council region⁹ and, for the first time, Sudan¹⁰) or organised campaigns with EU Member States to give them visibility, often in collaboration with the United Nations locally. EU delegations carried out other public actions with human rights defenders (e.g. supporting the launch of a network of women human rights defenders¹¹ in Indonesia).



Every year, the European Parliament awards the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. At a ceremony in Strasbourg on 16 December, President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola (centre) awarded the 2025 prize in absentia to two imprisoned journalists: Mzia Amaglobeli (Georgia) and Andrzej Poczobut (Belarus). They were recognised for their courageous fight for democracy, freedom of expression, and standing up against authoritarianism in their respective countries.

⁹ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/united-arab-emirates/chailot-prize-2025_en.

¹⁰ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/sudan/european-union-sudan-human-rights-prize-2025_en.

¹¹ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/indonesia/launch-women-human-rights-defenders-network-indonesia_en.

The EU continued its **engagement with lawyers and legal professionals** worldwide, who play a vital role in defending fundamental rights and upholding the rule of law, often in challenging environments. The EU supported their work through monitoring, advocacy and sustained engagement with civil society.

The EU intensified its efforts to counter the alarming, escalating global threat of **transnational repression** targeting human rights defenders. Through its network of EU delegations, the EU raised individual cases and consistently pressed for full respect of the international law principle of *non-refoulement*. It urged states to refrain from misusing INTERPOL Red Notices and from weaponising the denial of consular services as a form of coercion. The EU publicly denounced instances of transnational repression in its 2025 Council Conclusions on EU priorities in UN human rights fora¹² and in its Item 4 statement at the 60th session of the Human Rights Council¹³. Following the European Parliament resolution on transnational repression¹⁴ of human rights defenders on 13 November, on 4 and 5 December the EEAS co-organised a policy dialogue and a joint expert workshop on transnational repression with the UN OHCHR, the human rights subcommittee of the European Parliament (DROI) and civil society organisations active in this area. The EU further elevated this issue in exchanges with likeminded partners and within the G7 Rapid Reaction Mechanism, underscoring its growing concern about this widespread practice, including by joining G7 statements on transnational repression.

To follow up the European Commission's adoption of the revised EU Visa Code Handbook in 2024, which expands guidance on the facilitations that Member States may apply when issuing visas to human rights defenders, on 1 October a multi-stakeholder event on

12 <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5638-2025-INIT/en/pdf>.

13 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/eu-statement-hrc60-item-4-general-debate-human-rights-situations-require-council%E2%80%99s-attention_en.

14 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/joining-forces-tackle-transnational-repression-mapping-trends-and-improving-responses_en.

Protection and Mobility of Human Rights Defenders was organised in collaboration with the OHCHR, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency and civil society, with valuable input from the EU flagship programme ProtectDefenders.eu.

Supporting and protecting human rights defenders, as well as political prisoners, is one of the priorities of the EUSR for Human Rights, who engaged with independent civil society and human rights defenders from around the world, including during country visits. During her mission to Mexico in December, she met human rights defenders and victims' collectives working on enforced disappearances, including during a field visit to Zacatecas, and raised an individual case of concern. She inaugurated '*Protejamos sus voces*', a joint EU delegation-Member State initiative supporting human rights defenders and journalists. In Southeast Asia in October, the EUSR engaged with a wide range of civil society organisations and opened the ASEAN-EU Civil Society Forum in Malaysia, ensuring that defenders' perspectives fed into the broader ASEAN-EU human rights discussion.

The EUSR continued to raise emblematic individual cases and to speak out on situations where civil society is directly targeted. The EUSR also confronted the issue of **protection of civic space for partners working on accountability and documentation**, including by maintaining contact with civil society organisations affected by external sanctions measures and by channelling civil society findings into EU engagement where access and information are constrained.

To improve knowledge of HRD protection amongst EU diplomats, in cooperation with Commission services, the EEAS organised **training sessions** on HRD trial observation, on visa facilitation for human rights defenders, and on transnational repression against human

rights defenders, jointly with experts from civil society and the OHCHR.



As part of a project supported by the EU to protect HRDs in Venezuela, Fundación Rehabilitarte delivers dedicated support sessions for rights defenders in Zulia state. Activities focus on stress management, burnout prevention and self-care, and create a safe space for reflection, resilience and mutual support for those who defend fundamental rights.

Multilateral forums

The EU remained active on human rights defenders protection discussions at the UN and collaborated actively with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, including exchanging information on individual cases, particularly prior to the EU's bilateral human rights dialogues. At the UN HRC, the EU highlighted the critical role that HRDs play in the protection and promotion of human rights and spoke out in their defence, not least during the interactive dialogue on HRDs at HRC58¹⁵. The EU and its Member States supported the Norway-led resolution on 'Human rights defenders and new and emerging technologies: protecting human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, in the digital age'¹⁶, adopted by consensus at HRC58. Overall, the EU

¹⁵ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/eu-statement-hrc58-interactive-dialogue-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-defenders_en.

¹⁶ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/RES/58/23>.

continued to give a voice to HRDs by organising public side events and regular briefings for EU Member States on relevant topics, in the context of the HRC or the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

At the UN in New York, the EU continued to strongly advocate for support and protection of human rights defenders in relevant meetings, events and negotiations on resolutions in the General Assembly, particularly its Third Committee, and ECOSOC. The EU continued to actively follow the work of the ECOSOC NGO Committee. Although there are currently no EU Member States on the Committee, the EU engaged with likeminded members on efforts to reform its working methods to prevent or counter undue deferral or denial of accreditation for human rights NGOs. The EU continues to monitor any form of **reprisals against human rights defenders** who cooperate, seek to cooperate or have cooperated with the UN system.

Programming – financial support

In 2025, through the NDICI-Global Europe thematic programme on human rights and democracy, **the EU continued to lead worldwide on supporting and protecting HRDs financially**. The programme funds the EU's human rights defenders mechanism, ProtectDefenders.eu, with an overall envelope of EUR 45 million for the period 2021-2027. In the context of a dramatic increase in requests for protection in 2025, these funds contributed to supporting HRDs' efforts to promote human rights.

Since 2015, ProtectDefenders.eu **assisted approximately 95 000 at-risk HRDs and their families**. Of these, 29% were in Latin America and the Caribbean, 24% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 18% in Middle East and North Africa (MENA), 17% in Asia-Pacific, and 11% in Europe and Central Asia. The protection mechanism responds to the **multifaceted needs identified by HRDs**, such as direct support, temporary relocation programmes, training, capacity building, or advocacy at global, regional and local levels.

In 2025 alone, **ProtectDefenders.eu supported on average 849 HRDs each month, or 10 184 in total for the year across more than 90 countries.** Overall, 80% of support was directed to defenders in high-risk and repressive contexts. 90% of supported HRDs reported improvements in security, capacity, or continuity of work.

About half of the human rights defenders supported by the ProtectDefenders.eu programme are women or gender-diverse persons. **Women human rights defenders (WHRD)** often face dual threats: both those common to HRDs in general and gender-specific threats and discrimination, including sexualised violence, harassment and smear campaigns. As the number of women HRDs in need of protection continues to grow, ProtectDefenders' gender strategy ensures that its support is tailored, flexible and fit for purpose.

In December, ProtectDefenders.eu released a new financial analysis on official development assistance (ODA) funding for HRDs, highlighting major structural trends that have surfaced during the current funding crisis, impacting the whole human rights ecosystem. The research was part of ProtectDefenders.eu's ongoing work to strengthen the evidence base on public funding trends affecting HRDs.

In 2025, the **EU Emergency Fund for Human Rights Defenders at Risk**, directly managed by the EU since 2010, supported **85 individual HRDs** and organisations, together with 19 family members. This direct financial support reinforces the EU's political action to protect HRDs, implementing the EU guidelines on human rights defenders through rapid, flexible small grants covering costs related to temporary relocation, subsistence, medical and legal support, security measures (including digital security to an increasing degree), equipment and training.

Under the Global Europe thematic programme on human rights and democracy, in 2025, the EU launched **eight new projects at country level** whose main objective was support to HRDs, including in Côte d'Ivoire, Kyrgyzstan, the Philippines and Venezuela. This number is only a fraction of many more projects covering thematic areas like support for independent media, freedom of association and assembly or promoting the full enjoyment of human rights by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons, where the protection of HRDs is a key component.

In addition, the Global Europe CSO (civil society organisations) thematic programme provides for a civil society-led project in 80+ countries that got into its stride in 2025: the EU System for the Enabling Environment (EU SEE), focused on **fostering civic space and supporting civil society sector resilience**, complements existing programmes and tools. This year EU SEE issued 98 reports, including 62 baseline reports analysing the enabling environment for civil society. A network of CSO monitors issued 462 timely alerts across 63 countries. The project also responded with targeted interventions in 26 countries, contributing to a broader EU effort to protect civic space including human rights defenders.

TACKLING MULTIPLE AND INTERSECTING FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

Equality and non-discrimination are core values guiding the EU's policies both within and beyond its borders. In 2025, the EU continued to apply its human rights guidelines on non-discrimination in its external action, focusing particularly on addressing intersecting forms of discrimination, calling for a holistic approach to this issue.

Anchored in recently adopted EU legislation¹⁷, it is part and parcel of the Union of Equality and the various strategies adopted under its remit.

While the EU unequivocally prohibits discrimination based on sex, age, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability and sexual orientation, in 2025, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)¹⁸ revealed alarming levels of discrimination within European societies. The new EU anti-racism strategy (2026-2030) calls for more rigorous enforcement of the existing legal framework and for the adoption and effective implementation of Member States' national action plans against racism. The role of the European Commission's Anti-Racism Coordinator remains essential in these efforts, alongside the participation of civil society. The strategy calls for strengthening international partnerships with multilateral organisations and partner countries to advance shared anti-discrimination objectives globally.

The EU and its Member States remain committed to combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance globally. In 2025, the EU consistently highlighted the importance of this policy in its high-level bilateral human rights dialogues with non-EU countries and regional institutions like the African Union, where agendas included the universal ratification and full implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

During country visits, the EUSR for Human Rights promoted multilateral action against discrimination and supported EU efforts to integrate equality and non-discrimination into political dialogues and public diplomacy. Speaking at the EU-NGO Human Rights Forum dedicated to 'Partnering for Equality and Non-discrimination', EUSR

17 See Directive (EU) 2023/970 (Pay Transparency Directive), (EU) 2024/1385 (Violence against Women Directive) and Directives (EU) 2024/1499 & 2024/1500 (Standards for Equality Bodies).

18 https://fra.europa.eu/en/products/search?sort_by=published_at.

Ollongren highlighted current trends in discrimination, stressing that intersecting forms of discrimination can reinforce each other and multiply harm for victims¹⁹. She supported follow-up cooperation on equality issues with partner countries, for instance hosting an exchange in Brussels with Brazil's National Secretary for LGBTQIA+ Rights following the EU-Brazil Human Rights Dialogue.

In March 2025, High Representative Kallas issued a declaration on behalf of the EU in observance of the **International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and calling for renewed action to ensure that the Convention is fully and effectively upheld worldwide²⁰. In October, the EU's multilateral engagement contributed to the historical consensus adoption of the landmark Resolution 'From rhetoric to reality: a global call for concrete action against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related "intolerance"'²¹ at the 60th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

As part of the EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life (2021-2030)²², the EU is committed to playing a leading role in the global fight against antisemitism, addressing all its forms and manifestations, in line with the IHRA definition of **antisemitism**²³, including through the EU's external action. In January 2025, the European Commission marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day by illuminating its headquarters building with #WeRemember and organising a Holocaust Remembrance Conference in Brussels. In April it held the 2nd Civil Society Forum

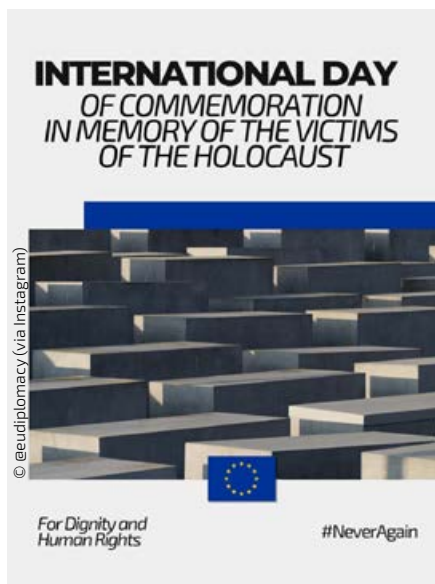
19 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-ngo-human-rights-forum-brussels-9th-december-2025-opening-remarks-global-trends-and-emerging_en.

20 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/03/20/international-day-for-the-elimination-of-racial-discrimination-statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union/>.

21 <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4090586?v=pdf>.

22 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52021DC0615>.

23 <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism>.



on combating antisemitism, gathering 250 representatives of civil society organisations. As part of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU, in June it held the 7th working group meeting on the implementation of the EU Strategy in Gdansk. In November, the EC Coordinator on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life co-chaired the biannual meeting of the Special Envoys and Coordinators Combating Antisemitism in Washington, D.C.

In March 2025, the second coordination meeting on **anti-Muslim hatred** brought senior officials responsible for fighting anti-Muslim hatred in Europe and North America together in Brussels, chaired by the European Commission's Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred, jointly with the Council of Europe. The meeting concluded that a non-binding working definition of anti-Muslim hatred could help make the efforts on combating anti-Muslim hatred more coherent and effective.

At the UN, the EU co-sponsored resolutions promoting **global anti-discrimination standards** and participated in relevant Human Rights Council sessions, presenting updates on EU policies and outcomes of EU-funded initiatives that combat hate crimes, particularly in digital spaces. Together with the Human Rights and Democracy Network of CSOs (HRDN), the EU organised focused online training sessions on anti-discrimination for EU delegation staff, following an intersectional and geographic approach to the fight against all forms of discrimination.

Of pivotal importance for stability and conflict prevention, the **rights of persons belonging to minority groups** remain a priority in the EU enlargement region and are addressed by specific provisions under the EU association agreements and in the context of EU accession negotiations. The EU, alongside key partners such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE, supports the gradual harmonisation of legislation with the EU *acquis* and European standards in this area.

For the Western Balkans and Türkiye, the EU continued the third phase of the Roma integration programme in partnership with the Council of Europe. Running until early 2026, this programme, with EU support amounting to EUR 2.7 million, contributes to the **socio-economic inclusion of the Roma population** in the Western Balkans and Türkiye. It supports national alignment with the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation, including through national Roma strategies, and the implementation of regional commitments.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

Freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) remained high on the EU's international human rights agenda, in line with the EU guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief²⁴. As the High Representative stressed in her statement on behalf of the EU on the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief (21 August)²⁵, the EU 'firmly upholds **the right of all individuals to enjoy freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief**'. The EU also called on the international community to 'promote a culture of religious tolerance, respect for diversity and mutual understanding, and foster interfaith and intercultural dialogue as essential tools for peaceful coexistence'.

24 <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/137585.pdf>.

25 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/08/21/international-day-commemorating-the-victims-of-acts-of-violence-based-on-religion-or-belief-statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union/>.

Once again, the EU promoted resolutions on FoRB at the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly, delivered statements and participated actively in FoRB-related events and interactive sessions. The EU continued to support the mandate of the **UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief**, co-organising an event on 'Freedom of religion or belief and the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment: Toward a holistic approach' in the margins of HRC58.

The EU upheld this right in multilateral forums and in bilateral relations, including in human rights dialogues with countries such as India²⁶, Ukraine²⁷, China²⁸ and Vietnam²⁹. The EU engaged on FoRB with the OIC during the seventh Senior Officials' Meeting that took place in Jeddah in January 2025.

FoRB was an important part of EUSR Skoog's mission to Pakistan in January 2025, where he raised concerns related to blasphemy laws, forced marriage and conversion, and the protection of religious minorities with government officials and others. Besides

*EUSR Skoog
with the Chief
Minister of Punjab,
Maryam Nawaz
Sharif, in Lahore,
Pakistan.*



© EU Delegation to Pakistan

- 26 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/india/11th-india-%E2%80%93-eu-human-rights-dialogue_en.
- 27 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ukraine-10th-human-rights-dialogue-takes-place-kyiv_en.
- 28 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/china-40th-human-rights-dialogue-european-union-takes-place-brussels_en.
- 29 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/viet-nam-annual-eu-viet-nam-human-rights-dialogue-takes-place-hanoi_en.

addressing worrying reports of persecution of Catholic clergy in Nicaragua and following up on the discrimination against persons belonging to religious minorities in Iran, EUSR engagement on FoRB also addressed religion-based intolerance and persecution through broader dialogue and public communication, for instance through the EU-Bahrain FoRB Conference.

The third **EU-Bahrain Freedom of Religion and Belief Conference**, entitled 'Freedom of Religion & Belief: The Practice of Promoting Coexistence', took place in Brussels on 28-29 October 2025, building on the previous editions in Manama in 2023 and 2022, with the active participation of EUSR for Human Rights Ollongren. Organised jointly by the EEAS and the European Commission in the framework of the EU-GCC Outreach Facility and the Bahrain-based King Hamad Global Centre for Coexistence and Tolerance, the conference underlined a shared commitment to advancing human rights, peaceful coexistence and global cooperation amidst a shifting geopolitical context. Participants from Europe, the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Gulf explored the role of government, civil society and faith actors in strengthening the freedom of religion and belief, including focus on strategies for fostering coexistence while countering discrimination and intolerance³⁰.

In 2025, the EU also supported FoRB through dedicated projects worth almost EUR 8 million, focused on raising awareness and increasing CSO advocacy capacities; creating multi-actor partnerships to develop new tools to address the root causes of discrimination based on religion; and improving the recognition and protection of FoRB among decision makers. A FoRB learning platform was created to provide a deeper understanding of global and regional FoRB

30 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/bahrain-third-eu-bahrain-freedom-religion-and-belief-conference-held-brussels_en.

issues, along with tools and best practices³¹, including two webinars to equip EU staff to implement the EU guidelines on FoRB in their working contexts.

GENDER EQUALITY

Atmosphere from International Women's Day 2025 in Podgorica, Montenegro.



In 2025, the EU scored 63.4 out of 100 points in the Gender Equality Index of the European Institute for Gender Equality³². This reflects more than 10 points of progress since 2010, but shows that full equality in the EU remains decades away. **While most people in the EU, both women and men, view gender equality as beneficial for individuals**, including for men, and for society as a whole, recent surveys revealed increased polarisation between young women and young men on the question of leadership.

In March 2025, the European Commission adopted the **Roadmap for Women's Rights** to guide policy makers and other stakeholders. The roadmap, endorsed by all Member States, other EU institutions and stakeholders in October, encompasses eight principles: freedom from gender-based violence, high health standards, equal pay, work-life balance, equal employment opportunities, quality and inclusive education, political participation, and institutional support

31 <https://www.forb-learning.org/eu/#digital-courses>.

32 <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2025>.

for women's rights. The new gender equality strategy 2026-2030 (adopted in March 2026) builds upon the roadmap, setting out initiatives for action at the EU level.

In 2025, in the area of research and innovation (R&I), the European Commission published the 'She Figures' report, marking the International Day of Women and Girls in Science. The findings showed the persistent underrepresentation of women in R&I, both within Europe and globally, underscoring the importance of efforts for **gender equality in science, technology and innovation (STI)**. The data supports monitoring progress towards SDG5, on gender equality and women's empowerment. The EU also contributed to the G20's 'STI for All: A Compendium of Good Practices in STI Policy 2025', promoting inclusive science and innovation policies and stronger support for women in STI careers.

Working towards gender equality worldwide

In 2025, the EU played a major role in promoting **gender equality worldwide through political dialogue, gender mainstreaming and targeted action**. Gender mainstreaming across all external policies and activities, including humanitarian aid operations, remained a key priority, in line with the commitments in the EU action plan for human rights and democracy and the EU gender action plan III 2021-2027 (GAP III). NDICI-Global Europe and GAP III stipulate that at least 85% of all EU external actions must contribute to gender equality³³. 2025 data show that the share of **actions with gender equality as a significant or principal policy objective** increased from 68% in 2020 to 82% in 2024. For NDICI-Global Europe, between 2021 and 2024, the share was 84%, very close to the target. Of those, 4% have gender equality

33 NDICI-Global Europe recital 44 and GAP III Communication. This means that actions must be informed by a gender analysis, contribute to gender equality as a substantial or principal objective and measure gender equality outcomes by means of specific indicators.

as their principal target, such as programmes on women's political participation, economic empowerment and the fight against gender-based violence.

In March 2025, the EU participated in the **69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)** at the UN Headquarters in New York, addressing all priority areas of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action during its 30th anniversary review. Despite global backsliding on progress towards gender equality, the active role of the EU delegation led by the Commissioner for Equality, Hadja Lahbib, working together with Member States and a likeminded coalition, helped secure the adoption of a political declaration showing the global commitment to continue the work on advancing gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. It reaffirmed the Beijing commitments, women's and girls' human rights and the need to step up efforts to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence.

Through the Instrument for Pre-accession III and the **EU4Gender Equality** project in the Western Balkans and Türkiye, the EU seeks to increase women's economic empowerment by strengthening their access to managerial and leadership roles, entrepreneurship and specialised employment opportunities in the digital labour market, green transition, and in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The project also aims to increase access to essential digital services for women and girls who are victims of online violence, while simultaneously advocating for legal and policy frameworks that address technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

In the Eastern Partnership countries, the EU supports gender equality through the **EU4Gender Equality regional programme**, focusing on fighting gender-discriminatory attitudes and practices in institutional and community spheres to prevent gender-based violence; and providing expertise on gender-related reforms to governments (except Belarus and Georgia) and to the EU delegations.

For the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region, cumulative data show that the target of 85% has been reached under the geographical budget envelopes. Among country-level actions that stand out, cases like Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Libya fully integrate gender considerations in all their actions. **Women's economic empowerment** is an EU priority in the MENA region, which has the lowest women labour force participation in the world (less than 20%) and the lowest women entrepreneurship rate (less than 5%). The EU supports women's economic rights and participation under its bilateral and regional cooperation, promoting women's entrepreneurship and innovation, including in the social economy and in rural areas, women's financial inclusion and a gender-responsive private sector development. The EU also integrates gender provisions in its most recent free trade agreements and the ratification of relevant core UN Conventions as a requirement for the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+).

The 'Women and Youth Democratic Engagement (WYDE)' flagship programme includes **direct financial support for women's rights and women-led organisations** dedicated to advancing women's political participation, with a specific focus on young women and fragile settings. In South Sudan, the EU strengthened democratic engagement and leadership of displaced and returnee women. In Syria, the programme supports women-led national NGOs, which work in conflict-affected communities promoting women and youth participation in building societal resilience. In 2025, these actions contributed to more women taking on leadership roles in local peace processes and civic initiatives in fragile and conflict-affected settings. In Afghanistan, the EU adopted the principled 'for women, by women' approach, putting women and girls at the centre of all interventions and ensuring they play a meaningful role in the design, delivery and receipt of assistance.

Countering gender-based violence

The EU has gone further in setting up new partnerships to eradicate gender-based violence, mainly through the second phase of the **Spotlight Initiative (Spotlight 2.0)**. New programmes have been launched in Ecuador, Uganda, Sierra Leone and Liberia. In 2025, the EU and UN signed the second phase of the Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme (SIARP 2.0), supporting the African Union (AU) Gender Policy within the AU Agenda 2063.

As co-leader of the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence, the European Commission has continued to implement the **ACT to End Violence Against Women** programme, in partnership with UN Women, as one of the few new global initiatives supporting women's rights organisations in the fight against gender-based violence. For example, in Colombia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dynamique des Femmes Juristes (DFJ) and GENFAMI are working to strengthen access to legal aid, psychosocial support and advocacy in areas affected by conflict. In West and Central Africa, feminist networks address violence against women and girls as part of humanitarian response. In 2025, ACT supported 20 global and regional normative and policy processes, ensuring that the priorities of women's rights organisations were reflected in key legal and policy outcomes. These include the adoption of the **African Union Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls**, signed by The Gambia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Djibouti, Angola and Liberia, as well as the ratification of ILO Convention No. 190 by Costa Rica.

In the framework of the EU enlargement policy, the EU continued to underscore the importance of candidate countries' and potential candidates' progressive alignment with the EU *acquis* and relevant international standards as concerns gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence, including the **EU Directive on combating violence against women** and Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

In highly fragile contexts, women and girls are **more exposed to distinct health risks and related rights violations, linked to maternal mortality, female genital mutilation and early pregnancies** leading to less educational access and poorer outcomes, and compounding their vulnerability³⁴. Women with disabilities face even higher risks from intersectional discrimination. In armed conflicts around the world, **sexual violence is increasingly used as a tactic of war, torture, terrorism and political repression**, with the highest number of cases recorded in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Somalia and South Sudan³⁵. The EU continued its support for survivor-centred services, accountability for conflict-related sexual violence and women's meaningful participation in peace and security processes, in line with the EU's women, peace and security (WPS) agenda, and in partnership with women's rights organisations at the frontline of conflict prevention, crisis management and resilience building.

LGBTI



Eswatini Pride Parade in Manzini in 2025, organised by the project Civil Society in Action and implemented by COSPE (Cooperation for the Development of Emerging Countries).

34 OECD (2025). States of Fragility. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/02/states-of-fragility-2025_c9080496/81982370-en.pdf.

35 UN SG Annual Report (2025) on Sexual Violence in Conflict: <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/digital-library/reports/sg-reports/>.

In 2025, **LGBTI** persons continued to face human rights violations and abuses worldwide, including multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, exclusion, marginalisation, violence, hate crimes and even murder. LGBTI persons were disproportionately targeted by violence, discrimination, harassment and stigmatisation, as well as by disinformation weaponising hate against them. Worrying developments include so-called anti-LGBTI propaganda laws and moves to criminalise consensual same-sex relations in some regions, within a broad climate of growing disregard for discrimination and equality issues.

The EU continued to honour its commitment to strongly oppose and combat all forms of discrimination, including on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, and **to stand up for the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by LGBTI persons and for LGBTI human rights defenders**, including in its Council Conclusions on EU priorities in UN human rights fora for 2025³⁶. The EU continued to raise the problem of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in its human rights dialogues with third countries and in relevant sub-committee meetings with candidate countries and potential candidates.

On 8 October 2025, the European Commission adopted its new **LGBTIQ+ equality strategy 2026-2030**³⁷, conducting extensive consultations including a call for evidence, an open public consultation and targeted consultations with LGBTIQ+ civil society organisations, Member State representatives, social partners and international organisations. Under its three pillars, the new strategy aims to protect LGBTIQ+ persons from violence, empower them to live freely and equally, and engage stakeholders at all levels, including through multilateral cooperation, diplomatic engagement, humanitarian aid and financial support. In view of the objective of gradual integration of candidate countries

36 <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5638-2025-INIT/en/pdf>.

37 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52025DC0725>.

and potential candidates, the strategy encourages them to promote equality and fundamental rights, and to follow the EU Member States' good practices in this area.

In May 2025, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) published a report entitled 'Being Intersex in the EU'³⁸.

At **multilateral level**, the EU continued to promote the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by all LGBTI persons. The EU supported the resolution on the extension of the mandate of the **Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (IE SOGI)** adopted during the 59th session of the Human Rights Council. At the HRC59 interactive dialogue with the IE SOGI, the EU decried the criminalisation of consensual same-sex relations as violating international human rights law and called for a worldwide end to, and prevention of, any form of violence against LGBTI persons³⁹. During the UN General Assembly Third Committee, the EU was part of a 58-country statement⁴⁰ on behalf of the UN LGBTI Core Group, calling on states 'to end all forms of discrimination and to align national legislation with international human rights standards, ensuring protection mechanisms for LGBTI persons at risk'. For the interactive dialogue with the IE SOGI, the UN LGBTI Core group called on all states to take appropriate measures to uphold the right to education for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity⁴¹. In October in Brussels, the EU welcomed the IE SOGI for an exchange of views with the Council Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM) and meetings with the EUSR for Human Rights and the EEAS Ambassador for Equality. The EEAS Task Force on Equality continued to support the mandate of the **EEAS Ambassador for Equality** who,

38 <https://fra.europa.eu/en/news/2025/rising-violence-and-harassment-against-intersex-people-eu>.

39 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/eu-statement-hrc59-interactive-dialogue-independent-expert-sogi_en.

40 <https://unlgbticoregroup.org/2025/11/06/third-committee-agenda-item-71-promotion-and-protection-of-human-rights-general-discussion-2/>.

41 <https://unlgbticoregroup.org/2025/11/06/third-committee-interactive-dialogue-with-the-independent-expert-on-protection-against-violence-and-discrimination-based-on-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-3-november/>.

in December, hosted a meeting with EU and third country special envoys and ambassadors, including ambassadors at large on human rights, on the rights of LGBTI persons, agreeing to continue to meet regularly.

Throughout 2025, the EEAS Task Force worked with LGBTI civil society organisations, including the intergovernmental Equal Rights Coalition, to remain informed of developments in third countries, notably concerning decriminalisation of consensual same-sex relations.

On 17 May, the High Representative, on behalf of the EU, **marked the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia (IDAHOT)** with a statement⁴² signalling that 'every person deserves to live free, equal, and with dignity. Human rights are for all of us – whoever we are, wherever we live, whomever we love'.



On IDAHOT, rainbow colours decorated the EEAS building in Brussels, Belgium.

EU delegations across the world observed IDAHOT, including by raising the Pride flag, participating in IDAHOT celebrations and events, publicising the statement of the High Representative, organising film

42 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/05/16/international-day-against-homophobia-biphobia-and-transphobia-statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union/> ; https://www.instagram.com/reel/DJyphDVMbhb?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link.

screenings, publishing opinion pieces and engaging with civil society organisations and human rights defenders. The EEAS also launched its annual communication campaign, this time focusing on LGBTI persons in creative industries. Delegations in Albania, Brazil, India, Kosovo^{*43}, Liechtenstein, Singapore, Spain and Switzerland facilitated testimonials marking the occasion and highlighting the voices of **LGBTI persons in creative industries** under the motto of 'creativity empowers us together'⁴⁴. The 2025 EU-NGO Human Rights Forum, focusing on equality and non-discrimination, included sessions on intersectionality and on the rights of LGBTI persons.

Since the launch of the EU human rights defenders mechanism (ProtectDefenders.eu) in 2015, at least 15 000 LGBTI rights defenders and 373 organisations have received direct support. **In 2025 alone, ProtectDefenders.eu supported at least 807 individual human rights defenders and 15 organisations working to advance the rights of LGBTI persons.** Furthermore, the EU supported projects worth almost EUR 15 million to protect and promote rights of LGBTI persons across the world.

The situation of LGBTI persons continues to be monitored under the EU's enlargement policy, including through a dedicated section in each of the country reports in the enlargement package. This supports candidate countries and potential candidates in effectively combating discrimination against LGBTI persons. Through the instrument for pre-accession's Civil Society Facility and Media Programme, EU delegations and offices in the Western Balkans supported LGBTI local shelters and civil society organisations advocating for the rights and safety of LGBTI persons. Support was also provided to LGBTI organisations in the Eastern Partnership countries through the EU4 Youth, the EU4 Gender Equality and the Partnership for Good Governance. **EU humanitarian assistance** further supported protection activities for LGBTI persons in vulnerable situations in many parts of the world.

43 *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

44 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/pride_en.

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Throughout 2025, the EU intensified its **advocacy for the rights of the child**, child participation, the protection of children from all forms of violence, exploitation and harm online and offline, while ensuring access to inclusive quality education and supportive environments, including in conflict areas. Central to this approach was the implementation of the 2021 EU strategy on the rights of the child, including the follow-up to the Commission Recommendation on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems (2024) against violence, the Better Internet for Kids initiative, and preparations for an EU action plan against cyberbullying, aimed at strengthening child protection in online environments. These efforts complement the Digital Services Act (DSA), which creates obligations for online platforms to mitigate systemic risks, including risks related to child sexual abuse online, alongside continued synergies between youth participation and child participation actions⁴⁵.

During 2025, a significant step towards **child-friendly justice** was taken with a revision of the Victims' Rights Directive that will help child victims benefit from better access to justice in EU countries. The revised Directive strengthens integrated support services for child victims, such as social, psychological and administrative assistance, the video recording of testimonies, and child-sensitive medical examinations.

The EU advanced its commitment to the **rights of the child in conflict-affected areas**, implementing the 2024 update of the EU guidelines on children and armed conflict (CAAC), which aim to prevent and protect children from the 'six grave violations' in situations of conflict: (i) killing and maiming; (ii) recruitment and use of children as soldiers or in other non-combat roles; (iii) abduction; (iv) rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence; (v) attacks on schools and hospitals; and (vi) the denial of humanitarian access.

⁴⁵ https://youth.europa.eu/sites/default/files/youth_strategy/library/Youth-Policy-Dialogues-General-Report--100-days.pdf.

The EU's actions in conflict areas in 2025 were also steered by the revised EU checklist for integrating child protection into common security and defence policy (CSDP) missions and operations. At the multilateral level, the EU continued to support the role of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for Children and Armed Conflict.

The situation of **children in humanitarian crises** was the focus of a high-level panel organised during the 2025 European Humanitarian Forum. The panel called for increased support to child-sensitive humanitarian assistance, especially in the context of funding cuts and pressures to re-prioritise, and for strengthening initiatives that enhance children's resilience and recovery, including through education. The EU continued to dedicate 10% of its initial humanitarian aid budget to education in emergencies, in line with longstanding policy commitments.



Young girls from the Indigenous communities of Bagobo Tagabawa, Obo Manobo, and Tinunanonin Mindanao in the Philippines brush up their leadership skills through the EU-funded project ENGAGE ('Empowering Girls as Agents of Change towards Gender Equality in Indigenous and Disadvantaged Communities in Cotabato Province'). Through the project, the girls learned what 'safe spaces' are for them and where to seek help in case of sexual and gender-based violence.

Special attention was given to **children in disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginalised circumstances**, including girls, children with disabilities, displaced children, Indigenous children, and those from ethnic or national minorities. In 2025 the EU and UNICEF organised a third consecutive year of joint dialogues in New York to spotlight the situation of children in underfunded crises and to call for urgent action, with sessions on the **Central African Republic, Myanmar, Haiti and Afghanistan**.

In 2025 the EU funded frontline partners in **Gaza** and the **West Bank** that provide education in emergencies (EUR 15 million), psychosocial support, health care and child protection services, while advocating for respect for international humanitarian law, including the protection of schools. In Gaza, EU funding enabled UNICEF to set up temporary learning spaces and enrol more than 100 000 children, even in the most difficult circumstances, and distribute warm clothing to approximately 150 000 displaced children living in tents or damaged buildings. The EU also financed mental health and psychosocial support programmes through UNICEF and UNRWA. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, EU assistance helped schools prepare safety and contingency plans to protect students from settler violence. The EU also supported UNICEF in improving monitoring and reporting on attacks against education, strengthening partners' ability to design safer and more resilient learning environments.

From survival to dignity: protecting children and young mothers on Cairo's streets

In 2025, the EU's support to Samusocial International Egypte (SSIEG), in partnership with Caritas and Nour El Hayat, helped hundreds of children and young mothers living in the streets in Cairo.

Through 260 nighttime outreach rounds, multidisciplinary teams provided medical care, psychosocial counselling, legal aid and referrals for 1 276 children and young people (397 boys and 879 girls and young women). The project created Egypt's first emergency shelter for women, including mothers with children, and for boys and girls. A Montessori-inspired day centre opened in April 2025 for children aged 3 to 7 living with their mothers in street situations. Psychological support, sports and arts activities for children living in shelters prepared them for social inclusion, while older children also benefited from economic reintegration activities. In partnership with Egypt's Ministry of Social Solidarity, the initiative is co-funded by the EU, Agence Française de Développement (AFD), the Sawiris Foundation and the Carrefour Foundation.

Project 'Let's Mobilise for the Prevention and Protection of Children'

The Bayti Association, co-financed by the EU, implemented the project 'Let's Mobilise for the Prevention and Protection of Children' (April 2023-October 2025), as part of national and international efforts to promote and defend children's rights, in line with internationally recognised standards and Morocco's commitments in this area. Implemented in Casablanca, Essaouira and the rural region of Kenitra (Bayti farm school), the project strengthened the national child protection system through a comprehensive, participatory and inclusive approach, linking prevention, protection, awareness-raising, education, support, skills development and advocacy. Street children, vulnerable children and victims of violence received particular attention.

As part of the EU accession process, in 2025 the EU prioritised the **integration of child protection systems and child-friendly justice reforms**, as well as accelerating the deinstitutionalisation of children deprived of parental care and/or those with disabilities progressing towards a gradual shift to community and family-based care.

The EU also upholds a strong policy framework for the protection of migrant children, including those displaced by conflict, such as **Ukrainian children unlawfully deported or forcibly transferred by Russia**. By April 2025, Ukrainian sources⁴⁶ estimated that around 1.6 million Ukrainian children were living in temporarily occupied territories⁴⁷ and at risk of forced russification, identity change and militarisation⁴⁸, as well as institutionalisation and forced adoption.



At the opening of the newly renovated sports facilities at the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education of the University of Sarajevo on Europe Day 2025, Luigi Soreca, EU Ambassador and EU Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, stands alongside 14-year-old para-swimmer Ismail Barlov, who represented Bosnia and Herzegovina at the 2024 Summer Paralympics, and Nihad Uk, Prime Minister of Sarajevo Canton.

⁴⁶ https://www.rada.gov.ua/en/news/News/top_news/261295.html?

⁴⁷ <https://zmina.info/en/news-en/1-6-million-children-may-remain-in-russian-occupation-almenda-human-rights-advocates/?>

⁴⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/06/20/education-under-occupation/forced-russification-school-system-occupied-ukrainian?>

The June 2025 report of the UNSR for Children and Armed Conflict⁴⁹ confirmed that the rise in grave violations against children in Ukraine was among the sharpest recorded worldwide. As of November 2025, Ukraine had registered almost 20 000 children unlawfully deported or forcibly transferred⁵⁰, though studies suggest up to 35 000 Ukrainian children may have been transferred to temporarily occupied territories or deported to Belarus and Russia⁵¹. At the end of 2025, fewer than 1 800 children had been returned or removed from situations of risk⁵².

The EU's response has been broad and multifaceted. EU sanctions have targeted 101 individuals and entities involved in the deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian minors, and 23 individuals and entities implicated in the indoctrination of children in the occupied territories. The EU became a full member of the **International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children** in September 2025, participates in the OSCE Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict in Ukraine, set up to coordinate diplomatic efforts, and supports the Bring Kids Back initiative led by the Office of the President of Ukraine. The EU participates in the Council of Europe Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU), a multilateral platform to exchange information and best practices on the protection of the rights of Ukrainian children within Council of Europe Member States, focusing on psychological support for deported or transferred children to facilitate their reintegration, child-friendly access to justice for victims, and access to education. In December 2025, the EU co-sponsored a resolution adopted at the UN General Assembly condemning the forcible transfer and deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia and Belarus, demanding their immediate, safe and unconditional return, and calling for strengthened international cooperation on their protection, rehabilitation and reintegration.

49 <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/247>.

50 <https://www.bringkidsback.org.ua/>.

51 <https://medicine.yale.edu/lab/khoshnood/give-now/>.

52 <https://www.bringkidsback.org.ua/>.

MIGRATION AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT

In 2025, the EU stood firm on its commitment to uphold international law and human rights in relation to refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and migrants regardless of status, in particular the fundamental right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement.

According to the latest global migrant estimates, **only 304 million people, or less than 4% of the 8.3 billion of the planet's population, are living in a country other than their country of birth.** Although the estimated number of international migrants has increased over the past 50 years, most migration globally is considered to happen regularly⁵³.

By the end of June 2025, 117.3 million people in the world – 1 in 70 – remained forcibly displaced owing to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order, a decrease of 5% compared to the end of 2024. Of these 117.3 million, by mid-2025, 67.8 million were internally displaced, 27.2 million were refugees under UNHCR's mandate, 3.3 million people were in a refugee-like situation, 6.1 million were other persons in need of international protection and 5.9 million were Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate⁵⁴.

UNHCR highlights that 69% of all **refugees and other people in need of international protection live in countries neighbouring their countries of origin**⁵⁵, with low and middle-income countries hosting the majority – 71% of the world's refugees. As in previous years,

53 <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/what-we-do/world-migration-report-2024-chapter-2/international-migrants-numbers-and-trends> and https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa_pd_2025_intlmigstock_2024_key_facts_and_figures_advance-unedited.pdf.

54 <https://www.unhcr.org/mid-year-trends>.

55 <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2024>.

two thirds of refugees and other persons in need of international protection were from Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, Ukraine and Venezuela. The largest refugee host countries were Colombia, Iran, Germany, Türkiye and Uganda⁵⁶.

The EU advocates for and implements a **human rights-based approach** that focuses on persons in vulnerable situations, including migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless persons in line with international human rights law and standards. The EU supports EU Member States efforts on integration through the EU action plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027 and its June 2025 mid-term review, which promote coordinated action across key areas such as education, employment, healthcare and housing to strengthen social cohesion and improve access to services for migrants.

In May 2025, in response to recommendations of the European Court of Auditors (ECA) in its special report on **the EU Trust Fund for Africa**⁵⁷, **the EU strengthened its application of the human rights-based approach in the migration and forced displacement sector**. It circulated a new internal guidance document on the relevant international standards, with practical tools for EU programme managers to identify, assess and mitigate human rights risks in migration and forced displacement settings. In June, the EU formalised an **internal procedure for handling complaints related to human rights in EU-funded interventions**.

The EU's human rights monitoring of migration programmes relies on **standard clauses in EU contracts**⁵⁸ providing that funding can be suspended or terminated if human rights violations occur. Those provisions were strengthened in the update to the Commission's contractual templates in January 2025. Implementing partners (as well as their grant beneficiaries and contractors) must

56 <https://www.unhcr.org/mid-year-trends>.

57 https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SR-2024-17/SR-2024-17_EN.pdf.

58 https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/spaces/ExactExternalWiki/pages/152798822/Annexes#Annexes-_QW5uZXhlcyIBbm5leGVzRShDaC42KTpHcmFudH

respect the values set out in the EU treaties, including human rights, and must notify the EU without delay of any credible allegations of violations.

At **multilateral level**, the EU continued to uphold the human rights of refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and internally displaced persons, and to cooperate with key UN actors, including OHCHR, UNHCR and IOM. In December 2025, the EU was represented at the highest level at the **Global Refugee Forum Progress Review**, reaffirming its support for refugees and host countries.

EU-funded humanitarian actions contributed to ensuring access to basic services, including health, education, protection and livelihoods for displaced populations and host communities, with particular attention to children on the move, while strengthening national asylum and protection systems in cooperation with UN agencies and implementing partners. In 2025, the European Union together with its Member States became **UNHCR's largest donor**, with a total contribution of EUR 974 million. Consistent with support since 2014, in 2025 the International Organization for Migration (IOM) received USD 221 million in EU operational funding, while consolidated contributions from the EU and its Member States reached USD 588 million⁵⁹.

Since 2017, the EU has supported humanitarian action in Uganda with more than EUR 362 million. Uganda ranks fifth in the world for the number of refugees it hosts, numbering 1.9 million in 2025. EU humanitarian funds help address the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and host communities, as well as the needs of people exposed to natural hazards.

59 (C/115/7 - Programme and Budget for 2025).



© EU Delegation to Trinidad and Tobago

Gender-based violence, in particular human trafficking, is a significant challenge faced by migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Trinidad and Tobago. EU Ambassador Cécile Tassin met with La Casita Venezuelan Cultural Heritage Centre to support the NGO's vital work during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence 2025.

EU frameworks

The implementation of the 2024 **Pact on Migration and Asylum**⁶⁰ progressed steadily in 2025, with Team Europe addressing its **external dimension**, ensuring coherence and complementarity between EU and Member State action including on aspects related to fundamental rights. On 11 November, the Commission adopted the **first European Annual Asylum and Migration Report**, a strategic overview of the asylum and migration situation and key trends that can guide EU-level solidarity policies. Combined contributions under the Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) tripled between 2022 and 2025 to reach EUR 5.5 billion. This approach promotes the development of **comprehensive cooperation frameworks with third countries** ensuring migration management and the protection of fundamental rights are addressed in a more integrated manner, from countries of origin, through transit, to destination.

⁶⁰ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en.

In December 2025, the EU adopted its first ever **Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Plan** for the years 2026–2027⁶¹, on voluntary admission by Member States of third-country nationals or stateless persons in need of international protection, in the context of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, with nine Member States making 10 430 resettlement and humanitarian admission pledges. Under the 2025 Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) Call for Union Actions, the EU engaged up to **EUR 5 million to fund pilot projects on complementary pathways linked to education** for young people displaced in countries of first asylum and in need of international protection.

In 2025, the EU delivered human rights-based support to partner countries in North Africa, the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean in the field of migration and forced displacement, in line with the Pact on Migration and Asylum and in bilateral frameworks such as Strategic and Comprehensive Partnerships. **EU special measures for Türkiye, Lebanon and Jordan addressed Syrian displacement.**

The **Pact for the Mediterranean**, published in October 2025, places human rights and good governance at the centre of deeper ties with partner countries, while promoting legal migration pathways and effective migration management, strengthening resilience and enhancing security cooperation. As part of the Pact, in 2025 the EU adopted **a new EUR 675 million migration package for the Southern Neighbourhood and MENA region** that aims to align migration management and governance with international human rights standards; support international protection and assistance to refugees and migrants in vulnerable situations; expand legal migration and mobility pathways; improve voluntary return and sustainable reintegration systems; and address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, including through investments in employment, education, economic resilience, social cohesion and stability.

61 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2025/2628/oj.

The EU continued to **promote safe, orderly and regular migration** through the development of legal migration and mobility pathways, including Talent Partnerships (with **Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Bangladesh** and **Pakistan**), academic and professional mobility schemes, and initiatives supporting the recognition of skills and qualifications. Talent Partnerships are supported by several EU-funded programmes, such as THAMM/THAMM+ programme and labour migration projects under the Migration Partnership Facility. The EU **stepped up the enforcement of rules aimed at preventing the exploitation** of legally residing workers as well as those in irregular migration situations, both by sanctioning individuals and companies that employ them illegally, and by strengthening safeguards for the rights of irregular workers.

The EU also **supported voluntary return and sustainable reintegration programmes**, including initiatives in North Africa and in Sub-Saharan Africa. Bilateral programmes in North Africa and in other countries of origin, such as Prottasha in Bangladesh, or the EU Support for Safe Returns and a Stable Future for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and Syria, are based on informed consent, dignity and sustainability. Actions in countries of origin complement the return programmes by supporting the development and ownership of national systems, including national referral mechanisms, for the reintegration of returning citizens. Specific efforts were also made to promote alternatives to detention, especially for children and families.

In 2025, the EU launched a new programme on returns to **support Western Balkan partners to operationalise return management systems** in line with EU standards. It aims to strengthen capacities for rights-based and effective return operations, enhance cooperation on return, readmission and reintegration with key countries of origin, and improve access to information and support for migrants before and after return.

Ensuring children on the move are no longer invisible in the data: **The International Data Alliance for Children on the Move (IDAC)**, funded by the EU and coordinated by UNICEF, is a unique global coalition working to strengthen the protection and promotion of the rights of displaced and migrant children by improving the availability, analysis, and use of child-specific data. On 3 April 2025, IDAC kicked off the 'Innovative Technologies for Children on the Move' webinar series with its first session, 'AI and New Data Technologies to Assess Conflict-Induced Child Displacement'.

Migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings

The EU supported **capacity building in partner countries to counter migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings** focusing on victim protection, access to justice, training of relevant authorities and regional cooperation, exercising due diligence to prevent any indirect contribution to human rights violations. In 2025, a EUR 73 million package of counter-smuggling actions was adopted to address Sub-Saharan Africa at country, regional and global levels. December 2025 saw the launch of a EUR 15 million Global Action against Financial & Digital Dimensions of the smuggling of migrants, implemented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

In 2025, the EU continued the implementation of the **Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling** with its second international conference on 10 December in Brussels, gathering more than 30 ministers of Member States and partner countries and high-level representatives of the European Parliament, international organisations, EU agencies and private partners. 61 partners endorsed the EU's Joint Declaration reaffirming commitment to the implementation of the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and its Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air.

The EU-funded 'Promoting global action and cooperation against trafficking in human beings and the smuggling of migrants (PACTS)' project aims to strengthen (i) the investigation and prosecution of trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling cases, (ii) the human rights protection and assistance framework for trafficking victims and smuggled migrants and (iii) global engagement in policy debates and exchanges of best practices regarding these crimes. PACTS brought together human trafficking survivor leaders, governments and civil society to shape a survivor-centred protection agenda in the 'Voices of Resilience' global forum in June 2025.

The revised **EU Anti-Trafficking Directive**, to be transposed by all EU Member States by July 2026, strengthens EU efforts to prevent and counter trafficking in human beings as well as to protect, assist and support victims. On 20 January 2025, the Commission published its fifth report⁶² on the progress made in the EU in combating trafficking in human beings, outlining the main anti-trafficking actions and providing a statistical analysis.

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The EU is actively addressing the **triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss, recognising their profound impact on human rights** such as life, water and sanitation, food, health, housing and self-determination⁶³. Building on the groundbreaking UN General Assembly resolution 76/300⁶⁴, adopted in July 2022, which acknowledges the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the EU worked throughout 2025 via multilateral forums, international partnerships and cooperation

62 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2025%3A8%3AFIN>.

63 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/eu-statement-hrc59-interactive-dialogue-special-rapporteur-human-rights-and-climate-change_en.

64 <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3983329?v=pdf>.

and internal policies, to raise awareness on the protection of human rights in response to global warming, extreme weather events, biodiversity loss, pollution and environmental degradation. In this regard, the EU welcomed⁶⁵ the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion on the Obligations of States in Respect of Climate Change of 23 July 2025, reaffirming states' obligations to prevent climate harm while safeguarding human rights.



Photo submitted to a competition on climate change through creative art and media, organised by the Civil Society in Action project implemented by COSPE in Eswatini.

The EU actively engaged with the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, as mandated by an EU-led resolution. At the 59th Human Rights Council, the EU co-sponsored a side event examining states' international human rights obligations and the **responsibilities of businesses to phase out fossil fuels** and related subsidies, as suggested by the Special Rapporteur's report. The EU also delivered statements at HRC59 during the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur and the Annual Panel on adverse impacts of climate change.

The EU underscores the imperative of a just transition: tackling climate change also means ensuring a fair and equitable transition that accounts for vulnerable populations, local communities

⁶⁵ Point 52, Preparation for the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (Belém, Brazil, 10-21 November 2025) Council conclusions.

and ecosystems⁶⁶. Environmental degradation exacerbates precariousness, with those contributing the least to climate change often facing higher vulnerability that jeopardises their human rights. At COP30 in Belém (Brazil), the EU engaged with all Parties and other stakeholders in the Just Transition Work Programme, addressing the sharing of information on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers. The COP 30 decision mandates the development of a **Just Transition Mechanism** by COP 31 that will enhance international cooperation, technical assistance, capacity building and knowledge sharing, and enable equitable and inclusive just transitions. The decision also emphasises the inherent connection between pursuing efforts to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 °C and pursuing just transition pathways.

Don Ramiro, a Colombian coffee grower, inspects his harvest. With support from Copernicus, the EU's Earth observation programme, he has been able to care for his crop and ensure excellent quality.



Gender equality is another cornerstone of the EU's efforts to tackle human rights challenges related to climate change. Women and marginalised groups face disproportionate climate risks and impacts,

⁶⁶ EU Statement - HRC60 - Interactive dialogue on Secretary-General's synthesis report on climate change | EEAS.

while being underrepresented in decision making. Nevertheless, they hold the potential to drive change by developing innovative solutions and enhancing community resilience. This is why the EU and several partners, totalling 92 countries, endorsed the **Global Statement on Gender Equality and Climate Action**⁶⁷ at COP30, along with a nine-year gender action plan, to gender-mainstream the UNFCCC process, enhance accountability and secure resources for gender-responsive actions.

To further address deforestation, steps were taken in 2025 to support the implementation of the **EU Deforestation-free Products Regulation (EUDR)**, in force since 29 June 2023. The EUDR requires companies to ensure commodities in the EU market are not linked to deforestation, aiming not only to curb global deforestation but also to strengthen the protection of indigenous territories and promote sustainable supply chains.

1.2 Empowering people

EMPOWERING WOMEN

Women, peace and security

The European Union further advanced the implementation of its strategic approach to **women, peace and security (WPS)** and its accompanying action plan by strengthening the systematic integration of a gender perspective across EU policy making and external action, including diplomacy, political and security dialogues. In the context of the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, the EU used key multilateral and regional platforms to reaffirm political commitments, highlight persistent gaps and promote concrete measures to ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in peace and security.

⁶⁷ https://climate.ec.europa.eu/news-other-reads/news/eu-rallies-global-call-gender-equality-and-inclusive-climate-action-cop30-2025-11-10_en.

In March 2025, the EU joined the UN Secretary-General's Common Pledge for **Women's Full, Equal and Meaningful Participation in Peace Processes**, committing to increase women's direct participation and to integrate gender expertise across all peace efforts to which the EU contributes. The EU also anchored the WPS



The closing workshop of 'Reactivating Peace with Women' brought together women human rights defenders, state institutions, and international allies, resulting in a jointly signed Feminist Manifesto to advance women's participation, security, and peacebuilding in Colombia.

agenda into two new Security and Defence Partnerships concluded in 2025 with the United Kingdom and Canada. Internally, the EU continued to convene the WPS Taskforce, bringing together EU institutions and Member States to exchange on challenges, good practices and priorities, including with civil society, and to prepare common positions ahead of key multilateral moments, including the UN Security Council open debate on WPS and the Beijing+30 review.

The EU co-organised three major events in 2025 alongside these strategic steps. A high-level conference in May, organised together with Belgium, Poland and UN Women, marked 25 years of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, with a forward-looking focus on the WPS agenda and contemporary challenges. In partnership with NATO and

the UK, an event in October was dedicated to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) highlighting Ukraine's national leadership and sharing lessons on CRSV prevention and response. A joint UN-EU photo exhibition on WPS, opened by High Representative Kaja Kallas at EEAS headquarters, reaffirmed the EU's highest-level commitment to WPS. The EU maintained structured engagement with women's civil society and experts, and supported **women's participation and leadership in conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding processes**, including through existing mechanisms such as the Afghan Women Leaders Forum and the Women's Advisory Council to the Middle Eastern Peace Process.

The EU continued to put gender equality, women's empowerment and the implementation of the WPS agenda at the heart of its regional partnerships, such as with the Council of Europe, the African Union, the Organization of American States, the OSCE, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and NATO.



In Barbados, EU Ambassador Fiona Ramsey (second from the left) supported the launch of a National Intimate Partner Violence Survey, alongside UN Women and government partners.

During the UN High-level week, on 25 September High Representative Kallas participated in a ministerial side event on WPS organised by Morocco to mark the extension of its WPS national action plan, with

interventions from almost 20 countries. HRVP Kallas highlighted the EU's enthusiastic support for the WPS agenda and cooperation with partners all around the globe. She stressed that in a context marked by the highest number of conflicts since World War II, the agenda is now more critical than ever⁶⁸.

EMPOWERING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

In 2025, the EU significantly stepped up efforts to empower children and young people through participation, mobility and youth-led funding opportunities. At a biennial European Youth Event, held in June 2025 at the European Parliament, thousands of young people aged 16-30 from across Europe co-created ideas and engaged with decision makers to shape the future of European democracy. In 2025, following on from the 2024 UN Summit of the Future, the European Commission brought together citizens, experts and stakeholders to co-create the **Strategy on intergenerational fairness**⁶⁹ (adopted on 5 March 2026) to help ensure that today's choices contribute positively to tomorrow's opportunities, and that benefits and responsibilities are shared fairly across age groups.



Universal human rights champions in EU jerseys! The finals at the International Human Rights Day in Rusizi, Rwanda, also allowed the EU to call for ending human rights violations on the other side of Lake Kivu.

68 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/opening-remarks-high-representative-kaja-kallas-high-level-meeting-women-peace-and-security-margins-0_en.

69 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=PL_COM:Ares\(2025\)8721454](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=PL_COM:Ares(2025)8721454).

As for Erasmus+, the flagship EU educational programme, 2025 saw the completion of negotiations to associate Switzerland and the United Kingdom with the programme, thereby expanding mobility and learning opportunities for young people. It also delivers on the commitment to inclusion, by fostering educational, youth, training and sport collaboration with partner countries globally. In 2025, it continued to award aid for short-term and full degree mobility to young people from outside the EU, as well as capacity building and policy dialogue projects, some of them with a focus on human rights and democracy.

For instance, the 2025 **Erasmus+ capacity building in higher education** 'HEAL-FGM' project works on enhancing the capacity of universities in Sudan to educate students, professionals, policymakers and communities on FGM prevention, gender equality and human rights⁷⁰. Also in 2025, through Erasmus+, a Jean Monnet centre of excellence on Holocaust remembrance, antisemitism and human rights policies was awarded in Argentina, which will include seminars and research-driven discussions on ethical leadership and scholarly engagement on issues of historical memory, justice and human rights⁷¹.

In line with the Commission's 2024-2029 political guidelines, **Youth Policy Dialogues** provided young people with a platform to share their views directly with senior EU decision makers, ensuring their voices are heard on important issues. Following the first round of dialogues, the Commission published a report on the European Youth Portal, summarising key insights and outlining future steps across a range of topics, including foreign and security policy, human rights, global diplomacy and democratic participation. The

70 <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/101237677>.

71 <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/101240913>.

conversation continued online via the European Commission's Citizens' Engagement Platform⁷², promoting sustained interaction and enabling young people to influence EU policymaking.

Complementing the Youth Policy Dialogues, in 2025 the Commission applied the **Youth Check**⁷³ for the first time as part of its annual work programme, to assess the potential impact of new policies on young people, ensuring EU policymaking remains future-proof and fair across generations. This process contributed to shaping EU initiatives, such as the flagship European Democracy Shield presented in November 2025.

In Asia, the 'Digital Spaces for Dialogue' project gave a voice to young people in public discourse on conflict resolution and peace building in Myanmar and Bangladesh. It utilised **digital spaces for dialogue about a peaceful future** with the youth in these countries and abroad, strengthened capacities of CSOs and youth activists to promote dialogue and communicate about peace, and empowered youth activists to engage with media and decision makers.

Similarly, the 'Youth-Led Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion Initiatives in Bangladesh and Myanmar' project, managed by ActionAid, has been working with youth- and women-led civil society organisations (CSOs) and peacebuilders, including from Rohingya camps and host communities. The project aims to increase their security, entrepreneurial, livelihood skills and **capacities to contribute to conflict prevention and resolution**, support them to be better organised and engaged in promoting inclusion and social cohesion, and help youth CSOs increase influence for inclusive local governance mechanisms and strengthened peace processes.

72 https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/concluded-online-debates/debate-youth-policy-dialogues_en?prefLang=en.

73 https://youth.europa.eu/news/progress-european-commission-youth-check-amplifying-young-voices-eu-policymaking_en.

Boosting Youth Voices in Colombia's Innovative Municipal Youth Councils: In Colombia, the EU-funded flagship WYDE (Women and Youth Democratic Engagement) partnered with inspiring local organisations to energise the second elections for Municipal and Local Youth Councils on 19 October 2025 – one of the world's most distinctive permanent youth participation structures. Learning from challenges seen in 2021 (low turnout, info gaps, neglect of rural and the youngest voters), the young professionals of WYDE partner European Partnership for Democracy supported two game-changing initiatives.

Fundación Colombia 2050's 'Candidateados' platform⁷⁴ showcased over 45 000 candidates' profiles and proposals, attracting more than 1 million views and earning official praise as the country's top electoral tool for these elections. **Civix Colombia** delivered training to over 80 teachers and 160 young candidates, especially in rural areas and among 14- to 17-year-olds, sparking real enthusiasm for informed participation. The result was a tangible step forward: turnout climbed from 10.42% to 12.82%, and blank or invalid votes plunged from over 20% to just 2%.



Candidateados: the platform to inform young people about the elections of the Municipal and Local Youth Councils in Colombia.

⁷⁴ <https://candidateados.com/>.

RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

In 2025, the EU strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities (2021-2030) continued to guide the EU's commitment to build a **Union of Equality**. The Commission continued to work with EU Member States on the transposition of the European Accessibility Act, as well as on the implementation of the European Disability Card and the European Parking Card. As a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the EU engaged in constructive dialogue with the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in March 2025. The recommendations issued by the Committee in its Concluding Observations called for the EU to strengthen its disability-inclusive policies across all areas of EU external action.

The full implementation of both the disability strategy and the UN CRPD being an EU priority, preparatory work began in 2025 on a Communication that will aim at enhancing the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities up to 2030. The Commission launched targeted and public consultations in June 2025, to gather input from EU Member States, social partners, organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), and civil society beyond the field of disability, inviting also international partners and third countries. In 2025, the Access City Award was given to Zaragoza (Spain), while several other cities received awards for their work on accessibility in a ceremony during the European conference marking the **International Day of Persons with Disabilities**, held on 4-5 December in Brussels.

In its relations with third countries, the EU continued to raise the importance of ensuring the welfare, dignity and effective inclusion of persons with disabilities in society, in order to ensure their participation on an equal basis with others, through policy dialogues, political dialogues and human rights dialogues as well as through international cooperation and humanitarian assistance. EU delegations and Commission services further rolled out disability-inclusion tools, guidance and training to support the

systematic integration of UN CRPD principles into programming and policy dialogue. The EU also continued its collaboration with the Global Disability Fund, recognising its importance in advancing inclusive governance and CRPD implementation in partner countries.



© Fórum das Associações Moçambicanas de Pessoas com Deficiência (FAMOD)

Image produced as part of an EU-funded social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) campaign, illustrating active participation and diversity in the project's initiatives.

The 18th session of the **Conference of States Parties (CoSP) to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**, on 10-12 June 2025 in New York, featured an impressive participation by 164 States Parties, experts and disability NGOs, as well as the European institutions. The Conference allowed for constructive engagement between the UN, States Parties and civil society on enhancing public awareness of the rights and contributions of persons with disabilities for social development. Besides statements from the EU and 25 EU Member States, the EU hosted a high-level breakfast and a side event on 'Artificial Intelligence: Opportunities and risks for persons with disabilities'.

At the third **Global Disability Summit (GDS)**, held in Berlin in April 2025, co-hosted by Germany, Jordan and the International Disability Alliance, the EU was represented at a high level and endorsed the Amman-Berlin Declaration. A central innovation of the 2025 Declaration is the '15 by 15' initiative, aiming for 15% of ODA programmes to reach persons with disabilities by 2028, to reflect their estimated share of the global population, monitoring progress through the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) DAC Disability Marker. The EU already exceeds this benchmark: approximately 40% of Commission ODA actions approved between 2021 and 2024 carried a D1 or D2 disability marker.

In its humanitarian action, the EU promoted **inclusive assistance and protection** through strengthened guidance, monitoring and the systematic use of the DAC disability marker, including through new Commission guidance to support humanitarian partners in effectively mainstreaming disability inclusion in EU-funded actions. The EU participated actively in global coordination platforms and worked closely with UN agencies, Member States and organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) to reinforce disability inclusion in crisis preparedness, response and recovery.



At the EU-NGO Human Rights Forum in Brussels, real-time captioning on a screen behind the panel ensured everyone, including persons with hearing impairments, could follow the discussion. This was part of broader measures to support inclusive participation for persons with visual and hearing impairments.

In December 2025, the EU-NGO Human Rights Forum, focusing on discrimination and inequalities, included a dedicated strategy session on disability. For the first time, the Forum provided specific measures to significantly improve **access for participants with disabilities**, including inclusive communication practices across all sessions and dedicated funding for carers of participants with disabilities.

HUMAN RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS

In 2025, the EU continued to advance the rights of older persons through active involvement in the **UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG)**, building on its longstanding commitment to strengthen existing international frameworks and address remaining normative gaps. In line with the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030), the EU and its Member States contributed to the 15th session of the OEWG. This included participating in discussions on a possible future legal instrument and reiterating the need to mainstream the human rights of older persons across the UN system. The EU also supported the work of the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, including through coordinated inputs to thematic reports on ageism, digital inclusion and access to services.

Within the EU, 2025 saw continued implementation of initiatives essential to older people's rights and wellbeing. Progress was made in implementing the 2022 Council Recommendation on access to affordable, high-quality long-term care, with several Member States advancing EU-supported reforms aimed at improving care accessibility, workforce conditions and community-based alternatives to institutional care. **The European care strategy** remained a key reference point for EU action in 2025.

In response to demographic trends, the EU also continued to promote the **inclusion and participation of older persons**. Implementation of the Demography Toolbox remained central to tackling demographic challenges, including through measures supporting active ageing and intergenerational solidarity. Digital inclusion continued to be a priority, with the EU rolling out measures under the Digital Decade policy programme to reduce digital skills gaps among older adults, expand age-friendly digital public services, and support targeted projects through the Digital Europe programme and European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), aimed at improving digital literacy and safe online participation for older persons.

RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The rights of Indigenous Peoples are an integral part of the EU's human rights policy, centred on promoting their participation in relevant human rights and development processes and upholding the principle to **free, prior and informed consent** in all decisions affecting them in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). In 2025 the EU actively participated in interactive dialogues and panels on the rights of Indigenous Peoples at the Human Rights Council, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and in meetings of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The EU made statements on Indigenous rights in the context of a just energy transition, and on the importance of recognition for states to live up to their obligations regarding Indigenous Peoples' rights under international law.

Recognising the vital role of **Indigenous Peoples and local communities** in sustainable resource management and biodiversity conservation amidst forest degradation, the EU advocated for the rights of Indigenous Peoples at COP30. Regarding biodiversity, at the second resumed session of COP16 on the Convention on Biological Diversity held in Rome in February 2025, the EU reaffirmed its

commitment to the rights of Indigenous Peoples by supporting the introduction of a new indicator to track **land-use changes in indigenous territories** under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF).

The **Indigenous Navigator**, supported by the EU since its inception in 2014, represents the first and only comprehensive global framework developed by and for Indigenous Peoples to monitor the implementation of the UNDRIP. In 2025, five community surveys and four national surveys were completed and published, increasing the total of surveys available on the portal to 343 surveys covering 26 countries. In addition to participating in various international events and forums, the Indigenous Navigator implemented 38 community projects in 25 countries in 2025.



© Kasosi Kerry Purengi/The Pastoralists Indigenous Non-Governmental Organizations Forum (PINGOs Forum)

Akiye women assisting with cleaning beehives using a local Akiye plant known as Ormagirigiran during the installation of beehives in Ngapapa village in Tanzania, a community project supported under the Indigenous Navigator.

The EU remains strongly committed to efforts to enhance the full, effective and meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples' representatives and institutions in relevant United Nations bodies,

including the Human Rights Council, on issues affecting them. To help make this a reality, the EU continued to support **Docip, the Indigenous Peoples' Centre for Documentation, Research and Information**, which promotes the direct and effective representation of Indigenous Peoples to the European Union, the United Nations human rights system and climate change conferences. In 2025, Docip provided online training on advocacy for Indigenous Peoples' rights to nearly 7 500 participants. Docip also co-founded an Indigenous Peoples' rights legal clinic in Brussels, enhancing Indigenous access to legal analysis and professional networks and supporting informed, autonomous and evidence-based advocacy.

The EU-NGO Human Rights Forum in December 2025 included a dedicated strategy session on Indigenous Peoples' rights with the participation of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

1.3 Promoting fundamental freedoms and strengthening civic and political space

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

The EU maintained its strong defence and promotion of the freedom of expression, media freedom and pluralism as key pillars of a democratic society, engaging actively in multilateral and bilateral settings. As such, the European Commission has beefed up its **support to independent media globally**. Under the Global Europe thematic programme on human rights and democracy, by the end of 2025 it had launched over 100 projects in 56 countries, as well as global programmes, supporting independent media. In May 2025, the EU raised EUR 5.5 million in urgent funding to support journalists when the resources for Radio Free Europe were suddenly withdrawn.

In the Western Balkans and Türkiye, the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) continued to support independent media, media literacy and fact-checking organisations, programming around EUR 40 million for this in 2025. In December 2025, the European Commission launched⁷⁵ a new EUR 5 million programme to detect and counter disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) in the Eastern Partnership countries.



EU Ambassador to Brazil Marian Schuefgraf awards the EU Human Rights Prize in a ceremony on Europe Day to Instituto Vladimir Herzog for a project on 'Protection of Journalists and Communicators from the Amazon'

On World Press Freedom Day (2 May) the High Representative issued a statement reaffirming the EU's commitment to defend free and independent journalism in the face of unprecedented threats. A joint EU statement from the EU institutions marking the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (2 November) expressed concern about **growing threats in the digital sphere**, where journalists increasingly face coordinated harassment, unlawful surveillance and campaigns designed to discredit or intimidate them.

⁷⁵ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/new-eu5-million-regional-programme-against-disinformation-launched-2025-eastern-partnership-civil-2025-12-03_en.

The EU continued monitoring **freedom of expression and the safety of journalists in candidate countries** and potential candidates for EU accession. Despite some improvements, in 2025 the media sector in most of these partners remained marked by media concentration and political influence, and broadly exposed to FIMI activities. Intimidation of journalists included strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), threats, reprisals, and physical attacks, while detention increased in several countries.

A variety of EU initiatives seek to reinforce the safety of journalists and media workers. In August 2025, the European Media Freedom Act⁷⁶ entered into application, putting in place strong safeguards for media and journalists across the EU to ensure they can carry out their work without undue pressure. Under the Global Europe thematic programme on human rights and democracy, projects to protect independent media reinforce the digital, physical and psychological safety of journalists, in particular women. The ProtectDefenders.eu mechanism offers dedicated **protection to journalists at risk** as human rights defenders, including emergency support, relocation or capacity building. In 2025, at least 686 individual journalists at risk benefited from assistance under the mechanism.

FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In 2025, the right to peaceful assembly came under renewed pressure in many regions, including through bans on gatherings and an increase in reports of excessive use of force, torture and other ill-treatment. The EU remained particularly concerned by the disproportionate use of force by law enforcement, including **arbitrary detention, injury and harassment of peaceful protestors** including the 'Gen Z' movements and protests.

76 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_6635.

EU delegations and Member State embassies issued a joint statement in Malawi following protests in June. On 9 September, the EU spokesperson for foreign affairs issued a statement expressing regret over the deaths and violence linked to the demonstrations in Nepal. The EU called for an independent investigation, urging all parties to exercise restraint and engage in peaceful dialogue, and stressing the need to respect fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

The EU also raised these issues bilaterally with governments through human rights dialogues. EU delegations actively engaged with local non-governmental organisations, human rights defenders and protest leaders. Through statements at HRC59⁷⁷ and UNGA80⁷⁸, the EU elevated these concerns to the multilateral level and in international bodies, stressing the importance of strong norms and accountability on freedom of assembly. The EU reiterated that any **restrictions on peaceful assembly must comply with international legal standards**: they must be prescribed by law, narrowly tailored, necessary and proportionate.

With funding from the Global Europe human rights and democracy thematic programme, in 2025 partnership agreements under the WYDE Freedoms programme translated into concrete action in 18 countries across regions of the world. These include countries where fundamental freedoms are obstructed or repressed. Places of intervention include Brazil, Colombia, Kenya, Senegal, Eswatini, Tunisia, Palestine^{*79}, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

77 EU Statement – HRC59 – Interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/eu-statement-hrc59-interactive-dialogue-special-rapporteur-rights-freedom-peaceful-assembly-and_en?s=62.

78 EU Statement – UN General Assembly: Report of the Human Rights Council 31 October 2025, New York - Statement delivered by H.E. Ambassador Stavros Lambrinidis, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, at the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly on Item 66: Report of the Human Rights Council: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/eu-statement-%E2%80%93-un-general-assembly-report-human-rights-council-1_en.

79 *This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

In 2025, pressure on freedom of association intensified worldwide. CSOs faced restrictive legislation and practices that limited their ability to operate and hindered donors' capacity to support them. Unprecedented worldwide cuts in overall public funding to CSOs caused both international and local organisations to reduce operations, close offices or field posts and lay off staff. In more constrained environments, many organisations and activists were subjected to intimidation, physical and online threats, harassment and attacks, including arbitrary detention and killings.

In response, **the EU firmly condemned all attacks against CSOs** and opposed legal and administrative measures that curtail human rights or shrink civic space. For example, at HRC60 the EU condemned reprisals against CSOs that cooperate with the United Nations, stressing the vital role that CSOs play in making the UN more effective by informing and shaping UN decisions, enhancing accountability and promoting inclusive dialogue⁸⁰. In its political and human rights dialogues with authorities in several countries, the EU raised concerns about legislation, policies and practices restricting civic space. It emphasised that such measures undermine the fundamental freedoms of all citizens. Civil society depends on these to operate effectively and fulfil its beneficial role within any rule of law-based democracy.

Recognising the vital role that CSOs play in society, in November 2025 the European Commission adopted its first ever **EU strategy for civil society**, sending a strong signal of support inside the EU and around the world. The strategy provides a framework for action at national and EU level, integrating an enlargement perspective throughout and including external deliverables to reinforce coherent

80 EU Statement - HRC60 - Interactive dialogue on the report of the Secretary-General on cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights - 24.9.2025 Geneva: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/eu-statement-hrc60-interactive-dialogue-report-secretary-general-cooperation-united-nations-its_en.

engagement with CSOs. The new strategy also acknowledges emerging trends and threats like transnational repression inside and outside the EU. While a key deliverable of the strategy is the creation of a Civil Society Platform, it also seeks to strengthen engagement with civil society as a partner, to ensure an open, safe and enabling civic space (including through protection), and to maintain adequate, sustainable and transparent funding support to civil society both within the EU and beyond its borders.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

In 2025, amid increasingly overt attacks on academic communities and efforts to discredit them worldwide, the EU maintained its commitment to protecting academic freedom, offering support to scholars, researchers and students at risk, and upholding the autonomy of academic institutions. Student protests around the world prompted government response that tested the **ability of higher education institutions** to preserve their autonomy under political pressure and to continue to act as safe spaces for freedom of expression, opinion and peaceful assembly, as well as academic freedom. Events in 2025 illustrated how academic spaces such as universities and research communities have become arenas of contestation between state authority and academic independence, which remains a core democratic value. New approaches to restricting academia emerged in the form of harassment, misrepresentation, and polarised digital debate, narrowing the space for academic freedom, or defunding scientific institutions, leading to mass layoffs of research staff in government agencies.

The EU continued to **support at-risk academics and institutions**, emphasising the importance of safe and autonomous academic environments in a context where pressure on academics may lead to self-censorship, withdrawal from public engagement, and reduced willingness to participate in international collaboration,

even in the absence of tangible risks. In 2025, ProtectDefenders.eu delivered emergency protection and support to at least 25 scholars and researchers. The EU-funded Global Campus of Human Rights provided support to six other academics and researchers through an Afghanistan-specific programme and the 'Reconceptualising Exile' programme.

On 14 May, the European Parliament hosted two exchanges of views addressing the current **attacks against academic freedom and scientific research globally**, warning that this could undermine democratic traditions and institutions. The #EP4AcademicFreedom forum maintained its STOA initiative, which in February 2025 published its EP Academic Freedom Monitor analysing the state of academic freedom in the EU and the main threats to it⁸¹. Continuing the tradition from previous years, in June 2025 the EU co-sponsored a side event on the margins of HRC59 in Geneva on 'Regional Approaches to Implementing the Right to Academic Freedom', organised by Scholars at Risk and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education.

Partly in response to the new risks faced by researchers in many countries, the European Commission announced the 'Choose Europe for Science' initiative to promote Europe as a destination of excellence for researchers. The EUR 500 million package aims to **make Europe a magnet for researchers seeking academic freedom and freedom of scientific research** by providing funding, support schemes and long-term opportunities. In October, a flagship European Conference on Research Security promoted responsible, open and secure research, identifying factors and contexts that limit academic freedom and put scholars at risk. The EU also began examining emerging concepts such as transnational information suppression that particularly affect and may even specifically target academic freedom. New risks to democratic resilience in higher education also arise from within increasingly digital learning environments,

81 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/stoa/en/ep-academic-freedom>.

including the weakening of shared academic spaces, the circulation of statements out of context, and concerns that extensive reliance on artificial intelligence may undermine core learning processes related to critical thinking and independent judgment.

The three-year INSPIREUROPE+ project concluded in August 2025, having reached an estimated 30 000 people in more than 100 countries and developed a set of recommendations on **expanding opportunities for researchers at risk**. The MSCA4Ukraine initiative, funded by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions under Horizon Europe and implemented by Scholars at Risk Europe and partners, continued in 2025 to support research institutions that host Ukrainian scholars and their families, contributing to securing the future of science in Ukraine. The three-year Supporting At-Risk Researchers with Fellowships in Europe (SAFE) project launched a EUR 12 million fellowship scheme in May 2025. Together, these initiatives reflect a shift **from normative advocacy towards structured protection pathways** for scholars under threat.

The **Global Campus of Human Rights**, a longstanding EU partner, continued to advance its unique global academic network linking over 100 universities and growing a network of alumni who bring knowledge and specialised skills in human rights to a range of professional pursuits. Besides providing post-graduate education, it offers opportunities to scholars, students and activists from countries where academic freedom is repressed.

1.4 Reinforcing Economic, Social, Cultural and Labour Rights

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

The EU continued to deliver on its commitment to promote economic, social and cultural rights by engaging in multilateral human rights forums and human rights dialogues. In addition to specific funding for human rights, EU international cooperation aimed at poverty reduction and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals supports partner countries in respecting, protecting and fulfilling these rights.

At the **World Social Summit** held in Qatar in November 2025, European Commission Executive Vice-President Mînzatu, on behalf of the EU and its Member States, underlined that the international community cannot be satisfied with the progress made over the last 30 years, since the first World Social Summit. More than 800 million people still live in extreme poverty worldwide. More than 2 billion continue to experience food insecurity. Inequality is rising, education results are stagnating, and progress on gender equality and disability inclusion is slow. She pointed to how the EU is tackling these issues both internally and globally as the largest provider of ODA, including by bringing in the private sector. The EU was an active contributor to the Global Coalition for Social Justice throughout 2025.

The EU and its Member States successfully supported initiatives promoting economic, social and cultural rights in the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly Third Committee. In 2025, the EU supported 17 HRC resolutions on economic, social and cultural rights co-sponsored by EU Member States. The EU has continued its efforts to build bridges to other groups and countries in multilateral forums, underlining shared commitment to advance the respect of economic and social rights through international cooperation. In these discussions, the EU underlined that **all human rights are**

universal, inherent, inalienable, interdependent and indivisible, and that the state, as the primary duty bearer, is obliged to ensure the principle of non-discrimination and to mobilise the maximum available resources for the realisation of economic and social rights.

LABOUR RIGHTS



© Oxfam

After engaging with the Empowering Women Through Civil Society Actors (EWCSA) project, co-funded by the EU and implemented by Oxfam, Putul, a former domestic worker in Bangladesh, became an advocate for workers' rights. She now leads efforts through Aparajita Grihakarmi Unnayan Sangstha, a collective dedicated to promoting the rights and dignity of Bangladesh's domestic workforce.

In line with the Communication on Decent Work Worldwide, the EU continued to promote decent work across all sectors and policy areas in the domestic markets of non-EU countries and in global supply chains by engaging in policy and standard-setting negotiations, advocating for compliance with international labour standards and participating in multilateral forums, bilateral and regional dialogues, and cooperation projects.

At the 2025 International Labour Conference, the International Labour Organization (ILO) for the first time adopted ILO standards specifically addressing **biological hazards in the working**

environment. The EU was one of the most active groups during the negotiations on the new convention and recommendation. Standard-setting discussions on **decent work in the platform economy** also commenced in 2025, with the EU actively participating.

The EU continued promoting decent work in the maritime and fishing sectors, encouraging the ratification of relevant ILO conventions. In 2025, the EU coordinated with Member States several amendments to the Code of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC 2026), aimed at improving working conditions of seafarers. Responding to global civil society campaigns, in some of its human rights dialogues, the EU also raised the issue of the rights of workers in distant sea fishing vessels.

The EU worked closely with the ILO in programmes such as 'Vision Zero Fund' to promote **safety and health at work** around the world, 'Decent Work – Innovative Solutions for Formalisation' in Latin America and 'Transition to the formal economy, with an emphasis on increasing productivity and improving working conditions in priority economic sectors in Latin America and the Caribbean'. The EU also funded the second phase of the ILO project on promoting safe and healthy workplaces in the Southern Mediterranean.

International labour rights were discussed in dedicated regional dialogues in the context of the Union for the Mediterranean and with ASEAN, as well as in bilateral dialogues with Latin American and other non-EU countries. For instance, during the Qatar Corporate Social Responsibility Summit 2025, which aligned with the country's ongoing reforms under its national development strategy 2024-2030, the EU emphasised the **integration of human rights due diligence and environmental standards**.

In the Western Balkans, through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance III, the EU supported several countries in implementing labour market reforms and social policies. During 2025, multiannual operational programmes for **employment and social inclusion**, skills, human capital, youth employment and related areas were

active in Montenegro, Albania, Serbia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Türkiye and Kosovo. The EU supported the implementation of the Ukraine plan and the Reform Agenda linked to the Reform and Growth Facility for Moldova. This year, these country programmes focused on youth, women and hard-to-employ categories of the unemployed, sought to remedy the shortcomings of the labour market and improve social dialogue, or rolled out the Youth Guarantee.

EU and ILO presenters at the first National Conference on Combating Child Labour in Iraq, held by the ILO.



© ILO Iraq/Ragda Muhi

EU trade and investment agreements include commitments to **promote and realise core ILO principles**, make efforts to ratify pending core ILO conventions and effectively implement the conventions ratified. In 2025 the EU had 14 trade agreements in place, covering 21 countries, which include binding labour commitments. Since 2019, the EU has funded the ILO 'Trade for Decent Work'⁸² project in select beneficiary countries, supporting the institutional and social capacity building needed for the implementation and application of international labour standards, ILO conventions and labour aspects of responsible business conduct.

82 <https://tradefordecentwork.ilo.org/>.

THE RIGHT TO THE HIGHEST ATTAINABLE STANDARD OF HEALTH

In July 2025, a year after the Council Conclusions on the **EU global health strategy: better health for all in a changing world** were adopted, the first report on its implementation showed the EU's unwavering commitment to global health. Between 2021 and 2025, NDICI-GlobalEurope committed EUR 5.4 billion in official development assistance to support health initiatives in partner countries. Horizon Europe contributed nearly EUR 1 billion to health-related research and innovation. The EU4Health programme allocated more than EUR 130 million between 2022 and 2024 to international partners. In humanitarian settings, EUR 745 million was directed specifically to health-related interventions between 2022 and 2025.

With the global gateway strategy, the EU has continued promoting investments in local manufacturing, using a Team Europe approach with democratic values, human rights and high social and environment standards at its centre. It has leveraged innovative financing mechanisms to attract private capital towards **production of critical medicines, technologies and vaccines** that will contribute to strengthening Africa's, Latin America's and Europe's strategic autonomy. In 2025, close to EUR 250 million of new investments in pharma in Sub-Saharan Africa were contracted.

At global level, too, the EU continues to be a major contributor to **global health initiatives**, such as the Pandemic Fund; the WHO Universal Health Coverage Partnership; GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance; the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and the UNFPA Supplies Partnership. The high-level GAVI replenishment event, 'Global Summit: Health & Prosperity through Immunisation', co-hosted on 25 June 2025 in Brussels by the EU, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and GAVI, brought together a record number of donors pledging more than EUR 7.7 billion. The European Commission pledged EUR 360 million, as part of a total pledge of more than EUR 2 billion from Team Europe.

In Africa, the transition from separate initiatives to one single **AU-EU Health Partnership Team Europe Initiative**, approved in September 2025, allows for a more comprehensive and strategic approach towards strengthening the partnership with institutional regional counterparts. During the High-Level Steering Meeting in South Africa in October 2025, African and European delegates reaffirmed their wide-ranging partnership on health, laying the groundwork for deeper cooperation ahead of the AU-EU Summit in Luanda.

The EU's **humanitarian health response** seeks to limit excess preventable mortality, permanent disability and disease for the most vulnerable populations affected by conflicts, displacement and humanitarian crises. In 2025, the EU released new 'Health Response in Humanitarian Settings' guidelines⁸³, reflecting the greater role given to health preparedness, cross-sectoral programming and healthcare system strengthening. In 2025, the EU allocated EUR 397 million for humanitarian health interventions⁸⁴, the highest-ever budget since 2011, maintaining a context-driven and needs-based approach in the face of diminishing humanitarian access and increasing needs, as well as a drastic global drop in funding following the 2025 closure of USAID and the politicisation of aid. Humanitarian health interventions this year have included access to primary healthcare; reproductive, maternal and newborn healthcare; mental health and psychosocial support; rehabilitation and trauma care; and capacity building. In addition, the EU's humanitarian aid, complemented by the work of ReliefEU and the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, has contributed to addressing cholera, yellow fever and ebola in Africa. The EU's advocacy efforts for the protection of health workers and infrastructure and for compliance with international humanitarian law in conflicts continued in 2025, for example during the Protection of Civilians Week and a dedicated ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment side event.

83 https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/resources-campaigns/policy-guidelines_en#health.

84 Figure as of 8.12.2025.

THE RIGHT TO WATER AND SANITATION

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a fundamental right⁸⁵ increasingly threatened by climate-induced shifts in weather patterns, water scarcity and mismanagement of freshwater resources⁸⁶. The EU is committed to implementing UN Resolution 64/292 on **the human right to water and sanitation** and to meeting the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 6. The EU human rights guidelines on safe drinking water and sanitation continued to be a reference framework and working tool for the EU to advance the right to safe water around the world.

This year, EU Member States Germany and Spain led on the Human Rights Council⁸⁷ resolution renewing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on safe drinking water and sanitation for another three years. Malta and Cyprus were among the core group of a new HRC resolution on **implications of sea-level rise for the full enjoyment of human rights**⁸⁸ and seeking more analysis on its impacts on, among others, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities and coastal communities, paying specific attention to the disproportionate impacts on women and girls.

References to the human right to water figure prominently in the **European water resilience strategy**⁸⁹ adopted in June 2025, which sets out a pathway to enhance water resilience in Europe and beyond, without compromising the rights of future generations. Building on the political momentum of the 2023 UN Water Conference⁹⁰, the strategy supports both domestic and global action for a sustainable management of shared water resources and conflict prevention. The strategy seeks to address SDG 6: worldwide, 2.2 billion people

85 <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/64/292> or see: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/821067?v=pdf>.

86 https://commission.europa.eu/topics/environment/water-resilience-strategy_en.

87 <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/RES/60/9>.

88 <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/RES/60/20>.

89 https://commission.europa.eu/topics/environment/water-resilience-strategy_en.

90 https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/water/eu-efforts-global-water-agenda-beyond-un-2023-water-conference_en.

still lack access to safe drinking water, more than half of humankind lacks access to safe sanitation, and many watersheds experience increasing levels of degradation, threatening ecosystem health and water availability, worsened by climate change. It is estimated that almost half of the world's population will suffer water stress by 2030.

The EU welcomed the collaborative implementation plan launched in July 2025 by UN Water to guide the operationalisation, localisation, and monitoring of the UN system-wide **strategy on water and sanitation (SWS)**. The EU continues to support the UN Special Envoy on Water.

The EU uses strategic partnerships and water diplomacy to promote integrated water resource management, the source-to-sea approach, the use of nature-based solutions, investment in sustainable water and sanitation for all, and innovation-driven policy reforms. In line with its commitments under the water action agenda, the EU-level objectives of the water resilience strategy and the Pact for the Future, the EU is targeting **access to an improved drinking water source and/or sanitation facility for at least 70 million individuals**. Under the global gateway strategy and by leveraging the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+), the EU contributes to protecting and restoring the global water cycle, building a water smart economy and ensuring water security for all. For example, Team Europe is providing over EUR 1.2 billion to enhance water governance, knowledge and investments in 18 major cross-border water basins in Africa and Central Asia.

In 2025 the EU developed phase III of the Bakheng water access programme in **Cambodia**, contributing to a treatment plant with a total cost of EUR 609 million, financed at over 80% by Team Europe (EU, EIB, AFD), that supplies clean water to the rapidly growing urban population of 2.3 million and industry in Phnom Penh. In **Malawi**, a new EUR 115 million EIB loan has been signed to help 4 out of the country's 5 water boards to improve their services, notably for the poorest segments of the population in rural areas.

The right to safe drinking water and sanitation is a central pillar of the EU's humanitarian action. **Humanitarian WASH** (water, sanitation and hygiene) needs are soaring more rapidly than available resources, with 3.5 billion people living without safely managed sanitation. In 2025, the EU allocated EUR 185 million to **enhance water, sanitation, and hygiene access for affected populations in crises** around the world. In Gaza and the West Bank, where the lack of access to water is an alarming concern, the EU allocated EUR 24 million to WASH services, over 10% of its humanitarian assistance to the crisis. Likewise, of a EUR 220 million urgent-needs allocation to Ukraine in 2025, EUR 23 million went to ensuring continued access to water and sanitation for persons in vulnerable situations.

A 2025 external evaluation of the EU's humanitarian WASH policy highlighted that WASH actions had been implemented in countries where needs were acute, and were context-specific, guided by thorough needs assessments and prioritising those in the most vulnerable circumstances, while mainstreaming gender, age and protection considerations. Through its Enhanced Response Capacity, the EU finances the WASH Insecurity Analysis (WIA) tool, an innovative data analysis framework helping to **identify where and why people are most at risk**, and supports the technical skills of WASH professionals to ensure quality, durability, accessibility and resilience of WASH services for persons in vulnerable situations.

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

In 2025, the global education crisis deepened, exacerbated by an escalating frequency of conflicts, protracted crisis and climate-induced disasters. 234 million children and adolescents remain in urgent need of educational support in zones of conflict and protracted crisis. Attacks on education continued to rise, with schools increasingly targeted in conflict zones, notably in the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe. Besides destroying

infrastructure, **these attacks severely disrupted learning continuity**, with a disproportionate impact on girls and children with disabilities. The gender gap in education persisted in several regions, driven by cultural barriers, poverty and state-imposed restrictions, threatening to undo decades of progress in gender equality.

Furthermore, 2025 witnessed **growing challenges regarding academic freedom and the autonomy of educational institutions**. In a context of global democratic backsliding and rising disinformation, education systems faced pressure to conform to authoritarian narratives, limiting critical thinking and civic engagement. The 'digital divide' also remained a significant barrier. While digital transformation offers opportunities for continuity of learning, the lack of equitable access to technology and connectivity continued to exclude the most vulnerable from quality education.

In 2025, the EU was on track to deliver on the ambition to dedicate at least 10% of its cooperation budget to education. Through bilateral cooperation around the world, the EU supported system-wide reforms, increasing focus on the recruitment and training of qualified teachers to address critical workforce shortages. The EU has remained the leading donor to the **Global Partnership for Education (GPE)**, upholding its commitments to Education Cannot Wait and to ensuring an optimal architecture for education.

Education and social inclusion in the Western Balkans and Türkiye

Under the Instrument for Pre-Accession III's 'EU4Social Inclusion' programme, the EU will continue through 2026 to support Roma children and youth education through the second phase of the EU's Regional Action for Roma Education (RARE), implemented by the Roma Education Fund in the Western Balkans and Türkiye.

The right to education is not suspended in times of crises and humanitarian emergencies. With its policy and programming on **education in emergencies** and protracted crises, the EU aims to minimise the impact of crises on children's learning. The EU considers education an integral part of lifesaving humanitarian interventions and continues to dedicate 10% of its initial humanitarian aid budget to support access to safe and quality learning for millions of children affected by violence, conflicts, displacement and natural hazards. In 2025, this translated into over EUR 180 million of support, providing formal and non-formal learning activities, protective learning environments, teaching and learning materials, training and mentoring of teachers, psychosocial support and lifesaving skills training (including health and hygiene awareness, mine risk education, conflict and disaster risk reduction activities, and personal resilience sessions), or school infrastructure rehabilitation and improvement in 45 countries worldwide.

Operationalising the Nexus: Ensuring Educational Continuity in eastern DRC

In the volatile context of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the EU successfully implemented the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus in 2025, specifically within the Ituri province, contributing to ensure that **the right to education remained uninterrupted for crisis-affected children**. To maximise impact, the European Commission coordinated closely with the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait in designing strategies for their actions in the area.

Sustainable and inclusive education for refugees and host communities in Jordan

The EU and Jordan continue to strengthen their commitment to inclusive and sustainable education. A EUR 36.6 million grant from the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis (EUTF 'Madad') has been allocated for the construction of seven new schools benefiting 5 733 students and enhancing local communities, implemented by the German Development Bank (KfW), in cooperation with the Jordanian Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Works and Housing. Four of these schools were inaugurated in May 2025, powered by solar energy and equipped with barrier-free and gender-sensitive infrastructure. 11.6% of the staff employed in the construction works were Syrian refugees, strengthening the community's ownership, cohesion and access to livelihood opportunities and contributing to accessible, inclusive, high-quality education for both Jordanian and refugee children, in line with the Jordan response plan for the Syria crisis. In total, with additional Team Europe funding from Germany, these new schools will serve almost 10 000 students across 152 classrooms and eight kindergarten classrooms, of which over 10% from the Syrian community and 50% girls, reinforcing the project's inclusive design.

Education support in Lebanon

The EU allocated EUR 110 million for 2024-2025 in support of the right to education in Lebanon for all children, including non-Lebanese, focusing on access for the most vulnerable, support for the functioning of public schools, inclusive education for children with learning difficulties and disabilities and alternative forms of learning for children who dropped out. This included support for Lebanon's child protection policy and the national action plan on prevention and response to child marriage.

CULTURAL RIGHTS

The EU continued to promote respect for **cultural rights** through EU statements in multilateral forums, public diplomacy and by promoting the preservation of cultural heritage. This commitment is rooted in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The EU's own motto, '**Unity in Diversity**', sends a strong message to protect everybody's cultural rights, including persons belonging to minorities and Indigenous Peoples.

Cultural diversity and artistic freedom remain central to the EU's work on culture and creative industries, cultural heritage and intercultural dialogue. Through its international cultural relations approach, guided by the 2016 Joint Communication 'Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations', the EU promotes culture as a fundamental component of human rights and a key pillar of good governance. Cultural relations play a vital role in building trust and fostering intercultural understanding, thereby strengthening people-to-people connections and supporting the investment priorities of the EU's global gateway strategy, as highlighted through the **Africa-Europe Partnerships for Culture** initiative with a EUR 30 million budget for 2025-2028.



A contemporary dance performance during the 'Focus 01 with the European Union: The Doors' exhibition, funded by the EU Delegation to Myanmar, showcased artistic expression as a platform to promote freedom of expression and dialogue on human rights in conflict.

Through its support for the **EU-UNESCO Expert Facility**, the EU continued to provide peer-to-peer cooperation to partner countries for the development of policies that strengthen cultural diversity. In 2025, 54 experts were made available through the facility.

EU delegations across the globe implement cultural diplomacy activities, showcasing the diversity of culture within the EU and supporting cultural diversity in EU partner countries. In 2025, the flagship **EU Film Festival** initiative was organised in 110 countries, with 550 screenings and an estimated 400 000 viewers. Human rights and diversity issues featured prominently in the programme. For example, *Primadonna*, a film dealing with the problem of violence against women and forced marriages in 1950s Italy; *The Man Without Guilt* about the use of asbestos in the construction industry, which led to the deaths of thousands of workers; *Maria's Silence*, which traces the life of an opponent of the Soviet regime; and *Je'vida* about the painful treatment inflicted on the Sámi minorities in Finland until the 1980s.

1.5 Supporting the rule of law and the fair administration of justice

Support to the Rule of Law in Jordan

In May 2025, the EU, in close partnership with the Public Security Directorate (PSD) of Jordan, inaugurated the Correction and Rehabilitation Centers Training and Development Institute with financial support from the 'Support to the Rule of Law in Jordan' budget support programme. Serving as a dedicated hub for training rule of law and correctional officers, the institute will also be a venue for equipping them with the required skills, knowledge, practical training and emotional intelligence to manage the complexities of modern correctional systems.

Institutional support to justice reforms remained a key priority for EU bilateral cooperation, through specific programmes in Angola, Bolivia, Guinea Bissau, Malawi, Myanmar, Pakistan, Rwanda, Timor-Leste and Zimbabwe. It can be part of wider support to good governance, as seen this year in Lesotho, The Gambia or Uganda. This is often implemented in partnership with EU Member States through a Team Europe Initiative on SDG 16 (governance, peace and security), for example in Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Honduras, Malawi, Nigeria, Somalia or São Tome and Principe. It can also be a key component of state-building actions in very fragile countries like South Sudan.

EU support focuses on 'people centred justice', which prioritises the issue of **access to justice** for local populations, for example by deploying **legal aid** mechanisms in countries like Bhutan, Burundi, Laos, Malawi or Tanzania, or supporting local 'village courts' in Bangladesh or Papua-New Guinea. In line with global gateway principles, EU programmes are increasingly looking at access to justice for populations working in or exposed to high-risk investment sectors such as the mining sector, for example in Zambia.

Many EU support programmes worked with other actors beyond the judiciary, such as the national human rights commission, as was done in Rwanda, or with customary institutions, ombudsperson institutions and other **alternative dispute resolution mechanisms**, for example in Sri Lanka. These represent a key tool to enhance access to justice.

Several dedicated projects looked at improving detention conditions for persons deprived of their liberty, including in Burundi, Cameroon, Comoros, Congo, Gabon, Lebanon, Liberia, Malawi, Morocco, Mauritania or Paraguay. In Côte d'Ivoire, the EU continued its longstanding cooperation with civil society and the government to improve the detention conditions of prisoners in a number of

detention centres, in line with the 'Mandela rules' adopted by the UN in 2015. These programmes look at the conditions of the most vulnerable groups, for instance IDPs in Haiti, vulnerable detainees



With support from the EU, the Legal Assistance Centre convened San community paralegals in Tsumkwe, Namibia, for an immersive empowerment training. The initiative focused on strengthening community-rooted justice systems by equipping San paralegals with practical legal frameworks, amplifying their voices, and building stronger peer networks to advance access to justice at grassroots level.

in Pakistan, or migrant children. They also pay attention to child protection systems, for instance in Chad, Morocco or Nigeria.

Another key aspect of many programmes relates to the professionalisation of key actors and the fight against corruption in the justice chain. The EU has been accompanying the recruitment and training of **justice staff** in Mozambique or the deployment of foreign judges to preside over high-level criminal justice cases in Lesotho or the Central African Republic. Cooperation with priority countries like Nigeria benefited from working arrangements with Eurojust. The most comprehensive programmes include a component on **juvenile justice**, such as in the Philippines or

Vietnam. **Twinning programmes** with experts from EU Member States were successfully undertaken with the judiciaries of the Dominican Republic, Mongolia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

The digital transformation of justice

On 20 November 2025, with the aim of accelerating digitalisation of justice in EU Member States by providing support as well as funding, the European Commission adopted the digital justice package. This includes the digital justice strategy (DigitalJustice@2030)⁹¹ and the European judicial training strategy 2025-2030⁹². These strategies acknowledge the need to mitigate potential risks to fundamental rights that are inherent in the use of new digital technologies, in particular AI systems. The digital justice strategy has an external dimension to extend standards, norms and tools to third countries, and to promote the use of secure international communications on criminal and civil matters. The judicial training strategy on

Following the play 'Prima facie', supported by the EU-funded programme ÍNTEGRA, the 'Judging with Gender Perspective' roundtable held in Maputo, Mozambique, fostered an important discussion on how gender stereotypes influence judicial decision making.



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- 91 https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/95918716-ce7d-401b-b6d5-e23effae5b36_en?filename=JUST_template_comingsoon_standard_4.pdf.
- 92 https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/1248005c-38c5-4f74-9417-997cc6ad34ad_en?filename=JUST_template_comingsoon_standard_5.pdf.

digitalisation aims to equip justice professionals within the EU and in candidate countries and potential candidates with enhanced skills, knowledge and awareness, including of fundamental rights concerns.

The EU's contribution to the modernisation of justice systems in its partner countries included significant components related to the **digitalisation of justice** in countries like Kenya and Kyrgyzstan. Adopting a human-rights based approach to this technical support has helped mitigate some of the risks, including to data security and privacy.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND COUNTERTERRORISM

In the December 2024 Council Conclusions on reinforcing external-internal connections in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, the EU reaffirmed its fundamental values and principles rooted in international law, in particular international human rights law and humanitarian law, stating that **the only sustainable response to terrorism and violent extremism is one based on democracy, the rule of law, transparency, accountability and gender-responsiveness**. Terrorist threats are diverse and geographically diffuse; they remain significant, complex and unpredictable, local or international, simple or sophisticated. Emerging technologies, increasingly aggressive terrorist propaganda online and politically motivated terrorism all pose new challenges.

In 2025, counterterrorism objectives continued to be misused by some governments to crack down on pluralism and dissent, including the suppression of human rights defenders and civil society organisations and the repression of freedom of expression and freedom of association. Restrictions on civic space related to regulatory and institutional practices of counterterrorism and P/CVE

(preventing and countering violent extremism) across regions have been documented⁹³. With a whole-of-society and human rights-based approach to the threat of terrorism and violent extremism, the EU sees a strong, essential role for civil society actors and other non-governmental organisations in ensuring effective prevention efforts. **Effective counterterrorism strategies strengthen civil society and do not weaken or target it.** The EU has raised the issue in some of its 2025 human rights dialogues with third countries.

Moreover, adherence to human rights is a standing item in the **EU's bilateral counterterrorism dialogues with partner countries**, with prevention efforts effectively grounded in the rule of law. Through the EU Global Facility on Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism, the EU also works on Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendation 8 with governments and civil society organisations. The EU offers technical cooperation to encourage partner countries to integrate human rights, gender equality and the rule of law into their counterterrorism policies and to develop evidence-based criminal justice systems. The EU's **gender-responsive approach** includes working with partners on raising the number of women in law enforcement and increasing attention to the role of women and girls in CT and P/CVE policies.

In October 2025, in the framework of the EU-funded 'STRIVE Juvenile' project and with the support of UNODC, the Government of Iraq launched a 'national roadmap to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of juvenile detainees previously associated with terrorist groups'. In Pakistan, an **EU-funded programme for preventing and countering terrorism** has contributed to strengthening the effectiveness of the justice system, enhancing support mechanisms for victims of terrorism, and supporting the creation of integrated networks to counter violent extremism, in close collaboration with the national authorities.

93 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a78520-report-special-rapporteur-promotion-and-protection-human-rights>.

The partnerships with civil society organisations across Pakistan, with locally driven P/CVE interventions reaching out to youth, educators and persons in vulnerable situations, stand out as one of the most impactful pillars of the programme.

The EU also promotes adherence to human rights in counterterrorism policies and measures at multilateral level, including with the UN counterterrorism compact, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), which the EU co-chairs with Egypt, and the Global Coalition against Da'esh. In September 2025, the GCTF endorsed the EU-led Brussels Memorandum on **Oversight and Accountability for Counterterrorism Operations**, which recommends 15 good practices towards measures that are transparent and grounded in the rule of law, compliant with international human rights and humanitarian law. The EU and its Human Rights in Counterterrorism Platform (CT PHARE) have begun developing a transregional oversight network to provide support to partners on the roles of national human rights institutions, civil society organisations, legislatures, and security institutions in oversight and accountability.

The EU engaged with the **UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism**, contributing on several topics in 2025⁹⁴. For the interactive dialogue during HRC58, the EU called on all states to cooperate with the mandate and accept requests for visits by the Special Rapporteur, as the only entity within the UN system mandated to report on counterterrorism from a human rights perspective exclusively. The EU also noted that engagement with and inclusion of civil society organisations is a crucial aspect

94 Including on protection of regional human rights organisations, the global counterterrorism strategy, the use of artificial intelligence and the definitions of terrorism, terrorist organisations and violent extremism.

of its policy to prevent and counter terrorism, enhancing the effectiveness, transparency and legitimacy of counterterrorism measures and contributing to enhanced security.



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In December 2025, the EU brought together key experts and stakeholders from regions including MENA, East and West Africa, and South and Southeast Asia in Brussels to mark the launch of the GCTF Brussels Memorandum.

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE

In 2025, the EU continued its efforts to support the global fight against impunity and ensure that perpetrators of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of aggression are held accountable for their actions. Against this background, the EU continued to provide **political, diplomatic and financial support to the ICC**, as well as mitigation measures in view of the threat of institutional sanctions against the Court. A statement from the High Representative in response to US sanctions against ICC judges and deputy prosecutors in August reiterated the ICC's role in holding perpetrators of the world's gravest crimes to account

and giving victims a voice. The EU issued diplomatic statements, démarches and outreach in support of the ICC and extended financial contributions to ensure its operational independence.

Throughout 2025, the EUSR for Human Rights underlined the EU's commitment to fighting impunity for the most serious crimes and its support for the ICC as a cornerstone of the international criminal justice architecture. EUSR Ollongren engaged with ICC principals and senior officials, reaffirmed the EU's political backing in high-level bilateral and public engagements, and worked closely with EU Member States and partners to **bolster the EU's position in support of the Court**. In view of the role of civil society in enabling the ICC's mandate, she maintained regular exchanges with organisations active in international criminal justice, including on the protection of civic space for documentation and cooperation.

The EU remained steadfast in **promoting the universality of the Rome Statute** of the ICC. Efforts included advocating for its ratification or accession through human rights dialogues, and incorporating clauses in agreements with non-EU countries encouraging them to ratify or accede to the Statute. Strengthening the Court's partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region to encourage more countries to join the Rome Statute was a key priority for the ICC in 2025, and EU support included an ongoing EUR 1 million annual contribution to the ICC Office of the Registrar.

The EU's effort to ensure that perpetrators of the most serious crimes under international law are held accountable includes reinforcing broader understanding of the Rome Statute, cooperation with the ICC, and national capacities in dealing with international crimes in countries related to situations before the ICC. In 2025 the EU provided EUR 5 million to the ICC Office of the Prosecutor to **enhance specialised investigative capacities** contributing

to the efficiency of investigations and prosecutions. This should enable the ICC to deliver agile, intelligence-led fugitive-tracking capabilities in Darfur (Sudan) and other situations.

In support of the ICC's **reparative justice framework**, in 2025 the EU committed EUR 5 million to support the ICC Trust Fund for Victims to implement the reparations orders issued by the ICC, an area of work not covered under the ICC's main budget under the Rome Statute. This support will benefit direct and indirect victims of the gravest crimes, including genocide, crimes against humanity, aggression and war crimes, by providing physical, psychological and material support.

The EU also provided support for the criminal justice systems of several countries including Ethiopia, The Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria and Rwanda. In 2025 the EU continued to support other **international criminal tribunals, ad hoc national tribunals and hybrid tribunals, as well as truth and reconciliation commissions and residual mechanisms**, to protect the rights of victims to justice and reparation. These included the Special Criminal Court in the Central African Republic, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, and the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, which is mandated to perform a number of essential functions previously carried out by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

Since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU has intensified cooperation between EU Member States and the ICC, including the ICC's formal participation in a dedicated Joint Investigation Team at Eurojust together with Ukraine, six EU Member States and Europol; involvement in the work of the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine (ICPA) at Eurojust; and co-chairing of the Dialogue Group on **Accountability for Ukraine**.

CLOSING THE ACCOUNTABILITY GAP, FIGHTING IMPUNITY AND SUPPORTING TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

The OHCHR, with its investigative mechanisms, constitutes a key partner for the EU. Regarding **the fight against impunity**, the European Commission provided EUR 3.5 million in support to OHCHR to enable rapid deployment of human rights monitoring and fact-finding missions from 2023-2025 to prevent or to respond to crises and to support investigative bodies established by the Human Rights Council and other UN bodies.

The **Global Initiative Against Impunity for International Crimes and Serious Human Rights Violations** continued to promote accountability with a focus on 28 country situations and 5 thematic priorities, increasing the agency and participation of survivors in formal and informal justice processes. It launched the public platform for knowledge management, 'Making Justice Work', and coordinated closely with international and grassroots organisations to enhance global and local capacities to deliver victim-centred, trauma-informed and gender-transformative justice.

In 2025, the EU continued its strong commitment to the **responsibility to protect (R2P) agenda**. At the UN General Assembly annual open debate on 'The responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity' in June, the EU highlighted the 20th anniversary of the 2005 World Summit. It recalled that R2P has helped to protect people across the world from unconscionable suffering and that R2P continues to be a key principle for national and international efforts to prevent atrocities. The EU has continued to fund the Global Centre on R2P to empower national civil society actors and raise awareness of atrocity-risk situations to relevant stakeholders, including through regular atrocity alert briefings. Together with the Global Centre, the EU co-hosted the 11th meeting of the Global Network of Focal Points for R2P in Brussels in May, bringing together senior government officials, human rights

defenders, EU and UN representatives and former and current UN Special Advisers on R2P to exchange on the multilateral atrocity prevention architecture. The EU committed further funds to support the Global Centre and continued to be an active member of the Group of Friends of R2P in Geneva and New York, which supports the R2P agenda through regular statements in relevant UN forums.

Regionally, the EU and the AU have cooperated on transitional justice both at political and operational level, linking the issue to the annual EU-AU human rights dialogue. In 2025, through the 'Initiative for Transitional Justice in Africa' (ITJA) project⁹⁵, the EU continued supporting the **implementation of the AU's transitional justice policy** by strengthening relevant AU bodies and providing technical assistance to AU Member States and regional economic communities (RECs). The initiative, implemented by a CSO consortium led by the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), is seeing a growing number of AU Member States addressing the AU Commission (AUC) for assistance in setting up national TJ processes. The project deploys African leaders and experts for mediation, negotiations, or to provide concrete technical support. Through the EU action, the AUC is providing technical assistance to Ethiopia, Lesotho, The Gambia and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). It has engaged in dialogue to extend support for DRC, CAR, South Sudan, Libya, SADC and ECOWAS, while Uganda's interest is being explored following a request from CSOs. The ITJA project also provides support to civil society and victims' group initiatives through subgrants: the second wave of six subgrantees began implementing their projects in 2025.

Other key TJ activities in Africa aim at creating a Continental Community of Practice that can be deployed, among others, via the African Transitional Justice Reference Group, which provides strategic advice to the AU and its Member States on the implementation of the AUTJP, or the African Women for Transitional

95 <https://www.ictj.org/initiative-for-transitional-justice-in-africa>.

Justice (AW4TJ). Together with research studies like the publication of the first volume of the study '**The State of Transitional Justice in Africa**'⁹⁶ in August and knowledge dissemination on emerging topics related to transitional justice, 2025 activities included the 5th edition of the AU-EU Experts' Seminar on Transitional Justice in June in Abuja, and the ninth African Transitional Justice Forum, held in September in Kinshasa.

EUSR for Human Rights Ollongren framed transitional justice as a political investment in sustainable peace and democratic resilience, supporting the EU's efforts to advance accountability and victim-centred approaches by engaging with partners and regional organisations. The EUSR worked with UN actors and international partners on accountability-related country situations, including through human rights dialogues like EU-AU where transitional justice and accountability featured prominently, and ensured that civil society perspectives and individual cases of concern continued to inform EU political messaging and follow-up.

The establishment of the **Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine** was formally endorsed on 9 May in Lviv, in the presence of High Representative Kallas and Commissioner McGrath, and a bilateral agreement on the establishment of the Special Tribunal was signed by President Zelenskyy and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Alain Berset on 25 June 2025. In October, the EU contributed EUR 10 million to support an Advance Team under the auspices of the Council of Europe to prepare the launch of the Special Tribunal. The EU also continued its financial support to the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression (ICPA) at Eurojust for preparing cases to be tried before the future Special Tribunal.

96 <https://www.csvr.org.za/the-state-of-transitional-justice-in-africa-volume-1-benchmarking-country-processes/>.

In October, on the basis of an EU-led consensus resolution⁹⁷, the UN Human Rights Council established an independent investigative mechanism (IIM-A) tasked with collecting and preserving evidence of serious human rights violations and international crimes in Afghanistan. The IIM is another step towards ending impunity, delivering justice for victims, and contributing to accountability for the perpetrators of human rights violations. To mark the 10th anniversary of the EU policy framework on transitional justice, the EU, in collaboration with the Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organisation (AHRDO), organised an exhibition at the EEAS between 3 and 21 November: **'The Afghan Memory Box Initiative'**. The memory boxes and body maps created by Afghan survivors are acts of remembrance and resistance that give voice to those who have endured conflict, repression and silence.

As regards **support to national authorities in their investigations and prosecutions of international crimes**, Eurojust and the Genocide Prosecution Network have served as a central hub for information and knowledge-sharing. Their EU-supported 'National Authorities Against Impunity' programme strengthened cooperation between CSOs documenting these crimes and national authorities both in the EU and in non-EU countries.

In 2025, Eurojust continued to provide operational and financial support to joint investigation teams (JITs), with submissions to Eurojust's **Core International Crimes Evidence Database (CICED)** by competent national authorities from EU Member States and countries with liaison prosecutors at Eurojust continuing to increase steadily. Some of these submissions relate to situations other than that of Ukraine.

In 2025, the EU actively participated in the negotiations on setting up a **Claims Commission for Ukraine** to review, assess and decide on eligible claims recorded in the Register of Damage, and determine

97 (A/HRC/60/L.9).

the amount due in each case. In December 2025 the European Commission signed the Convention establishing the International Claims Commission alongside 34 other delegations and announced up to EUR 1 million in support for preparatory steps.

In **Ethiopia**, the EU and EU Member States were active in coordinating their work to support transitional justice. EU-funded actions supported transitional justice processes at federal level, including assistance to the Ministry of Justice and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. It complemented support for the work implemented by the United Nations on demobilisation and reintegration, legal aid and the monitoring and reporting of human rights violations. Other actions focused on local authorities and civil society, including initiatives to assist victims, such as with mental health and psychosocial support or legal aid.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, the second phase of the programme supporting justice reforms focused on improving access to justice and the efficiency and independence of the judiciary system. It was implemented in partnership with the NGOs RCN Justice & Democratie, Avocats Sans Frontières and Trial International, complementing actions furthering police reforms. In parallel, supported by the Team Europe Democracy initiative, the EU delegation coordinated the various actions of the EU and its Member States in the field of transitional justice.

Support to transitional justice is often part of a wider support to countries undergoing **democratic transitions** like The Gambia and Guinea. Cooperation extended to reforms of the security sector and other governance structures.

Working with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on accountability

The EU supports the UN OHCHR to **strengthen the rule of law and accountability for human rights violations**. The support enabled the Human Rights Inquiries Branch to respond rapidly and effectively to human rights emergencies triggered by conflict and political crises in 2025, for instance by providing critical support to 12 HRC-mandated independent investigative bodies and facilitating the deployment of investigative expertise, including OHCHR fact-finding teams.

02. BUILDING RESILIENT, INCLUSIVE AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES

In 2025, democracy and human rights faced mounting global pressure⁹⁸. For the first time in two decades, autocracies outnumber democracies and 72% of the world's population now live under autocratic rule⁹⁹. Core democratic rights and principles have declined in a majority of countries over the past five years, with significant setbacks in political participation, representation and the rule of law, even in long-established democracies¹⁰⁰. Fundamental freedoms are increasingly restricted, civic space is shrinking, and threats to electoral integrity are growing. Disinformation, attacks on independent media and open disregard for international norms further weaken democratic governance and the rules-based international order. At the same time, democratic resilience still persists in some countries: in certain cases, 2025 has seen autocratisation halted or reversed, demonstrating that positive trajectories are still possible even amid widespread backsliding.

As the world's largest collective provider of democracy support, the EU deploys a comprehensive set of tools. These range from enlargement policy and political dialogues to election observation and targeted financial assistance, a contribution that has become even more critical in the global context of the 2025 cuts to USAID funding. The EU remains committed to tackling current challenges, working with partner countries and regional organisations to uphold shared standards for credible electoral processes, accountable institutions and fundamental freedoms. The EU also continues to stand with those on the front line – partner organisations,

98 The Global Democracy Score from the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2025 Democracy Index fell to its lowest level (5.17 at the end of 2024) in 20 years.

99 V-Dem Institute Democracy Report 2025: 25 Years of Autocratisation https://www.v-dem.net/documents/60/V-dem-dr__2025_lowres.pdf.

100 International IDEA Global State of Democracy 2025 report <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/2025-09/global-state-of-democracy-2025-democracy-on-the-move.pdf>.

independent media, civil society, human rights defenders, and especially women and young people – who play a vital role in protecting democratic values and principles.

The EU has stepped up efforts to enhance its action across internal and external policies, recognising that democratic resilience at home and abroad are increasingly interlinked. The EU's framework programme for research and innovation, **Horizon Europe, supports innovative research on 'Democracy and Governance', funding research projects on rule of law and trust, citizens' participation, fundamental rights and inclusive policies** with partners from EU Member States, associated countries¹⁰¹ and other third countries. The **European Democracy Shield**, adopted in November 2025, underscores the EU's strong commitment to enhancing democratic resilience both within the EU and beyond its borders, including in candidate countries, potential candidates and international partners. It is centred around three priorities: reinforcing situational awareness and supporting response capacity to safeguard the integrity of the information space; strengthening democratic institutions, free and fair elections and free and independent media; and boosting societal resilience and citizens' engagement. The European Democracy Shield refers to EU external actions to counter and prevent FIMI, enhance electoral integrity, including through election observation, and support independent and pluralistic media.

101 https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/social-sciences-and-humanities/research-and-innovation-funding-democracy-and-governance_en.

2.1 Enhancing democratic, accountable and transparent institutions

STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

In 2025, the EU-funded flagship INTER PARES¹⁰² programme remained at the core of EU parliamentary support. INTER PARES, implemented by International IDEA, applies a Team Europe approach aligned with the global gateway strategy, fostering peer-to-peer cooperation to bolster representative democracy and leveraging expertise from over 20 EU Member State parliaments through **peer exchanges with 27 partner countries**. In 2025, it launched new parliamentary capacity building partnerships with Indonesia, South Africa, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka, and continued to play a key role in coordinating parliamentary support to Ukraine. The Agora platform¹⁰³, an online portal dedicated to parliamentary development, expanded in 2025, bringing new resources supporting parliaments globally. The programme strengthened cross-regional partnerships in Africa, Asia and Europe by hosting events such as a High-Level Strategic Planning Workshop in Lusaka, or a workshop in Kyiv on reinforcing research services to support Ukraine's EU integration path.

INTER PARES produced innovative resources such as the Youth Parliamentary Academy toolkit and citizen engagement guides. Together, these position youth empowerment and inclusive participation at the heart of **parliamentary legitimacy**. INTER PARES also supported parliaments in becoming more accountable and proactive, thereby fostering democratic resilience.

¹⁰² <https://www.inter-pares.eu/en>.

¹⁰³ <https://www.agora-parl.org/>.



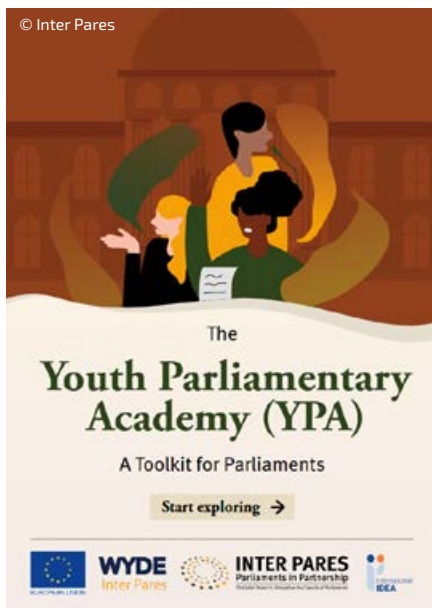
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Senior parliamentary leaders from across Africa, Europe, and North America gathered in Lusaka, Zambia, in October 2025 for a high-level Inter-Parliamentary Strategic Planning Workshop hosted by the National Assembly of Zambia in partnership with INTER PARES and the WYDE initiative. The event fostered candid peer exchange on the practical challenges of strategic planning, highlighting the importance of political buy-in, institutional ownership, and integrating strategy into everyday parliamentary work. In this photo, Rt. Hon. Nelly B. K. Mutti (right), Parliament Speaker at the National Assembly of Zambia, welcomes Jonathan Murphy, INTER PARES Head of Programme.

Building on INTER PARES' success, the EU, partnering with International IDEA, expanded **bilateral programmes to support parliamentary assemblies** in Panama, Bhutan, The Gambia, Libya and Malawi. The EU offered targeted parliamentary support to Chad, Jordan, Sierra Leone and Liberia in partnership with ECES, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, International IDEA and NIMD/UNDP. One of the EU's most strategic and comprehensive parliamentary support engagements was in Ukraine, in partnership with International IDEA and IFES.



In Kyiv, Ukraine, the Research Service of the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine and INTER PARES co-hosted a workshop on 'Enhancing Parliamentary Effectiveness: The Role of Research Services in European Integration' in September 2025. Marking the third anniversary of the Verkhovna Rada's Research Service, the event highlighted the importance of independent, evidence-based analysis in supporting lawmaking, oversight, and Ukraine's EU integration process. The workshop brought together parliamentary and European partners to reflect on strengthening research capacities and laid the foundation for a forthcoming analytical report on parliamentary research and EU integration, funded by the EU.



The Youth Parliamentary Academy (YPA) Toolkit is a practical guide developed by International IDEA under the INTER PARES programme. It provides parliaments with the information and materials required to organise their own YPA.

OBSERVING ELECTORAL PROCESSES TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES

In 2025, election observation continued to be an essential component of EU efforts to protect democracy, human rights and the rule of law worldwide. In an era of democratic backsliding marked by rising intimidation, disinformation, and challenges to electoral integrity, credible and transparent elections remain a core safeguard of democratic legitimacy, help build public confidence in electoral processes, and deter fraud and violence by providing independent scrutiny and accountability throughout the electoral cycle. During the year, the EU deployed 17 missions, including **seven election observation missions** (to Kosovo, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guyana, Honduras, Malawi and the Philippines), **three election expert missions** (to Kosovo, Iraq and Suriname) and **seven election follow-up missions** (to Colombia, Guatemala, Kenya, Lesotho, the Maldives, Nigeria and Timor-Leste). The EU also continued to cooperate with other international observation organisations and trusted citizen observer groups.

As in past years, EU election observation faced tense and hostile environments at times, with disinformation-fuelled campaigns contributing to the erosion of public trust in electoral processes.

From election observation to democratic reform: follow-up in Jordan

The EU is a longstanding supporter of Jordan's triple modernisation agenda, including efforts to advance more participatory, inclusive and accountable democratic processes and institutions. Building on the recommendations of the 2024 EU election observation mission in Jordan, the EU is implementing a EUR 10 million action to increase women's and youth participation in democratic processes at all levels, notably in view of the 2028 legislative elections.

Support is being provided to political parties, the electoral administration, the House of Representatives and the Ministry of Parliamentary and Political Affairs. The action will run at least until 2027, in preparation for the 2028 legislative elections.

Strengthening the participation of women and youth in election observation

WYDE (Women and Youth Democratic Engagement) is the EU's global umbrella programme incorporating a range of initiatives aimed at strengthening women and youth participation and leadership in democratic processes.

WYDE Women's Leadership made significant strides in empowering women leaders and fostering a stronger, more inclusive women's movement globally. WYDE Women's Leadership awarded over USD 981 000 in grants to eight women's rights organisations across four regions to advance the goals of the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Feminist Movements and Leadership.



Young people being trained on election observation during a training event by Gambia Participates as part of the EU-funded WYDE Civic Engagement – Cluster 2 project.

These organisations focus on empowering young women towards increased political participation, including those from internally displaced populations, women with disabilities, Indigenous and LBT (lesbian, bisexual and transgender) women, and Dalit women, among others.

The WYDE programme continues to foster **collaboration in the field of election observation between European and African organisations**. On the European side, this includes Democracy Reporting International (DRI) and Experts in Democracy Governance and Elections (EDGE); on the African side, partners include Gambia Participates, YIAGA Africa (Nigeria), the Network for Election Watch (Sierra Leone), the Liberia Election Observer Network, and the Centre for Democratic Development (Ghana). These organisations pooled financial resources and expertise to build a peer-to-peer partnership



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At the launch of the Global Youth Participation Index (GYPI), a member of the GYPI youth panel exchanged with dedicated EU programme manager Jean Costedoat-Miossec about the importance of including young people in decision making. The GYPI is part of the WYDE Civic Engagement project and aims to fill critical gaps in global data on youth political participation by fostering youth-led research.

focused on sharing best practices in domestic election observation, culminating in the joint development of an innovative e-learning course to increase youth participation.

PROVIDING ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE IN PARTNER COUNTRIES TO STRENGTHEN ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

In 2025, the EU continued to play a leading role in electoral assistance globally, by **supporting credible, inclusive, accessible and transparent electoral processes**, particularly in countries facing political transition or consolidation challenges. The EU's global support this year, implemented with trusted partners including UNDP, ECES, International IDEA and the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), focused on Africa. It supported electoral management bodies, capacity building for civil society and media, conflict prevention and inclusive participation, often in fragile or post-coup contexts.

Promoting election integrity in the CELAC region

In 2025 the EU deployed electoral observation missions (EOMs) to four countries: Ecuador, Bolivia, Guyana and Honduras. The global trend towards increased political polarisation, disinformation and narratives of electoral fraud has not spared the region. The EU EOMs deployed in 2025 provided additional electoral guarantees that helped to increase citizens' trust in electoral processes. For instance, in Ecuador the EU EOM helped to dispel allegations of widespread electoral fraud made by the two main candidates, while in Bolivia the mission helped increase trust in the rapid results transmission system that had been a major source of controversy in previous polls.

In the **Eastern Partnership**, the EU supported independent election management bodies through the regional Pro-Elect project, implemented by the Transatlantic Foundation and Equal Rights and Independent Media, which enhanced civic participation and oversight through activities aligned with national electoral calendars.

Strengthening electoral integrity and civil society oversight in Moldova

In Moldova the Pro-Elect programme strengthened civil society's capacity for independent election observation across the electoral cycle notably through citizen workshops targeting youth, women and linguistic minorities to improve capacities for electoral monitoring and observation of irregularities. The EU also supported Promo-Lex to monitor the 2025 parliamentary elections, deploying 230 short-term observers nationwide on election day. EU support addressed strategic communication and countered disinformation ahead of the elections, with local CSOs carrying out door-to-door outreach and voter awareness campaigns.

In parallel, the 'Shielding Democracy: Strengthening Moldova's Electoral Integrity through Enhancing Capacity and Resilience' project reinforced the Central Electoral Commission's capacity to manage electoral risks and counter malign interference, including cyber threats, disinformation, foreign information manipulation and interference, and social media campaign interference.

In **Ukraine**, the EU prioritised protecting electoral reform and democratic progress amid Russia's ongoing war of aggression. EU-funded projects focused on enhancing transparency, strengthening public trust and advancing electoral education to

preserve democratic gains. By reinforcing citizen participation, these initiatives aim to uphold the integrity of Ukraine's electoral system under extraordinary conditions.

In the **Western Balkans**, the EU signed a new collaboration with OSCE/ODIHR, under the third iteration of the 'Enhancing Electoral Reforms in the Western Balkans' project. It aims to improve the conduct of elections across the six Western Balkans beneficiaries and to further align electoral processes with international obligations, standards and good practice.

'Day of Dialogue' in Damascus

On 15 November 2025, the EU held its 'Day of Dialogue' event in Syria for the first time, signalling a major step toward increased local ownership, participation and accountability from the Syrian transitional authorities and civil society, who co-organised the event together with international partners. The event allowed for open discussion in the post-Assad era. It emphasised the crucial work of Syrian civil society and created a safe space to address highly sensitive issues such as enforced disappearances, sectarian violence, discrimination against persons belonging to minorities and violence against women, thus fostering accountability networks and supporting human rights-centred conflict resolution. Participation was broad and inclusive, with over 300 representatives of Syrian civil society from diverse ethnic, religious and regional backgrounds, including strong representation from Kurdish CSOs and organisations from outside Damascus. The event is expected to influence policy development by creating a structured mechanism for CSOs to contribute to the transition agenda, guide international assistance and inform future reconstruction policy.

In the **MENA** region, the EU provided targeted electoral assistance in Lebanon to strengthen electoral management and promote inclusive participation in a fragile political context. Through the EUR 4.5 million **Lebanese electoral assistance programme (LEAP III)**, implemented by UNDP, the EU supports the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, election management bodies and Parliament to organise high-quality elections. The programme strengthens coordination with civil society on advocacy, accessibility, youth and women's representation, and media monitoring, while promoting gender mainstreaming and advocating for a gender quota in electoral legislation. The EU also supports the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), which aims to advance realistic electoral reform measures and reinforce civil society oversight.

Support to the pan-African Electoral Capacities initiative

The EU assisted the AU and regional economic communities (RECs) in election observation through the initiative on 'Harmonisation of pan-African Electoral Capacities'. This strengthened the capacities of continental, regional and national electoral management bodies and enhanced the domestic observation capabilities of CSOs. Within this initiative, in 2025 the EU supported **AU and REC election observation and high-level preventive diplomacy missions** in Cameroon, Tanzania, Malawi, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea Bissau, recognising their potential to prevent pre-electoral conflicts. Furthermore, two electoral integrity summits¹⁰⁴ were held, contributing to the adoption of an African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) resolution on strengthening electoral integrity in Africa¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁴ <https://ahead.africa/en/second-electoral-integrity-summit/>.

¹⁰⁵ <https://achpr.au.int/en/adopted-resolutions/648-achprres648-lxxxv-2025>.

In **Africa**, where several countries experienced prolonged or military-led transitions, EU supported pathways back to constitutional order through technical electoral preparations, legal and constitutional expertise, and strengthened civil society participation in national dialogues, consultations and oversight mechanisms. In 2025, targeted electoral support included capacity building for electoral management bodies in Ethiopia and strengthened democratic governance efforts in Zambia and Madagascar. In Sierra Leone and The Gambia, EU-backed initiatives reinforced citizen engagement and conflict mitigation.

Focus on the EU EOM in Bolivia: enhancing trust in elections at a political crossroads

The inauguration of Rodrigo Paz as Bolivia's president in November 2025 marked the end of nearly two decades of single-party dominance. He assumed office after an unprecedented second-round election held in a context of widespread mistrust in public institutions, including the electoral authorities. At the invitation of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, the EU EOM observed the entire electoral process and concluded that the elections were well organised and competitive. Bolivian civil society enhanced the transparency of the process, with national observers operating without restrictions. The EOM strengthened public trust in the elections, and its recommendations will support the authorities in improving the quality of future electoral processes.

Enhancing impact: collaborative democracy support with Team Europe Democracy

Team Europe Democracy (TED) brings together 14 EU Member States to promote and protect democracy globally through a coordinated and strategic European response to growing challenges to universal democratic principles and values.

In 2025 TED achieved substantial results. Under its research pillar, the initiative supported the **collection and publication of widely used data on democracy**, including the 2025 Global State of Democracy report¹⁰⁶, the 2025 World Press Freedom Index¹⁰⁷ and the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) 2025 annual report on democracy in the world¹⁰⁸. The initiative supported further research including V-Dem policy briefs¹⁰⁹, IDEA report on artificial intelligence for electoral management¹¹⁰, the 2024 European Democracy Support Annual Review¹¹¹ and other publications¹¹² produced by the European Democracy Hub.

Through its network of over 400 practitioners, TED continues to play a crucial role in facilitating the exchange of experience among European actors and in enhancing the effectiveness of EU democracy support, with an increasing focus on global gateway-related activities. In 2025, TED organised webinars on **anti-corruption, land rights disputes, information integrity and the fight against disinformation**.

TED expertise also contributed to **visible improvements in democratic governance** across partner countries, including Guatemala, the Central African Republic, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia,

106 <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/global-state-of-democracy-2025-democracy-on-the-move>.

107 <https://rsf.org/en/world-press-freedom-index-2025-over-half-worlds-population-red-zones>.

108 <https://v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports/>.

109 <https://v-dem.net/pb.html>.

110 <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/artificial-intelligence-electoral-management>.

111 <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/01/european-democracy-support-annual-review-2024?lang=en¢er=europe>.

112 <https://europeandemocracyhub.epd.eu/publications/>.

Malawi, Kyrgyzstan, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Bangladesh. In the Central African Republic, TED analysed the needs and resources of the Special Criminal Court to help coordinate a Team Europe response. In Guatemala, TED developed a roadmap for the implementation of EU election observation mission recommendations, and strengthening civil society engagement in the justice sector and open government reforms. In Kyrgyzstan, EU supported criminal justice reform and the digitalisation of justice, recognising their potential contribution to anti-corruption efforts.

STRENGTHENING THE RULE OF LAW AND ANTI-CORRUPTION EFFORTS

The rule of law is cornerstone of democracy. **Anti-corruption** is an integral part of this framework, as corruption undermines equality before the law, weakens accountability and allows public authority to be captured by private interests, thereby eroding democratic legitimacy and public trust. Through financial assistance across the enlargement and neighbourhood regions, the EU continued to back reforms promoting rule of law, reconciliation and anti-corruption efforts.

In the Western Balkans, EU supported advancing reconciliation and combating impunity by **strengthening judicial cooperation and the prosecution of war crimes**. In 2025, with EU support, the UN International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals and UNDP facilitated peer-to-peer exchanges and regional conferences for war crimes prosecutors and judges, supporting cross-border case transfers and judicial cooperation. Through a joint action with the OSCE/ODIHR, the EU supported democratic institutions in Eastern Partnership countries to become more inclusive, accountable and transparent. The Commission's 2025 Rule of Law Report again

included Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, supporting them to sustain efforts on the rule of law throughout their accession path.

EU and Council of Europe partnership

In 2025, the EU continued its partnership with the **Council of Europe** via several programmes. The Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye, for example, supported reforms towards efficiency and accessibility of justice, non-discrimination and the rights of persons belonging to minorities, countering corruption and financial crime, freedom of expression and the media. Between 2023 and 2025, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe issued 27 opinions that were requested by national authorities, channelled through the Expertise Coordination Mechanism.

Since 2014, the Partnership for Good Governance has supported the implementation of the Eastern Partnership countries' domestic reforms in the fields of the judiciary, countering economic crime and combating discrimination and violence against women.

The South VI 'Strengthening Euro-Mediterranean legal space for shared prosperity and human security' programme, a joint initiative between the European Union and the Council of Europe launched in 2025, contributes to progressively extending the common legal space between Europe and the southern Mediterranean region based on international human rights and rule of law standards.

In the area of anti-corruption, the EU completed the executive summary of its first implementation review cycle under the **UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC)**. Conducted by Czechia and Niue with support from the UNODC, the review looked at the chapters on 'criminalisation' and 'international cooperation', and highlighted EU-level actions to comply with its obligations. The European Commission acted as focal point for this review. At the 11th Conference of States Parties to UNCAC in Doha in December, the EU delivered four statements¹¹³ reaffirming its strong commitment to the Convention, its own efforts in preventing and combating corruption, UNODC's work, and continued technical assistance to partner countries.

Anti-corruption was also a central focus of the **Open Government Partnership (OGP) Summit** held in October in Vitoria, Spain. An active OGP contributor, the EU supported the co-creation and implementation of action plans with governments and civil society in countries including Indonesia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Colombia, Honduras and the Philippines. It also supported the Open Government Challenges Awards, which mobilised over 160 commitments across areas such as anti-corruption, civic space, digital governance, fiscal openness, justice and climate.

Through its cooperation portfolio, the European Commission supported **public sector integrity** through budget support programmes reinforcing accountability and transparency, with 2025 disbursements linked to progress in public financial management. Additional activities included support to legal and institutional reforms, justice and security sector capacity building, and the creation or strengthening of specialised anti-corruption bodies. The EU contributed to Nigeria's removal from the FATF list of jurisdictions under increased monitoring.

113 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/vienna-international-organisations/eu-statement-agenda-item-3-technical-assistance_en?s=66.

The EU also continued to support **independent oversight actors**, including civil society organisations such as Transparency International, independent media, whistle-blowers, human rights defenders, supreme audit institutions and parliaments in the fight against corruption. 'Twinning' and 'TAIEX' modalities in partnership with EU Member States help improve the functioning and transparency of the public sector. The EU promoted peer-to-peer institutional cooperation in the EU neighbourhood and beyond, for example including support to Namibia's national anti-corruption framework and Zambia's Anti-Corruption Commission.

Finally, **addressing illicit financial flows** remained a priority in 2025. The EU strengthened cooperation on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism, including through a Team Europe Initiative with Finland, France, Germany and Sweden to support African partners in tackling illicit financial flows and transnational organised crime.

2.2 Promoting responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making

Inclusive and representative decision-making strengthens democratic resilience by fostering participation, accountability and public trust. When citizens see their interests reflected in institutions, democracies are better able to resist authoritarian pressures, reduce polarisation and address grievances before they are exploited. Civic education supports this by helping people engage critically and constructively in public life.

Under the Global Europe thematic programme on human rights and democracy, the EU supported projects promoting civic education and democratic participation in a wide range of countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Cambodia, Colombia, Liberia, Zambia, Namibia, Guatemala, Venezuela, Sri Lanka, Jamaica, Iraq and Kyrgyzstan.

These initiatives aimed to strengthen the capacity of young people and civil society organisations – particularly women-led and grassroots CSOs – to **foster inclusive democratic participation and contribute to sustainable civic engagement**. In parallel, the EU promoted youth political participation through dedicated actions to strengthen dialogue with youth constituencies, notably in Nepal and Madagascar.



Young leaders from Kenya during a Democracy School training, implemented by the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) with EU support.

EU democracy support places strong emphasis on empowering civil society. By supporting spaces for dialogue, participation and oversight, particularly in fragile and post-conflict environments, the EU helps strengthen accountability networks between citizens, authorities and international partners. These efforts further aim to ensure that **transition processes are informed by local voices**, grounded in human rights and resilient to renewed instability.



The 2025 edition of the National Public Speaking Contest in Costa Rica promoted student participation and critical thinking about the history and rights of people of African descent, strengthening oral expression as a tool for active citizenship.

Empowering Ecuadorian Youth in Open Government

A notable success under the WYDE programme and the EU's human rights and democracy action plan, closely aligned with the Participate! pillar of the youth action plan (YAP) 2022-2027, was the promotion of youth participation in Ecuador's Open Government Partnership (OGP) process. This pillar bridges the two EU action plans by emphasising equal, meaningful and sustained youth participation in public and political life.

In partnership with Fundación Datalat, WYDE launched the Youth Ambassadors for Open Government initiative in July 2025. The programme **trained 29 young ambassadors from 15 provinces to engage directly with public institutions**, including the Presidency's Open Government Directorate.

Through national roundtables and online consultations, participants developed more than 60 open government proposals, which were consolidated into two unified youth priorities for inclusion in Ecuador's third national action plan. The initiative reached thousands of young people nationwide, increasing awareness and visibility of open governance at a time of political and social challenges.

Supporting pluralistic party systems through political foundations

At the European level, the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP) promotes democratic principles and political pluralism across ideological lines, in Europe and beyond. Under the WYDE programme and in partnership with ENoP, the EU supported a project on the **inclusion and representation of women and youth in political parties in Sub-Saharan Africa**. Active in 2025 in Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, the project facilitated policy dialogue, advocacy, mentorship, and networking between political actors and institutions, adapting its activities in challenging electoral contexts, including Tanzania.

In Kenya, WYDE supported institutional innovation initiated by the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties, including the establishment of an African Association of Political Parties Regulatory Authorities and the launch of an East African Regional Women's Caucus to promote mentorship, coordination and cross-border advocacy. Also in Kenya, the EU supported the scaling up of the reality TV show *Ms President*, a locally driven media initiative promoting women's political leadership. In 2025, the programme challenged gender stereotypes and inspired public debate, with several former participants moving into political and leadership roles.

Boosting Youth Voices in Colombia's Innovative Municipal Youth Councils

In Colombia, the EU-funded flagship WYDE programme partnered with local organisations to energise the 19 October second elections for **Municipal and Local Youth Councils – one of the world's most unique permanent youth participation structures**. Building on lessons from challenges faced in 2021 (low turnout, information gaps, rural/youngest voter neglect), the young professionals of WYDE partner European Partnership for Democracy enthusiastically supported two game-changing initiatives. Fundación Colombia 2050's Candidateados platform showcased over 45 000 candidates' profiles and proposals, attracting more than 1 million views and earning official praise as the country's top electoral tool for these elections. Civix Colombia delivered training to over 80 teachers and 160 young candidates, especially in rural areas and among 14-17-year-olds, sparking real enthusiasm for informed participation. The result was a remarkable step forward: turnout climbed from 10.42% to 12.82%, and blank or invalid votes plunged from over 20% to just 2% – proof that targeted, collaborative support truly empowers youth and strengthens democratic vibrancy.

2.3 Supporting independent and pluralistic media, access to information and the fight against disinformation

The EU supports media freedom and pluralism as essential to democracy, social cohesion and human rights, adapting its approach to digital and AI-related challenges while remaining rooted in local contexts. Overall, the EU has stepped up efforts to foster better coordination, both internally and with a wide range of stakeholders, to enhance the quality and impact of its actions to support media

freedom and pluralism. The TED initiative has played a key role, with the creation in 2025 of a dedicated **working group on information integrity** bringing together the EU, EU Member States, media development organisations, relevant international organisations and other stakeholders.

The EU actively supports independent and pluralistic media across the world, promoting access to reliable information and strengthening resilience against disinformation. Through policy dialogue, financial support and partnerships with media actors and civil society organisations, in 2025 the EU has continued to promote **initiatives to safeguard freedom of expression and foster informed and democratic societies**.

In 2025, two projects to protect independent media under the Global Europe thematic programme on human rights and democracy continued to deliver holistic support to media outlets, individual journalists and other media actors with measures that include core funding, strengthening financial viability, media literacy, peer-to-peer learning, consolidation of skills and advocacy for a more enabling environment.

The EU promotes **media freedom and pluralism in the MENA** region by supporting the capacity and sustainability of independent media outlets and facilitating access to reliable information. Through the implementation of regional programmes like 'Bousolah' and 'Core Support to Independent Media in the Southern Neighbourhood', in addition to in-country initiatives, the EU encourages constructive journalism, supports alternative media, fact-checking and engaging in policy dialogue, and develops networking mechanisms that are essential for countering disinformation and hate speech.

In **South-East Asia**, the 'Indo-Pacific Media Resilience (IPMR)' programme implemented by Internews has worked with local newsrooms in Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand to support media freedom and independent journalism.

This includes capacity-building training, mentorships, regional meetings and media business sustainability bootcamps, ensuring that local media capacities are strengthened and able to counter FIMI and disinformation, while fostering ethical reporting standards that uphold accountability and public trust.



Media freedom and fact-based, professional journalism are crucial safeguards for accountability, public trust, and long-term stability. In Libya, the EU supports networks of journalists through capacity building and stands for a safe, enabling reporting environment.

In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, through bilateral and regional actions, the EU has continued to address disinformation and FIMI, promoting democracy and public trust in institutions, and enhancing the stability and security of partners in the region. This included strengthening resilience against information manipulation by identifying key disinformation narratives, actors and tactics, promoting media literacy and supporting fact-checking networks, multi-stakeholder dialogues and advocacy efforts to pre-empt, detect and debunk disinformation, as well as to strengthen the information environment.

In November 2025, the Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU hosted the Copenhagen Conference on Information Integrity, with support from the EU and co-hosted by UNDP. Policy makers, civil society, independent media, and tech companies discussed **alternative platforms and solutions to counter threats to information integrity and strengthen democratic resilience**. As part of the conference, International Media Support released a series of Solution Papers¹¹⁴ presenting practical and forward-looking responses to key threats to information integrity.

The conference drew upon the work conducted under the Digital Democracy Initiative, a flagship partnership between Denmark, the EU, and Norway to reinforce the digital skills and protection of civil society, particularly in countries undergoing democratic regression and where civic space is under pressure. Support delivered under the Digital Democracy Initiative includes actions to counter technology-facilitated gender-based violence in Latin America, reinforce youth civic engagement in the digital sphere in Sahel countries, strengthen the protection of Indigenous civil society actors combating environmental violations, provide emergency support to civil society actors and journalists facing digital threats, or advocate at global level against internet shutdowns. On the increasingly concerning issue of **internet shutdowns**, the V-Dem Institute issued a policy paper¹¹⁵ with recommendations to donors under the EU's Team Europe Democracy initiative.

114 <https://www.mediasupport.org/in-depth/information-integrity-solutions-papers/>.

115 https://v-dem.net/media/publications/PB_40.pdf.

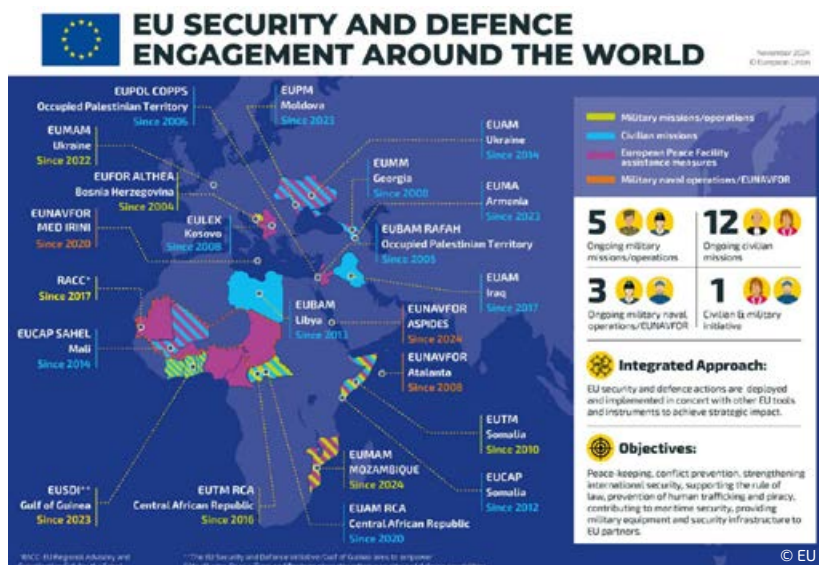
The European Endowment for Democracy: flexible and demand-driven support for democracy actors in uncertain times and challenging contexts.

Since 2013, the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) supports democracy actors, activists and independent media in the European Neighbourhood and beyond, complementing EU and Member States' democracy support programmes. EED responded quickly to the impact of USAID's global funding cuts in early 2025. With double the number of grant applications, EED **rapidly mobilised EU support to provide fast lifeline funding to the most jeopardised actors** and to put in place a safety net for independent journalists as a short-term emergency support initiative.

In Syria, EED used EU rapid response support to **seize the momentum of the democratic opening** in 2025, including urgent support to pro-democracy actors. EED continued to contribute to the EU's enlargement agenda by bolstering media freedom and civil society's resilience in countries such as Moldova and across the Western Balkans region. In Ukraine, EED supported civil society resilience amid Russian aggression, and safeguarded democracy against the undermining of anti-corruption institutions from within. In the Western Balkans, the EU continued to enhance **media pluralism and resilience** through projects strengthening fact-checking efforts, combating harmful narratives, promoting ethical journalism and ensuring media sustainability to reduce reliance on political or economic interests.

2.4 Reinforcing a human rights and participative approach to conflict prevention and crisis resolution

Under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the EU takes a leading role in peacekeeping operations, conflict prevention and the strengthening of international security, as an integral part of the **EU's comprehensive approach towards crisis management**, drawing on civilian and military assets. Currently, some 5 000 military personnel and 1900 civilian personnel are deployed around the world, participating in 21 ongoing EU CSDP missions and operations. This includes 12 civilian, eight military and one civilian-military security and defence initiative, in Europe, Africa and the Middle East.



Civilian CSDP missions promote stability and security and build resilience in fragile environments. The missions carry out a broad range of activities including monitoring, border security and supporting the reforms of the police, criminal and justice systems, with a strong focus on human rights and the rule of law.

Monitoring activities of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) Georgia.



In 2025, **human rights** due diligence mechanisms continued to be implemented in most of the civilian CSDP missions as part of their risk management process. This is particularly relevant as missions operate in challenging operational contexts. Human rights mainstreaming is a standard practice in the missions, both in their internal and external activities. The following examples of engagement reflect the EU's comprehensive approach to crisis management, leveraging both civilian and military assets to foster stability and uphold human rights and participative approaches in conflict prevention and crisis resolution, even in challenging global contexts.

Working session between the EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) Iraq and the Head of the Human Rights Directorate of the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MoI).



EUCAP Sahel Mali

EUCAP Sahel Mali has been a key and trusted partner in Mali's security sector reform for over 10 years, offering strategic guidance, enhancing the capabilities of the Internal Security Forces and contributing to infrastructure initiatives that foster security and uphold the rule of law. In 2025, the mission expanded its support to the Brigade for the Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings to include renovating housing facilities for victims of human trafficking and setting up identification chambers that allow witnesses to anonymously identify perpetrators. These efforts restored dignity to survivors, fostering increased confidence in cooperating with investigators. Coordination between the Brigade and the Border Police strengthened the prevention of cross-border crime.

EUCAP Sahel Mali completed the Maison Justice in Mopti in central Mali, which comprises law courts, equipped offices, training halls and modern security installations. This institution substantially enhanced access to justice for the population of the region, while training improved the judiciary's ability to address matters pertaining to human rights.



The Maison Justice in Mopti, inaugurated on 19 June 2025.

EUBAM Libya

2025 marked the eighth mandate of EUBAM Libya, placing a strong emphasis on human rights mainstreaming across its work with Libyan authorities. As a civilian, non-executive EU CSDP mission, EUBAM provides technical advice, capacity building and specialised training to Libyan law enforcement and border management agencies, anchored in respect for international human rights standards. Every project implemented by the mission must be accompanied by a human rights due diligence assessment.

EUBAM Libya collaborated with international partners, such as IOM and ICMPD (migration), UNDP (women leadership) or UNICEF (child protection). From March 2025, EUBAM cooperated on a campaign with the Women's Affairs and Human Rights Office within the Ministry of the Interior to recruit more women into security forces. Strengthening maritime law enforcement is one of the central pillars of EUBAM's human rights efforts. In April 2025, in partnership with the Italian Coast Guard, the mission organised a comprehensive training course for Libyan Coast Guard officers. The curriculum focused on human rights, medical assistance to persons in distress and international maritime best practices, to align Libyan search and rescue operations with globally accepted standards. EUBAM Libya also helped draw up the national search and rescue plan with the Libyan Coast Guard. EUBAM facilitated genetics, toxicology and anthropology training in Rome for Libyan forensic experts, improving technical capabilities for rights-oriented criminal investigations.

EUAM Ukraine

The European Union Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine) continued in 2025 to support Ukrainian authorities in line with international and EU human rights standards. It advised on the implementation of the overarching strategic plan for the reform of the law enforcement sector for

2023-2027 and its action plan, including embedding safeguards for persons in vulnerable situations into all law enforcement and prosecution practices.

Ukraine is overhauling its legal framework on international crimes following its ratification of the Rome Statute and accession to the ICC on 1 January 2025. The Office of the Prosecutor General (OPG) has established a working group with national stakeholders and international partners, including EUAM Ukraine, to align domestic law and practice with the Rome Statute. The Parliament of Ukraine has adopted several draft laws on criminal liability for international crimes and amendments to the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure. EUAM Ukraine advised on legislative alignment, facilitating interinstitutional coordination between the OPG, judiciary and law enforcement bodies, and providing specialised training.

The mission also supported the Parliament through legal opinions on the need to effectively protect personal freedom and promote human rights. Throughout 2025, EUAM Ukraine deepened cooperation with oversight institutions, specifically the Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights (the Ombudsman), helping to strengthen its **oversight capacity**, particularly for regional representatives in liberated and adjacent territories.

EUAM Ukraine supported legislative amendments on criminal liability for international crimes, facilitating interinstitutional cooperation, offering specialised training on the **rights of victims of international crimes**. It also supported in assisting victims of international and other serious crimes. As the Coordination Centre for Victims and Witnesses of the OPG expanded its operations and set up regional units in nine regions, the mission provided capacity building and promoted greater coordination among law enforcement agencies. In October 2025, the mission hosted a coordination workshop for the Coordination Centre and the Security Service of Ukraine (SSU).

Together with the Coordination Centre, EUAM Ukraine organised training of trainers on victim-centred approaches in international crimes cases leading to nationwide roll-out.

EUAM Ukraine, together with the NPU, the Government of the Netherlands, the Dutch National Police and the ARQ National Psychotrauma Centre, implemented 'Blue Haven for Ukraine', a network of safe, stigma-free spaces for law enforcement officers, veterans and their families to access confidential **mental health and psychosocial support** in the context of Russia's full-scale war, including centres in Lviv, Rivne and Vinnytsia, with Kyiv to follow. Through this support, EUAM Ukraine is helping to strengthen the resilience and wellbeing of Ukraine's law enforcement community.



As one of the implementing entities of the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group (ACA), EUAM Ukraine continued to support the Office of the Prosecutor General (OPG) and other law-enforcement bodies on the investigation and prosecution of war crimes and other international crimes. Pictured is Claudio Pala, Deputy Lead Coordinator of ACA and Head of EUAM Ukraine's International Crimes Component.

Finally, EUAM Ukraine's Mobile Unit advanced **human rights-based policing and justice** services across eastern and northern Ukraine, despite operating in areas heavily affected by the full-scale invasion, supporting police, prosecutors, social services and local authorities on the protection of civilians, victims and persons in vulnerable

situations. This aimed to ensure that European standards, survivor-centred approaches and rule of law principles remain central to local policing and justice services. The Unit supported regional prosecutors and investigators from Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Luhansk and Zaporizhia through specialised workshops on CRSV, focusing on victim-centred approaches.

EUPOL COPPS Palestine

In a persistently complex situation, progress was achieved in several areas in 2025 with assistance from EU Mission for the Support of Palestinian Police and Rule of Law (EUPOL COPPS). The Ministry of Justice activated an online legislative platform, for the public and institutions to review and provide feedback on draft laws, drafted an implementation plan for the recommendations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and advanced an electronic monitoring and inspection system for correction and rehabilitation centres.

In a significant step towards advancing the **rights of children in conflict with the law**, four Palestinian institutions (the Public Prosecution, the Palestinian Bar Association, the Ministry of Social Development and the Palestinian Civil Police) signed a memorandum of understanding establishing a unified framework to guarantee **early legal representation and social assistance for children during the initial stages of legal proceedings**, with support from EUPOL COPPS and the joint programme of UNDP, UNWOMEN, and UNICEF 'Sawasya'. This grounded justice reform efforts in Palestine in national law aligning with international human rights obligations. As a result, in November 2025, for the first time in Palestine, early legal representation at the police stage was granted to a juvenile suspect at Nablus Family & Juvenile Protection Department.

EUPOL COPPS commemorated the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 with a round table dialogue on the **women, peace and security agenda**. The Palestinian National Committee of UNSCR 1325

and the Advisory Committee for Gender Units in Security Forces shared experiences and discussed the four pillars of UNSCR 1325: participation, protection, prevention and relief & recovery. EUPOL COPPS conducted workshops in 2025, including on gender-based violence, and a review of regulations governing Palestinian Authority Security Forces, strengthening cooperation across civil society and security institutions. Others addressed Palestine's cybercrime legislation to better align it with constitutional principles and international human rights standards.



Roundtable dialogue on 25 years of UN Resolution 1325 held in Ramallah in October 2025.

03. PROMOTING A GLOBAL SYSTEM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

Multilateralism is an exceptionally effective way to manage global relations. The EU's own development can attest to its mutual benefits. In 2025, growing challenges continued to strain the multilateral system and its structures. Effective multilateralism and the universal rules-based international order, with the United Nations at its core, needed the EU's continued commitment more than ever. The EU is dedicated to reform efforts towards a streamlined multilateral system built on universal rules and values, ensuring that it can effectively tackle global crises, threats and challenges.

3.1 Multilateral cooperation

UN80 INITIATIVE

As the United Nations approached its 80th anniversary facing unprecedented challenges, in March 2025 UN Secretary-General António Guterres announced the **UN80 initiative**. The aim of this reform initiative is to shape a **more effective, cost-efficient and responsive UN**, ensuring it is fit for purpose and capable of delivering for all across its three pillars – peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development.

The EU participated actively in the UN80 process advocating for **upholding the UN Charter** and the fundamental rules and principles it enshrines. The EU called to strengthen the UN's human rights pillar (including human rights compliance, gender aspects and the rights and interests of persons in vulnerable situations) and address the **structural underfunding of human rights**. The EU believes that streamlining resulting from the reform must continue to positively sustain the UN standards and the normative mandates.

UNGA THIRD COMMITTEE

The Third Committee (3C) of the UN General Assembly took place from 3 October to 21 November 2025 under the chairmanship of the Permanent Representative of Thailand. The session hosted 96 interactive dialogues with UN mandate holders, special procedures and senior officials on a wide range of issues, as well as the negotiation and adoption of 55 resolutions.

As in the Human Rights Council, the EU actively defended the universality of human rights and counteracted **attempts to weaken the international human rights system**, focusing on gender issues. The EU and its Member States presented a total of 14 resolutions, yielding good results.

The EU-led resolutions on freedom of religion and belief, on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar as well as the biannual resolution on the rights of the child, co-facilitated with Uruguay on behalf of GRULAC, were adopted. The EU also engaged actively on the other three country resolutions, namely the human rights situation in Iran, Syria and the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

EU Member States presented resolutions on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation; torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity; the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of digital technologies; and the system of national human rights institutions (NHRIs).

UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL SESSIONS IN 2025

Since its establishment in 2006, the Human Rights Council (HRC) has proven its relevance by addressing urgent human rights situations around the world and bringing attention to war crimes and serious violations of international human rights law, wherever they occur.

In 2025, the EU continued to play a leading role at the HRC both by advancing thematic priorities and addressing country situations of concern through EU-led resolutions and statements, and by working cross-regionally and supporting action led by others. The EU and likeminded countries joined forces in upholding existing reporting, monitoring and investigative mandates and creating new mandates for urgent or emerging human rights issues. The EU countered attempts to undermine universal values, international law and the universality of human rights.

The EU demonstrated strong support for the HRC with its **system of Special Procedures and the Universal Periodic Review, as well as the Treaty Bodies**, all essential for the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide. In 2025, the 58th, 59th and 60th sessions of the HRC addressed several human rights thematic and country situations. In most cases, resolutions were adopted by consensus.

The EU-led consensus resolution on the human rights situation in **Afghanistan** included a significant new element: the creation of an independent investigative mechanism (IIM-A) to address impunity and support future accountability efforts. This initiative reconfirmed that the international community recognises the gravity of the situation in Afghanistan, and that the Human Rights Council supports accountability and the rights of all Afghans.

The resolutions on the human rights situation in **Myanmar**, where the military continues to commit atrocious crimes, in **the DPRK** for continued denial of human rights, in the **Central African Republic**,

Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya and Mali, presented by the African Group, as well as the ones on **Somalia, Sri Lanka and Colombia**, also passed by consensus.

All EU Member States, along with countries across the world, supported the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur for the **human rights situation in Russia**, where the repression of civil society, human rights defenders, independent media and political opposition as well as torture and ill-treatment in detention have reached unprecedented levels since the start of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine.



EU Ambassadors lay flowers at the Solovetsky Stone on the Day of Remembrance for Victims of Political Repressions on Lubyanka Square, Moscow, in October 2025.

The EU also supported the renewal of the mandate of the **Commission of Inquiry (Col) on the human rights situation in Ukraine stemming from the Russian war of aggression**, which has reconfirmed its finding of systematic and systemic torture of Ukrainian prisoners of war held by Russia. According to the Col, Russian armed forces have committed crimes against humanity, including murder, as well as war crimes, including deliberate targeting of civilians.

At the EU's initiative, the HRC also addressed the grave human rights situation in **Belarus**, where systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations committed with complete impunity have further deteriorated the situation on the ground.

The EU also firmly supported the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in **Iran**, as well as the fact-finding mission. The EU gave full support to the resolution renewing the independent international fact-finding mission for **Sudan** to investigate violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, stressing the need for accountability for all crimes committed against civilians. Additionally, the EU supported the extension of the mandates of the fact-finding mission on **Venezuela** and the Special Rapporteur on the **Syrian Arab Republic**.

Furthermore, the EU led the work on the successful renewal of the mandates of the Special Rapporteurs on **Burundi** and **Eritrea**, while also keeping the attention of the HRC on the situation in **Ethiopia**. The EU actively participated in the debates of the Human Rights Council, including on Afghanistan, Belarus, Eritrea, Iran, Mali, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Russia, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Venezuela.

The EU welcomed the adoption of several thematic resolutions addressing global human rights concerns, such as the **death penalty, arbitrary detention, preventable maternal mortality and morbidity**. The EU supported the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the **right to safe drinking water and sanitation** and secured the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on **human rights and climate change**. The EU continued to actively promote **gender equality and empowerment of women and girls** at every session of the Council, supporting related resolutions.

On top of the three regular sessions of the HRC, two special sessions were called during 2025: the 37th special session on **the situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo**, and the 38th special session on **the situation in and around El Fasher**, in the context of the ongoing conflict in Sudan.

THE UN OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (OHCHR)

Consolidating the strong EU-OHCHR partnership, the EU stood by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, supporting the mandate and independence of his office, and strongly advocated to maintain adequate funding for the UN human rights pillar within the UN reform process. Attesting to the strength of the relationship, in December 2025 High Commissioner Volker Türk spoke alongside High Representative Kallas and European Parliament DROI subcommittee chair Satouri at the opening of EU's flagship event on human rights,



UN High Commissioner Volker Türk and HRVP Kallas at the EU-NGO Human Rights Forum in December 2025.

the EU-NGO Human Rights Forum. Throughout the year, the EU and the OHCHR continued to coordinate on a broad number of thematic and geographic situations.

Team Europe remains the biggest donor to OHCHR, with the EU remaining a solid and reliable partner. **Since 2023, the EU has been the largest contributor to the budget of the OHCHR.** In 2025, funding from the EU and its Member States represented 60.2% of voluntary contributions and 34.5% of total funding to OHCHR, including its regular budget. Reiterating its commitment to advancing human rights by providing predictability of funding, the EU provided vital financial support amounting to EUR 16.4 million in 2025 for the implementation of OHCHR mandates covering 2025–2027. Such funds are crucial to support OHCHR monitoring and reporting on human rights situations in various countries, such as in Ukraine with the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU), or the work of country-specific special procedures, such as on Belarus, Afghanistan, DPRK, Myanmar, Eritrea and Burundi, which are linked to EU-led resolutions.

3.2 Regional partnerships

THE EU AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

In 2025, the EU continued to strengthen its strategic partnership with the Council of Europe to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Regular interactions with the leadership of the Council of Europe Secretariat included the annual Senior Officials Meeting in July 2025.

Work is progressing on the EU's objective of **acceding to the European Convention on Human Rights**. On 25 July 2025, following the judgment of the Court of Justice of the EU in the 2024 EULEX-Kosovo case¹¹⁶, the EU requested that the new accession agreement

¹¹⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:62022CJ0029>.

be fully compatible with the EU treaties. The EU's accession to the convention would bring the EU under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights and strengthen the protection of human rights throughout Europe and beyond.

On 13-14 May 2025, the **Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe** held its 134th session in Luxembourg. The session received a request from Ukraine to the Secretary-General to establish a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine within the framework of the Council of Europe. The ministers adopted the Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law and opened for signature the Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer and the Third Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters. On behalf of the EU, the European Commission participated in negotiations on an Additional Protocol to the Warsaw Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism.

The EU remains the primary donor to the Council of Europe's activities under the cooperation pillar and continued **to work closely with the Council of Europe on EU enlargement and in the context of the annual enlargement package**. In 2025, work continued on the third phases of the Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye and of the Partnership for Good Governance in the Eastern Partnership region, both launched in 2023. The fifth phase of the South Programme, launched in 2022, also continued. These supported the work of the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (the Venice Commission) to respond to a growing number of requests for legal opinions, which are crucial in guiding reforms in partner countries and helping align with European and international standards.

In 2025, the EU and the Council of Europe continued to cooperate in the enlargement and neighbourhood regions, **including regional programmes on combating cybercrime and on Roma inclusion**. Joint projects also supported the independence, professionalism and transparency of the judiciary in Moldova, justice reform in Serbia, strengthening European standards on anti-discrimination and rights of persons belonging to national minorities in Ukraine, along with several programmes in Türkiye and strengthening effective justice in Morocco.

THE EU AND THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE)

Human rights and democracy are at the heart of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. In 2025, the OSCE Human Dimension work plan and meetings continued to focus largely on the impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on human rights, particularly on upholding international humanitarian and human rights law and calling for accountability. As a result of Russia's continued obstruction, the most important annual meeting, the consensus-based Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, did not take place for the sixth year in a row. To provide a platform for dialogue, the Finnish Chairpersonship, with support from the OSCE/ODIHR, organised the **Warsaw Human Dimension Conference** from 6 to 17 October 2025, gathering around 1 800 participants. The conference featured more than 100 side events and informal meetings addressing among others the consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the growing repression in Belarus and the shrinking space for civil society in the OSCE's 57 participating states.

The EU remained active in all OSCE Human Dimension meetings, delivering statements and engaging with civil society representatives and human rights defenders on issues pertaining to

the implementation of the OSCE's principles and commitments. In the OSCE Permanent Council, the EU raised several issues relating to human rights, including marking World Press Freedom Day, World Day against the Death Penalty, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, the International Day of the Girl Child and International Human Rights Day. The EU also addressed the impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, including regarding gender-based violence and violations of the rights of the child.

The EU continued to **support the valuable work of the OSCE's autonomous institutions** (ODIHR, the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner on National Minorities) and countered criticism of their activities or mandates. The EU continued to support ODIHR's documentation of violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law under the **Ukraine Human Rights Monitoring Initiative**¹¹⁷.

EU-OSCE cooperation in EU candidate countries and potential candidates included cooperation with ODIHR on rule of law and electoral reform in the Western Balkans and support for Eastern Partnership countries in making their democratic institutions more inclusive, accountable, transparent and compliant with human rights and the rule of law. Ensuring the proper functioning of democratic institutions is an essential element of the 'fundamentals' of EU accession negotiations.

117 <https://www.osce.org/odihr/537287>.

COOPERATION WITH THE AFRICAN UNION (AU)

In 2025, the EU-AU cooperation on human rights and democracy continued. As regional bodies, the two Unions use their diplomacy and human rights institutions at bilateral and multilateral levels, and the EU remains a key contributor to the AU's governance, peacebuilding and human rights architecture.

On 7 October 2025, the EU and the AU held their **20th human rights dialogue** in Brussels, co-chaired by EUSR for Human Rights Ollongren and the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Ambassador Bankole Adeoye. The 2025 dialogue reflected a deep partnership commitment between the EU and the AU, focusing on multilateral cooperation in addressing global human rights challenges. In line with established practice, representatives of the Civil Society Steering Committee, representing African-based and European-based CSOs, presented their recommendations to the dialogue participants¹¹⁸.

Both the EU and the AU reaffirmed their **shared commitment to human dignity, democracy and the rules-based international order**, emphasising the need to protect civil society, promote human rights and ensure respect for community rights in sustainable development. The dialogue recognised the AU's theme of the year for 2025 – 'Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations' – as an opportunity for deeper EU-AU cooperation, notably in the area of **transitional justice**. Reparations were discussed with regard to addressing systemic racism, ending Africa's marginalisation, and improving natural resource management and climate justice. Both sides called for greater cooperation on addressing the growing concerns of **digital disinformation, hate speech and information manipulation, especially in the context of elections**. They discussed strategies for improving human rights in African-led peace support operations and for ensuring that

118 For the recommendations, see: <https://www.fiacat.org/attachments/article/3337/EU%20AU%20civil%20society%20on%20changing%20HR%20landscape%20November%202025.pdf>.

business practices align with human rights, particularly in relation to exploitation of natural resources. They agreed to promote joint high-level visits to assess practices on transitional justice and elections¹¹⁹.

The high-level meetings between the EU and the AU in the course of 2025 also addressed human rights issues. At the **EU-AU ministerial meeting** in Brussels on 21 May, the EU and the AU reaffirmed their commitment to promoting universal human rights standards and democratic governance. They specifically mentioned protecting human rights defenders, combating discrimination and advancing gender equality, and called for greater international cooperation to address the human rights implications of climate change, migration and inequality, as well as accountability for human rights violations in conflict zones¹²⁰. The AU-EU summit held in Luanda on 24-25 November strengthened the partnership to promote democracy, human rights, peace and sustainable development. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to fostering inclusive governance, to promoting gender equality and empowering women, also announcing the new EU strategy for civil society. The summit emphasised the importance of tackling the root causes of instability, for example poverty, inequality and exclusion. It underlined the rights of persons in vulnerable situations, calling for a stronger focus on climate action and multilateral solutions to global challenges such as migration and conflict prevention. In its final declaration, the summit reaffirmed a joint commitment to cooperation through the annual AU-EU human rights dialogue¹²¹.

These high-level meetings were preceded by **EU-AU Civil Society and Youth Forums** on 20 May (Brussels) and 20-21 November (Luanda), emphasising the involvement of civil society and youth in

119 The Joint Communiqué is accessible at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/au-eu-joint-communicu%C3%A9-20th-human-rights-dialogue_en.

120 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/q50bjauc/joint-communicu%C3%A9-21052025.pdf>.

121 See paragraph 22 of the Joint Declaration of the seventh African Union – European Union Summit 2025 at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_25_2799.

promoting democratic values, human rights and justice across both continents and delivering on a commitment of the new EU strategy for civil society. The forums highlighted the importance of combating discrimination, advancing gender equality and safeguarding the rights of marginalised groups, including refugees and migrants. CSO and youth representatives contributed the recommendations from each forum to the high-level meetings¹²².

Within the EU-funded '**European Support for Transitional Justice in Africa**' project, the 2025 EU-AU expert annual seminar on transitional justice was held in Abuja in June to assess progress in implementing transitional justice processes and criminal accountability at national and regional level.

COOPERATION WITH ASEAN (THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS)

The sixth ASEAN-EU Policy Dialogue on Human Rights (PDHR) was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 15 October. The dialogue was co-chaired by Edmund Bon Tai Soon, Representative of Malaysia to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and AICHR Chair, and EUSR for Human Rights Ollongren. The 10th anniversary dialogue was preceded by the fourth ASEAN-EU Civil Society Forum on 13 and 14 October and followed by a side event on business and human rights on 16 and 17 October, which also included a field visit to a plantation in Pahang, Malaysia.

Held under Malaysia's Chairmanship of the AICHR, the sixth PDHR brought together the newly appointed EUSR and several first-time AICHR representatives, allowing for open, candid and constructive exchange, with ASEAN noting the uniqueness of its relationship with

122 See, respectively, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/document/download/84d11d8f-eaa4-40cf-bd7c-a8b036b2b396_en?filename=eu-au-ministerial-cso-youth-declaration-20250521_en.pdf and https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/document/download/7cbc24f9-afee-4639-bcd1-2adb2615909e_en?filename=au-eu-cso-youth-forum-2025-joint-declaration-full-version_en.pdf.

the EU on human rights. Discussions related to civil and political rights, human trafficking, scam compounds, business and human rights, and the right to development and peace. Both ASEAN and the EU acknowledged the openness and frankness of the dialogue and expressed their interest in strengthening cooperation and partnership on human rights amid growing global uncertainties. Host and AICHR chair Malaysia agreed to share a possible deliverables list for the next two-year period, in line with the AICHR 2026 annual plan and AICHR five-year work plan and looking ahead to the seventh PDHR in 2027.



EUSR Ollongren and Edmund Bon Tai Soon, Representative of Malaysia to the AICHR and AICHR Chair, at the sixth ASEAN-EU Policy Dialogue on Human Rights in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in October 2025.

COOPERATION WITH THE ORGANISATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION (OIC)

In 2025, the **EU continued to work with the OIC on interfaith dialogue and international cultural relations**, focusing on efforts and policies to combat hatred based on religion or belief. Once again this year, in the area of freedom of religion or belief, the EU and the OIC promoted twin consensual resolutions in parallel at the Human Rights Council in Geneva and the UNGA Third Committee in New York. These were the EU-led resolution on 'Freedom of religion or belief' and the OIC-led resolution on 'Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatisation of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief'.

3.3 Bilateral cooperation

HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUES

Human rights dialogues and consultations with non-EU countries and organisations continue to be an essential instrument for advancing the EU's human rights agenda. With 35 human rights dialogues and consultations in 2025, the EU continued to conduct more of this kind of bilateral dialogue than any other actor, engaging on a broad spectrum of human rights issues, including sensitive and challenging ones.

During human rights dialogues and consultations, the EU balances its own observations on the counterpart's human rights challenges by sharing information and best practices on how the EU and its Member States address related issues within the EU and work to achieve coherent and consistent policies. In several dialogues in 2025, the **EU Fundamental Rights Agency** offered perspectives on the EU's internal human rights situation, sharing insights on legal and policy responses.

The EU routinely consulted representatives of relevant civil society organisations when preparing for dialogues and offered debriefings, where appropriate, after the dialogues had taken place. At its request, the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) was also debriefed on some dialogues in 2025.



Some of the dialogues benefited from having the **EUSR for Human Rights as co-chair**. These included the dialogues held in Brussels with the African Union in October, Brazil in November, and Colombia and Saudi Arabia in December, as well as the EU-ASEAN dialogue in Kuala Lumpur in October and the dialogue with Mexico in Mexico City in December.

The topics discussed in the dialogues reflect the **EU's thematic human rights priorities, its participation in multilateral human rights forums and, where applicable, recommendations from election observation missions**. In line with the EU guidelines on

human rights dialogues with third countries¹²³, dialogues lead to follow-up actions such as joint initiatives, expert exchanges and project activities, and leveraging synergies with other instruments available to the EU to implement its external human rights policy. Wherever possible, joint press releases are issued, setting out the main topics of discussion and the issues for follow-up or future cooperation. In human rights dialogues, the EU also raises individual cases of human rights defenders, asking for information about their whereabouts and health if they are in prison, and calling for guarantees of a fair trial or for immediate release if they have been arbitrarily detained.

TRADE INSTRUMENTS

Under its **Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP Regulation)**¹²⁴, the EU continued to grant beneficiary developing countries preferential access to the EU market, requiring them to respect fundamental human and labour rights. In 2025, as part of monitoring compliance with international standards on human rights, labour rights, environmental and climate protection, and good governance under the special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance (**GSP+**), the EU conducted missions to Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Uzbekistan. In these missions, the EU engaged with beneficiary countries and various stakeholders, including civil society, social partners, and Member States' embassies, on the progress made in strengthening the protection of human rights, including labour rights, since the last report on GSP in 2023¹²⁵, and the challenges that remain. Following a legislative review of the GSP Regulation, the European Commission,

123 <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6279-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.

124 Regulation (EU) No 978/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 applying a scheme of generalised tariff preferences and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 732/2008, OJ L 303 of 31 October 2012.

125 Joint Report to the European Parliament and the Council on the Generalised Scheme of Preferences covering the period 2020–2022, JOIN(2023) 34 final of 21.11.2023.

European Council and European Parliament reached agreement on the revised GSP on 1 December 2025, notably increasing the number of relevant international human rights conventions from seven to nine. The new legislation will apply from 1 January 2027 for a period of 10 years.

In December 2025, DG INTPA launched a new 4-year, EUR 5 million GSP+ project, 'INSPIRED+ 2.0' with a consortium led by Club de Madrid (World Leadership Alliance). Involving more than 11 countries around the world, it focuses on **strengthening GSP+ implementation through civil society empowerment**, while supporting three countries under the EU's Everything but Arms (EBA) arrangement for potential application to the GSP+ arrangement in the future. Bangladesh, the largest beneficiary of the EBA, has faced profound human rights issues in 2024 and a challenging transition in 2025, and is set to graduate from the LDC (Least-Developed Country) category in November 2026 and begin a transition out of the EBA.

The EU continued to implement the **trade and sustainable development (TSD) chapters** of EU trade agreements, which commit to respect, promote and put into practice ILO principles concerning fundamental rights at work. The principles relate to freedom of association and effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, abolition of child labour, elimination of discrimination in relation to employment and occupations, and a safe and healthy working environment. The parties also commit to effectively implementing ratified ILO conventions, as well as their obligations under international agreements addressing gender equality and women's rights, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In 2025, meetings of the TSD committee and Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs) took place as planned, as part of the institutional mechanisms overseeing implementation of the trade and

sustainable development chapters of free trade agreements concluded by the EU. Progress was achieved, for example, with Chile, which ratified fundamental ILO Convention C155 on occupational safety and health. Japan decided to do so as well. Angola ratified six additional ILO conventions, including two fundamental conventions (C155 and C187) within one year of entry into force of the EU-Angola Sustainable Investment Facilitation Agreement.

The modernised EU-Mexico Global Agreement, which includes a comprehensive TSD chapter, was concluded on 17 January 2025, while the EU-Chile Interim Trade Agreement entered into force in February 2025 and includes a chapter on trade and gender, with commitments to eliminating all discrimination against women. In September 2025, negotiations were finalised on the EU-Indonesia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, including an ambitious TSD chapter. The EU's 2025 annual report on the implementation and enforcement of EU trade agreements, published in November 2025, includes information on implementation of the TSD chapters.

In 2025, the Commission's Single Entry Point received two **formal complaints**, the first one on the implementation of the TSD chapter of the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement, concerning human rights and labour rights violations, and the second one on the implementation of the TSD chapter of the EU-Ecuador, Colombia and Peru Free Trade Agreement, concerning human rights, environmental rights and labour rights violations.

On 17 September 2025, following the 2025 State of the European Union address¹²⁶, and to respond to the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza, the European Commission put on hold its bilateral support to Israel¹²⁷, with exceptions for Israeli civil society and Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre. It also proposed to suspend certain trade-related provisions of the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement between the EU and Israel. On 28 July

126 https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/state-union/state-union-2025_en.

127 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025PC0890>.

2025, the Commission had already proposed to the Council a partial suspension of the application of the Horizon Europe (HE) Agreement with Israel¹²⁸. This proposal specifically concerns the participation of entities established in Israel in activities funded under the HE European Innovation Council Accelerator. Both proposals are subject to a vote by qualified majority in the Council of the European Union.

3.4 Civil society and national human rights institutions

CIVIL SOCIETY

The EU maintains a longstanding commitment to protecting, supporting and partnering with civil society globally and at country level. In 2025, the EU continued to engage with civil society and support an enabling environment through political dialogue, reforms, targeted assistance and partnership with civil society. In November 2025, in parallel with the European Democracy Shield, the European Commission adopted the **EU strategy for civil society**, as part of the EU's efforts to support civil society's contribution to democracy at a critical time, underlining the importance of enabling civic space within and outside the EU. The strategy explicitly aims to foster greater coherence between the EU's internal and external activities in this area, showing that the EU is adopting an increasingly joined-up approach.

Civil society continued to be an indispensable partner for the EU in implementing the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy worldwide. Creating a more enabling environment for civil society in candidate countries and potential candidates is also an important element of the EU accession process. The conditions under which civil society operates form an essential component of democratic institutions, and evaluating them has become a fundamental

128 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025PC0620>.

part of the enlargement process since the adoption of the revised enlargement methodology in 2020. In 2025, **as other major donors made deep cuts to the overall funding available to CSOs worldwide, the EU continued its funding.** It remains a leading global donor to and through CSOs, providing support under NDICI-Global Europe thematic programmes (notably on CSOs and on human rights and democracy), IPA III Civil Society Facility and Media Programme for the Western Balkans and Türkiye, geographic envelopes, humanitarian aid and more.

The Global Europe CSO thematic programme this year revised the process for creating **civil society road maps in partner countries** to ensure greater compatibility with the shift towards global gateway within EU development cooperation and international partnerships. The EU System for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society (EU SEE)¹²⁹ supports a network of CSOs in monitoring and issuing alerts about changes in the enabling environment in over 80 countries across the world.

The EU System for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society (EU SEE)

EU SEE (2024-2029) aims to improve the capacity of civil society partners at global, regional and partner-country level, to improve their ability to detect and respond to a deteriorating or improving enabling environment, and to address and contribute to structural prerequisites for such an environment.

¹²⁹ The EU SEE early warning mechanism was called for by the European Parliament in 2016: 'Addressing shrinking civil society space in developing countries', 3 October 2016/2324(INI).

EU SEE provides near real-time data on event-based shifts in the enabling environment for civil society. A network of national CSO partners sends **alerts** regularly, some of which trigger an **early warning mechanism**. By detecting signs of positive developments in a timely manner, local CSOs can be ready to support improvements.

Detailed annual country focus reports combine existing indicators with fresh primary data on unexplored dimensions of the enabling environment, as well as information gathered throughout the year. These reports help identify critical trends, challenges and catalysts that may lead to either a deterioration or an enhancement of the enabling environment. The following are examples of successes in 2025:

- **in Somalia**, after data from the EU SEE country focus report was used to engage with the Ministry of Justice, the government formally committed to consulting civil society on future laws and policies and to maintaining collaboration, creating a structured channel for continued dialogue between civil society and government;
- **in Nepal**, EU SEE data and analysis of a draft NGO bill prompted rapid coordination with civil society, resulting in the authorities expanding mechanisms for formal civil society review of the legislation.

In 2025, together with civil society partners, the EU co-created the **26th EU-NGO Human Rights Forum**, with human rights defenders and civil society activists from around the world. The forum focused on the theme of equality and non-discrimination and served as a vital platform for direct engagement and in-depth dialogue between civil society representatives, human rights defenders, the EU, Member States and international organisations.

Through the human rights and democracy thematic programme, the EU supported **projects aimed at safeguarding civic space** at country level. During 2025, 13 projects supporting the freedoms of association and peaceful assembly were ongoing in 12 countries, including in some of the world's most restrictive contexts. Through the EU's global framework partnerships on freedom of association and peaceful assembly, partners supported civil society actors in 18 countries through strategic planning workshops, mentorship, sub-granting and networking opportunities. On the basis of research conducted under one of those projects, EU-funded partners made an expert submission to the UN Human Rights Committee on the development of **General Comment No 38 on the freedom of association**.

NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS (NHRIs)

NHRIs remained essential for promoting and protecting human rights globally, including in enlargement countries. Through its continued support of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) and four regional networks¹³⁰, the EU has kept up its efforts to strengthen NHRIs worldwide and to protect those under threat. The EU promotes compliance by NHRIs with the Paris Principles (a set of international standards for NHRIs, emphasising independence, pluralism, and effectiveness) by supporting the work of the Subcommittee on Accreditation and by increasing the effectiveness of GANHRI and the regional networks in supporting their member NHRIs. In 2025, they set up cross-regional working groups on specific topics such as climate change, migration, business and human rights, disability rights, older persons, torture and ill-treatment. The topic of GANHRI's 2025 International Conference

130 Asia Pacific Forum (APF), European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI), Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI) and Network of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the American Continent (RINDHCA).

was 'The Human Rights of Women and Girls – Promoting Gender Equality: the Role of National Human Rights Institutions'. The EU engages with NHRIs during country visits, as well as through EU delegations on the ground, and encourages its partners to involve them in human rights dialogues.

Regarding candidate countries and potential candidates, the country reports published under the enlargement package give a detailed assessment of the protection and promotion of human rights, along with targeted recommendations. The issue of how to help enforce human rights by **strengthening ombudsperson institutions, NHRIs and equality bodies** was raised at meetings with these partners.



The 2025 Global Classroom on Business and Human Rights was held in Bangkok, Thailand, hosted by the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University, the Global Campus of Human Rights Asia-Pacific coordinator. This Global Campus flagship student-centred research initiative brings together students, academics, and experts from all eight regional Master's programmes.

3.5 Business sector

The EU is committed to ensuring that companies uphold their responsibilities to respect human rights and the environment in order to harness their contribution to sustainable global prosperity. In 2025, the EU continued its efforts to promote human rights and responsible business conduct as envisaged by the EU action plan on human rights and democracy. At the same time, in line with the political priorities of the European Commission and as outlined by the Competitiveness Compass presented on 29 January, steps were taken to simplify EU sustainability rules, foster a favourable business environment and boost competitiveness, while upholding the original policy objectives.

As part of the 'Sustainability Omnibus'¹³¹, amendments were made to the **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD)**, in force since July 2024, and the **Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)**, in force since January 2023. Starting in July 2029, the CSDDD will require very large companies registered in the EU or creating significant turnover on the EU market to identify, prevent, mitigate and address adverse environmental and human rights impacts of their operations, those of their subsidiaries, and across their chains of activities. It will steer companies towards responsible behaviour, reduce their adverse impact on the environment and strengthen the protection of human rights. The CSRD requires certain companies and groups to report on a range of sustainability issues, including environmental, social and human rights, and governance.

The European Commission continued to prepare for the implementation of the **Regulation prohibiting products made with forced labour on the EU market**, which entered into force on 13 December 2024 and will apply from December 2027. The Regulation introduces a ban on products made with forced

¹³¹ Resulting in adoption of the Directive (EU) 2026/470 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 February 2026 amending Directives 2006/43/EC, 2013/34/EU, (EU) 2022/2464 and (EU) 2024/1760 as regards certain corporate sustainability reporting requirements and certain corporate sustainability due diligence requirements.

labour being placed on the EU market or exported from the EU, irrespective of their origin. On the basis of the conclusions of specific investigations, bans will be imposed on specific products and not on entire countries or industries. The European Commission will investigate and take decisions on cases involving forced labour outside the EU, while the competent authorities of the Member States will oversee cases within their territories. The Regulation builds on international standards set by the ILO and contains dedicated provisions on promoting international cooperation. In 2025, the European Commission continued to prepare support tools, including a database of forced labour risks and implementation guidelines (to be published in 2026) to help economic operators, competent authorities and stakeholders identify and assess risks in their supply chains.

As part of the implementation of the Conflict Minerals Regulation, in force since 8 June 2017, in October 2025 the European Commission recognised the equivalence of the 'Responsible Minerals Assurance Process', a **supply chain due diligence** scheme owned by the Responsible Minerals Initiative - the first time a due diligence scheme has been officially recognised under the Regulation. Moreover, on 1 October, the European Commission launched ReMIS, the Responsible Minerals Information System, a **voluntary transparency platform** for responsible sourcing of metals and minerals. In July 2025, application of the due diligence obligations under the **Batteries Regulation** was postponed by two years to August 2027, allowing companies and third-party verifiers to prepare more thoroughly for the implementation. These will address four key minerals used in batteries: lithium, cobalt, nickel and natural graphite.

Spotlight on the Conflict Minerals Regulation

The Regulation sets up an EU system for supply chain due diligence to curtail opportunities for armed groups and security forces to benefit from trade in tin, tungsten, tantalum and gold (3TG). By depriving these groups of revenue in resource-rich areas, the Regulation helps prevent severe human rights violations and abuses. The Regulation entered into force on 8 June 2017, and its operational due diligence requirements have applied to EU importers of 3TG since 1 January 2021. On 1 October 2025, the European Commission launched **ReMIS, the Responsible Minerals Information System**, a transparency platform for economic operators in mineral supply chains. The voluntary platform allows economic operators in both upstream and downstream industries to register and share their due diligence policies and initiatives, showcasing best practices in responsible sourcing of metals and minerals.

The process towards a **UN legally binding instrument (LBI) on business and human rights** presents an opportunity to promote human rights and environmental protection globally in line with international responsible business conduct (RBC) standards, international law and the EU's international commitments. While the EU does not yet have authorisation from the Council to negotiate on the LBI, it participated constructively in the 11th session of the **UN negotiations** from 20 to 25 October by sharing its experience of developing and implementing legislation and other policies to promote businesses' respect for human rights. The EU maintained its position that any future treaty should complement rather than duplicate existing EU laws, in the interest of a coherent framework. The EU also actively participated in the 14th global UN Forum on

Business and Human Rights (24-26 November in Geneva), notably sharing its experience on sustainable public procurement and on safeguarding human rights in the age of artificial intelligence.

The OHCHR has a mandate within the UN system to lead the business and human rights agenda and is an important partner in advancing EU strategic priorities such as the global gateway strategy. The OHCHR is also one of the implementing partners in the regional 'Responsible business conduct (RBC) programme for Latin America', which is in its second phase of implementation.

During its first year of implementation in 2025, the **Corporate Accountability, Resilience and Participation for an Equitable Transition (CARPET) project**, led by the Business and Human Rights Centre, focused on strengthening meaningful participation by rights-holders, enhancing corporate accountability and improving access to remedies. It supported the transition to green, rights-based economies in Indonesia, Kenya, the Philippines and South Africa. In 2025, EU support enabled the creation of safe and inclusive spaces for communities in Asia negotiating with states and companies with respect to just transition projects affecting them.

The EU-funded 'Corporate Accountability Initiative'¹³², launched in July 2025, is a consortium of international NGOs and local CSOs working to increase accountability and strengthen the regulatory frameworks applicable to private security providers and their clients, with a particular focus on those operating in the extractive, agricultural, forestry and financial sectors. The project is currently active in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Iraq, Mozambique and Nigeria. In its first year, the initiative trained 20 CSOs in Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the documentation, monitoring and reporting of international crimes linked to corporate activities.

132 <https://trialinternational.org/latest-post/introducing-the-corporate-accountability-initiative-cai/>.

In 2025, with EU support, the **Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC)** continued to work on countering the increasing restrictions on the right to freedom of association and the shrinking civic space in garment-producing countries, supporting the resolution of several serious labour rights violations through its network's internal remedy mechanism. The CCC and its allies successfully led a case in which 48 000 Bangladeshi workers were freed from the threat of imprisonment after demanding fair wages and safe working conditions¹³³. Through a EUR 4 million intervention on '**Responsible Business Conduct for Green, Digital and Resilient Supply Chains in Asia**', the EU has continued to promote convergence and alignment around a common understanding of responsible business conduct practices in line with the internationally agreed principles set out in the OECD's RBC standards.

With EUR 3 million in EU support, a regional '**Agents of Change: Youth and Media for Responsible Business Practices**' project in Asia promotes the role of media and youth in the context of environmental and human rights due diligence in business conduct. Implemented by UNDP Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia and Thailand, the project aims to raise awareness among the Asian public, especially youth, about the impact of business on human rights and the environment. It also seeks to strengthen inclusive and gender-responsive media reporting on these issues while building regional connections that encourage youth and media engagement on shared human rights and environmental priorities.

When engaging with partner countries and regions, the EU continued to promote business and human rights (BHR) and implementation of the UN guiding principles on business and human rights. EUSR for Human Rights Ollongren committed to the topic, taking part in an event on 'Intensifying actions and overcoming barriers in implementing business and human rights', held on 16 October

133 <https://cleanclothes.org/news/2025/victory-48-000-bangladeshi-workers-freed-from-the-threat-of-imprisonment>.

in Kuala Lumpur, back-to-back with the sixth EU-ASEAN Policy Dialogue on Human Rights. Business and human rights were discussed at the dialogue and in the EUSR's exchanges with other relevant stakeholders while in Malaysia, including representatives of state-linked enterprises in the context of the evolving EU corporate sustainability and due diligence frameworks. Efforts by the EU and its partners to advance **responsible business conduct and implementation of the UN guiding principles** were addressed in several other human rights dialogues and consultations co-chaired by EUSR Ollongren in 2025, including with the African Union (in October) and with Brazil (in November).



The Regional Corporate Sustainability and Environmental Rights in Asia Conference 2025.

3.6 Compliance with international human rights and international humanitarian law

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

The EU remained committed to promoting respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) and safeguarding the humanitarian space. It reaffirmed its strong commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts and continued to promote respect for IHL across the various areas covered in the EU guidelines on promoting compliance with international humanitarian law¹³⁴. In July 2025, the EU published the eighth report on the implementation of the guidelines. The EU also continued to be vocal on matters relating to IHL as an active member or observer in international organisations and bodies, through high-level dialogues, bilateral meetings and public communication, including at the UN Security Council.

All EU Member States have adhered to the **Global Initiative to Galvanise Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law**, launched by the ICRC, together with Brazil, China, France, Jordan, Kazakhstan and South Africa, with the EU supporting complementary activities. The initiative aims to develop actionable recommendations to ensure that international humanitarian law is respected, through a participatory process culminating in 2026. While not a formal member of the initiative, the European institutions have supported complementary activities and dialogue.

As a leading humanitarian donor, the EU sees strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law as a key consideration in the allocation of its humanitarian aid funds. The ICRC remains a crucial actor and a key EU partner in protecting and promoting international humanitarian law and humanitarian

¹³⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/eu-guidelines-on-the-promotion-of-compliance-with-international-humanitarian-law.html>.

principles. It received more than EUR 158 million from the EU's humanitarian aid budget in 2025. This included a EUR 30 million programmatic partnership supporting the Global Initiative.

In 2025, the EU financed projects aimed at **addressing gaps in the monitoring of IHL violations**, boosting data collection, reinforcing evidence-based advocacy and strengthening monitoring standards. At the European Humanitarian Forum in March, the 'IHL in Focus' project presented the first 'Global IHL Report'. In 2025, the EU also supported the IHL Centre in developing the 'Stockholm Manual', which offers practical guidance on how to conduct IHL advocacy.



The Stockholm Manual offers practical guidance on how to integrate IHL into daily advocacy and policy work.

The EU supports monitoring and reporting of the **six grave violations against children during armed conflict**. In addition to peacebuilding and recovery efforts, the EU advocates for the protection of education as a core civilian infrastructure that is vital to children's lives. EU Commissioner Hadja Lahbib issued a statement on the International Day to Protect Education from Attack¹³⁵ (9 September) and addressed the Fifth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration, held on 25–26 November in Nairobi.

Conflict consistently remains the primary driver of food insecurity. Of particular concern is the deliberate **use of starvation as a war tactic**, a practice that continued systematically throughout 2025. The EU was actively involved in this topic in UN Security Council meetings and delivered a statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States, underlining the need for early preventive action, protection of humanitarian principles, accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and increased cooperation with regional partners.

In 2025, the EU continued to promote the **protection of humanitarian workers**, medical personnel and health infrastructure from attacks. It continued to fund 'Protect Aid Workers', supporting local aid workers who have experienced a critical incident or are under threat because of their humanitarian work. Along with all 27 EU Member States, the EU associated itself to the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel, launched in September by Australia and eight other countries. At UNGA80, Commissioner Lahbib formally participated in the signing ceremony and vigil for the declaration, which seeks to align and reinforce existing legal obligations with practical action to reverse the trend for humanitarian workers to be killed, injured and targeted. On 13 November, as facilitator of the UNGA Resolution on the safety and security of humanitarian

¹³⁵ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/news/statement-commissioner-lahbib-9-september-international-day-protect-education-attack-2025-09-09_en.

personnel and the protection of UN personnel, the EU organised an informal round table on advancing the implementation of the commitments in the resolution.

The EUSR for Human Rights contributed to the EU's efforts in 2025 by mainstreaming IHL considerations in engagement, including in human rights dialogues, crisis-related diplomacy and public communication.

International humanitarian law country examples

In 2025, the EU advocated for respect for international humanitarian law across a range of conflict situations and continued financing humanitarian operations that incorporate promotion of IHL. Some examples are given below.

The humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region, and in particular in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, deteriorated drastically in 2025 as a result of the escalation of the conflict in eastern DRC, with further mass displacement, including across borders to neighbouring countries, characterised by extreme levels of sexual and gender-based violence, forced returns, forced recruitments and recruitment of children. The EU provided EUR 129 million for the humanitarian response in 2025 and increased its humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy efforts by organising donor coordination meetings and stakeholder events, adopting advocacy messages towards all parties to the conflict.

The humanitarian situation in **Ethiopia** remained dire in 2025, with IHL violations reported in Oromia and Amhara. The conflicts hinder access to vulnerable communities, preventing the delivery of much-needed aid. Over 90 aid workers were kidnapped in 2025, most of them in Amhara, and at least one was killed. In 2025, the EU allocated close to EUR 80 million to address the country's needs for humanitarian assistance and protection. At HRC60 in September

2025, the EU delivered a Joint Statement on the Human Rights Situation in Ethiopia¹³⁶, signed by 42 states, expressing concern about human rights and transitional justice in the country.

High Representative Kallas made several appeals for humanitarian access and protection of civilians in the context of the **Gaza conflict**, notably in July 2025 and, also on behalf of Member States, in October 2025¹³⁷. Commissioner Lahbib, too, has consistently called for full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to Gaza and for all parties to respect international humanitarian law in both Gaza and the West Bank. During her visit to the Rafah border crossing in Egypt on 29 November, she recalled the humanitarian workers killed at this entry point, reiterating the urgent need to protect civilians and humanitarian personnel. In Gaza and the West Bank, the EU has supported projects helping children facing several of the six grave violations against children in times of war.

Throughout 2025, the humanitarian situation in **Haiti** further deteriorated. Some 6 million people need humanitarian aid – half of them are children. The UN reported over 4 000 killings between January and September 2025. The number of people displaced because of violence has risen to over 1.4 million. In 2025, the neighbouring Dominican Republic deported some 270 000 Haitians and Haitian descendants under conditions violating human rights, including physical, financial, sexual and other forms of abuse.

Protection is mainstreamed across all sectors of the EU-funded humanitarian intervention, totalling EUR 42 million in 2025, including increased funding devoted to child protection, responding to gender-based violence, protecting forcibly displaced people and

136 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/joint-statement-hrc60-general-debate-item-2-joint-statement-human-rights-situation-ethiopia_en.

137 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/10/10/israelpalestine-statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union-on-the-comprehensive-plan-to-end-the-gaza-conflict/> and <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/10/10/israelpalestine-statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union-on-the-comprehensive-plan-to-end-the-gaza-conflict/>.

promoting respect for human rights and human dignity in the country. A Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) coordinator in Haiti monitors the duty of care in humanitarian action, the mainstreaming of sound feedback and compliance mechanisms, and the funding of a knowledge platform by UNFPA.



A man in Umm al-Daraj (also known as al-Zuwaitin) fishes through the rubble of his demolished home, pulling out items worth saving, including his daughter's toy car. Documenting and reporting human rights violations and the wider consequences of Israeli military occupation on the lives of local communities is an integral part of the work of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), a programme of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Despite the November 2024 ceasefire, repeated violations resulted in significant military activity across **Lebanon** throughout 2025. The ongoing insecurity exacerbated protection concerns, limited humanitarian access, hindered relief and recovery efforts, and delayed the return of over 64 000 internally displaced people to the south. At the ninth EU-Lebanon Association Council, which took place on 15 December 2025, both sides expressed serious concern about the violations of the ceasefire agreement and the targeting of UN peacekeeping force (UNIFIL) personnel, civilians

and civilian infrastructure. They called on Israel to abide by the ceasefire provisions, withdraw from Lebanese territory and uphold international humanitarian law.

Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees per capita globally. With hopes high for refugee returns to Syria after the fall of the Assad regime at the close of 2024, conditions for large scale returns were not met in 2025. The EU is committed to ensuring that, once conditions allow, returns happen in a voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable manner, preserving protection space and respecting the principle of *non-refoulement*. In 2025, the EU allocated EUR 93.25 million to humanitarian assistance in Lebanon, for both refugees and vulnerable persons in host communities, including to support the ICRC's work on compliance with IHL.

Mine action is a central IHL priority in **Myanmar**. The country is not a signatory to the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty and has recorded the highest number of landmine casualties in the world for two consecutive years, with children accounting for one third of all victims. The EU supported local partners to integrate risk mitigation, civilian protection and victim assistance components into their programmes, for example by conducting explosive ordnance risk education for exposed communities and local organisations.

EU-funded protection programmes also include activities to engage with the diverse armed groups to promote IHL compliance and child protection by addressing issues such as forced recruitment of children, the rules of hostilities and standards for humanitarian access. In 2025, the EU continued to support initiatives aimed at improving the protection of civilians, safeguarding education services and supporting impartial humanitarian assistance in contested areas.



The EU was the first respondent to announce humanitarian assistance support to those affected by the devastating earthquake that took place in Myanmar in March 2025.

In the **Sahel and Lake Chad area**, in addition to the continuous region-specific dialogue with the ICRC and financial support for the ICRC's work on IHL compliance, the EU has been using bilateral meetings and multilateral events to uphold its commitment to preserving humanitarian principles and to call for IHL to be respected. In October, the EU and Denmark co-chaired a Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) on the Sahel and Lake Chad to discuss IHL and the protection of humanitarian space. This led to concrete recommendations presented at a ministerial round table on 19 November in Brussels, where participants acknowledged that all actors in the Sahel and Lake Chad region must commit to respecting and upholding IHL, refugee law and human rights, alongside applicable national legislation.

In **Sudan**, the country with the most people in need of humanitarian assistance worldwide (30 million) and the world's largest displacement crisis, the humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate dramatically in 2025. Large-scale violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law were reported throughout the year in the troubled Darfur region (notably El Fasher) and beyond, potentially constituting war crimes and crimes against humanity. Women and children are disproportionately affected, facing extreme risks of sexual and gender-based violence. Systematic obstruction of humanitarian access and attacks against aid workers prevent aid from reaching people in need. A total of 129 humanitarian workers have been killed so far in the conflict, including 44 in 2025. Responding to the humanitarian crisis in Sudan is a priority: in 2025, the EU increased its advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy efforts and allocated a total of EUR 161 million in humanitarian assistance, focused on providing immediate assistance and protection to the civilians affected by the conflict.

Syria's transition continues to be marked by serious and recurrent violations of international humanitarian law, with re-emerging sectarian violence, attacks against religious minorities and the continued targeting of civilians, who also face threats from explosive ordnance, targeted killings and impeded humanitarian access, and of civilian infrastructure. Although initial steps have been taken to investigate abuses, including through a National Inquiry Commission, accountability remains limited and violations by multiple actors persist, reinforcing the need for sustained commitment to IHL compliance and protection of civilians. In May, the EU expressed strong support for the creation of two national commissions by the transitional government, on transitional justice and missing persons. They are independent mechanisms that can play a crucial role in rebuilding trust, ensuring accountability and promoting long-term peace. The EU's humanitarian funding in 2025 integrated

protection mainstreaming across all sectors and supported targeted protection measures, such as child protection activities or action to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

In the context of Russia's war of aggression against **Ukraine**, the EU's humanitarian aid budget supported the promotion of IHL, particularly for protecting civilians and others no longer participating in hostilities. To assist the proper accounting of protected persons and prevent disappearances, the EU also supported the ICRC in raising awareness of the situation of missing people and their families, promoting respect for obligations towards the dead, the missing and their families, and providing material and technical support to authorities where needed. Support also entailed stepped-up efforts to disseminate IHL among representatives from Ukraine's parliament, journalists, students, the armed forces, and law enforcement agencies.

With continued violations of IHL and international human rights law in 2025, in **Yemen** the EU focused on the protection needs of 16.4 million people, including women, children and migrants affected by gender-based violence, grave child protection violations, arbitrary detention and exposure to mines. The environment deteriorated further, with aid workers arbitrarily detained in areas controlled by the de facto Houthi authorities, increased security incidents and movement restrictions, and interference in needs assessments across the country. In the May 2025 Council Conclusions on Yemen¹³⁸, the EU called on all parties to abide by their obligations under international law, including IHL. The EU continued to lead in calling for a principled donor engagement to enable the delivery of essential humanitarian aid to vulnerable communities across the country, including by convening a Senior Officials Meeting in 2025. The EU continued to support UN agencies, the ICRC and international NGOs working on

138 <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8690-2025-INIT/en/pdf>.

protection, the promotion of women's and children's rights, and the reduction of gender-based violence. The EU also supported those working to document incidents of grave child rights violations.

EU SANCTIONS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS (EU GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS SANCTIONS REGIME)

The EU global human rights sanctions regime (EUGHRSR), established in 2020, enables the EU to impose restrictive measures on individuals or entities that commit acts such as genocide, crimes against humanity and other serious human rights violations or abuses, including torture, slavery, extrajudicial killings, or arbitrary arrests or detentions. In 2025, the EU succeeded in acting fast to impose restrictive measures under the sanctions regime, in particular in Syria and Iran. As of December 2025, the EUGHRSR applies to **135 individuals and 37 entities worldwide**.

On 28 May 2025, responding to serious **human rights violations and abuses in Syria**, the EU sanctioned two individuals and three entities for their responsibility during the March 2025 violence in Syria's coastal region, including killings, abductions and abuses against civilians. The listings targeted Muhammad Hussein al-Jasim and Sayf Boulad, as well as the Sultan Sulaiman Shah Brigade, the Hamza Division and the Sultan Murad Division, all linked to grave abuses committed against the civilian population. On 23 June, the EU imposed restrictive measures on five additional individuals for their involvement in the violence in the coastal region and for supporting the use of chemical weapons against the civilian population under the al-Assad regime. Of the five listings, three target former members of the Syrian Republican Guard and Armed Forces under the al-Assad regime, while two are prominent businessmen, Mudalal Khoury and Imad Khoury, who supported the al-Assad regime.

On 15 July 2025, reacting to serious cases of **transnational repression by Iran**, the EU imposed restrictive measures on eight individuals and one entity responsible for committing serious human rights violations and abuses on behalf of the Iranian state bodies outside of Iran, in particular extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions and killings as well as enforced disappearances of persons deemed to be opponents or critical of the actions or policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The listings demonstrate the EU's concerns about transnational repression by Iranian state bodies through the use of proxy agents, in particular criminals and organised crime networks targeting dissidents and human rights defenders across the world, including on EU territory.

On 5 September 2025, following reports of widespread and systematic **human rights violations in Crimean detention centres**, as documented by the United Nations and the European Court of Human Rights, the EU adopted additional restrictive measures against Vadim Bulgakov and Aleksei Pikin, respectively the head and deputy head of the Directorate of the Russian Federal Penal Enforcement Service for the 'Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol'. Under their leadership the administrative practice of ill-treatment and denial of medical care to political prisoners at the Simferopol detention centre in Crimea was documented. This affected, among others, the human rights defenders Iryna Danylovykh and Amet Suleymanov.

In addition to the global EUGHRSR, the EU applies several geographically focused sanctions regimes to respond to human rights violations and abuses.

With a view to addressing human rights violations in **Iran**, on 14 April the EU imposed restrictive measures on seven individuals and two entities. The EU sanctions list was broadened to include Shiraz Central Prison (Adel Abad Prison) and the first Branch of the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz, where detainees, including political

opponents, ethnic and religious minorities, and unlawfully detained European citizens, faced severe human rights violations, arbitrary detention without fair trial and executions. Alongside these entities, senior officials in the Iranian judicial and prison systems were listed for their roles in upholding convictions based on forced confessions, the systematic denial of the right to a fair trial and facilitating repression and violence against dissidents and minority groups.

On 17 March, in relation to the conflict in **eastern DRC**, the EU listed eight individuals occupying relevant positions in the M23 rebel group or the Rwandese Defence Forces for human rights violations.

On 18 July, the EU listed two individuals and two entities for their roles in severe violence, ethnic targeting, forced displacement and other abuses linked to the conflict in Sudan. These included Hussein Barsham, military field commander of **Sudan's** Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and Abu Aqla Mohamed Kaikal, commander of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), as well as the Alkhaleej Bank and the Red Rock Mining Company. On 20 November, the EU also imposed targeted human rights sanctions on Abdel-Rahim Hamdan Dagalo, deputy leader of the RSF, for serious human rights violations committed in Darfur, for his responsibility for ethnically motivated violence, widespread sexual violence, the deliberate use of starvation against civilian populations and the obstruction of humanitarian assistance.

In 2025, the EU made use of its **dedicated sanctions regime concerning human rights violations in Russia** with multiple rounds of restrictive measures in response to serious human rights violations. On 20 May, the EU listed 28 individuals, many of whom were judges involved in the persecution of the late opposition politician Alexei Navalny, as well as in sentencing activists and bloggers through arbitrary and unfair judicial proceedings to intimidate dissenting voices. On 15 July, the EU imposed sanctions on five individuals, primarily members of the Russian judiciary, who played a key role in the persecution of the activist Alexei Gorinov.

On 20 November, the EU expanded the sanctions list to include a further 10 individuals, targeting high-level officials within the federal penitentiary service of the Rostov oblast, members of the judiciary, and individuals involved in the prosecution of journalists and activists linked to Alexei Navalny and his foundation.

On 22 December, the EU listed two additional members of the Russian judiciary responsible for serious human rights violations, the repression of civil society and democratic opposition, and undermining democracy and the rule of law in Russia.

On 10 January 2025, under the EU's **dedicated sanctions regime concerning the situation in Venezuela**, the EU included five individuals responsible for serious human rights violations linked to post-electoral repression, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention and repression of democratic opposition.

04. NEW TECHNOLOGIES: HARNESSING OPPORTUNITIES AND ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

As digital transformation accelerates across the world, the protection of human rights in the digital sphere is a growing EU priority. While digital technologies can improve access to education, employment, information and healthcare, they can also spread disinformation and hate speech online, enable surveillance and censorship, and exacerbate inequalities through AI systems. The EU remains committed to protecting human rights online, seeking ways to ensure that appropriate safeguards rooted in a human rights-based and human-centric approach underpin digital technologies going forward, with the involvement of all stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector.

The EU has supported a multi-stakeholder approach to **internet governance** rooted in a human-centric and human rights-based approach. It has reaffirmed the importance of global digital inclusion, including universal meaningful digital connectivity, as one of the central drivers of sustainable development, social inclusion and economic opportunity. The EU has also opposed initiatives or attempts to fragment the open internet and to place internet architectures under state control. EU initiative Horizon Europe's Cluster 2 addresses the **impact of digital technologies on democracy** by funding partners from EU Member States, associated countries and other third countries to undertake research and innovation that strengthens democratic resilience, counters disinformation, and promotes secure digital participation¹³⁹.

In 2025, the EU played an active role in ensuring proper follow-up of the implementation of the **Global Digital Compact (GDC)**, adopted in September 2024 as an annex to the UN Pact for the Future. The

¹³⁹ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/social-sciences-and-humanities/research-and-innovation-funding-democracy-and-governance_en.

EU advocated for continuous alignment of other UN processes with the GDC commitments, welcoming the new UN Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies (ODET)¹⁴⁰ set up in January 2025.

The EU strongly supported the consensual adoption in August 2025 of a UN resolution (A/RES/79/325) establishing the **Independent International Scientific Panel on AI** and a **Global Dialogue on AI governance**¹⁴¹, signalling that the international community sees the UN as a key forum to attend to the global impact of AI and to advance understanding of new and emerging technologies.

The EU also participated in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)¹⁴², which marked its 20th anniversary in 2025 with the WSIS+20 Review. The WSIS process, as reinforced by the UN GDC, has designated the **internet as a global public space** open to everyone on a non-discriminatory basis.

In October 2025, the **23rd Asia-Europe Meeting Human Rights Seminar on Human Rights and Artificial Intelligence** was convened in Copenhagen by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the University of Copenhagen and the Asia-Europe Foundation, with EU support. The seminar convened over 100 experts from Asia and Europe, representing governments, civil society, academia and the private sector, to examine the relationship between emerging AI and internationally recognised human rights frameworks. The EUSR for Human Rights, Kajsa Ollongren, and other keynote speakers underlined the need for a human-centred and inclusive approach to AI governance that balances innovation with rights-based safeguards. Participants reflected on regional and global governance frameworks, including progress made under the **EU Artificial Intelligence Act**, and called for more rigorous implementation

140 <https://www.un.org/digital-emerging-technologies/fr/content/press-release-new-un-office-digital-and-emerging-technologies>.

141 <https://www.un.org/global-digital-compact/en/ai>.

142 <https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/ws20/background>.

of existing human rights protections, enhanced algorithmic accountability, improved transparency and the development of effective oversight mechanisms to address AI-related challenges.

The European Commission's 2025 update to the **Living guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in research** insists on human accountability, transparency about AI use, and checks against bias and privacy harms.

RightsCon 2025, the major international summit on human rights in the digital age co-funded by the EU, was held from 24 to 27 February, for the first time in East Asia, drawing over 3 200 in-person participants from 155 countries to Taipei, including from the European Parliament, other EU institutions, Member States, European civil society and specialised NGOs. RightsCon focused on shrinking funding for digital rights, warfare in the digital age, AI and platform accountability. UNGA80 and COP30 also spotlighted information integrity, including in the context of debates on climate change. In September, the UN published a first brief on information integrity¹⁴³, building on the UN Global Principles for Information Integrity.

Several events were also organised by EU delegations. For instance, a seminar on 'Regulatory Frameworks and Practices in the Digital Age: Lessons from Qatar and the EU' was held in September in partnership with the Qatar Public Prosecution, which gathered legal practitioners and policymakers to discuss challenges and opportunities in data protection, privacy and digital governance, showcasing an EU commitment to fostering regulatory cooperation and protecting digital rights in the MENA region. EU experts illustrated EU legislation on digital rights and online freedom of expression, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), while Qatari officials outlined the country's evolving digital framework.

143 <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un-information-integrity-issue-brief-01.pdf>.



H.E. Dr. Issa bin Saad Al Jafali Al-Nuaimi, Attorney General of the State of Qatar, and H.E. Mr. Cristian Tudor, Ambassador of the EU to the State of Qatar, inaugurated the two-day seminar, 'Regulatory Frameworks and Practices in the Digital Age: Lessons from Qatar and the EU'.

The EU-funded project 'Promotion and Protection of Digital Rights: A Pathway to the Digital Future', implemented by OHCHR, aims to **strengthen human rights due diligence in digital policies and regulatory processes** within the UN and with UN Member States. The EU also supports the implementation of UNESCO's guidelines for digital platform governance by bringing together regulators, civil society, judicial actors and other stakeholders to foster collective adherence to **human rights protection in the context of digital regulation**. The guidelines aim to safeguard freedom of expression, access to information and other human rights within digital platform regulatory processes across the world. The project led to landmark commitments such as the Praia Policy Framework and Action Plan for Information Integrity, which was signed by countries in West Africa and the Sahel in September 2025.



The Regional Conference on Information Integrity in West Africa and the Sahel took place in Cabo Verde in September 2025 with the support of UNESCO and the EU. It brought together regulators, civil society, media, tech companies, and other stakeholders to protect information ecosystems and strengthen digital platform governance. The event resulted in the adoption of a roadmap for regional cooperation in safeguarding human rights in the digital era.

05. DELIVERING BY WORKING TOGETHER

5.1 Public diplomacy and strategic communication

On International Women's Day (8 March), the EU celebrated **women and young voices driving climate action** and their role in the green transition. Despite being disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, women and girls are key to building a sustainable, climate-resilient future.

To mark the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (17 May) and Pride Month (June), the EU ran a campaign in line with the global IDAHOT theme chosen by civil society organisations for 2025 – '**The power of communities**'. The campaign featured the artistic expressions and voices of LGBTI persons in the creative industries¹⁴⁴, demonstrating that creativity is a universal language.



On IDAHOT, the EU reaffirmed its commitment of upholding the human rights of all LGBTI persons and called for a united stand against discrimination, hate, and prejudice towards the LGBTI community.

144 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/pride_en#106648.

The EU observed the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women¹⁴⁵ (25 November) against the backdrop of the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action¹⁴⁶. Joining UN Women's global call to **#OrangeTheWorld** in solidarity with victims and survivors of violence under the theme 'End digital violence against all women and girls', the Secretary-General of the EEAS and the EEAS Ambassador for Equality took part in a video message¹⁴⁷ on technology-facilitated violence. The High Representative also shared a message on social media¹⁴⁸. The **16 days of activism against gender-based violence** ran until Human Rights Day on 10 December.



EU Delegations across regions took part in the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence from 25 November to 10 December. Under the theme 'There is #NoExcuse for online abuse', the 2025 campaign highlighted violence in online and digital spaces.

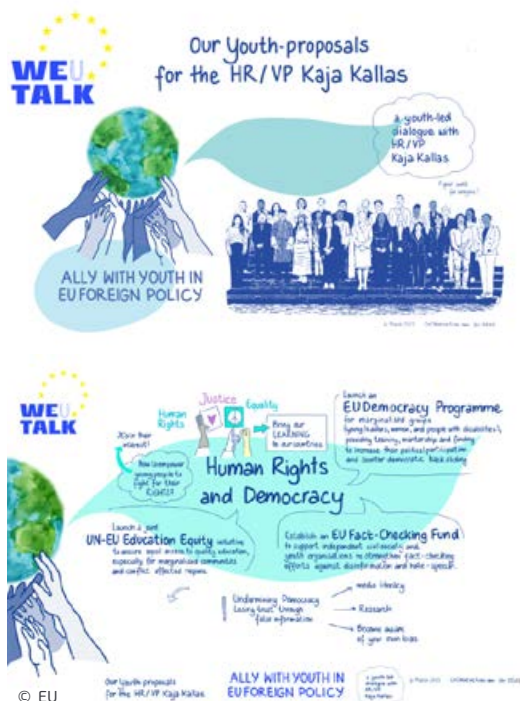
¹⁴⁵ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/global-hub-victims-violence_en.

¹⁴⁶ https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/PFA_E_Final_WEB.pdf.

¹⁴⁷ <https://youtu.be/cx88H4ojZBw?si=3N0nwjui8YhKdJF7>.

¹⁴⁸ <https://x.com/kajakallas/status/1993216982670323777?s=20>.

To mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December), the European Commission organised an event¹⁴⁹ on 4-5 December 2025 in Brussels, bringing together policymakers, organisations and persons with disabilities to advance disability inclusion and equality. The focus was on including **persons with disabilities in emergency preparedness and crisis management**, building on the lessons learned from recent crises. Speakers highlighted the need for early warning systems, inclusive civil protection measures and the involvement of persons with disabilities in emergency planning and response.



From 4 to 6 March 2025, 25 young community builders took part in an interactive three-day event in Brussels, the first Youth Policy Dialogue on EU Foreign Policy, during which they engaged in active discussions with high-level EU representatives, policymakers, and HRVP Kallas.

149 https://commission.europa.eu/get-involved/events/european-day-persons-disabilities-2025-2025-12-04_en.

WORKING WITH YOUTH

High Representative Kallas hosted the first **Youth Policy Dialogue on EU Foreign Policy**¹⁵⁰ on 6 March 2025 in Brussels, bringing together 25 community builders aged between 19 and 30 from the Americas, Asia-Pacific, Africa and the neighbourhood regions, as well as from EU Member States. High Representative Kallas emphasised the EU's commitment to empowering young voices and ensuring their meaningful participation in shaping the future of a stronger Europe around the world. Human rights and democracy were among the themes discussed, with particular attention on youth participation



Brazilian activist and artist Erik Martins de Albuquerque performs in 'Diáspora Nordestina' a production by Coletivo Pé Na Lapa. One of 25 young participants invited to join HRVP Kallas in Brussels for the Youth Policy Dialogue, he is also a member of the #OurVoiceOurFuture community, a global network of young changemakers working to ensure that EU policies are inclusive, relevant, and aligned with the aspirations of younger generations.

© Erik Martins de Albuquerque

in democratic decision-making. Participants stressed the need to involve young people from diverse backgrounds, and not just those with international-relations or policy-related experience.

¹⁵⁰ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ally-youth-eu-foreign-policy_en.

Other events throughout the year provided young activists and multipliers with a platform to engage directly with EU ambassadors and high-level representatives from the Council of Europe, the UN and other international organisations. On 13 June, the EEAS hosted a 'Join the EU's Foreign Policy Adventure' panel at the **European Youth Event**. On 20 November¹⁵¹, six young members of the #OurVoiceOurFuture initiative from the Western Balkans and the Eastern Neighbourhood took part in the **Young Activist Summit** at the UN. This enabled them to gain insights into the multilateral system and share their views during exchanges with UN representatives, including the Vice-President of the Human Rights Council and representatives from OHCHR.

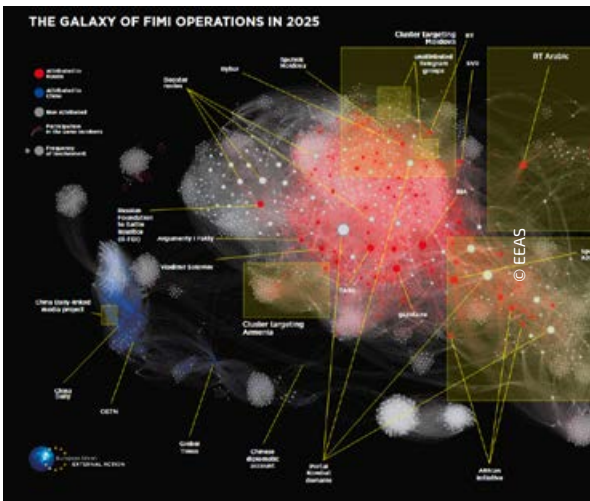
EU Commissioner Marta Kos held her first **Youth Policy Dialogue (YPD) on Enlargement** in February 2025 in Nova Gorica/Gorizia, a once-divided city that symbolises European integration and cross-border cooperation. The YPD brought together 40 young people originating from 37 countries – EU Member States as well as the EU candidate countries, potential candidates and the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood – to discuss the EU enlargement process and the role of youth in shaping its future. Commissioner Glenn Micallef also held dialogue with young leaders, exploring the transformative power of young people to advance the EU's enlargement agenda and to address complex challenges such as fostering integration, healing divisions and building bridges across borders.

FOREIGN INFORMATION MANIPULATION AND INTERFERENCE (FIMI)

In 2025, the EU continued to strengthen its response to FIMI, focusing on situational awareness, building capacities and resilience among governments and societies, reinforcing regulatory and countering measures (including through sanctions) and international

151 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/young-voices-pushing-change_en.

cooperation and targeted strategic communications. The Joint Communication on the European Democracy Shield, adopted on 12 November 2025, includes specific actions to increase the EU's capacity to detect, analyse, respond to and counter FIMI, including in EU external action. This work will be supported by a **European Centre for Democratic Resilience**, which brings together expertise to increase collective situational awareness and capacities across the EU to anticipate, detect and respond to, as well as withstand, common threats such as FIMI and disinformation. In February 2025, the EEAS published its third report on FIMI threats¹⁵², revealing the digital infrastructure put in place by FIMI actors and their well-funded networks and presenting a framework for how to expose FIMI operations and raise the cost of such activities and highlighting the role of **information suppression**.



The FIMI Galaxy maps the core FIMI ecosystem in 2025, illustrating how highly active channels, including Russian- and Chinese-linked infrastructures and unattributed networks, coordinate to amplify content across regions.

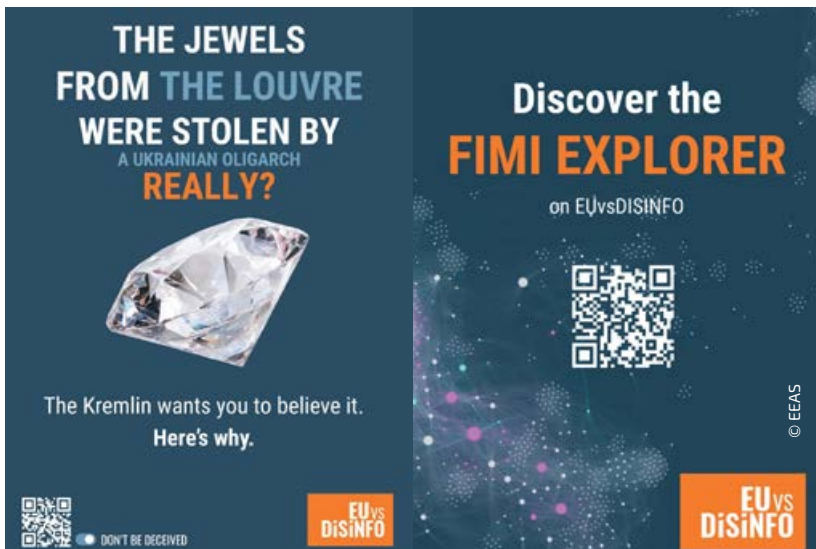
The **EUvsDisinfo platform**¹⁵³ reached over 39 million people in 2025, benefitting journalists, researchers, scholars and others tracking and debunking pro-Kremlin FIMI and disinformation campaigns,

152 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/3rd-eeas-report-foreign-information-manipulation-and-interference-threats-0_en.

153 <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/>.

counting more than 19 000 cases. Throughout the year, EUvsDisinfo also monitored and exposed the use of hate speech in disinformation activities and documented human rights violations by the Belarusian regime and other authoritarian actors in the EU neighbourhood¹⁵⁴.

In 2025, the EU mobilised rapid resources to address persistent disinformation and hate speech issues in Syria through a EUR 225 000 project implemented by Deutsche Welle on **'Ensuring information supply and media trust for stabilisation in Syria'**.



EUvsDisinfo's core objective is to increase public awareness and understanding of the Kremlin's disinformation operations, and to help citizens in Europe and beyond develop resistance to digital information and media manipulation.

154 <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/hate-speech-inciting-mass-violence-against-civilians-is-an-international-crime/> and <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/belarus-the-campaign-to-harass-and-lure-back-exiled-political-opponents/>.

5.2 Implementation, monitoring and evaluation

The EU has continued to mobilise its human rights and democratic instruments and strategies to advocate for and protect human rights globally, in line with the objectives outlined in the **EU action plan on human rights and democracy**. Throughout the past year, amidst numerous international crises, conflicts and setbacks in human rights, democracy and respect for the international system, the EU has persisted, on multiple fronts in implementing the action plan and engaging with civil society on the plan's strategic directions and priorities.

In collaboration with its Member States, the EU has leveraged its role within multilateral human rights forums and has been steadfast in its **outreach efforts to safeguard the integrity of the global human rights framework** and ensure that it remains fit for purpose to address the most severe violations and abuses worldwide. Once again, in 2025, the EU conducted a higher number of bilateral human rights dialogues and consultations than any other entity, engaging with partners from diverse regions, including through vigorous outreach carried out by the EUSR for Human Rights.

These activities are reviewed with EU Member States within the **Council Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM)**, promoting a coherent and streamlined approach worldwide. Besides formulating and establishing EU stances and initiatives, COHOM attentively oversees overall implementation of the action plan, ensuring its continued alignment with the EU budget cycle (spanning the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework). COHOM also receives regular updates on the implementation of the EU's series of 13 human rights guidelines.

Honouring its pledge within the action plan, the EU continues to innovate its strategy on **training programmes for personnel in EU delegations** through the EEAS 'Human Rights and Democracy Factory'. The nine focused online training labs that took place in the

2024-2025 cycle benefited from the input of thematic experts from civil society, the UN family and academia and peer-to-peer sharing among EU delegations. Moreover, the European Commission's 2025 seminar of EU delegation focal points for human rights and democracy, civil society and gender equality on 17-21 February brought hundreds of EU staffers to Brussels for updates and exchange to optimise the implementation and mainstreaming of these political priorities.



Organised by the European Commission, the 2025 Focal Points Forum brought together over 200 EU Delegation and headquarters colleagues.

This annual report on human rights and democracy in the world remains wholly aligned with the action plan to effectively monitor progress on priority actions and evaluate its implementation.

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