

Photo front page

© UNFPA Mozambique / 2024 / Mbuto Machili

A group of women gather at a Women and Girls Safe Space (WGSS) supported by the European Union in Marrupa, Niassa. Safe spaces in communities are vital for women to access protection, empowerment, and essential services. Through a multisectoral mechanism, these spaces are dynamic hubs for support, fostering resilience and opportunities for women and girls. The primary objective of a WGSS is to serve as a safe environment where women and girls are supported through processes of empowerment. These spaces offer information, foster personal growth, promote resilience, support healing, and provide opportunities for skills development. The Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies identifies WGSS as one of the ten core standards in GBV programming. Evidence shows that creating women- and/ or girl-only spaces during emergencies reduces risk, prevents further harm, and supports psychosocial well-being and protection for affected women and girls.

OF THE UNION FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY POLICY

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY HIGH REPRESENTATIVE	05
INTRODUCTION	07
EU SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS	09
01. PROTECTING AND EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS	13
1.1 Protecting people and eliminating inequalities, discrimination	
and exclusion	
> The death penalty	14
> Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or	17
punishment	
> Human rights defenders	
> Tackling multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination	
> Freedom of religion or belief	
> Human rights of persons belonging to minorities	
> Gender equality	
> LGBTI > Rights of the child	
Nigration and forced displacement	
Environment and climate change	
1.2 Empowering people	60
> Empowering women	
> Empowering children and young people	
> Rights of persons with disabilities	
> Human rights of older persons	
> Rights of Indigenous Peoples	
1.3 Promoting fundamental freedoms and strengthening the ci	
and political space	
> Freedom of expression	
> Safety of journalists	
> Academic freedom	78
1.4 Reinforcing Economic, Social, Cultural and Labour Rights	
> Cultural rights	
> Labour rights	
> The right to the highest attainable standard of health	
> The right to water and sanitation	
> The right to education	9

1.5 Supporting the rule of law and the fair administration of justice.	
> Human rights and counterterrorism	
> The International Criminal Court	.96
1.6 Closing the accountability gap, fighting impunity and supporting	g
transitional justice	
> Working with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Righ	
on accountability	05
22. BUILDING RESILIENT, INCLUSIVE AND DEMOCRATIC	
SOCIETIES	07
2.1 Democratic, accountable and transparent institutions	
> Strengthening parliamentary capabilities for effective governance1	80
> Observing electoral processes to strengthen and deepen	110
democratisation	
 Providing electoral assistance in partner countries Strengthening democracy and rule of law: accompanying progres 	
in the enlargement and neighbourhood regions	
 Provide comprehensive assistance to prevent and fight against 	110
corruption	118
> Enhancing impact: collaborative democracy support with team	
europe democracy	119
2.2 Promoting responsive, inclusive, participatory and representat	ive
decision-making.	
2.3 Supporting independent and pluralistic media, access to	
information and the fight against disinformation	74
2.4 Reinforcing a human rights and participative approach to conf	
prevention and crisis resolution	20
3. PROMOTING A GLOBAL SYSTEM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS	
AND DEMOCRACY	35
3.1 Multilateral cooperation	127
> Pact for the future	
> UN Human Rights Council sessions in 2024	
> UN General Assembly Third Committee session	
> The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)	
3.2 Regional partnerships	
> The EU and the Council of Europe	
 The EU and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 1 Cooperation with other regional organisations 	
 Cooperation with other regional organisations 	UCI

3.3 Bilateral cooperation	
> Human rights dialogues	152
> Trade instruments	155
3.4 Civil society and national human rights institutions	156
> National human rights institutions	
3.5 Business sector	159
3.6 Compliance with international human rights and inte	rnational
humanitarian law	165
> International humanitarian law	165
> EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime	179
ADDRESSING CHALLENGES > Human rights in the digital world > External dimension of EU legislation and policies > Bilateral and multilateral diplomacy > Support for human rights defenders > Funding/programming	182 185 189
> Building in-house knowledge	195
05. DELIVERING BY WORKING TOGETHER	197
5.1 Public diplomacy and strategic communication	197
> Foreign information manipulation and interference	
5.2 Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation	20F

FOREWORD BY HIGH REPRESENTATIVE



Kaja KALLAS High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Our 2024 annual report comes at a very troubling period for human rights and democracy across the globe. In 2025, we mark 80 years of the UN Charter – a set of globally agreed, universal principles, including human rights for all. Yet eighty years on, we see these principles under the heaviest fire since their inception. We see trust in the Charter diminishing. We see new global alliances forming, underpinned by a rejection of the rules-based international order.

In 2024, an unprecedented number of people cast votes across the world. Far from being a sign of democracy's good health, we have instead witnessed extraordinary levels of hostility towards democracy from rampant disinformation and information manipulation by foreign actors, to the silencing of media and human rights defenders, and a strong

pushback against gender equality and diversity, undoing years of progress in many countries across the globe. Today, only 29% of the world's population live in liberal democracies¹.

At the heart of these challenges lies peace. Peace is not simply the absence of war. It is the active cultivation of justice, the protection of the most vulnerable, the realisation of all human rights and the commitment to dialogue and reconciliation. Fundamental to peace is respect for international humanitarian law and accountability for human rights violations, which is why we stand by the International Criminal Court and the principles enshrined in the Rome Statute. This interconnection between peace, human rights and democracy is evident in the vicious conflicts ongoing in our own backyard. While Ukraine fights for its own survival and for freedom, selfdetermination, and democracy the world over, human rights are being trampled on. In the Middle East, the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza is yet another tragic reminder of the brutality human beings are capable of and how fragile human rights are in times of violent conflict. Conflict resolution, from Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Middle East, or Ukraine, requires accountability and the protection of human rights from the start. Peace cannot come at the expense of human rights and wrongs must be made right.

As this report shows, the EU has continued to empower those on the frontlines of human rights advocacy, support media freedom as a beacon of democracy, and champion human rights and democracy in fostering peace, security and sustainable development. If the European Union – founded on these principles – does not stand up for them, who will? It is precisely because of the increasing challenges to human rights and democracy that we must redouble our efforts to protect and promote them, while supporting others to do the same.

INTRODUCTION

In 2024, the European Union remained committed to promoting and protecting human rights and democracy worldwide. Advancing human rights, rule of law and democracy is both a treaty obligation and a strategic priority, ensuring the EU remains a reliable global partner. Amid an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape, this annual report provides an overview of the EU's efforts to safeguard fundamental rights, democratic principles, and individual freedoms.

Amid growing global crises—including persistent conflicts in Europe, resurgent violence in neighbouring regions, and escalating geopolitical tensions—the EU remains a key force in addressing critical challenges. With only 29% of the world's population living in liberal democracies, the need to combat human rights violations, counter democratic backsliding, and uphold international norms has never been more urgent. This report highlights the EU's proactive responses to these pressing issues, its steadfast commitment to justice and accountability, and its dedication to universal human rights and the rules-based international order founded on multilateral cooperation.

The UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights remain central to the FU's external action. The FU has maintained an active role in UN human rights fora, advocating for adequate funding of the UN human rights pillar and supporting the independence of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and his Office. Following the adoption of the Pact for the Future, the EU stands ready to collaborate with all partners to strengthen governance structures to tackle emerging challenges, including climate change, digital transformation, and rising inequalities. Committed to justice and the rule of law, the EU continues to support the International Criminal Court and its mandate to investigate, prosecute, and try individuals accused of the most serious crimes of international concern.

¹ V-Dem, 'Democracy Report 2024, https://www.v-dem.net/documents/43/v-dem_dr2024_lowres.pdf

Meanwhile, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights has worked to enhance both the effectiveness and visibility of EU human rights policy on the global stage.

On 27 May, the EU renewed its commitment to human rights and democracy in its external action by extending its Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for 2020-2024 until 2027. In these challenging times, the action plan continues to be the compass that guides EU action on human rights and democracy. Like in previous years, this report is structured around the action plan, focusing on its five key pillars of action. It details the EU's comprehensive initiatives to uphold human rights, defend democratic principles, and strengthen strategic engagements worldwide.

Through close collaboration with civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and international partners, the EU has continued to empower those on the frontlines of human rights advocacy. Over 10,050 high-risk defenders received support through the ProtectDefenders.eu mechanism in 2024 alone. The Team Europe approach has further strengthened collective action, leveraging resources such as the NDICI-Global Europe financial framework, which allocates nearly EUR 80 billion through to 2027 to advance human rights and democracy. 2024 was a 'super election year' with over 75 countries holding elections. EU election observation missions remained essential for safeguarding the integrity of democratic processes, protecting fundamental values, and upholding the rule of law.

Despite the troubling global trend of democratic backsliding, the EU remains resolute in strengthening inclusive, accountable institutions and combatting threats such as information manipulation through initiatives like 'EUvsDisinfo'. Support for media freedom, democracy actors and civil society – via mechanisms like the European Endowment for Democracy – has been crucial in several countries, including Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.

While the global outlook remains challenging, the EU is steadfast in its belief that deeper international cooperation and strengthened early warning and prevention mechanisms are essential. Together with its partners, the EU is determined to protect the multilateral human rights system and uphold the central role of human rights and democracy in fostering peace, security and sustainable development.

EU SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

In 2024, the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore, concluded his five-year tenure (2019-2024) and his successor, Olof Skoog, was appointed as of 1 March. Promoting human rights in EU foreign policy, as well as compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) and support to international criminal justice, the EUSR continued to work under the authority of the High Representative/Vice-President. Through targeted activities and high-level engagements, the EUSR contributed to the coherence, visibility and effectiveness of the EU's human rights and IHL activities worldwide. He continued to play a central political role in guiding the implementation of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy.

EUSR Skoog started his mandate by visiting Cabo Verde to engage with a number of developing countries committed to the advancement of the human rights agenda, followed by a visit to The Hague as the hub critical for international criminal justice and accountability efforts. Immediately afterwards, he travelled to Ukraine where Russia's aggression continued to take a high toll on civilians with serious human rights and humanitarian ramifications. In 2024, he visited 11 third countries in total (Cabo Verde, Ukraine, Turkmenistan, United States, Colombia, Brazil, Kenya, Republic of

Korea, Gambia, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia) and co-chaired or opened 10 Human Rights Dialogues, namely with Ukraine, Turkmenistan, United States, Colombia, Brazil, Chile, Indonesia, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

The EUSR made it a key focus of his mandate to establish strong relations with global and regional multilateral institutions, visiting the United Nations in New York and Geneva, the International Criminal Court (ICC) and EUROJUST in The Hague, and the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. He advanced the EU's support for effective multilateralism and the United Nations system in particular, while forging strong working relations with the High Commissioner for Human Rights and his office, notably on the crisis in Gaza.

Addressing Russia's aggression against Ukraine was one of the EUSR's priorities. In April, he visited Kyiv to demonstrate the EU's unwavering support to accountability efforts for violations of international law and to engage on the domestic human rights reform agenda. He worked with multilateral institutions to address the deportations of Ukrainian children to Russia and other consequences of the Kremlin's aggression. The EUSR held periodic interactions with Russian civil society, including in exile. The EUSR promoted the EU's support for the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people and repeatedly called for the release of political prisoners. In Central Asia, the EUSR visited Turkmenistan to address areas of concern and seek areas of cooperation. He laid the ground for further engagements in the region with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In the South Caucasus, the EUSR addressed the human rights situation in Azerbaijan, including in meetings with the authorities and civil society. He engaged with Armenia, with a view to a possible country visit.

The grave humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the alarming deterioration of the situation in the West Bank as well as the wider escalation of violence across the Middle East were the focus of a number of engagements throughout the year. The EUSR talked to the

Palestinian and Israeli authorities and civil society. He continued to consult and maintain close contact with key international actors, notably across the UN system. With the fall of the regime of Bashar Al-Assad in Syria, the EUSR raised the importance of working on human rights, accountability and transitional justice. In November, the EUSR visited Egypt to discuss issues such as civil society space, freedom of expression, death penalty, non-discrimination and cooperation with international human rights mechanisms. In December, he chaired the EU-Saudi Arabia Human Rights Dialogue, with a focus on the application of the death penalty, freedom of expression online, women's rights and gender equality, and the Saudi reform agenda.



EUSR speaking at panel event on children in humanitarian crises organised by UNICEF on 22 November, 2024.

In Asia, the EUSR followed with great concern the crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar, coordinating with UN actors and mechanisms, notably the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan. In October, he visited the Republic of Korea to focus on the dire situation in the Democratic People's Republic

of Korea (DPRK), multilateral cooperation, and selected domestic issues such as the death penalty, non-discrimination and gender equality. During the visit, he met DPRK escapees who shared their stories of hardship in the DPRK. The EUSR was instrumental in unblocking the stalled Human Rights Dialogue with Indonesia.

In Africa, the EUSR focused his efforts on those countries, which despite challenges – follow the path of democratic governance. His visit to Cabo Verde in early April was an opportunity to exchange with the Prime Ministers of Cabo Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe and with the State Minister of Guinea Bissau on democratic governance in Africa. Later in 2024, the EUSR visited Banjul to meet with key Gambian governmental officials to discuss how the EU could better support the country's democratic transition. In October, he visited Kenya, a key partner in the region, which experienced difficulties in ensuring accountability for the police violence during protests of August 2024.

The EUSR's first engagement in the Americas was his visit to the United States where he chaired the Human Rights Consultations and met government interlocutors to raise issues such as the death penalty, abortion laws, and the U.S. sanctions against the ICC. He cochaired Human Rights Dialogues in Colombia and Brazil. In Colombia, the EUSR paid particular attention to human rights within the peace process and transitional justice as well to human rights defenders. In Brazil, the EUSR focused on Indigenous Peoples, including their land rights, racial equality and multilateral cooperation in that regard. More broadly, the EUSR established close collaboration with the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights. He also opened the Human Rights Dialogue with Chile and had several exchanges on the situation in Cuba, including on individual cases and women's rights.

PROTECTING AND EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS

Human rights lie at the heart of the EU's policies and actions, both within its borders² and globally. They define how we coexist in society. They are universal, indivisible and interdependent – rights to which every person is entitled without exception. Human rights apply everywhere and at all times, including during conflict or crisis, and are all equally vital to upholding human dignity, whether civil, cultural, economic, political, or social.

In an evolving geopolitical environment, the EU remains a steadfast advocate for human rights. Despite significant progress, challenges persist, including resistance to the universality and indivisibility of human rights and democratic backsliding. Central to the EU's mission to defend and promote these rights are the individuals who hold them.

To uphold human rights, eliminate inequalities and discrimination, the EU works to protect and empower individuals, as discussed in the following chapter.

² Inside the EU, human rights are safeguarded as fundamental rights in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which contains both civil and political as well as economic, cultural and social rights. According to its Article 51(1), the Charter always applies to the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Union, and to the Member States when they are implementing EU law.

15

'Diary of the People: Past, Present and Our Dreams' - Art exhibition featuring artworks from the 'Let Art Heal' activity, which used art as a medium for human rights defenders to reflect on their experiences. hopes and dreams. The exhibition was organised in Banakok, Thailand. as part of an EUsupported seminar on transitional justice in May 2024.



1.1 Protecting people and eliminating inequalities, discrimination and exclusion

THE DEATH PENALTY

Abolishing the death penalty in all parts of the world remains one of the EU's top human rights priorities. The EU strongly and unequivocally opposes the death penalty in all cases and in all circumstances. Capital punishment is incompatible with the right to life and with human dignity. It neither deters violent crime nor contributes to a safer society.

More than two thirds of all countries have abolished the death penalty in law or in practice and the global trend towards the abolition of the death penalty continues unabated. Zimbabwe is the latest country to have abolished the death penalty at the end of 2024. Similar bills are also being discussed in Kenya and Liberia. In

2024, Ivory Coast and Zambia ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming to abolish the death penalty. The number of countries that carry out executions has reached an all-time low, leaving those that apply the death penalty increasingly isolated. However, the EU remains concerned about the increasing number of executions in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and the United States.

In their annual joint statement on the European and World Day against the Death Penalty, the High Representative Josep Borrell and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Marija Pejčinović Burić underscored the need to increase transparency around the application of the death penalty and the importance of having open debate about its abolition. The EU also issued several public statements about specific cases where the death penalty was applied, urging countries that still practice it to implement a moratorium as an initial step toward its abolition.

Political and human rights dialogues are important opportunities for the EU to raise concerns with countries that still carry out the death penalty. The EU Special Representative for Human Rights engages bilaterally with states that retain the death penalty advocating for fair trial rights, protection from torture and the right to adequate defence, appeal and clemency. For example, in 2024, the EUSR advocated for the abolition of the death penalty with high-level interlocutors during his visits to Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Republic of Korea. In line with the EU's guidelines on the death penalty, the EU continued to encourage states to introduce a moratorium as a first step towards abolition. Other intermediate priorities include the abolition of mandatory death sentences and to ensure that it is not imposed for crimes not meeting minimum standards of international law, such as drug-related offences, espionage, economic crimes, blasphemy and apostasy, consensual same-sex relations, adultery, and crimes committed by minors.

High Representative Josep Borrell and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Marija Peičinović Burić meeting in Brussels, in February 2023.



2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

In 2024, the EU remained actively engaged in capital punishment discussions in different multilateral fora, at the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe. The negotiations on the resolution on the question of a moratorium on the use of the death penalty at the UN General Assembly were a top priority for the EU. The resolution, calling for a global moratorium on the use of the death penalty was adopted by a record number of votes, with two thirds of UN membership supporting the call to uphold international minimum standards and increase transparency about its application.

To move closer towards the universal abolition of the death penalty, the EU partners with the Global Consortium for Death Penalty Abolition. Officially launched in July 2024, the Consortium will operate in 40 target countries with its work focusing on four categories:

- (I) promoting transparency in countries which take a hard line on retaining the death penalty;
- (II) reducing the scope of death penalty application which retain the death penalty but where there is a possibility for change;
- (III) achieving abolition in law in countries that have abolished the death penalty in practice;
- (IV) encouraging the ratification of abolitionist treaties in countries that have legally abolished the death penalty.

By coordinating efforts, strengthening collaboration, providing financial support and sharing best practices, this action will empower CSOs to better advocate for abolition and support partners at the national, regional and international levels.

TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR **DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT**

Torture is an extreme form of abuse of power and an abhorrent crime. It is prohibited in all circumstances, without exception. In recent years, however, there has been a disturbing rise in incidents of police violence, including ill-treatment and torture, when peaceful protests take place. In 2024, the EU continued its efforts to eradicate torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment globally through prevention, prohibition, accountability and redress for victims.

On the International Day in support of Victims of Torture on 26 June 2024, the High Representative issued a statement³ recalling that torture 'is prohibited in all circumstances, without exception', adding that 'the use of torture as a method to guash political dissent and to restrict civic space is unacceptable' as it 'undermines the very fabric of democracy and erodes trust in institutions and the

³ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/international-day-support-victims-torture-statement-high-representative_en

rule of law fuelling cycles of violence and unrest'. Moreover, the High Representative called for improved independent oversight, transparency, and accountability to mitigate the risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

In December, the EU marked the **40**th **anniversary of the UN Convention against Torture** (CAT), which lays out a clear roadmap for preventing these heinous acts. Throughout the year, the EU continued to call on those states that have not yet ratified the Convention and its Optional Protocol (OPCAT) to do so as a matter of priority.

On the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the EU called for a zero-tolerance policy to torture and other illtreatment and emphasised the importance of the CAT as one of the most critical instruments for torture prevention and the support of survivors.



The EU kept up its efforts to combat torture globally, working bilaterally, regionally and multilaterally. It used political and financial tools such as trial observations, prison visits, and emergency support for at-risk human rights defenders and promotes security sector reforms, including police reform. These efforts aim to strengthen

justice systems, ensure fair trials, improve access to justice and legal aid, and improve detention conditions for those deprived of liberty. Furthermore, the EU continued to raise the issue of torture and ill-treatment in human rights dialogues with partner countries. The **EUSR for Human Rights** actively contributed to the fight against torture, by publicly raising the issue, including individual cases, with counterparts around the world.

One of the most important tools at the EU's disposal is the EU Antitorture Regulation⁴, which prohibits trade in inherently abusive goods and regulates trade in goods that could be used for capital punishment, torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. As the world's first legally binding regulatory instrument in this area, it serves as an example for the development of similar measures by non-EU countries, regional and international organisations.

Internationally, the EU continues to lead the Global Alliance on Torture-free Trade together with Argentina and Mongolia. The Alliance, composed of 63 states, offers a space to exchange information on best practices to end the trade in goods used for torture and capital punishment globally, as inspired by the EU's Regulation. In 2024, the Commission engaged extensively with Member States experts on a legislative proposal to broaden the scope of the Anti-torture Regulation to reflect changes in the international security market, changes in use and misuse of law enforcement equipment as well as emerging challenges, notably extra-custodial torture and ill treatment during the repression of peaceful protests.

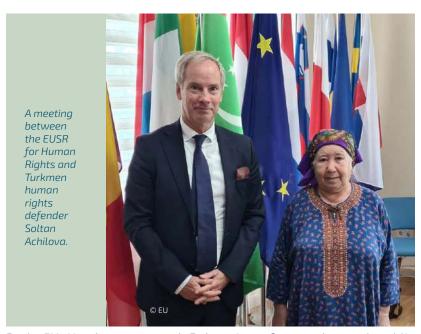
In 2024, the EU continued to support and closely collaborate with the **United against Torture Consortium** (UATC). This alliance of six leading anti-torture NGOs strategically reflects the EU guidelines against torture, offering a cooperative and comprehensive response to the main priority areas of work, from prevention to rehabilitation

⁴ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019R0125

and redress. In the UATC's first year, EU funding reached over 160 less-resourced anti-torture organisations throughout the world, while more than 80 CSOs were accompanied to engage in CAT state review processes. The Consortium implemented crisis response actions in five countries and conducted a summer school for African anti-torture practitioners. It played a key part in developing a model protocol and toolkit for law enforcement officials to promote and protect human rights in the context of peaceful protests, which was presented to the Human Rights Council at its 55th session. To mark the 40th anniversary of the UN Convention against Torture, the UATC produced a series of videos as part of a campaign called Voices for Human Dignity: 40 Years of the Anti-Torture Convention⁵.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Throughout 2024, the EU maintained its steadfast commitment to protecting human rights defenders (HRDs). To this end, the EU mobilised a comprehensive range of tools, including emergency funding, to assist those championing human rights worldwide. The EU discussed HRD protection with a wide range of countries, raising individual cases of HRDs and concerns for shrinking civic space, including for example in human rights dialogues, with Brazil, China, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Turkmenistan. Inside the EU, actions to empower civil society organisations and human rights defenders are taken under the strategy to strengthen the application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights⁶.



Both EU Headquarters and Delegations frequently used public diplomacy to support HRDs or speak out about the shrinking space for civil society. Examples include raising awareness about the challenges faced by HRDs in Azerbaijan, Mexico and Russia, as well as in China on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the sentencing of Sakharov Prize winner Ilham Tohti. On World NGO Day in February 2024, the High Representative reaffirmed the EU's global support for HRDs⁷.

EU Delegations and Member States' embassies actively engaged with HRDs, monitored trials when possible and visited detained HRDs in countries such as Egypt, Türkiye, Cambodia and Pakistan. In addition, Delegations awarded prizes to HRDs in Honduras and Uganda and organised collaborative campaigns with Member States to amplify visibility such as the Protejamos Sus Voces campaign in

⁵ https://www.omct.org/en/resources/news/voices-for-human-dignity-40-years-of-the-anti-torture-convention

^{6 &}lt;u>EUR-Lex - 52020DC0711 - EN - EUR-Lex</u>

⁷ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/montenegro/world-ngo-day-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell_en?s=225

Mexico and Defendamos la Vida in Colombia. Public initiatives also included support for the launch of a network for women HRDs in Indonesia⁸.



The EUSR for Human Rights, EU Member States, government entities and human rights defenders met to mark the fifth anniversary of the European campaign in support of human rights defenders #DefendamosLaVida and to address the threats and risks faced by human rights defenders in Colombia.

Supporting and protecting HRDs, including addressing the plight of political prisoners, remains a top priority for the EUSR. Since beginning his mandate in March 2024, the EUSR has actively engaged with independent CSOs and HRDs during all his country visits, such as that to Egypt. He also met with HRDs from Afghanistan, Argentina, Belarus, Eswatini, Georgia, Guatemala, India, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tunisia and Turkmenistan. In his bilateral meetings with third country representatives, the EUSR raised specific cases of detained HRDs in Azerbaijan, Bahrain and Cuba. On 23-25 October 2024, the EUSR attended the Annual Dublin Platform for Human Rights Defenders - a major event for HRDs, with more than 100 in attendance. The EUSR reconfirmed EU support to HRDs and held exchanges with them about the challenges to their work and to their ability to stand up for human rights. He also met

with several HRDs in the margins of the annual conference on the state of human rights organised by the Global Campus of Human Rights in May in Venice, Italy.

The EU continued to highlight the topic of protection for HRDs in discussions in UN fora. The EU actively cooperated with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, regularly exchanging information on individual cases.



More than 100 human rights defenders from around 100 countries gathered in Dublin 23-25 October, as part of Front Line Defenders' flagship event, the Dublin Platform.

At the **Human Rights Council**, the EU highlighted the critical role that HRDs play in protecting and promoting human rights and spoke out in their defence. Significant examples include the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders⁹, and the joint statement on the death of Alexei Navalny and the situation of the political opposition and human rights defenders in Russia¹⁰. The EU regularly raised the need to

⁸ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/programming/programmes/act-end-violence-against-women_en

⁹ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/hrc55-interactive-dialogue-special-rap-porteur-situation-human-rights-defenders-eu-statement_en

¹⁰ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/hrc55-joint-statement-death-alexei-na-valny-and-situation-political-opposition-and-human-rights_en

protect HRDs during interactive dialogues, for instance with the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran¹¹, or with the International Expert on the situation in Colombia.



The EU was one of many organisations calling for the release of Russian human rights defender Oleg Orlov. In August 2024, he was finally released as part of a prisoner exchange.

In June 2024, the Commission revised the **Visa Code Handbook**¹² with new guidance and examples concerning the processing of visa applications submitted by HRDs, based on practical experience gained by Member State consulates and input from stakeholders and experts such as the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA). The Handbook's new guidance refers to the possibility to: (i) request a visa in a Member State's consulate situated in a country other than the one in which the HRD is resident (ii) benefit from fast-track procedures; (iii) lodge applications via a third party; iv) be treated as bona fide applicants; and (v) apply for a visa at a country's external borders. Finally, Member States may waive or reduce visa fees for HRDs in specific cases.

Transnational repression against HRDs is increasingly documented by trusted NGOs, with the EU holding discussions with partners on how this phenomenon should be tackled. Through its network of Delegations, the EU raised cases of transnational repression against HRDs and insisted on respect for the principle of *non-refoulement*. The EU also called on countries not to abuse the INTERPOL Red Notices system¹³.

The EU remained a major donor in supporting and protecting HRDs, most notably under the NDICI-Global Europe programme. The EU Human Rights Defenders Mechanism – ProtectDefenders. eu – is funded under the Human Rights and Democracy thematic programme with EUR 30 million allocated for 2022-2027. Since 2015, ProtectDefenders.eu has been a beacon of support, assisting approximately 85.500 at-risk HRDs and their families. Through a holistic approach encompassing short, medium, and long-term actions, the mechanism engages in diverse activities such as direct support, temporary relocation programmes, training and capacity building. In 2024, ProtectDefenders.eu extended support to over 10.050 high-risk defenders, 51% of whom were women.

The **EU** Emergency Fund for Human Rights Defenders at Risk, directly managed by the EU since 2010, continued to operate in 2024. The Fund has supported over 1.730 HRDs and their families since 2014 (including over 67 individuals and organisations in 2024). This direct financial support helps implement the EU guidelines on human rights defenders effectively and is complementary to the EU's political action in protecting HRDs. Crucial assistance was provided through small grants, which served to cover costs related to temporary relocation, subsistence, medical and legal support, security measures, digital and other equipment, and training. In 2024, being at the forefront of the EU's work to protect HRDs worldwide,

¹¹ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/hrc55-interactive-dialogue-special-rap-porteur-human-rights-iran-eu-statement_en

¹² https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/1d79f44d-49ba-4847-951e-129f924b1051_en?filename=Commission%20Implementing%20Decision%20C(2024)%20 4319-annex_en.PDF

¹³ The INTERPOL Red Notices system is a global alert mechanism used by INTERPOL to request the location and arrest of a wanted person for extradition. It is not an international arrest warrant but a request for law enforcement agencies worldwide to assist in identifying and detaining individuals pending legal action.

the EU Delegations received online training on the EU action and instruments used to protect HRDs, including those with a specific focus on women HRDs and on monitoring trials of HRDs.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

TACKLING MULTIPLE AND INTERSECTING FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

Equality is a core value guiding the EU's policies both within and outside its borders. In 2024, the EU continued to fulfil its commitment to applying its human rights guidelines on non-discrimination in its external actions, focusing particularly on addressing intersecting forms of discrimination. While the EU unequivocally prohibits discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin, in 2024 reports from the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights revealed alarming levels of discrimination within our societies. The EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025¹⁴ calls for better enforcement of European law and concrete measures set out in national action plans. The EU Anti-Racism Coordinator remains essential to this work, alongside the full and meaningful participation of civil society.

The EU is committed to eradicating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, both within its Member States and through its global efforts. This commitment was consistently highlighted in bilateral dialogues with non-EU countries, where the EU emphasised the importance of the universal ratification and full implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). The EU also underscored the need for the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action to be fully implemented. The EUSR for Human Rights also particularly emphasised the multilateral dimension of anti-discrimination during his country visits.

In March 2024, the High Representative issued a declaration on behalf of the EU in observance of the **International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**, reaffirming the EU's continued commitment to combating racism in all its forms and calling for the International Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) to be fully implemented. As the High Representative remarked in the statement on the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, 'the only way to prevent future atrocities is to ensure that past atrocities and their victims shall never be forgotten'¹⁵.



Irene Shashar, a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto, addressed MEPs at a plenary session in Brussels on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. 'We pay tribute today to the victims of the Holocaust and reaffirm our unwavering commitment against antisemitism, racism and other forms of hate. Europe remembers' stressed European Parliament President, Roberta Metsola.

As part of the EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life (2021-2030)¹⁶, the EU is committed to playing a leading role in the global fight against antisemitism. In the first progress report the Commission reaffirmed that it will use all instruments at

¹⁴ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/ combatting-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/eu-anti-racism-action-plan-2020-2025_ en

¹⁵ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/international-holocaust-remembrance-day-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-0_en

¹⁶ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combatting-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/combating-antisemitism/eu-strate-gy-combating-antisemitism-and-fostering-jewish-life-2021-2030_en

its disposal to address antisemitism through the EU's external action. The strategy also includes actions regarding safeguarding Jewish cultural heritage worldwide and commemorating the Holocaust.

To boost international coordination on actions to fight against anti-Muslim hatred, in March 2024, the European Commission's Coordinatoron combating anti-Muslim hatred, jointly with the Council of Europe, held the first-ever meeting of senior officials responsible for fighting anti-Muslim hatred in Europe and North America in Strasbourg. In July, the European Commission's Coordinator on combating antisemitism, on behalf of the European Commission, cosigned the 'global guidelines for countering antisemitism'¹⁷, along with 42 other countries. Both coordinators participated in events organised on the sidelines of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, showcasing international efforts to combat antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred. In October 2024, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights released its report 'Being Muslim in the EU'¹⁸, which concluded that almost one out of two Muslims faced racial discrimination, which is more than in the 2016 survey (39%).



Anti-Muslim hatred impacts lives of individual Muslims and people perceived as such, including their dignity, safety, integrity, education, employment opportunities and access to goods and services. Anti-Muslim hatred also affects organisations and society as a whole. The situation has deteriorated after 7 October 2023 with an increase of threats and hatred against Muslim communities in the European Union.

The joint EU and Council of Europe programme 'Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye phase III' promotes anti-discrimination and protection of the rights of vulnerable groups among its core themes. This programme includes a regional action on promoting equality and combating racism and intolerance. Promoting equality and non-discrimination is also a key area under the Partnership for Good Governance phase III implemented as part of the Eastern Partnership, which includes five country-specific projects and one regional project that focuses on promoting equality and non-discrimination: towards more resilient and inclusive societies.

At the UN, the EU co-sponsored resolutions promoting global antidiscrimination 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, the EU organised focussed online sessions for EU Delegations on antidiscrimination, following an intersectional and geographic approach to the fight against all forms of discrimination.



The EU Delegation to Namibia and the Legal Assistance Centre visited San communities as part of the EU-funded project 'Empowering the San: Legal capacity building for human rights'. The EU is strongly committed to promoting and protecting the rights of marginalised people, inclusive development, cultural preservation and anti-discrimination.

¹⁷ https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/18a63a76-ada1-46c9-9e79-a2a52a8d-ba9a_en?filename=Global%20Guidelines%20on%20countering%20antisemitism%20en-dorsed%20by%20European%20Commission%20%28002%29.pdf

¹⁸ https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2024/being-muslim-eu

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 belief¹⁹. As the High Representative stressed in the statement on behalf of the EU on the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief²⁰, the EU 'strongly believe[s] and support[s] the principle upon which all individuals have the right to freedom of thoughts, conscience, religion or belief'. Furthermore, the EU also called on the international community, to 'unite in fighting against discrimination, hatred and violence based on religion or belief' and 'promote a culture of religious tolerance, respect for diversity and mutual understanding'.



In Tanzania, the Kirtalo Women Rights and Leadership Forums during one of their monthly meetings. With EU support, the EMPUAN project, led by the Pastoral Women's Council, has established 103 women-led grassroots forums, bringing together 25 women and 5 male traditional leaders, combining constitutional and customary leadership to challenge gender norms, promote pastoralist women's participation in decision-making and address gender-based violence.

The EU upheld this right in multilateral fora and in bilateral relations, including in human rights dialogues with countries such as China, Laos, Qatar and Ukraine. Once again, the EU promoted resolutions on FoRB at the UN Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, and 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 as a tool for the promotion of peace', on the margins of the 79th session of the Third Committee.

The EU's Special Envoy for the promotion of FoRB outside the EU visited Pakistan²¹, where he engaged with government authorities, encouraging them to implement the relevant international conventions and thereby to facilitate the country's reapplication to take part in the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP+) arrangement. He also met religious representatives and grassroots activists to discuss matters such as the protection of religious minorities, the abuse of blasphemy laws or the issue of forced



Frans Van Daele, Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief along with Ambassador of the European Union to Pakistan Dr. Riina Kionka with Speaker of the National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq at Parliament House, Pakistan.

¹⁹ https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11491-2013-INIT/en/pdf

²⁰ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/08/21/international-day-commemorating-the-victims-of-acts-of-violence-based-on-religion-or-belief-statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-eu/

²¹ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/pakistan/eu-special-envoy-freedom-religion-or-be-lief-concludes-official-visit-pakistan_en

marriage and conversion, and to foster the right to FoRB for everyone. He also participated actively in the international ministerial meeting on FoRB that took place in October 2024 in Berlin.

FoRB was an important part of the EUSR's mission to Egypt. While there, he raised with government officials the issue of blasphemy legislation continuing to be used against religious minorities, and the situation and administrative challenges endured by the Bahá'í and Shia religious minorities owing to their religion and belief.

Following the global call for proposals under the NDICI-GE thematic programme on human rights and democracy, the European Commission awarded two grants totalling EUR 5.5 million to protect minorities and people who suffer discrimination based on religion or belief that will run until 2027.

One project focuses on Asia and aims to strengthen civil society as well as institutional actors and mechanisms, to increase public awareness and improve recognition of FoRB in national and international laws. The second project will support field research and the capacity and engagement of local actors in West Africa to prevent and combat discriminatory practices, intolerance and violence based on religion or belief in all its forms.

HUMAN RIGHTS OF PERSONS BELONGING TO MINORITIES

The EU has taken several steps to promote the respect, protection and fulfilment of the human rights of persons belonging to minorities.

On 25 September 2024, the Commission adopted the first report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic frameworks²². This report takes stock of the actions Member States have taken to fight and prevent antigypsyism – a root cause of Roma exclusion and calls on Member States to strengthen their efforts to tackle such discrimination as well as spatial and educational segregation. It also addresses the implementation of the national Roma frameworks in

the enlargement countries. While these frameworks explicitly include antigypsyism for the first time, the number of measures to address it still remains limited.

The EU continued the third phase of the Roma integration programme in partnership with the Council of Europe, which runs until 2025 with the EU providing funds amounting to EUR 2.7 million. It contributes to the socio-economic integration of the Roma population in the Western Balkans and Türkiye. The programme supports: (i) the progressive alignment with the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation; (ii) the implementation of the national Roma strategies; (iii) the Poznan commitments taken by leaders of all Western Balkans countries in 2019; and (iv) the Council of Europe strategic action plan for Roma and Traveller inclusion (2020–2025).

Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion

© Council of Europe



Additionally, under the NDICI thematic programme for human rights and democracy, the EU provided support to protect the rights of persons belonging to minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Serbia and Türkiye.

²² https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/ combatting-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu/national-roma-strategic-frameworks-commission-assessment-and-implementation-reports_en

^{*} 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.

GENDER EQUALITY

In 2024, the EU played a major role in promoting gender equality worldwide. Gender mainstreaming across all external policies and activities 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)²³. The EU strives to channel its programming efforts towards gender equality and women's empowerment both within the EU and across the globe through external action with partner countries.

The 'Jordan Stitch: Empowering Women in Fashion' workshop united 20 talented women from across Jordan to reinvent traditional Jordanian motifs into ecofriendly, wearable art. Participants gained valuable skills in branding and accessina international markets. all while honouring their cultural heritage.



The adoption of the **EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence**²⁴ marked a major milestone and is a crucial step towards ensuring the safety and protection of women and girls in all spheres of life, including online, setting an inspirational example worldwide.





The EU remained a vocal advocate for women's and girls' full enjoyment of all human rights in UN multilateral fora, driving key country and thematic resolutions. The EU co-sponsored several resolutions on eliminating discrimination and violence against women and girls. In March 2024, the EU participated in the 68th session of the **Commission** on the Status of Women (CSW) at the UN Headquarters in New York. The CSW adopted agreed conclusions at the session on 'accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective. This applies a gender lens to poverty eradication, social policy and major issues of international finance such as debt, taxation, international trade and the reform of the international financial architecture. The text establishes strong commitments to women's legal capacity, economic autonomy and independence, underpinned by their right to work and based on equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men in the household regarding care and domestic work as well as investing in the care economy. Through its active participation in the CSW sessions and side events, the EU aimed to bring about change and see progress on a global scale. The EU also underscored the urgency to step up the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development

²³ Joint communication on the EU Gender Action Plan III, JOIN(2020) 17 final, 25 November 2020 (https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/join-2020-17-final_en.pdf), which has been extended with the adoption of the joint mid-term report on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III. JOIN (2023) 36 final, 20 November 2023: Joint mid-term report on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III) | International Partnerships (europa.eu).

²⁴ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1385/oj/eng

Goals (SDGs) while ensuring: (i) the respect, protection and fulfilment of all human rights; (ii) gender equality; (iii) the empowerment of all women and girls; and (iv) the full and effective implementation of the UN's Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

The EU Team at the CSW68, including former Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli and the Ambassador to the UN Stavros Lambrinidis.



In 2024, cooperation between the EU and the Council of Europe continued, based on the EU's accession to the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the **Istanbul Convention**) – a benchmark for international standards in this field²⁵. The Convention entered into force for the EU on 1 October 2023. This means the EU is now bound by ambitious and comprehensive standards to prevent and combat violence against women in public administration, judicial cooperation in criminal matters, asylum and *non-refoulement*. In May 2024, Latvia became the 22nd EU Member State to ratify the Convention.

The EUSR for Human Rights raised gender equality and women's rights across his multilateral and bilateral engagements. Those issues were mainstreamed in his human rights dialogues and consultations with

Brazil Colombia, Indonesia, Ukraine, the United States and Turkmenistan and his bilateral meetings with Cabo Verde, Egypt, the Gambia, Kenya and Republic of Korea as well as in engagements at multilateral hubs (Geneva, The Hague, New York and the African Union). During the EUSR's visit to the UN in New York in May and June 2024, he met with the executive director of **UN Women** to discuss the backlash against women's rights and gender equality around the world and in UN fora, not least the CSW.

In his consultations with the United States, the EUSR raised EU concerns over restrictive state-level **abortion laws** and the role of US-based evangelical organisations working in many parts of the world to undermine or reverse gender equality achievements. In **Republic of Korea**, the EUSR advocated for a comprehensive anti-discrimination law to be adopted and encouraged more progress towards gender equality in the country. He also inquired about recent deepfake sex crimes targeting Korean women and girls and about government measures to tackle this phenomenon. With CSOs, the EUSR regularly discussed the situation of women HRDs, including attacks on them both offline and online.



During his mission to Republic of Korea, the EUSR for Human Rights met with representatives of several civil society organisations.

²⁵ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/06/01/combatting-vio-lence-against-women-council-adopts-decision-about-eu-s-accession-to-istanbul-convention/

Regarding the implementation of the EU's strategic approach to **women**, **peace and security** (WPS) and its accompanying action plan²⁶, the EU acted to further embed the gender perspective in EU diplomacy, political dialogue and policy decisions. WPS was consistently raised in bilateral political, security and human rights dialogues, informal working groups and consultations with partner countries. The EU continued to meet women's civil society representatives and support the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women and girls in conflict prevention and resolution.



October 2024: Stella Ronner-Grubačić, Deputy Managing Director for Values and Multilateral Relations, European External Action Service and Ambassador for Gender and Diversity of the European Union, addresses the Security Council meeting on 'Women building peace in a changing environment' under the theme of Women and Peace and Security.

Across the globe, the EU, its Delegations and common security and defence policy missions and operations prominently celebrated **International Women's Day** on 8 March 2024, the **International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women** on 25 November 2024, as well as joining the **16 Days of Activism campaign**. Under the global theme, 'UNITE! To End violence against women' the EU carried out its

'Break the Silence. End the Violence.' communication campaign to raise awareness of violence against women and girls and highlight its efforts to prevent violence and protect women in the EU and across the world.



In Namibia, the EU joined the global call to #OrangeTheWorld by UN Women in solidarity with victims and survivors of violence and supports 16 days of activism against gender-based violence.



16 Days of activism against gender-based violence 2024 campaign in Jordan.

The Spotlight Initiative is an unprecedented global effort by the EU to invest in gender equality, recognising it as both a precondition for and a driver of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, by addressing all forms of violence against women and girls. In 2024, the Spotlight Initiative High-Impact Programme for Violence Elimination by 2030 (HIVE Programme) was launched, as a follow up programme to its initial EUR 500 million investment. The overall objective of this programme is to ensure that the achievements and results of the Spotlight Initiative are sustained and contribute to comprehensive and effective country programmes on ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG) as well as increased global awareness, knowledge sharing, and networking on EVAWG. Building on the critical civil society engagement of the Spotlight Initiative, the ACT programme (Advocacy, Coalition Building and Transformative Feminist Action to End Violence Against Women), aims to increase global advocacy by civil society and women's rights organisations, by strengthening their capacity and resilience, boosting coalition building and networking.

The EU continued to prioritise education in emergencies. In addition, the EU's humanitarian aid budget supported targeted actions to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence (GBV) with a budget of EUR 47 million. For example, in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, the EU works with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) on integrated prevention and response to GBV, as well as on providing sexual and reproductive health services to vulnerable populations affected by the complex humanitarian crisis in the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri. In 2024, the EU also started to support an innovative project with UN Action, to equip the UN and its partners, including governments and CSOs, with the knowledge and tools required to systematically prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) using a survivor-centred approach.

The EU has been supporting projects to combat female genital mutilation (FGM) worldwide, engaging communities on the need to eliminate FGM, transforming social norms through collective action. Since 2016, the

EU has been supporting UNFPA/UNICEF Joint Programmes on ending child marriage and FGM, most recently through the Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme (SIARP). As funding to SIARP ended in December 2023, EUR 20 million has been mobilised to support phase 2 of the programme. The new phase of the programme seeks to address violence against women and girls and harmful practices, and to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights across Africa. The programme adopts a comprehensive, human rights-based, and survivor-centered approach to tackling structural inequalities and addressing the root causes of violence through coordinated actions at regional, sub-regional, and national levels.



The EU is a firm supporter of projects such as the Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme.

It is estimated that 190.000 girls in 17 European countries alone are at risk of being mutilated while 600.000 women are living with the consequences of FGM in Europe²⁷. Every year at least 20.000 women and girls arrive in Europe from FGM-risk countries as asylum seekers. Ahead of the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital

^{27 &}lt;a href="https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_23_563">https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_23_563

Mutilation on 6 February 2024, the European Commission and the High Representative reaffirmed the EU's strong commitment to eradicate FGM worldwide²⁸.

Improved human rights for women and young people, including democratic participation and representation, better sexual and reproductive health, and the elimination of GBV are the goals of the **Stop Female Genital Mutilation Now - Komesha FGM Sasa! Project in Kenya**. With a focus on Kenya's commitment to end FGM by 2026, the action's overall objective is to better protect vulnerable populations such as women, young people, children, persons with disabilities and communities affected by displacement against all forms of GBV, and to support Kenya's efforts to combat FGM effectively. The unsuccessful attempt to lift the ban on FGM in the Gambia was closely monitored and raised by the EUSR for Human Rights with government officials on several occasions, including during his mission to the Gambian capital Banjul.



Despite significant progress, FGM remains an issue in Kenya. With the EU's support, the Stop FGM Now! – Komesha FGM SASA! programme aims to address challenges that hinder eradication efforts through the engagement of frontline activists and civil society organisations while also collaborating with national and country institutions.

Ending discrimination and violence against women is a priority in policy dialogues, as well as in the EU's programming efforts worldwide through regional and bilateral programmes. For example, the regional programme in the Eastern Neighbourhood, 'EU4Gender Equality' implemented by UN Women and UNFPA. This programme focuses on two areas of intervention: (i) fighting gender discriminatory attitudes and practices in institutional and community spheres, and preventing GBV; and (ii) providing expert support to government and CSOs for evidence-based policy processes. Furthermore, it provides demand driven expert support to governments for gender mainstreaming in policies and programmes.

The mandate of the European Union Advisory Mission in Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine) was renewed in May 2024. The mandate includes increasing the capacities of the Ukrainian agencies and institutions to investigate and prosecute international crimes, including war crimes. This includes conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). In addition to Ukrainian authorities, the Mission works with civil society. The Mission applies a victim-centred approach in its efforts to increase accountability concerning CRSV.

LGBTI

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons still face numerous challenges worldwide ranging from multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation, to violence, hate crimes and even murder. Against a picture of worrying developments worldwide, the EU continued to honour its commitment to stand up for the full and equal enjoyment of human rights by LGBTI persons and LGBTI human rights defenders, showing strong commitment to respect, protect and fulfil their human rights.

^{28 &}lt;a href="https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_24_605">https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_24_605



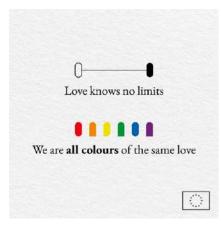
Staff members of the EU Delegation to Iceland participating in the Reykjavík Pride Parade 2024.

The EU continued to implement the LGBTIQ equality strategy for 2020-2025. In September 2024, a report on the strategy's implementation ²⁹was published. It assessed the work carried out so far and identified the areas requiring further attention so that the strategy can be fully implemented by 2025.

In May 2024, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) published a report entitled 'LGBTIQ Equality at a Crossroads: Progress and Challenges'³⁰, which concluded that, although there are signs of slow but gradual progress, LGBTIQ people still experience hate-motivated violence and discrimination. In July 2024, President von der Leyen announced in her political guidelines a new LGBTIQ equality strategy post-2025³¹. As stated in the Mission Letter³² for the European

Commissioner for Equality, the new strategy will notably focus on hate-motivated harassment and violence, including online, and banning conversion practices.

At the **multilateral level**, the EU continued to promote the human rights of LGBTI persons in the UN system. During the UN General Assembly Third Committee debate on promoting



and protecting human rights, Sweden delivered a strong statement³³ on behalf of the UN LGBTI Core Group, consisting of 60 countries, showing strong support for the UN Secretary General's call for redoubling efforts to end human rights violations of LGBTI persons such as discrimination, bias and violence based on their sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics.

The EU strongly condemned the decision of the Russian Supreme Court outlawing the so-called 'LGBT movement' as 'extremist' during the 56th session of the Human Rights Council interactive dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights³⁴. During the 57th session of the Human Rights Council, the EU drew attention to the plight of the LGBTI community in five different statements. These included: (i) the general debate under item 4, which included references to the treatment of LGBTI persons in Russia, Afghanistan and Türkiye; (ii) the interactive dialogue on Nicaragua; (iii) the interactive dialogue on Afghanistan; iv) the interactive dialogue on Russia; and (v) the general debate under item 10, which included references to the LGBTI community in Georgia.

²⁹ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/ combatting-discrimination/lesbian-gay-bi-trans-and-intersex-equality/lgbtiq-equality-strategy-2020-2025_en

³⁰ https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2024/lgbtiq-equality-crossroads-progress-and-challenges

¹¹ https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb-2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf

³² https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/faaf33ff-c8c7-49a1-b01d56681e11a5e6_en?filename=Mission%20letter%20-%20LAHBIB.pdf

³³ https://unlgbticoregroup.org/2024/10/22/third-committee-agenda-item-71-promotion-and-protection-of-human-rights/

³⁴ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/hrc56-interactive-dialogue-high-commissioner%E2%80%99s-annual-report-eu-statement_en

On 17 May, the High Representative marked the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia (IDAHOT) with a statement. EU Delegations worldwide raised the rainbow flag, participated in events from Albania to Timor-Leste, engaging with CSOs and activists. In Lesotho, Taiwan, and Timor-Leste, EU representatives joined the local Pride marches. Other initiatives launched include the 'safe place map' initiative for LGBTI persons in North Macedonia, an inclusive theatre workshop for young people in Cuba, and a jewellery workshop for trans women in Peruvian prisons. Delegations in Latin America, the Maghreb, and Western Europe also prepared video testimonials marking the occasion³⁵.



Staff at the European Economic and Trade Office and EU Member States' offices participate in the Taipei LGBT+ Pride Parade on 26 October 2024.

The EU supports CSOs and HRDs worldwide, protecting and advancing the human rights of LGBTI persons. Since the launch of the EU Human Rights Defenders Mechanism, more than 8.980 different LGBTI rights defenders and grassroots LGBTI rights communities have received direct, comprehensive support through emergency

grants and funding for local initiatives. Over 2.200 LGBTI HRDs were supported through the Human Rights Defenders Mechanism in 2024. Additionally, the EU took action to tackle **foreign information manipulation and interference** related to LGBTI persons, including by publishing 'How to handle LGBTIQ+ disinfo: Do's and Don'ts'³⁶.

Under the **EU's enlargement policy**, the situation of LGBTI persons continues to be monitored, including through a dedicated section in each of the country reports in the enlargement package. The 2024 Communication on enlargement policy noted that non-discrimination laws are in place, but greater efforts are still needed to combat discrimination, particularly against LGBTI persons, Roma and other minorities.

Promoting equality and non-discrimination, including for LGBTI persons, is a feature of the EU's joint work with the Council of Europe through the Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye and the Partnership for Good Governance in the Eastern Partnership. In 2024, the EU concluded a call for project proposals under the 2023 Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance Civil Society and Media Facility, which included a specific lot on LGBTI equality for an overall amount of EUR 1 million for the Western Balkans. The subpriorities for this lot covered social and economic inclusion of LGBTI community, and participation in the public sphere. It also covered support for LGBTI children and young people and for strengthening the capacities of teachers and other professionals to prevent bullying and recognise students at risk due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

³⁵ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/mediagallery_en?f%5B0%5D=media_site%3AEEAS&f%5B1%5D=media_tag%3APride2024%20-%20HQ&f%5B2%5D=media_type%3Avideo

^{36 &}lt;a href="https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/how-handle-lgbtiq-disinfo-dos-and-donts_en">https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/how-handle-lgbtiq-disinfo-dos-and-donts_en

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Throughout 2024, the EU intensified its advocacy for the rights of the child, strengthening its long-standing commitment to protecting children from violence, exploitation and harm, while ensuring access to quality education and supportive environments. Central to this approach was the continued implementation of the EU strategy on the rights of the child³⁷ and the recommendation on integrated child protection systems to combat all forms of violence against children focusing on expanding protective digital spaces for children. The European Commission's 2024 Recommendation on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems³⁸ in the best interest of the child promotes cohesive frameworks within Member States and supports external action implementation.



Timor-Leste: Empowering children and young people: Human rights for all!

The EU also advanced on its commitment to the rights of the child in conflict-affected areas, guided by strategic frameworks addressing protection, education, and holistic development. The EU updated its guidelines on children and armed conflict (CAAC)³⁹ to strengthen protection, providing a comprehensive framework for cooperation in humanitarian-development-peace instruments to prevent the six grave violations against children in times of war identified and condemned by the UNSC40: (i) killing and maiming; (ii) recruitment and use as soldiers or in other non-combat roles; (iii) abductions; (iv) rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence; (v) attacks on schools and hospitals; and (vi) the denial of humanitarian access. The guidelines also include support to reintegration programmes, and to help speed up trauma recovery through childcentred and gender-sensitive approaches, as well as for perpetrator accountability mechanism and child-focused justice systems. Alongside the guidelines, the EU introduced an updated checklist for the integration of protection of children affected by armed conflict by EU crisis management operations under EU common security and defence policy⁴¹.

Delivering on the SDGs remained a focus of the EU's global work and advocacy for the rights of the child, especially in areas affecting children's education and well-being. Special attention was given to children in disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginalised circumstances, including girls, children with disabilities, Indigenous children, and those from ethnic or national minorities.

³⁷ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en

³⁸ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/recommendations-on-developing-and-strengthening-integrated-child-protection-systems-in-the-best-interests-of-the-child.html?fromSummary=11

³⁹ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/24/children-and-armed-conflicts-council-updates-eu-guidelines-and-approves-conclusions/

^{40 &}lt;a href="https://www.unicef.org/children-under-attack/six-grave-violations-against-children">https://www.unicef.org/children-under-attack/six-grave-violations-against-children

⁴¹ https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10703-2024-INIT/en/pdf



Between August 2023 and December 2024. psychological support services were provided in 16 child friendly spaces in Syria. 11,516 children were supported. utilising War Child's evidence based methodology.

The EU expanded projects delivering education, protection, healthcare and psychological support to children in conflict areas. In response to increased needs in Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine and other war and crisis contexts, the EU directed resources towards childcentred programmes. In Sudan, EUR 30 million was provided for inclusive education for the most vulnerable children. EUR 34.5 million dedicated to nutrition programmes, and EUR 5 million for protection of civilians including boys and girls. More than EUR 175 million was allocated to education in emergencies projects and EUR 160 million to child protection activities in humanitarian settings. These efforts include investments in family tracing and reunification, prevention, psychosocial support, support to unaccompanied and separated children, registration and restoration of lost civil documentation, and provision of education in conflict zones. Targeted support for children affected by armed conflict was also continued in CAAC priority countries including Afghanistan, Chad, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territories, Mozambique, Somalia, Syria, Ukraine, and

Yemen. More information on the EU's humanitarian response can be found in Section 3.6 – compliance with international human rights and international humanitarian law.



In conflict-affected regions of Ethiopia, an EU-funded project for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of schools gave children the opportunity to go back to school.

In Ukraine, the joint EU-UNICEF project 'Better Care: Pathways for Childcare Reform in Ukraine' facilitates the return and reintegration of children displaced from Ukraine through support to central and local authorities. The project has a particular focus on facilitating access to necessary social services both for children and for their families – especially trauma informed care and mental health and psychosocial support.

The EU continued its global actions against harmful practices like child marriage and FGM through partnerships with UNICEF and UNFPA. The EU's work in digital rights progressed in 2024 through the Better Internet for Kids initiative, strengthening child protection in online spaces. This initiative complements the new Digital Services Act rules, setting obligations for service providers to prevent, detect and report cases of child sexual abuse online.

As part of the EU accession process, the EU assists candidate countries and potential candidates for EU accession in adopting evidence-based laws that align with international commitments. The EU monitors these efforts at every stage to ensure alignment, implementation and enforcement. Furthermore, the EU upholds a strong policy framework for protecting migrant children, including those displaced by conflict, such as children displaced by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

MIGRATION AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT

According to the latest global migrant estimates⁴², almost 281 million people are living in a country different from where they were born. Despite the estimated number of international migrants having increased over the past 50 years, the vast majority of people live in the country in which they were born⁴³. Most migration globally is considered to be regular.

By the end of June 2024, 122.6 million – 1 in 67 people – were forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, an increase of 5% compared to the end of 2023. These record-high levels of forced displacement continue a series of year-on-year increases over the last 12 years⁴⁴.

Of the 122.6 million forcibly displaced, by mid-2024, 72.1 million were internally displaced, 32 million were refugees under UNHCR's mandate, 8 million were asylum seekers, 6 million were Palestinian refugees under UNRWA's mandate, and 5.8 million were other people in need of international protection⁴⁵.



Thailand: Through the Ship to Shore Rights programme, the EU has contributed to the promotion of fair and sustainable employment to protect the rights of all workers, including migrant workers, in the fisheries sector.

UNHCR highlights that 69% of refugees and other people in need of international protection live in countries neighbouring their countries of origin, with low- and middle-income countries hosting 87% of the world's refugees and other people in need of international protection. 65% of refugees under UNHCR's mandate originate from the following five countries: Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, Ukraine, and Venezuela.

The EU stands firm on its commitment to protect the rights of refugees, including in relation to the principle of non-refoulement and the fundamental right to asylum of people fleeing persecution or conflict in their country of origin, in line with the commitment made at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum. The EU also still hosts over 4.2 million Ukrainian refugees, who were granted temporary protection. The EU advocates a **human rights-based approach** that focuses on people in vulnerable situations, including migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless persons in line with international human rights obligations under international law and standards, and through existing policy and legislative frameworks.

^{42 &}lt;a href="https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock">https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock

⁴³ https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/what-we-do/world-migration-report-2024-chapter-2/international-migrants-numbers-and-trends

^{44 &}lt;u>UNHCR mid-year Trends Report: https://www.unhcr.org/mid-year-trends</u>

^{45 &}lt;u>UNHCR: https://www.unhcr.org/mid-year-trends-report-2024</u>



Promoting Occupational Safety among Migrant Workers in Agriculture. A peer educator conducts an occupational safety information session with migrant workers in a sugar cane plantation. She demonstrates proper use of protective equipment - such as masks and gloves - when spraying chemicals, ensuring workers understand how to protect themselves on the job.

In 2024, the EU continued to provide support in a variety of areas related to migration and forced displacement, such as: (i) humanitarian assistance; (ii) international protection – including for refugees in vulnerable situations; (iii) returns and sustainable reintegration; (iv) the fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings; and (v) legal migration and mobility, with particular attention being paid to the situation of children on the move. The EU has committed to spending approximately 10% of NDICI-Global Europe's funding on actions supporting the management and governance of migration and forced displacement⁴⁶. This target also includes actions to address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement. In 2021-2023, actions on migration and forced displacement contributed over EUR 5.5 billion to this spending target⁴⁷. In 2024, the EU and its Member States contributed

close to USD 1 billion to UNHCR's budget. It is a tangible example of EU solidarity and shows how Team Europe is delivering impactful results.

The EU is supporting the International Data Alliance for Children on the Move, a unique global coalition working to improve the collection, analysis, sharing and use of data for displaced and migrant children, thus strengthening the protection and promotion of the rights of children on the move. The EU is also committed to addressing the critical issue of trafficking in human beings, with a particular focus on women and children, as well as the smuggling of migrants.



Health services are restored in a refugee camp in the Somali region of Ethiopia thanks to an EU-funded solar power plant and mini-grid providing electricity access.

The EU continued the implementation of the **Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling** and its Call to Action, launched by the President of the Commission in 2023. The Alliance focuses on the three strands of strengthening international cooperation in the prevention of migrant smuggling, providing a strong law enforcement and judicial response to migrant smuggling and addressing alternatives to irregular migration including legal pathways and root causes of irregular migration.

⁴⁶ An overview of all actions on migration and forced displacement under NDICI-Global Europe funding is publicly available on the European Commission's website: https://international-part-nerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-forced-displacement_en

⁴⁷ SWD(2024) 267 final: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PD-F/?uri=SWD:2024:267:FIN

Under the 'Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants – Asia and the Middle East' (receiving EUR 12.5 million in funding), the EU has supported the creation of a **Women's Network of Gender Champions against Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling**. It consists of champions of women's rights working in policymaking, the justice sector, law enforcement, civil society and other relevant local entities. The project ended in March 2024 and the Network has now grown into a vibrant community of practitioners.

In June 2024, the EU adopted the revised **EU Anti-trafficking Directive**⁴⁸, which will strengthen the EU's legal framework to prevent and counter human trafficking, as well as to protect, assist and support victims. The Directive entered into force on 14 July 2024. Additionally, the EU made historical progress with the adoption of the **New Pact on Migration and Asylum**⁴⁹ on 10 April 2024. The Pact entered into force on 11 June and will enter into application in 2026. The Pact is a comprehensive set of legislative and policy measures that aim to establish a fairer and more sustainable migration and asylum process in the EU and will equip the Member States with a sustainable migration and asylum system that is gender-responsive and child sensitive, that fully respects fundamental rights and pays due attention to specific vulnerabilities. The Pact ensures that the EU has strong and secure external borders, that fundamental rights are guaranteed, and that no EU country is left alone under pressure.

Safe, secure and legal pathways for migrants and refugees are an important tool for ensuring human rights protection for migrants and refugees. The European Year of Skills (May 2023 – May 2024) underlined that a strategic approach to solving labour and skills shortages, including through regular migration, remains indispensable. Work is underway to improve the EU's legislative framework to streamline legal migration procedures. In April 2024,

the revised Single Permit Directive was adopted. This streamlines the single permit procedure to work and reside in the EU and introduce rules to strengthen the protection of non-EU workers against labour exploitation. Work on the implementation of the 'Talent Partnerships' with Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh is ongoing. Talent Partnerships provide a framework to strengthen cooperation between the European Union, Member States and key partner countries to develop skills and talent and boost international labour mobility in a mutually beneficial way, as part of wider migration management in line with the Pact on Migration and Asylum.

The EU provides funding to support Member States in the resettlement and humanitarian admission of the most vulnerable refugees in line with the EU's collective pledges announced in the context of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, and in support of pilot projects that offer safe and legal protection avenues to skilled refugees displaced in third countries. In May 2024, the Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Framework Regulation was adopted, as part of the Pact on Migration and Asylum. The Regulation aims to provide a harmonised framework for the creation of safe and legal pathways of protection for the most vulnerable refugees. The EU is now working to implement the Regulation.

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The EU continued to highlight the connections between climate change, environmental issues and human rights throughout 2024, building on the UN General Assembly resolution recognising the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment alongside access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

The EU continued to support measures to address the impact of climate change, the loss of biodiversity, pollution and environmental degradation on the full enjoyment of all human rights, upholding the need for a human rights-based approach to solving these

⁴⁸ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32011L0036

⁴⁹ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en

problems. It continued its efforts to protect environmental, human and Indigenous rights defenders and stressed the need for effective, inclusive action to address climate challenges. A just and equitable green transition requires public awareness and consultation, ensuring that vulnerable groups, local communities, and ecosystems are duly considered.



Trinidad and Tobago during a tree-planting event on Earth Day 2024: Fighting Climate Change with the Indigenous Community – EU Ambassador looks on as Chief of the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community ceremonially waters the first tree planted on the community's ancestral land in Arima.

Ongoing destruction, degradation and conversion of the world's forests and natural ecosystems, as well as human rights violations are to a large extent linked to the expansion of agricultural production – in particular by converting forests to agricultural land to produce high-demand commodities and products. In response, the EU has agreed the EU Deforestation Regulation as part of the European Green Deal. The law will apply to large companies from 30 December 2025. Its purpose is to fight against deforestation and forest degradation and address the associated impacts on human rights, which are driven by European production and consumption of products like beef, leather, palm oil, coffee, cocoa, timber, rubber and soy. The law addresses violations of human rights that are

associated with deforestation or forest degradation, including rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and customary tenure rights holders.



The Amazon forest is under constant threat due to deforestation and forest degradation.

The EU and its Member States demonstrated their commitment to advance the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities at the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP16). The EU strongly supported the creation of a permanent body to implement provisions related to Indigenous Peoples and local communities, which will step up their engagement with and participation in all processes of the Convention.

The EUSR spoke in Seoul at the international conference 'Climate Change and Human Rights – Ensuring Action and Justice for All', highlighting the importance of national, regional and international courts in advancing the enforceability of this right. The EUSR also delivered an opening statement during the Samarkand Forum on Human Rights 'Environmental Challenges: Ensuring Sustainable Solutions for the Future of Human Rights in a Changing World'.

1.2 Empowering people

The EU remained committed to ensuring that no-one is left behind, by enabling individuals to reach their full potential as equal and active members of society. Upholding human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights forms the foundation of societal cohesion, solidarity, and mutual trust between both people and the state.



International
Day of Rural
Women: March
against GBV
in Nhlambeni,
Eswatini in the
framework of the
'YES, together we
can' project.

EMPOWERING WOMEN

Gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment and their enjoyment of all human rights were consistently raised in the EU's bilateral political and human rights dialogues. Such dialogues with non-EU countries and international organisations provided an avenue to support the full implementation of the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** (CEDAW) worldwide.

In addition, the EU continued to put gender equality, women's empowerment and the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda at the heart of its regional partnerships, such as with

the Council of Europe, the African Union, the League of Arab States, the Organisation of American States, the OSCE, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and NATO.



Women participating in an economic empowerment session in Marrupa, Mozambique. Empowering women and girls economically strengthens families and drives sustainable community development.

Throughout the year, the EUSR met with women human rights defenders and organisations raising concerns related to gender equality and women's rights, including from Argentina, Bahrain, Belarus, Egypt, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Uzbekistan. These engagements resulted in a deeper analysis of the overall human rights situation as well as stronger advocacy with relevant partners.

The EU continued to invest in actions targeting gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment as a principal objective in all policy areas, from eliminating gender-based violence to social, economic and political empowerment. Two new global actions are supporting the Spotlight Initiative and regional and global networks of women's organisations in order to fight gender-based violence.

Through the 'EU 4 Social Inclusion' regional programme in the Western Balkans and Türkiye, EU4Gender Equality component, implemented by UNDP and UN Women with an EU contribution of EUR 6.3 million, the EU seeks to achieve the following: (i) increase women's economic empowerment by strengthening their access to managerial and leadership roles, entrepreneurship, and specialised employment opportunities, particularly in the digital labour market and green transition, and in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); (ii) increase access to essential digital services for women and girls who are victims of online violence; and (iii) promote legal and policy frameworks that address technology-facilitated gender-based violence.





In **Zimbabwe**, a **Team Europe Initiative** focuses on promoting women's social, political and economic empowerment (EU contribution: EUR 110 million). The initiative underscores the EU's dedication to working alongside the Zimbabwean Government to increase gender equality, empower women and girls, and eradicate

gender-based violence. It also emphasises economic empowerment for women by engaging with the private sector on developing the skills of female entrepreneurs and on advocacy for better access to finance for women-led micro, small and medium-sized businesses.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, a new action for youth empowerment, gender equality and human rights for all aims to increase the capacity of CSOs and national human rights institutions to defend human rights. It aims to help combat gender-based violence and strengthen the environment for civic engagement to enable young people to participate. It will seek to empower women's rights organisations, social movements and other CSOs so they can be influential in ending gender-based violence.

In the Southern Neighbourhood, the EU is partnering with the OECD to support a new four-year regional project, launched in November 2024that supports a policy and regulatory framework to help women entrepreneurs access finance and achieve financial inclusion. This new project, called 'Enhancing Women Entrepreneurs' Financial Inclusion and Access to Finance in the Digital Age', is aligned with the priorities of the Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society.

The EU supports the Study on Women's Political Participation and Leadership in ASEAN, working together with the ASEAN Committee on Women. The study will focus on women's political participation and leadership in ASEAN countries and their impacts on sustainable development. The study also looks into the governing structures and policy developments that stimulate gender balance in government and decision-making bodies in individual ASEAN Member States, including Indonesia.

Civilian CSDP missions continue to implement the EU's strategic approach and action plan on women, peace and security (2019-2024) and the gender action plan (GAP III) in their operations. These frameworks emphasise participation, gender mainstreaming, prevention, protection and leadership.

Efforts to increase women's participation are central to the EU's strategy, including the updated 2024 strategy and action plan to 'Enhance Women's Participation in Civilian CSDP Missions', valid until 2027. The Civilian CSDP Compact, adopted in May 2023, aims for 40% women among international staff. The action plan focuses on equal opportunities in recruitment, retention, career development, and creating an inclusive, harassment-free work environment. Missions also aim to boost women's participation in key mandate areas, including civilian security sector reform, by supporting women's associations and gender-sensitive and responsive human resources policies.

Gender mainstreaming is guided by the civilian operations commander's operational guidelines, updated in February 2024. Missions have dedicated gender advisors and focal point networks, integrating gender considerations into monitoring, mentoring, advising and training.



Young people in sports advocating against gender-based violence during 16 days of activism in Fiji.

EMPOWERING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

In 2024, the EU advanced its youth agenda continuing the implementation of the youth action plan in EU external action⁵⁰ through several engagement and empowerment initiatives. The number of youth sounding boards in EU Delegations increased, stepping up dialogue with young people and providing a platform for their views to be fed into EU policy discussions, particularly in areas like sustainable development, human rights and democratic participation.

The EU Youth Empowerment Fund, now totalling EUR 11 million, supports projects to boost the capacity of young people to contribute to the sustainable development of their communities and societies by means of leading and implementing projects. Numerous other programmes, including those under the Global Gateway strategy, promote access to education, training and digital infrastructure, and stimulated, youth-led advocacy in various communities.

To mark the second anniversary of the youth action plan and to provide a platform for substantive discussions on the transformational impact of youth empowerment and participation, achievements and the road ahead, the European Commission hosted the **Global Gateway High-Level Youth Event**, 9-10 October, 2024. The EUSR for Human Rights participated in the event and took part in a panel discussion with young activists from Sudan and Venezuela, on peace, democracy and human rights in geopolitically challenging times.

Through the youth action plan, the EU also commits to promoting the implementation of the UN Youth, Peace, and Security Resolution, as restated in the revision of the Civilian CSDP Compact. In 2024, the EU also signed a Financial Framework Partnership Agreement and a EUR 4 million action grant with the United Network of Young Peacebuilders to further support their efforts in ensuring young people's voices are present in the peace and security arena.

^{50 &}lt;a href="https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/youth/youth-action-plan_en">https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/youth/youth-action-plan_en

Peace, democracy & Human Rights IN GEOPOLITICALLY CHALLENGING TIMES DON'T GIVE UPON US, LOCAL ACTIVISTS ANYA GABRELA PERMISITA OLOF ASTORINA ASTORINA ALANGE DARTGONEASES LOCAL ALANGE DARTGONEASE LO

Panel discussion at the Global Gateway High-Level Youth Event.

Initiatives such as the Western Balkans Youth Lab Project further demonstrate the EU's commitment to youth-led peace-building and reconciliation.

During the UN General Assembly High-Level week, the EUSR participated in an event on Child Protection and Safety in the Digital Age and put the spotlight on the EU's efforts to safeguard children's rights, including the mental health of children and young people in relation to social media.

At an **international conference on the rights of children in humanitarian crises**, chaired by Her Majesty the Queen of Belgium and organised by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNICEF Belgium and Plan International Belgium, the EUSR called for a push for accountability, and to give children a voice so as to fulfil their right to participate and be heard. This means that children should be involved in decisions that impact their lives, such as the provision of services, protection measures, and recovery efforts.

RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

In 2024, the European Union reinforced its commitment to advancing the rights of persons with disabilities, building on the strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030⁵¹. Work is underway with the European Standardisation Organisation to revise the current accessibility standards and develop new ones, to facilitate the implementation of the European Accessibility Act, which will become applicable as of 28 June 2025, and promoted inclusive labour market opportunities for persons with disabilities. Initiatives like the Disability Employment Package remain central to promoting social inclusion and economic autonomy. The Commission developed the package with key stakeholders. It provides guidelines and good practices covering all stages of employment from recruitment, through retention, to return to work.



As part of the "Back to School" campaign. Ambassador Beata Peksa visited the Public Association "Yenme" to hand over 50 school kits to children with disabilities and celebrate the start of the new school year.

Moreover, in 2024 the Directive establishing the European Disability Card and the European Parking Card⁵² for persons with disabilities, and extending it to third-country nationals legally residing in a Member States, came into force. The aim is to facilitate the free movement of persons with disabilities and the cards will provide

⁵¹ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/disability/union-equality-strategy-rights-persons-disabilities-2021-2030_en

^{52 &}lt;a href="https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52023PC0512">https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52023PC0512

them with legal certainty that their disability status will be recognised when travelling to other Member States. This will allow them to take advantage of special conditions and preferential treatment offered to residents with disabilities in respect of a wide variety of services, activities, for facilities, including parking rights on equal terms and conditions.

In addition, the guidance on independent living and inclusion in the community of persons with disabilities in the context of EU funding⁵³ provides recommendations as to the use of the EU funds to support living in the community by persons with disabilities on an equal basis. The Access City award celebrated its 15th anniversary, honouring cities in the EU that have done remarkable work on accessibility.



Wheelchair ramp funded by the EU Delegation to Iceland in collaboration with the Embassies of Germany, France, Finland and Sweden during Reykjavík Pride 2024.

Demonstrating the importance of the CRPD for the EU and its commitment to implementing the Convention globally, the EU, as a party to the Convention, proposed for the first time a candidate for the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This is an independent body tasked with monitoring and providing recommendations to help implement the Convention. The EU candidate was elected for the first time in June 2024 and became one of the independent experts on the Committee⁵⁴.

The EU also continued advocating for disability rights globally, supporting CRPD implementation in partner countries and working with them to uphold the human rights of persons with disabilities and support their social inclusion and participation in all areas of life. Cooperation agreements and dialogue with partner countries are underpinned by significant financial assistance, provided to both governmental and civil society organisations through NDICI-Global Europe and the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance, in sectors such as accessibility, employment, education and the situation of adults and children in institutions.

The EU funded in Ukraine a EUR 12 million project to implement a comprehensive reform of alternative care for children, including also trauma-informed care for children contributing to the deinstitutionalisation of children with disabilities.

Furthermore, the EU has promoted disability inclusion in responses to crises, providing humanitarian aid that is inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. In 2024, based on the OECD DAC marker on disability inclusion, almost 50% of our projects mainstreamed disability and 8% included targeted support for persons with disabilities.

The EU has continued engaging with Member States, UN entities and organisations representing persons with disabilities, fostering disability inclusion in international coordination mechanisms as well as in programme implementation at local level. In preparation for the 2025 CRPD review, the EU has actively engaged stakeholders to demonstrate advancements in accessibility, inclusion, and equal rights for persons with disabilities across its Member States.

⁵³ https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-adopts-guidance-inde-pendent-living-persons-disabilities-2024-11-20_en

⁵⁴ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/elected-inmaculada-placencia-porre-ro-eu-candidate-committee-rights-persons-disabilities_en?s=63



2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

In Jordan, Autism MENA, with funding from the EU, is committed to advocating for the rights of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and promotes their inclusion in Jordanian society. As part of this effort, civil society organisations are being empowered to foster a more inclusive environment for children with ASD.

The EU also helped prepare the 2025 Global Disability Summit, highlighting disability inclusion in EU-funded development and humanitarian action. In the lead-up to the Global Disability Summit, in 2024, the EU actively participated in the European Regional Disability Summit, a regional pre-summit to raise awareness and discuss the importance of inclusive international cooperation and humanitarian action with partners from Europe and Central Asia.

HUMAN RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS

In 2024, the EU continued advocating for the rights of older people through partnerships with international organisations and active engagement in the UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing. Recognising the need for consensus among UN Member States, the EU is committed to strengthening current frameworks and exploring their full potential to ensure comprehensive protection for older people, while remaining open to addressing any normative gaps in these frameworks. The EU emphasised the need to mainstream the

human rights of older persons and proposed policies to promote equality, non-discrimination and dignity, equity, and protection against age discrimination globally.

Responding to an ageing demographic, the EU focused on digital inclusion, affordable long-term care, and improved social services. The European care strategy made strides in expanding care options, supporting carers and promoting work-life balance. The Demography Toolbox, which is a comprehensive set of strategies and interventions designed to address demographic challenges, continued to promote digital literacy for older adults, expanding age-friendly digital services, and fostering inclusive environments within Member States.



RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The EU is committed to the international recognition and advancement of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as confirmed by the EU's support for the **UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.** In 2024, the EU continued to support the implementation of the UN Declaration at country level, through its cooperation programmes and through its political and human rights dialogues.

The EU took an active part in the 24th session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in April 2024 focusing on emphasising the voices of Indigenous young people. The EU also delivered statements at the 17th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which took place in July 2024. The EU took an active part in the negotiations on the UN General Assembly's annual resolution on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The voices of Indigenous Peoples contribute significantly to EU policies and programmes. The EU-Arctic Forum and the Indigenous Peoples' Dialogue, which took place on 14 and 15 May 2024 in Brussels, was a major opportunity in this regard. The **EU-Arctic youth dialogues** comprised a full segment in the programme, reflecting the importance of listening to and engaging with young voices and ideas.

On the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples on 9 August, the High Representative issued a statement on behalf of the EU highlighting that the increasing competition over natural resources and land, as well as the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution puts Indigenous Peoples in particular at risk. It underlined that the EU is keenly aware of the need to ensure that the green transition is just and inclusive, namely by respecting and protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples.



The 2024 edition of the EU-Arctic Forum saw the very first EU-Arctic Youth Dialogue – the opportunity to give a platform to those representing the present and future of the Arctic.

The EU continued to fund the **Indigenous Navigator tool**, an open-source, community-based data collection system and mapping tool managed by Indigenous Peoples for Indigenous Peoples. It provides timely global reports on the situation of Indigenous Peoples, including Indigenous women, and thereby supports international advocacy. The data collected through the Indigenous Navigator empowers Indigenous communities to identify gaps in the implementation of their rights and advocate for necessary changes at national, regional and international level. This evidence-based approach strengthens their position in policy dialogues and negotiations.

By the end of 2024, the Indigenous Navigator had expanded its coverage to 29 countries across Asia, Africa, the Americas, and the Arctic, collecting data on challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples worldwide. In 2024, three new modules⁵⁵ were developed that focused on expanded indicators responding to new developments in the international human rights system, including indicators

⁵⁵ A module, in this context, refers to a combination of national and community surveys, accompanied by detailed guidance and related instruments. It includes weighted questions, score calculations, and an index explorer for data analysis and advocacy.

on climate, due diligence and biodiversity, informed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the underlying binding legal obligations in human rights treaties.



Participants who completed economic entrepreneurship training in traditional crafts and weaving in Maleku Indigenous Territory as part of a project funded by the EU and implemented by Paz y Desarrollo to strengthen the rights of Indigneous Peoples in Costa Rica.

The EU also continues to provide support to the **Indigenous Peoples' Centre for Documentation**, **Research and Information** (DOCIP). In 2024, 117 indigenous delegates were trained on their rights, 1617 (59% female, 41% male) Indigenous delegates received assistance during three sessions of the United Nations (UNPFII, EMRIP and FBHR)⁵⁶ with interpretation into 5 languages for non-official sessions, and 76 reports or statements made by Indigenous Peoples were issued.

In 2024, 23% of the 10.500 human rights defenders supported by ProtectDefenders.eu were working on environmental, land and indigenous people's rights in 41 countries such as the Philippines, Colombia, Honduras or Uganda.

The EUSR raised the situation of Indigenous Peoples as a part of the human rights dialogues with Brazil, Colombia and Mexico. During his mission to Brazil, he raised the issue of Indigenous Peoples land rights with key counterparts, an issue he had exchanged on earlier

with Brazil's Minister for Indigenous Peoples. The EUSR also received a delegation of the Maasai People from Tanzania, who expressed their concern about the ongoing human rights violations they are facing while attempting to preserve their traditional way of life on their ancestral lands.

1.3 Promoting fundamental freedoms and strengthening the civic and political space

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In 2024, as pressure on freedom of expression intensified globally, the EU stood resolute in its commitment to uphold this fundamental right, engaging actively in both multilateral and bilateral settings. Government censorship of the media, attacks on academic and cultural expression, and harassment of journalists were among the key drivers of democratic backsliding worldwide⁵⁷. In response, EU Delegations around the world and the EUSR took decisive action to defend freedom of expression, in close partnership with independent media, individual journalists and civil society organisations.

Concerns over legislation, policies and practices restricting freedom of expression were raised by the EU with the authorities in several countries as part of political and human rights dialogues. The EU voiced strong opposition to the misuse of legal tools to infringe on the right to freedom of expression, including defamation charges, claims of spreading false information and the use of counterterrorism and anti-corruption laws to suppress dissent. The EU also worked with partners around the world to address the increased use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) to intimidate and silence journalists as well as so-called 'foreign agent' laws designed to discredit and constrain independent media.

⁵⁶ The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), and the Forum on Business and Human Rights (FBHR).

⁵⁷ Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot accessible at https://v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports/

The EU continued to promote the public's right of access to information through high-quality, diverse, and reliable sources, stepping up efforts to increase information integrity and counter disinformation. The EU also addressed infringements on freedom of expression online, condemning practices like internet shutdowns, online censorship and the use of intrusive surveillance, including spyware.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

In 2024, the EU worked with partners around the world to build political support and mobilise resources to fulfil the objectives of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, a total of 101 journalists and media workers were killed in the line of duty in 2024⁵⁸. The vast majority of journalists killed were local Palestinian journalists reporting from Gaza. The EU strongly condemned attacks on journalists and media workers, calling for compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) as well as independent and effective investigations.

Despite international commitments, most perpetrators of crimes against journalists continue to evade justice, resulting in a climate of fear and self-censorship that shields those in power from public scrutiny and undermines the public's right to information. Threats and harassment are also forcing an increasing number of journalists into exile. The EU worked with partners to address the worrying increase in transnational repression aimed at silencing and attacking journalists that have fled abroad.

Let the truth be told, let the press be **free**. Let the truth be told, let the press be free. Let the truth be told, let the press be free. Let the truth be told, let the press be free. Let the truth be told, let the press be free. Let the truth be told, let the press be **free**.

© EU



A near-record 361 journalists were imprisoned for their work as of 1 December 2024, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists⁵⁹. Journalists also continued to face widespread harassment and intimidation, both online and offline, as both governments and nonstate actors sought to silence critical reporting. Women journalists, in particular, encountered heightened risks, including genderbased violence, online abuse and targeted threats. The EU's Special Representative for Human Rights actively raised individual cases of journalists at risk in dialogues with non-EU countries.

The EU also monitored the safety of journalists, considered a key feature of media freedom in candidate countries and potential candidates for EU accession. The increased use of SLAPPs against civil society and journalists is identified as a trend in several countries under the EU's enlargement policy like Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia.

The EU continued to provide direct support to journalists at risk across the world through its Human Rights Defenders Mechanism ProtectDefenders.eu. More than 700 journalists at risk in 60 countries benefited from support in 2024 in the form of emergency

⁵⁸ https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/104-journalists-killed-this-year-according-to-the-ifi

⁵⁹ https://cpi.org/2025/01/journalist-jailings-near-record-high-in-2024-as-crackdown-onpress-freedom-grows/

grants, temporary relocation, financial support for physical and digital protection, medical aid, capacity building, advocacy and other measures.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

In 2024, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to protecting academic freedom globally and to supporting scholars, researchers and students at risk, as well as the autonomy of academic institutions.

Around the world, academic communities are increasingly subject to interference, suppression and direct attacks. Concerns over restrictions on academic freedom were raised during human rights and political dialogues with non-EU countries. Through its Human Rights Defenders Mechanism, the EU intensified its support for at-risk academics and institutions, emphasising the importance of safe and autonomous academic environments. In 2024, ProtectDefenders.eu delivered emergency protection and support to at least 47 scholars and researchers.

The EU co-organised a side event at the 56th Human Rights Council in June 2024, in collaboration with the UN's Special Rapporteur on the right to education, UNESCO, and Scholars at Risk. This event marked the presentation of the Special Rapporteur's thematic report to the Human Rights Council on 'The Right to Academic Freedom'⁶⁰. The report followed up on the Joint Statement on Academic Freedom delivered by France on behalf of 74 countries during the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council⁶¹.

The Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Commission hosted on 16 February 2024 an international Ministerial conference, attended by representatives of more than 50 countries, which endorsed a Ministerial Statement on principles and values

in international cooperation in research and innovation ('Brussels Statement')⁶². The Statement, crafted collectively by the participating countries, stakeholder organisations like UNESCO, OECD, and the International Science Council, as well as the Presidency and the European Commission, calls for the sustainability of the Multilateral Dialogue on principles and values in research and innovation launched by the Commission as a global platform for constructive and collaborative engagement, fostering a common understanding and an open exchange of views, experiences, and best practices on principles and values such as academic freedom, ethics and research integrity, as well as gender equality and inclusiveness.



Former European Commissioner Iliana Ivanova and former State Secretary Thomas Dermine of the Belgian Presidency with participants at the international Ministerial conference on cooperation in research and innovation.

In April 2024, the European Commission announced a EUR 10 million top-up for the MSCA4Ukraine initiative, funded by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions under Horizon Europe. Since 2023, the scheme has allowed 125 displaced researchers from Ukraine to train and work in 21 countries. The extra funds will enable around 50 more new fellows, including doctoral candidates and postdoctoral

⁶⁰ https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5658-right-academic-free-dom-report-special-rapporteur-right

⁶¹ https://onu-geneve.delegfrance.org/Joint-declaration-on-Academic-freedom

⁶² https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/94d6bb42-1fe7-478c-b6b4-d0be4dfb0204 en?filename=brussels-ministerial-statement-2024-02.pdf

researchers, to continue their work safely in academia, businesses, research centres and public institutions based in the EU and countries associated to Horizon Europe. The scheme includes specific support for research organisations, allowing them to host researchers for a period of between six months and two years, along with family and special needs allowances to assist researchers with dependents or disabilities.

Supported by the European Parliament, in 2024, the European Commission launched a European fellowship scheme for researchers at risk (EUR 12 million) as part of the new Supporting Atrisk Researchers with Fellowships in Europe project (SAFE). Over a period of three years, SAFE will support up to 60 non-EU researchers, based in and outside Europe, with fully funded fellowships for up to two years. The first fellowships are expected to start in May 2025.

The project INSPIREUROPE+ continued to help prepare academic and non-academic institutions across Europe to support researchers at risk in sustainable and ethical ways. It also continued its work on providing guidance to researchers at risk through a series of webinars on how to find research and employment opportunities in Europe.





Specific online seminars for EU Delegations were organised in partnership with Scholars and Risk and the Global Campus of Human Rights to raise awareness of academic freedom as a human right to be protected and promoted in the EU's external action globally and at country level.

The Global Campus of Human Rights continued to be a crucial partnerforthe EU as an international academic network providing postgraduate courses on human rights, but also ensuring the protection of many academics at risk. In 2024, the Global Campus of Human Rights was awarded the Council of Europe's North-South Prize, in recognition of its crucial work in ensuring access to high-quality human rights courses and promoting broad support for universal human rights and democratic values through engagement with academic communities. In 2024, the Global Campus continued its 'Reconceptualising exile' programme to support scholars and activists forced into exile by repressive regimes.



In June 2024, the Global Campus organised the International Student Conference on Just Transition in Bishkek.

1.4 Reinforcing Economic, Social, Cultural and Labour Rights

The EU continued to deliver on its comprehensive agenda to: (i) promote and protect economic, social and cultural rights through public diplomacy and by engaging in multilateral human rights fora and human rights dialogues; and (ii) provide support to partner countries to respect, protect and fulfil these rights through development cooperation and by achieving the SDGs and Agenda 2030. The EU has continued its efforts to build bridges with other groups and countries in multilateral fora, underlining the shared commitment to advance the respect for economic and social rights through international cooperation, despite differences that might persist on other questions.

The EU has remained a staunch advocate of economic, social and cultural rights in the context of the Summit of the Future and in the ongoing preparatory work for a World Social Summit to be held in 2025. The EU's contribution is guided by the principle that all human rights are interrelated and indivisible, be they civil, cultural, economic, political or social. In this vein, the EUSR's office held exchanges



The EUSR for Human Rights participated in the third African Business and Human Rights Forum in Kenya.

with the Special Rapporteur for Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights of the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights about the EUSR's work in the Americas region. Furthermore, the EUSR regularly addressed this topic during his engagements with officials from the African Union, as well as during his missions to Kenya and the Gambia.

CULTURAL RIGHTS

The EU's motto, 'Unity in Diversity,' underscores its commitment to safeguarding cultural differences, with particular attention paid to minorities and Indigenous Peoples. Through multilateral statements, public diplomacy, and initiatives to preserve cultural heritage, the EU consistently champions respect for cultural rights.

The ACP-EU culture programme with a total budget of EUR 40 million has supported more than 30 small projects in sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific region. These projects have actively contributed to multiculturalism and helped promote cultural rights, with a focus on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and minorities.

EU Delegations worldwide actively engage in cultural diplomacy, not only showcasing the rich diversity of European culture but also supporting cultural diversity in partner countries. A specific example is the European Film Festival (EUFF), held in 103 countries in 2024 involving 540 screenings, with diverse audiences bridging cultural divides, promoting creativity and celebrating the diversity of European cinema and cultural production. Many films in the EUFF catalogue explore themes of human rights and diversity. Each year, the EU Delegation to Türkiye organises an EU Human Rights Short Film Competition for Human Rights Day, breaking a new record in 2024 with a total of 305 applications.



The EU-UNESCO Expert Facility supports partner countries to improve the design and development of cultural policies. The facility focuses on improving artists' working conditions, encouraging spaces to be provided for free expression and advancing cultural rights. These efforts aim to ensure that artists can fully enjoy their rights while improving their professional and creative environments.

In 2024, the EU-Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Cinema campaign began, supporting audio-visual cooperation with a focus on young people, gender and diversity. Activities include opportunities for young talent and screenings of EU-LAC coproductions, exchanges and networking opportunities among EU and LAC film professionals and policymakers in major international film festivals. One of the first actions enabled two young women filmmakers from Peru and Colombia to take part in the prestigious San Sebastian Film Festival, with their films placing a special emphasis on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and minorities.

LABOUR RIGHTS

The EU continued to implement the **Decent Work Worldwide**⁶³ initiative in 2024, ensuring the EU's commitment to championing decent work both in the EU and around the world. The EU promotes decent work across all sectors and policy areas in the domestic markets of non-EU countries and in global supply chains. This is done by engaging in multilateral fora, legislation and standard-setting, bilateral and regional dialogues, and cooperation projects.

At the 2024 International Labour Conference, the EU actively contributed to negotiations on protection against biological hazards in the working environment, the recurrent discussion on the strategic objective of fundamental principles and rights at work, and on the 'General Discussion on Decent work' and the care economy.

The EU worked closely with the International Labour Organization (ILO) in programmes such as 'Vision Zero Fund' to promote safety and health at work around the world and 'Decent Work – Innovative Solutions for Formalisation' in Latin America.

Furthermore, the EU funded the Global Deal Initiative to develop, implement and strengthen international labour standards. As part of this initiative, events to promote social dialogue were held in Kenya, Nigeria and Sri Lanka.

The EU passed two legislative initiatives in 2024, which are expected to significantly help improve respect for labour standards worldwide. The first was the Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence, which lays down rules on obligations as well as penalties for large companies regarding actual and potential adverse impacts on human rights, including labour rights, in their supply chains. The second was the Regulation to ban products made with forced labour from the EU's single market. Updates on EU trade policy instruments can be found under Section 3.3 bilateral cooperation – trade instruments.

^{63 &}lt;u>https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2022:66:FIN</u>



A woman employed in a cashew processing factory in western Sierra Leone that empowers farmers to meet local and international standards while boosting incomes. This is part of the efforts of the EU to support women empowerment in the agro-business sector.

International labour rights were discussed in bilateral dialogues and consultations with non-EU countries in 2024, including dedicated labour rights dialogues with Canada, China, Japan, Thailand and the United States. Regional dialogues were also held with organisations such as the Union for the Mediterranean and ASEAN.

THE RIGHT TO THE HIGHEST ATTAINABLE STANDARD OF HEALTH

In January 2024, the Council of the European Union approved conclusions on the 'EU Global Health Strategy: Better Health for All in a Changing World,' reaffirming the EU and its Member States' leading role in advancing global health. The Council emphasised that physical and mental health is a human right and a prerequisite for sustainable development⁶⁴. Through these conclusions, the Council highlighted that physical and mental health is a human right and that

health is a prerequisite for sustainable development. The strategy puts forward three key overarching and interrelated priorities to: (1) ensure better health and well-being for people; (2) strengthen health systems and advance universal health coverage; (3) prevent and combat health threats, including pandemics, applying a 'One Health approach'.



A nurse engages with a mother at the Cumaba health center in Mozambique, highlighting the importance of providing essential health services to women. Accessible maternal and reproductive healthcare is vital for promoting healthier families and stronger communities.

Health is one of five key areas of partnership of the EU Global Gateway, adhering to democratic values and high social and environment standards. The implementation of the strategy takes place through a Team Europe approach, across sectors and in partnership with a range of stakeholders at different levels. Engagement with the private sector and leveraging innovative financing mechanisms are also key. On a global level, the EU is 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. Regionally, health-focused Team Europe initiatives are being implemented with partners involved in: (i) vaccines, medicines and

⁶⁴ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/01/29/eu-glob-al-health-strategy-council-approves-conclusions

health technologies (MAV+); (ii) sexual and reproductive health and rights; (iii) the strengthening of public health institutes; (iv) health security using the 'One Health approach'; and (v) digital health.



The mobile clinic bus is part of an EU-funded project to expand healthcare access in remote Fijian communities.

The EU's humanitarian health response seeks to limit excess preventable mortality, permanent disability and disease associated with humanitarian crises. In 2024, the EU provided funding of EUR **347 million** for humanitarian health interventions, following a crosssectoral, needs-based and integrated approach. Some examples of vital care in fragile and conflict-affected settings include: (i) access to primary healthcare and reproductive healthcare; (ii) access to mental health and psychosocial support; (iii) rehabilitation; and (iv) responses to gender-based violence. In 2024, the EU's humanitarian health assistance, complemented by the work of the European Humanitarian Response Capacity and the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, has contributed to epidemic preparedness and response, notably to address Cholera, Mpox and Marburg in Africa. The EU's advocacy efforts for the protection of health workers and infrastructure and compliance with international humanitarian law in conflicts continued in 2024, for example, through a dedicated side event during the Protection of Civilians Week 2024. Likewise, the EU was engaged in raising awareness about mental health and

helped provide quality mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian settings. In particular, it highlighted this topic at the 30-year celebration conference of the IFRC Psychosocial Centre.

THE RIGHT TO WATER AND SANITATION

The EU is committed to implementing UN Resolution 64/292 on the human right to water and sanitation and to meeting the targets of SDG 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, by raising awareness and promoting action in multilateral fora, development cooperation and humanitarian action. Since March 2023, the EU has been working closely with UNICEF and the Sanitation and Water for All partnership on a project titled 'beyond pipes and toilets: promoting the human rights to water and sanitation through advocacy, coordination, and accountability'.

References to the right to water figured prominently in EU statements, specifically in the High Representative's statement ⁶⁵on World Water Day in March 2024. 'As water scarcity intensifies,



⁶⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_24_1577

increased competition for dwindling freshwater resources threatens stability among and within nations through conflicts, displacement, or migration. And water is also far too often used as a weapon of war. There can be no peace without universal access to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation for all'.

The EU welcomes and supports the UN system-wide strategy for Water and Sanitation adopted in July 2024. It also supports the UN Special Envoy on Water recognising the pivotal role she plays in ensuring coordination and providing leadership to attain the human right to water and sanitation for all. The EU will further significantly upscale investments in partner countries, including in water infrastructure, under its Global Gateway strategy, delivering on its commitment under the Water Action Agenda to help 70 million people access improved drinking water sources and/or sanitation facilities by 2030. The European Commission committed an estimated EUR 1.9 billion to water-related actions between 2021 and 2024. This confirms an upward trend compared to the EU's previous multiannual financial framework and puts the EU on track to delivering on its commitment.

Following the outbreak of the war in Gaza, the EU allocated a total of EUR 238 million for 2024, with many humanitarian activities focused on providing emergency water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services and emergency WASH kits, particularly for the most vulnerable populations. The EU also launched a humanitarian air bridge (HAB) operation to aid the people affected by the crisis in Palestine. In 2024, a total of 61 flights transported over 3.650 tonnes of cargo including medical supplies, shelter, WASH kits, educational supplies, and medicines among others.

Finally, the new European Commission, which took office in late 2024, highlighted water and sanitation as key priorities in its agenda. This included a focus on sustainable water management practices and ensuring access to clean water as a fundamental human right.

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

The EU continued to promote and protect the right to education for all in its bilateral and multilateral action. In line with SDG 4, the EU continued to work on ensuring universal, inclusive and equitable quality education for all by putting **education** at the heart of its international cooperation, almost doubling its investments in education to over EUR 6 billion for the period 2021-2027. Together with the EU Member States, in a Team Europe approach, the EU provides over half of the official development assistance to education worldwide.

EU funding supports partner countries in their efforts to fulfil their obligations to ensure the right to education for all. Following a human rights-based approach, the EU pays particular attention to ensuring that people from all parts of society can access education, especially the poorest and most marginalised of people, and that access is not discriminatory on any grounds. The EU is introducing over 40 Team Europe initiatives across the world to improve inclusion, equity and quality in education and embed education components in various sectoral actions to power the digital and green transition. Aligned with the objectives of the EU's gender action plan III, 92% of education funding includes targeted gender equality actions, up from 82% at the end of the previous multiannual financing framework.

^{66 *}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.



The EU supports the modernisation of the vocational education system in Jordan: here, the EU Delegation visiting the Sharif Abdul Hamid Sharaf Vocational Secondary school in Amman.

An estimated 224 million children and adolescents affected by crises are in urgent need of education support. Some 72 million of these children and adolescents are out of school (53% of whom are girls). For children in emergencies, education is not only about the right to learn. It is a lifeline. The EU continued to prioritise 'education in emergencies' with 10% of its initial humanitarian aid budget going towards helping children caught in emergencies return to and stay in education through various formal and non-formal education pathways. In 2024, the EU spent over EUR 175 million to support access to safe and quality learning for over 2 million children and young people caught in humanitarian emergencies. The EU prioritises projects that promote girls' education in crisis situations. The education in emergencies funding also supports the commitments to protect educational facilities from attack, and to strengthen preparedness and resilience of education provision.

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

HUMAN RIGHTS AND COUNTER-TERRORISM

Terrorist attacks across the world show the extent of the unabated threat to the public from all forms of violent extremism. Terrorist threats are diverse and geographically diffuse. These threats are significant, complex and unpredictable. Threats arise from the risk of radicalisation and violent extremism propagated in local communities within the EU and beyond, as well as from the (re-) emergence of terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and Da'esh, as well as low-key lone operators. Furthermore, emerging technologies, an increasingly aggressive terrorist propaganda online, and politically motivated terrorism are leading to new challenges.

The EU action plan on human rights and democracy reaffirms the EU's commitment to consistently and coherently promote human rights in all its external action, including in counter-terrorism (CT) efforts. Nonetheless, counter-terrorism objectives have been misused by some governments as an excuse to crack down on pluralism and dissent, which includes crackdowns on human rights defenders and CSOs. In 2024, the EU responded to situations where such measures threaten the civic space or if they involve a misuse of emergency or exceptional powers and procedures to curtail the exercise of other human rights.

The EU has concluded cooperation clauses and agreements with non-EU countries. It is also carrying out projects to aid and strengthen capabilities with partner countries. Adherence to human rights in counter-terrorism policies and measures is a standing item in the EU's bilateral counter-terrorism dialogues with partner countries, and as part of our multilateral counter-terrorism engagement, including with the UN CT compact, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the

Global Counter-terrorism Forum, which the EU co-chairs with Egypt, and the Global Coalition against Da'esh. The importance of human rights is reflected in the EU's capacity-building support to partners through the EU's counter-terrorism facilities, as well as bilateral and regional projects. Technical cooperation is offered to encourage partner countries to integrate human rights, gender equality and rule of law into their counter-terrorism policies and to develop evidence-based criminal justice systems. The EUSR for Human Rights has consistently expressed his concerns regarding the use of counter-terrorism legislation to clamp down on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The EU's overarching priorities as co-chair of the **Global Counter-terrorism Forum** are to address the terrorist threat in Africa and reinforce education and gender as key aspects of counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism policies. To this end, the EU and Morocco co-lead a Forum initiative on Education for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism (Edu4PCVE) with the Sahel as the pilot region.



On 25 April 2024, the Global Counter-terrorism Forum (GCTF) held a Thematic Expert Workshop on Education for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism (P/CVE).

To effectively counter and prevent the threat of terrorism and violent extremism, the EU takes a **whole-of-society approach**. This approach envisions a **strong role for CSOs** and other non-governmental organisations in ensuring effective prevention efforts that are based on human rights and respect for the rule of law. It is crucially important to ensure that civil society organisations are not abused for terrorism financing purposes. As part of these efforts, the EU remains vigilant against attempts to use this as an excuse to disrupt the legitimate activities of CSOs or unduly restrict their access to resources, including funding, necessary to carry out their legitimate activities.

The Terrorist Content Online Regulation, applicable since June 2022, has had a major impact in limiting the spread of terrorist content that can lead to radicalisation and recruitment, while including strong safeguards to ensure fundamental rights are protected, particularly the freedom of expression and information. By 30 November 2024, more than 1 300 removal orders were issued in total.

In 2024, the EU continued to fund programmes such as CT Phare, dedicated to increasing the compliance of counter-terrorism actions with human rights standards. Likewise, the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) continued working with policymakers and those who work in the field of prevention of radicalisation to ensure a coordinated EU approach to preventing radicalisation⁶⁷. RAN activities have been taken over by the EU Knowledge Hub on the prevention of radicalisation – the EU's new flagship initiative to support Member States in their prevention efforts.

⁶⁷ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a4bd65f1-4987-4213-851c-df5b-2d071d49_en?filename=Strategic%200rientations%202024-2025_en.pdf&prefLang=pt

THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

The EU continued its efforts to: (i) support the global fight against impunity; (ii) ensure that perpetrators of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of aggression are held accountable for their actions; and (iii) achieve justice for victims of atrocities. Against this background, the EU continued to provide political, diplomatic and financial support to the International Criminal Court (ICC)⁶⁸.

EU action in support of the ICC focused on helping the Court to counter external attacks against it, its judges and its staff and threats of the imposition of sanctions against it. This issue gained heightened significance when Russia issued arrest warrants against the ICC Prosecutor and judges involved in investigating potential war crimes in Ukraine, as well as following the ICC Prosecutor's decision to request arrest warrants for Hamas and Israeli leadership. The EU supported the Court through EU statements, démarches and interventions in support of the Court's independence and integrity.

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, targeted démarches to specific countries, and incorporating clauses in agreements with non-EU countries encouraging them to ratify or accede to the Rome Statute. The EU also offered assistance to support those states wishing to advance in this process.

Throughout the year, the EUSR for Human Rights continued to support the work of the ICC and promote the widest possible participation in the Rome Statute, specifically during his mission to Ukraine in early 2024. The EUSR availed of every opportunity to express the EU's support in bringing the perpetrators of war crimes and other violations of IHL and human rights to justice and emphasised the EU's steadfast commitment to support the effective



The EUSR for Human Rights engaged with the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC.

functioning of the ICC. A visit to The Hague in April 2024, served to send a strong political message about the priority and urgency the EU and the EUSR attach to IHL and international justice. The EUSR met with senior officials of the ICC: the Vice-President, the Registrar, the Prosecutor and the Executive Director of the Trust Fund for Victims. The EUSR underlined the crucial role of international law, as a common denominator, and the need to rely on the impartial and independent work of competent international legal authorities, including the ICC. Against the backdrop of repeated attacks (including cyber) and sanctions against the Court, the EUSR has been consistent in stressing the need to preserve the Court's independence and integrity, to allow it to carry out its work, to investigate international crimes worldwide, to protect and provide reparations to victims and witnesses, and to support and cooperate with national authorities and other accountability mechanisms.

Since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, cooperation between the EU and the ICC has significantly intensified. The ICC continues to operate within the framework of the Joint Investigation Team coordinated by Eurojust, enabling information

⁶⁸ In accordance with Council Decision 2011/168/CFSP and the 2011 action plan on its implementation, as well as part of the implementation of the 2006 Agreement between the ICC and the EU on cooperation and assistance.

and evidence to be exchanged and supporting investigations into war crimes committed in Ukraine. It also remains an active participant in the Dialogue Group on Accountability for Ukraine, a platform for coordination and dialogue among accountability stakeholders.



High Representative meeting Ukranian President in Ukraine in December, 2024 to discuss EU support.

In **Ukraine**, the EU bolstered efforts to ensure accountability for the atrocity crimes committed in and against Ukraine in the context of Russia's war of aggression. This included strengthening the investigative and prosecutorial capacities of the ICC, supporting the establishment and operations of the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine (ICPA) at Eurojust, and providing assistance to survivors of conflictrelated sexual violence. In 2024, the EU changed its status from Associate Member to fully-fledged Participant in the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, under the Council of Europe's auspices. In 2024, the EU also continued to participate in the ongoing discussions on the setting up of the International Claims Commission, which will review and decide on eligible claims recorded in the Register of Damage and determine the value of each claim, as well as of the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine.

The EU's support for the ICC is part of its wider efforts to ensure that perpetrators of the most serious crimes under international law are held accountable. In line with the principle of complementarity, the EU provided support for the criminal justice systems of several countries including Ethiopia, the Gambia, Georgia, Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria and Rwanda. Strengthening the Court's partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region, in order to encourage more countries to join the Rome Statute, was a key priority for the ICC in 2024.

The EU continued to support a number of other international criminal tribunals, ad hoc national tribunals, hybrid tribunals, as well as truth and reconciliation commissions and residual mechanisms to protect the rights of victims to justice and reparation. The bodies supported included: (i) the Special Criminal Court in the Central African Republic; (ii) the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia; (iii) the Special Tribunal for Lebanon; and (iv) 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.



President of the European Council, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and High Representative with the President of Ukraine on a visit to Ukraine in December 2024.

101

1.6 Closing the accountability gap, fighting impunity and supporting transitional justice

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

Closing the accountability gap, fighting impunity and supporting transitional justice remain high on the EU agenda. To advance in the fulfilment of these goals, this agenda includes engaging with non-EU countries, bilateral dialogues and cooperating with regional organisations, such as the African Union (AU).

In **Ethiopia**, the EU actively supports transitional justice through various programmes. The current criminal justice initiative significantly aids the transitional justice process, and new programmes are in the pipeline including EUR 10 million to boost the capacity of key institutions and CSOs in implementing a comprehensive national transitional justice policy with a focus on accountability.



In the **Central African Republic**, the EU remains committed to justice sector reform and transitional justice. The EUR 17.5 million programme 'Renforcement de l'État de droit et de la justice pour les citoyens centrafricains' adopted in 2024, aims to improve judicial independence, accountability, access to justice, human rights and transitional and traditional justice. The programme also supports the country's Special Criminal Court (SCC) in investigating and prosecuting war crimes and crimes against humanity. Furthermore, a Team Europe initiative to bolster the SCC was approved in June 2024 involving Belgium, France, Germany, Spain and Switzerland, focussing on fighting impunity through information sharing and resource mobilisation.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, a new 36-month project was launched on 1 February 2024 with a EUR 1.4 million budget to support CSOs in documenting serious human rights violations, identifying victims and assisting them throughout the legal process.

In **Colombia**, the EU supports the functioning of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace with EUR 2.3 million over a two-year period. The project seeks to improve the system of restorative sanctions with a gender perspective to promote reconciliation.



EU Member States playing football with ex-combatants and regional authorities in Caquetá, Colombia as a step towards reconciliation.

Regionally, the EU and the AU have actively cooperated on **transitional justice** both at political and operational level. Transitional justice is a central part of the annual EU-AU high-level human rights dialogue. In 2024, the EU through the 'Initiative for Transitional Justice in Africa' project supported 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. Furthermore, the AU launched a sensitisation campaign to promote the implementation roadmap for the 2019 continental transitional justice policy, which provides guidelines for national authorities using 'African solutions to African problems' and draws inspiration from the EU's transitional justice

policy. Increasingly, AU Member States are seeking AU Commission assistance to establish national transitional justice processes. African leaders and experts are deployed to mediate, negotiate and offer technical support based on best practices.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

Through EU support, the AU Commission has engaged with countries like Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Libya, South Sudan and The Gambia. The project also funds civil society and victim initiatives, with six subgrantees having started projects. Recent activities include: (i) the launch of the 'African Women for Transitional Justice (AW4TJ)' platform to amplify women's voices in conflict resolution; (ii) the inaugural meeting of the Community of Practice on transitional justice; and (iii) thematic webinars with accompanying policy briefs.

Fighting impunity for serious human rights violations requires coordinated global efforts to uphold international law. The EUR 21.3 million, four-year project 'Global Initiative Against Impunity for International Crimes and Serious Human Rights Violations: Making Justice Work!', launched on 1 December 2023, aims to empower civil society in addressing international crimes. It supports genderresponsive and victim-centred approaches to transitional justice. The project is implemented by a consortium of eight international organisations, and the Coalition for the ICC and the Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities (AIPG). Already, the Victims' Rights Working Group, a network of over 300 CSOs and experts that ensure victims' rights are respected in ICC judicial processes, has been re-established. It is providing legal and psychosocial support for victims, and has participated in trials such as Ousman Sonko's conviction for crimes against humanity.

The fight against impunity and support being given to transitional justice processes have been significant features of the work of the EUSR for Human Rights. The EUSR has consistently stressed the EU's fundamental commitment to ending impunity and ensuring accountability for all violations of international law, including

human rights law, and international humanitarian law worldwide. In his conversations with national authorities and CSOs, he stressed the importance of documenting human rights and IHL violations to ensure accountability, not least in post-conflict situations: establishing facts, and ensuring accountability and justice are essential for peace to be sustainable. He also demonstrated the EU's support for the rule of law, accountability and international justice by visiting relevant institutions in The Hague (International Court of Justice, International Criminal Court, EUROJUST), at the start of his mandate, by regularly engaging with them throughout the year, and by supporting their work during high-level engagements, be they private or public.

The EUSR regularly discussed the rule of law, accountability and international justice during his missions to Ethiopia, Colombia and The Gambia. Specifically, the main objective of the EUSR's four-day mission to **Ethiopia** in early 2024, was to take stock of the progress the country made towards accountability and transitional justice. He engaged with governmental officials and other local stakeholders. including the National Dialogue Commission, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, the Ethiopian Transitional Justice Working Group of Experts, and civil society representatives. During his mission, he also visited the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia and met with the local government, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and civil society representatives, who all demonstrated a constructive joint commitment to sustainable peace, transitional justice and accountability.

In addition, the EU supports the National Authorities Against Impunity project. This aims to contribute to justice and accountability efforts for core international crimes by stepping up the cooperation between CSOs and national authorities investigating and prosecuting core international crimes in both EU and non-EU countries.



A specialist, wearing gloves, carefully examines a folder from the former Sigurimi files kept during Albania's communist period at the Authority for Information on Former State Security Documents.



Former political prisoner shares his stories with the younger generation during a revisit in the infamous Spaç Prison.

In 2024, the EU continued its strong commitment to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) agenda in both principle and practice. Through its Horizon Scanning and its Conflict Early Warning and Conflict Analysis toolsets, the EU links strategic foresight with conflict and

atrocity prevention. This includes regional, scenario-based, gender-responsive and data-driven conflict analysis as well as assessments on risks of electoral violence. The EU has funded several actions that promote the R2P agenda. The Global Centre on R2P aims to empower national civil society actors as well as raise awareness among EU policymakers on specific atrocity-risk situations. The EU also 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 fora. In July, at the annual UN General Assembly Debate on the R2P agenda and the 'Prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity', the EU delivered a statement highlighting the need to act early, to end impunity and to ensure accountability for crimes linked to atrocities and other gross violations of human rights.

WORKING WITH THE OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMIS-SIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ON ACCOUNTABILITY

On top of un-earmarked funding, the EU supports the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to strengthen the **rule of law and accountability** for human rights violations. It achieves this by: (i) integrating human rights information and analysis in early warning and analysis systems; (ii) strengthening human rights monitoring and fact-finding missions to prevent/respond to crises; and (iii) boosting the OHCHR's capacity to support investigative bodies set up by the Human Rights Council and other UN bodies.

In 2024, the EU helped the Human Rights Council-mandated Investigative Body to respond swiftly to the crisis in Bangladesh. It began by setting up a remote monitoring team and, at the government's request, deployed a fact-finding team to conduct on-the-ground human rights investigations.

The multidisciplinary team carried out a four-week investigation. It included human rights investigators, a forensic imagery expert, a forensic pathologist, a military and weapons expert, a gender adviser, and a legal/reporting officer. The forthcoming report from the fact-finding mission will detail violations and abuses that occurred during the July 2024 student protests, analyse their root causes, and provide recommendations on how to advance justice, accountability and long-term reforms.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

O2. BUILDING RESILIENT, INCLUSIVE AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES

In 2024, global democracy continued to experience a decline, with only 29% of the world's population living in liberal, electoral democracies, compared to 52% in 2009⁶⁹. The democratic backsliding was especially noticeable in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood and South and Central Asia, whereas in Latin America and the Caribbean, some countries have shown resilient democratic practices. Sub-Saharan Africa showed a complex dynamic, with both democratising and autocratising tendencies. In some cases, cyberattacks, disinformation, foreign interference and economic pressures are combined with legislative measures restricting foreign funding for NGOs and other limitations on civil society and civic space. Such hybrid tactics have significantly contributed to the global democratic decline. Amid this challenging landscape, elections remained a vital mechanism for accountability, with more people voting in 2024 than at any previous time in history⁷⁰. Over half of the global population resided in countries holding national elections in 2024, providing a significant opportunity for democratic expression, even as threats to electoral integrity persisted. In 2024, the EU remained a key player in supporting democracy globally, through initiatives promoting civic and political engagement among women and young people, strengthening democratic institutions, and supporting independent media and journalists.

⁶⁹ V-Dem, 'Democracy Report 2024, https://www.v-dem.net/documents/43/v-dem_dr2024_low-

⁷⁰ I-IDEA, The 2024 Global Elections Super-Cycle, https://www.idea.int/initiatives/the-2024-global-elections-supercycle

2.1 Democratic, accountable and transparent institutions

STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENTARY CAPABILITIES FOR EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE



In 2024, the Women and Youth in Democracy Initiative (WYDE) entered its third year of implementation. The WYDE Leadership Initiative was launched in March 2024 at the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. With EUR 11.5 million over three years, the programme is implemented by UN Women, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the World Organisation of Untied Cities and Local Governments, to foster women's democratic engagement and leadership by altering social norms and building political competencies in collaboration with global partners. WYDE civic engagement aims to promote political pluralism and the inclusiveness of democratic processes by significantly enhancing the participation of youth and women in all aspects of public life. WYDE's civic engagement chapter has already distributed 50 small grants, accompanied by expertise, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa (Benin, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, The Gambia, and Togo).



Meet the Youth Advisory Board 2024-2025 who play a strategic role in WYDE Civic Engagement activities. The Board will enhance outreach and communication of the project and provide valuable youth perspectives. From left to right, Gold Ikyiriza (Uganda), Dechen Rabgyal (Bhutan), Mumbiko King'ori (Kenya), Daisi Matthew Omokungbe (Nigeria) and Qyira Yusri (Malaysia).

Active since 2019, Inter Pares follows a Team Europe approach by bringing together the resources of the EU institutions and the expertise of EU Member States' national parliaments. The project's purpose is to strengthen the capacity of parliaments in partner countries, by enhancing their legislative, oversight, representative, budgetary and administrative functions and making them more inclusive for young people and women. It focusses on parliamentary committees and the staff of parliaments' secretariats. In 2024, notable peer-to-peer activities were carried out in Benin, Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Nepal, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Zambia.



An Inter Pares scoping mission on Nepal's Democracy Day 2024 to further support the consolidation of democracy in Nepal.

OBSERVING ELECTORAL PROCESSES TO STRENGTHEN AND DEEPEN DEMOCRATISATION

The EU remained committed to supporting democracy by investing in electoral work, particularly through election observation, as a response to **democratic backsliding and autocratisation** trends. In 2024, the EU actively engaged across diverse regions, providing independent and impartial assessments of electoral processes and collaborating with partner countries to promote electoral and governance reforms based on observation mission recommendations.

EU election observation operates as a partnership, achieving the greatest impact when its independent expertise aligns with a **genuine political commitment** to reform. However, observers increasingly face hostile environments, making it crucial to ensure that election observers, especially citizen observers, can perform their work without pressure or fear.

The EU deployed **20 missions** in 2024, including election observation missions (EOMs) in Jordan, Mozambique, Senegal, and Sri Lanka, four cases that effectively illustrate the diversity of contexts in

which EU electoral missions take place. Election expert missions were deployed in Bangladesh, Comoros, El Salvador, Gabon, Ghana, Mexico, Mauritania, Panama, Pakistan, Solomon Islands, South Africa, and Sri Lanka. Follow-up missions (EFMs) were conducted in Peru, São Tomé and Príncipe, The Gambia, and Zambia.

EU EOM Sri Lanka: upholding the integrity and transparency of the electoral process

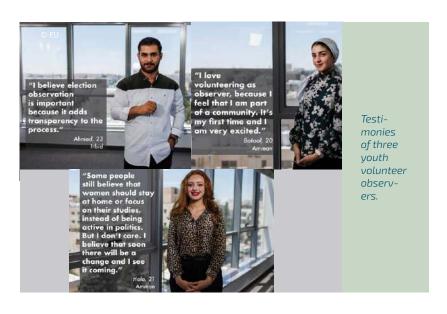
On September 21, 2024, Sri Lanka held its first presidential elections since the 2022 crisis that led to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's resignation. At the invitation of the Election Commission of Sri Lanka (ECSL), the EU deployed an election observation mission (EOM) to assess the elections against national and international democratic standards. The EOM commended the ECSL for its transparent and independent management, particularly during the tabulation and preferential vote count. Civil society played a key role, with numerous domestic observers and organizations monitoring disinformation and electoral violence. The EOM's presence helped strengthen public trust in the elections and will inform recommendations for future improvements.



Presidential Election day in Sri Lanka: voters and EU EOM Observers en route to a polling station, 21 September 2024.

EU EOM in Jordan: a first step to multiparty politics

Jordan's parliamentary elections on 10 September, 2024, introduced a dual-list system, electing 138 parliamentarians from local lists (97 seats) and national lists (41 seats) across 36 political parties. The election process, managed by the Independent Electoral Commission, was inclusive, efficient, and peaceful nationwide. The EU election observation mission, deployed from July to October 2024, issued recommendations that broadly support the political modernisation process initiated by the King in 2021. Key suggestions included enhancing voter education, improving transparency in campaign financing, and aligning the cybercrime law with international human rights standards. Notable outcomes of the election included a rise in the number of women elected (19.6%, up from 11.5% in 2020) and increased youth participation as domestic observers, reflecting progress in inclusivity and civic engagement.



PROVIDING ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE IN PARTNER COUNTRIES

The independence and professionalism of election management bodies are vital for transparent, inclusive and credible elections. In 2024, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to electoral integrity by funding initiatives tailored to the unique challenges of partner countries. A key example is the EU-funded regional project 'Promote Accountability in Electoral Processes in EaP Countries through Increased Participation and Capacity of Civic Actors (Pro-Elect),' implemented by the Transatlantic Foundation and Equal Rights and Independent Media. This project combines a regional focus with activities timed to match the electoral calendars of Eastern Partnership countries. By supporting CSOs and independent media, the EU advances civic education, voter awareness and election observation, and counters disinformation, propaganda and hate speech across the region.

In **Moldova**, the EU's Pro-Elect support focused on strengthening democracy ahead of the 2024 presidential election and EU integration referendum. Efforts targeted disinformation, voter awareness, and inclusivity through legal aid, media campaigns, workshops and social media outreach to young people, diaspora and linguistic minorities. The EU bolstered electoral transparency, accountability and public trust amid challenges such as interference and hybrid campaigns by Russia and its proxies. Through the EU Partnership Mission, support was provided for strategic communication, countering interference and addressing cyber threats. Local CSOs received assistance with observing elections and advocating for implementation of OSCE/ODIHR recommendations.



A voter casts her ballot during the second round of the presidential election in Chisinău, Moldova, 3 November 2024.

In **Ukraine**, EU efforts have prioritised safeguarding the progress made in electoral reform and democratic development despite the ongoing war of aggression by Russia. The projects focus on maintaining transparency, building public trust and advancing electoral education to ensure that achievements in democratic governance are not eroded by the current crisis. By fostering resilience and **empowering citizens** to engage meaningfully in democratic processes, these initiatives aim to uphold the integrity of Ukraine's electoral system at a time of extraordinary challenges.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the EU has continued to provide election assistance for partner countries requesting it, as in Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and Zambia.

In the field of election assistance, a partnership has been thriving with the African Union where EU funding is used to help the AU meet requests for election observation and election assistance from its Member States. The project has two strands: (i) an institutional strand, working with the African Union Commission's Department of Political Affairs, Peace, and Security and (ii) a civil society strand,

working with a network of specialised African CSOs (AFEONET, Africtivistes, the East and Horn of Africa Election Observers Network (E-HORN), the Electoral Support Network of Southern Africa (ESN-SA) and the West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON)).



Participants at the Electoral Integrity Africa Summit I hosted by AfEONet in Uganda from 10 to 12 September 2024.

While many political processes in Africa in 2024 faced significant challenges in terms of inclusion and transparency, Senegal emerged as a compelling example of success. The country's third peaceful political transfer of power was made possible by the determined efforts of its citizens, especially young people, a strong commitment to the rule of law with a neutral and independent Constitutional Court, and a vibrant, credible civil society. The strength of the civil society is the result of long-term efforts, to which EU initiatives have significantly contributed, particularly in the fields of human rights and democracy. Key EU partners, such as the Gorée Institute, Dialogue Citoyen, and la Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO), have played a crucial role in supporting Senegal's deeply rooted democratic traditions and in maintaining the social cohesion that facilitated this peaceful transition.

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AND RULE OF LAW: ACCOMPANYING PROGRESS IN THE ENLARGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD REGIONS

Through financial assistance across the enlargement and neighbourhood regions, the EU ensured continuous support for reforms aimed at strengthening human rights, democracy and preventing and tackling corruption.

The EU supports regional and national reconciliation processes and the fight against impunity in the **Western Balkans** by strengthening the judicial handling of and cooperation on war crimes. In 2024, the UN International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals and UNDP, with EU support, facilitated peer-to-peer meetings and regional conferences of war crimes prosecutors and judges, aiming at cross-border transfer of cases for prosecution. An additional outcome of the EU-funded support as implemented by UNDP, is the adoption by the Montenegrin Supreme State Prosecutor's Office of a four-year war crimes investigation strategy for the prosecution service, with an accompanying action plan.



A two-day meeting on the topic of admissibility and transfer of evidence in cooperation with the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office of Montenegro, within the regional project 'EU support for Confidence Building in the Western Balkans' funded by the EU.

Throughout 2024, the EU continued to cooperate with the OSCE's **ODIHR** in support of electoral reforms in the **Western Balkans**, in line with international recommendations and in close coordination with local stakeholders, including civil society. In 2024, the EU supported several electoral reform processes in the region. For example, in Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina it supported the drafting of laws on electoral management bodies, while in Serbia, it provided the Inter-Agency working group with technical support through a comparative review of practices and regulations on accessing voter registration data. The EU also supported the ODIHR regional conference 'Promoting Conditions for Free and Fair Election Campaigns in the Western Balkans', the aim of which was to share knowledge and draw conclusions for follow-up action on improving the conduct of election campaigns in **Montenegro**. Through a joint action with the OSCE's ODIHR, the EU is also supporting democratic institutions in Eastern Partnership countries in becoming more inclusive, accountable and transparent and in respecting human rights and the rule of law.



Participants at the regional conference on Promoting Conditions for Free and Fair Election Campaigns in the Western Balkans, part of the Support to Electoral Reform in the Western Balkans programme, Podgorica, 14-15 May 2024.

In 2024, the EU deepened its partnership with the **Council of Europe** in these areas. EU support to this institution channelled by the EU mainly through the Horizontal Facility with the Council of Europe for the Western Balkans and Türkiye, as well as through the Partnership for Good Governance in the Eastern Partnership countries of **Georgia**, **Moldova and Ukraine**.

Since 2014, the Partnership for Good Governance has supported the implementation of the Eastern Partnership countries' domestic reforms in the fields of the judiciary, the fight against corruption and money laundering, and combating discrimination and violence against women. In 2024, this work continued through phase III of the EU-CoE Partnership for Good Governance. By December 2024, the Venice Commission issued 16 opinions that were requested by national authorities in **Armenia**, **Georgia**⁷¹, **and Moldova**, and channelled through the Partnership for Good Governance Quick Response Mechanism. Launched in 2023, the Governance Progress Board concluded in July 2024 and produced five national progress board reports on good governance covering the Eastern Partnership countries.

PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE ASSISTANCE TO PREVENT AND FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

The EU supports efforts to detect and prevent corruption through both direct and indirect means, often integrated into programmes focused on budget support, public financial management, public procurement, good governance and justice sector reform. These initiatives involve a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society, government agencies, electoral bodies, media, and the private sector. Anti-corruption measures are also being mainstreamed into new interventions under the Global Gateway, recognising corruption as a major barrier to social and economic development.

This includes the development of sectoral guidance notes. The Team Europe Democracy (TED) Initiative serves as a platform for fostering a shared understanding and provide a forum for learning, developing best practices, and coordinating with Member States, international partners and civil society organisations.

ProPALOP is a EUR 8 million continuation of an existing regional programme on economic governance with UNDP which aims to enhance transparent and gender-inclusive budgets, domestic resource mobilisation and external control of public expenditure and policy practices in the Portuguese-speaking African Countries: Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé and Príncipe, and Timor-Leste. One of the sub-objectives is to consolidate and strengthen public financial management systems and domestic resource mobilisation capacities by the finance ministries. This will be done in line with the Addis Tax Initiative. It will include training for officials on how to better monitor and fight tax evasion, illicit financial flows and corruption. It will also promote transparency and dissemination of revenue data.

ENHANCING IMPACT: COLLABORATIVE DEMOCRACY SUPPORT WITH TEAM EUROPE DEMOCRACY

The Team Europe Democracy (TED) is a global initiative involving 14 EU Member States aimed at promoting democracy worldwide. Its goal is to create a coordinated European response to address growing challenges.

Under its research pillar, TED supports the collection and publication of data that conceptualises and measures democracy, including the Global State of Democracy report and the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project, both of which are widely used by policymakers, researchers and civil society. TED also fosters exchange among European actors to enhance the effectiveness of joint action. For

⁷¹ In June 2024, as a consequence of the political developments in Georgia, the European Commission has halted technical assistance directly benefiting Georgian authorities until further notice.

instance, TED organised webinars on topics such as anti-corruption in climate finance, customary and community justice and protecting human rights online.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD



The TED Network's Second Annual Meeting took place in Brussels 13-14 June, 2024 providing space for practitioners to share lessons learned, strengthen evidencebased policy dialogue and formulation, and foster joint collaborations with the aim of increasing the impact of democracy support interventions.

Finally, expertise provided by TED to partner countries has helped achieve results in democratic governance. TED support for Team Europe cooperation is ongoing in several countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Jordan, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. These cover a wide range of products and topics. In the Central African Republic, an analysis of the Special Criminal Court was carried out to help Team Europe to structure its support. For Guatemala, work will include a roadmap for the EU Electoral Observation Mission recommendations and an analysis to increase civil society involvement in the justice sector and in open government reforms. In Jordan, the focus is on supporting a Team Europe approach to political and civic participation.

The Partnership for Democracy and Accountability (PDA) is a global initiative by the Open Government Partnership to strengthen democracy and improve citizens' lives by fostering open, inclusive and accountable governance. It supports governments, parliaments, judiciaries and civil society in co-creating and implementing policy reforms through open government approaches in seven target countries: Colombia, Ghana, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, and the Philippines.

2.2 Promoting responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making

As part of the youth action plan for external actions, EU Delegations are gradually establishing youth sounding boards, involving young people in EU initiatives in their countries. For instance, the "Plateforme Jeunes et Engagés" in Madagascar has been offered training and opportunities to influence democratic reforms and development policy.



The Kofi Annan Foundation's WYDE accountability hubs organised annual meetings in 2024 for their young beneficiaries, the 'Young Leaders'. The English-speaking cohort met in Nairobi, and the French-speaking cohort gathered in Abidjan. The meetings covered topics such as leading for positive change, ethical leadership 'the Kofi Annan Way', financial oversight, anti-corruption, public debt management, gender-responsive budgeting, elections and political rights, efficient project management, advocacy, communications, and working with international partners. After one year of support, the 'Young Leaders' are better equipped to contribute to decisionmaking at local and national levels and can rely on the network they have built through the EU and Kofi Annan Foundation.



The Kofi Annan Foundation brought together ten young leaders from across Sub-Saharan Africa for an inspiring learning and networking event in Tanzania. As part of the WYDE Accountability Hubs, these leaders engaged in high-level discussions, capacity-building workshops, and collaborative brainstorming sessions aimed at strengthening accountable and transparent governance across the continent.

In partnership with the European Network of Political Foundations, the EU launched an ambitious EUR 5 million project to strengthen the capacity of political parties in Sub-Saharan Africa, focusing on making them more inclusive and representative, especially of women and youth. This project will facilitate policy dialogue, advocacy campaigns, and mentorship programs across Western and Fastern Africa.

These global and regional initiatives are complemented by incountry projects. For example, the EU's thematic programme on human rights and democracy supports active citizenship and civic education in countries such as Burkina Faso, Bolivia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Madagascar, Moldova, Palestine, Serbia, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Türkiye, and Ukraine.

Many of these programmes also promote women's participation. The WYDE/Women's Leadership Initiative, launched in 2024 in partnership with UNWomen, aims to advance women's political participation. With EU funding of EUR 11.5 million, this global initiative takes a multifaceted approach, including advocacy, networking, and transformative social norms change.

Key activities included the Regional Dialogue on Advancing Transformative Gender Social Norms, held on 26-27 November, 2024, which targeted Eastern and Southern African countries. The event aimed to enhance women's and youth's leadership participation, providing a platform for exchanging ideas and developing strategies to overcome societal barriers and promote gender equality. Additionally, the National Intergenerational Dialogue was held on 28 November, 2024, in South Africa to address barriers preventing young women from engaging in leadership, promoting intergenerational learning and capacity-building. The initiative also launched the 'Generation Equality – Parliamentarians Dialogue Series', with the first session held on 15 October, 2024. This series aims to foster collaboration between civil society leaders, government representatives, philanthropists, and parliamentarians committed to advancing gender equality, with a particular focus on young women's leadership at national and multilateral levels.



The WYDE regional dialogue and national intergenerational dialogue funded by the EU, International IDEA and UN Women took place in Johannesburg, South Africa on 28 November, 2024. Participants addressed gender norms, digital violence and ways to advance women and youth in leadership.

Furthermore, the programme continues to support the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics), a unique platform for experts in women's political participation. This platform fosters exchange, dialogue, and knowledge creation for all those working to promote women's political participation.

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

Independent media continued to face significant pressure in 2024 from financial, social, political and technological forces, undermining the essential role of information as a public good. In this context, collaborative efforts with multilateral institutions, including the OHCHR, UNESCO, Council of Europe, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the OSCE, underscored the EU's commitment to strengthening media freedom and pluralism.



In cooperation with like-minded partners, the EU contributed to the development of the OECD development cooperation principles for relevant and effective support to media and the information environment, which were adopted in March 2024. The six principles advocate for a comprehensive approach to media support that better responds to the real needs of independent media in a rapidly changing information environment. The EU is committed to supporting the implementation of these principles. This includes efforts by the Working Group on Information Integrity of Team Europe Democracy, which is developing a toolkit to facilitate their implementation.

Key legislative initiatives aimed at strengthening media freedom inside the EU were finalised in 2024. In May, the European Media Freedom Act was adopted, introducing stronger protection for journalists and media providers against political interference while supporting their operations across the EU. In April, the EU adopted a Directive to combat strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), requiring Member States to implement safeguards for journalists and others targeted by abusive legal actions in crossborder civil and commercial cases. These initiatives now serve as reference points for EU external action around the world to strengthen media freedom.

The EU supported independent media worldwide under its thematic programme on human rights and democracy. In 2024, the EU established partnerships with consortia of media development organisations under dedicated Financial Framework Partnership Agreements, providing an initial EUR 20 million in funding, with additional allocations planned by the end of 2027. These partnerships aim to strengthen the resilience of at-risk media outlets, combat hate speech and disinformation, and expand journalists' access to professional development and learning opportunities. A strong emphasis is placed on supporting women journalists and those working in areas with limited access to local news coverage. Project activities include supporting key national media networks and organisations, fostering cross-regional learning among atrisk journalists, strengthening the digital security of journalists, enhancing curricula for journalism students, advocating for a more enabling environment for public-interest media, and providing demand-driven funding and capacity building to media outlets.

In parallel, the EU continued to strengthen its response to foreign information manipulation and interference through the work of EUvsDisinfo. The project reached 35 million people in 2024 and remains at the forefront of efforts to expose and counter disinformation campaigns. Throughout the year, EUvsDisinfo has systematically documented and debunked Russian disinformation narratives attempting to justify the war of aggression against Ukraine, while also monitoring and exposing human rights violations by the Belarusian regime and other authoritarian actors in the EU neighbourhood. In a year notable for the large number of elections, EUvsDisinfo also addressed attempts to interfere in democratic processes and efforts to discourage citizen participation in democratic governance.



EUvsDisinfo tackles anti-EU pro-Kremlin disinformation.

Moreover, funding under Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity **Corps** has also supported media literacy projects in formal and nonformal educational settings with a total budget of EUR 48.3 million since 2021.

Across the European Neighbourhood, the EU supported activities to improve digital and media literacy, strengthening independent media and empowering civil society. In the Western Balkans, the EU supported media pluralism and resilience through projects focused on strengthening fact-checking efforts, combating harmful narratives, promoting ethical journalism and ensuring media sustainability to reduce reliance on political or economic interests. At the same time, the EU also supported policy and legislative reform to enhance the transparency, accountability and plurality of information sources. Lastly, as part of the digital education action plan⁷², the guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training⁷³ were translated into all Western Balkans languages as well as into Georgian.

^{72 &}lt;a href="https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan">https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan

⁷³ https://education.ec.europa.eu/news/guidelines-for-teachers-and-educators-on-tackling-disinformation-and-promoting-digital-literacy-through-education-and-training



In the Eastern Neighbourhood, the EU continued to empower civil society and independent media through regional programmes and grants. Key initiatives include the **EU4Independent Media** programme, which promotes quality, fact-based journalism, gender inclusion and financial sustainability of independent media in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Another programme, the **Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility**, supports pro-democracy groups and independent media across the region.

In the Southern Neighbourhood, the EU supported a number of regional programmes aimed at strengthening media pluralism and resilience, while promoting media and digital literacy among diverse audiences. Through core support for media actors across the region, the EU supports the production and distribution of high-quality public interest content tailored to diverse audiences, supports business growth and encourages collaboration.

The European Endowment for Democracy: safeguarding democracy actors in challenging contexts and repressive environments

Established in 2013, the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) supports pro-democracy activists, civil society and independent media across the European Neighbourhood, the Western Balkans, Türkiye, Eurasia and the Middle East. In 2024, EED's flexible and direct funding was vital in countries facing a shrinking civic space. It supported civil society and independent media in fostering democratic change and providing reliable information.

EED played a key role in advancing the EU's enlargement priorities, including media freedom and civil society support in the Western Balkans. In the Eastern Neighbourhood, EED strengthened Ukrainian civil society's capacities and resilience in the face of Russia's war of aggression and supported efforts in Georgia and Moldova as part of the EU accession process. In the Southern Neighbourhood, EED support brought together independent journalists and media actors from these regions, reinforcing democratic values and media resilience across the region.



'Grunt' or soil in Ukrainian is a new media platform created by journalists and civil society activists addressing fake news and manipulation, and producing quality content on the on-going war of aggression against Ukraine.

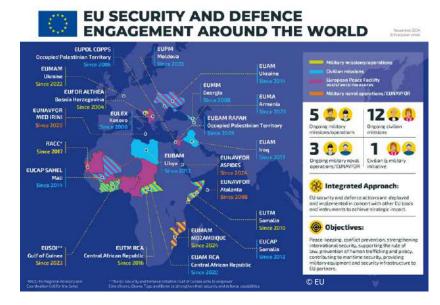
2.4 Reinforcing a human rights and participative approach to conflict prevention and crisis resolution

As a global actor, the EU promotes the prevention and resolution of conflicts as a way of promoting peace and prosperity around the world. The EU takes an integrated approach to conflicts and crises by using the comprehensive toolbox at its disposal – at all stages of a conflict, from prevention to crisis management recovery and peace-building – to contribute to **sustainable peace**.

The EU strives to deliver stability and peace, in close coordination with its Member States, by combining conflict prevention, mediation and peace-building in an effective way, and by promoting conflict sensitive programming. On conflict prevention, the EU aims to address structural risks linked to violent conflicts through all relevant policies, tools and instruments in a timely and sequential manner.

After EU Member States endorsed it in December 2023, on 19 February 2024, EU Foreign Ministers approved the **EU human rights** and international humanitarian law due diligence policy (EU HRDDP) on security sector support for third parties. The adoption of this policy is a major step forward in consolidating the EU's long-standing commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and international humanitarian law in its external action. The EU HRDDP provides an overarching risk management framework. It spells out core principles and concrete actions to manage potential human rights and IHL-related risks that may be associated with the EU's security sector support for non-EU countries, provided under common foreign and security policy and common security and defence policy instruments.

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. It is an integral part of the EU's comprehensive approach towards crisis management, drawing on civilian and military assets. Currently, some 3 500 military personnel and 1 300 civilian personnel are deployed around the world. Since the first CSDP missions and operations were launched back in 2003, the EU has undertaken over 40 overseas operations, using civilian and military missions and operations in several countries in Europe, Africa and Asia. As of today, there are 21 ongoing EU CSDP missions and operations, including 12 civilian, 8 military and 1 civilian and military initiative. In addition, a Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell operates in the Sahel.



In 2024, the European Union Capacity Building Mission in Somalia (EUCAP Somalia) continued its work to strengthen human rights protection in the country, seeking to tackle ongoing impunity for violations by all conflict parties. A key focus was enhancing structures to address misconduct, with training on ethical standards for Somali law enforcement and coast guard units. EUCAP delivered several dedicated human rights training sessions including police officers

133

in Somaliland and Puntland strengthening their understanding of human rights in law enforcement as well as the coast guard and navy. These efforts aim to foster more ethical and human rightscompliant law enforcement practices across Somalia.



Human rights was a key element of the maritime criminal investigation training conducted at EUCAP's Somalia field office Puntland in Bosaso.

EUPOL COPPS, established on 1 January 2006, is the European Union Mission for the Support of Palestinian Police and Rule of Law. It supports the Palestinian Civil Police reform and development. In October, EUPOL COPPS started regular bi-monthly consultations with Palestinian human rights organisations. The discussion focused on police accountability and conditions in detention facilities. EUPOL COPPS has been spearheading efforts to introduce early representation for juveniles, to fill a gap in the Palestinian legal system that leaves these children vulnerable to violations of their rights. In May 2024, the Mission hosted a workshop for the Chief Juvenile Prosecutor, prosecutors, the Palestinian civilian police and the Palestinian Bar Association's Council. EUPOL COPPS has further moved this forward by partnering with the UNDP-chaired Sawasya network of international and national partners to draft a position paper.



In Palestine, EUPOL COPPS organised a structured dialogue with the Independent Commission on Human Rights to start a closer cooperation on justice and human rights.

The **EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia** (EUMM) is an unarmed civilian monitoring mission. It was established by the EU on 15 September 2008. Over 200 civilian monitors were sent by EU Member States to help stabilise the situation on the ground following the August 2008 conflict. They monitor compliance by all sides with the EUbrokered Six-Point Agreement of 12 August, signed by both Georgia and Russia, and the Agreement on Implementing Measures of 8 September 2008. The Mission's efforts have been primarily directed at observing the situation on the ground, reporting on incidents and, generally, through its presence in the relevant areas, helping to improve the security situation.

In 2024, the EUMM Georgia awarded its Special Prize for Peace Journalism to Mamuka Kuparadze and Madina Gagloeva from Studio Re, for their documentary 'Under the Shadow of Conflict'. The film captures the daily lives of two families living on opposite sides of the South Ossetian administrative boundary line (ABL). With this award, EUMM Georgia aims to promote high-quality reporting on conflict-related issues while fostering journalism that builds bridges between divided communities. By recognising such work, EUMM Georgia highlights the critical role journalism plays in raising awareness of the human consequences of the conflict.



EUMM Georgia awarded the 11th edition of its Special Prize for Peace Journalism to Mr Mamuka Kuparadze and Ms Madina Gagloeva from Studio Re for their documentary "Under the Shadow of Conflict."

Additionally, in 2024, **EUMM Georgia** played a key role in securing reliable irrigation water for farming communities on both sides of the ABL, supporting livelihoods dependent on this vital resource. Their confidence-building efforts (regular technical meetings, incident prevention and response mechanism discussions, and the EUMM-managed hotline) helped to deliver better waterflow for farmers throughout the year. Additionally, during the 2024 irrigation season, EUMM Georgia conducted daily water measurements along the ABL, sharing the results impartially with all parties. This helped maintain a consistent water supply and ensured that communities on both sides of the ABL received the water they needed.

PROMOTING A GLOBAL SYSTEM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

The EU has a strategic interest in upholding the rules-based and effective multilateral system, with the UN at its core. Multilateralism has been and remains the most effective means of governing global relations in a way that benefits everyone. Countries must continue to work together to settle disputes and to achieve common goals. In the face of mounting challenges, the multilateral system and its structures are under strain. The EU is committed to leading reform efforts towards a multilateralist approach fit for the 21st century, with renewed energy generated by the **Summit of the Future**. To respond successfully to global crises, threats and challenges, the international community needs an efficient multilateral system, founded on universal rules and values.



27 September 2024, New York – Statement on behalf of the European Union by Ambassador Hedda Samson, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, at the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly: United Nations Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC) Group of Friends Meetina.

The EU works closely with the UN and regional partnerships such as the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the OECD, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the African Union (AU), the Organisation of America States and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACT), as well as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The EU is particularly active in defending and promoting human rights at the UN Human Rights Council which sits in session three times a year and in the UN General Assembly Third Committee which meets intensively for six weeks in New York starting in October after the High-Level Week. The EU also supports the mandate and independence of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as international courts such as the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights.





3.1 Multilateral cooperation

PACT FOR THE FUTURE

On 22-23 September 2024, the Summit of the Future was held as part of the High-Level Week of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly. The Summit was a high-level event, bringing together world leaders to forge a new international consensus on how to deliver a better present and safeguard the future. World leaders adopted the **Pact for the Future**⁷⁴, an action-oriented outcome document.

© FL

- Sustainable development & financing for development.
- International peace & security.
- Science, technology & innovation & digital cooperation.
- Youth & future generations.
- Transforming global governance.

The five key areas of the Pact for the Future.

The Pact is the conclusion of a years-long process to adapt multilateralism to the multiple challenges of our time. Actively involved all along this process, the EU welcomed the adoption of the Pact as an important milestone in rebuilding trust among the UN Member States and in setting up the building blocks for a fairer, more inclusive multilateral system. The Pact contains a number of important elements which the EU had advocated for. The balance

⁷⁴ https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sotf-pact_for_the_future_adopted.pdf

between the three pillars of the UN - peace and security, sustainable development and human rights – is well reflected in the document. Strong human rights language is present throughout. For example, it mentions: the interdependence of human rights and sustainable development; the promotion of gender equality; and the role of civil society. Other important deliverables include revitalising the mandate of the Commission of the Status of Women under the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and assessing the potential need for increased financing for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The adoption of the Global Digital **Compact** (GDC), annexed to the Pact, has become the first-ever comprehensive framework to address digital governance and digital cooperation at global level. The GDC promotes the EU's vision of an inclusive, open, safe and secure digital space that respects, protects and promotes human rights and democracy. The Interoperable Europe Act⁷⁵ is complementary to the GDC, as it aims to close divides through improved cooperation between national administrations on data exchanges and IT solutions.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL SESSIONS IN 2024

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

In 2024, 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 like-minded countries have also been instrumental in upholding existing reporting, monitoring and investigative mandates and

creating new mandates for urgent or emerging human rights issues. The EU resisted attempts to divide or undermine universal values, international law and the universality of human rights.



The EU at the 55th session of the HRC.

The EU strongly supported the HRC with its system of Special Procedures and the Universal Periodic Review, as well as the Treaty Bodies, which all continue to contribute significantly to the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide.

55TH, 56TH AND 57TH SESSIONS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

In 2024, the Human Rights Council addressed a number of human rights thematic and country situations. In the majority of cases, resolutions were adopted by consensus.

⁷⁵ Regulation - EU - 2024/903 - EN - EUR-Lex



This was the case among others for the EU-led resolutions on the human rights situation in **Afghanistan**, where the Taliban's gender-based discrimination may amount to gender persecution; in **Myanmar**, where the military continues to commit the most atrocious crimes; and in **DPRK** for continued denial of human rights. The resolutions on the human rights situation 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.

26 EU Member States, along with countries across the world, also 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.

The EU also supported the renewal of the mandate of the **Commission** of Inquiry on the human rights situation in Ukraine, stemming from the Russian war of aggression, which has recently reconfirmed its finding of systematic and systemic torture of Ukrainian Prisoners of War held by Russia.

At the EU's initiative, the Council 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 called on Iran to facilitate their access to the country.

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 which stressed 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 Council on the situation in **Ethiopia** following the publication of a worrying update by the Office of the High Commissioner.

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, including on the **right to food**, **adequate housing and the right to safe drinking water and sanitation**. The EU supported the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the **right to a clean**, **healthy and sustainable environment** and secured the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on **human rights and climate change**.

Together with the Group of Latin American countries (GRULAC), the EU led work towards the adoption of a consensual resolution on the rights of the child, which this time focused on realising the rights of the child and inclusive social protection, urging states to ensure that children are served by age-, gender- and disability-responsive and inclusive social protection policies.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

The EU also addressed racial discrimination, the rights of persons with disabilities, the shrinking space for civil society, the protection of human rights defenders, countering violence against children and religious hatred and intolerance.

The EU continued to actively promote gender equality and **empowerment of women and girls** at every session of the Council and support related resolutions, including two new initiatives calling upon all states to take decisive and effective action to prevent and eliminate domestic violence in all its forms, and to address technology-facilitated gender-based violence.



As part of the 57th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, the EU Delegation to the UN in Geneva, in cooperation with the Permanent Missions of Finland and Germany, UN Women and Zonta International. launched the art and poetry exhibition "I Was Born a Girl" on September 9, 2024.

Based on our long-standing commitments and priorities, the EU also supported the resolution on the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment as well as the resolutions on the promotion and protection on human rights in the context of peaceful protests.

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY THIRD COMMITTEE SESSION

The Third Committee (3C) of the UN General Assembly took place from 3 October to 22 November 2024 under the chairmanship of the Permanent Representative of Burundi. During the session, there were nine general discussions, 87 interactive dialogues with UN mandate holders, special procedures and senior officials on a wide range of issues, and 49 resolutions were negotiated and adopted.

Once again, 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, paying particular attention to gender issues. The EU and its Member States presented a total of 10 resolutions which yielded good results.

The EU-led resolutions on **DPRK** and the human rights situation of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar were the only two country resolutions adopted without a vote despite the lack of support from the countries concerned. This sends a strong signal from the international community on the human rights violations and abuses in these countries. The DPRK resolution included a substantial new element: a high-level meeting to address the human rights violations and abuses. The resolution on the human rights situation for Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar contains several important new elements, reflecting recent worrying developments in the country. 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.

The resolution on a moratorium on the use of death penalty, presented by Italy, gained five more affirmative votes than last year which is a welcome positive advancement. For the first time, it surpassed the symbolically important threshold of support from more than two-thirds of UN membership.

EU Member States also presented resolutions on many topical human rights issues, including extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; violence against women and girls; the digital environment; the system of Human Rights Treaty bodies; human rights in the administration of justice and the right to privacy in the digital age.



View from the European Union seat in the United Nations General Assembly Hall.

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

Building on a strong EU-OHCHR partnership, the EU stood by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, supporting the mandate and independence of his Office. The EU and the OHCHR held the fourth High-Level Strategic Consultation on 21 October in Geneva, addressing a broad number of thematic and geographic situations.

The EU also continued to give crucial financial support to the Office through its EUR 5 million un-earmarked annual contribution, complemented by additional earmarked thematic supports and numerous country-level actions. By the end of the year, the EU was the second-top voluntary contributor to the office. The EU also continued to strongly advocate for adequate funding for the UN human rights pillar.



EU-OHCHR high-level strategic consultation which took place on 21 October in Geneva.

3.2 Regional partnerships

THE EU AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

In 2024, the EU continued to strengthen its strategic partnership with the Council of Europe to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law as part of the implementation of the EU action plan on human rights and democracy for 2020-2027. This included a visit by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights to the Council of Europe shortly after the appointment of the new **Secretary General**, **Alain Berset**, as well as regular interactions with the leadership of the **Council of Europe's Secretariat and the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights**, **Michael O'Flaherty**.



2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

Conference on the 25th anniversary of the institution of the CoE Commissioner for Human Rights.

The year saw important progress towards the EU's objective of acceding to the European Convention on Human Rights. On 10 September, the Court of Justice of the EU delivered its long-awaited judgment in the **EULEX-Kosovo case**⁷⁶. The judgment clarified the Court's jurisdiction over the EU's common foreign and security policy (CFSP) matters and expressly stated that the EU's system of judicial protection in the CFSP area is compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. The EU's accession to the Convention would bring the EU under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights and strengthen human rights protection throughout Europe and beyond.

On 17 May 2024, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe held its 133rd session in Strasbourg, preceded by a celebration to mark the Council's 75th anniversary. The Presidency's declaration highlighted the work establishing the Register of Damage in light of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine. Furthermore, the Ministers adopted the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law. The Convention, which is consistent with the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, aims to ensure that activities within the lifecycle of artificial

intelligence systems are also fully consistent with human rights. democracy and the rule of law, while also being conducive to technological progress and innovation. This first-ever international legally binding treaty in the field of artificial intelligence opened for signature in Vilnius on 5 September 2024. The EU was among its first signatories and is currently taking further steps to conclude the Convention.

The **Register of Damage for Ukraine** is the first step in setting up an international compensation mechanism for Ukraine. On 2 April, the Register received the first claim - relating to the damage or destruction of immovable residential property. The aim is to have all 44 categories of damage open for the submission of claims by mid-2025. On 22 July 2024, the Council adopted the Decision on the EU's change of status from associate member to fully-fledged participant in the Register of Damage. The EU also continued to work closely with the Council of Europe on the next steps in the process of establishing an international compensation mechanism for Ukraine, namely the setting up of an International Claims Commission, which will review and decide on eligible claims recorded in the Register and determine the value of each claim.

The EU continued its collaboration with the Council of Europe on EU enlargement and in the context of the annual rule-of-law cycle. With its continued financial support, the EU remains the primary donor to the cooperation pillar of the Council of Europe's activities. Last year saw a continuation of 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, and a continuation of the fifth phase of the South Programme, launched in 2022. The Horizontal Facility and the Partnership for Good Governance also supported the work of the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (the Venice **Commission**), empowering the institution to respond to a growing number of requests for legal opinions, which have been crucial to

⁷⁶ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:62022CJ0029

guide reforms in partner countries and alignment with European and international standards. Programmatic cooperation between the EU and the Council of Europe also includes other regional and bilateral programmes in the enlargement and neighbourhood regions, such as:

- regional programmes on combating cybercrime, and Roma inclusion;
- bilateral projects on justice reform in Serbia and Moldova, on effective justice in Morocco and on anti-discrimination and protection of minorities in Ukraine; and
- several programmes implemented in Türkiye.



EU ambassador to the Council of Europe, Vesna Kos meeting Secretary General, Alain Berset on 30 October, 2024.

THE EU AND THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

Human rights and democracy are also at the heart of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. In 2024, the workplan on the 'human dimension' continued to largely focus on the human rights impacts of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, with accountability for war crimes, upholding of international

humanitarian and human rights law, tackling of violence against women in conflicts and the safeguarding the rights of children in conflicts. At the **OSCE Permanent Council**, the EU proactively raised several issues relating to human rights, including marking World Press Freedom Day, International Day against the Death Penalty, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and International Human Rights Day.

In 2024, the EU, for the fourth consecutive time, led efforts by 45 Delegations to invoke the **Moscow Mechanism** to report on the ongoing human rights and humanitarian impacts of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, this time with a focus on **arbitrary detention of civilians**. The EU also continued to support the ODIHR's documentation of violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law under the **Ukraine Human Rights Monitoring Initiative**⁷⁷.

Due to Russia's continued obstruction, the most important annual meeting, the consensus-based Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, did not take place for the fifth year in a row. However, the Maltese Chairpersonship-in-Office facilitated a platform for dialogue in the form of the **Warsaw Human Dimension Conference** which took place from 30 September to 11 October 2024, bringing together over 1500 participants. The conference featured some 100 side events, many of which, including those organised by the EU, focused on accountability and the human rights and humanitarian impact of Russia's war of aggression, as well as on the shrinking civil society space in the 57-participating states within the OSCE area.

EU-OSCE cooperation in EU enlargement countries fosters synergies and strengthens the impact of EU-OSCE actions on the ground, such as rule of law and electoral reform in the Western Balkans (cooperation with the OSCE and ODIHR), and support for democratic institutions to be more inclusive, accountable, transparent, and compliant with human rights and the rule of law (cooperation with

⁷⁷ https://www.osce.org/odihr/537287



Warsaw Human Dimension conference, 2024.

the ODIHR in the Easter Partnership countries). Ensuring the proper functioning of democratic institutions is another essential element of the 'Fundamentals' of EU accession negotiations.

COOPERATION WITH OTHER REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS

In 2024, the EU and the AU continued their cooperation in the field of human rights and democracy. The 19th EU-AU Human Rights Dialogue took place on 24-25 January 2024 in Ethiopia, serving as a platform for addressing human rights, democracy, and legal issues and exchanging experiences in both Africa and Europe. The 2024 Dialogue focused on the right to education in Africa and Europe, in line with the AU Theme of the Year 2024 'Educate and Skill Africa for the 21st Century'. The Dialogue highlighted the role of education in promoting knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to prevent conflicts, resolve conflicts peacefully, create conditions for peace and stand up for human rights. Parties also discussed other matters, such as business and human rights, the abolition of the death penalty, the right to development and human rights in conflict situations.

The fourth EU-AU Transitional Justice experts' seminar was held in Brussels in June, and an AU peer-to-peer electoral visit took place in conjunction with the European Parliament elections. This peer-to-peer mission – the first of its kind – enhanced the EU-AU partnership's focus on the advancement of democratic principles and the promotion of international standards for democratic elections. The EU furthermore participated in the third Africa Business and Human Rights Forum in Nairobi and in the 81st session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in The Gambia, both held in October 2024.



The EUSR for Human Rights at the third Africa Business and Human Rights Forum.

In line with its existing strategic partnership with **the Association of Southeast Asian Nations** (ASEAN), the EU continued to stress the importance of a regional architecture that remains open and rulesbased, with a strong commitment to the rule of law, human rights and international law.



With the **OIC**, the EU is interested in fostering joint efforts to increase respect, diversity and pluralism. In 2024, an event on religious pluralism for civil society representatives, co-hosted by the EU and the Anna Lindh Foundation, welcomed high-ranking participation from the OIC. Senior officials from the EU and OIC have been meeting regularly since 2017. In these meetings, they recently highlighted women's rights, election observation, interreligious dialogue and mediation as priorities for cooperation. In addition, there is ongoing EU-OIC cooperation on resolutions in multilateral fora on topics such as Myanmar, and freedom of religion or belief. In connection with this, the EU stands ready to work with the OIC on revitalising the Istanbul Process, and making progress together on combating intolerance and discrimination 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 organised in 2024, the EU continued to conduct more

of this kind of bilateral dialogues than any other actor, engaging on a broad spectrum of human rights issues, including challenging ones. In the dialogues and consultations, the EU also shared information and best practices on how the EU and its Members States act to address challenges within the EU and work to arrive at coherent and consistent policies. The Fundamental Rights Agency participated in some dialogues to offer perspectives on the EU's internal human rights situation and to share insights on legal and policy responses. Civil society representatives were consulted during the preparations for the dialogues and were debriefed afterwards. At its request, the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) was also debriefed on some dialogues.

Following the resumption of the human rights dialogue with China in 2023, the 39th session of the dialogue took place in **China** in June 2024, giving the EU the opportunity to raise many key concerns and several individual cases through this dedicated communication channel on human rights issues. This was supplemented by an exchange with civil society representatives and preceded by a side visit to Tibet.



EU-Colombia human rights dialogue, 2 July 2024.

The EU Special Representative for Human Rights co-chaired a number of dialogues, including one with the African Union in January in Addis Ababa, with Brazil in July in Brasilia, with the United States in June in Washington, DC and with Saudi Arabia in December in Riyadh. In their fourth annual Strategic Consultation on 21 October in Geneva, the EU and the OHCHR reviewed their ongoing strategic cooperation and discussed future priorities against the continuing backsliding on human rights and democracy amid a proliferation of crises and conflicts globally.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD



EUSR for Human Rights meeting Saudi Arabia's Minister for Foreign Affairs in preparation of the EU-Saudi Arabia human rights dialogue in December 2024.

The EU guidelines on human rights dialogues with third countries 78, renewed in February 2021, continued to guide the conduct of human rights dialogues. The topics discussed at the dialogues reflect the EU's thematic human rights priorities, its cooperation in multilateral human rights fora as well as, where applicable, recommendations from election observation missions. In line with the guidelines, dialogues are conducted in a results-oriented manner leading to follow-up actions, including joint initiatives, expert exchanges and project activities, leveraging synergies with other instruments

available to the EU for implementing its external human rights policy. Wherever possible, joint press releases are issued featuring the main subjects of discussion and future cooperation. When necessary, the EU has also raised individual cases of human rights defenders in these dialogues, asking for information about their whereabouts and health if in prison, and calling for guarantees of a fair trial or for immediate release if arbitrarily detained.

TRADE INSTRUMENTS

In 2024, under the **EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences** (GSP), the EU continued to monitor countries' compliance with international standards on human rights, labour rights, environmental protection and good governance under the special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance (GSP+) and undergoing enhanced engagement under the everything-but-arms arrangement. The EU continued to actively engage in dialogue on these issues with beneficiary countries and various stakeholders including civil society, social partners and Member States. In 2024, an EU monitoring mission took place in Kyrgyzstan.

The European Parliament and the Council continued discussions on the legislative proposal for a **new GSP Regulation**. The current GSP scheme applies until the end of 2027, unless an agreement on a new regime is reached earlier.

Guided by the 2022 communication on 'the power of trade partnerships: together for green and just economic growth', the EU continued to implement the trade and sustainable development **(TSD) chapters** of EU trade agreements. Parties to the agreements 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

⁷⁸ https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6279-2021-INIT/en/pdf

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.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

In 2024, all TSD committee meetings took place as planned, and progress was achieved in implementing the commitments. The 2024 Annual Report on the Implementation and Enforcement of EU Trade Agreements⁷⁹ published by the EU in October 2024, includes information on implementation of the TSD chapters of free-trade agreements concluded by the EU. To support selected trade partner countries in implementing the labour provisions, the EU funds the Trade for Decent Work (T4DW) project⁸⁰, which is implemented by the ILO and aims to improve application of ILO fundamental conventions in partner countries.

3.4 Civil society and national human rights institutions

Civil society continued to be an indispensable partner for the EU for the implementation of the action plan on human rights and democracy across all its lines of action and priorities. Civil society is both a partner and a target for EU action, particularly with regards to protecting civic space and fundamental freedoms. In 2024, as in the previous years, the EU organised a dedicated session with civil society to gather feedback and comments on implementation of the EU action plan, this time with a special focus on extending it.

In 2024, shrinking space for civil society remained a pressing concern both inside and outside the EU. Civil society actors faced challenges in terms of democratic principles, rule of law and human

rights. Governments attempted, with some success, to introduce legislation and practices to limit the space for civil society to operate and impede donors' ability to support CSOs, like the so-called 'foreign agents' law. National security, anti-terrorism and antimoney laundering were also pretexts used by many governments to curtail fundamental freedoms and civic space. In most constrained environments, CSOs face not only obstacles in their efforts to promote and protect fundamental rights, but also physical and online threats, harassment - including judicial harassment and abusive lawsuits aimed at censoring, intimidating and silencing critics – and attacks, including arbitrary detentions and killings.

The EU firmly condemned all attacks against CSOs and opposed legal and administrative measures curtailing human rights and shrinking civic space. The EU continued to engage with civil society and support an enabling environment, civil society participation in policymaking and the capacities of civil society organisations, through political dialogue, reforms, targeted assistance and partnering with civil society. Findings from the Standing Strong report⁸¹ by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) highlight that arbitrary arrests and detentions are increasingly used to suppress human rights defenders, staff of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI). A certain number of NHRIs reported having been targeted by intimidation and reprisals due to their cooperation with the UN or regional human rights systems. These patterns of intimidation weaken the ability of NHRIs to carry out their mandates effectively and undermine broader democratic rule of law and human rights protections. The EU remained one of the leading donors to CSOs in partner countries, providing support under the NDICI thematic programme for CSOs and for human rights and democracy, complemented by geographic instruments. At the same time, the EU accession process provided an impetus for progress and some countries made significant strides in entrenching democratic values and civil society participation.

⁷⁹ Register of Commission Documents - COM(2024)385 Implementing and enforcing EU trade agreements - European Commission

^{80 &}lt;a href="https://www.ilo.org/projects-and-partnerships/projects/trade-decent-work">https://www.ilo.org/projects-and-partnerships/projects/trade-decent-work

⁸¹ https://ganhri.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Standing-Strong-Report_Oct2024.pdf

CSOs also continued to provide services, particularly assistance to people in vulnerable situations and played an essential part in the humanitarian response to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

In the past year, the EU paid particular attention to at-risk national human rights institutions (NHRIs). It raised concerns during human rights dialogues and ad hoc meetings when NHRIs were facing legal and administrative barriers to their independence. In most human rights dialogues held in 2024, the EU called on partner countries to ensure that NHRIs are independent, receive the necessary human and financial resources, and are systematically consulted in all relevant policymaking and legislative processes. This is done in parallel to the strategy to strengthen the application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, where the Commission refers to the importance of strong and effective NHRIs inside the EU. NHRIs monitor the application, implementation and promotion of fundamental rights, provide information and support to victims of violations and cooperate with national institutions to raise awareness and build capacity on fundamental rights.

The EU engaged with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions and with regional networks of NHRIs to gather accurate information on the situations faced by NHRIs across the globe. EU Delegations regularly met with NHRIs representatives to discuss a wide range of human rights issues.

On the same track, in 2024 the EU's emergency fund for Human Rights Defenders provided assistance for people working for independent NHRIs who faced risks because of their work defending human rights. Furthermore, the EU continued to provide financial and technical support for many NHRIs around the world, through the Global Alliance of NHRIs and regional networks, for example. In 2024,

under the thematic programme on human rights and democracy alone, projects supporting NHRIs were implemented in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Egypt, Ivory Coast, Mexico, Mozambique and Togo.

NHRIs remained essential actors in promoting and protecting human rights in the enlargement and neighbourhood regions. The EU continues to promote compliance of NHRIs with the Paris Principles, for example by strengthening their independence. A detailed assessment of the situation for the protection and promotion of human rights and targeted recommendations are included in the country reports under the Enlargement package. The issue of how to help enforce human rights by strengthening Ombudsperson institutions, NHRIs and equality bodies was raised at meetings under the Stabilisation and Association Process with the Western Balkans. Recurring issues in this regard include ensuring necessary human and financial resources and consistent follow-up of these independent bodies' recommendations. The EUSR met with NHRIs in the context of nearly all of his missions to non-EU countries, raising challenges in relation to compliance with the Paris Principles with national authorities. He also extensively cooperated with regional organisations of NHRIs, notably with the African Network of NHRIs.

3.5 Business sector

The EU is committed to advancing human rights in business to eradicate abuse and foster sustainable and responsible corporate conduct throughout global value chains. In 2024, the EU continued to actively promote the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, both in the EU and internationally. While states have a duty to protect human rights, companies have a responsibility to respect them, including in their global supply chains.

The **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive** entered into force on 25 July 2024, requiring EU Member States to transpose it into national legislation by July 2026. It will start to apply for large

companies from 26 July 2027, with staggered implementation and full application expected within five years. However, in order to give the concerned parties' additional time to ensure proper and effective implementation, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a Directive in order to postpone the entry into application of the obligations under the Directive by one year for the first group of large companies under its scope and to delay the transposition deadline for Member States by one year. The Directive requires large companies operating in the EU market to identify, prevent, mitigate, address and account for adverse environmental and human rights impacts in their operations, subsidiaries, and, where applicable, business partners globally. Companies must make reasonable efforts to end violations while fostering continuous engagement and improvement. To support compliance, the European Commission is developing guidance documents and implementing accompanying measures as outlined in the Directive.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

The Regulation on **Forced Labour Products** entered into force on 13 December 2024 and will apply from December 2027. It introduces an EU market ban on products made with forced labour, regardless of their origin. The ban will be imposed on specific products based on the conclusions of dedicated investigations, and not on entire countries or industries.

PRESS RELEASE

Council adopts position on a regulation to ban products made with forced labour on the EU market

#COMPET





The European Commission will investigate and take decisions on cases involving forced labour outside the EU, while Member States will oversee cases within their territories. The Regulation builds on international standards set out by the ILO and contains dedicated provisions promoting international cooperation, through information exchanges on high-risk products or regions, best practices to combat forced labour, and decisions on product bans.

The European Critical Raw Materials Act, in force since 23 May 2024, aims to secure a diverse, sustainable, and reliable supply of critical raw materials vital for EU industries, including clean technology, digital, defence and aerospace sectors. It strengthens domestic production, promotes sustainable and circular supply chains, and advances diversification efforts, ensuring the EU can meet its 2030 climate and digital goals while maintaining high environmental, governance and social standards.



On 24 September 2024 the Commission adopted the first review of the functioning and effectiveness of the Conflict Minerals **Regulation.** The review was supported by an external study, and by

inputs and consultations with a broad range of stakeholders. 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 of revenue armed groups and security forces 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.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

Following the entry into force of the EU Deforestation-free Products Regulation on 29 June 2023, the European Commission issued guidance documents⁸² and a strategic framework to support global stakeholders, Member States and non-EU countries in preparing for implementation of the Regulation. To give the concerned parties' additional time to ensure proper and effective implementation, the Regulation will be applicable as of 30 December 2025 for large companies and as of 30 June 2026 for micro- and small businesses. The new rules will guarantee that the products that EU consumers buy and use on the EU market do not contribute to deforestation and forest degradation in the EU and globally. The Regulation requires that commodities and products, targeted by the new rules, are also produced in line with the relevant laws applicable to the legal status of the area of production. This includes labour rights, human rights protected under international law, land use rights and the principle of free, prior and informed consent. Therefore, the deforestationfree requirement is expected to reduce the risks of violations of the rights of indigenous peoples as products issued from recently deforested land will not have access to the EU market.

The EU participated constructively in the tenth session of the **UN** negotiations on an international legally binding instrument on business and human rights, which took place 16-20 December. The Council has not yet adopted a decision authorising the opening of

the negotiations (in accordance with Article 218(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union), but the EU maintained its approach of constructive engagement with the legally binding instrument (LBI) process at the negotiation session. The EU also liaised with UN members to explain the EU approach and notably how the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive substantially addresses many of the aims of the draft LBI.

The EU Special Representative for Human Rights spoke at the third African Business and Human Rights Forum in Nairobi on 8 October and at the fourth Business and Human Rights Forum for Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Additionally, the EU was present at the global UN Forum on Business and Human Rights on 25 November. At this forum, the EU co-organised a side event with UNDP entitled 'Making the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive work for all'.

The EU also continued to promote business and human rights and implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights through bilateral engagement with partner countries and regions, notably through human rights dialogues and a wide range of projects.

The EU launched three new business and human rights initiatives in 2024 to support civil society organisations in preventing corporate harm and ensuring corporate accountability. The support amounts to EUR 10 million. The 'Addressing the Accountability Gap' project implemented by TRIAL International aims to support civil society in seeking remedy across high-risk value chains, holding companies to account for corporate international crimes and bolstering compliance with relevant EU Regulations. The 'Fabric of Fairness' project aims to uphold workers' rights in the garment industry, by monitoring, preventing and responding to labour and human rights violations and abuses in the garment sector. The 'Corporate Accountability, Resilience and Participation for an Equitable **Transition**' project, implemented by the Business and Human Rights

⁸² https://green-business.ec.europa.eu/deforestation-regulation-implementation_en

Resource Centre, aims to support civil society in addressing and mitigating due diligence risks across value chains, particularly in the high-risk sectors of critical minerals mining, renewable energy, textiles and agribusiness in Africa and Asia.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD



UNDP and EU hosted collaborative dialogue to empower indonesian youth and media in advancing business and human rights.

Additionally, UNDP launched the 'Agents of Change: Youth and Media for Responsible Business Practices' project in July. This project seeks to engage and empower the media and young people, as key drivers of change, to raise awareness about the impact of corporations on human rights and the environment, and to foster compliance with international and environmental standards. It supports capacity building and networking events for youth organisations, communication campaigns with youth influencers and facilitates policy dialogues.

The 'Better Work' programme implemented by the ILO and the International Finance Corporation in 13 countries across three continents, brings together governments, employers' and workers' organisations, global brands, factory owners and workers to improve working conditions in the garment industry and make the sector more competitive. The EU contribution allowed the project to expand to three additional countries (Madagascar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), and to run feasibility missions and studies in Uzbekistan. The EU contribution facilitated 'Gender Equality and Return' training in Bangladesh, Madagascar and Sri Lanka supporting the promotion of women workers to managerial positions in textile factories.

The EU-funded 'Ending Child Labour in Supply Chains' project addresses the persistent issue of child labour in global supply chains. It aims to tackle child labour primarily within the coffee value chain, which has been identified as a sector of concern, with Honduras, Uganda and Vietnam selected as target countries. The project will also tackle the cobalt value chain in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The goal is to address these issues and create a model for intervention, with a focus on corporate due diligence and responsible sourcing practices.

3.6 Compliance with international human rights and international humanitarian law

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

The EU remained engaged in promoting respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) and safeguarding the humanitarian space. In particular, it reaffirmed its strong commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. The EU continued to promote respect for IHL across the various areas covered in the EU guidelines on promoting compliance with international humanitarian law⁸³. In July 2024, the EU published the seventh report on the implementation of the guidelines, which highlights the activities the EU carried out in support of IHL in 2024. The report was launched at a public event in December 2024.

⁸³ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/eu-guidelines-on-the-promotion-of-compliance-with-international-humanitarian-law.html

Working party on public international law (COJUR)

_

Report on the EU guidelines on promoting compliance with international humanitarian law January 2023 - December 2023

JULY 2024



The EU also continued to be vocal on IHL matters active member or observer in a range international organisations and bodies, through high-level dialogues, bilateral meetings and public communication. The EU took part in open debates in the UN Security Council, including debates on the protection of civilians in armed

conflict. In September, the EU and Belgium organised a high-level event in the margins of the UN General Assembly Ministerial Week focusing on restoring the centrality of IHL in today's armed conflicts and reaffirming the obligation to adhere to and ensure respect for IHL at all times.



Ambassador Stavros Lambrinidis, Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations addressing the UN Security Council.

The EU remains committed to strengthening the monitoring of IHL violations. To that end, in 2024, it financed several projects aimed at addressing gaps in the monitoring, strengthening data collection, reinforcing evidence-based advocacy and strengthening monitoring standards. In March, a new initiative, 'IHL in Focus' was launched at the European Humanitarian Forum. The project aims to provide states, international organisations, civil society and academics with suitable tools for IHL analysis. The tools should be independent, impartial and met with the highest academic standards to support advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy, with the ultimate goal of contributing towards increased respect for IHL.

The EU also remained a strong supporter of the intergovernmental process, co-facilitated by Switzerland and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), on finding concrete ways to strengthen respect for IHL by the 34rd International Conference in October 2024. To this end, the EU, together with Member States, made a series of pledges related to the promotion of and respect for IHL. The EU also delivered a coordinated statement with its Member States, reaffirming their commitment to IHL, and co-hosted several side events on conflict-related sexual violence and the protection of humanitarian workers.

The EU has continued to support and advocate for the protection of schools from attacks in armed conflicts and marked the International Day to Protect Education from Attack on 9 September. The EU has also continued to condemn targeted attacks against education and the military use of education facilities, which can constitute violations of international humanitarian law.

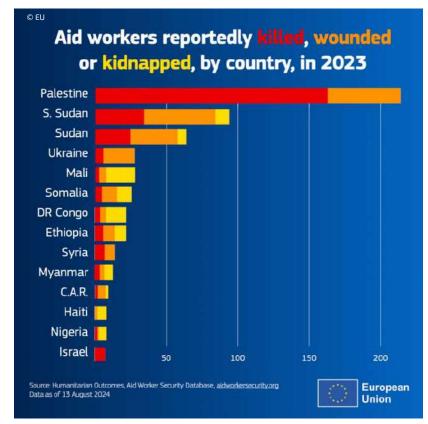
Since the start of Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, at least 2 180 children have been killed or injured, and more than 1 300 educational facilities in Ukraine have been damaged or destroyed. The EU has allocated more than EUR 100 million for the rehabilitation of damaged school buildings in Ukraine. The EU stepped up action to protect children caught up in

armed conflict, continuing its strong advocacy work, delivering on the commitments made in the EU strategy on the rights of the child and funding several projects on this theme. These projects include various activities such as the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and armed groups, providing general child protection services and psychosocial support. The relationship between conflict and hunger is well known and conflict remains the main cause of food insecurity. Particularly worrying is the use of starvation as a war tactic, a practice that is still being used today. The EU continued supporting a project with Action Against Hunger Spain to systematically gather evidence on violations to help monitor this practice and inform advocacy efforts.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD



In 2024, the EU continued to promote the protection of humanitarian workers, medical staff and health infrastructure from attacks. It also continued to fund 'Protect Aid Workers', an initiative that supports local aid workers who have experienced a critical incident or are under threat due to their humanitarian work.



As a major humanitarian donor, the EU considers compliance with IHL an important factor in disbursing funds from its humanitarian aid budget. The EU continued to support the work of the ICRC, one of the EU's most trusted humanitarian partners, and a key ally in upholding respect for IHL and humanitarian principles. In 2024, the ICRC received approximately EUR 146 million in funding from the EU's humanitarian aid budget. The EU has advocated for respect for international humanitarian law in various conflicts and funds humanitarian work involving the promotion of IHL in several countries, such as the DRC, Myanmar/Burma, occupied Palestinian territory, Sahel, Sudan, Ukraine and Yemen. Some examples of these activities are given below.

In Ukraine, in 2024, the EU supported the ICRC in promoting respect for IHL among the parties to the conflict and to urge them to protect civilians. In a difficult context where humanitarian principles are called into question, the EU fully supports ICRC's life-saving mandate and its role as a neutral facilitator between the parties.

In the **Middle East**, the EU remained a steadfast advocate for upholding IHL. The EU has substantially scaled up its humanitarian assistance and support for UN agencies, the ICRC and international NGOs working on the protection of civilians, specifically for children and women in Gaza. **UNRWA** is the backbone of the humanitarian response in Gaza and the EU is a long-standing partner of UNRWA, recognising its unique role in delivering essential services for Palestinian refugees – not only in Palestine, but also in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. The EU supported UNRWA with EUR 48.5 million in humanitarian funding in 2024, in addition to EUR 82 million in core support.

In the Council Conclusions of March 2024⁸⁴, the EU unanimously condemned illegal settlement expansions, urging Israel to halt these activities, prevent settler violence, and ensure accountability. In its Conclusions of 17 October 2024⁸⁵, the European Council called on all parties to fully abide by international law, including international humanitarian law, and drew attention to the need to ensure that civilians are protected at all times, that civilian infrastructure is not targeted and that international law is respected. For Gaza, the EU has been calling for IHL compliance at high-level meetings and with all relevant stakeholders. The EU co-chaired an IHL event at the UN General Assembly (UNGA 79) with ICRC President Spoljaric and ICC Prosecutor Khan.



The protracted humanitarian situation facing Palestinians in **Gaza** continues to deteriorate rapidly due to the continued intensification of hostilities after the terrorist attack by Hamas on 7 October 2023. According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, since 7 October 2023, at least 47 100 Palestinians have been killed and more than 111 100 have been injured. Over 13 000 recorded fatalities are children⁸⁶. More than 2 million Palestinians are without protection, food, water, sanitation, shelter, healthcare, education, electricity, and fuel – the basic necessities for survival. Over 1.9 million people⁸⁷ (over 90% of the population) have been internally displaced multiple times amidst intensified Israeli airstrikes, ground confrontations and recurrent evacuation orders.

^{84 &}lt;a href="https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/70880/euco-conclusions-2122032024.pdf">https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/70880/euco-conclusions-2122032024.pdf

^{85 &}lt;u>https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/2pebccz2/20241017-euco-conclusions-en.pdf</u>

⁸⁶ At the time of publication; https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/mid-dle-east-and-northern-africa/palestine_en

^{87 &}lt;a href="https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-187-gaza-strip">https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-187-gaza-strip



Military operations and restrictions on movement hampered the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza. Here, the staff of UNRWRA and other EU partners are trying to ensure the continuation of humanitarian operations.

In 2024, the EU allocated EUR 237 million in humanitarian funding for vulnerable Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. On 16 January 2025, the EU announced another EUR 120 million of humanitarian aid for Palestine⁸⁸. This funding supports humanitarian organisations working in both Gaza and the West Bank. Despite the considerable insecurity and logistical challenges, EU humanitarian partners continue to respond on the ground, doing their utmost to provide relief in Gaza and the West Bank.

The EU also launched a humanitarian air bridge (HAB) operation to deliver aid to the people affected by the crisis. As of 5 February 2024, a total of 67 flights had transported over 4 000 tonnes of cargo supplied by humanitarian partners, EU-owned stockpile items, and donations from Member States.

The **Union Civil Protection Mechanism** has been activated 14 times since 7 October 2023 chiefly to provide humanitarian supplies for Gaza and support for countries affected by the spillover of the crisis, to repatriate EU citizens from Israel and Gaza and to evacuate Palestinian patients to Europe for medical reasons.

In **Lebanon**, against the background of the escalation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, European Council Conclusions recalled the need to ensure that civilians are protected at all times, that civilian infrastructure is not targeted, and that international law is respected. The European Council condemned the attacks against the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (**UNIFIL**), stating that they constitute a grave violation of international law, and that all actors have an obligation to ensure the safety and security of UN staff and property, and to respect the inviolability of UN premises at all times.

In **Yemen**, the operating environment for aid workers deteriorated significantly in 2024, both in areas controlled by the Houthi de facto authorities, and in territories under the control of the internationally recognised government, with a marked increase in security incidents affecting frontline staff, restrictions on movements, interference in needs assessments and bureaucratic impediments. Most notably, 2024 saw a resurgence of arbitrary detentions of UN staff and aid workers by the Houthi de facto authorities. The EU continued to promote compliance with IHL and a principled donor engagement to enable the delivery of essential humanitarian aid to vulnerable communities across the country. The EU also maintained its leading role in convening donors, international organisations and Yemeni non-governmental organisations through a Senior Officials Meeting. Operationally, the EU continued to support UN agencies, the ICRC and international NGOs working on protection, promotion of women's and children's rights, and reduction of gender-based violence. The EU maintained its support for the work of UNICEF and Save the Children in documenting incidents of grave child rights violations, alongside support for a Middle East and North Africa regional action (led by Diakonia in partnership with Geneva Call) aimed at improving protection for civilians in the region through increased knowledge of and respect for international humanitarian norms among armed actors and religious leaders.



Children continue to bear the brunt of conflicts around the world. In Yemen, over 2.4 million children have dropped out of school. With EU humanitarian funds, IOM is helping children regain access to education by rehabilitating schools and providing essential supplies.

The humanitarian crisis in **Sudan** remains the world's largest displacement crisis and a major food security and protection crisis. There have been confirmed reports of war crimes and widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, as well as severe access constraints and systematic obstructions for humanitarian actors operating in the country. Around 25 million people (over half of Sudan's inhabitants), of which 48% are children, urgently need humanitarian assistance. Reports of violence against women and girls, violations of children's rights and child protection concerns are dramatically increasing. In 2024, the EU allocated EUR 147 million in humanitarian assistance. According to the available data at the time of writing, 51 humanitarian workers have been killed in the conflict. Attacks against humanitarian aid are on the rise, including the targeting of humanitarian convoys and the looting of humanitarian warehouses and offices. The EU continued to support the ICRC in 2024 to help ensure the safety and well-being of civilians, address urgent needs and support access to basic services for internally displaced persons and their host communities, both inside and outside active conflict zones.

In the **Sahel**, in addition to the continuous region-specific dialogue with the ICRC and financial support for the ICRC's work on ensuring compliance with IHL, the EU held discussions throughout 2024 with key regional actors such as the Economic Community of West African States on possible joint approaches to IHL-related issues and access to conflict-affected areas.

The EU provided a total of EUR 114 million for new humanitarian projects including protection activities in West and Central Africa. These projects are expected to benefit an estimated 4.4 million people in need. The EU also participated in joint advocacy efforts with other humanitarian actors and donors, using fora such as the Senior Officials Meeting on food security and nutrition in the Sahel and Lake Chad and the donor conference on the refugee crisis in Sahel and Lake Chad hosted by Saudi Arabia with support from the OIC.

In the DRC, IHL violations are widespread, with targeted killings and forced recruitments. Camps for internally displaced people are regularly shelled by artillery and mortars, as are other urban areas. Sexual violence is alarmingly widespread, with record figures of sexual violence and abuse. In 2024, the EU continues to fund Diakonia and Geneva Call to enhance humanitarian access and protection for



Salomé is a mother of 11 and a survivor of sexual violence, she endured unimaginable pain fleeing conflict in the DRC. With the support from the EU, UNFPA and Action Aid. she has access to health care.

civilians while engaging with armed groups and defacto authorities, as well as CSOs and community leaders, to promote IHL knowledge and compliance. The EU has also rolled out a new holistic response strategy against sexual and gender-based violence in 2024.

In **Afghanistan**, **23.7 million people** are in need of humanitarian assistance. Despite the significant reduction in armed conflict, Afghanistan remains one of the countries most contaminated by explosive ordnance worldwide. Restrictions imposed on women and girls (including a ban on secondary education), child labour, child marriage, and gender-based violence are strongly interconnected protection risks. In 2024, the EU allocated EUR 160 in humanitarian aid, bringing the total since 1994 to around EUR 1.8 billion.



Millions of women and girls in Afghanistan have little or no access to healthcare. It is one of the most dangerous places to give birth. The EU funds organisations which provide consultations, medicines, maternal and emergency care.

In **Syria**, 16.7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, 2.4 million children are out of school and more than half the population lacks a stable source of water. Despite many challenges, the EU has continued to provide impartial humanitarian aid to those in need across Syria since 2011. The EU, along with its Member States, is the largest donor to the Syria crisis. Over the past 14 years, the EU and its Member States have mobilised more than EUR 35 billion in humanitarian, development, economic and stabilisation assistance.

In 2024, the European Commission budget included EUR 163 million in humanitarian aid to assist millions of people inside Syria. The EU has regularly allocated humanitarian funding to respond to new emergencies with a significant amount of EU funding gone towards meeting health needs and the rising food insecurity inside Syria.



In northwest Syria, 2 million displaced people live in camps. The EU and WHO help administrate a mass drug to minimise the spread of scabies lesions within the camps. Those living in camps are 7 times more likely to contract scabies.

Myanmar/Burma still presents a protection crisis. There are multiple violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law; indiscriminate and disproportionate use of weapons against the civilian population. Humanitarian assistance and supplies of essential goods and services are still being denied to people in areas not controlled by the government. The EU's humanitarian assistance has consistently focused on supporting the promotion of IHL and on delivering a dedicated protection response. This entails promoting respect for IHL to armed groups; documenting IHL violations, including cases of violence against educational and medical services and staff; providing mine risk education and assistance for victims; providing assistance for victims of human rights violations such as sexual and gender-based violence; providing legal assistance for vulnerable populations such as children and stateless people; and conducting activities to help prevent the recruitment of vulnerable groups such as young men and boys into armed groups.



'When I grow up, I want to become a teacher' says Mostakima. Together with UNICEF, the EU contributes to the education of Rohingya refugees.

Throughout the year, the EUSR for Human Rights remained actively engaged in promoting compliance with IHL. This is a key area complementing the human rights dimension of his mandate. It is also in line with the EU action plan on human rights and democracy. Through his participation in public events and direct high-level engagement, the EUSR helped raise the visibility of EU action and instruments, such as the recently adopted EU human rights and international humanitarian law due diligence policy (HRDDP), which seeks to ensure that EU security sector support is in compliance with human rights law and IHL.

Amidst a multitude of crises and conflicts, and multiple and persistent attacks on multilateralism, the rule of law and IHL, the EUSR also maintained deep and regular exchanges with relevant international actors, including the OHCHR, UN Special Procedures mandate holders, the ICC as well as the ICRC, as the guardian of IHL. He conveyed the EU's continued support for their mandate and work. Given the EUSR's broad and horizontal mandate, he was regularly invited to take part in discussions and share the EU's perspectives on the role of human rights and IHL throughout the entire conflict cycle, from prevention and mediation, to crisis management, stabilisation and early reconstruction.

EU GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS SANCTIONS REGIME

The EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, 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 (e.g. torture, slavery, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests or detentions). It underscores the EU's determination to strengthen its role in addressing serious human rights violations and abuses worldwide. In 2024, the EU moved fast to impose several restrictive measures (sanctions) under the sanctions regime in reaction to serious human rights violations and abuses, in particular in Russia, Middle East and DPRK. In addition to the human rights sanctions regime, the EU also has several geographically focused sanction regimes.

In January 2024, the EU sanctioned three persons employed in the Russian judicial system responsible for serious human rights violations, as well as the Russian para-governmental **Safe Internet League** which aids the Russian government in enforcing censorship



practices, along with **Ekaterina Mizulina**, the Chairwoman of the Safe Internet League, responsible for serious and systematic abuses of freedom of opinion and expression.

In March, the EU sanctioned 33 persons and two entities linked to the sudden death of the Russian opposition politician Alexei **Navalny**. The new listings include members of the judiciary and the penal-colony institutions where Alexei Navalny was held from June 2022 until his death including the IK-6 corrective colony and IK-3 maximum security corrective colony.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

In April, the EU, in response to the brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks that occurred across Israel on 7 October 2023, sanctioned the Al-Ouds Brigades, the armed wing of the EU-designated terrorist organisation Palestinian Islamic Jihad; Nukhba Force, a special forces unit of the EU-designated terrorist organisation Hamas; and the **Oassam Brigades**, the military wing of Hamas.

In April, the EU listed four persons and two entities responsible for serious human rights abuses against Palestinians in the West Bank. The listed entities are Lehava, a radical right-wing Jewish supremacist group, and Hilltop Youth, a radical youth group consisting of members known for violent acts against Palestinians and their villages in the West Bank. Two leading figures of Hilltop Youth, Meir Ettinger and Elisha Yered, were also listed. Additionally in July, the EU approved additional restrictive measures against five persons and three entities. The listed individuals and entities are responsible for serious and systematic human rights abuses against Palestinians in the West Bank and one Israeli group of violent activists is responsible for blocking humanitarian aid trucks delivering food, water and fuel to Gaza.

In July, four persons and two entities responsible for systematic and widespread sexual and gender-based violence in Syria were listed. The listings include the former chief of staff of the Syrian army, Abdel Karim Mohammad Ibrahim, and Ali Mahmoud Abbas, previously Minister of Defence of Syria, and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Syrian Army. Both were responsible for the actions of the armed forces that, under their command, committed systematic and widespread torture, rape, as well as sexual and gender-based violence against civilians.

The EU also listed the DPRK Minister of State Security, Ri Chang Dae, who is responsible for numerous acts of sexual and gender-based violence committed by Ministry officials notably against women and girls opposing the regime or held in detention/prison centres in DPRK. Also listed is Evgeniy Sobolev, the head of the so-called 'penitentiary service', installed by Moscow in the temporarily occupied Kherson oblast of Ukraine. Under his command, a widespread and systematic pattern of human rights violations in detention facilities in areas under the Russian occupation authorities' control, including the Kherson region, have been documented. Lastly, two entities have been sanctioned: Kokorat San Ras, a Haitian gang operating mostly in the Artibonite and North West region, well known for its use of violence against women as a common weapon, and the **Onsong County MSS Detention Centre**, a detention facility in North Hamgvong Province of DPRK, where torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment are established practice.

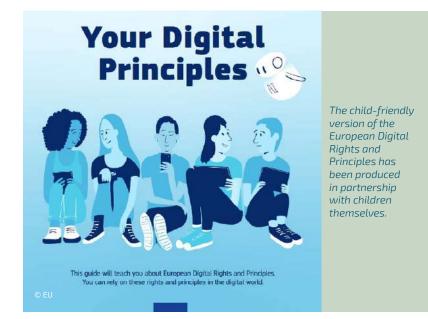
The listed individuals and entities are subject to an asset freeze in the EU and the listed individuals are prohibited from travelling to the EU. Moreover, persons and entities in the EU will be prohibited from making funds and economic resources available to those listed, either directly or indirectly. As of December 2024, sanctions are being applied to 116 natural and legal persons and 33 entities. The EU has also continued to address human rights violations and abuses through its geographical sanctions regimes.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES: HARNESSING OPPORTUNITIES AND ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

The transition to the digital age has accelerated across the world. While digital technologies can facilitate access to education, work, information and healthcare services, we are also confronted with the spread of disinformation and hate speech online. Surveillance and censorship hamper the work of civil society while the use of artificial intelligence (AI) systems can exacerbate inequalities. Human rights must be protected both online and offline. This requires the engagement of all stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector. It is why the intersection of the digital world with human rights is becoming even more of a priority for the EU.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

One of the main objectives of EU digital diplomacy and of the EU's external human rights policy is to promote internationally universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and democratic principles in the digital space. The principles on which EU action is based are enshrined in the EU treaties and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, as well as in international law, in particular international humanitarian and human rights law. How international law can be applied in the online space has been recalled in the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles⁸⁹, and is reflected in the Declaration for the Future of the Internet⁹⁰, signed by the EU and over 70 partners.



The EU's position in its bilateral diplomacy and multilateral fora remained clear. The EU continued to advocate for an internet that is open, un-fragmented, free, safe and secure for everyone. The EU promoted the right to privacy and data protection, addressed arbitrary and mass surveillance and actively combated internet shutdowns, online censorship, hate speech and crimes, genderbased violence, information manipulation, disinformation and cybercrime, in full compliance with international human rights law. The EU also promoted a human-rights-based approach to the design, development, deployment, evaluation and use of AI.

In a changing geopolitical landscape, the EU approach may be increasingly challenged internationally, in particular in the area of privacy, data protection, and freedom of expression. These divergences may hinder the secure, free flow of data as well as regulatory cooperation and consumer protection, underscoring the need to promote international alignment with EU standards, for instance, facilitate a trustworthy, free flow of data.

⁸⁹ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=0J:JOC_2023_023_R_0001

^{90 &}lt;a href="https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_2695">https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_2695

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

In Belize, seven community hubs provide residents with vital opportunities to enhance their digital literacy and bridge the technology gap. The hubs are located in Dangriga, Silk Grass, Independence, Bella Vista, Big Falls, San Pedro Columbia, and Punta Gorda; these hubs are not just places with computers and internet access—they are transforming lives by offering the tools and knowledge that residents need to thrive in a rapidly digitising world.



The PLANTS (Preparing Local CSOs to improve their Ability to facilitate an enabling environment through Training and Service delivery) project is implemented by Humana People to People Belize and funded by the European Union. Running from February 2023 to June 2025, the project supports an enhanced environment for service delivery in seven rural communities in the Stann Creek and Toledo Districts.

EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF EU LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

The EU continued to regulate the digital sphere. In 2024, the EU adopted the Artificial Intelligence Act⁹¹. This Act is the first legal framework on Al. It aims to promote the development of Al and address the potential high risks it poses to health, safety and fundamental rights. The legal framework will apply to both public and private actors, both inside and outside the EU, where the AI system is placed on the EU market or its use affects people located in the EU.



While many AI systems will pose low to no risk, certain AI systems create risks that need to be addressed to avoid undesirable outcomes. Recognising the potential threat to rights and democracy posed by certain applications of AI, the new legislation will prohibit a series of uses including biometric categorisation systems that use sensitive characteristics (e.g. race, sexual orientation, religious, political and philosophical beliefs); social scoring based on social behaviour or personal characteristics; and AI systems that manipulate human behaviour to circumvent their free will.

⁹¹ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32024R1689

The legislation also regulates so-called high-risk uses of AI which will be subject to a number of requirements concerning, for example, training data, transparency, human oversight and risk management. The provider of the system must perform a conformity assessment before putting a high-risk AI system on the market or into service in the EU. This assessment is aimed at demonstrating that the system complies with the mandatory requirements for trustworthy AI.

Al has consequences and challenges that transcend borders; therefore international cooperation is important. The EU AI Office⁹² is in charge of the EU's international engagement on AI matters, based on the AI Act and the Coordinated Plan on AI⁹³. The EU seeks to promote responsible stewardship and good governance of AI in collaboration with international partners and in line with the rules-based multilateral system and the values it upholds. The EU engages bilaterally which partners such as the US, Canada, Japan, and multilaterally in the UN, OECD, global partnership on AI, G7, G20 and Council of Europe to promote trustworthy, human-centric and ethical AI.

The **EU's Digital Services Act** (DSA) has been fully applicable to all intermediary service providers in scope of the DSA since February 2024. The EU remains committed to implementing and enforcing the DSA effectively. The DSA ensures that the fundamental rights and freedoms of all users, including the rights to freedom of expression and information, are safeguarded online while simultaneously improving the safety and trustworthiness of digital services in the EU.

The main regulatory tool of the DSA is the supervised risk management framework for Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) and Search Engines (VLOSEs) with 45 million users or more in the EU. The risk management framework means that these large online

platforms are required to regularly assess and effectively mitigate systemic risks stemming from their services or from the use of their services, including any actual or foreseeable negative effects on the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms. At least once a year, VLOPs and VLOSEs must identify and analyse risks stemming from their services, such as the dissemination of illegal content, disinformation and risks to the protection of minors. They must also outline the measures they have put in place to mitigate the identified risks. The mandatory disclosure of all these reports helps bring about further transparency and accountability and offers a basis for public scrutiny⁹⁴.

To safeguard the integrity of electoral processes in the EU, the Commission published DSA guidelines⁹⁵ in March 2024 on recommended measures for very large online platforms and search engines to mitigate systemic risks online that may impact the integrity of elections. The empowerment and protection of minors online is another priority area of DSA implementation. The DSA obliges all online platforms accessible to minors to ensure a high level of privacy, safety and security for children and VLOPs and VLOSEs must assess and mitigate against systemic risks of their services, including possible negative effects on the mental and physical wellbeing of users and on the rights of the child. In July 2024, the Commission initiated the development of guidelines on the protection of minors online. The guidelines will assist all online platforms which are accessible to children to meet their obligations in the DSA.

To fight disinformation and hate speech around the world, the EU expanded its international engagement on platform governance, promoting governance that is effective and balanced, which safeguards fundamental rights and empowers civil society. The principles intended to safeguard fundamental rights, empower users

^{92 &}lt;a href="https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/ai-office">https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/ai-office

 $^{93 \}quad https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/coordinated-plan-artificial-intelligence-2021-review$

⁹⁴ https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/dsa-brings-transparency#ecl-in-page-lsets8gr

^{95 &}lt;a href="https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_1707">https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_1707

and protect democratic processes, enshrined in the DSA, are also reflected in key documents issued by international organisations, including the Global Digital Compact, the UNESCO guidelines for the governance of digital platforms⁹⁶ and the United Nations Global Principles for Information Integrity⁹⁷. The collaboration with UNESCO is underpinned by the 'Social Media 4 Peace'98 initiative, funded by the EU, to strengthen the resilience of societies against the spread of potentially harmful online content. The initiative places a particular emphasis on hate speech and incitement to violence, while enhancing the promotion of peace through digital technologies and social media. NDICI-Crisis Response actions have been mobilised to this effect. The EU also funds an initiative to support the implementation of the guidelines for the governance of digital platforms, which brings together government regulators, civil society, judicial actors, and other stakeholders worldwide on a sub-regional basis. The initiative aims to raise awareness of the guidelines and foster collective commitment to the protection of human rights in processes regulating digital platforms.



On May 30, 2024, the EU Delegation to UNESCO hosted a joint celebration of Europe Day and World Press Freedom Day at UNESCO. Centered on the pressing challenges of AI, the student-led debate highlighted the vital role of free, open, fair, and inclusive dialogue in driving positive change and innovation for all.

As regards exports of cyber-surveillance technology, the EU has tightened controls to ensure that digital technologies are traded legitimately and not misused to violate human rights. In October 2024, the EU adopted guidelines to help EU exporters navigate the export controls on cyber-surveillance items, including guidance on how to conduct due diligence via a step-by-step approach to transaction screening. The guidelines also aim to help exporters assess whether exports of specific cyber-surveillance items could pose a risk for internal repression or serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and would hence require an export notification to the national competent authority, which should make EU controls more effective and consistent across Member States.

BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY

The EU used some of its political dialogues, including **human rights dialogues**, to discuss possible joint responses to the spread of internet shutdowns, online censorship and mass and targeted arbitrary surveillance including the targeting of human rights defenders and journalists by spyware. These issues were discussed in human rights dialogues with Brazil, the Philippines and Qatar, for example. Through public diplomacy, the EU condemned internet shutdowns and laws that breached human rights in the digital sphere and called on countries to protect freedom of expression online. An example of this is the EU statement on 'women, life, freedom' in Iran⁹⁹.

⁹⁶ https://www.unesco.org/en/internet-trust/guidelines

⁹⁷ https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un-global-principles-for-information-integrity-en.

^{98 &}lt;a href="https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/projects/social-media-4-peace_en">https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/projects/social-media-4-peace_en

⁹⁹ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/09/16/iran-statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union/

191



Mahsa Amini and the Woman, Life, Freedom movement are laureates of the 2023 Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought.

The global influence of technology and its integral role in daily life make multilateral and multi-stakeholder approaches indispensable. The EU has maintained active engagement in UN fora, sharing analyses and proposing best practices and recommendations to foster a digital sphere that is compliant with human rights.

The Global Digital Compact – a landmark document

At the Summit of the Future, the Global Digital Compact (GDC) was adopted enabling all countries to benefit from the digital transition.

The EU worked closely with all UN Member States to achieve an ambitious Global Digital Compact outlining principles, objectives and actions to support an open, free and secure digital future for all that upholds human rights, overcomes digital divides and reaffirms the multi-stakeholder governance of the internet. The EU engaged actively throughout the negotiations, ensuring that human rights standards were upheld throughout the text and pushing back against attempts to undermine international human rights law.

The GDC establishes clear commitments by all UN Member States to:

- ensure that the development and implementation of national legislation relevant to digital technologies is compliant with obligations under international law, including international human rights law;
- refrain from internet shutdowns and measures that target internet access:
- prioritise the development and implementation of national online child safety policies and standards, in compliance with international human rights law; and
- ensure that laws and regulations on the use of technology in areas such as surveillance and encryption are compliant with international law.

The EU will engage actively with all UN members calling on them to implement the GDC's human rights provisions.

In Geneva, during Human Rights Council sessions, the EU participated actively in debates on new and emerging digital technologies, the right to privacy, cyber-bullying and freedom of expression online. The EU engaged actively in the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) to ensure that its work on developing ICT standards takes account of the human rights dimension, supporting closer cooperation between the ITU and the OHCHR.

In addition, in September, the EU signed the **Council of Europe Convention on AI**¹⁰⁰. This Convention is the result of intensive negotiations led by the Committee on AI (CAI), in which the EU actively participated and brought together experts from civil society, academia, industry and government. This agreement provides a crucial framework and is aligned with the principles underlying the EU AI Act, reinforcing a human-centric approach to AI development. The Convention will be implemented in the EU through the AI Act, which lays down harmonised rules for the selling, deployment and use of AI systems in the EU.

¹⁰⁰ https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=225



On 5 September 2024, during the informal conference of Council of Europe Ministers of Justice in Vilnius (Lithuania), the European Commission signed the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence (AI) on behalf of the European Union. This Convention marks a historic milestone as the first legally binding international agreement on AI, aimed at ensuring that AI systems align with human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

Moreover, the EU was strongly involved in the UNGA negotiations for the first UN resolution on safe, secure and trustworthy AI, adopted in March 2024. The EU and its Member States put forward some substantial human rights language, to bring the resolution up to EU standards in terms of human rights in the digital environment, in line with the AI Act.

The EU and the US engaged actively within the **EU-US Trade and Technology Council** (TTC). The TTC continued to serve as a forum for the US and the EU to coordinate approaches to key global trade, economic, and technology issues and to deepen transatlantic trade and economic relations based on these shared values. Within the TTC, the EU and the US continued to discuss a wide range of human rights issues in the digital sphere (see Section 4.4 on support for human rights defenders). For an example, in April 2024, the EU and US published Joint principles on combatting gender-based violence in the digital environment¹⁰¹.

SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The EU is aware of the impact of digital technologies on civil society organisations and human rights defenders (HRDs). Not only are some defenders explicitly targeted, but large-scale, corporate data breaches and security incidents have indirectly affected human rights work at the global level.

Protecting human rights defenders from digital threats: guidance for the private sector

Recent years have seen a rapid growth in online threats against HRDs, such as malicious cyber activity, online censorship, targeted internet shutdowns, arbitrary or unlawful online surveillance through the misuse of commercial spyware amongst other techniques, harassment, smear campaigns, disinformation and doxing. In March 2024, the EU and the US responded with joint guidance setting out 10 practical steps that technology platforms can take globally to prevent, mitigate and remedy attacks targeting HRDs online¹⁰².

The joint guidance acknowledges the role that online attacks play in paving the way for physical human rights violations and abuses, including beatings, killings, enforced disappearances, and arbitrary detention. The key recommendations for online platforms are:

- 1. commit to a HRD protection policy;
- 2. identify risks to HRDs;
- 3. exchange information with HRDs, CSOs, and industry peers;
- 4. create a policy implementation plan to mitigate risk and prevent adverse impacts;
- 5. resource and staff HRD protection efforts;

¹⁰¹ https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/us-eu-trade-and-technology-coun-cil-ttc-joint-principles-combatting-gender-based-violence-digital

¹⁰² https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-us-release-joint-guidance-online-platforms-protect-ing-human-rights-defenders-online_en

- 6. build capacity to address risks in local contexts;
- 7. provide safety tools and security education for HRDs;
- 8. create and maintain accessible incident reporting channels for HRDs:

2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

- 9. contribute to and provide access to remedy for HRDs;
- 10. commit to transparency, public reporting, and continuous improvement.

The EU and the US co-organised a side-event in the margins of the June HRC 56 session to present the key recommendations.

In 2024, at least 63 emergency grants for digital security and protection measures were awarded, benefiting 212 HRDs working in countries such as India, Israel, Philippines, Russia, and Türkiye. The ProtectDefenders.eu digital security reinforcement grants for organisations and local communities contributed to the security set up and training for more than 1 077 local NGO staff. This organisational support strengthened the digital security structure of actors operating in delicate environments, such as in Honduras, Indonesia, Nicaragua and Senegal.

FUNDING/PROGRAMMING

The EU funds projects to implement the EU's digital policy such as the 'Multilateralism and Digitalisation' action amounting to EUR 30 million. This promotes the EU's vision of digitalisation in the multilateral system and in multi-stakeholder for a and helps advance the EU's participation and role on a specific range of topics and to reduce the risk of propagation of non-democratic and non-humancentric developments in the digital domain.

Under this action, the EU is contributing EUR 4 million to a twoyear project aimed at protecting digital rights and implemented by the OHCHR in a selection of countries. The project focuses on three

central objectives: producing UN system-wide human rights due diligence guidance for digital technologies; expanding integration and the application of digital rights by states and technological companies; setting technical standards and protecting human rights. The project includes work within the UN, involving states (engaged in regulating digital technologies), companies (designing and deploying digital technologies), technical standard-setting bodies and civil society.

The Digital Democracy Initiative is another example of how a multistakeholder approach can advance the protection of human rights in the digital age. The Digital Democracy Initiative, a partnership between Denmark, the EU, and Norway, aims to reinforce the digital skills and protection of civil society in the Global South, particularly in countries undergoing democratic regression and where civic space is under pressure.

Furthermore, the EU recently launched a three-year initiative 'AI-POL: advancing innovation governance and responsible AI in law enforcement'103 implemented by UNICRI (the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute) and INTERPOL. The initiative seeks to promote responsible AI innovation within the global law enforcement community. To this end, law enforcement agencies will be supported in making effective use of AI technologies, while safeguarding human rights and maintaining public trust.

BUILDING IN-HOUSE KNOWLEDGE

To enhance the knowledge of EU staff on digital and human rights, the EU regularly organised training on digital and human rights issues with the support of international NGOs and UN experts like the special online session on internet shutdowns held in December 2024.

¹⁰³ https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/20241122_ press_release_ai-pol_ct-tech_launch.pdf

The Cybersecurity Days 2024 - October is an important month for cybersecurity awareness across Europe, thanks to the European Cybersecurity Month (ECSM) a campaign that seeks to raise awareness about the importance of cybersecurity, encourage best practices, and provide resources for individuals and organisations to stay safe online.



High Representative with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya on the inauguration of the photo exhibition on Belarusian political prisoners at EEAS headquarters, December 2024.

O5. DELIVERING BY WORKING TOGETHER

5.1 Public diplomacy and strategic communication

Effectively communicating the European Union's role and activities has become all the more crucial in an increasingly polarised and transactional world amid accusations of double standards and backsliding on human rights. In response, the EU has ramped up its communication efforts, using social media, videos, press releases, blog posts and the coverage of High Representative meetings and missions to raise concerns or share positive human rights stories worldwide. To tackle disinformation and counter false or misleading information, the EU has strengthened its fact-checking and myth-busting initiatives. These efforts include improving strategic communication within the Eastern Partnership, Southern Neighbourhood, and Western Balkans through regional communication programmes and the EUvsDisinfo project.

The marking of the international days relevant to the human rights and democracy agenda is also a central element of the EU's communication activities across the world. The **High Representative issued statements on behalf of the EU** on International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, Day of International Criminal Justice, International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples and International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence based on Religion or Belief. The High Representative also issued statements to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day, International Albinism Awareness Day, and International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. Together with Commissioners, the High Representative marked the International Days against Female Genital Mutilation and against Child Labour, World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, World NGO Day, World

Refugee Day, International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, Universal Children's Day and International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The High Representative also made a joint statement with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on the European and World Day against the Death Penalty.



Human Rights Day being celebrated in Monrovia, Liberia, May 2024.

For International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia, and Pride Month, the EU ran a campaign¹⁰⁴ addressing discrimination and hate. It featured testimonials from the community or their families, who shared their experiences and the challenges they face from discrimination and lack of acceptance.



104 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/pride-2024_en

The annual International Day¹⁰⁵ for the Elimination of Violence against Women was marked for the 25th time in 2024. The EU joined UN WOMEN's global call to #OrangeTheWorld in solidarity with victims and survivors of violence. In observance of the 25th anniversary, the campaign exceptionally ran over a period of 1.5 months. The 16 days of activism against gender-based violence initiative ran until Human Rights Day on 10 December.



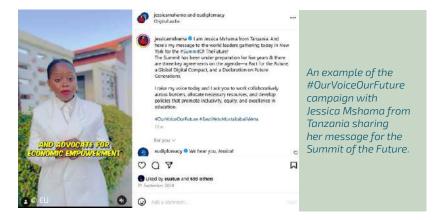
¹⁰⁵ Https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/global-hub-victims-violence_en

In 2024, the EU continued its engagement with youth on global challenges. Empowering youth and ensuring their meaningful inclusion and active participation in decision-making processes is a key priority for the EU, as outlined in the EU action plan on human rights and democracy, 2020-2027. 'Engage' – the first pillar of the youth action plan in EU external action 2022-2027 – focuses on amplifying the voices of young people in policy and decision-making at all levels.



In Thailand, youth leaders share their reflections and insights in a panel discussion entitled 'the rights of the future generation: the roles of youth in defining their future' to mark International Human Rights Day.

As part of this effort, the EEAS continued the #OurVoiceOurFuture social media campaign. This campaign is a collaboration between the EU, EU Delegations, and young opinion leaders from Latin America, Africa, the Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership Countries, the Asia-Pacific region, and the MENA region. In 2024, young content creators were invited to participate in European Youth Week, held from 2-19 April, organised by the EU and the European Parliament. The session was specifically designed for young activists, focusing on youth empowerment, active participation and issues of global interest. Additionally, in September 2024, young content creators were involved in communication about the Summit of the Future ahead of the UN General Assembly. This initiative highlighted the crucial role of the younger generation in shaping the future at international level.





The 'Who rules the world¹⁰⁶' podcast series, hosted by EU's UN Youth Delegate, featured interviews with various young voices from the #OurVoiceOurFuture network. Topics covered included the Summit of the Future, youth engagement, green diplomacy and human rights.

^{106 &}lt;a href="https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/global-hub-victims-violence_en">https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/global-hub-victims-violence_en

Partnerships with civil society

To commemorate International Human Rights Day and International Human Rights Defenders Day, and also marking the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the EU guidelines on human rights defenders, the OHCHR's Regional Office for Europe and the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), in partnership with ProtectDefenders.eu and the Human Rights and Democracy Network, organised a spotlight event¹⁰⁷ on HRDs on 9 December 2024 in the European Parliament in Brussels. The event brought together HRDs and a wide range of policymakers and key stakeholders including the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders to address all aspects of HRDs' protection needs, given the shrinking civic space and rising extremism, populism and nationalism.



On 9 May, the European Union marks its creation and foundational document, the Schuman Declaration, which is the basis for the idea of political and economic cooperation. Every year, Europe Day is celebrated around the world.

Among the many examples of creative initiatives of EU Delegations, the EU Delegation to North Macedonia¹⁰⁸ celebrated this year's Human Rights Day with a unique approach by launching an interactive online game, NAVIGATOR. Developed by the Europe House network



Over a thousand sport enthusiasts took part in Europe Run&Walk 2024 edition organised by EU Delegation in Zambia for Europe Day.

in collaboration with young lawyers, gamers, the UN, EU Member States, and the Ministry of Education, the game captured the interest of young people, highlighting their engagement with human rights issues. Played over 50 000 times, with a 70% average success rate in answering questions, it showcased young people's significant understanding of human rights, a vital foundation for shaping the future.



The EU Delegation in North Macedonia marked Human Rights Day by creating an interactive online game, NAVIGATOR, to test and boost human rights knowledge.

¹⁰⁷ https://europe.ohchr.org/news-events/news/next-event-spotlight-human-rights-defenders

¹⁰⁸ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/north-macedonia/human-rights-day-online-game-raises-awareness-tests-knowledge-and-shows-good-results_en

Running for two weeks from International Human Rights Day, the game featured 300 questions across nine themes, including health, the environment, children's rights, discrimination and data protection. Its purpose was to raise awareness about the importance of human rights in fostering a peaceful and progressive society, at a time of global conflicts and rising authoritarianism.

FOREIGN INFORMATION MANIPULATION AND INTERFERENCE

Foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) has been acknowledged as a multifaceted threat to society, democracy and security. This activity also includes tactics to suppress independent and critical voices, for example through trolling, harassment and intimidation. In addition to other harmful impacts of FIMI, this can lead to self-censorship and limit the right to freedom of expression.

The EU has continued to strengthen its response to FIMI through the work of EUvsDisinfo. The project reached 35 million people in 2024 and remains at the forefront of efforts to expose and counter disinformation campaigns. In addition, Horizon Europe mobilised EUR 18 million to fund a cluster of research projects¹⁰⁹ which, tackling different aspects of the FIMI phaenomenon, will work to fortify the EU's defences against the evolving landscape of information manipulation and interference.

A notable milestone in strengthening global cooperation against FIMI was achieved through the Connecting Media Communities conference held in Pristina, Kosovo. The event brought together over 100 journalists, fact-checkers, and media professionals from around the world (Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership and Central Asia, Latin America, the Asia-Pacific region, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the MENA region) to enhance their capabilities in countering FIMI. The

conference resulted in the creation of the Charta for Journalists, a collective commitment to building societal trust, ensuring journalist safety, securing sustainable funding for independent media, and strengthening fact-checking capabilities. This initiative exemplifies the EU's dedication to fostering international collaboration in defending democratic values and human rights and combating FIMI through practical support to media professionals.



In October 2024, Pristina, Kosovo, became the gathering point for over 100 journalists, fact-checkers, and media professionals. Organised by the EU, the event aimed to address the threat of FIMI by equipping journalists with essential tools, knowledge, and networks to bolster their efforts.

Connecting Media Communities events, previously organised in Sarajevo, Warsaw, Kyiv and Chişinău, serve a very clear purpose: to assess needs, build capacity, and promote collaboration amongst like-minded partners, professionals and practitioners. The ultimate goal of the event is to strengthen the capacity of global media communities to address FIMI by creating a global network of defenders. The main topic was constructive journalism as it relates to countering FIMI, but also the dynamic between traditional and new media in a region at a crossroads between enlargement, geopolitical tensions and a rapidly changing media environment propelled by AI and other technology breakthroughs. The project has

¹⁰⁹ An overview of the ongoing projects available here: https://www.disinfo.eu/wp-content/up-loads/2024/06/Tackling-FIMI-in-Europe-brochure.pdf

also broadened its geographical focus to track and analyse Russia's growing information influence operations beyond Europe, notably in Africa, where coordinated efforts to undermine democratic values and human rights have been identified and exposed.

5.2 Implementation, monitoring and evaluation

As this report shows, the EU has continued to make use of the full range of its human rights and democracy instruments and tools to uphold and promote human rights across the world, delivering on the action plan on human rights and democracy. The EU continued to report annually on its implementation and engaged regularly with civil society on the action plan's lines of action and priorities. In the face of multiple crises and conflicts, further backsliding on human rights and democracy, the EU continued its efforts to act on all fronts and at all levels and strengthened the Team Europe approach to mobilise more resources for human rights action.

Together with its Member States, the EU leveraged its role in multilateral human rights fora, doing more outreach than ever before to defend the integrity of the international human rights system and to make sure that it addresses the most egregious violations and abuses around the world. The EU again conducted more bilateral human rights dialogues and consultations than any other actor and engaged with partners from all regions, for example through intense outreach activity by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights.

These activities continue to be planned and reviewed with the EU Member States in the Council Working Party for Human Rights (COHOM) to maximise their impact and reach and pursue a unified and streamlined approach around the world. In addition to negotiating and agreeing EU positions and initiatives, COHOM closely follows the

implementation of the action plan¹¹⁰ from a cross-cutting perspective, with the aim of aligning it with the EU budget cycle (the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework). With the extension of the action plan until 2027, relevant thematic and geographic programmes will continue to contribute directly to the implementation of the action plan, for the remainder of this budget cycle and for future budget cycles. Reflecting a renewed sense of urgency, the extension of the action plan reconfirmed the EU's commitment to protecting and advancing human rights and democracy in its external relations, joining efforts with Member States, civil society, human rights defenders, democracy actors and international organisations.

Delivering on its commitment in the action plan, the EU continued to innovate in its approach to training for colleagues in EU Delegations through the EEAS Human Rights and Democracy Factory, which organised 13 focused training labs benefiting from the input of thematic experts from civil society and academia.

The structure of this Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World continues to be fully aligned with the action plan in order to track progress on priority actions and monitor implementation.

¹¹⁰ JSWD(2023) 210 final; Extension of the EU action plan on human rights and democracy: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-extends-its-action-plan-human-rights-and-democracy-until-2027_en



Follow the European Union on social media to stay up to date on all our activities throughout the year.











