

World Report 2024



France

Events of 2023

A protester in front of French CRS riot police during a demonstration as part of the eleventh day of nationwide strikes and protests against French government's pension reform, in Paris, France, April 6, 2023.

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Excessive use of force by law enforcement against protesters and detainees persisted in 2023, a year marked by demonstrations and strikes. Actions taken to curb civil society activities raised concerns about the erosion of the rule of law.

Spillover from the hostilities in Israel and Palestine negatively impacted human rights in France with an increase in antisemitic incidents, restrictions on pro-Palestinian protests, and threats to limit rights of asylum seekers and migrants.

Government measures to mitigate the effects of inflation were inadequate to protect the right of many, particularly in economically vulnerable communities, to an adequate standard of living. Migrants and asylum seekers, including children, continued to face inhumane living conditions, detention, and police abuse. Discriminatory identity checks remained widespread.

France continued to reaffirm its commitment to the multilateral human rights protection system but did not consistently prioritize human rights in its foreign policy.

Rule of Law

The European Commission's [July 2023 Rule of Law report](#) noted that civic space in the country had narrowed. The report noted that authorities suspended public funding for some associations and denied them authorization to conduct certain activities.

In June, the government [dissolved](#) Les Soulèvements de la Terre, an umbrella group of environmental activists protesting the [construction of a giant water reservoir](#) in Sainte-Soline in western France, adding to [growing concerns](#) about curbs on civil society. The Council of State, France's highest administrative court, [overturned](#) the dissolution in November, ruling that the decision to shut down the group was an infringement of freedom of association.

In April, France's interior minister [threatened](#) to withdraw government funding from the prominent rights group Ligue des droits de l'Homme after it denounced police violence during the Sainte-Soline protests. The European Commission [noted](#) in its *Rule of Law* report that several announcements by the interior minister about dissolution proceedings and review of subsidies to certain groups "could be perceived as a means to exert pressure."

Thirty-eight civil society organizations, including Human Rights Watch, and the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH) [voiced concerns](#) that a [law](#) adopted in March authorizing the use of [controversial surveillance technology](#) at the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games poses risks to fundamental rights.

The Council of State [ruled in October](#) against the interior minister's blanket ban on pro-Palestinian protests in the wake of hostilities in Israel and Palestine, emphasizing that risks of disturbance to public order should be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

In July, the [European Commission](#) criticized the frequent use of accelerated procedures for the adoption of laws and noted the often-negative impact on freedoms and rights.

Freedom of Media

In May, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) moved France up from [26th to 24th place](#) in its press freedom index, [citing](#) a positive legal and regulatory framework for press freedom and editorial independence, while noting an insufficient legislative framework "to prevent vertical media concentrations in the hands of just a few owners." In its *Rule of Law* report, the European Commission [highlighted](#) the persistent problem of media concentration.

In September, after police detained journalist Ariane Lavrilleux and raided her home, [media organizations denounced](#) the threat to confidentiality of sources and press freedom. Lavrilleux had co-authored a 2021 investigative article [using leaked classified documents](#) on France's alleged complicity in unlawful airstrikes by the Egyptian military.

Prison Conditions

In May, the [Controller General of Places of Deprivation of Liberty](#) (CGLPL) again denounced prison overcrowding, a major cause of prisoners' rights violations. The European Court of Human Rights [condemned](#) France in July for inhuman and degrading detention conditions and for the lack of an effective remedy for abuses at Fresnes prison.

Discrimination and Intolerance

Interior ministry data [published](#) in July showed a 23 percent decrease in racist and antisemitic incidents in 2022 compared to 2021. CNCDH's [annual report](#), released in July, noted “the rise of xenophobic identity-based rhetoric” in public debate and the persistence of racist, antisemitic, anti-Roma, and anti-migrant prejudices.

The interior minister [said](#) in early November that the escalation of hostilities in Israel and Palestine had triggered an “explosion” in antisemitic acts on French territory and that the police had carried out almost 500 arrests for such acts since October 7.

In January, the government presented its overdue [national plan to combat racism, antisemitism, and discrimination](#). While a positive step, the plan [has significant shortcomings](#), including a lack of measures to address ethnic profiling and systemic racism.

In July, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination [called on France](#) to address the structural and systemic causes of racial discrimination, including by the police, following [the killing](#) of Nahel M., a 17-year-old French citizen of Algerian descent, during a traffic stop. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) [called](#) on France to address “deep issues” of racism in policing.

In June, the Council of State [upheld a ban](#) on players wearing the hijab in football competitions, rejecting an appeal by the Muslim women’s collective “Les Hijabeuses” against the French Football Federation (FFF).

At the end of August, the government [banned from schools](#) the abaya, a long robe worn by some Muslim women and girls. The Council of State [upheld](#) the ban, rejecting complaints that the ban was discriminatory and could incite hatred against Muslims.

In May, the rights group SOS Homophobia said the number of [cases of transphobia sharply increased](#) from 2021 to 2022.

Law Enforcement Abuse

Numerous [rights groups](#) and independent bodies, including the [CNCDH](#) and the [Defender of Rights](#), [criticized](#) law enforcement [abuse](#), particularly during demonstrations and strikes. [According](#) to RSF, several clearly identified journalists were “assaulted by security forces while covering protests.” The [UN special rapporteur on freedom of association](#); the Council of Europe [Commissioner for Human Rights](#); and a group of seven [UN experts, including the special rapporteur on freedom of association](#), reminded France of the duty to protect the rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

In October, the Council of State [issued a decision](#) in a class action suit against police ethnic profiling, brought in 2021 by six rights groups, including Human Rights Watch. While recognizing that ethnic profiling is a serious problem that is taking place and cannot be explained away as isolated cases, the court [failed](#) to order French authorities to take necessary measures to end it.

Poverty and Inequality

The government implemented [measures](#) to [mitigate](#) the effects of the cost-of-living crisis, but the impact on the most vulnerable remained a major concern.

France’s National Institute of Statistics (INSEE) [said](#) that at the beginning of 2022, 9 million people in metropolitan France—14 percent of the population—were living in material and social deprivation, with 10 percent of people living in households lacking the financial means to heat their homes properly.

In its annual report on housing in France, the Abbé Pierre Foundation [found](#) that low-income and precarious workers are disproportionately affected by the rising costs of energy and food.

Migrants and Asylum Seekers

In November, the Senate [toughened](#) a highly controversial government [bill on immigration](#) that [threatens](#) to limit the rights of asylum seekers and migrants. At time of writing, the bill was still pending before parliament.

A [police operation](#) launched in Mayotte in April to dismantle informal settlements of undocumented migrants was met with [widespread criticism](#) that it [violated](#) the rights of migrants and vulnerable people, including children. The CNCDH [urged](#) the government to cease the operation, as did [United Nations Children's Fund \(UNICEF\) France](#), citing the risk of harm to children, particularly unaccompanied children.

People [continue](#) to make the [dangerous journey](#) across the English Channel in the absence of safe migration and asylum routes to the United Kingdom. France and the UK [signed](#) agreements focused on increased surveillance, securitization of the border, and new detention centers.

In May, migrants' rights groups [denounced](#) the forcible evictions of migrants and asylum seekers in northern France.

Children's Rights

In August, [18 nongovernmental groups denounced](#) “the pushbacks, confinement, and the lack of care” for unaccompanied children in Menton and Nice and the deterioration of their situation in Alpes-Maritimes department.

The [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) in May and the [Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) in October pressed France to urgently improve the situation of child asylum seekers and migrants.

In its annual report for 2022 published in April, the Defender of Rights [voiced concerns](#) about the number of children held in administrative detention. France continued to detain children, despite [repeated calls](#) against it by the CGLPL and [two European Court of Human Rights judgments](#) in May, which ruled that detaining migrant children, including infants, violated their rights to liberty and security and constituted inhuman and degrading treatment.

In April, the Defender of Rights [highlighted](#) to the Committee on the Rights of the Child violations of children's rights in Mayotte, including the separation of migrant children from their families, their treatment afterward, and reports that police had altered birth dates on official paperwork to facilitate the administrative detention or deportation of unaccompanied migrant children.

In August, UNICEF and the Fédération des acteurs de la solidarité [highlighted](#) the increasing number of migrant children [left to sleep in the streets](#) and voiced concerns about closures of emergency housing units.

Repatriations of French Citizens from Syria

In [January](#) and July, France [repatriated](#) a total of 57 children and 25 women, who were held in northeast Syria as suspected members of Islamic State (ISIS) or family members of ISIS fighters. In January, the UN Committee against Torture found that [France's failure](#) to take steps to protect French women and children in northeast Syria violated its obligations under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. At time of writing, [about](#)

80 French women and 100 French children were reportedly still being held in Syrian camps. 80 French women and 100 French children were reportedly still being held in Syrian camps.

Women's and Girls' Rights

Oxfam said in January that women in France earn on average 28.5 percent less than men, earn 15.8 percent less than men for the same work, and are disproportionately affected by rising prices.

In March, French President Emmanuel Macron announced plans to enshrine in the Constitution “the freedom of women to resort to voluntary termination of pregnancy” as part of a broader constitutional reform. In November, he announced that the proposed constitutional change would be presented to the Council of Ministers by the end of the year.

The High Council for Equality said in its annual report that sexual violence against women in France had increased by nearly one-third in recent years.

France ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention (C190) in April.

Government figures released in September show that intimate partner femicides occur every 2.5 days in France.

Disability Rights

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child voiced concerns in June that children with disabilities, notably children with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, continue to face discrimination, particularly in overseas territories and rural areas. It also criticized France for institutionalizing children with disabilities, urging it to take measures to decrease institutionalization and ensure regular monitoring.

International Justice

In October, the French parliament voted to remove a provision from a 2010 law, thus allowing French judicial officials to prosecute individuals for serious international crimes even if those crimes were not criminalized in the domestic legislation of the country where the crimes were committed. The parliament did not, however, address other restrictions that hamper France's justice system from pursuing the prosecution of serious crimes, such as the requirement that an accused be habitually resident in France.

Two May decisions by France's Court of Cassation, related to atrocity crimes in Syria, recognized France's ability to prosecute perpetrators of serious crimes committed outside of France under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

Climate Change Policy and Impacts

France remains one of the EU's biggest greenhouse gas emitters and contributors to the global climate crisis that is taking a growing toll on human rights around the globe. According to government data published in June, greenhouse gas emissions in France fell by 2.7 percent in 2022 compared to 2021. This pace is insufficient to achieve France's 2030 reduction targets, according to the High Council for the Climate. In May, the Conseil d'Etat asked the prime minister to “take all necessary additional measures” to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with its commitments.

The National Observatory on the Effects of Global Warming said in August that 2022 was the [hottest year on record](#) since 1900, with an average temperature of 14.5 degrees Celsius over mainland France (2.7 degrees higher than the historical average).

Foreign Policy

France reaffirmed its commitment to the multilateral human rights protection system, the protection of civilians in conflict, international criminal justice, women's rights and the fight against sexual violence, the protection of journalists, and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people.

However, concrete implementation of these commitments continued to be uneven, with government actions too often failing to match the gravity of global human rights challenges.

At the UN Security Council, France supported the renewal of cross-border delivery of vital humanitarian aid for 4 million Syrians, particularly in the context of the February 2023 earthquake in southern Türkiye and northern Syria, and [deplored](#) Russia's veto of this renewal in July.

In October, France voted in favor of a UN Security Council [resolution](#) condemning all violence against civilians in Israel and Palestine and calling on all parties to comply with international humanitarian law (IHL). The resolution was vetoed by the United States. France also voted for a resolution adopted at the UN General Assembly calling for a "humanitarian truce," the parties to respect international law, unimpeded aid to the Gaza Strip, and the "immediate and unconditional release" of all civilians held hostage. According to French authorities, [40](#) French nationals were killed during the October 7 Hamas-led attack in Israel; 8 others were missing or taken hostage, 4 of whom had been released at time of writing. France condemned Israeli settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, calling it a "[policy of terror](#)." In November, France voted in favor of a second UN Security Council resolution focused on the plight of children in the Gaza Strip and Israel that also called for humanitarian pauses and full compliance with IHL. This second council resolution passed, with the US, UK, and Russia abstaining.

At the UN Human Rights Council, France supported accountability for serious crimes in Ukraine and the renewal of the mandate of the special rapporteurs on Russia and Belarus. France also voted in favor of a resolution establishing a [fact-finding mission](#) for Sudan, but it [did not support](#) the continuation of the international commission of human rights experts on Ethiopia, despite ongoing serious abuses there and France's international [commitment](#) to fight impunity for the most serious crimes.

France has pursued or strengthened its commercial and strategic ties with grossly abusive governments at the expense of the defense of rights.

In April, during his visit to China with European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen, President Macron [remained silent](#) on Chinese crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and other Turkic communities in Xinjiang and other serious abuses by Chinese President Xi Jinping's government.

In June, for the second time in less than a year, Macron [received](#) the crown prince and de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, known as MBS, at the Elysée Palace, with the aim of boosting France's partnership with Saudi Arabia. Their meeting took place despite ongoing brutal repression under MBS and his approval of the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, [according](#) to US intelligence.

The French president made Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi his guest of honor for the July 14 military parade and [awarded](#) him the highest rank of France's Legion of Honor, despite the Modi government's increasing repression of Muslims and other minorities, and crackdown on civil society and media freedom. During the visit, India [announced](#) a multibillion-dollar arms deal with France.

France also pursued its close partnership with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) despite widespread human rights abuses under President Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan. France's [annual report](#) on arms exports lists the UAE as its [biggest arms buyer](#) in 2022.

France [pulled out](#) its troops from Burkina Faso in February and announced [its withdrawal](#) from Niger in late September in the wake of military coups in these countries and against a backdrop of growing hostility to the French military presence in the region. The French journalist Olivier Dubois, kidnapped in Mali in April 2021, [was released](#) in March.

In September, President Macron [presented](#) a new plan to meet the government's commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 55 percent compared to 1990 levels by 2030. Despite some positive measures, such as investments in public transport, the plan does not phase out oil and gas and was [criticized](#) for its lack of ambition.

In October, France was re-elected, on a closed slate for the Western Group, to the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2024-2026.