

and small and medium sized businesses in exile. The third annual Senior Officials' Meeting took place in April 2024, providing a forum for representatives of EU institutions, Member States and Belarusian civil society and democratic forces to assess the needs and coordinate assistance to the people of Belarus across the supported sectors, including in the human rights domain.

**5. Multilateral context:** The EU continued to raise the human rights violations in Belarus in international fora and support initiatives to promote accountability, including by leading efforts in the UN Human rights Council to address the human rights situation in Belarus. The EU presented a resolution in March 2024 renewing the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Belarus and creating the mandate of the Group of Independent Experts, building on the work and recommendations by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human rights. The EU made several statements in the Council of Europe, the OSCE framework, and the UN General Assembly, condemning the ongoing human rights violations in Belarus.

## Arab Republic of Egypt

**1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation:** Egypt's constitution defines its political system as a democratic republic, where the President serves as both the head of State and the head of the Executive. The space for political activities and democracy remained severely restricted in 2024. At the same time, in 2024 the House of Representatives exercised more oversight on the Executive with regular sessions with Ministers (including the new Cabinet appointed in summer 2024) as well as on the state budget.

The implementation of commitments stemming from the National Strategy for Human Rights has been slow and lacking a concrete action plan, with concerns also related to the independence of the National Council for Human Rights. In 2024, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions recommended to downgrade Egypt's National Council for Human Rights from A to B.

Human rights challenges in Egypt remain. Restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom and the right of association, arbitrary detention, use of torture, and forced disappearances targeting inter alia political activists and opponents and human rights defenders were reported by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International among others.<sup>12</sup> Problems remain in relation to the extensive and indiscriminate use of pre-trial detention, including the authorities' use of the Terrorism Law against peaceful critics, human rights defenders and individuals. The reform of the Criminal Procedures Law has raised the concerns of human rights lawyers, bar association and others, all advocating more in-depth consultation. Meanwhile four remaining individuals under the 2011 'NGO Foreign Funding Case' known as 'Case 173' saw the lifting of their frozen assets. Despite the reactivation of the Presidential Amnesty Committee in 2022, Egypt did not see any releases of political prisoners in 2024, and new arrests were recorded. Egypt retains the death penalty for 105 crimes under

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<sup>12</sup><https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/egypt#c667ea>;  
<https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-net/2024>;  
[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2FC%2FEGY%2FCO%2F5&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2FC%2FEGY%2FCO%2F5&Lang=en); <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/north-africa/egypt/report-egypt/>

the Penal Code and military laws. According to Amnesty International, the use of the death penalty continues with 13 executions and 365 death sentences in 2024.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, despite a commitment to reduce the number of crimes punishable by the death penalty and limiting them only to the most serious crimes in accordance with Article 6 ICCPR, there has been no progress.

Freedom of the press has remained significantly hampered, with continued blockage of websites and prosecuting of criticism on social media. Egypt was ranked 170 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index 2024. Concerning freedom of religion or belief, Egyptian authorities have continued making visible signs of support to the Coptic community, but other religious minorities, including the Baha'i community, continue to raise concerns about discrimination. While the Constitution recognises Christianity, Islam and Judaism, it remains the case that some religious minorities such as Copts, Shia Muslims and the Baha'is face discrimination. No steps were taken to establish an Anti-Discrimination Commission as foreseen in the Egyptian Constitution. Egypt continued to provide protection and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers, however the Asylum law approved in Parliament, without thorough consultations, has raised the concerns of relevant local and international stakeholders. Key concerns include the risk of criminalising asylum seekers, enabling arbitrary procedures, and undermining the principle of non-refoulement. According to ILGA World, there is no law that explicitly criminalises same-sex sexual activity in Egypt. However, Law No. 10/1961 on the Combating of Prostitution (1961) is selectively used to target individuals of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

**2. EU action - key focus areas:** The EU continued to provide direct support to Human Rights NGOs. EU projects included support to human rights defenders, aimed at improving living conditions and promoting development at community level, particularly for the benefit of disadvantaged groups residing in informal settlements in urban areas. The technical Education and Vocational Training sector has also been supported by the EU.

Cooperation projects with the Egyptian authorities and civil society focused on reinforcing a culture of human rights, capacity-building for civil society organisations, the rights of women and girls, cultural rights, the promotion of tolerance and the protection of persons in vulnerable situations, including refugees. In 2024, the EU funded project with OHCHR continued, which supports Egypt in implementing its human rights commitments. Thanks to EU support, UNDP has started the implementation of a project aiming at enhancing governance and leadership at the local level.

Through cooperation with the OHCHR, the EU works to establish a partnership EU-UN and join synergies to reinforce a culture on human rights in Egypt. The project aims, among others, at strengthening capacities of public officers and relevant stakeholders, monitoring and implementing the National Human Rights Strategy and reporting to the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism and Human Rights bodies.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/8976/2025/en/>.

In 2024, the EU continued a project in support to Egypt's National Council for Human Rights, including with the use of a digital complaints management system, accessible to victims of Human Rights violations in remote areas of the country.

In 2024, the EU and Member States in Cairo collaborated closely on human rights issues, for example on trial observation of political cases. The EU facilitated meetings with different interlocutors in the field of human rights for Member States and organised a joint visit to the National Council for Human Rights in December 2024.

**3. EU bilateral political engagement:** The EU's bilateral engagement with Egypt is guided by the EU-Egypt Association Agreement which stipulates that EU-Egypt relations are based on respect for human rights and democratic principles. In 2024, Egyptian authorities have shown greater engagement with the EU on matters related to human rights. The EU and Egypt built on their constructive in-depth dialogue on human rights and democracy issues during the visit of the EUSR for Human Rights in November 2024, which also led to recommendations to the authorities and EU member states present in Cairo. Concerns regarding human rights issues were raised at various levels in bilateral EU-Egypt political dialogue, and discussed in regular consultation with civil society. Observation of trials by the EU and Member States continued, although in 2024 diplomats continued to face restrictions in access.

**4. EU financial engagement:** Significant EU bilateral assistance to Egypt was directed to support to civil society and the socio-economic sector, in line with Egypt's 'Sustainable Development Strategy – Vision-2030'. Ten EU-supported projects contributed to the promotion and protection of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, through the NDICI Human Rights and Democracy and the NDICI bilateral envelope.

**5. Multilateral context:** Egypt has ratified all major international human rights treaties, but has not yet signed the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture. The EU mentioned Egypt under Item 2 at the 57<sup>th</sup> Human Rights Council session in September 2024. A number of visit requests issued by UN Special Procedures are pending. At UN multilateral fora, the EU's and Egypt's views are not aligned, in particular when it comes to positions on gender and SOGI rights.

## State of Israel

**1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation:** Human rights and democracy in Israel have continued to be significantly affected by the aftermath of the brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks by Hamas against Israel on 7 October 2023, including the conflict in Gaza and the conflict at the Israel-Lebanon border. Communities in the Gaza envelope and Northern Israel have been particularly impacted, having had to leave their homes since October 2023.

Israel is a democracy with independent institutions and robust checks and balances, and a free press. Civil society organisations do face some challenges, for example during the discussion around the draft law containing restrictions for foreign funding to NGOs, limiting civil society