

international community take a more robust line on the conflict. As a member of the Human Rights Council from 2023 to 2025, Chile has emerged as a significant partner for the EU in defending the multilateral system of human rights protections.

Republic of Colombia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The first government from the left in Colombian history placed a new focus on human rights, incorporating human rights provisions into sectoral policies, appointing well-known human rights defenders (HRDs) to key positions in government ministries and departments, and establishing a Ministry of Equality spearheaded by Vice-President Francia Márquez, the first Afro-Colombian to hold the position, and a Vice-Ministry of Diversity. The Petro Administration made concerted efforts to address violence against social leaders and HRDs, adopting an Emergency Plan and resurrecting the campaign *Lidera la Vida* to raise awareness of the situation of social leaders and HRDs. In addition, in December, a presidential decree recognised the important role social leaders and HRDs play in strengthening democracy, and reaffirmed the Government's commitment to support them.

In accordance with the Government's policy of "Total Peace", several ceasefires with armed groups were concluded in 2023, which also contributed to reducing levels of violence, especially clashes with the military. Despite government's efforts, important human rights concerns persisted, particularly killings, violent attacks and threats against HRDs, social leaders or former FARC combatants, as well as forced displacement, perpetrated by different illegal armed groups. In 2023, the number of mine victims decreased from 82 to 55, with most casualties in Nariño (39). The number of reported child recruitments by armed groups decreased from 178 to 86, with the highest number from Cauca (32). In total, 44 former FARC combatants were killed (compared to 50 in 2022), the majority of which in Cauca (7), Meta (6) and Huila (5). Finally, the number of victims from forced displacement dropped from 298 783 to 167 540, with most cases in Nariño (35 024) and Valle del Cauca (25 731). These are positive tendencies, but the number of assassinations of human rights defenders is still very high (188). The migration/humanitarian situation at the border with Panama raised alarm bells. Many migrants fall victim to financial extortion, human trafficking, kidnapping or sexual and physical violence.

The local and regional elections, held on 29 October, saw an increase in violence against candidates, including 28 reports of lethal violence according to the Misión de Observación Electoral, a civil society platform promoting civil and political rights. Illegal armed groups exerted heavy influence over the choice of candidates and their ability to campaign.

2. EU action – key focus areas: EU action on human rights and democracy in Colombia focused on seven priority areas: (i) prevention and protection from violence against social leaders, environmental leaders, human rights defenders and unionists; (ii) gender equality: participation and empowerment of women; (iii) guaranteeing the rights of the LGBTI

community; (iv) guaranteeing the rights of indigenous and afro-descendant people and other vulnerable populations; (v) guaranteeing the rights of the migrant population; (vi) human rights in the context of peacebuilding and conflict prevention; and (vii) democratic and human rights empowerment for sustainable development.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: There are a number of sectoral bilateral dialogues between the EU and Colombia on topics such as human rights, security and defence, drugs, the environment and climate. The 14th edition of the EU-Colombia Human Rights Dialogue covered a wide range of topics, including the security of social, political and environmental leaders, HRDs and ex-combatants; peacebuilding and conflict prevention; migration; business and human rights; and cooperation on human rights in multilateral fora.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU supports human rights in Colombia with a wide range of instruments and projects, both regional and bilateral. Under the bilateral Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2021-2027, peace projects aim to address the root causes of armed violence and poverty in Colombia, focusing on reintegration of former combatants, socio-economic integration of migrants, combating gender based violence and continuing support to the Special Jurisdictions for Peace. These priorities were allocated EUR 38 million of the total funding available for 2021-2024 (50.6%). Environmental projects, in areas such as climate change, biodiversity, deforestation, boosting green rural development and sustainable development, were allocated EUR 23 million (30.6%).

Through Human Rights and Democracy and Civil Society Organisations thematic programmes, the EU has provided vital support to the guarantee and protection of human rights in particular of social leaders and persons qualified as HRDs. Projects amounting to an overall EUR 8.2 million in 2023, aimed at monitoring the situation of violence in the regions, building HRDs' protection and self-protection capacities, at individual and collective level, providing access to justice, and supporting the adoption of an efficient and effective public policy guaranteeing the individual and collective rights of HRDs and social leaders. Together with the OHCHR's country office, the EU has continued strengthening institutional support to the Ombudsman's Office, particularly its ability to follow up on its early warnings. The project also developed assessments and important recommendations related to the situation of civil servants carrying out human rights work, and the state of play on judicial sentences in cases of violence against HRDs. It also provided recommendations to state institutions in the reform of the public policy on protection and security guarantees, currently under revision. Through EU emergency grants and national mechanisms, the EU Delegation and Member States have ensured the provision of individual and collective emergency support to several HRDs and organisations facing imminent threats. Public diplomacy, including visible presence and support to HRDs and communities in their territories of origin, has also proven a very effective tool, including through the #DefendamosLaVida campaign that brings together the EU Delegation and all EUMS Embassies as well as Norway and Switzerland.

EU provided judicial and psychosocial accompaniment to women victims of the armed conflict to access the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and promoted participation of women and their organisations in the development of a National Action Plan under the Resolution 1325. In the lead up to the local and regional elections in October 2023, the EU Delegation implemented a series of activities to promote political participation of women, and to dispel stereotypes against participation of women in politics and violence against women candidates.

In the run-up to the local and regional elections in October 2023, the EU supported local citizen electoral observation efforts, in alliance with Misión de Observación Electoral, the largest Colombian CSO platform engaged in election observation in the country.

5. Multilateral context: The EU works very closely with the UN in Colombia in the promotion and protection of human rights, particularly the OHCHR. The EU also has a lot of interaction with the Mission to Support the Peace Process of the Organisation of American States (MAPP/OEA), given its central role in the peace process, particularly in the negotiations with FARC-dissident group Estado Mayor Central.

Colombia's voting patterns in multilateral fora generally align with the EU, particularly in the area of human rights.

Republic of Costa Rica

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Costa Rica has a long democratic tradition and has long represented an example in Central America in terms of political stability and a strong human rights record. However, challenges continue to persist despite an improved economic situation illustrated by deflation, lowest unemployment in 10 years (7,7%) and a slightly decreased poverty rate (21,8%).

Press freedom and hate speech, migration, gender violence as well as rights of indigenous people and of the LGBTI community were the main challenges in 2023. Costa Rica fell 15 places in the 2023 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Frontiers (RSF) losing its position as the best country on the American continent on press freedom. Online hate speech increased by 110% over the previous year.

The number of migrants increased by 133% in 2023 with 530.000 migrants entering Costa Rica. This triggered the Government to declare state of emergency on migration issues in September 2023 and announce deportations of migrants if law and order are not respected. The migrant population continues to represent 11% of the total population and Costa Rica is the third country in the world as regards the number of refugee seekers – 300 000 until now (85% of them Nicaraguans), increasing from 2022. Together with Panama, Costa Rica established orderly migration flows to alleviate pressures from record numbers crossing the Darien Gap and to curb human trafficking.

Gender discrimination remains an issue and 2023 was the year with most female homicides (over 800). In the area of environment, the Escazú Agreement was archived without ratification in February 2023. The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment reiterated his disappointment about Costa Rica's shift away from ecological leadership. Against this background, insecurity has in the meantime come to the forefront as a main concern Costa Rica, compounded by the lowest social expenditure in the last five years with implications also on health and education.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU action in Costa Rica continues to focus on the protection of the international human rights system and the upholding of the rights of vulnerable groups