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EU ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD
2022 COUNTRY UPDATES

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Enlargement countries

Albania

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Overall, Albania complies with international human rights instruments and has ratified most international conventions on the protection of fundamental rights. During 2022, some progress was made with the adoption of a new National Action Plan for LGBTI persons, which includes measures to fight discrimination, improve access to services and approve the legal gender recognition law, although discrimination against LGBTI persons is still very prevalent, especially as regards access to healthcare, education, justice, employment and housing. Albania also adopted a Strategy on Gender Equality and its Action Plan, in line with the EU Gender Action Plan III, as well as a new National Action Plan for equality, inclusion and participation of Roma and Egyptians in Albania. The use of alternatives to detention and, in particular, the probation service have also made some progress. Enhanced efforts to consolidate property rights through the registration and digitalisation of cadastral data are needed and the sector remains prone to corruption, while the compensation process has stalled. On the protection of national minorities, Albania adopted a new piece of implementing legislation that creates a fund for civil society projects in support of minority rights. However, adoption of the remaining implementing legislation, including on freedom to self-identify as a member of a national minority and on the use of minority languages, is still pending. Preparations for the long awaited population and housing census continued, including with pilot censuses in minority population areas. However, the census was postponed to 2023. Further actions need to be taken to strengthen data protection and align national legislation with the EU General Data Protection Regulation .Comprehensive justice reform continued, resulting in good progress overall. However, long proceedings, a low clearance rate and a large case backlog continue to negatively impact the efficiency of the judicial system.

Following the 2021 legislative elections, the elected members from the largest opposition parties took their seats in Parliament putting an end to the opposition relinquishing their mandates in the prior legislature. Internal conflict within the largest opposition party (DP) affected parliamentary life. In 2022, the Parliament elected a new President of the Republic. On EU oriented reforms, Parliament passed a time-limited constitutional extension of the vetting bodies mandate and nine laws aimed at alignment with the EU acquis. On 6 March 2022, Albania held by-elections in six municipalities. No electoral subject contested the results, although concerns about the misuse of State resources during electoral campaigns persist. Cooperation between civil society and the Government still needs to be strengthened to ensure meaningful participation of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in decision-making processes and in the EU-integration process.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's 2022 Report on Albania.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continues to monitor the protection of human rights, paying attention to access to justice, independence of media and freedom of expression, protection of minorities and vulnerable groups as well as to registration of properties and

transitional ownership rights. The EU has closely followed developments in the areas of citizenship rights, gender equality, right to life, prevention of torture and ill-treatment in the prison systems, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Against the backdrop of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU welcomed Albania's great efforts in welcoming and hosting a high number of Ukrainian citizens, and setting up a specific Task Force to manage the flow of international protection seekers.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 19 July 2022, the first Inter-Governmental Conference took place, officially opening the accession negotiations. The same day, the Commission launched the screening process, which is advancing smoothly. Human rights and democracy remained a central focus of the political dialogue with the authorities in 2022, notably in the context of the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association bodies.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the EU continued the implementation of a wide array of programmes and projects in the field of human rights and democracy.

Under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) 2020 (approx. EUR 600,000) projects enhancing investigative journalism and reinforcing independent journalism through multimedia and data quality continued. The implementation of additional support (approx. EUR 799 000) deployed from the IPA 2018-2019 instrument for the recovery of children and families in vulnerable situations – including children with disabilities – affected by the COVID-19 pandemic ended. The IPA 2019 programme on Social Inclusion (EUR 70.65 million) is focusing on families in vulnerable situations, including those affected by COVID-19 crisis, Roma and Egyptian families, and older persons. As part of this programme, eleven grants (EUR 3.8 million) are supporting local interventions in the area of social care services for children with disabilities, the elderly, domestic violence, employment and education of Roma community. In addition, two resource centres for children with hearing impairment and for blind children in pre-university education, have been established. Implementation of an EU for Property Rights programme under the IPA 2020 and IPA 2021 (more than EUR 15 million) continues.

Under the Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy, a budget of EUR 1.2 million supported the role of civil society in the democratic process, the rights of LGBTI persons, human rights of persons in detention, and missing persons.

Under the IPA Civil Society Facility and Media Programme, there were seven ongoing projects focusing on active citizenship, support to civil society, investigative journalism and social re-use of confiscated assets for more than EUR 5.1 million of EU contribution. Five new projects have been contracted at the end of the year to support CSOs in the fields of Good Governance and Rule of Law for a total EU contribution of EUR 2.3 million.

Cooperation under the EU/Council of Europe Horizontal Facility phase II continued with a focus on ensuring justice, fighting corruption and organised crime, promoting equality, human rights and social inclusion.

5. Multilateral context: Albania continued its dialogue and cooperation with national, European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies. Following the adoption of the Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council (in September

2019), national institutions engaged in a dialogue on human rights in order to better integrate human rights in strategic and development policies and to identify focus areas. Several Council of Europe and OSCE missions took place during the reporting period.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The legislative and institutional framework on fundamental rights and democracy is largely in place and overall in line with the relevant international and European standards. Limited efforts were made in 2022 to address Opinion key priorities related to fundamental rights, notably by adopting action plans for the social inclusion of the Roma in April and on the rights of LGBTI persons in July. Bosnia and Herzegovina has yet to adopt a comprehensive strategic framework and the protection of human rights continues to be uneven across the country. Significant reforms are needed to bring the Constitution in line with the European Convention on Human Rights, ensuring that all citizens are able to exercise their political rights (Sejdić-Finci ECtHR case law), and to overcome the practice of 'two schools under one roof' thus guaranteeing non-discriminatory, inclusive and quality education for all children. On freedom of expression and of the media, no progress was made on ensuring the appropriate judicial follow-up to cases of threats and violence against journalists. Challenges persist as regards the freedom of assembly, particularly in the *Republika Srpska* entity. Gender-based violence, ill treatment of detainees and the protection of minorities, including Roma, continued to be issues of concern, and the social inclusion of LGBTI persons remains to be improved. No progress was made in ensuring an enabling environment for civil society.

The political blockage by *Republika Srpska*-based political parties led to an almost complete standstill in reforms until spring 2022. The *Republika Srpska* entity also pursued efforts to unilaterally take over state competences and dismantle state institutions; the related legislation has since been quashed by the Constitutional Court. Since the 2018 elections, the Federation entity government has acted in a caretaker role. Elections took place on 2 October; according to the findings of OSCE/ODIHR, they were overall competitive and well organised but marked by mistrust in public institutions and ethnically divisive rhetoric. The High Representative imposed significant election reforms, including on the evening of election day. For more information, please refer to the European Commission's 2022 Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continues to closely monitor the respect for human rights, including freedom of assembly and association and freedom of expression, the rights of persons in vulnerable situations including persons belonging to minorities, as well as gender equality, as part of the EU integration process. Six out of the fourteen key priorities set out in the 2019 Commission Opinion on the EU membership application of Bosnia and Herzegovina focus on fundamental rights. They call upon the country to strengthen non-discrimination and gender equality, ensure the prohibition of torture, guarantee freedom of expression and media freedom, improve the protection and inclusion of groups in vulnerable situations, and promote an environment conducive to reconciliation.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Following a recommendation of the European Commission, the European Council in December 2022 granted to Bosnia and Herzegovina the status of EU candidate country.

The blockage of state institutions impeded the regular holding of the meetings under the Stabilisation and Association (SA) Agreement in the first half of the year. An extraordinary SA Committee took place in May. Subcommittees restarted over summer, including the subcommittee on justice, freedom and security.

Since the outbreak of the political crisis, the EU has engaged in intense advocacy and facilitation efforts, as well as in high-level visits to engage with political actors with the aim to ease tensions and find solutions to the political crisis. Despite an intense facilitation of talks by the EU and the United States, parliamentary parties could not agree on a solution for constitutional and electoral reforms to end ethnic- and residence-based discrimination, thus complying with the Sejdić-Finci ECtHR case law.

4. EU financial engagement: EU support via the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance focuses on the areas of judiciary (EUR 6.4 million), gender equality and non-discrimination, and support to persons in vulnerable situations (including children, persons with disabilities, Roma), as well as support to civil society and the media. EU funding contributes to accounting for missing persons (EUR 3 million) as well as supporting and monitoring the processing of war crime cases (EUR 5 million). EU funds are helping to strengthen the institutional mechanisms for gender equality (EUR 500 000) and fighting discrimination, empowering persons in vulnerable situations (EUR 1 million). Achievements include publishing the enriched statistical bulletin on *Women and Men in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022* and developing the first partial BiH Gender Equality Index.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is making good progress in the implementation of the EU-funded Regional Housing Programme (EUR 65 million regionally), which continues to provide durable housing solutions to refugees in vulnerable situations, internally displaced persons and returnees. By end 2022, 2,425 housing units have been provided to accommodate circa 6 500 persons The Civil Society and Media Facility, (EUR 11.5 million) also continues to support twenty five projects for the capacity building of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the areas of health, social inclusion and social entrepreneurship, environment, youth, culture, local economy, women's rights, freedom of expression, anti-corruption and political pluralism.

Eleven projects funded via the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EUR 2.2 million) continue supporting women victims of violence, capacity building of gender equality commissions at the municipal level, capacity building of women human rights defenders, protection of rights and psychosocial support to LGBTI persons, protection and promotion of the rights of the child, consumer rights and youth. Within the successor Thematic Programme on Human Rights and Democracy, five contracts totalling to EUR 980 000 were signed.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EU – Council of Europe Horizontal Facility has financed activities aimed at strengthening human rights treatment of persons in detention; preventing

and combatting trafficking in human beings; promoting diversity and equality (members of national minorities and LGBTI persons); quality education for all; and freedom of expression and freedom of the media. EU-funded regional projects also continue supporting the fight to ending violence against women.

5. Multilateral context: Bosnia and Herzegovina continued its dialogue and cooperation with domestic, European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies. The absence of a systematic follow-up means that the country still has to address most of the 204 accepted recommendations from the November 2019 Universal Periodic Review (UPR), as well as the seventy nine recommendations and three requests received in October 2021 by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The Republic of North Macedonia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The legal framework on the protection of fundamental rights is largely in line with European standards. The deinstitutionalisation process is progressing with the resettlement of persons with disabilities to community-based care. Continued improvements can be noted in gender mainstreaming and respect for women's rights. However, all provisions of the Law on prevention and protection from violence against women and domestic violence need to be implemented. The recommendations made by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture regarding the treatment of detainees and convicts were not adequately addressed. Implementation of the legislation on hate speech and of the national action plan for the Istanbul Convention's provisions need to be improved. Serious efforts are needed to protect and ensure LGBTI persons can exercise their rights. The civilian external oversight mechanism over the police is still not fully functional and it lacks representatives from civil society organisations.

The general context is favourable to media freedom and allows for critical media reporting. Greater transparency is needed regarding media advertising by state institutions and political parties. The authorities need to step up their efforts to reform the public service broadcaster, ensuring its independence, professional standards and financial sustainability. The labour rights of journalists still need to be addressed.

North Macedonia continued its efforts to improve democracy and the rule of law, despite some challenges. The work of Parliament was marred by political polarisation, which delayed the adoption of many pieces of legislation. The Parliament needs to play an active and positive role in the EU accession negotiation process.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's 2022 Report on North Macedonia.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU activities concerning fundamental rights focused in 2022 on the advancement of the rule of law and democratic institutions; protecting and empowering

individuals; safeguarding fundamental freedoms, including harnessing the opportunities and addressing the challenges of the new technologies.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 19 July 2022, the first Inter-Governmental Conference took place, officially opening the accession negotiations. The same day, the Commission launched the screening process, which is advancing smoothly. Human rights and democracy remained a central focus of the political dialogue with the authorities in 2022, notably in the context of the EU- North Macedonia Stabilisation and Association bodies.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), the EU for Rule of Law action and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) grant contract "Anti-discrimination Commission that Delivers on its Preventive and Protective Role" strengthened the capacity of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination by organising a series of trainings and study visits. Furthermore, the awareness on harmful effects of discrimination was raised during two summer schools for approximately 100 young people. In the area of freedom of expression, EU assistance under IPA 2020 addressed the issues related to economic and social rights of journalists.

In 2022, the NDICI Thematic Programme on Human Rights and Democracy allocated around EUR 1.5 million to seven contracts, aiming to improve the respect of children's rights, combat discrimination, ensure decent working conditions for women, provide overall monitoring on the respect of human rights in the country, as well as enhancing national protective mechanisms against hate speech.

Under the Civil Society Facility, seventeen contracts were signed in 2022 for EUR 4.4 million. The projects will support civil society organisations and networks/platforms in strengthening the participatory democracy and the EU integration, by contributing actively in the decision-making and in improving freedom of expression and the working environment for civil society. The grant projects will be contributing to the further democratisation of the society, through empowering women and youth, promoting gender equality, enabling advocacy and networking linked to human rights in different areas such as justice, health, education, Roma inclusion, migration and integration of refugees. The EU assistance is supporting the freedom of expression by providing trainings for journalists and media workers to improve their professional standards and increase their EU related knowledge.

The implementation of the EU - Council of Europe Horizontal Facility phase II programme was completed in 2022. It has supported the beneficiary institutions to advance reforms in the field of human rights and rule of law, including the implementation of the recommendations of the Council of Europe's monitoring bodies. Furthermore, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, authorities and civil society organisations, the European Union supported activities for effective recognition of the rights of LGBTI persons, combating hate speech and discrimination. The EU organised awareness raising events in twelve municipalities to inform local communities on the use and the access to the Free Legal Aid services. It enhanced the Free Legal Aid knowledge among local communities and legal professionals, with a special focus on vulnerable groups, including women and children. The awareness raising campaign "Block the Hatred; Share the Love", launched in December 2021 as part of a regional project,

continued in 2022 with a series of successful activities aiming to inform young people on the danger of hate speech.

5. Multilateral context: North Macedonia continued to actively cooperate with international organisations, while joining the EU in supporting the decision leading to the cessation of membership of Russia from the Council of Europe. North Macedonia also aligned with all the EU statements submitted at international organisations (UN, OSCE and Council of Europe), including the EU position in UNGA when voting on resolutions regarding Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its humanitarian impact. North Macedonia voted for suspension of Russia from the UN Human Rights Council. The country holds the 2023 Chairpersonship of the OSCE.

Kosovo*

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The legal framework guarantees the protection of fundamental rights and is in line with European standards. However, additional efforts are still needed to effectively enforce fundamental rights. The government's capacity to streamline and oversee fundamental rights policies and legislation requires improvement, including in coordinating the mechanisms to protect human rights, gender equality and non-majority communities, at both central and local levels. Fundamental rights issues need to feature higher on the political agenda. Human and financial resources remain lacking and relevant authorities are still dependant on donor support and need to assume greater ownership. While the Constitution protects against discrimination based on sexual orientation, general acceptance and public awareness of the rights of LGBTI persons remains low. More needs to be done to ensure gender equality and child protection in practice. Further efforts are needed to effectively guarantee the rights of persons belonging to minorities, including Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, persons with disabilities and displaced persons. The situation in the north of Kosovo remains challenging, in particular in terms of the adjudication of corruption, organised crime, and the conditions for freedom of expression, including attacks on media professionals. The mass resignation of Kosovo Serbs from public institutions and the following erection of roadblocks negatively affected the security situation and the rule of law in the northern region, where the justice system and police operate with very reduced capacity.

In 2022, Kosovo enjoyed political stability, with the government holding a solid majority in the Assembly. This political environment has been conducive to Kosovo stepping up its efforts to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. Nevertheless, the Assembly's work continued to be negatively affected by a polarised political atmosphere and a lack of decision-making quorum. Kosovo's electoral process still needs strengthening to address weaknesses throughout the electoral cycle, as identified in successive EU election observation missions, and more recently by the EU Election Follow-up Mission, deployed to Kosovo in November 2022.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's 2022 Report on Kosovo.

*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.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continues to closely monitor the respect for human rights in Kosovo. This includes freedom of assembly and association, freedom of expression, the rights of persons in vulnerable situations including persons belonging to minorities, the right to equality and non-discrimination, children, LGBTI persons, and persons with disabilities, as well as gender equality, as part of Kosovo's European path.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: A regular policy dialogue takes place, at both technical and political levels, notably in the subcommittee on Justice, Freedom and Security under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, as well as through regular peer reviews and joint cooperation projects. The EU continues to facilitate the Dialogue on normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. There have been recurrent crises in the relations between Kosovo and Serbia in 2022 and the situation on the ground remains fragile. However, in 2022, the Parties adopted an Energy Agreements' Implementation Roadmap, agreed on travel with only identity cards and reached an agreement to refrain from further action on licence plates to allow the Dialogue to focus on the recent EU proposal on normalisation of relations.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, Kosovo continued to benefit from support under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance. The EU's post-COVID-19 recovery support (EUR 68 million) continued in 2022, including EUR 5 million for urgent medical equipment and EUR 63 million for socio-economic recovery measures. This included a resilience contract (budget support), and a social protection programme addressing the needs of persons in the most vulnerable situations. Implementation of a project to strengthen the capacities of the Ombudsperson Institution continued (EUR 2.7 million). Voluntary return and reintegration of 56 displaced families within Kosovo and in the region was facilitated (EUR 1.5 million). The EU supported 156 projects for the socio-economic stability of minority communities (EUR 0.7 million).

Under the NDICI Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy, implementation continued for projects focusing on supporting children's rights (EUR 0.4 million), protecting and promoting the labour rights of vulnerable groups (EUR 0.3 million), promoting the right to a clean and healthy environment, access to justice for the most vulnerable groups (EUR 0.6 million) and promoting women's political participation (EUR 0.5 million). Three new projects for a total of EU 0.5 million were contracted to counter discrimination, hate speech and gender-based violence in society and increase the capacities of institutions in preventing and addressing these issues.

The Civil Society and Media Facility Programme continued to provide support to women in vulnerable situations and to marginalised groups with sheltering, re-integration and socio-economic empowerment (EUR 0.45 million). Ongoing support for persons with disabilities was strengthened with a new contract. The EU also continued to support media freedom, investigative journalism, media resilience and capacities to inform the public on important matters such as corruption, environmental protection and human rights issues (EUR 1.5 million) and a new contract promoting media pluralism was signed (EUR 0.35 million). Three new contracts were signed to support Civil Society Organizations in fighting corruption, improving access to justice and improving public administration reforms (EUR 0.6 million).

Assistance continued under the EU/Council of Europe Horizontal Facility II for the Western Balkans and Turkey. Actions in Kosovo focused on three thematic areas/projects: Strengthening the quality and efficiency of justice – KOSEJ II (EUR 1 million); promotion of diversity and equality (EUR 0.3 million) and freedom of expression and freedom of the media with the project JUFREX 2 (EUR 0.425).

5. Multilateral context: Kosovo continued its dialogue and cooperation with national, European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies. In 2022, Kosovo submitted applications for membership in the European Union and in the Council of Europe.

Montenegro

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The legislative and institutional framework is largely in place and is broadly in line with the relevant international and European standards. However, additional efforts remain needed to implement it fully. The increased political and societal polarisation and division affected specifically the most vulnerable groups in society (including Roma and Egyptians, persons with disabilities, LGBTI persons), who were increasingly subjected to discrimination, hate speech and hate crime. An increased number of femicides with insufficient follow up by the authorities, publicly expressed misogyny, gender-based violence and violence against children remained issues of serious concern. Montenegro needs to improve its legal and institutional framework to increase the protection against domestic violence, discrimination, hate crimes and hate speech. Montenegro must ensure access to justice and the enforcement of rights in administrative and judicial proceedings in particular for vulnerable groups. On freedom of expression, Montenegro improved its legal framework on the protection of journalists and other media workers, through the adoption of a set of amendments to the Criminal Code providing more stringent penalties in cases of violence against them.

In 2022, the authorities' political commitment to the strategic goal of EU integration and their ambition to move forward in the accession negotiations based on continuing reform progress were consistently stated as the country's key priority. However, the year was marked by continuous political tensions, polarisation, the absence of constructive engagement between political parties and the failure to build consensus on key matters of national interest and caused two fractious governments to fall on votes of no-confidence. The proper functioning of Montenegrin institutions was affected by political volatility, government instability and tensions within the ruling majority, stalling decision-making processes and reform implementation. The main judicial bodies, including the Constitutional Court, continued to operate in an incomplete composition due to the Parliament's inability to elect new members, thus undermining their proper functioning.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's Montenegro Report 2022 (europa.eu).

2. EU action - key focus areas: Media freedom and freedom of speech was a key focus area of EU action in 2022, including the protection of journalists and other media workers. The protection of minorities and the continued improvement of the legal framework for the protection of the rights of LGBTI persons continued to be areas of focus. In addition, building a more democratic society remained in focus through support to electoral reforms in the country and to more transparent spending of public funds during the election campaigns. The EU's action in Montenegro continued to focus on the key areas described in the interim benchmarks of Chapter 23 – judiciary and fundamental rights – of the accession negotiations. The interim benchmarks on fundamental rights relate to the alignment with the EU *acquis* and international standards on the strengthening of effective application of human rights, procedural safeguards, the protection of minorities and cultural rights, protection against racism and xenophobia and data protection.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to monitor closely the respect for human rights in Montenegro within the framework of the EU accession negotiations, in particular under Chapter 23 – Judiciary and fundamental rights. There is a regular policy dialogue at technical and political levels, including in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. Such dialogue draws from monitoring of the implementation of the action plan for Chapter 23, as well as the interim benchmarks, regular peer reviews, EU funded projects, and engagement with international organisations and civil society.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, financial support was provided to EU human rights priorities. Bilateral funding in the sector through the 2018 Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) had a focused budget of EUR 1.5 Million (700 000 was not contracted) within the wider EUR 13.5 million Rule of Law programme. Targeted IPA actions to support gender equality included the Communicating Gender Equality project implemented by UNDP (EUR 200 000) and completed by the end of 2022. This assisted various administrations to develop guidelines for gender mainstreaming, including the media regulator. The regional project on 'Implementing norms, changing minds', implemented by UN Women continued to support women's CSOs working with victims of gender-based violence. Under the IPA Civil Society Facility, four grant contracts (nearly EUR 1 million) were implemented to respond to the post COVID-19 context and its impact on the most vulnerable groups.

The implementation of five projects (EIDHR 2020 envelope of EUR 800 000) was ongoing in 2022. Topics range from trial monitoring, equality before the law, to the protection of vulnerable groups such as elderly, children in institutions and Roma. In December 2022, one grant contract of EUR 500 000 was awarded from the 2021 envelope of the NDICI Thematic Programme on Human Rights and Democracy covering the protection of the human rights defenders and the rights of vulnerable groups including sub-granting.

The EU/Council of Europe Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey – Phase II, funded through IPA, continued its implementation in 2022 with the same focus on the alignment with European human rights standards in the area of procedural rights, freedom of expression, anti-discrimination, and prevention of torture and ill-treatment.

5. Multilateral context: Montenegro continued its dialogue and cooperation with national, European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies, including the

United Nations' bodies and the Council of Europe. Montenegro continued to fully align itself with EU statements on human rights in multilateral fora, including EU restrictive measures following Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine, its vocal support for EU initiatives at the UN in response to this aggression, as well as for international law and a rules-based international order. Montenegro's tenure as a member of the UN Human Rights Council started on 1 January 2022. Montenegro continued to fully align with the EU's foreign and security policy.

In May 2022 the UN Committee against Torture concluded that Montenegro had only partially implemented its 2014 recommendations on ensuring or strengthening legal safeguards for detainees, conducting prompt, impartial and effective investigations, and prosecuting suspects and sanctioning perpetrators of torture or ill treatment. In June 2022, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment carried out an ad hoc visit to Montenegro.

Serbia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Serbia's legislative and institutional framework for upholding fundamental rights is broadly in place. This framework needs to be consistently and efficiently implemented. Serbia adopted new strategies on anti-discrimination and Roma inclusion, as well as action plans on gender equality. Serbia needs to strengthen human rights institutions by allocating the necessary financial and human resources and by putting in place procedures to ensure compliance with the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights as well as its interim measures. In September 2022, Europride was hosted for a first time in the Western Balkans, in Belgrade. Hate speech, threats and violence continued to target human rights defenders and LGBTI persons. No progress was made regarding freedom of expression. In several cases of attacks and threats against media professionals, the police and the prosecution reacted swiftly. However, cases of threats and violence against journalists remain a concern and the overall environment for the exercise of freedom of expression without hindrance still needs to be further strengthened in practice. Implementation of the media strategy experienced increasing delays.

The April 2022 presidential and early parliamentary elections were held in a generally calm and peaceful atmosphere and fundamental freedoms were largely respected. However, according to the final report of the International Election Observation Mission, a number of shortcomings resulted in an uneven playing field favouring the incumbents. It is crucial that outstanding and new recommendations from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and Council of Europe bodies are fully implemented, in a transparent process, well ahead of any new elections and with the involvement and consultation of expert civil society organisations. A new, more pluralistic Parliament was constituted on 1 August.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's Serbia Report 2022 (europa.eu)

2. EU action - key focus areas: Key focus areas in 2022 included freedom of expression, human rights institutions and the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, including the Roma. The EU's action in Serbia continued to focus on the key areas described in the interim benchmarks of Chapter 23 of the accession negotiations – Judiciary and fundamental rights. As regards the latter, benchmarks relate to the effective application of human rights, procedural safeguards, the protection of minorities and cultural rights, the EU *acquis* and international standards against racism and xenophobia, and EU data protection standards. The EU closely monitored Serbia's continuous implementation of its action plan for Chapter 23, including the set timelines.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to monitor closely the respect for human rights in Serbia within the framework of the EU accession negotiations, in particular under Chapter 23. There is a regular policy and political dialogue at technical and political level, including in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. Such dialogue draws from monitoring of the implementation of the action plan for Chapter 23, regular peer reviews, EU-funded projects, and engagement with international organisations and civil society.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the EU continued to implement programmes under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) to support social inclusion and anti-discrimination policies and to improve the situation of persons in vulnerable situations, including Roma and internally displaced persons.

The core support to media in Serbia continued through an ongoing IPA grant of EUR 2.4 million implemented by the European Endowment for Democracy, which was strengthened by a new Serbia-dedicated window of EUR 3.6 million going well beyond the initial aim of emergency funding. New IPA media support started in 2022 with the launch of a new long-term grant benefiting the Press Council of Serbia (EUR 600 000) and the signature of nine new grant agreements in support of independent media (about EUR 2.8 million).

Under the Civil Society Facility, implementation of 18 grants were ongoing in 2022, with a total value of EUR 8.5 million. An additional amount of EUR 4.8 million was awarded to the 'EU National Resource Centre' project to enable further development of civil society.

Several projects funded through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights were completed in 2022, focusing notably on the protection of minorities, gender equality, child rights, migrants and human rights defenders. Under the successor NDICI Thematic Programme on Human Rights and Democracy, five new grants (EUR 850 000) were signed on similar topics.

In addition, the implementation of activities under IPA regional projects has continued. Through the EU-Council of Europe Horizontal Facility, support was provided to the fight against discrimination and the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups (including LGBTI persons and minorities) as well as freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

5. Multilateral context: Serbia continued its dialogue and cooperation with national, European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies. In March

2022, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment published its new report on Serbia, following its periodic visit of 2021. In April 2022, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights published its Concluding Observations on the third periodic report of Serbia. In May 2022, Serbia submitted its Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child for the period 2017-2021. In December 2022, Serbia submitted its Report on Follow-up to the Concluding Observations to the Committee against Torture.

In multilateral fora, Serbia aligned with the EU when voting at the UN General Assembly on two resolutions regarding Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its humanitarian impact. Serbia also voted for suspension of the Russian Federation in the UN Human Rights Council. Serbia extradited a Bahraini citizen on 24 January 2022, despite the interim measure imposed on 21 January by the European Court of Human Rights to refrain from extradition until after 25 February and until the completion of Court proceedings, which were still ongoing. This is contrary to Serbia's obligation as a party to the European Convention on Human Rights.

Türkiye

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the deterioration of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Türkiye continued. The combined effect of new legislation, the continuous pressure and the aggressive implementation of existing legislation and measures introduced during the state of emergency, reinforced the chilling effect on civil society's activities. Türkiye continued its explicit refusal to implement certain European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) rulings, notably in the cases of Selahattin Demirtaş and Osman Kavala, further increasing concerns regarding the judiciary's adherence to international and European standards. Pressure on the judiciary continued, and the institutionalised control of judicial appointments by the executive resulted in its lack of independence. Freedom of expression and media continued to be curtailed, with increasing pressure and restrictive measures. A new law on press and media presents major risks of further reducing space for free speech and criticism, providing for prison sentences for the crime of disseminating what is vaguely defined as 'fake news'. As regards freedom of assembly and association, recurring bans, excessive use of force by security forces in peaceful demonstrations as well as investigations, administrative fines and prosecutions against demonstrators on charges of terrorism-related activities continued. Following Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in July 2021, violence against women and gender discrimination remained matters of serious concern. Hate speech against minorities as well as bias-motivated speech and violence against LGBTI persons and civil society continued. Media campaigns and senior government officials in their political speeches have on several occasions encouraged discrimination. The authorities continued their implementation of the Human Rights Action Plan adopted in 2021, but the reforms undertaken have not addressed critical issues and did not lead to significant improvement of the overall human rights situation.

The functioning of Türkiye's democratic institutions continued to be severely hampered and deep political polarisation persisted. Structural deficiencies in the presidential system

remained in place. Parliament continued to lack the necessary means to hold the government accountable. The constitutional architecture continued to centralise powers at the level of the Presidency without ensuring the sound and effective separation of powers.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's 2022 Report on Türkiye.
2. EU action - key focus areas: EU actions in 2022 focused on protecting and empowering individuals, on building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies, and on addressing challenges of new technologies. Emphasis was put on support to human rights defenders, refugees, persons belonging to minorities, access to justice and support to freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and media pluralism, and to increase civil society organizations' (CSO) capacity to monitor human rights. In view of national elections in 2023, the EU also focused on promoting credible, transparent and inclusive elections, including by supporting international observation and civil society advocacy, as well as on tackling disinformation and false narratives by means of training and radio broadcasts aimed at raising awareness to their inherent risks. The EU vocally denounced attempts to silence dissenting or opposition voices ahead of the 2023 elections. The EU Delegation to Türkiye attended and monitored a number of trials relating to fundamental freedoms' cases.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to monitor closely and report on human rights violations in Türkiye. Continuous policy and political dialogue at technical and political level, and engagement with international organisations and civil society continued. The EU-Türkiye Political Directors meeting was held in Ankara on 31 May 2022. The relevant Sub-committee, under the framework of the EU-Turkey Association Agreement, which covers inter alia the functioning of the judiciary, fundamental rights and freedoms and home affairs was held in April.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the IPA Civil Society Facility and Media Programme and the NDICI Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy remained the main tools to support rights-based civil society organisations, activists and human rights defenders in Türkiye.

As of December 2022, 56 human rights projects were being implemented with a total value of over EUR 94 million, aimed to support civil society and fundamental rights: 11 projects for a total of EUR 31 million under the IPA programmes for Türkiye, 19 projects for EUR 9 million under EIDHR and HR&D, and 26 projects for EUR 54 million under the Civil Society Facility. Most of this support aims at reinforcing the capacities and resilience of CSOs working on human rights. The EU's projects focus on freedom of expression and media; rights of LGBTI persons; women's rights and rights of the child; rights of people with disabilities; non-discrimination; access to justice; rights of persons belonging to minorities. A dedicated mechanism is in place to support human rights defenders.

The Facility for Refugees in Turkey continued to support Türkiye in hosting over 4 million refugees from Syria and other countries. It mobilised EUR 6 billion. Its full operational budget was contracted at the end of 2020, with over EUR 4.9 billion disbursed by December 2022. Its achievements included helping 1.9 million refugees meet their basic needs, helping 740 000 refugee children go to school, the ongoing building of 405 schools, and delivering over EUR 22.8 million primary health care consultations. The Commission has allocated an additional

package of EUR 3.5 billion covering the 2020-2023 period to provide support in key areas such as basic needs, healthcare and education, and protection and socio-economic support.

In 2022, Türkiye also benefited from assistance under the EU/Council of Europe Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey (phase II – financed by IPA) with projects such as "Fostering Women's Access to Justice in Turkey" and "Strengthening the Human Rights Protection of Migrants and Victims of Human Trafficking in Turkey".

5. Multilateral context: In 2022, the EU Delegations to the Council of Europe, to the UN and to the OSCE kept expressing on multiple occasions the EU's concerns over the human rights and fundamental freedoms situation in Türkiye. Türkiye continued its dialogue and cooperation with national, European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies. The Council of Europe anti-torture Committee (CPT) carried out a periodic visit to Türkiye in October 2022 to examine the treatment and conditions of detention of foreign nationals detained under "aliens" legislation and the procedures applied to them in the context of their removal. The co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) for the monitoring of obligations and commitments by Türkiye, carried out a fact-finding visit to Istanbul and Ankara from 18 to 20 May 2022.

EEA/EFTA Countries and non EU Western European Countries

Switzerland

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Switzerland has a very high standard of human rights internally, and an active human rights policy abroad. There are no issues of major concern. Since the 2021 Parliamentary vote in favour of establishing a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), Switzerland has retained the Swiss Centre of Expertise in Human Rights (SCHR) as a temporary pilot project, which is expected to be replaced by a permanent, legally anchored NHRI in 2023. The founding assembly of this NHRI is planned to take place in May 2023, following preparatory work that has involved the Swiss authorities, the cantons, the civil society, and the business community.

As regards LGBTI rights, in a national referendum on 26 September 2021, around 64% of Swiss voters were in favour of legalizing same-sex marriage and adoption, as well as in vitro fertilisation, in Switzerland. The relevant legislation entered into force on 1 July 2022. As regards gender equality, Switzerland continues to face persistent wage differences between the sexes, the underrepresentation of women in managerial positions, the difficulties in balancing work and private life, domestic violence and violence against women in general. The Swiss Federal Council has made greater equality between men and women a policy priority.

Switzerland has ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (known as the Istanbul Convention), which entered into force for Switzerland on 28 September 2018. On 22 June 2022, the Swiss Federal

Council adopted a national action plan 2022-2026 for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. The plan is centred on three topics: public information and awareness raising, providing basic and further training for professionals and volunteers, and sexualized violence.

In October 2022, the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent published findings stating that people of African descent in Switzerland experience racial discrimination in various aspects of their lives. Even though the UN experts welcomed the positive steps taken to address anti-Black racism, they also expressed particular concerns about the human rights situation of people of African descent in Switzerland, including in relation to racial profiling and police misconduct.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU and Switzerland enjoy close and frequent cooperation within the international institutions and multilateral arena as regards human rights and democracy promotion (such as the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE). The EU and Switzerland often support each other's resolutions/statements in the UN Human Rights Council. The EU and Switzerland are also like-minded partners in the context of the UN General Assembly Third Committee.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In general, Switzerland has good mechanisms in place to assure the protection of human rights within its territory. Possible issues are best addressed in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review in the UN Human Rights Council. The EU and Switzerland hold human rights consultations, most recently in Brussels on 12 December 2022. A range of matters, including EU-Switzerland cooperation in multilateral fora, are addressed as part of these consultations.

4. EU financial engagement: Switzerland is not included in any operational projects or programmes funded by the EIDHR or other EU instruments.

5. Multilateral context: Under its Federal Constitution, the promotion of respect for human rights and democracy is a stated goal of the foreign policy of Switzerland. At the political level, the Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23 sets out how Switzerland aims to reinforce the universality of human rights in the global context. In the strategy, the stated priorities are eliminating the death penalty, advocating a ban on torture, strengthening the freedom of expression, and protecting particularly vulnerable groups. As a follow-up to the Foreign Policy Strategy 2020-23, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs has released Human Rights Guidelines 2021–24. These guidelines are meant to ensure coherent and effective Swiss human rights diplomacy, including in the fields of peace and security, business, and sustainability.

Switzerland is currently a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC), with a two-year mandate that started on 1 January 2023. In the context of the UNSC, Switzerland has four thematic priorities, which are closely linked to human rights: building sustainable peace, protecting civilians, enhancing effectiveness in the work of the UNSC, and addressing climate security. Switzerland is also a member of the UN Commission on the Status of Women during the period 2020-2024.

Norway

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Norway is a strong supporter and promoter of human rights. Norway has ratified all the main UN conventions on human rights, and the protection of civil and political and economic, social and cultural rights is very strong domestically. It is considered as one of the most gender-equal countries globally, ranked third in the WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2022. Human Rights priorities focus on inclusion (gender equality, a specific focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights), digital including countering disinformation, freedom of expression also in the context of cultural expressions, and human rights defenders as a cross-cutting issue.

The promotion of human rights and international law are key components of Norway's foreign and development policy focusing in particular on enhancing the protection of civilians, promoting women's participation and rights in peace processes and highlighting the links between security and sustainable development, including security concerns related to climate change no efforts. Their UN Security Council membership (UNSC) as non-permanent member 2021-22 was a good opportunity to apply human rights based approach, even if UNSC is not a place for normative human rights discussions.

Human Rights Defenders are a priority for Norway. They support actions to make different representatives of the civil society visible as for example the cooperation between their embassies and LGBTI human rights defenders. Following the LGBTI-shooting in Oslo on 25 June 2022, the Government strengthens its effort to combat discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and gender characteristics.

In Norway, there is also a healthy debate on many issues, including some criticisms. Examples include criticism over the excessive use of solitary confinement and isolation in prisons, concerns over cases of what some see as over-zealous child protection services, rights of sex workers, and criticism over the use of coercive measures in mental health and government surveillance.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In Norway, highlighting the various international days linked to human rights (via social media, official institutions, schools, etc.) is a priority, as well as providing targeted information to relevant Norwegian stakeholders.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Norway and the EU have very similar views on human rights issues. Close cooperation takes place in various multilateral fora (UN, Council of Europe, OSCE), where Norway is very active on human rights issues. The EU and Norway also cooperate locally on the country-specific strategies around the world.

In November 2022 Norway and the EU resumed human rights and multilateral consultations after a first such meeting in 2015.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation in Oslo undertook several Public Diplomacy and Information activities during the course of 2022, including:

- #StandWithUkraine – continuous coverage throughout the year on EU solidarity with Ukraine, as well as updates on sanctions against Russia and Belarus. (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and website)
- Sami National Day - Norwegian indigenous people (Twitter)
- Women Science Day (Twitter, Facebook post)
- International Women's Day (Twitter, Retweet, Instagram Story, Facebook post)
- Oslo Pride (Twitter, Instagram, website)
- International Day of Democracy (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Website)
- International Day of Peace (Instagram)
- International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists (Twitter, Instagram)
- World Humanitarian Day (Instagram, Facebook)

The #orangetheworld campaign against gender-based violence (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook)

- International Human Rights Day

5. Multilateral context: Norway is active on human rights issues in multilateral context (UN, OSCE, Council of Europe) and it often provides added value to the EU and its Member States' efforts. Norway put protection of human rights, focusing especially people who suffer in wars and crises, at the core of its term on the UNSC (2021-22). Norway is the main sponsor of a biennial resolution on human rights defenders in the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly.

The third cycle of UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR) examining Norway took place in 2019. The review welcomed Norway's inclusion of a new chapter on human rights in its Constitution and the adoption of Action Plans on domestic violence and sexual abuse, discrimination based on sexual orientation and human trafficking. In addition, the review praised Norway for being one of the world's leading countries in terms of providing development assistance. The UPR also raised several concerns and put forward numerous recommendations (of which Norway accepted 176, partially accepted 22 and refused to accept 43). Areas of concerns were mostly related to equality and discrimination, gender-based violence, rights of the child and rights of persons belonging to minorities.

Iceland

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Iceland maintained a high standard of human rights and a high level of cooperation with international organisations on human rights issues in 2022. The country continued to be at the forefront of promoting human rights issues and particularly gender equality at both national and international level[2] making it, once again, the most gender-equal country in the world for the 13th year in a row.[3]

[2] July 2022 Global Gender Gap Report

[3] Iceland was the first country in the world to require employers by law to obtain an equal pay certification to ensure equal pay for equal work

Following Iceland's successful tenure on the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in 2018-19, its intention to seek a full three-year term in 2025-27 has been announced.

On a bilateral level, Iceland increased its support for humanitarian efforts to safeguard women's and girls' rights in countries such as Iran and Afghanistan.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Iceland is a like-minded partner of the EU in the field of human rights and democracy. Iceland usually aligns itself with HR/VP Declarations on behalf of the EU on human rights issues.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In general, Iceland has good mechanisms to ensure the protection of human rights within its territory. Possible issues are best addressed in the conjuction of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) framework of the UN HRC.

4. EU financial engagement: Iceland is not included in any operational projects or programmes funded by the EIDHR or other EU instruments.

The EU Delegation and Member State Missions in Iceland have been focusing on (1) showcasing EU action on promoting human rights and relevant initiatives; (2) maintaining dialogue with the main human rights organisations active in Iceland; and (3) encouraging EU-Iceland cooperation on human rights issues in multilateral fora. In 2022, cooperation in the latter category-focused, in particular, on Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

5. Multilateral context: Iceland generally aligns with EU positions on human rights issues in multilateral fora. For example, the country has supported and aligned with the EU human rights-related measures imposed on Russia in response to the invasion of Ukraine.

In November 2022, the UN HRC adopted a resolution tabled by Iceland and Germany to set up an international independent fact-finding mission to investigate ongoing human rights violations in the Islamic Republic of Iran related to the protests happening since 16 September 2022.

Iceland voted along the same lines as the EU with regard to a series of resolutions at the autumn 2022 meeting of the UNGA Third Committee. Of the nine EU statements in the Council of Europe that were open for alignment in the first half of 2022, Iceland aligned with four.

Iceland is a member of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission and chairs the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe from November 2022 to May 2023. In June 2022, the Parliament of Iceland passed the first Action Plan on the rights of LGBTI individuals.

Iceland’s most recent Universal Periodic Review (UPR) took place in January 2022. It generally reflects Iceland’s longstanding commitment to democracy and human rights, both at national and internaitonal level. In April 2022, the Icelandic Government announced that it accepted 218 of the 250 UPR recommendations recieved.

Several steps have been taken towards establishing a National Human Rights Institution in Iceland - a major recommendation of the 2022 UN Human Rights Council UPR.

Liechtenstein

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Liechtenstein has a very high standard of human rights. In November 2016, the Liechtenstein Parliament adopted a law forming the basis for a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) and this law entered into force on 1 January 2017. The Liechtenstein NHRI is called the Association for Human Rights (*Verein für Menschenrechte*, VMR) and it has the responsibility for the protection and promotion of human rights in Liechtenstein.

In June 2021, Liechtenstein ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (called Istanbul Convention). The Convention entered into force on 1 October 2021. In October 2022, Liechtenstein submitted its first State report within the framework of review of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. In the context of implementing the Convention, Liechtenstein is focused on work with the relevant authorities (such as the National Police), awareness-raising, as well as financial support provided to civil society actors (such as the Liechtenstein Women's Shelter).

In July 2022, the European Commission published the most recent country report on gender equality for Liechtenstein. The report reaffirmed that the implementation of the EU gender equality *acquis* in Liechtenstein is satisfactory. However, the report stated that because of the lack of case law concerning gender equality, it is difficult to assess whether enforcement is satisfactory as well. According to the 2021 status report on the human rights situation in Liechtenstein, published by the Liechtenstein authorities in April 2022, there remain persistent wage differences between men and women. The report states that, in 2018, the monthly gross wage (median) for women was 14.7% lower than for men in Liechtenstein. However, the wage difference between the sexes has been declining since 2014. The status report also acknowledges the continued underrepresentation of women in domestic politics, either as candidates or in elected public office.

As regards LGBTI rights, under the legislation that entered into force in 2011, same-sex couples are able to register their partnerships in Liechtenstein. However, the adoption of children is not permissible for same-sex partners.

In September 2020, the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) under the Council of Europe submitted an evaluation report on Liechtenstein. It assessed the effectiveness of the systems in place to prevent corruption in respect of members of parliament, judges and prosecutors. In its review evaluation report published in July 2022, GRECO concluded that Liechtenstein implemented one of the 16 recommendations that GRECO had addressed to Liechtenstein. For the other recommendations, six have been partly implemented and nine have not been implemented. GRECO concluded that Liechtenstein achieved a "very low level of compliance" with the recommendations and encouraged the Principality to pursue further progress.

Liechtenstein's third Universal Period Review cycle took place in January 2018. Liechtenstein received a generally positive appreciation during its review. The creation of an independent NHRI in accordance with the Paris Principles was noted as a positive development. 126 recommendations were made, encouraging Liechtenstein to continue addressing crosscutting discrimination, enhancing civil and political rights and rights of specific persons or groups. Liechtenstein provided replies in June 2018, accepting or taking note of 111 recommendations (15 are considered as already implemented).

2. EU action - key focus areas: Liechtenstein is a like-minded partner of the EU in the field of human rights and cooperation takes place in various multilateral forums (UN, Council of Europe, OSCE). Liechtenstein is a steadfast supporter of the International Criminal Court, including with regard to the investigations in Ukraine.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In general, Liechtenstein has good mechanisms in place to assure the protection of human rights within its territory. Possible issues are best addressed in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review in the UN Human Rights Council.

4. EU financial engagement: Liechtenstein is not included in any operational projects or programmes funded by the EIDHR or other EU instruments.

5. Multilateral context: Protection of human rights and the rule of law are amongst Liechtenstein's key foreign policy objectives. Liechtenstein focuses on the protection of human rights especially within the framework of multilateral cooperation, notably the UN, Council of Europe and OSCE.

The Veto Initiative, launched by Liechtenstein, was adopted by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) without a vote on 26 April 2022. It ensures that, whenever a veto is cast in the UN Security Council (UNSC) by one of its five permanent members, the UNGA will meet automatically within 10 days. The Veto Initiative adds transparency and accountability in the work of the UNSC, including when it comes to the potential use of the veto in the face of human rights abuses.

Liechtenstein has played a central role in advancing the Finance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAST) initiative, which is based at the UN University Center for Policy Research. The FAST initiative aims to put the financial sector at the centre of global efforts to end modern slavery and human trafficking. It remains among the main initiatives of the Principality in the multilateral context. Liechtenstein also played an important role in the process that led to the 2016 establishment of International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to assist in the investigation and prosecution of persons for the most serious international crimes in Syria.

United Kingdom

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The UK maintains a solid human rights framework, which ensures equal opportunities, LGBTI rights and freedom of

media/speech. Nonetheless, in the course of 2022 the government has continued to come under criticism for legislative initiatives and a political language, which have created anxiety among the UN bodies, Council of Europe as well as human rights activist, lawyers.

In 2022, the UK government submitted a draft "Bill of Rights" to Parliament. The Bill would replace the Human Rights Act of 1998 and has given rise to some concerns that it may restrict access to judicial redress for human rights violations. These changes would include restrictions on the extent to which the UK courts would rely on judgements of the European Court of Human Rights in the interpretation of the scope of rights, and a curtailing of the UK courts' ability to overturn Acts of Parliament on human rights grounds. There would also be restrictions on the ability to bring cases before the courts via the introduction of a so-called 'permission stage'. Continued adherence by the UK to the Convention is an essential underpinning of the law enforcement and judicial cooperation provisions of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement as well as of the Good Friday Agreement.

In April 2022, the UK Parliament adopted a Nationality and Borders Act on the management of migrants and asylum seekers. Some of aspects of the legislation give rise to concerns from a human rights perspective, in particular insofar as: it criminalises irregularly arriving migrants, including those who may be in need of international protection; it creates a two-tier, discriminatory asylum system, with less access to protection and reception rights for asylum seekers arriving irregularly; it allows for the externalisation to third countries of the UK's international legal responsibilities for the protection of refugees. The government concluded in April a Memorandum of Understanding with the government of Rwanda which would allow for the deportation to Rwanda of asylum seekers in the UK who have arrived via irregular means, in particular via small boats crossing the English Channel, for the processing of their asylum claims and for their protection. This development gives also rise to concerns that it could have an adverse impact on the integrity of the international refugee system, in particular if it inspires other countries to adopt similar policies.

In May 2022, the Government introduced the controversial Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill to the House of Commons. This will establish a new Commission responsible for reviewing all outstanding legacy cases and will be responsible for granting immunity from prosecution to individuals who meet certain conditions. Meanwhile, all Troubles-related criminal investigations, criminal prosecutions, inquests, civil claims, and police complaints will be subject to prohibitions or restrictions.

The UK ratified the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) in July 2022 with a reservation for article 591 (regarding the protection of migrants who are victims of violence).

Child poverty, social exclusion and the housing crisis have become pressing problems in the light of the increasing costs of living and inflation in 2022.

2. EU action - key focus areas: A Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy is yet to be elaborated.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 7 October, a meeting took place between EU Special Representative for Human rights and the UK Ambassador to the EU to discuss human rights in the UK and abroad.

4. EU financial engagement: Not applicable - no EU projects or programs related to human rights are currently covering the UK.

5. Multilateral context: In July 2022, the UK hosted the International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief and a Conference on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) on 28-29 November. The UK cancelled the International Conference Safe to be Me planned in June 2022.

The UK underwent its fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review on 10 November 2022. Recurring themes presented by delegations included the treatment of migrant and asylum seekers, raising of the minimum age of criminal responsibility, the possible weakening of human rights by the Bill of Rights and the UK's continued commitment to fully implement the European Convention on Human Rights. The UK received 302 recommendations from 115 delegations (including 22 EU Member States) and will provide responses by the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council in March 2023. In her report on her visit to the UK published in December 2022, the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner also highlighted several concerns.

The UK has continued to sanction human rights abuses under its Human Rights Sanction regime. The UK adopted sanctions against individuals as well as state actors from Iran to Russia. The UK has now imposed 50 new sanctions in response to human rights violations by the Iranian regime since Mahsa Amini's death.

The UK remained strongly committed to multilateralism in 2022 and was eager to cooperate with like-minded countries to push forwards human rights and democracy in an international context.

European Neighbourhood Policy

Eastern Partnership regional cooperation

Despite Russia's war of aggression and the overall challenging situation in the Eastern Neighbourhood, the regional cooperation between the EU and Eastern partners has continued. Following the European Council decision in June 2022, Moldova and Ukraine became candidates for membership of the EU and Georgia has a European perspective. The Eastern Partnership will complement the work that will take place under the accession process.

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) ministerial meeting in November 2022 reconfirmed the shared commitment to the EaP agenda of "recovery, resilience and reform". In this agenda the EU and EaP partners committed to the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, fostering inclusive societies, promoting gender equality, as well as full respect for the principles and norms of international law. While Belarus chose to self-suspend from the EaP framework, the EU has continued to support the Belarusian people and civil society organisations.
The EU's support to EaP countries will be conditional upon the implementation of agreed structural reforms, particularly in the areas of rule of law, justice and anti-corruption. There are many outstanding challenges and room for improvement in the region on these issues, as well as the ratification of international instruments and legislation on violence against women, gender equality and non-discrimination.

In 2022, the EU support for ongoing projects and programmes in the Eastern Neighbourhood continued. The EU continued projects with the Council of Europe on legal independence and professionalism, and accountability in the justice system. Following the adoption of the 2021-2027 Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-GE), work on support to human rights in the region continued, including through Team Europe initiatives and the Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) for the Eastern neighbourhood. Specific measures will seek to safeguard and develop legal frameworks for the protection of minorities, ensure timely execution of European Court of Human Rights judgments, promote gender equality and women's empowerment based on the Gender Action Plan III[4], and pursue dialogue with representatives of persons belonging to minorities, including through close cooperation with the Venice Commission.
Throughout 2022, the EU also continued its involvement with civil society through the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF), a multi-layered regional platform aimed at promoting European integration, facilitating reforms and democratic transformations in the partner countries. The EaP CSF contributed to strengthening civil society in the region and boosting pluralism in public discourse and policy making by promoting participatory democracy and fundamental freedoms.

Armenia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Armenia maintained a relatively good record of human rights and democracy, and continued in 2022 to undertake ambitious judicial, police and constitutional reforms. Areas in which further improvements are needed include curbing discrimination and hate speech, freedom of assembly, protection of minorities, gender equality, preventing gender-based violence, as well as domestic violence, prosecution of torture and ill-treatment.

The security situation remained a significant challenge for the country as the September 2022 escalation was the deadliest since the 44-day war in 2020. Despite the challenges, Armenia

[4] https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/join-2020-17-final_en.pdf

kept its commitment to implement the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which includes provisions on strengthening democracy and human rights. According to the EU funded e-rights.am platform, 81% of the National Human Rights Strategy 2020-2022 and its Action Plan had been implemented by the end of 2022.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to support the implementation of the National Human Rights Strategy (NHRS) 2020-2022 and the related Action Plan through policy dialogue and assistance, including through geographic/thematic instruments such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The development of the new NHRS Action Plan for 2023-2025 was kicked off in July 2022. The EU continued to provide support to the Office of the Human Rights Defender.

The EU continued to put significant efforts in supporting the ambitious judicial and police reforms – Strategy for Judicial and Legal Reforms 2022-2026, Strategy for Anti-Corruption Reform 2019-2022, Strategy for Penitentiary and Probation Services 2019-2023 and the Strategy for Police Reforms 2020-2022. The adoption of new Criminal and Criminal Procedure Codes (effective from July 2022) was a major improvement in the criminal justice sector, ensuring a modernized criminal justice system with human-rights based approach in each stage of a criminal case.

Moreover, the EU continued raising human rights challenges and providing support in the areas of gender equality, domestic violence, the judicial and penitentiary system, anti-discrimination policy and protection of vulnerable groups (including children and people with disabilities), freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, as well as labour rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The 12th EU-Armenia Human Rights Dialogue (HRD) and the EU-Armenia Sub-committee on Justice, Freedom and Security (JFS) took place back to back in Brussels on 7 and 8 November 2022. Specific human rights challenges were discussed at the HRD, including fight against discrimination, gender equality and gender-based violence, rights of the child, labour rights, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression and information, as well as human rights aspects related to the Justice, Security and Penitentiary system. At the JFS it was noted that while the judiciary was still affected by inefficiencies, politicization, and lack of institutional independence of the justice sector institutions, Armenia had made major improvements in the legislative framework, which was reflected in all the key sectorial strategies.

The EU Delegation and Member States present in Armenia continued to advocate for the implementation of key human rights and democracy objectives. A special emphasis was made on the CEPA implementation and development and adoption of the subsequent Implementation Roadmap by the Government. The representatives of the EU and its Member States raised the human rights issues publicly at various events, as well as at the meetings at the highest levels, emphasising among others the need to protect vulnerable groups and pursue anti-discriminatory legislation. The EU-Armenia Civil Society Platform, foreseen by the CEPA, was launched on 1 September 2022. It allow civil society organisations from both EU and Armenia to monitor the implementation of the CEPA and provides a framework for Armenia and the EU to work together to strengthen democracy, rule of law and human rights.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU is the largest donor to the justice sector including an ongoing budget support programme (2021-2023) with a total amount of EUR 30 million and upcoming Phase II budget support programme of EUR 11 million (2023-2025). Among other projects in this field, the EU funded a two year project (ended in June 2022) to support the Government in advancing its rule of law and anti-corruption agenda and meeting the commitments under CEPA. The project supports the Ministry of Justice and other relevant stakeholders in enhancing the quality of justice to meet the requirements of independence, efficiency, integrity, accountability and transparency in line with the priorities of CEPA and EU best practices.

In parallel, various Member States support projects in the field of human rights and rule of law. A new project "Justice Reform Monitoring in Armenia – JUREMONIA", implemented by Netherlands Helsinki Committee, started in February 2022. It aims to achieve that civil society organisation are empowered to meaningfully engage in the Justice sector reforms (including police and criminal justice system) in Armenia as effective, trusted and sustainable independent actors, in order to create a more accountable, transparent and international human rights-compliant justice system.

In 2022, projects related to civic activism and human rights, and to support to media outlets were launched. Among several new grant contracts, a contract *EU4Women Empowerment in Armenia (EQAUL)* was signed end of 2022. The project aims to elevate and empower women in Armenia to bring about societal change in Armenia with the specific focus on several regions (including Syunik, Lori and Tavush).

5. Multilateral context: Armenia continued to fulfil its international commitments in the field of human rights. The visit of the Advisory Committee on the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities took place in February 2022. The seventh periodic report of the Republic of Armenia on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was discussed and adopted in October 2022 through a dialogue with the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The public discussion of the third interim report being voluntarily presented by Armenia within the framework of the UN Universal Periodic Review process took place in December 2022. Armenia concluded its two year term (2020-2022) as a member of the Human Rights Council.

Azerbaijan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The state of play regarding safeguarding of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the respect of the rule of law in Azerbaijan continues to be of concern. No progress has been made in the area of pluralism and the rule of law, notably with regard to the lack of independence of the judiciary, the restrictions on basic freedoms including freedom of expression, assembly and association. The new Law on Political Parties, signed by the President on 11 January 2023, will likely further limit political pluralism in Azerbaijan, making the establishment of new political parties very

difficult and leading to the possible disappearance of some smaller existing parties. The overall electoral legal framework remains to be revised to align it with international standards and obligations. Activities of non-governmental organisations are still restricted, including by the obligation to go through a complex and arbitrary procedure for registering grant agreements.

Freedom of opinion and expression continued to be restricted, including on social media. Defamation remains a criminal offence. The new Law on Media signed by the President on 8 February 2022 poses significant restrictions, preventing the media to effectively exercise its role as a "public watchdog"[5]. Intimidation, arrests, detentions and court cases against human rights defenders, civic activists, journalists and political opposition activists continued.

Freedom of assembly continued to be restricted. In the course of 2022, political rallies were in general not authorised and the police dispersed a number of unauthorised rallies. Cases of reported torture and other forms of physical ill- treatment against detainees by the police and other law enforcement agencies were not effectively investigated.

Gender inequality remains high. Domestic violence is an issue of concern. The rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex communities are not fully recognised.

Corruption remains an issue of concern[i], despite the actions undertaken by the government.

Numerous cases relating to violation of freedom of thought, conscience and religion are pending before the European Court of Human Rights. Some positive developments include the Presidential pardoning in May of 213 people, including 22 political party members, activists and a journalist. The authorities are working on a draft law on the "great return to Karabakh" for internally displaced persons that should be based on the principles of a voluntary, safe and dignified return. The enforcement of court judgements has continued to improve.

Mediation started to be applied with a 6% success rate. Alternative punishments are broadly applied.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The promotion and support of human rights and fundamental freedoms is at the core of EU's action in Azerbaijan, along the following priorities:

- *Strengthening Rule of law and democratic institutions:* In this framework, the EU is supporting steps in the direction of an independent, fair and efficient justice system, as well as supporting the fight against corruption.
- *Promoting an enabling environment for civil society*: The EU is supporting civil society organisations (CSOs) and strongly promoting the elimination of legal provisions (such as registration obligations) that are currently hampering CSOs space and action in the country.
- *Promoting freedom of expression*: The EU supports the freedom of press and the plurality of opinions, advocating against the prosecution of individuals on political grounds.

[5] https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2022)009-e

- *Support development and social and economic inclusion*, including by contributing to access to basic services and by focusing on regional development and on vulnerable groups.

The EU also aims at contributing to the protection of rights, equal opportunities and equal participation in the public and political life of women, youth, persons with disabilities, displaced people and minority groups.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: To promote the implementation of the human rights and democratic principles the EU continued addressing relevant concerns with the authorities. Meetings were held with the competent national institutions in the course of 2022, notably the Presidential Administration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ombudsperson, State Committee on Family and Children, State Committee on Religious Associations, State Committee for Refugees and internally displaced persons, General Prosecution Service, Bar Association, Agency for State Support to NGOs etc. In the course of 2022, several thematic meetings on human rights have been held upon initiative of the EU Delegation with EU Member States (EUMS), US, UK and Switzerland representatives. Representatives of independent NGOs, human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists have been often invited to share their views and concerns with the EU Delegation and like-minded countries. Meetings were held with representatives of NGOs, think tanks, political activists, human rights lawyers, human rights defenders, journalists, bloggers as well as with representatives of religious organisations and the LGBTI community. The EU Delegation and/or some EUMS conducted trial monitoring in several politically sensitive cases. The EU Delegation and numerous EUMS engaged regularly in public diplomacy events on human rights and stressed the pivotal importance of promoting and protecting human rights.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU supported projects in the following areas: CSOs and human rights defenders; gender equality and women's rights; rights of the child and rights of persons with disabilities; freedom of expression, media freedom and freedom of assembly and association; strengthening the independence, impartiality, professionalism and efficiency of the judicial system and the rule of law and on promotion of peacebuilding and reconciliation.

Regarding EU financial support to civil society organisations, in 2022 no EU direct grants were registered at the Ministry of Justice. The EU provided financial support to Azerbaijani CSOs via contribution agreements with UNDP, OHCHR, Council of Europe and UNICEF.

5. Multilateral context: Despite some recent positive developments, the overall rate of implementation of European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) rulings remains extremely low. On 19 November, Azerbaijan signed Protocol No. 16 to the European Convention on Human Rights, allowing the highest courts and tribunals to request the Court to give advisory opinions on questions of principle relating to the interpretation or application of the rights and freedoms defined in the Convention or the protocols thereto. Despite some recent positive developments, the overall rate of implementation of ECtHR rulings remains low. The proposal to ratify the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention remains under consideration.

Belarus

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: For a third year in a row, the human rights situation in Belarus deteriorated. By the end of 2022, there were 1446 political prisoners, up from 969 at the end of 2021 and 170 at the end of 2020. The regime continued to introduce new repressive legislation, further undermining fundamental rights, freedom of association and freedom of expression. The lists of persons and entities designated as “terrorists”, "terrorist organizations" and “extremists” grew as the effort to silence any opposition to the regime continued. Since August 2020, more than 1 000 civil society organisations were liquidated or had to close due to pressure. More than 100 media outlets have been targeted up to date (closed, blocked, declared extremist, etc.), with people sentenced to long imprisonment terms, up to 15 years, for managing them. In late December, 33 media workers were behind bars. According to the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), access has been restricted to more than 3 000 web resources (mostly Telegram channels and chats).

The judiciary became an integral part of the process of repression, ignoring the international standards of a fair trial and due process rights. Participants in protests, human rights defenders, media workers and opposition leaders, received politically motivated harsh sentences. Citizens protesting against Belarus’ support to Russia’s war against Ukraine were also prosecuted. A very worrying trend is that the repression is increasingly supported by new legislation abolishing safeguards for citizens’ rights and restricting fundamental freedoms that should be key features in societies build on the rule of law.

The referendum adopting constitutional amendments on 27 February 2022 cancelled Belarusian nuclear weapon free status and exempted former presidents from accountability for actions committed during their term in office. The scope for the death penalty was enlarged to include acts of "attempted terrorism", potentially targeting the political opposition (May 2022) and treason by an official or a military officer (December 2022).

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued its support to the victims of repression, civil society organisations and independent media. The EU also continued its support to holding perpetrators of human rights violations ensuring accountability for the many human rights violations, including the use of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. As in 2021, the EU Delegation in Minsk, in cooperation with Member State embassies and like-minded partners, took numerous initiatives to support political prisoners and draw attention to their situation, for instance by posting their stories and meeting with their families, and by intervening with the authorities in case of serious medical conditions of the prisoners. The Belarusian authorities did however not respond to demarches by EU diplomats. The EU and like-minded countries continued to observe politically motivated trials, a practise which the Belarusian authorities made increasingly difficult, including through the aggressive behaviour of representatives of Belarusian State media vis a vis EU diplomats.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2021, Belarus continued to be at the top of the EU's agenda. The continuing repression and the deteriorating human rights situation was addressed at all levels, including by the Foreign Affairs Council and the European Council, and raised in numerous contacts with third countries. In response to human rights violations and the support to illegal border crossings, the Council adopted two packages of sanctions, adding to the three packages adopted in 2020. In line with the Council conclusions of 12 October 2020, the EU scaled down its bilateral cooperation with Belarusian authorities at central level and increased EU's support to the Belarusian people and civil society. In May 2021, the EU published a comprehensive plan of economic support to a future democratic Belarus of up to EUR 3 billion, reflecting the support to a peaceful democratic transition in the country. Throughout 2021, the European Parliament was vocal on the need to end the human rights violations and to support the Belarusian population in its demand for democracy, and also made a substantive contribution to the efforts to ensure accountability for the crimes committed. The HR/VP addressed the situation in the EP plenary on several occasions. The EU Special Representative for Human Rights also addressed the dire human rights situation in Belarus focusing on improving the situation of political prisoners and ensuring their release.

4. EU financial engagement: In line with the Council conclusions on Belarus of 12 October 2020, the EU has redirected assistance from the central level to non-state actors. The total support to the people of Belarus, coming from different European Commission sources of funding since August 2020 amounts to over EUR 100 million. The last support package adopted in November 2022 consists of EUR 25 million and has two main strands: (i) support to Belarusian civil society organisations, and (ii) support to students and professionals (including by continuing the scholarship programme).

5. Multilateral context: The EU continued to raise the human rights violations in Belarus in international fora. The EU has made sure that the human rights situation in Belarus is a standing item on the UN Human Rights Council's agenda. The mandate of the Special Rapporteur was renewed in 2022. Furthermore, the EU politically and financially supports the International Accountability Platform for Belarus, an independent and impartial platform for the collection, verification and preservation of documentation and evidence of serious human rights violations. The EU made several statements in the Council of Europe as well as in the OSCE framework, condemning the ongoing human right violation in Belarus.

Georgia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Georgia applied for membership of the European Union in March 2022. The European Council recognised the European perspective of Georgia in June 2022 and stated its readiness to grant the status of candidate country once the priorities specified in the Commission's Opinion on Georgia's membership application have been addressed. These priorities include issues related to the strengthening of democratic principles, the rule of law and human rights obligations.

Overall Georgia has a solid human rights framework, including legislations and policies in line with international and European standards. However, implementation should be strengthened in several areas. In 2022, progress has been achieved in the reforms of the electoral system, of the public administration, the enhancement of gender equality, the rights of the child, and the rights of persons with disabilities. Further efforts are still needed in the area of judicial reforms, anticorruption, strengthening the independence of State's institutions. The human rights situation in the Georgians breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia remains concerning.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU action in Georgia is guided by the Association Agreement and the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-24. In 2022, the EU focused on strengthening the independence and accountability of the judiciary, reducing inequalities, contributing to the fight against discrimination and empowering the civil society to promote and defend their civic rights. The EU advocated and provided support to the realization of the rights of the child, the rights of persons with disabilities, the advancement of gender equality and the fight against gender based and domestic violence. The EU also focused on advocating for the protection of the rights of the LGBTI community, including their right to freedom of association.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged in regular political dialogue with Georgia throughout 2022 including on human rights issues. The EU-Georgia Association Council took place in September 2022 and the annual EU-Georgia Human Rights Dialogue in June 2022. The EU deployed significant efforts to encourage Georgia to develop the Georgian National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights for 2022-2030. These included regular meetings with the Prime Minister's Human Rights Advisor, in close cooperation with the UN, including in the framework of the EU HumanRights4all programme. The strategy was endorsed by the government just ahead of the Association Council meeting and is awaiting parliamentary adoption. However, the process lacked thorough consultations with the international partners' and civil society. A dialogue on the development of a comprehensive action plans to implement the National Strategy is ongoing. The EU has put forward suggestions aiming at integrating issues that had not been included in the strategy, such as addressing discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, hate crimes and judicial matters.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation continued to be at the forefront of protecting and promoting human rights in Georgia through implementing substantial human rights programmes and systemic outreach activities. Key assistance has been implemented through the 'EU4Human Rights' (EUR 11 million). Its overall objective is to strengthen human rights protection, including the rights of minorities and vulnerable groups, the fight against violence against women and domestic violence, internal and external oversight of law enforcement, protection of privacy, child rights and the support to victims of domestic violence.

Throughout 2022, the EU Delegation has maintained its support for civil society as powerful agents of good governance and socioeconomic growth. In the framework of the EIDHR Country Based Support Scheme (CBSS) for Georgia, Civil Society Organisations implement grants on issues encompassing social and economic rights of ethnic minorities, rights of persons with disabilities, the right to health, the promotion of gender equality in the workplace as well as equal, free and fair elections in Georgia.

The EU bilateral assistance in this field is complemented by ongoing Regional EU programme EU4Gender Equality for the Eastern Neighbourhood countries of total budget EUR 8 million. Reforms of the judiciary was supported via the EU-funded Programme for Good Governance PGG II implemented by Council of Europe. The components implemented in Georgia provided support to the judiciary, to court administrators, collection of statistics, High School of Justice, Supreme Court, Independent Inspector and others.

5. Multilateral context: Georgia continued its multilateral engagement throughout 2022. It was elected Member of the UN Human Rights Council for 2023-2025. In March 2022, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on continued technical assistance by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights focused on the human rights situation in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. Through the resolution presented by Georgia, the HRC requested the High Commissioner to present an oral update and a written report on developments relating to the human rights situation in the two breakaway regions.

On 9 June, the UN General Assembly adopted by vote, for the 15th time, the Georgian resolution "Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia".

During the year, Georgia was also reviewed by the Human Rights Committee, monitoring compliance with the Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the Committee on Ending Racial Discrimination. In these dialogues with Georgia, the respective UN Treaty Bodies expressed concern over the human rights situation in the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, including in relation to violations of the right to life, liberty and security, freedom of movement, and further challenges in the context of the COVID pandemic.

Republic of Moldova

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the Republic of Moldova (hereinafter Moldova) continued implementing the EU-Moldova Association Agreement, including its commitments in the areas of human rights and democracy. In response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Moldova has provided support for more than 700 000 Ukrainian refugees transiting the country and is still hosting more than 85 000. It is thus fulfilling one of the key elements of international human rights law, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

On 23 June, the European Council decided to grant Moldova candidate country status, on the understanding that it takes several steps in a range of fields as identified in the Commission opinion, including human rights and civil society engagement, and that Moldova also addresses shortcomings identified by OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe/the Venice Commission. First reforms were undertaken in the area of democracy with the pre-vetting law, which entered into force on 16 March and the Electoral Code, which was adopted by parliament on 8 December. The pre-vetting law provides that the candidates for the Superior

Council of Magistracy and the Superior Council of Prosecutors must be vetted (integrity and professional behaviour) by a Committee composed of international and national independent experts. The EU has played a leading role in the nomination of international experts. The new Electoral Code, mostly or fully addressed prior recommendations by ODIHR and the Council of Europe, including in particular the adjustment of procedures of appointment and nomination of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) to enhance its impartiality. Other welcome measures include the clarification of procedures for voting abroad, strengthening of the campaign funding regulations and strengthening the CEC's mandate to engage in meaningful supervision of political and campaign financing.

While progress in some areas is notable, there remains much to be done, particularly when it comes to the rule of law, the justice sector, the fight against corruptions and money laundering, gender equality and minorities. More efforts are needed to ensure the effective implementation of reforms and to anchor them in society. Detention conditions remain precarious, with persistent issues such as insufficient access to medical treatment overcrowding and a general bad state of detentions facilities.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to focus in 2022 on key areas such as promoting credible, transparent and inclusive elections; supporting anti-corruption efforts; strengthening rule of law, independent justice and democratic institutions; empowering civil society and supporting media freedom; promoting gender equality and child protection. The EU has supported these areas by providing significant assistance, as well as through policy dialogue and public diplomacy. Throughout 2022, the EU supported advocacy for a new Electoral Code in Moldova, and empowered Civil Society with the aim to increase social accountability. Throughout the year, the EU actively supported independent and pluralistic media, access to information and the fight against disinformation. The EU action in 2022 also sought to promote gender equality and women's empowerment as well as protection of women and young women from domestic violence and human trafficking.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged in regular political dialogue with Moldova throughout 2022. Human rights and democracy were discussed in the framework of the main meetings related to the implementation of the Association Agreement, such as the subcommittee on Justice, Freedom and Security (in October). The 13th EU-Moldova Human Rights Dialogue took place in October 2022. Discussions covered a wide range of issues, from the main developments in the EU's human rights policy, to Moldova's national human rights policy implementation, elections and electoral framework, freedom and pluralism of the media, upholding human rights in the justice system, rights of the child, fight against discrimination and protection of persons in vulnerable situations, labour rights and cooperation in international fora. In the discussions, a special focus was placed on the need for further reform of the media environment, in particular addressing concentration of media ownership and lack of transparency. The EU welcomed the steps in this direction. The EU welcomed the new mandate of the Audiovisual council and its transparent approach to the civil society and general public.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU assistance to Moldova remains strictly conditional upon the progress of reforms. The EU continued to use efficiently this principle as an important leverage to ensure that democracy and human rights standards and principles are effectively

implemented and respected, bringing tangible improvements to the lives of citizens. A pre-condition for granting macro-financial assistance is that the eligible country respects effective democratic mechanisms, including a multi-party parliamentary system and the rule of law, and guarantees respect for human rights.

5. Multilateral context: The Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) entered into force on 1 May 2022. Moldova is a signatory to Protocol 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights. On 4 July, a report on the human rights situation in Moldova was adopted at the 50th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. This is the last stage of the third cycle of Universal Periodic Review, following the examination of developments and advances in the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms since January. The Government undertook to implement 189 out of 209 recommendations proposed by UN member states.

Ukraine

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2022 was a disastrous year for human rights in Ukraine due to Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, while the Ukrainian government has shown clear commitment to enhance human rights. Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression has brought death, devastation and unspeakable suffering to Ukraine and its people. The atrocities committed by the Russian armed forces are inhumane, barbaric acts, committed on a large scale, in a systematic, deliberate and indiscriminate manner. As such, they represent severe breaches of the international humanitarian and human rights law, including the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, and may amount to war crimes. The human rights monitoring mechanisms of the UN, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), have verified allegations of arbitrary deprivation of life, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance, torture and ill-treatment of detainees, and conflict-related sexual violence. A specific concern regards the forced displacement and transfer of civilians, including children, to Russia. Russia's war of aggression has brought severe damage to civilian and critical infrastructure and housing, including hospitals, schools and places of worship. Hence, the hostilities have also infringed on the enjoyment of human rights such as the rights with respect to health, work, access to basic needs (i.e. water, heating and electricity), education, adequate housing and freedom of religion or belief. The war aggravated the situation of persons in vulnerable situations, including displaced persons, whose number rose significantly in 2022: 12.5 million Ukrainians became refugees or received temporary protection abroad; 5.9 million were internally displaced; 14.03 million became homeless; 144 000 houses were destroyed. Freedom of expression, including access to media, has been fundamentally restricted in areas temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation, resulting in shrinking civic space and a highly restrictive and lawless environment. Civic rights are practically non-existent in the areas temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation. The so-called 'authorities' treat individuals holding opposing political views, whether actual or perceived, with violence and arbitrary arrest. Russia pressures local residents to accept Russian passports and deprive them of Ukrainian citizenship. Regarding the treatment of prisoners of war (POWs), OHCHR

documented violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by both parties to the conflict. However, Ukraine has shown openness and enabled international actors access to Russian POWs, while Russia continued to deny access to Ukrainian POWs held in Russia or temporarily occupied territories. Russia has also denied UN access to the Olenivka detention centre to investigate reported torture and ill-treatment of Ukrainian POWs and the killing of more than 50 POWs in a possibly deliberate explosion. Due to Russia's full-scale invasion, martial law is currently in place in Ukraine, also limiting the full exercise of human rights. While international law permits a state in a situation of public emergency that threatens its survival to, temporarily, derogate from part of its obligations, the duration, necessity and proportionality of this law should be under continuous review. The martial law in Ukraine is being regularly re-assessed and extended for 90 days at a time.

Despite Russia's war of aggression, the Ukrainian civil society has remained vibrant and has bravely stepped up to play a key role in ensuring the country's resilience to withstand Russia's war. Several new grass-root initiatives emerged and many existing civil society organizations re-focused on the war-related needs, including humanitarian support to conflict-affected population, including internally displaced persons, as well as documentation of evidence of war crimes. The Ukrainian government is actively pursuing accountability, with the help of the international community including the EU. Ukraine has yet to ratify the Rome Statute. Despite Russia's war of aggression, Ukraine has proved its resilience as a democratic country, with continued progress on the rule of law reforms and the alignment of its legislation with international human rights standards, also in the context of the EU candidate status granted by the European Council in June 2022. The Constitution of Ukraine guarantees the freedoms of association and assembly and it is generally well respected by the authorities, with limits posed by the war. The room for freedom of association in areas under Russian military control, including Crimea, remains severely restricted. A major achievement in the area of freedom of expression and freedom of media was the adoption in December 2022 of the media law. This is an important step in aligning Ukraine's media legislation with the EU acquis, and in particular with the Audio-visual Media Services Directive and as concerns the independence of the regulator. Freedom of media and freedom of speech in areas under Russian military control in southern and eastern Ukraine and Crimea remain extremely curtailed; independent journalism does not exist.

In 2022, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted the law on national minorities (communities), a step in aligning Ukraine‘s national minority legislation with international and European standards and best practices. Freedom of religion and belief remains generally well respected in Ukraine. At the same time, amid Russia's war of aggression, Ukraine has undertaken steps to limit Russia's influence through religious organisations undermining Ukraine's security and constitutional order. The space to enjoy the freedom of religion and belief is limited in the Ukrainian territories under Russian control, on Crimea; the Crimean Tatars are disproportionally affected. Ukraine's ratification of the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) in June 2022 is a major achievement and its implementation will be key. Over the past year, no progress was recorded on the rights of LGBTI persons. Overall, while the legal and institutional framework regulating human rights is in place, and laws generally follow European and international standards, their implementation should be strengthened.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU's response to Russia's war of aggression has been threefold: (1) unprecedented support to Ukraine for as long as it takes (political, military, financially, humanitarian), (2) sanctions packages with measures intended to step up pressure on Russia and its government to end the war and withdraw its entire military equipment and troops from Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, and (3) diplomatic outreach to bring together a large international coalition to support Ukraine and condemn Russia's actions. EU funds and projects were refocused to reflect the changed geopolitical context and to put into operation an effective framework for addressing violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including war crimes, by Russia. Within the new context of Ukraine's EU candidate status, the EU continued to support Ukraine's efforts to strengthen the rule of law and human rights. This is done through projects, expertise sharing, political and expert dialogue and financial support.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU – Ukraine bilateral political engagement reached unprecedented levels in 2022. The EU stands with Ukraine and its people. The June 2022 European Council decision that granted Ukraine candidate status, confirmed that the future of Ukraine and its citizens lies within the European Union. The bilateral engagement with the Ukrainian authorities and civil society continued in all fields, including human rights. Due to the circumstances, the 2022 Human Rights Dialogue was postponed, but is expected to take place in 2023. On the ground, the EU Delegation continued its engagement on the rule of law, human rights and international humanitarian law with Ukrainian authorities as well as civil society, as did the EU Advisory Mission to Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine). One of the main work strands of EUAM Ukraine entails supporting Ukraine in investigating and prosecuting international crimes reportedly committed in the context of Russia´s large-scale invasion of Ukraine.

4. EU financial engagement: Since Russia's war of aggression, the EU has provided Ukraine and the Ukrainian people with EUR 67 billion support. The EU's readiness to continue this support remains steadfast. In reaction to the full-scale Russian invasion, the EU launched a series of new projects, specifically in the field of human rights. These include support to several projects by local organisations that focus on documentation of events that have signs of war crimes and mass atrocities committed during the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, legal assistance to victims and awareness raising. The EU supports media channels in their provision of relevant, evidence-based information and target misinformation and fakes via independent and impartial media materials. Ongoing human rights projects were in some cases repurposed in order to address human rights needs following Russia's war of aggression. This is the case for the project by the Norwegian Refugee Council "Promoting transitional justice and human rights of conflict affected persons and IDPs". The project was repurposed in order to cover not only housing, land and property issues, but also freedom of movement (including crossing the border), asylum/refugee procedures, pensions, social and IDP benefits, IDP registration, access to services and communal settings, access to humanitarian assistance, and civil legal documentation. The project JurFem focused on training women lawyers and activists about women rights, covers now also cases of war-related sexual violence. The EU's Right to Protection aimed to increase sustainable protection of social, economic and administrative rights across Ukraine, with a focus on the conflict-affected communities in the East. Other ongoing projects include (1) CrimeaSOS, "Fight against torture, ill-treatment and impunity in Ukraine" supporting human rights activists, (2) NGO ZMINA, "Supporting Active

Citizens under Pressure in Ukraine" offering emergency assistance to human rights defenders, activists, journalists at risk in war-affected areas, and (3) DII, "Support of Information Reintegration of Donbas" for supporting public information on the war. The EU also continued its support to the activities of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (HRMMU). This work has traditionally been important to record violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, all the more so in the current context.

5. Multilateral context: The EU has actively engaged in the UN, OSCE, and the Council of Europe, on the human rights implications of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. In March 2022, the Human Rights Council (HRC) created a Commission of Inquiry to investigate all alleged violations and abuses of human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law and to collect, consolidate and analyse the evidence thereof. The investigations of the Commission of Inquiry will complement the ongoing reporting of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission under the auspices of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. As a continuation, in May, the HRC held a special session to discuss the deteriorating human rights situation in Ukraine stemming from the Russian aggression. The resolution adopted at the end of the session expressed deep concern over the effects of the aggression on civilians, condemned the reported violations and abuses, while also reiterating the demand for immediate cessation of military hostilities against Ukraine and calling for respect of the fundamental principles and rules of international humanitarian law, including refraining from any attacks against civilians and civilian objects. In line with its previous decision, the HRC called for prompt, independent and impartial national and international investigations into alleged violations and abuses of human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law. In April 2022, the UN General Assembly voted by a two-thirds majority to suspend Russia from its membership at the Human Rights Council due to the aggression on Ukraine. Throughout the year, the General Assembly adopted several resolutions following Russia's war, including on the need for furthering of remedy and reparation for victims of Russia's war.

In the context of the OSCE, the Moscow Mechanism was invoked two times last year. On 3 March, 45 OSCE member states, including all EU member states and with the support of Ukraine, invoked the OSCE Moscow Mechanism in light of grave concerns regarding the humanitarian impacts of Russia's invasion and potential war crimes and crimes against humanity. On 2 June, the same number of OSCE participating states invoked the Moscow Mechanism in view of Russia's ongoing aggression. The fact-finding mission deployed under the Mechanism confirmed the conclusions reached by the first mission on the clear patterns of serious violations of international humanitarian law attributable mostly to the Russian Armed Forces. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE (ODIHR) also issued two separate reports violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine.

Egypt

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Although the political leadership in Egypt took several steps towards greater emphasis on and respect for human rights, creating positive expectations, human rights challenges remained, particularly in relation to freedom of expression and the rule of law. While Egypt was still recovering from the effects of the pandemic, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine strained further the state resources devoted to socio-economic protection and other wide-scale programmes.

The President had declared 2022 as the Year of Civil Society in Egypt following the reform of the NGO law and bylaws in previous years. COP27 brought the discussion on human rights under the spotlight, linked to civil society access to the event and advocacy on individual cases. In April, the reactivation of the Presidential Amnesty Committee was announced. During the months that followed, around 1 000 prisoners were released, yet new arrests were recorded as well. Meanwhile, former detainees' reintegration into society faces challenges, with asset freezes and travel bans being some of the main hurdles. In April too, President Al Sisi announced the launch of a National Dialogue covering political and socio-economic issues, with a committee focusing on human rights. The first year report on the implementation of the National Human Rights Strategy (2021-2026) was published in December 2022, noting progress in the institutional development track, with several ministries establishing human rights departments, yet limited implementation in the legislative track.

On the subject of freedom of the press, the independent outlet Mada Masr faced accusations linked to the publication of a story on corruption and saw its licence formally refused in October 2022, which it has appealed. Concerning freedom of religion or belief, President Al-Sisi has continued making visible signs of support to the Coptic community such as attending Christmas mass. In 2022, concrete and consistent progress remained necessary with respect to the protection of fundamental freedoms and the restricted space for civil society and human rights defenders. Constraints remained as regards freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and media freedom, and concerns remained about broad application of the Terrorism Law against peaceful critics and individuals, and extensive and indiscriminate use of pre-trial detention. Failings in the protection of LGBTI persons continue to present a serious concern, with security forces using digital targeting, based on "debauchery" provisions and the Cybercrime Law, to arbitrarily arrest and detain LGBTI people.

In 2022, Egypt continued to manage migration, including providing protection and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers. Egypt has yet to adopt asylum laws. Extensive use of the death penalty continued. According to independent reports, Egypt was the third country globally with the highest number of executions in 2022.

2. EU action – key focus areas: The EU and Member States applied different tools ranging from diplomatic outreach, consultation with civil society and cooperation projects with the authorities and civil society. In addition to socioeconomic aspects, projects and initiatives focused on capacity-building for civil society organisations, support to human rights defenders, the rights of persons with disabilities, the rights of women and girls, judicial trainings, anti-discrimination, protection of vulnerable communities including refugees. Observation of trials was among the tools employed by the EU and Member States, although diplomats continued to face restrictions in access.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2022, the EU and Egypt adopted the new Partnership Priorities, reaffirming a shared commitment to the universal values of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights, and an agreement to strengthen dialogue and cooperation on these issues. Salient human rights issues were raised throughout the year at all levels. The EUSR for Human Rights carried out his first visit to Egypt in April. In his wide contacts with the Egyptian counterparts, he highlighted issues such as prisoners' conditions, the need to reform pre-trial detention legislation, and abolish the death penalty. The EU and Egypt had a constructive in-depth exchange on human rights and democracy issues at the Subcommittee on Political, Human Rights Affairs and Consular held in Cairo on 8 December 2022. Coordination meetings among EU Member States and regular consultations with Egyptian and international CSOs continued throughout the year. On 23 November 2022, the European Parliament adopted a plenary resolution on the human rights situation in Egypt.

4. EU financial engagement: In line with the August 2013 Council conclusions, the EU's bilateral assistance to Egypt was directed to the socio-economic sector and support to civil society. The EU's cooperation in Egypt aims to support Egypt's 'Sustainable Development Strategy – Vision-2030'. EU-supported projects in Egypt contributed to the promotion and protection of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights though global and bilateral means of implementation. In 2022, the EU delegation managed 24 projects worth EUR 23.6 million in support of human rights through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights / NDICI Human Rights & Democracy, thematic lines supporting civil society organisations, and the European Neighbourhood Instrument. Activities included the fight against all forms of discrimination, as well as advancement of the rights of women including the fight against female genital mutilation and violence against women, the rights of the child, migrants and persons with disabilities, freedom of religion or belief, access to justice, culture and cultural diversity. An EU-financed project in support of the National Council for Human Rights' work on implementing the National Human Rights Strategy was launched on 11 December 2022.

5. Multilateral context: Egypt voted against the ninth UNGA Resolution for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. Egypt has ratified all major international human rights treaties, but not yet signed the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, nor the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture. Egypt was cited in the EU Statement under Item 2 at the 51st Human Rights Council session in 13 September 2022.

State of Israel

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Israel is a democracy with independent institutions and robust checks and balances. A strong judiciary serving as check and balances for government proposals and legislations has continued to play an active role in ensuring the protection and promotion of human rights and freedom of individuals and groups in Israel. Human rights defenders and civil society organisations continue to be actively involved in the promotion of good governance and human rights, which have been affected

by the severity of the political and security challenges in Israel's relations with the Palestinians and the surge in violence in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) in 2022. While Israel has a free media landscape, journalists covering events in the oPt are often subjected to violence. The EU has regularly called for a thorough investigation clarifying all the circumstances that led to Shireen Abu Akleh's death, and that those responsible are brought to justice.

A general election took place in November 2022 in line with international standards, with a higher voter turnout than in 2021 (70.63 % as compared to 67.44%). The turnout among Arab Israelis increased to 53.2% as compared to 44.6 % in 2021. This was the fifth election in Israel in four years. The new multi-party coalition government is led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and besides Likud includes ultra right-wing, nationalist and religious parties. Few days into office, the government announced its intention to introduce potentially controversial judicial reforms, which led to large scale protests and to promote and develop settlements, including in the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Golan.

In the oPt, in 2022 the situation has deteriorated with a record numbers of Palestinian casualties (more than 200 in the West Bank and in Gaza), resulting also from an increase in counter-terrorism operations of the Israeli Security Forces, following a wave of terror attacks that claimed the lives of 31 Israelis. In 2022, settlement expansion continued and evictions, demolitions and settler violence increased. In 2022, the number of EU funded structures demolished/seized reached some 91 structures valued at EUR 337 000; again in 2022, OCHA recorded 849 settler attacks, an increase of 58% compared to 2021. Concerns persist over the use of arbitrary administrative detention and the detention of Palestinian minors. Gaza continued to be affected by the closure, including the movement of people and goods. An armed conflict between Israel and Palestinian militant factions, led by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, took place between 5 and 8 August 2022, leading to 46 Palestinian casualties and 360 injured. In Israel, there were no fatalities, but 70 Israelis were injured.

Many human rights NGOs, mainly those active on Israel's responsibilities as an occupying power in the oPt, have throughout 2022 continued to raise concerns about restrictions on their work. The six Palestinian NGOs, which were designated in October 2021 by the Israeli Ministry of Defence as terrorist organisations continued to experience restrictions in their work. Convincing evidence to justify their designation has not been provided.

With regard to discrimination and marginalization experienced by the Arab minority, the previous Israeli government undertook a number of efforts to address socio-economic disparities, including by increasing the funding for economic and political measures. Israel upheld its policy of temporary residence status to Palestinians married to Israelis. The Arab Bedouin minority of the Negev are amongst the most underprivileged groups, being subject to territorial and evictions and with more than two thirds of 280 000 Bedouins living below the poverty line.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU focused on five strategic priority areas: Israel's responsibilities as an occupying power; upholding democratic values; combatting discrimination against the Arab minorities; rights and protection of persons in vulnerable situations; and engagement with the United Nations.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In December 2022, the EU and Israel resumed the meetings of the Informal Working Group on Human Rights, which had been suspended since 2016. This followed the EU-Israel Association Council in October 2022, which had been resumed after a ten-year pause, and of the Political Dialogue, which also had been suspended since 2016. The resumption of these meetings led to increased political engagement with Israel and provided good opportunities for the EU to voice concerns on a number of human rights developments.

In 2022, several high-level visits, for instance by Presidents von der Leyen and Metsola, took place, during which human rights issues and the need to preserve the viability of the two-state solution were raised with Israeli authorities. The EU Delegation to Israel engaged regularly with the Israeli authorities on a wide range of human rights issues in line with the EU statement on the Association Council. The EU Delegation participated in a number of demarches on issues including demolitions and evictions, new settlements and the raid of the offices of the designated Palestinian NGOs. The Delegation continued to convene the Human Rights Working Group with EU Member States to discuss pressing human rights and democracy issues and coordinate action.

4. EU financial engagement: In the framework of the NDICI - Human Rights and Democracy programme, in 2022, 12 human rights projects were implemented by approximately 20 NGOs. Six new contracts were signed in December 2022 (worth EUR 2.3 million), with implementation in 2023 and 2024. In addition, funding to NGOs is channelled through the thematic programme for civil society, and the European Peacebuilding initiative. The EU has a yearly bilateral allocation of EUR 2 million that has been used to finance Twinning projects supporting the approximation to the EU acquis. Twinning projects all have a good governance and institution-building component. Four Twinning projects were completed in 2022, and two new Twinning projects were signed in December 2022. From 2022 onwards, the bilateral allocation for Israel will be directed towards regional cooperation projects in support of Israel's normalisation of relations with its neighbours, including the oPt.

5. Multilateral context: The EU continues to regularly address the human rights situation in Israel and the oPt in UN fora. On 31 December 2022, the UN General Assembly passed resolution 77/400 requesting the International Court of Justice to render an advisory opinion on the legal consequences of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory. Throughout 2022, Israel increased its engagement in the Human Rights Council and proposed its first ever resolution on cyberbullying, which was passed by consensus with EU support.

In June and September 2022, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the oPt, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel published its first two reports. The reports concluded that the Israeli occupation of the oPt is in violation of international law due to its permanence and the de-facto annexation policies of the Israeli government and is the root cause of the recurrent tensions and instability. Israel accused the UN Commission of a biased approach and rejected them. The OHCHR has not been physically present in Israel and the oPt since June 2021, following Israel's decision to suspend ties with the organization in February 2020. The EU raised the need to resume cooperation with OHCHR and renew the visa for international staff of OHCHR at the Informal Working Group for Human Rights.

The fifth periodic report of Israel on its implementation of the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights were concluded in 2022, with noticeable concerns on administrative detention practices. Israel became a Party to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in September 2021. This achievement was marked by a joint EU-Israeli reception in June 2022.

Jordan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan embarked on legislative reforms towards the modernisation of the political system initiated by King Abdullah II in 2021. To this end, in March 2022, the Constitution as well as the political parties' law and the elections law for the House of Representatives were amended to encourage the formation of nation-wide programme-based political parties, participation of women and youth and to enhance geographical representation. The Kingdom also launched a new justice sector strategy for 2022-2026. Still, challenges in relation to freedom of expression (online and offline), freedom of peaceful assembly and association, the rule of law, gender-based violence and gender equality remain. Civic space in Jordan was challenged through legal and administrative restrictions as well as enhanced monitoring of activities. The foreign funding authorisation system continued to put pressure on civil society actors. The economic participation of women remained low while discrimination of women continued to persist in the personal status law, particularly as regards custodianship, divorce and inheritance of citizenship.

2. EU action – key focus areas: The EU promoted leadership at municipal level, women's economic empowerment, gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence. It supported projects aimed at enhancing the resilience and strengthening the protection of women refugees, internally displaced persons and women in host communities. EU Member States supported projects to strengthen the economic and political participation of women as well as to improve gender equality with a particular focus on youth. In 2022, the EU continued to co-chair the Gender Partners Coordination Group with UN Women and the Jordan National Commission for Women.

The EU encouraged the authorities to further enhance freedom of expression and media freedom. Together with its Member States, it supported projects aimed to build capacities of independent journalists and train journalists on new media.

The EU and its Member States supported projects aimed at enhancing the rights of persons with disabilities, as well as promoting their inclusion in the school system and in the labour market. The EU continued its support to Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities in Jordan, providing assistance in education, healthcare and socio-economic well-being. The EU and its Member States also worked on strengthening the participation of the Palestine refugee community, and on promoting the socioeconomic and political participation of young people in Jordan. They continued to support projects promoting and increasing awareness of the rights of the child, including the issue of child marriage.

The EU supported the development of the justice sector strategy for 2022-2026 and funded technical assistance to improve the criminal justice chain in Jordan. Similarly, Member States continued to support judicial institutions in Jordan, fostered capacity-building of young lawyers and implemented projects aiming to improve access to juvenile justice.

The EU and ita Member States supported projects aimed to enhance the digital rights infrastructure to promote internet freedom in Jordan. The EU has also funded technical assistance in the field of digitalising the criminal justice chain and strengthening remote trials in criminal proceedings.

The EU collaborated with EU MS agencies and UNDP to foster more accountable and efficient local governance throughout the country.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The 14th EU-Jordan Association Council, held on 2 June 2022 in Jordan, adopted the new Partnership Priorities for the period 2021-2027. The EU and Jordan reaffirmed their commitment to democratic principles and fundamental human rights as set out in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and in the EU-Jordan Association Agreement.

4. EU financial engagement: Strengthening good governance, the rule of law, democratic reform and human rights, including social and labour rights is a shared priority stipulated in the new EU-Jordan Partnership Priorities 2021-2027. To this endeavour, within its Annual Action Programme 2022 for Jordan the EU adopted a programme aiming at promoting a more participatory, inclusive and accountable democratic process (EUR 10 million). The EU signed a new EUR 39 million Financing Agreement with the Jordanian authorities to support the Rule of Law. Moreover, the Special Measure 2022 for Jordan (EUR 80 million) aims at supporting the country's efforts in hosting refugees from Syria for the benefit of both refugees and vulnerable host communities.

5. Multilateral context: In 2022, Jordan supported, for the second time, the UNGA resolution on a moratorium on the death penalty. In September, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities visited Jordan. In his report, he welcomed relevant legislation while stressing the need for systemic change to achieve an inclusive society and inclusive labour market.

Lebanon

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: A deepening institutional vacuum has characterised Lebanon over the year 2022, with no full-fledged government since May and no President since 1 November. Compounding the economic and financial crisis, this unprecedented situation has further affected Lebanon's capacity to address governance and human rights challenges, and to deliver basic services to an increasingly impoverished population. Lebanon hosts the world's highest share of refugees per capita, mostly from Syria.

Due to the very high prices, increasing poverty levels and food insecurity, 90% of Syrian refugees, 73% of Palestine refugees and over 50% of Lebanese households need assistance. The economic crisis has profoundly affected the economic and social rights of the population and led to an increase in migration.

Challenges to the respect of human rights and the rule of law have remained largely unaddressed, notably the right to justice and accountability, fight against corruption, freedom of expression and media or gender-based violence. The National Human Rights Commission and the National Preventive Mechanism against Torture could not carry out their mandate due to lack of by-laws and budget. Worsening working conditions for judges affected legal proceedings, hence undermining the right to a fair trial. The investigation of the 2020 Beirut port blast continued to face obstructions and has effectively been suspended as of December 2021, which has further increased concerns over justice and accountability. Whereas the request by the Minister of Justice to the Venice Commission to issue a legal opinion on the draft law on the independence of the judiciary was welcome, this draft law remains still at the Parliamentary Justice Committee. Also positive was the fact that the 2017 Law Criminalising Torture was applied for the first time at the Military Court in 2022. However, the prison system remains overcrowded, with occupancy rates exceeding 300% in prisons and 200% in detention centres. The space for freedom of expression has shrunk further.

The electoral reforms recommended by the 2018 EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) have remained unaddressed. While the May 2022 general elections took place timely and without major incidents, the 2022 EU EOM highlighted recurrent instances of vote buying and clientelism. While the freedom of speech was generally respected, the media failed to provide balanced coverage. The EOM made 23 recommendations, including enhancing women's representation in parliament.

Gender-based violence increased due to the socio-economic crisis and discriminatory laws on custody, marriage and divorce remained in place. Positive developments included the entry into force of the new Public Procurement Law and the establishment of the respective Authority.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU advocated for human rights as part of its political and policy dialogue with the Lebanese government, and ensured strategic coordination of efforts among EU Member States and like-minded partners.

The EU supported efforts to increase women's electoral participation, reduce gender-based violence, improve access to and inclusivity of education for vulnerable children and rehabilitate schools. The EU concluded two projects to protect LGBTI rights by raising awareness and supporting legal and health services.

Using political dialogue and public outreach, the EU emphasised the accountability gap over the Beirut port blast. The EU supported civil society to foster freedom of expression, including media law reform and media related recommendations of the EU EOM. The EU continued its support to Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese, and reminded of the fact that returns of Syrian refugees must be voluntary, safe and dignified as per UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) guidelines. The EU continued to support Palestine refugees' access to health, social protection

and education via the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). The EU supported vulnerable migrant workers.

The EU enhanced political dialogue with the Ministry of Justice, notably with regard to the draft law on the independence of the judiciary. The EU supported the National Anti-Corruption Commission and promoted access to justice under a rights-based approach. The EU supported the National Human Rights Commission, the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and the National Anti-Corruption Strategy as well as support to civil society in fighting corruption.
The EU reinforced safe social media practices and raised awareness about misinformation among the youth. The EU funded training for Lebanese women in digitalisation to help their professional integration.

The EU continued to engage regularly with civil society organisations (CSOs) on human rights and democracy priorities and related programmes, the Brussels VI conference on 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region', and inclusive electoral participation.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Pursuant to the 2020 Council Conclusions, the EU continued to call on the authorities to deliver urgently on key reforms, including the independence of the judiciary, respect for human rights and the rule of law, as well as fighting corruption. On 26 July 2022, the Council of the EU extended for one year the framework for targeted restrictive measures to address the situation in Lebanon, including possible sanctions against persons and entities undermining democracy or the rule of law. The EU deployed an EOM for the May 2022 general election.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the EU continued to embed a human rights-based approach in its programming and development efforts that are implemented mainly by CSOs or UN agencies. Support to migrant workers amounted to EUR 700 000 under the EIDHR and the EU continued to respond to socio-economic needs of vulnerable persons. The EUR 154 million in response to the Syrian crisis addresses the needs of Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities in social assistance, food security, education, health and wastewater. The EU continued its support to UNDP's Lebanese Electoral Assistance Project with EUR 6 million over 2020-2023. The EU increased its humanitarian aid to Lebanon to EUR 77.6 million. To mitigate the global food price increase as a consequence of the Russian war against Ukraine, the EU provided additional EUR 25 million to Lebanon in support of food security and resilience.

5. Multilateral context: Lebanon voted in favour of the ninth UNGA Resolution for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. In March 2022, the UN Human Rights Committee adopted a report by the Special Rapporteur on follow-up to concluding observations concerning Lebanon. Following its May 2022 visit, the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture expressed concern about the prolonged pre-trial detention, prison overcrowding and deplorable conditions in places of deprivation of liberty. In 2022, Lebanon was raised under Item 2 at the Human Rights Council sessions.

Libya

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, Libya witnessed a considerable number of human rights and international humanitarian law violations, committed with high levels of impunity. The lack of accountability for human rights violations has reduced the potential deterrent effect of justice against crimes committed by armed groups throughout the country. A number of serious offenses, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, kidnappings, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, as well as a variety of other violations and abuses, have reportedly been committed. There is still a widespread problem of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and victims do not have due access to adequate medical, social, or legal aid.

A significant number of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people have fallen victim to discrimination, exploitation, sexual violence, extreme insecurity, human trafficking, and even slavery. They have also been subject to torture and other forms of ill-treatment. This situation is exacerbated by the existence of national laws penalising illegal entry and not providing the basis for an asylum and protection system. On a more positive note, the Libyan authorities have demonstrated their willingness to increase cooperation with neighbouring states on regulating labour migration through the conclusion of Bilateral Labour Agreements.

The number of migrants in the country continued to increase throughout the year, in line with a trend already registered in 2021. While being predominantly a country of destination, Libya has become the main country of irregular departures towards the EU via the Central Mediterranean Route. Libya also hosts approximately 44 000 refugees and asylum-seekers (UNHCR, 2022). This number, however, does not reflect the total number due to registration issues. In addition, there are about 134,787 internally displaced persons. The Tripartite Task Force, a multilateral initiative including the EU, UN and AU, facilitated more than 11 000 voluntary humanitarian returns and allowed the evacuation of more than 1 300 people of concern outside Libya.

With regard to the migrants' detention system, a positive development occurred in October, when the Department for Combatting Illegal Migration transferred approximately all migrant women and children to a new designated detention centre dedicated exclusively to these two groups and run by a majority of female guards. Reportedly, the conditions are assessed to be above the usual standards of detention centres in the country, and the facility includes a food hall, a playroom for children with TV, a gym and a small school for children.

Hate speech, intimidation and threats, notably against human rights activists, journalists and some politicians and members of the judicial system, continued to be pervasive in 2022, in both offline and online contexts. Freedom of expression and the practice of journalism are far from reaching their full potential. Violence/pressures exerted online against politically active women have increased, resulting in a negative impact on participation of women in public and political life. There is still cause for concern regarding the rights of racial and ethnic minorities, individuals who identify as LGBTI and people with disabilities.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU and its Member States are working based on five political and operational strategic priorities: (i) strengthening democracy, rule of law and legitimate national institutions, (ii) addressing impunity and strengthening accountability for human rights violations and violations of International Humanitarian Law; (iii) promoting fundamental freedoms and strengthening civic and political space; (iv) promoting gender equality, women's rights and combatting gender-based violence ;(v) enhancing the protection of internally displaced persons, minorities, migrants, irregular migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, in particular those in vulnerable situations.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In the absence of an EU-Libya Association Agreement, there is no structural bilateral political dialogue with Libyan authorities and the EU's political engagement is done through informal outreach at working level and high-level meetings. EU advocacy focused on a key set of issues, including arbitrary detention and the continued shrinking of civil space. The Libyan authorities have also engaged in a constructive dialogue on what would come after the expiry of the UN Fact Finding Mission in March 2023.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, EU support for Libyan institutions included capacity building for anti-corruption, anti-money laundering, and asset recovery agencies, as well as support for relevant key ministries, including: the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Higher Council of Childhood. Over the year, the EU and Member States continued working in partnership with Libyan diaspora organisations to monitor cases of torture and ill-treatment in the country, to establish a national referral mechanism to provide legal aid to survivors of torture and inhumane treatment in front of the Libyan judicial system and to ensure accountability of perpetrators of human rights violations and international crimes, also with regard to the work of the International Criminal Court.

With regard to civil society, the EU closely followed developments related to the shrinking of civic space and human rights violations committed against journalists and media professionals. Additionally, the EU has provided support to the Ministries of Justice and Interior to enhance their ability to uphold the rule of law.

With regard to gender equality and women empowerment, in constant coordination with UN Women and EU Member States, the EU continued its efforts to address the gender issues and to combat Gender Based Violence, notably by advocating and promoting the participation of Libyan women in political, economic and social life of the country and by strengthening their protection and assistance.

Around 70% of the approximately 600 000 refugees, asylum seekers and migrants who live in Libya remain without any formal legal status and in a highly fragile and vulnerable situation. They are unable to access basic social services and are prone to exploitation. Against this background, the EU has granted UNHCR EUR 22 million to assist in the protection of persons of concern in Libya, including registration, access to assistance and protection services, lifesaving interventions at disembarkation points and detention centres, evacuation outside Libya, and family reunification. Furthermore, EUR 17 million under NDICI instrument were channelled to the International Organization for Migration to support activities such as protection services, lifesaving interventions at disembarkation points and detention centres,

health, mental health, and psychosocial support, rapid response, social cohesion, labour migration and data collection.

5. Multilateral context: Libya is a party to the majority of international human rights agreements, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocol; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. There are, however, notable exceptions and reservations such as the country not being a party to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The death penalty continues to be on the books, although a moratorium is being applied.

Syria

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Grave violations of fundamental human rights and humanitarian law are still ongoing across the country and are carried out by all parties involved, especially the Assad regime and its allied militias, with a dramatic impact on the human rights, including social and economic rights of the entire population. The dire situation that Syrian civilians experience further deteriorated due to the worst economic and humanitarian crisis the country has faced since the start of conflict. Weakened control by the Syrian regime over large parts of the country it nominally controls has led to generalised lawlessness and a rapid growth in drug production and trafficking as well as a resurgence of ISIS and other terrorist groups.

Syrian security forces and affiliated militias continue to arbitrarily detain, and mistreat people across the country, including returnees and individuals in areas retaken by the regime that have signed so-called reconciliation agreements. Many of those arrested disappear. Syrian authorities also continued to unlawfully confiscate property and restrict access to areas of origin for internally displaced persons or returnees. Arbitrary detention, including torture and ill-treatment, some of which leading to death, remained systematic during the reporting period. The population continues to suffer widespread gender-based violence in its different forms and protections needs remain high.

The amnesty decree issued in April 2022 did not lead to meaningful progress on the issue of detainees and missing persons in the Syrian conflict, as the releases were very limited and without international monitoring, which was rejected by the regime. There is no information to date about 135,253 detainees and forcibly disappeared people. The cybercrime law issued in April 2022 further undermines an already heavily controlled online civic space in Syria, strengthens content censorship and domination of the various aspects and sectors of media work in Syria. Civil space is also shrinking due to efforts of the regime to firmly control the activities of civil society organisations (CSOs). There continue to be reports of arrests of NGO workers and many CSOs are prevented from receiving certain funds, as they are not granted any work permit by the authorities.

In 2022, the ability of people in Syria to meet their basic needs has further diminished. Access to shelter, healthcare, electricity, education, public transportation, water, and sanitation have all worsened. People across the country are constantly facing fuel shortages and rising food prices. As a result of these challenges, in 2022, 90 percent of Syrians lived below the poverty line and 15.3 million people among a total population of 22.1 million are anticipated to require humanitarian assistance in 2023, compared with 14.6 million people in 2022.

2. EU action - key focus areas: As per the strands of the Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, the EU supports efforts to promote free speech in Syria, including by supporting free and independent media, particularly at local level. On the accountability front, the EU supports access to justice mechanisms while on the Housing, Land and Property rights and civil documentation, the EU contributes to a better understanding of the legal framework. In addition, the EU delegation worked on online campaigns tackling various human rights issues including rights of the LGBTI community. It also organised an online workshop where members of the Syrian LGBTI community expressed their experiences and biggest challenges.

The EU continued to provide substantive support to Syrian civil society organisations, including to the work of the UN's Civil Society Support Room and Women's Advisory Board (both created by the UN in order to support intra-Syrian negotiations in the framework of UNSCR 2254).

In 2022, the EU continued to support financially the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on Syria and to work to ensure accountability for war crimes, human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, including the use of chemical weapons.

In the framework of some project activities, the EU Delegation to Syria conducted discussions with Syrian activists and CSOs on the challenges related to the access to new technologies. The most relevant tackled i) the design of innovative tools at local level in general and ii) the way to improve the access to information on gender-based violence more particularly, and to safe referrals for women by relying on technology.

The EU Council has regularly introduced new sanctions against individuals and entities – including military and security officials – responsible for violence and repression in Syria, and the use of chemical weapons.

3. EU bilateral political engagements and their impact: The EU has enhanced its dialogue with human rights activists both inside and outside Syria and with the Syria Office of the OHCHR in order to support their efforts, to achieve accountability for crimes committed by state and non-state actors, and to look for ways for communities to prevent such crimes. The EU Delegation regularly exchanges on the human rights situation with other like-minded actors on the ground.

4. EU financial engagements and their impact: The Syrian crisis is one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters. The EU and its Member States remain the largest donors in support of Syrians in Syria and across the region since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, mobilising over EUR 27.4 billion in humanitarian, stabilisation and resilience assistance. Funding includes support for civil society among which human rights related actions. ECHO Humanitarian Aid

inside Syria in 2022 amounted to a total of EUR 150.7 million. At the end of 2022, the EU scaled up its food aid contribution to EUR 15 million to help over half a million people in urgent need of food assistance across Syria.

5. Multilateral context: Syria underwent its examination in the framework of the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review on 24 January 2022. Syria received 287 recommendations and it supported 207 recommendations at the adoption of its UPR outcome at the 50th Human Rights Council in July 2022. Supported recommendations related to legal and general framework of implementation, universal and cross-cutting issues, civil and political rights, economic, social, and cultural rights, women's rights, and rights of other vulnerable groups and persons. The EU has been supportive of UNSC resolutions mandating the continuation of UN cross-border humanitarian assistance to Syria, and has participated in the work of the Human Rights Council and the UNGA Third Committee on Syria. In Geneva, the EU participates in the Humanitarian Task Force and the Ceasefire Task Force, which attempt to foster international cooperation in favour of humanitarian interventions and reductions in hostilities. The 2022 Brussels Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region mobilised EUR 6.4 billion for 2022 and beyond for humanitarian aid to Syrians inside the country and in neighbouring countries, and for their host communities. Out of this amount, over EUR 4.8 billion were pledged by the EU, with over EUR 3.1 billion coming from the European Commission and EUR 1.7 billion from the EU Member States.

Palestinian Authority (occupied Palestinian territory – oPt)

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: *Preliminary remark*: A distinction must be drawn between the responsibilities of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and those of Israel as the occupying power. The focus of this report lies primarily on the PA's responsibilities in the West Bank and the responsibilities of the *de facto* authorities in Gaza (although, formally, the government in Ramallah also bears responsibility for Gaza).

Challenges remain as regards fundamental freedoms in both the West Bank and Gaza. As regards free and fair elections, while the holding of local elections (December 2021/March 2022) was a first welcoming step to renew democratic legitimacy, national elections have not yet been scheduled following the postponement sine die in 2021. While the signing of the "Algiers declaration" by 14 Palestinian factions ahead of the Arab League Summit in October 2022 (including Fatah and Hamas) was a positive sign towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation, the lack of an implementation mechanism lowers any expectation for real progress.

With regard to freedom of opinion, expression and peaceful assembly, 2022 witnessed an increase in the number of violations committed by the PA security forces against journalists, media and activists. In this context, the prosecution process of those involved in the killing of human rights activist Nizar Banat in June 2021 has not yet been satisfactory. There has been an increase in online and physical violence against journalists, including against politically divergent media outlets. While the Media Bill represents progress, it has failed to protect journalists against institutionalized censorship as well as self-censorship. In addition to Israeli

pressure on Palestinian civil society through the designation of six civil society organisations (CSOs) as "terrorist organizations" and the following office raids and arrests in 2022, the PA has also contributed to shrinking civic space; most recently through a number of recent presidential decrees undermining the independence and activities of non-profit companies. In Gaza the right to freedom of expression remains under severe pressure, and the human rights situation overall is assessed as challenging.

Arbitrary detention continues to be a matter of concern, with regular complaints being lodged to the Independent Commission on Human Rights, including on violations of the right to due process of law, detention without providing fair trial guarantees, and detention upon orders of a governor. Recent developments regarding the number of death penalty sentences issued and five executions carried out in Gaza in September 2022 were publicly condemned by the EU Heads of Missions in Jerusalem and Ramallah. These were the first executions since 2017.

Rule of law in the West Bank has continued to deteriorate, with a number of developments that have infringed the independence of the judiciary, the fairness of judicial processes and the integrity and transparency of the overall justice system. The continued practice of resorting to Presidential decrees contributed to a further weakening of both the judiciary and legislative powers. Although positive steps have been carried out towards improving law and policy making procedures to make them more participatory, inclusive, transparent and targeted (through EU funded assistance) the irregular law-making process hampers legal harmonization.

Freedom of religion or belief is generally well observed. Even though the Basic Law of Palestine[6] states that women have the same rights as men, gender equality, domestic and gender-based violence remain a challenge. 2022 saw limited progress towards repealing laws discriminating against women and passing legislation to protect women from violence. The draft Family Protection Bill has not yet been promulgated into law. Failings in the protection of LGBTI persons continue to represent a serious concern.

With regard to social rights and public health there have been noticeable efforts to launch a social registry as well as to strengthen the referral system.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In 2022, the EU continued its support for Palestinian state building, rule of law and justice, as well as on service delivery to the most vulnerable people and on sustainable economic development. Cross-cutting issues (gender equality, youth, environmental protection, human rights, and support for civil society) were mainstreamed in all sectors. The EU has also followed the guidelines established by the Joint European Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Palestine, which has sought to contribute towards an environment in which CSOs are fully able to participate in Palestinian society.

The EU continued to engage in human rights and democracy discussions with the Palestinian Authority (*not with the de facto authorities in Gaza*). In this regard, the EU continued its structured dialogue with the PA on human rights issues through European Neighbourhood

[6] 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.

Policy mechanisms, including the EU-PA subcommittee on human rights, good governance, and rule of law on 17 November 2022.

The Office of the EU Representative in Jerusalem (EUREP) carried out a large number of actions at local level. These included local statements, field visits, and attendance at court hearings. Issues of concern were raised at regular meetings with Palestinian counterparts. EUREP also engaged with CSOs to obtain information and to explain and promote the EU's position. The EU has also continued to advocate for the holding of presidential and parliamentary elections.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2022, the EU continued to provide financial support for human rights and democracy-related programmes and projects. Sustainable development in Palestine is supported in line with the aim of the two-state solution based on parameters set out in the Council Conclusions of July 2014.

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5. Multilateral context: Since 2012 Palestine has been a non-member observer state in the UN. It has ratified more than 50 conventions, including the seven key human rights conventions. As regards the rights of the child, the PA has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and on 25 July 2021 published it in the official Gazette. Nevertheless, the PA still needs to finalize an action plan on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to implement the recommendations/concluding observations of the Respective CRC Treaty Committee received in February 2020. The UN Convention against Torture (UNCAT) was signed by Palestine in March 2014 but regular complaints of torture and ill-treatment in detention centers continue in both Gaza and the West Bank. Although no executions have been carried out in the West Bank since 2006, capital punishment remains in domestic legislation and, despite statements by the Presidency, there is no official moratorium on the abolition of the death penalty.

Kingdom of Morocco

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the Moroccan government focused on the socio-economic reform package in an attempt to overcome the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this context, a compulsory health insurance scheme was finalised, which ensures equitable access to universal healthcare cover, family allocations, unemployment insurance and pensions for Moroccan citizens. The reform reinforces social assistance and rights of vulnerable persons (protection and care, including for migrants) following a rights-based approach. In the education sector, progress was registered in the pre-schooling enrolment and efforts were made to launch the reform of the higher education system.

In the area of fight against corruption, Morocco made only limited progress through the implementation of the 2015-2025 Anti-Corruption Strategy. Draft laws on conflict of interest, illicit enrichment and on the protection of whistle-blowers were put on hold. The country has an active civil society sector, which mostly focuses on questions related to social or cultural areas.

Challenges remain as regards the freedom of expression and freedom of the press, including the use of tactics, such as intimidation, surveillance and harassment of journalists. Significant challenges remain as regards the prevention of torture and the fight against impunity. The draft Penal Code has been pending adoption since 2016, without progress.

Morocco's National Human Rights Council reported that sexual harassment and gender-based violence are widespread against female staff and students at Moroccan universities. Morocco should further train law enforcement and court officials in handling domestic violence cases. Morocco has improved its legal and institutional framework to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, however the implementation of adopted legislation remains limited.

Some positive developments took place regarding the judiciary: two laws aimed at improving the status of magistrates and at streamlining the internal management of High Council of the Judiciary, were adopted.

Morocco continued to pursue efforts to manage migration, including providing protection and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers, but has yet to adopt the asylum and migration laws pending since 2014. The UNHCR has registered an increase of requests for refugee status and asylum in Morocco from 10,000 (June 2021) to 19,437 (January 2023) of asylum seekers and refugees, with a notable increase of applicants of Sudanese and Libyan origin. A migration incident erupted on 24 June 2022 at the Moroccan-Spanish border crossing point of Nador/Melilla when more than 2500 mostly Sudanese migrants attempted to cross into Spain, resulting in the death of 23 migrants and five Moroccan police officers.

Morocco has been observing an undeclared moratorium on the application of the death penalty since 1993. No executions took place in 2022.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The main areas of cooperation include: the strengthening of processes and institutions that guarantee democracy and the rule of the law, in particular the National Human Rights Council (CNDH); decentralisation and regionalisation; the reform of the justice system; the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms; freedom of expression and media professionalization and freedoms of association and assembly; promotion of women's rights and gender equality; children's rights and the rights of vulnerable people; cooperation with the Council of Europe; and the fight against corruption.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU's political engagement in Morocco continued to build on the 2019 Joint Political Declaration. In May 2022, the EU and Morocco held the Sub-Committee on Migration and Social Affairs, which addressed, inter alia, aspects related to labour and social rights and social protection. The EU Delegation regularly discussed the human rights situation with the CNDH, civil society actors and human rights defenders.

4. EU financial commitment: The EU provided support to civil society actors, through several thematic and sectoral instruments. This support focused on: promotion of participatory democracy and strengthening of civil society involvement in public policies at local and regional levels; strengthening the institutional capacity of the CNDH and the International Delegation for Human Rights (DIDH) to ensure efficiency when addressing human rights violations, and to enhance human rights protection mechanisms, including the torture prevention mechanism; implementation of the Civil Society Roadmap.

EU's financial support also targeted public administration reform, justice sector reform, with the aim to strengthen applicability of the rule of law and to ensure a more accessible, independent and internationally compliant justice system, which offers increased access and protection for the individuals. The EU continued to support education, training and literacy in line with the new relevant Framework Law that strengthens the right for education for all.

5. Multilateral context: Morocco is a state party to all major UN conventions on human rights and is an active member of several UN working groups, demonstrating good cooperation on human rights. On 11 October 2022, Morocco was elected – for the third time – to the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2023-2025.

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) 41st Session started examining Morocco on 8 November 2022. Morocco presented the progress made in the fields of preventing and eliminating violence and discrimination against women, strengthening the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, the use of death penalty, safeguarding the freedom of press, etc. Morocco received recommendations, including on violence and discrimination against women, gender equality (especially when it comes to marriage), the decriminalisation of consensual sexual relations outside marriage, child marriages, rights of persons with disabilities, freedom of expression and the abolition of the death penalty. Morocco also received a number of recommendations related to the situation in Western Sahara.

Western Sahara

Western Sahara is listed by the United Nations as a non-self-governing territory, whose status remains the object of a negotiation process conducted under the auspices of the UN. This dedicated UN-led process assists the relevant parties in achieving a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution, based on compromise, in the context of arrangements consistent with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations.
The UN Security Council agreed on 27 October 2022 through its Resolution 2654 to renew the mandate of the UN peacekeeping mission in Western Sahara, MINURSO (*Mission des Nations Unies pour l'Organisation d'un Référendum au Sahara Occidental*) for a period of one year. The resolution draws attention to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Tindouf refugee camps and about the increased need for funding; it urges aid agencies to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance in accordance with United Nations best practice; it stresses the importance of improving the human rights situation in Western Sahara and the Tindouf camps, and encourages the parties to work with the international community to

develop and implement independent and credible measures to ensure full respect for human rights, bearing in mind their relevant obligations under international law; it encourages the parties to sustain and prioritize their efforts to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights in Western Sahara and the Tindouf refugee camps, including the freedoms of expression and association. It welcomes steps and initiatives taken by Morocco, and the role played by the National Council on Human Rights Commission operating in Dakhla and Laâyoune, as well as Morocco's interaction with Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council.

Following his appointment in October 2021 as the new Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Western Sahara, M. Staffan de Mistura established contacts with all concerned parties and paid several visits to the region. Despite the call, in UNSCR 2654, upon all parties to resume negotiations under the auspices of the Secretary-General without preconditions and in good faith, and the Personal Envoy's efforts, there has been no concrete relaunch of political negotiations to date.

The overall security situation remained fragile but stable, and was marked by low intensity incidents. The UNSC Resolution 2654 recognised the important role played by MINURSO and the need for it to conduct the safe and regular resupply of its team sites, to conduct patrols throughout its area of responsibility to fully implement its mandate.

The EU continued to fully back the UN process including the Personal Envoy, and encouraged the parties to return to the UN-led talks, as well as promote and protect human rights in Western Sahara.

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: President Tebboune has approved pardon measures on the eve of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the country's independence (5 July 2022). These measures concern several categories of detainees, including those under common law and those imprisoned for "gathering", arrested in the context of the Hirak marches. This decision enabled the release of dozens of prisoners of conscience who had not yet been tried or convicted. As regards those who had already been convicted, a specific law has been adopted by the parliament as an extension of the laws on the Rahma and civil concord[7].
Upon a proposal by the government, a draft organic law on associations has been put on the agenda of the Algerian Parliament for the 2022-2023 ordinary session. According to the explanatory memorandum, the purpose of this bill is to harmonise the Algerian law on associations with Article 53 of the new Algerian Constitution, under which "the right to create associations" is guaranteed.

This apparent comparative progress notwithstanding, the media landscape has witnessed a progressive reduction of opposition voices. Newspapers rarely criticise the authorities and

[7] These are amnesty laws for repentant members of terrorist groups and people imprisoned during the 1990s.

tend to align themselves with their positions. This change is due in particular to the pressure exerted through public advertising, which constitutes the primary financial source for local media.

A revision of the law on information (last updated in 2012) was proposed to Parliament in December 2022 and is pending debate. This law is one of the government's priorities for the year 2023.

The year 2022 was marked by an increasing closure of the civic space, impacted notably by the tightening of the legal framework targeting peaceful dissent. Several trials are underway, including cases of students, journalists and activists that have been ongoing for the past three years. Charges of terrorism and sabotage under Article 87 bis[8] are still very commonly used by prosecutors in such proceedings. Reportedly, on June 2022, Algeria had at least 260 prisoners of conscience held in 29 wilayas (districts).

According to the International Organisation for Migration, in recent years, many sub-Saharan migrants have turned to Algeria both as a country of transit and destination. Each week, a large number of migrants of different nationalities (mainly from West Africa) enter Algeria. Most arrive on Algerian territory across the 1 500 km border with Mali and Niger in the middle of the Sahara Desert. In response, there has been a growing interest in the challenges and opportunities represented by national and regional migratory flows in Algeria.

According to UNHCR, Algeria is equally a country of transit and destination when it comes to the situation of refugees. Algeria mainly hosts Sahrawi refugees – in five camps near Tindouf - and 11 500 refugees and asylum-seekers in urban areas, the majority of whom are. Syrians (80 per cent), with sub-Saharan Africans accounting for the remaining 20 per cent.

2. EU action on Human Rights and Democracy - key focus areas: Consultations with civil society organisations and actors were held by video conference in May 2022 in preparation for the fourth round of the Universal Periodic Review. The main areas of cooperation identified by the EU-Algeria Partnership priorities for 2017-2020, currently being updated, include governance, participatory democracy, the promotion and defence of fundamental rights, enhancing the role of women in society, decentralisation, strengthening the judicial system and reinforcing the role of civil society.

Refugee protection is an integral part of EU-funded humanitarian projects in five Sahrawi refugee camps in south-west Algeria, near Tindouf.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU has regularly raised the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms with the Algerian authorities, in particular during high-level visits, and also during the meeting of the Political Dialogue, Security and Human Rights"Subcommittee conducted in the framework of the EU-Algeria Association Agreement. The main human rights issues addressed during the high-level meetings included freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of association.

[8] Article 87 bis of the Penal Code (amended in 2021) defines the crime of terrorism or sabotage as any act against State security, national unity and the stability and normal functioning of Stateinstitutions.

4. EU financial commitment: The EU renewed its support to the Algerian agenda for local development and participatory democracy in partnership with UNDP: the Capacity-Building Programme for Local Development Actors (CapDeL) was extended until the end of 2022. This programme allowed the emergence of young actors (many of them women) and new collaborations between civil society and local authorities.

In the field of Justice reform and rule of law, numerous training courses were organised in 2022 in the framework of the "Programme d'Appui au secteur de la Justice en Algérie" (PASJA), for professionals in the sector such as notaries, magistrates and lawyers. The programme, launched in 2017, aims to modernise the justice sector by “contributing to strenghtening the rule of law and fair, impartial and quality justice”.

5. Multilateral context: Algeria has ratified all major international human rights treaties, but not yet signed the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. However, the country applies a moratorium on the enforcement of death penalty since 1993. On 11 October 2022 the UN General Assembly elected Algeria to the Human Rights Council (HRC) for the 2023-2025 term.

Furthermore, Algeria has maintained a moratorium on executions since 1993 and has regularly voted in favour of United Nations resolutions calling for its implementation worldwide.

The human rights situation in Algeria was examined for the fourth time in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review of the HRC on 11 November 2022 in Geneva. Algiers was asked to repeal the amendments to Article 87 bis of the Penal Code which "contains an overly broad definition of terrorism". The Committee on the Rights of the Child urged Algeria to review and amend the existing legislation in order to fully comply with the object and purpose of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the interpretation provided by the Committee.

Republic of Tunisia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The President of the Republic implemented the political roadmap announced in 2021, which included the drafting of a new Constitution and subsequent referendum on 25 July 2022, and two rounds of legislative elections, which took place on 17 December 2022 and 29 January 2023, respectively. The turnout at all polls was very low and largely boycotted by the political opposition, which was excluded from any consultative process. The new Constitution strongly reinforces the role of the President who now enjoys broad executive powers and clearly has the upper institutional hand over a weakened legislative and judiciary.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are still enshrined in the new Constitution but institutional guarantees for their protection have been weakened. Individual rights were broadly respected during the past year. However, there were growing concerns with regard to political and civil rights, including freedom of expression via decree-law nº 54 on

cybercrime, which provides for harsh penalties for spreading fakes news and rumours. Trials of civilians in military courts have continued and the 2014 constitutional provision limiting their jurisdiction to members of the army has not been maintained in the new Constitution. Also, the government has expressed its intention to review decree 2011-88 on associations in the context of the fight against terrorism, which raises concerns over further restrictions of civic space. Socio-economic rights are under stress given the dire economic situation Tunisia, which was already fragile and severely deteriorated further due to halting progress on reforms, notably the lack of agreement with the IMF as well as the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Tunisia has ratified the UN convention on the rights of refugees. However, the adoption of an asylum law is still pending. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) registered a total of 8 940 individuals between 2018 and 2022. There was a decrease in the number of individuals registered in 2022, with 1 448 refugees and asylum-seekers, compared to 2021, when 3 183 were registered. The main countries of origin of refugees and asylum-seekers in Tunisia are Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan and Syria.

2. EU action on Human Rights and Democracy: The EU continued its work on gender equality and gender-based violence, including by coordinating efforts with Member States on the ground. Apart from the development of targeted programmes, the EU Delegation in cooperation with Member State embassies carried out public diplomacy activities around International Women's Day on 8 March and the 16 days of activism against gender–based violence.

The EU civil society roadmap (2022 – 2027) aims to facilitate cooperation with civil society and support horizontal integration of human rights, gender equality and social inclusion of vulnerable groups, notably LGBTI, in their work. Other actions include the development and implementation of programmes focused on education, healthcare and youth as well as the continuation of ongoing projects in a wide range of sectors.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU regularly engages Tunisian authorities as well as civil society on human rights issues as well as the evolution of the political and economic situation in the country, including continuing its support to civil society in this domain. Such outreach was also conducted on the occasion of several high level visits, most notably that of the European Commissioner for Justice, as well as the visits of delegations of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee and its Subcommittee on Human Rights.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU has continued working on gender equality and violence against women, developing two new programmes aimed at protecting Tunisian women and girls from all forms of gender-based violence. Several centres and/or shelters for women victims of violence were selected to benefit from the technical and financial support of the programme over the next four years.

On the healthcare sector, the existing *Essaha Aziza* programme continued to deliver positive results when it comes to supporting the quality of primary health care services and access to for the most vulnerable. This project is of particular importance in the aftermath of the Covdid-19 pandemic.

Building on existing youth, education and employability projects, the EU developed a new programme aimed at creating new opportunities for the Tunisian youth. Similarly, programmes on innovation and entrepreneurship also continued.

Other relevant initiatives on Human Rights were also implemented in the past year, for instance, a programme to strengthen emerging civil society organisations and support measures to social inclusion, just to name a few.

5. Multilateral context: Tunisia underwent its regular Universal Periodic Review in November 2022. Most recommendations focused on the death penalty, prosecution of civilians in military tribunals, gender equality, LGBTI rights and rights of migrants. Some also addressed the dissolution of the parliament and the anti-corruption authority, the recent cybersecurity law and the issue of judicial independence. Tunisia accepted 185 recommendations, noted 54 and undertook to examine 44 before giving a final reply. The "noted" recommendations focused mainly on the abolition of death penalty, revision of the Personal Status Code, abrogation of article 230 of the Criminal Code, ratification of the Convention on the rights of migrant workers, as well as those concerning freedom of press and freedom of expression (including revision of cybersecurity law) and the 'restoration of Constitutional order'. Authorities are still examining recommendations concerning the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, revision of Military Justice Code, Criminal Code, reinstallation of the anti-corruption authority, prosecution of civilians in military tribunal and implementation of the Truth and Dignity commission report.

Russia and Central Asia

Russia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine accelerated repression on the domestic scene, both in terms of more restrictive legislation and increased number of human right violations. In 2022, the Russian Federation continued the use of repressive legislation to impede the exercise of civil and political rights. Already the first days following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine brought criminalisation of protests and increasingly brutal violence against the anti-war protesters. The Russian authorities intensified their efforts cracking down on journalists and media workers, human rights defenders, activists, and even random anti-war-minded people, to silence any criticism of its war in Ukraine. Russia expanded its repressive legislation in contravention of its international human rights obligations. New categories were introduce to the so-called "foreign agent" legislation. These include "person affiliated with a foreign agent" or "organisation or person under foreign influence", which have been used to target individual activists and journalists, educational institutions, media outlets, commercial entities, as well as NGOs. Russian citizens living abroad can also be designated as "foreign agents". Over the

last year, many NGOs, grass-roots organisations and movements were liquidated, listed as "foreign agents" or banned as so-called "undesirable organisations". Many civil society activists had to either stop their activity or flee the country for their own safety. The Criminal Code was amended in July, introducing long prison terms for "creating threats to the national security". The law on "public dissemination of deliberately false information about the use of the Armed Forces", the so-called "fake-news" law resulted in a "total information blackout on the war" not allowing civil society any space for freedom of expression. Sharing information about the war that deviates from the Russian official position has become punishable with up to 15 years in prison. The anti-extremism law was updated and actively (mis)used by the Russian authorities to limit civic participation and exercise of political rights. The announced "partial" mobilisation generated protests across the country and resulted in thousands of arbitrary arrests of protesters and a new exodus of Russian citizens abroad.

In 2022, the legislation further tightened censorship and information control and had a significant impact on the Russian media landscape. Many independent media in Russia either had to close down, were blocked and/or left the country. More than 200 000 Internet resources have been blocked since 24 February 2022. The Russian authorities are actively carrying out a clearly coordinated and state-funded information manipulation on the war. Political trials are one of the primary tools of the Russian authorities in dealing with political opposition figures and critical voices in Russia today. The most notorious political trial concerns the case of Alexei Navalny, who continues serving his 11.5-years prison sentence, spending most of his time in solitary confinement.

In 2022, the Russian authorities continued persecuting Crimean Tatars and issuing long-term prison sentences on terrorism charges. The discriminatory policies and laws against LGBTI and religious communities, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, remain unchanged or have in some cases even been further strengthened. Discrimination against women and girls, based on the "traditional family values" rhetoric and sexual and gender-based violence remain widespread, with poor rule of law and corruption impacting access to justice. The situation in Chechnya is marked by continued unlawful actions towards human rights defenders and their relatives, including torture, fabrication of evidence and enforced disappearances.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2022, the European Union's support was crucial for enabling Russian civil society organisations to continue their work in an ever more restrictive environment. Rising public awareness of the human rights violations in Russia and using several instruments, trial observation included, are used to support to the individuals under pressure. The EU programmes help civic activists stay connected with their European partners and within the common European agenda based on rule of law and human rights.

In the current circumstances, activities engaging Russian authorities are not possible. In the absence of a human rights dialogue with Russian authorities, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights frequently consulted on the situation of human rights in Russia with civil society, international organisations, like-minded countries. Following the cessation of Russia's membership in the Council of Europe (CoE), the joint CoE-Russia project on legislative and regulatory reforms to combat sexual and gender-based violence was stopped, affecting negatively the work on gender equality and women's rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: As a response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine as of 24 February 2022, the EU suspended all bilateral engagement with Russia, including programmes and projects with Russian public bodies and state-owned enterprises across all policy areas. All contacts and forms of EU funding and support in and to Russia has to be also in line with existing EU restrictive measures.

The EU remains committed to support NGOs, civil society organisations, human rights defenders and independent journalists inside and outside Russia, in line with the European Council Conclusions of June 2021. The EU continued raising concerns over human rights situation, undue restrictions on civil society, legislative developments and individual cases using public statements and social media. The EU publicly communicated on various commemoration events, like those related to the Remembrance of Victims of Political Repression and the poisoning and sentencing of Alexei Navalny and assassination of Boris Nemtsov.

4. EU financial engagement: Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, all activities with Russian state-linked entities under existing contracts were suspended and measures were taken to proceed with the effective termination of the Russian participations in the Cross Border Cooperation and the Northern Dimension programmes. The EU continued to engage directly with Russian civil society, human rights defenders and independent media inside and outside Russia.

5. Multilateral context: The human rights and democracy situation in Russia has consistently been on the agenda of regular meetings of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Vienna. The EU has regularly addressed the situation in Russia in its statements at the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly Third Committee. Russia has not made any real progress in executing judgments of the ECtHR. In several cases, including the Navalny case, Russia is stressing the supremacy of national courts in the interpretation and application of national law.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe deplored a number of negative tendencies in Russia with regard to democracy, the rule of law and human rights, and called on Russia to fulfil all the recommendations made in a series of Assembly resolution The international community has reacted to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in a strong and united manner, isolating Russia in multilateral fora. On 17 March 2022, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe decided to cease the membership of the Russian Federation in the Council of Europe as of 16 March. Russia subsequently itself decided to cease to be a high contracting party to the European Convention on Human Rights in September 2022. At the end of 2022, there were 16.750 pending cases against Russia in the European Court of Human Rights.

The UN human rights mechanisms have become increasingly important to address the human rights situation in Russia. Since Russia's invasion, the UN General Assembly passed four resolutions in 2022 on Russia's aggression against Ukraine (2 March), the humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine (24 March), the suspension of Russia's membership in the UN Human Rights Council (7 April) and Russia's attempted illegal annexations in four regions of Ukraine (12 October). In October, the UN Human Rights Council

adopted an EU-led resolution that strongly urged the Russian authorities to comply with all of the State's obligations under international human rights law and created the mandate of a special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation for a period of one year.

Kazakhstan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Kazakhstan is still recovering from the tragic events of January 2022. These events have not only reshaped the political reality in the country but have also changed the shape of the political transition that has been ongoing since 2019. President Tokayev consolidated his power, and will remain in office until the end of his single term in 2029. Wide-ranging reforms were adopted, which are already partly being implemented, for example, two new political parties were registered for the first time since 2009. One year later, a full, transparent and independent investigation into January 2022 events did not show any sign of completion. Beyond the January investigation, some general progress was made in the area of human rights, for example, the Commissioner for Human Rights was granted increased powers and budget, as well as a network of regional offices. Overall, 324 cases of torture were registered during January 2022 events; currently, six cases are under investigation. The investigation of only one case of torture has been concluded so far, with two police officers receiving prison terms.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU action in the area of human rights in Kazakhstan was implemented based on the first four strands of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024. Several demarches were carried out concerning human rights (refer to point 5. Multilateral context). On 9 December 2022, to mark International Human Rights Day, the EU organised an event in Almaty, dedicated to Media and Human Rights. It was especially relevant in view of the fact that during the tragic January events, the right to freedom of the media was not respected, many journalists were detained and one journalist died. The event brought together students, journalists and activists, and was transmitted live on the social media channels of the Delegation. The event was organised in cooperation with the Dutch Embassy and Internews (REVIVE project).

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU raised human rights issues in all its high level dialogues held with Kazakhstan throughout 2022; EU-Kazakhstan Cooperation Committee (31 March), EU-Kazakhstan Cooperation Council (20 June). The Human Rights Dialogue and the Justice and Home Affairs Subcommittee were postponed to early 2023. In addition, the EU Delegation, together with Member States and like-minded Embassies, monitored trials, for example that of Zhanbolat Mamai, leader of the unregistered opposition party DPK, and the police officers accused of torture of detained protesters with a hot iron in Taldykorgan. The EU Delegation was in regular contact with the Commissioner for Human Rights on individual cases. During regular dialogues, the EU stressed the importance of a full, transparent and independent investigation into the January 2022 events, including on human rights violations. The EU also expressed, among other issues, concerns on the law on public assemblies, on the draft law on media (including defamation), and on the blocking of independent trade unions. The EU acknowledged the continuing reform process in Kazakhstan, and underlined the

importance of effective implementation with the active participation of civil society. In line with international standards, the EU called on Kazakhstan to take further steps to conduct prompt, thorough, impartial and independent investigations into all allegations of torture following January 2022 events, and to bring all perpetrators to justice. The EU also stressed the importance of tangible results in addressing obstacles to freedom of expression, freedom of the media, freedom of assembly and association.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the EU Delegation has been managing six bilateral human rights related projects under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) for a total amount of EUR 2.7 million. These projects aim at supporting women human rights defenders and human rights defenders working for the rights of women and girls where they are the most at risk, enhancing the migrants' access to justice and promoting the elimination of torture and ill-treatment. There are also projects to develop democratic foundations of modern policing with respect to human rights, increasing media and legal literacy, new media and communication capacity of human rights organizations and civic initiatives, and improving the quality of life in rural districts of Western Kazakhstan through public service delivery and state resource allocation, which effectively meets local needs. These projects contribute to the development and institutionalisation of interactions between civil society and public authorities, which, in turn can have a positive impact on the development of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights and freedoms in Kazakhstan.

The EU also continued its support programme for the education of Afghan women in Kazakhstan and other countries of Central Asia. The EU also facilitated TAIEX-financed technical assistance for the office of the Commissioner for Human Rights to support the National Prevention Mechanism. The EU is coordinating further short medium and long-term technical assistance to this institution, together with other donors present in the country, for example, OSCE and UN. The EU is also facilitating technical assistance in the area of human rights-friendly prison design through TAIEX. The EU also continued to implement the "Central Asia Rule of Law Programme". Since November 2019, a joint EU - Council of Europe programme (48 months) is reinforcing human rights, rule of law and democracy in accordance with European and international standards.

5. Multilateral context: Throughout 2022, the EU and its member states, and in some cases with like-minded countries, presented several demarches to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan on human rights related issues. These demarches in relation to the Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly Third Committee concerned, for example, the human rights situation in Russia, Belarus, China/Xinjiang, and Russia's military invasion of Ukraine. In March 2022, Kazakhstan abstained from the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine; in April 2022, it voted against the suspension of Russia from the UN Human Rights Council and on 12 October, Kazakhstan abstained on the UN resolution condemning the illegal annexation by Russia of Ukrainian territories. On 15 December 2022, Kazakhstan voted against the UN resolution demanding Russia to stop its military aggression and to withdraw all its military forces from Ukraine.

The Kyrgyz Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Kyrgyzstan has been worsening, with some negative trends in areas such as freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, media, good governance, labour rights. Civil society organisations have been increasingly under pressure. Their situation deteriorated with the adoption of laws on NCO financial obligations and on False Information. Systemic barriers are still in place as regards the prevention of torture: modern forensic medicine is still missing, obstacles on conducting visits are still in place and the Istanbul protocol to report on cases of torture is not fully in use. Kyrgyzstan ranked 140th of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perception index, indicating a high level of corruption in the public sector[9], although a positive development was the adoption of the Anti-Corruption Strategy by the Government.

The situation of national minorities showed little change and they continue to face discrimination in access to employment. The rights of persons belonging to religious minorities, while legally recognised, are not always respected. Discrimination against LGBTI persons remains unaddressed. Among the positive developments are the adoption of a national gender strategy and of legislation improving the protection of the rights of the child.

2. EU action – key focus areas: Throughout 2022, the EU and its Member States used various tools and engaged in activities to support human rights and democracy in the country. The implementation of the Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2021-2025 (GAP III) is ongoing. In development cooperation, the EU flagship project "Rule of Law in the Kyrgyz Republic – phase 2" supported ongoing legal and judicial reform, the establishment of a more professional, independent, accountable and transparent judicial system, the introduction of e-justice in all courts, and the development and functioning of an online register of crimes and misdemeanours.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU regularly engages with authorities on human rights issues in a number of formats, including at the highest level. In September 2022, the 12th EU-Kyrgyzstan Human Rights Dialogue took place in Bishkek. A broad range of issues were discussed in detail: controversial legislative initiatives, good governance, national human rights institutional framework, rule of law, rights of persons belonging to minorities, women's rights, prevention of torture, anti-discrimination, LGBTI rights and EU projects related to strengthening human rights and the rule of law. The EU raised several individual cases. Since 2016, the Kyrgyz Republic has been a beneficiary of the Special Incentive Arrangement for Sustainable Development and Good Governance (GSP+). Throughout the year, monitoring activities on human rights under GSP+ commitments continued and a dedicated mission visited Kyrgyzstan in September 2022. Local civil society was regularly consulted on important relevant issues, e.g. human rights developments, programming activities, including consultations on future programming. Each senior level EU official visiting Kyrgyzstan conducted meetings with the civil society, and followed up on concerns raised with the authorities. The EU delegation ensured regular and active dialogue with local and international

[9] And a score of 27 in 2022, down from 31 in 2020, indicating a worsening trend. https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/kgz

human rights defenders on various issues of concern and in preparation for the annual human rights dialogue.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU continued to provide significant financial support to projects in the field related to rule of law and human rights, funded by the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) and Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation instrument (NDICI), the Human Rights and Democracy (HRD) and Civil Society Organisations (CSO) thematic programmes, and the Instrument contributing to Peace and Stability (IcSP).

The EU supported the "Rule of Law in the Kyrgyz Republic - phase 2" (May 2018-November 2022), implemented by GIZ with a consortium of mandated bodies of EU Member States, dedicated to supporting judiciary reform, including independence of the judiciary.

The EIDHR-funded project "HERo – New narratives towards a gender equal society" contributed to the development of the National Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic until 2030 and the National Action Plan for Achieving Gender Equality for 2021-2023 and provided nationwide consultations with the participation of state bodies, representatives of local authorities, international organizations, NGOs and activists. The Government approved the Strategy and Plan in September 2022. The project also provided with implementation costs of the newly adopted National Gender Development Strategy 2022-2030 and its first Action Plan 2024 for the first time in order to promote clear provisions on gender responsive budgeting.

5. Multilateral context: The EU teamed up with the OHCHR and International Labour Organization on several occasions to raise concerns on human rights in Kyrgyzstan. The EU carried out demarches on EU priorities and initiatives at the UN General Assembly Third Committee. Together with the UN and EU Member States Embassy Court hearings monitoring on prominent human rights cases were conducted. The EU Delegation made a tailor made joint statement with the like-minded Embassies on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists.

Tajikistan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Tajikistan's human rights record worsened in 2022, deteriorating in the areas of freedom of the media, freedom of expression, the situation of human rights defenders and minority rights. The working environment for independent media significantly deteriorated with an increasing number of journalists sentenced to lengthy prison terms. Serious concerns with the many obstacles to media freedom in the country were raised by the OSCE Representative for Media Freedom during her visit to Tajikistan on 3-7 October 2022. In the 2022 World Press Index of Reporters Without Borders, Tajikistan ranked 152/180. Of particular concern was the situation in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous region (GBAO), following protests with deadly clashes, which culminated in an "anti-terrorist operation" by security forces, claiming dozens of lives of

dozens and leading to numerous detentions. Ensuing trials of protesters and local human rights defenders led to extremely harsh prison sentences.

Scrutiny and pressure increased on human rights defenders and civil society organisations, considerably worsening their already precarious situation. Several human rights defenders received heavy prison sentences, especially in connection with the crisis in GBAO. Following her visit to Tajikistan at the end of 2022, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights denounced a climate of fear for human rights defenders in the country. At the same time, the space for political participation continued to be extremely limited in a country with a highly centralised political system. In the 2022 Freedom in the World 2022 Country Report of Freedom House, Tajikistan's scored 8/100 points for political rights and civil liberties.

In addition to the described internal context, the situation at the border with Kyrgyzstan, in particular the several waves of armed clashes during the year, with the bloodiest incidents in September 2022, has been cause for concern with the human rights of the population residing in border areas affected by the conflict.

On a positive note, an anti-discrimination law was adopted for the first time in July 2022, which was welcomed as a major achievement for the country, yet the text was criticised as it does not list sexual orientation and gender identity as characteristics protected from discrimination. The authorities also showed commitment to make progress on gender equality and advance women's rights. However, domestic violence remained endemic, with a long-standing proposal to criminalise it not adopted in the national legislation in 2022

2. EU action - key focus areas: Activities from both Head Quarters and the EU Delegation in Dushanbe pursued through political and financial means a vast array of EU priorities for the country, including the empowerment of civil society; support to independent media and access to information, including digital rights; gender equality and women's rights; upholding the rule of law; rights of people with disability; and supporting penitentiary system reform. Given the worsening of the situation of independent media and of human rights defenders, a special emphasis was given to this area. The EU-UN Global Spotlight Initiative continued in 2022 to provide support to the Government of Tajikistan in eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In the course of 2022, the EU continued to monitor human rights developments in Tajikistan, held political dialogues with the authorities and actively co-operated with civil society and international organisations. On 7 December 2022, the 13th EU-Tajikistan Human Rights Dialogue took place in Dushanbe. During the dialogue, the EU side raised the most concerning issues, with particular focus on freedom of expression and access to information offline and online, as well as the working environment for journalists, human rights defenders, and the human rights situation in GBAO. The EU urged the Tajik authorities to uphold its human rights commitments, including the international fair trial standards. The Human Rights Dialogue was coupled in the same week by an European Commission fact-finding mission on Tajikistan's pre-accession process to the GSP+ tariff scheme. In addition, the visits of a group of Members of the European Parliament (February), the European Commissioner for Environment (June), as well as the several visits of the EUSR

for Central Asia, provided important opportunities to promote the human rights agenda at the highest level.

On 8 December 2022, the Council adopted directives for the negotiation of a new Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Tajikistan. The agreement will reflect the ambitions of the EU and Tajikistan to strengthen their bilateral relationship, and EU will negotiate an enhanced agreement that will support Tajikistan's reform agenda.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, a number of human rights projects focusing, inter alia, on civil society support, freedom of expression, penitentiary reform and torture, and gender equality were operating. The new phase of the Spotlight Initiative, that aims at contributing to elimination of gender-based violence against women and girls, was launched. While EIDHR projects continued to run, during the year a new call for proposals under the thematic programme on Human Rights and Democracy was launched. CSO-LA projects in 2022 focused on youth employment and empowerment, rights of people with disabilities, climate change and digital empowerment and awareness. Among initiatives within the CSO-LA projects, a rehabilitation centre for children with disabilities was inaugurated in southern Tajikistan. In addition, a Youth Forum brought together young Tajiks from the remote rural districts and the city of Dushanbe with successful young entrepreneurs. Various FPI-funded projects in the country contributed to the promotion of the rights of national minorities, women, youth, freedom of media and speech and awareness of refugee laws and international human rights related to detainees.

5. Multilateral context: Following the third Universal Periodic Review of Tajikistan which took place on 4 November 2021, the review outcome was adopted at the 49th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2022. Tajikistan accepted (totally or partially) 169 of the total of 234 received recommendations, related to legal and general framework of implementation, universal and cross-cutting issues, civil and political rights, economic, social, and cultural rights, women's rights, children's rights, and other specific groups and persons.

On 27 October 2022, a demarche on priorities at the 77th session of UNGA Third Committee and a demarche in support of the Resolution on the moratorium on the use of the death penalty were delivered at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan.

Turkmenistan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the internal political situation in Turkmenistan was marked by the transition of presidential power from Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to his son Serdar following snap elections on 12 March. OSCE ODIHR did not observe the elections because "the authorities have not engaged in follow-up to ODIHR [past] recommendations", due to "the constrained time frame" and the obligatory quarantine in the country[10]. Former president Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov continued to

[10] OSCE ODIHR NAM report of 12 March 2022

exert significant political influence as the chair of the upper chamber of the parliament. New president Serdar Berdimuhamedov has not introduced systemic reforms in the field of human rights or democracy, but in December in a welcome move pardoned four prisoners considered by human rights defenders to have been sentenced on politically motivated charges.

In 2022, Turkmenistan stepped-up cooperation with the International Labour Organisation to tackle the issue of forced labour. Despite the formal implementation of the second National Action Plan on Human Rights 2021-2025, all fundamental freedoms in the country are severely restricted. Corruption, which continues to be widespread in Turkmenistan, and the lack of access to reliable data, hamper effective implementation of government policies and much needed reforms.

Stability in the country continued to be assured thanks to the tight control of the population by the security apparatus. The economic situation of the population has not improved. A possibility to express dissatisfaction does not exist.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to support capacity building of Turkmen authorities to implement international human rights conventions and domestic legislation. The EU advocated for reforms of the judicial and prison systems. Following reports about cases of torture and enforced disappearances, the EU continued to encourage Turkmenistan to establish a National Preventive Mechanism for the monitoring of places of detention, to facilitate access to prisons for independent international monitoring bodies, to invite the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, and to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.

The EU continued supporting civil society and human rights defenders, including journalists. The EU advocated with Turkmen authorities to involve civil society in the process of drafting or amending legislation and implementing the human rights instruments. The EU Delegation to Turkmenistan conducted consultations with civil society and independent journalists on human rights issues. The EU continued to include issues relating to gender equality and women's rights in all its actions implemented in Turkmenistan.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The 14th EU-Turkmenistan Human Rights Dialogue (HRD) took place on 25 November 2022 in Ashgabat. This was the first HRD held in person since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The discussions covered all fundamental freedoms, allowed for clarifying respective positions and provided a good basis for future cooperation. Human rights were also part of discussions with Turkmen authorities during visits of the EU Special Representative for Central Asia to the country, as well as in EU Delegation's contacts with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and relevant line ministries. EEAS headquarters continued raising human rights related issues with the Embassy of Turkmenistan in Brussels.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, Turkmenistan continued benefitting from the following EU funded regional projects: (i) the Central Asia COVID-19 crisis response programme (phase 2) ; (ii) the Law Enforcement in Central Asia programme; and (iii) the EU-Central Asia Rule of Law programme.

The EU also supported capacity building of Turkmen civil society and advocated for Turkmenistan's participation in the Spotlight Initiative to counter violence against women. The EU co-financed a survey *On the status of women in the family*, the results of which were published by the Government of Turkmenistan in August 2022. The survey data is expected to be used to monitor and accelerate national progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 5 and to identify strategies for the prevention of, and response to, gender-based violence at various levels, in line with the National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2021-2025. Gender equality and women' rights are mainstreamed into all EU projects implemented in Turkmenistan.

5. Multilateral context: The EU kept Turkmen authorities informed in detail on EU positions on issues under consideration by the UNGA Third Committee and the UN Human Rights Council, seeking for alignment of positions whenever possible. In 2022, the EU strengthened cooperation with likeminded partners regarding human rights situation in Turkmenistan. The EU cooperates inter alia with the OHCHR and its Regional Office for Central Asia, as well as relevant UN agencies.

Uzbekistan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the Human Rights and Democracy situation in Uzbekistan deteriorated slightly. The country made some progress in respecting human rights in a few areas, notably with respect to eliminating systemic forced and child labour, and also with respect to the fight against corruption. However, the government's overall reform process slowed down and there were setbacks in some areas, especially as regards the freedom of expression. In July 2022, demonstrations in Karakalpakstan against proposed constitutional reforms led to severe repression and the deaths of at least 22 people.

Amendments to two important legal texts, the Criminal Code and the NGO Code, have been on hold for over one and a half years. In general, when it comes to human rights and democracy, there remain clear discrepancies between official statements and the reality on the ground. In a challenging geopolitical context, the process of implementing core human rights and democracy, by liberalising political life, nurturing a free, independent and vibrant civil society, and safeguarding freedom of expression, has not been prioritised.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU and its member states continued addressing human rights concerns and the strengthening of democratic institutions. Five demarches were carried out concerning human rights issues, including in support of EU priorities in the UN Human Rights Council. The EU Delegation observed two trials of bloggers. On the occasion of International Human Rights Day, the EU Delegation, together with the US Embassy, organised a roundtable on the state of freedom of expression in Central Asia, with the participation of media lawyers from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The event was organised with the support of the EU-funded regional project REVIVE, implemented by

Internews. It was attended by prominent journalists, bloggers, lawyers, as well as representatives of the Foundation on Mass Media, and the Agency on Mass Media.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights issues were raised and discussed in the EU-Uzbekistan Subcommittee on Justice and Home Affairs, in the Human Rights Dialogue and during the GSP+ first monitoring mission in March. A new Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Uzbekistan was initialled in July. The agreed text provides for more cooperation with the EU in the domain of Human Rights and Democracy. EU Member States also raised the human rights and democracy situation in the country during their bilateral meetings and political consultations. The EU Delegation participated in and co-sponsored two international conferences (in June and September 2022) organised by the National Human Rights Centre on proposed amendments to the Constitution. Human rights issues were at the centre of both conferences. Throughout the year, the EU Ambassador to Uzbekistan promoted the human rights agenda with Uzbekistan's government and parliament. Human rights and democracy were also raised in high level contacts (October 2022) between the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, and the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and between the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy/Vice President of the European Commission Josep Borrell and President Mirziyoyev (November 2022). The EU Special Representative for Central Asia, Ambassador Terhi Hakala, also raised human rights and democracy issues in her contacts with President Mirziyoyev (October 2022).

4. EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation in Uzbekistan launched a call for proposals aimed at (i) protecting and empowering civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, (ii) strengthening the capacities of civil society organisations (CSOs) and independent media to exercise fundamental freedoms to protect and support journalists, bloggers and other media workers, and (iii) safeguarding fundamental freedoms, including harnessing the opportunities, and addressing the challenges of new technologies to create and maintain an environment conducive to the full exercise of all fundamental freedoms, online and offline. The overall indicative amount made available under this call for proposals was EUR 800 000 from the 2021 budget and EUR 890 000 from the 2022 budget. Additional supplementary funding to the tune of EUR 400 000 was made available from the 2022 NDICI-Global Europe cushion. As a result of the call, six applications were awarded a grant. New projects mainly focus on empowering youth CSOs, gender equality, strengthening vulnerable communities and protecting and promoting the labour rights of vulnerable groups. The total EU contribution for the signed contracts is EUR 2 230 000.

5. Multilateral context: Uzbekistan became Vice President of the UN Human Rights Council on 24 January 2022. Despite the President's declaration in 2021 that Uzbekistan would ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, no progress was made in this regard and the planned visit of the UN Rapporteur on Torture was postponed due to the nomination of a new Rapporteur in August. At the multilateral level, Uzbekistan abstained on all country specific resolutions, including resolution 49/1 of March 2022 on the deteriorating human rights situation in Ukraine following Russia's aggression. This corresponds to the Uzbek foreign policy concept of non- interference in other countries' internal affairs.

Africa

African Union

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: At continental level, the African Union (AU) continued their work towards the strengthening of the Human Rights system on the continent. Main human rights organs continued their ordinary sessions, transitioning back to in-person events in the second semester. It was also known that the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (which commemorated their 35th anniversary in 2022) will, from now on, only have one in-person session in Banjul per year, due to a reduction in its functioning budget. This development is particularly concerning for civil society organizations, who appreciated the closer contact and awareness/lobby opportunities brought forward by a physical session congregating human rights actors from the continent.

The reorganization of the African Union Commission and merging of the departments of Political Affairs (previously in charge of Governance and Human Rights issues) and of Peace and Security, under the leadership of Commissioner Bankole Adeoye, continues to raise challenges for the Human Rights domain. The new Director for Governance and Conflict Prevention, Patience Chiradza (from Zimbabwe), took office in the end of August, with new appointments expected soon. This will be essential to guarantee that the Directorate can effectively deal with its vast mandate, particularly in face of conflicting priorities within the Department. The institutional merger should also lead to a closer intertwining of the African Governance Architecture and the African Peace and Security Architecture, the concrete details of which are not yet known.

The AU remained active on several areas of Human rights. Key events organised include the African Business and Human Rights Forum (together with UNDP), the 11th High-Level Dialogue on Democracy, Governance and Human Rights (under the theme Strengthening Democratic Governance Systems in Africa) and the sixth edition of the African Transitional Justice Forum. Unconstitutional Changes of Government were a matter of heightened attention during the year, with the holding of the Accra Forum (convened by the AU Peace and Security Council) and the Malabo Extraordinary Summit, which adopted the Accra Declaration, setting guidelines for future AU work on the matter. The African Peer Review Mechanism is also focusing its 2023 African Governance Report on this matter, which shall be essential to understand next actions and progress made.

2. EU action – key focus areas: the main issues of focus at the moment are transitional justice, elections, combatting armful practices (such as female genital mutilation) and human rights compliance in the framework of peace support operations. The EU also focusses on supporting efforts by the AU Commission and human rights organs to advocate for broader ratification of the regional human rights instruments, implementation of its provisions and periodic reporting by member states. Our action is also focused on growing our collaboration with the

AU as a whole, supporting the ongoing institutional reform for a better efficacy of the organization in the discharge of its mandate.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: the 18th AU-EU Human Rights Dialogue was originally scheduled for December 2022 in Brussels, but had to be postponed given the unavailability of the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Bankole Adeoye, and a firm decision to have it in a physical format. The dialogue co-chairs had the opportunity to meet in other occasions throughout the year, maintaining an ongoing conversation on these matters
After two years of hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the 10th AU-EU Civil Society Seminar was scheduled days before the foreseen AU-EU Human Rights Dialogue, for its recommendations to feed into the dialogue and Steering Committee. It was organized by the AU-EU CSO Steering Committee, with DG INTPA financial support. Civil Society Organisations (CSO) representatives were foreseen to attend a segment of the dialogue and exchange with officials of both institutions. Despite the dialogue's postponement, this is still foreseen and expected by CSOs.

This year's Civil Society seminar, held on 1-2 December in Brussels, joined more than 30 CSO representatives and aimed at assessing the impact of the work undertaken by civil society, as well as monitoring the concrete implementation of civil society recommendations and the commitments expressed by EU and AU institutions at each dialogue. The seminar sought to identify good practices of the institutions and civil society for the future, with the aim of reinforcing their input to the AU and EU, their member states and to overall EU-AU relations, both at inter-continental and at multilateral level.

The EU Special Representative for Human Rights Eamon Gilmore joined the closing session in-person, with AUC's Ambassador Salah Hammad (Head of African Governance Architecture Secretariat) joining virtually to represent PAPS Commissioner Bankole Adeoye. Both interventions reaffirmed the importance of civil society to the dialogue and the value of its inputs, reflecting also on achievements since the last dialogue edition. The debate that followed allowed for a frank exchange, with CSOs calling for more action by the AU related to its Member States when human rights violations take place and for EU support to these actions and broader civil society activity. Special attention was also paid to Economic, Social and Cultural Rights with the AU asking civil society to support the discussion about the right to development.

4. EU Financial Engagement: direct engagement with the AU is done through the African Governance Architecture (AGA) support programme, which includes direct grants to five bodies (African Peer Review Mechanism, African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Pan African Parliament); a technical assistance component targeting the same five bodies and also the African Union Advisory Board on Corruption and the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security of the African Union Commission.

The support programme also includes financing of actions focussing on promoting CSOs' participation and engagement with the AGA Platform; and supporting the implementation of the EU Strategy for Engagement with Pan African Civil Society. The EU has also recently started

supporting the African Union in the development of their Human Rights Compliance Framework for African Peace Support Operations, in partnership with the UN.

Two specific projects, one on transitional justice and other on elections, were also approved in 2022, with implementation due to start shortly. They are both aimed at increasing capacity of the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security of the African Union Commission in their respective domains, namely with the goal of helping the Department provide better assistance to AU Member States in these fields. An AU-UN (OHCHR) project on Human Rights Compliance in the framework of peace support operations also started in earnest in 2022.

5. Multilateral context: collaboration with the African Union in a multilateral context happens strictly on a country-by-country basis, as no defined Common African Position exists on Human Rights domain. Nevertheless, there is continental level engagement on specific issues, such as the protection of the comprehensive nature of the gender agenda and the universal abolition of the death penalty. Regarding the first one, discussions continue to be difficult at a continental level, notably on sexual reproductive health and rights and its sensitive rights-based dimension, despite the advocacy initiatives of the AU as an organization, which include collaboration with the EU and UN on Spotlight Initiative's Africa Regional Programme.

Angola

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Angola continues to face challenges in democratic governance and human development, with socio-economic rights suffering after years of economic recession, and concomitant worsening health and quality of life indicators. Youth especially struggle due to lack of jobs and career perspectives, which fuels increasing frustration and disappointment. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be felt, further aggravating the challenges for vulnerable groups. Concerns remain over the humanitarian situation in the southern provinces. The drought severely weakened the communities' resilience, with women, older people and children the most affected.

Angola has made progress with the implementation of the Angolan National Strategy for Human Rights adopted in 2020. Efforts to staff, finance, and operationalise the network of Local Human Rights Committees are ongoing. All 18 Provinces have established Provincial Human Rights Committees. In addition, all but one of the 164 municipalities have set up Municipal Committees. However, the vitality and work of these committees is uneven and depends on the pro-activeness and abilities of the people involved.

Throughout 2022, and in particular in the months before and weeks after the General Elections, there were episodes of excessive display and use of police force as well as human rights violations related to public demonstrations and freedom of association. Peaceful anti-government protests were blocked and dispersed. Several activists have been detained for months without trial. Activists are being detained without warrants at their homes, often by plainclothes officers.

The General Elections (for President and National Assembly) on 24 August were the main event of the year in terms of democracy. The EU deployed an Election Expert Mission. All observation missions expressed concerns about matters including voters' registration, restrictions on domestic and international election observation, the lack of independence of the National Election Commission and partisanship of the public media in favour of the ruling party, MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola).

Election Day was peaceful, no significant electoral or security related violence took place. The General Elections saw a relatively low turn-out, yet led to a shift in the political landscape, with the MPLA winning 124 seats with 51% of the votes and the main opposition party, UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) almost doubling the number of seats from 51 to 90, with 44% of the votes. No date has been set for the local elections, which have been announced and postponed.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to support human rights and democracy in Angola in partnership with the government, intermediary institutions and civil society. Following a rights-based approach, the protection of human rights and the fight against inequality form the basis of all EU actions in Angola. The Multiannual Indicative Programme for Angola for the period 2021-2027 identifies "transparent, accountable and effective governance" as a priority area. This priority responds to the interest of stakeholders for more inclusive governance and reflects the EU's support to the judicial and public administration reforms (i.e. review of legislative framework, capacity building/human resources, digitalisation, including sound public financial management) as well as the expansion of social protection in line with the principle of 'leaving no one behind'.

The thematic budget line dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights and democracy (funded under the EIDHR, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights) complements the bilateral cooperation envelope with specific targeted actions that aim at helping groups in vulnerable situations. Key areas of cooperation in 2022 included: (i) civic education, education on democracy and basic education on human rights in the context of the General Elections; (ii) protection of vulnerable groups (e.g. farmers and women) due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; (iii) support and protection to minors; iv) protection of young girls against sexual health disinformation; and v) support and protection to refugees and migrants.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Political dialogue on human rights continued in 2022, in the framework of the EU-Angola Working Group, created under the EU-Angola 'Joint Way Forward' partnership. The yearly Political Dialogue on Human Rights was held on 26 January 2022. The following issues were on the agenda: (i) the Angolan National Human Rights Strategy; (ii) the EU Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy; (iii) freedom of speech and assembly (including an update on the investigations on the Lunda Norte events); and (iv) elections and human rights in the context of the electoral process. Crosscutting issues, such as follow up to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), gender equality and the rights of vulnerable groups were also discussed.

4. EU financial engagement: Funded through the EIDHR and the European Development Fund (EDF), a number of projects with a positive impact on human rights in Angola were implemented in 2022. Key target areas included: support to youth and women's empowerment (vocational training, support to business incubators) and combatting corruption; promoting access to justice, as well as access to information and freedom of expression; fighting social exclusion of homeless children and persons in vulnerable situation. PASCAL, the EU-funded programme promoting participatory democracy at local level in the framework of the decentralisation process, is in its full implementation stage.

5. Multilateral context: Progress made in implementing the UPR recommendations is a token of Angola's commitment to international human rights standards. In June 2022, the EITI (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative) Board approved Angola's application to join the EITI. Core international treaties have been ratified. Angola has improved its positioning in international standards, notably on the Transparency International Corruption Index (it now ranks the 136 – among 180 countries –, with 29 points). However, to date, Angola has not ratified the International Criminal Court Rome Statute and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

Benin

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The rather negative trend in 2019-2021 regarding democracy, which drifted Benin away from its traditional image of a democratic country in sub-Saharan Africa, have been partially reversed in 2022. Political dialogue was restored, restrictions lifted and more parties allowed to participate in the legislative polls of 8 January 2023, which, in contrast with past elections, took place in a peaceful and inclusive context. As an outcome, the new Parliament has an increased number of female members, for whom 24 out of 109 seats are reserved by law, and includes the opposition after four years of absence, though the main opposition party contested the provisional results, denouncing frauds. However, the Constitutional Court rejected its appeals.

The consolidation of this new inclusive climate will be important for democracy and political pluralism in Benin in the coming years, particularly in view of general (legislative, local and presidential) elections in 2026. The last presidential elections in 2021, which reconfirmed Patrice Talon as President, were held under the "*parrainage*" (sponsorship) system that ultimately prevented significant opposition candidates from running. The opposition has announced that it will propose modifications to the Beninese electoral code ahead of the 2026 elections.

Restrictions to the freedom of press and arrests of bloggers and Internet activists persist. In the 2022 World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders, Benin was ranked 121st, down 43 places from 2017. Besides, while 17 prominent opposition members were released in 2022, two of them, Reckya Madougou and Joël Aïvo, remain in jail. They have been sentenced in December 2021 to 20 years and 10 years of prison respectively, for charges

related to terrorism (Madougou) and to breaching State security (Aïvo). In 2022, a UN working group declared arbitrary the arrest and imprisonment of Reckya Madougou.

Children and women rights, civil and political rights, and good governance remain a source of concern, despite positive developments over the last years Progress has been made on adopted legislation promoting women's rights and gender equality. However, women are still exposed to various forms of discrimination and inequality, both in their professional lives and their families. While the child mortality rate decreases, Benin still faces challenges in the education and health sector. The government has launched several programs to improve primary and secondary education, including school canteens and special support measures for the education of girls.

2. EU action – key focus areas : The action of EU and Member States in Benin focuses on the following three strategic priorities:

- Fight against inequalities – Women, children and minorities rights
- Reinforcement of civic and politic space – Freedom of press, speech, opinion, capacity building for journalists, space for civil society
- Accountability of public institutions – Good governance, fight against corruption, support to the Beninese Commission for Human Rights

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The seventh session of the Political Dialogue Article 8 took place on 30 June 2022, and confirmed the close and trustful relations established between Benin and the EU. During the session, Benin and the EU inter alia discussed the promotion of human rights and democracy. The EU and its Member States welcomed the important reforms that Benin adopted to protect and promote gender equality and the reprisal of political dialogue with the opposition. Yet, the issues of independence of the judicial system, freedom and pluralism of media, and detention of political prisoners (a definition firmly rejected by the Beninese authorities) are still causes of concern.

The EU and Member States take active part in the technical financial partners (PTF) sectorial groups. They maintain a regular dialogue with Beninese civil society organisations, notably on the promotion of human rights, political and civic freedoms, gender equality, and children rights.

4. EU financial engagement : EU financial engagement in Benin, along with the three co-operation priorities listed above, has been, inter alia, covered by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. Under this instrument, the EU financially supports the Beninese Commission on Human Rights and its capacity building, electoral observation projects and support to civil society organisation. Several projects for women, children and minorities rights are funded via the Belgian, Dutch and French co-operation programs.

5. Multilateral context: In October 2021, the UN General Assembly almost unanimously (189 votes out of 192) elected Benin as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) for the period 2022-2024. Amnesty International stated that this appointment should foster more engagement of the country in promoting human rights, and reminded that basic civil and political rights should be protected no less than socio-economic ones, calling on the Beninese Government to stop the judicial harassment cases against opposition leading

members and prominent journalists. Out of the 198 recommendations made by the UNHRC in 2017, 191 were adopted by Benin, including the abolition of the death penalty enshrined in the Constitution since 2019.

Republic of Botswana

1. Overall human rights and democracy situation: Botswana has long had a reputation of a stable and well-established democracy with a legal framework and institutions designed to guarantee respect for human rights in the society. Human rights complaints are addressed by courts, with government accepting decisions and implementing respective rulings. Media remain relatively weak. World Press Freedom Index noted negative trend with respect to their role in the society and downgraded Botswana's ranking from 38 in 2021 to 95 in 2022 (out of 180 countries). Botswana is yet to create an independent National Human Rights Institution (NHRI). The NHRI remains under the mandate of the Office of the Ombudsman, which, in turn, is under the mandate of the Office of the President. Elimination of gender based violence as well as advancement of rights of women and minorities continue to pose challenge for the country. Similar situation applies to the LGBTI rights – despite decriminalization, LGBTI people often continue to face discrimination in practice. Botswana remains part of a small group of countries, in Africa and globally, which continue to retain death penalty in law and in practice. The government indicated that a public debate on the application of death penalty should be part of the review of the national Constitution, for which a Commission of Inquiry was appointed by the President in 2021. The Commission submitted its report to the President in September 2022. An informed debate on the death penalty did not take place in 2022.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to engage with Botswana government, multilateral organizations, non-governmental organizations and the broader Botswana society in three main areas (i) death penalty, (ii) gender-based violence (GBV) and empowerment of women and (iii) LGBTI rights as well as on support of media and implementation of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In addition to ad hoc consultations and human rights-oriented outreach efforts, the EU engages with the Botswana government on human rights formally in the context of its regular Political Dialogue. The last one took place on 23 March 2022. In parallel to government engagement, the EU pursued its dialogue with human rights oriented representatives of civil society, as well as with UN organisations and other partners of the country. The EU continues to be the driving force behind the Gender Dialogue (nominally co-chaired with UNDP and the Gender Affairs Department in the Ministry of Youth, Gender, Sport and Culture). Two Gender Dialogue meetings were held in 2022. The objective of the Gender Dialogue is to bring together stakeholders to discuss gender issues and map a way forward regarding partnerships.

4. EU financial engagement: Three gender based violence projects funded under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) were completed in 2022. Implemented by various organisation (DITSHWANELO, the Botswana Gender Based Violence

Prevention and Support Centre, Gender Links and Humana People to People), their activities ranged from provision of a safe house for gender-based violence survivors and psychosocial support, community education, male involvement and a radio drama aired on a national radio station. A new call for proposals is scheduled for 2023.

5. Multilateral context: The UN Committee Against Torture conducted a review of Botswana. The report expressed an urgent concern that death sentences had been carried out without providing advance notice to the individuals on death row or to their families. The report also expressed concern that hangings were used in executions and that the bodies of those executed were not handed over to their relatives for burial. The Committee urged Botswana to commute all death sentences and to establish a moratorium on death penalty, with a view to abolishing it, while ensuring that detention conditions for condemned prisoners do not constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

Botswana remains an important partner for the EU with respect to the human rights agenda at multilateral level. The country's positive role on human rights in the multilateral context would be strengthen further by initiating domestic process of reflection about the signature and ratification of several pending core human rights conventions and/or optional protocols (e.g. Convention for the protection of all persons from enforced disappearances, International covenant on economic, social and cultural rights, Optional protocol of the Convention against torture, etc.).

Burkina Faso

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the human rights situation has worsened due to the aggravation of the political and security context in Burkina Faso. Whereas the impact of terrorism and the counteraction of security forces and armed civilians on human rights and democracy in the country is nothing new, the succession of two successful military coups during 2022, has in addition not only reduced significantly the level playing field for political and civil society actors, but has also impacted increasingly on free speech and political freedoms more generally.

As regards the impact of terrorism, developments have aggravated notably in the Sahel, Northern, Central North, Boucle du Mouhoun and Eastern parts of the country, with more sporadic violence in other parts of the country. The methods of radical armed groups becoming more sophisticated and 'professionalised' have proven to be particularly deadly, causing a considerable number of casualties and resulting in parallel in a humanitarian crisis. Many cities in the North of the country (Djibo, Arbinda, Markoye, etc.) are facing blockades organised by those radical armed group, resulting more and more in a serious risk of starvation. In 2022, 2 766 civilian victims (1 279 dead, 906 wounded and 581 kidnapped) have been reported. More than 40% of the country is outside the control of state authorities, and at the end of 2022 the number of internally displaced persons in Burkina Faso amounted to over 1.8 million (OCHA / government). Among them, 60% are children. Within one year, this number has actually increased by 20% (+ 308 000 internally displaced persons). Four major

attacks were particularly significant: Seytenga (9 June) with 79 deaths, Madjoari (27 May) where at least 50 deaths have been reported, Gaskinde (27 September) with 37 deads and 50 others missing, and Nouna (31 December) where 28 deaths have been counted. Terrorist armed groups are responsible for the majority of those slaughters but the last one in Nouna has been committed by Dozos (traditional hunters) enrolled as Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie (VDP). The recent (November 2022) recruitment of 50 000 new VDPs may well increase the further risk of similar atrocities. In the meantime, the country continues to face other important challenges, including widespread poverty, especially in rural areas, high youth unemployment, high population growth, persistent corruption and perfectible justice.

Whereas the Burkinabe civil society was very active during the year and contributed to a certain extend to public political dialogue and expression, we have witnessed an increasing politicization of this civil society, with stronger visibility of groups supporting the new President of the Transition (Captain Ibrahim Traoré). Even though some local print and electronic media (in an economically weak media environment) are still willing and able to publish certain critical voices, freedom of speech and media is more and more threatened. Other than the official ban of Radio France Internationale, local media have not yet been formally sanctioned, but journalists criticising the Transition or contradicting the official speeches are often targeted in both official statements (more generally) or by political activists in social media (including direct physical threat). Moreover, since the first coup led by lieutenant-colonel Damiba (24 January 2022), hate-speeches on social media, mostly against Fulani people, has increased and entail a climate of suspicion in some parts of the country.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In 2022, the EU and its member states continued to support politically the priorities of the 2021-24 human rights strategy for Burkina Faso; some member states suspended the implementation of activities. The EU strengthened the human rights dialogue with the OHCHR which has installed its office end 2021. Gathering of information about the human rights situation, and exchange with especially like-minded has been the main focus of human rights activities in the sensitive context of Burkina Faso after two military coups and a deterioration of the security context.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2022, a political dialogue took place in June. This exchange with the former government has been rather open and constructive, mainly focussing on the agreement, under negotiation by this time, with ECOWAS. Issues related to human rights and international humanitarian law were also discussed. Since the coup of Captain Traoré (30 September), the bilateral relation remains fragile and the discussions about human rights more difficult, given the fact that the highest priority of the government is the fight against terrorist armed groups.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the strong commitments that should be underlined are:

- ECHO, including via its strategic partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross, has continued to contribute to raising awareness of international humanitarian law among various bodies of the defence and security forces.
- In the area of justice, the EU's Justice Programme (EUR 10 million, EU Emergency Trust Fund) continues to strengthen Justice and military, its main objective being the fight against impunity and the reduction of human rights violations. At the level of the

military criminal chain, the EU supported the establishment of a pre-emptive gendarmerie service.

- As regards the fight against economic exploitation of children, trafficking in human beings and forced labour, the EU intervened with a project aimed at the protection of children in cotton producing areas (CLEAR COTTON).
- Concerning the registration of children in civil status, the EU brought massive support (EUR 25 million) for the modernisation of civil status through the Population programme.
- In the fight against radicalisation and the employability of the youth, the EU has, among other, accompanied the modernisation of French-Arab education, the recognition of diplomas and the creation of bridges between the non-formal and formal education system.
- Under the Executive Control Support Programme (PACE), the EU has accompanied the National Assembly (Programme d'Appui Commun à l'Assemblée nationale — PROCAB) for a better monitoring of government action.

5. Multilateral context: The promotion of a global human rights and democracy system is at the heart of the European Union's commitment. The cooperation between Burkina Faso and the various bodies of this system is considered satisfactory. Nevertheless, the EU Delegation and the Member States are making efforts to improve it even further, particularly within the framework of the United Nations (Human Rights Council, monitoring of the implementation of international instruments, Universal Periodic Review), and regional and international organisations, including ECOWAS and the African Union. Particular attention is paid to the implementation of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

Burundi

1.Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy situation is problematic, with structural reforms still lacking. Nevertheless, there has been noticeable progress, including in terms of lifting of restrictions against media, the fight against human trafficking, and repatriation of Burundian refugees.

However, the government continues to refuse any cooperation with the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the country and no progress was achieved for reopening the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Cases of violations of the right to life, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other ill-treatment, rape and sexual violence, as well as violations of civil liberties, are documented. Civil society organisations and human rights defenders find it extremely difficult to engage in the promotion and protection of civil and political rights.

2. EU's action - key focus areas: The EU's action addresses several priority areas. First, the EU continued to raise issues related to citizens' access to justice with local authorities, in particular with the Ministry of Justice. The EU strengthened its collaboration with the National Independent Commission for Human Rights to ensure a more systematic and rigorous

commitment to protection and promotion of human rights. The EU aimed at strengthening capacity of local Burundian NGOs to monitor, document and report on human rights violations. Issues related to the protection of women's rights and gender equality were a priority. Within a long-term perspective of strengthening of a democratic culture and inclusive governance, the EU continued to support civil society organizations, including in the promotion and respect of economic, social and cultural rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Since 2021 bilateral engagement and exchanges on human rights have intensified. In view of improvements secured, in February 2022 the EU lifted its appropriate measures under the framework of Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, which had suspended direct financial assistance to the Burundian administration or institutions. EU-Burundi Political Dialogue has been key in reviewing progress made in implementing the reforms in the field of human rights, good governance and the rule of law, as set out in the roadmap ("feuille de route") elaborated by the Burundian Government. There have been fruitful and regular high-level exchanges on human rights issues e.g. with the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022 EU funded actions focused on: (i) supporting the development of the judicial system; (ii) promoting gender equality and women's rights;(iii) strengthening the rights of the child; (iv) supporting independent media, access to information and combating disinformation; (v) strengthening democratic culture and the rule of law. Among the activities, the Justice Program (EUR 15 million), a Team Europe initiative, and the Promotion of Culture and Strengthening of the Rule of Law project (EUR 5 million). Support to free access to health care for mothers and children under five has led to good progress. New projects for a total amount of EUR 55 million were signed in 2022.

5. Multilateral Framework: Both in the context of the UN and in its partnership with the African Union, the EU supported steps and actions aimed at promotion and protection of human rights and peaceful transformation of political conflicts. Based on a resolution proposed by the EU, the UN Human Rights Council extended by a year the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi. In multilateral UN bodies, Burundi tends to vote against the EU's positions on human rights.

Cabo Verde

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Cabo Verde remained in 2022 one of the countries with the best records on human rights and democratic governance in Africa thanks to a strong legal framework that recognizes and protects human rights and fundamental freedoms, stable political institutions, and a functioning multiparty parliamentary democracy since 1991. The "cohabitation", harmonic so far, of a President and a Prime Minister belonging to the two opposite sides of the political spectrum since the legislative and presidential elections of 2021, is offering a further token of the ripeness and stability of Cabo Verde democracy.

The implementation of the Gender Parity Law adopted in 2019 resulted in a substantial increase in the number of women MP after the last legislative elections. However, Cabo Verde continues to face challenges in what concerns gender equality and in particular gender based violence, (GBV) as well as children rights (especially on child labour and sexual exploitation of children). The rights of persons with disabilities, although recognised, also continue to face challenges in their implementation. Other areas of concern include the treatment of immigrants and prison conditions. In what concerns social rights, single parent families led by women are particularly vulnerable to falling into poverty and the lack of adequate housing is widespread. Finally, the judiciary continued to emerge as the one constitutional branch that is in clear need of reform, as well as a strengthening of capacities.

2. EU action and bilateral political engagement: Key political messages on Human Rights and Democracy are included in bilateral contacts with local authorities and other partners, both by the EU and Member States. They also feature in interventions at public events to which the Delegation is invited. Specific human rights points rarely figure in formal political dialogue agendas, since there are no serious human rights concerns regarding Cabo Verde. However, when discussing cooperation programmes or budget support, a joint assessment is made about the human rights and human development dimension. In the EU Delegation active publication on social media and the EU Delegation webpage pay an important role.

3. EU financial engagements and their impact: In 2022, the EU in Cabo Verde focused its attention and cooperation activities on the above-mentioned areas that appear more problematic by the human rights point of view. Therefore, both the EU and Member States have either supported or developed projects targeted at eradicating GBV and the EU Delegation took public initiatives on gender equality. Regarding children's rights, the EU and Portugal co-financed a project aimed at "Promoting the Inclusion of Children with Neurological Disabilities". The EU Delegation supports Social and Labour Rights through two projects implemented by ILO.

Many of the EU and Member States' activities and projects in Cabo Verde include a human development and human rights dimension with a particular focus on gender. The EU Delegation has a regular dialogue with the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDHC), which plays a determinant role in monitoring and promoting human rights in the country. In 2021, about 30% of the EUDEL Press and Info Budget was allocated to outreach and awareness raising activities on human rights.

4. Multilateral context: Cabo Verde has ratified most international and regional human rights instruments, and ensures their implementation and enforcement in a generally effective manner. The country joined the international Human Rights Coalition in 2018.

Cameroon

1. Overall human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the situation of human rights and democratic governance remained problematic. The government continued to restrict the

ability of opposition political parties and civil society to exercise their rights to assemble, to demonstrate peacefully and to express freely their opinions. On the positive side, during the course of the year, authorities agreed to establish an inclusive permanent platform of dialogue and collaboration with civil society. The right to a fair trial was infringed in several cases, especially related to separatists or political opponents. Some detainees died in dismaying detention conditions in prisons.

2022 was also marked by an increase of violence and abuse against LGBTI people. In the regions affected by the Anglophone separatist crisis (North-West and South-West) and by terrorism (Far North), numerous human rights abuses continue to be reported, committed by both armed groups and national security forces (cases of torture and unlawful killings, destruction of houses and villages, forced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and kidnapping for ransom, as well as increasing cases of harassment and death threats against human rights defenders).

Very limited progress was registered in terms of impunity and lack of accountability of members of the security and defence forces accused of human rights violations and abuses – at the same time security and defence forces started taking more into account human rights in the conduct of their operations. The country continues to face systemic weaknesses in ensuring sufficient protection of the most vulnerable groups, notably women, children and displaced people. Displaced populations (over half a million refugees and asylum seekers from Nigeria and the Central African Republic, approx. 976 000 internally displaced persons) are mostly in the East, Far North, North-West and South-West regions.

2. EU action: key focus areas: EU's priorities in 2022 were: abolition of death penalty, eradication of torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, and fair access to justice; protection, conflict prevention and crisis/conflict resolution; gender equality, women's rights and non-discrimination, including as regards to sexual orientation; strengthening civic and democratic spaces, good governance and accountability, transparency and fight against corruption; green deal, business and human rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: A variety of human rights, civil society and gender parity promotion issues were discussed in meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and relevant line Ministries, including in the framework of the political dialogue. These included abuses of the antiterrorism law in cases of peaceful opposition protests, the issue of impunity, lack of compliance with International Humanitarian Law, non respect of the principle of habeas corpus, disinformation and fake news; tensions with local and international NGOs and civil society. The EU and Member states outreached relevant Ministries on the protection of humanitarian actors and protection of the LGBTI community and abolition of the death penalty (not applied since 1997). They continued to support Cameroon Human Rights Commission and encourage it work with all civil society actors impartially. The EU and Member States continued to monitor trials of journalists and human rights defenders, as well as cooperate with civil society and authorities to improve detention conditions and judicial procedures.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU has supported financially projects aimed to increase awareness among key actors at local and regional level (including security forces and CSOs),

focusing on peaceful conflict resolution and gender-based violence (EUR 455 000). The "Platform of Dialogue Civil Society-Parliament on public finance" was created in 2022, supported by the EU (EUR 540 000); it helps civil society participate in activities related to the preparation and management of the budget. Several EU actions have been launched in early 2022, contributing to strengthening gender equality (including through training for women on entrepreneurship), and the protection of women's and sexual minorities' rights (EUR 2 846 000). The EU provided financial support for the training of health workers who have reached out and sensitize more than 65 000 people on issues related to gender-based violence, disability, HIV and family planning. The EU co-funded a series of workshops and awareness raising content on disinformation, specifically targeting the Government, journalists, civil society organisations and international partners. The EU financially supported (EUR 540 000) the National Observatory on Civil Rights, which counts on a network of 278 civil society organisations across the country: its aim is to monitor the respect of Human Rights and alert on their possible violation.

5. Multilateral context

Cameroon is party to several key international human rights treaties. However, the signing and ratification of the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, have been repeatedly rejected by Cameroon. Cameroon has also no signed the African Union Charter on democracy, governance and elections nor ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. Cameroon issued a standing invitation to all UN Special Procedures in 2014. The country has been a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council since 2019, and has been reelected to a second term until 2024. The latest Universal Periodic Review took place in May 2018. Its recommendations were related to human rights violations in the context of the crisis in the English-speaking regions, enforced disappearances, abuses related to anti-terrorism legislation, terrorism, conditions of detention, freedom of expression, association and assembly, torture, rights of LGBTI minorities, gender-based violence and human rights defenders. EU and Member states are committed to work with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the upcoming UPR of Cameroon in 2023. In multilateral fora, Cameroon's priorities on human rights did not match the EU's, especially when African countries were involved.

Central African Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the human rights situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) remained extremely worrying, with severe and widespread violations of human rights, despite intensified efforts to implement the 2019 Peace Agreement and the 2021 "Luanda roadmap". Although the democratic opposition is legally allowed to operate and organise, its activities are threatened by intimidation, pressure and disinformation. Freedom of the media came under severe pressure in numerous cases, notably with the detention of correspondents, assaults on journalists, their equipment and their property, as well as with the arbitrary suspension of radio frequencies. Hate speech on local media increased during 2022, at times inciting physical violence against political

opposition or against the expatriate community. Areas of major concern included violations of the right to physical integrity, torture, maiming and injuries, ill-treatment and threats, conflict-related sexual violence, as well as extrajudicial executions and killings of civilians. High rates of arbitrary arrest and non-respect of the legal deadlines for detention continued. human rights and international humanitarian law violations were committed by armed groups and by the country's own security forces and "other security personnel". Women represent only 18% of members of the National Assembly, far below the percentage of 35% required by the law on parity. Access to justice remained difficult for female victims of sexual violence.

Some positive steps were also taken. CAR abolished the death penalty by a law promulgated on 27 June 2022. Despite of the lack of funding and training and corruption of the judicial system, there was some progress in the fight against impunity: several suspects of war crimes and crimes against humanity were prosecuted by the International Criminal Court. The Special Criminal Court (SCC), an underfinanced mixed court, also issued its first verdict against three members of a rebel group in October. Within the national justice system, criminal sessions were held in 2022 for the first time in two years.

2. EU action – key focus areas

Focal areas of EU's action in 2022 were:

Protecting and empowering individuals:

- Advocating the abolition of the death penalty in CAR
- Prevention and protection from all forms of sexual and gender-based violence
- Promoting a safe and enabling environment for civil society
- Protecting and promoting freedom of expression, media freedom and pluralism, and access to information
- Advancing the rule of law, supporting an independent and impartial judiciary
- Engaging with the ICC and the SCC
- Supporting state authorities in providing legal identity for all, in particular ensuring universal birth registration.

Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies

- Ensuring a systematic follow-up on the recommendations of EU election observation mission for the elections 2020-2021
- Promoting media freedom and pluralism by supporting the capacity and sustainability of independent media outlets and promoting access to reliable information.

Successful examples:

- Thanks to the EU project "Gender III" 814 survivors of sexual violence were medically treated, 113 survivors received legal support and 284 received socio-economic assistance, mostly by the provision of rapid economic support
- Through the EIDHR project "Improving access to justice and the protection of human rights in CAR", 32 people accused of witchcraft (17 women and 15 men), as well as eight minors unlawfully detained, were released from prison.
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3. EU bilateral political engagement: Through its regular dialogue with the authorities, civil society and various stakeholders, incl. MINUSCA and other UN Agencies, the EU continued its advocacy for greater consideration for human rights in the country. Human rights were a central point of the Article 8 Political Dialogue attended by the President in October.

The EU is an active member of the institutional mechanism for the coordination and implementation of the Justice Sector Policy (JSP) adopted in December 2019 by the CAR Government and provided training to professionals in the criminal justice system on the prevention and repression of sexual and gender-based violence and on victim assistance. Thanks to the progress in the JSP, by the end of 2022, 21 of the 28 defined criminal and civil courts in CAR were operational (including the court for children). The EU also continued its support to the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission.

During 2022, three EU-funded projects by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) addressed gender-based and sexual violence, in particular for women prisoners. In the framework of these projects, the EU sponsored legal and judicial advice to women in Bimbo prison (the only prison in CAR exclusively for women) and to the minors at the Bangui prison, facilitating the release of eight individuals.

Within the framework of an electoral reform project Arc en Ciel Network and its partners are currently contributing to the improvement of the election legal framework. This focuses on the right of women, youth and disabled people to be voters and especially to be candidates in local elections. The project “EU Democracy” is also focused on the participation of women in the electoral process and strengthening the capacities of the female members of the National Assembly. An activity against hate speech and fake news, implemented by Fondation Hirondelle, is ongoing.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, a project to support local civil society was signed for an amount of EUR 3.7 million. The project will be implemented by International Rescue Committee and half of is budget will be used to fund local organisations trough sub-granting. Under the NDICI Rapid Response Mechanism, five new projects were launched during the course of the year in the fields of mediation, resilience an inclusive dialogue among communities to contribute to peace and stabilisation in CAR. The total budget of these five projects ascends to EUR 9.1 million.

5. Multilateral context: CAR is party to multiple key human rights treaties, including the Convention against Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. In June CAR ratified the 2nd Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights for the abolition of the death penalty. CAR underwent its last Universal Periodic Review in November 2018; out of the 207 recommendations, CAR supported 179 and took note of 28. In the course of 2022 CAR’s approach in multilateral fora did not match the EU’s human rights priorities.

Union des Comores

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The overall situation of human rights and democracy in Comoros remains of concern. Persistent human rights infringements

relate to restrictions on freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and expression, freedom of movement, human trafficking, arbitrary arrests, lengthy pre-trial detention, appalling prison conditions and the general weakness of the judiciary.

Social networks are often monitored, and authors of articles deemed offensive are tracked down. Intimidation of journalists has led to self-censorship. Opposition members and critical journalists are subjected to constant pressure through various means.

After four years in house arrest without trial, former President Sambi was sentenced to life imprisonment by the State Security Court in December 2022 for corruption and high treason. Beyond doubts about the fairness of the process, his lawyers are questioning the legality of the sentence and assessing the trial as politically motivated. Former Governor Salami was sentenced to 12 years in prison by the same court earlier in 2022 for his role in anti-government protests, again following a lengthy pre-trial house arrest. No appeal is possible against rulings of this court.

Political tensions have risen in a perceived climate of authoritarian tendencies. In view of the upcoming presidential election in 2024, the President launched a “national dialogue” in February 2022. Important representatives of the opposition and of civil society did not participate, criticising a framework dominated by the government and a climate of repression in the country. The opposition is also challenging a number of laws passed in December 2022, including the status of the opposition and the electoral framework.

Overall, there is a legal framework to protect against discrimination and violence against women and children, but law enforcement in these areas is lacking at local level. Poor governance, corruption, cronyism, and a weak judiciary have exacerbated the country’s economic vulnerability.

The death penalty, although enshrined in law, has not been carried out in the country since the 1990s. A recommendation resulting from the national dialogue to waive the current moratorium has not been implemented.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU is preparing a project to improve conditions of imprisonment. The EU will also support a media capacity-building project to improve the quality of public debate ahead of the next elections.

The EU and its Member States have adopted an action plan on equality between men and women, setting out the EU's strategic goals in this area in Comoros. The EU also adopted a roadmap to strengthen civil society's capacity to be a major actor in the policy dialogue.

The EU has provided further support to MAAECHA NGO assisting unaccompanied minors. The EU is also funding, through the EIDHR, a Red Cross’ project strengthening the protection of women and children, as a complement to the TAIEX (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument) project.

Human rights are constantly present in the EU Delegation’s social media and cultural activities organized by the EU, such as the European Film Festival.

In order to improve governance and the fight against corruption, the EU, together with France, continued implementing its support programme to public finance management.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In July 2022, the Political Dialogue Comoros - EU was held and human rights issues were discussed. The EU and Member States representatives insisted on an inclusive national dialogue, both in terms of participation and agenda. In a difficult political context in 2022, the EU focussed on cases of detention without trial of former President Sambi and former Governor Salami, raising this issue at the highest levels on several occasions.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU supported several projects in the area of human rights:

- unaccompanied minors (EUR 400 000);
- detention conditions in Moroni prison (EUR 440 000) – under preparation;
- strengthening media and information quality (EUR 315 000) – under preparation;
- protection of women and children against violence (EUR 350 000);
- 2 TAIEX projects:
  - interrogation techniques of minors or victims of violence;
  - reinforcing of capacities of the ORTC (Radio and Television Office of Comoros) in the provision of quality information.

France is also implementing a capacity-building program on justice (training of judges) – EUR 1 million.

5. Multilateral context: The EU regularly raises human rights issues concerning Comoros (freedom of expression, human trafficking, death penalty, gender-based violence) with UN representatives at regional and international level. Possible synergies are being explored in the framework of EU projects. The EU office in Comoros encouraged the Comoros Government to support the EU priorities in the 77th session of the UN General Assembly Third Committee, also including issues related to the rights of women and children and freedom.

Republic of Congo

1. Overall human rights situation: In 2022, the overall human rights and democracy situation in the Republic of the Congo remained problematic with serious violations of human rights and limited space for the opposition. Two emblematic political figures of the opposition, Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko and André Okombi Salissa, sentenced for “infringing the security of the state”, continued to serve their sentence in prison. The last legislative and local elections were not very transparent and registered a high abstention rate. Enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions and arbitrary detentions and arrests were reported. The use of torture, especially in prisons, remained a widespread practice. The conditions under which persons are detained prior to their appearance before a judge, continued to fall far short of international standards. The economic and social rights of the Congolese have deteriorated due to the economic crisis. There has been some progress on the fight against gender-based

violence with the adoption, following the recommendations of the last Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2018, of a law to fight violence against women. Equality between women and men is yet to be achieved. Legal and regulatory texts on the protection of indigenous peoples were approved. Civil society organizations can operate in the country but may face difficulties and intimidation if they address certain themes such as human rights national resource management or electoral processes.

2. EU action: key focus areas: The EU's priorities on human rights and democracy in 2022 were: (1) Effective functioning of institutions and mechanisms for monitoring democratic political life and human rights; (2) Good governance, respect for the rule of law and implementation of necessary reforms in different areas; (3) Participation of citizens in decision-making and control of governance, including through strengthening the role of civil society and local authorities; (4) Improving the situation of vulnerable populations (including indigenous peoples) and gender equality.

EU actions in 2022 included projects on protection of indigenous populations' rights, promotion of childhood's rights, the fight against gender-based violence and prevention of torture and arbitrary detentions.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In the framework of the fourth session of the Justice Sector Dialogue that took place in 2022, the following issues were discussed: rule of law, including at the international level, the promotion of human rights, electoral governance and relations with civil society.

The promotion of human rights and democratic advancement was transversal to several EU actions. In 2022, the EU launched the campaign entitled "Quinzaine des droits humains" for the promotion and defence of human rights, including the rights of women, children and sexual minorities.

4. EU financial engagement: Several projects funded with the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EUR 2 500 000) made satisfactory progress in 2022. These projects cover various themes such as the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples, the promotion of children's rights and the fight against gender-based violence. In addition, four projects are currently funded by the CSO-AL instrument civil society organisations and local authorities (EUR 7 000 000) and successfully continued their activities in 2022. A programme is under way to prevent any form of torture, degrading or inhuman treatment through the professionalization of the Congolese police and the establishment of pilot police stations.

In 2022, the EU organised, in cooperation with the "Conseil Supérieur de la Liberté de Communication du Congo", two informative, training and reflection seminars for the benefit of all media in the country, in order to strengthen the capacities and professionalism of the print and audio-visual press for inclusive, fair and transparent coverage of the legislative and local elections process. The EU also provided support to the informal private sector through a number of projects targeting marshes, fish stakeholders, small-scale bean farmers and local economic initiatives in the sector, in the context of promoting social and economic rights.

5. Multilateral context: The country's next Universal Periodic Review is scheduled for October 2023. The Republic of the Congo has not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. Regarding the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aimed at abolishing the death penalty, the Government has initiated the ratification process in 2021. In the United Nations General Assembly, the Republic of the Congo supported the EU-co-sponsored resolution for a moratorium on death penalty, but its priorities on human rights did not match the EU's.

Chad

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the human rights situation in Chad was seriously problematic with structural human rights issues exacerbated by the tensions stemming from the ongoing political transition. The national dialogue that took place from 20 August to 8 October to lay the basis of the future state and constitution was not fully inclusive. Its conclusion was marked by protests and forceful repression of protest demonstrations by the security forces, in particular on 20 October 2022, which resulted in at least 50 deaths, hundreds of injured, and hundreds of arrests. Indications are that some of these were arbitrary – and some sentencing took place without lawyers or observers being present. Social and economic rights (notably access to healthcare and education) remained limited. The authorities have used the suspension of internet access and / or social media access (via telecoms operators) to disrupt demonstrations by critical political and civil society actors. Intercommunal conflicts, mostly between pastoralists and farmers continued during the year causing hundreds of deaths. Insecurity remained widespread, especially due to the action of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad area, responsible for numerous human rights violations.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The main areas for EU action, as agreed with Chad, targeted improvement on the human rights situation broadly conceived (including environmental rights): food security, sustainable management of natural resources, and rule of law/institutional capacity building. Among others, the EU worked with the judiciary to improve its reporting and statistics, as well as the provision of medical services in Chadian prisons. Trainings on human rights were part of the cooperation for security sector reform.

The EU updated its human rights and democracy approach for Chad in November 2022, following an in-depth consultation of civil society organisations. The updated strategy focuses on supporting: (1) the transition to democracy (in particular the development of the constitution and institutions); (2) civic education and literacy; (3) the fight against impunity and the development of a credible judiciary; (4) reform of the security forces (in particular with regards to the use of excessive force); (5) reform of the governance of natural resources; (6) freedom of expression; (7) the understanding and recognition of rights for vulnerable groups (; (8) the freedom and rights of human rights defenders and civil society organisations.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights were included within EU-Chad political exchanges, though no Article 8 Political Dialogue session took place in 2022. The EU repeatedly

shared with authorities its expectations that the transition be peaceful ant that it ensures a transfer to civilian-led, democratic government and return to constitutional rule as soon as possible while respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. Following the events of 20 October, the EU engaged intensely with the Chadian authorities condemning the violence, calling for a rapid and credible inquiry, and reiterated the importance of the respect of human rights and a prompt return to constitutional rule. The EU continues to closely monitor both the investigation into the events of 20 October and the evolution of the transition.

The EU also actively engaged with civil society, including with human rights defenders. The EU continued its efforts with regard to ensuring respect of human rights by the Chadian forces engaged in the framework of G5 Sahel and the Multinational Joint Task force for the Lake Chad Basin.

4. EU financial engagement: Projects financed via the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, with some EUR 1.6 million contracted and approximately EUR 1 million spent, were implemented in the fields of citizen participation and dialogue, women's rights, access to justice, and training to security forces. The EU has also provided support to the transition process.

5. Multilateral context: The Committee against torture discussed Chad in its 75th session (31 October – first week of November 2022) and adopted concluding observations. It expressed particular concern regarding prison violence, deaths in custody, allegations of torture, and the lack of accountability. In multilateral fora Chad's priorities on human rights overall did not match the EU's.

Côte d'Ivoire

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In the absence of notable political violence, the human rights situation in Côte d'Ivoire overall improved in 2022. In March 2022, a positive political dialogue between the government and the opponent parties took place and reached a compromise on important issues in view of the next local elections in 2023. A historical meeting between President Alassane Ouattara and his two predecessors (Henri Konan Bédié and Laurent Gbagbo) took place in July 2022 and sent an important message of dialogue and reconciliation. A few weeks after, Alassane Ouattara granted a presidential pardon to Laurent Gbagbo for a 20 years sentence handed down by the national courts. Nevertheless, as it is not an amnesty, Laurent Gbagbo cannot participate to any election. More recently, Charles Blé Goudé, who had been acquitted by the International Criminal Court at the same time as Laurent Gbgabo, came back in Côte d'Ivoire on 26 November 2022 without any incident. However, with local election in October/November, 2023 could be a more agitated year. Yet, the two main political opposition parties, PDCI and PPA-CI, denounced irregularities during the updating of the electoral list.

Regarding security, the deteriorating situation in neighbouring countries, in particular in Burkina Faso, resulted in an influx of several thousand refugees in the North East region of

Côte d'Ivoire. A few local incidents happened in 2022, but no significant attack (such as in Kafolo in 2020 and 2021) has been reported.

The year 2022 was also marked by several events in which the freedom to demonstrate peacefully was challenged. On 25 November, the organization Urgences ivoiriennes, close to the opposition, tried to organize a demonstration in Abidjan against the high cost of living, resulting in the arrest of four of its members. On 21 December, a small group of PhD graduates protested for not being employed by a public administration. 45 of them were arrested and sentenced a week later to a four-month suspended prison sentence for disorderly conduct. These two events illustrated the difficulty for Ivorian citizens to exercise their right to demonstrate peacefully, whereas this right is protected by the Constitution and regulated by law.

Child labour remains a reality and a cultural fact, particularly in agriculture, mining, transport, domestic work and trade. Violence against women remains high in the country: practices such as female genital mutilation (reportedly affecting more than 35% of women nationally but reaching very high rates in some areas), early marriage and polygamy are prohibited in law but continue to occur. High rates of pre-trial detention and overcrowding still affect the prison system and the efficiency of the whole penal chain.

On a more positive note, in September 2022, the government adopted a decree in order to deploy the Universal Health Coverage system for the whole Ivoirian population. Nevertheless, several organisations criticized the fact that the affiliation will be mandatory to apply for public or private jobs, to obtain a passport or a driving license, or to register at the university.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The eight priority sectors of the EU and its Member States are:

1. Fight against child labour, child trafficking and forced labour, with particular attention to the compliance with relevant ILO conventions ;
2. Contribute to the eradication of torture, in particular by improving detention conditions and implementing alternative measures to imprisonment ;
3. Help prevent gender-based violence, including harmful norms and practices such as female genital mutilation ;
4. Strengthen the rule of law, the independence and the proper functioning of justice, and improve the integrity of electoral processes by following up on the recommendations of EU election observation missions ;
5. Strengthen the role of civil society organizations ;
6. Contribute to equal opportunities for women and men in all spheres of social life and step up the fight against all forms of discrimination, with particular attention to LGBTI people and people with disabilities ;
7. Improving access to public services, with a focus on vulnerable people, including through digital technologies ;
8. Promoting freedom of expression and supporting efforts to counter disinformation and hate speech.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU, with support of Member States present in Côte d'Ivoire, carried out in 2022 formal demarches on human rights and democracy issues in the

framework of the 77th UN General Assembly and 49th, 50th and 51th sessions of the Human Right Council. A political dialogue under Article 8 of the former Cotonou Agreement was held on in November 2022 and provided room for discussions with the government on several important issues linked to the human rights situation and state of democracy in the country.

4. EU financial engagement: As part of the Gender Action Plan 2021-2025 (GAP III), a Country-Level Implementation Plan (CLIP) was adopted in 2022. Over a 5-year period, the EU will actively be pursuing the objective of reducing gender inequalities in each of the priority areas of the GAP III while focusing on the transformation of gender power relations, and improving the economic and social position of women. Among other actions, the EU will contribute to the electoral technical assistance through the Project to Support Elections in Côte d'Ivoire (PACE II) and support the capacity-building of Human Rights National Council (CNDH) regional offices.

5. Multilateral context: In February 2022, the government adopted its National Human Rights Plan which takes into account the 242 recommendations accepted by Côte d'Ivoire during the last Universal Periodic Review in May 2019. The effort to bring together in a single document the priorities resulting from international recommendations and commitments undoubtedly marks a significant step forward.

Djibouti

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the human rights and democracy situation has overall been stable. Djibouti improved its ranking in the World Press Freedom Index from 176/180 in 2021 to 164/180 in 2022, marking some progress in the area of freedom of expression and freedom of information. Access to social media remained partly restricted.

Djibouti remained a beacon of stability in a troubled region, but the stability showed signs of fragility. Ethnic tensions between Issas and Afars, linked to the conflict in neighbouring Ethiopia, provoked riots in the capital city in April and May. Most of the arrested people were declared illegal residents.

Allegations remain of harassment against human rights activists, operating outside officially approved or tolerated Human Rights Groups, of journalists and some outspoken opponents of the Government. However, it is often difficult to get independent verification of these allegations.

Reform of the justice sector continued. Despite progress, challenges remain in resource allocation and the maintenance of customary justice.

In 2022, the National Assembly has continued to work on legislation concerning communication and election as well as on digital code and has passed laws on access to health services and on the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has adopted a national strategy on the rights of people with special needs, which is based on international best

practise. The Mediator, the Human Rights commission (CNDH) and the Court of Auditors have submitted reports to the National Assembly.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2022, protecting and empowering individuals, particularly women and children, migrants and refugees and building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies remained the focal priorities of the EU in Djibouti in the frame of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024.

The EU supports Civil Society, ranging from women's rights to rural resilience. The civil society programme aims at improving the legal and institutional framework and amplifying the voice of civil society in public consultations on issues such as justice, water and sanitation. It also includes capacity building in the Ministry of Interior. A digital exchange platform should facilitate dialogue with civil society organisations.

An EU-funded programme in the National Assembly led to the setting-up of a women caucus as well as the establishment of a Standing Committee on Human Rights and the adoption of a law on violence against women and children. National Assembly can hear complaints from citizens, especially in the context of 'parliamentary caravans'. Cooperation between the National Assembly and governance institutions has been improved.

In 2022, the Delegation supported the justice system in partnership with UNDP, reaching out the population in the provinces with 350 cases of mobile justice, providing continuous training to judges, magistrates, clerks and prison officials, renovating services and investing in digitalisation.

The EU deployed efforts to increase access to basic services for the population (mother and child health; nutrition; education), gender equality, women empowerment, access to justice.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In its regular political dialogue meetings the EU and Djibouti are discussing the humanrRights situation in the country and opportunities for cooperation. In this context, the EU is actively working with the Ministry in charge of digitalisation to meet EU standards on General Data Protection Regulation. The EU is committed to support preparation for the next Universal Periodic Review cycle, to advance work on the review of the communication law and to strengthen the Electoral Board (CENI). The EU's justice support project resulted in important reforms such as the revision of legislation (family, civil law, civil procedure), the measures for the implementation of the reform of judicial and penitentiary assistance.

The European Union supports the National Assembly in its legislative functions and in its over-view role, strengthening inter-institutional links with the Court of Auditors for better transparency on the public spending. The EU supported a complex Public Financial Management analysis exercise to strengthen public finance and future public investments.

To strengthen civil society, the EU Delegation has started to establish a more structured dialogue with civil society organisations.

4. EU financial engagement: Financial engagement in the area of Humans Rights is around EUR 2 million, mostly for a programme which encourages democratic governance and an inclusive and equitable civic culture.

5. Multilateral context: In 2022, Djibouti chaired the UN General Assembly Third Committee and was commended for the manner in which it managed this role. Djibouti also showed commitment to take forward the discussion on climate change and biodiversity protection at global level. Djibouti condemned the violent aggression of Russia against Ukraine and its consequences on humanitarian situation.

Djibouti has ratified the major international UN conventions on human rights. It is the only country in the IGAD region that has abolished the death penalty.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Respect of human rights and democratic governance continued to face serious and systemic challenges, but there was some progress. The military was responsible for 30% fewer violations in 2022 compared to 2021, while the police committed 16% fewer violations. There has, however, also been a resurgence in restrictions on civic and political space, with a sharp decline in press freedom. Freedom of expression and association drastically deteriorated in the two eastern provinces under the state of siege, where martial law was used to quash peaceful demonstrations with lethal force, arbitrarily detain and prosecute activists, journalists, and opposition politicians. Most human rights violations in the east were committed by armed groups, some of which have been involved in war crimes. Attacks by armed groups against internally displaced persons and the increasing use of improvised explosive devices have increased, and so has the tally of civilian victims. In March, the Government launched national consultations on a national transitional justice initiative and reaffirmed its commitment to accountability for serious crimes committed across the country.

2. EU action on Human Rights and Democracy - key focus areas: EU priorities were: (1) Promotion of the freedom of expression, demonstration and association; (2) Promotion of the democratic system as set out in the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the participation of women in political life; (3) Promotion and entrenchment of a fair and easily accessible justice system including the fight against impunity in particular for those implicated in sexual violence; (4) Promotion of gender equality particularly in public life and respect for women's rights especially for the survivors of sexual and gender based violence.

Regarding the justice sector reform, the EU-funded programme PARJ III helped to strengthen the independence of the judiciary and improves the performance of the Ministry of Justice to fight against impunity and corruption and promote the respect of human rights. Another EU-supported activity strengthened the independence and economic autonomy of local medias, in the fight against fake news. In addition, EU funds supported the creation of the Talatala barometer, to measure parliamentary activity and government activities by providing summaries of public debates and plenary sessions.

The EU led by example in the protection of human right defenders. Its local protection mechanism, which covers the entire territory of the country, has allowed for the direct protection of over 60 human rights defenders (HRDs) since 2021. Over 445 HRDs deem they are working in a more secure environment due to the local protection mechanism. Almost four million people were reached by awareness raising activities on the respect of their fundamental rights (counts started in early 2021). The EU also supported a programme aimed at to preventing torture in Kinshasa-based detention centres.

The EU was also active on actively promoting gender equality and strengthen women's rights: the project 'Tujenge Amani Leo' promotes the resilience of vulnerable women and youth in crisis-affected territories in Eastern DRC; EU's support to Panzi Foundation enabled over 4 000 victims of sexual and gender-based violence to receive medical, socio-psychological, legal and economic assistance. A new action worth EUR 20 million called 'Unis pour l'égalité du genre', launched in November 2022, aims to reduce women's, girls', boys' and men's vulnerability to gender-based violence, including through vocational training, awareness rising and wider protection measures.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2022, the EU and its Member States engaged in a wide array of political actions in support of human rights, with the government, civil society at large, and international partners. Human rights were included within EU-DRC political exchanges, though no Article 8 Political Dialogue session took place in 2022. The EU Delegation carried out several demarches and outreach including on the arbitrary arrest and detainment of LUCHA members, press freedom and the death penalty. The EU Delegation and Member States have been active in advocating for the adoption of the law on protecting HRDs, which is currently being studied by the Human Rights Commission of the DRC National Assembly. A particular focus was given to coordination and communication outreach on gender-bases issues, ranging from sexual and reproductive health, to the role of women in peace processes and national decision making. The EU plays a key role in coordinating donor activities in these thematic fields and setting common donor priorities, by chairing several Inter-donor groups, including the Inter-donor groups on justice, human rights and gender. The EU is also one of the main supporters of the President's national campaign to fight gender-based violence in the country.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU provided EUR 2.5 million of support in 2022 to programs and projects regarding the rule of law and human rights, amongst others in the justice sector, the media, the protection of Human Rights Defenders and the promotion of gender equality and the strengthening of women's rights.

5. Multilateral context: The DRC is party to multiple key international human rights treaties. The DRC did not vote on any of the human rights-related resolutions in 2022 in the UN General Assembly. In the Human Rights Council, the annual resolution on the DRC, presented by the African Group on behalf of the DRC itself, was once again adopted by consensus. The resolution renewed the mandate of the International Team of Experts on the DRC for a further period of one year, and requested them to provide the DRC with technical support in the implementation of the national strategy on transitional justice. The Office of the High Commissioner was requested inter alia to continue to provide forensic expertise, to support

the judicial authorities in their investigation of allegations of human rights violations and abuses with a view to bringing the perpetrators to justice, and to support the process of implementation of the transitional justice mechanism.

State of Eritrea

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Eritrea requires continuous international scrutiny and monitoring, including in the light of the conflict in neighbouring Tigray, which has distracted human and financial resources from development. Following several waves of fighting, the conflict came to a Cessation of Hostilities in November via the Pretoria agreement between the Government of Ethiopia and Tigray's People Liberation Front (TPLF). Eritrea was not formally involved in negotiations, but is key to the implementation of the agreement. The constitution of 1997 remains suspended and the Parliamentary Assembly is not meeting. There have never been elections since the independence of the country in 1993.

Only limited sectoral improvements were registered in the overall human rights situation within Eritrea. A number of aspects of the country's human rights policies and practices remain of serious concern such as those linked to the lack of full respect of the rights to liberty, security and a fair trial enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights caused by enforced disappearances, violence against women, very serious restrictions in the right of speech and assembly, arbitrary arrests and detention incommunicado. In December 2022, the Council of the EU renewed sanctions against the National Security Agency under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime due to grave human rights violations committed in Eritrea.

Notwithstanding the overall difficult human rights situation and the challenging circumstances caused by the conflict in Tigray, Eritrea has registered some progress on child and women's rights and in general on health. It managed to reduce child mortality and female genital mutilation thanks to long-standing programmes. Education in Eritrea is free and universal, and the rate of girls into all levels of education continued to register an increase.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU provided support to civil society organisations (CSOs) for advocacy initiatives aimed at awareness raising among Eritrean society around different illnesses and vulnerabilities such as blindness, HIV and various forms of disability through thematic budget lines CSO-LA and EIDHR.

The EU is following the Universal Periodic Review process which remains an opportunity for engagement and progress. In 2019, Eritrea has accepted 133 recommendations. Its next cycle is coming up in 2024.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU remains seriously concerned with the human rights situation and, in particular in the aftermath of the Cessation of Hostilities in the neighbouring country, will continue to monitor the human rights situation, including on

arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances, prison conditions, and freedom of religion and beliefs.

While these concerns are regularly brought up in the relevant human rights fora and EU statements, the EU remains available to support the authorities in the fight against human rights violations with concrete, practical programmes that may help bring about improvements, however small.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation works with and provides support to CSOs through grants under the thematic budget lines CSO/LA and EIDHR. Over the last years, the Delegation has expanded its portfolio of projects funded under the two thematic budget lines. In 2022, 15 such projects were ongoing, implemented by eight local CSOs and three international NGOs, for a total amount of around EUR 4 million. The projects focused on:

- supporting deaf and blind people, children with intellectual disabilities such as autism, for abandoned children leaving in three private orphanages, and vocational training support for women with minor disabilities for deaf and blind;
- awareness raising campaigns to fight social stigma against vulnerable categories;
- delivering basic service to vulnerable beneficiaries such as disabled person;
- income generating activities (agriculture, open small family business etc.) to support families with vulnerable kids.

5. Multilateral context: In January 2022, Eritrea welcomed a representative of the UN OHCHR for the first time in years. In July 2022, the UN Human Rights Council extended the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea for a further period of one year. Eritrea continues to be a member of the Human Rights Council.

Eswatini

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the Kingdom of Eswatini continued to find it difficult to fulfil its democracy and human rights obligations. Since the unprecedented unrest in 2021, society has increasingly polarised. The political and security situations have seriously deteriorated throughout 2022, with acts of violence, arson attacks and killings of security forces. Police and army have been deployed in the streets. By the end of 2022, there has been no legislative and legal follow-up to the Human Rights and Public Administration Commission's preliminary report, pointing to 46 deaths and 245 gunshots injuries from the 2021 unrest. Two Members of Parliament (M. B. Mabuza and M. Dube) who were at the forefront of the pro-democracy protests have been in prison since July 2021, their bail repeatedly denied, facing alleged human rights violations. A third parliamentarian, M. Simelane, remained in exile in South Africa and was stripped of his seat for absenteeism. On 30 July 2022, by-elections took place in his constituency and his wife won with a large majority, becoming the third elected female MP. Despite tensions leading up to the by-elections, voting was calm and orderly. The Government of Eswatini did not launch yet the comprehensive and inclusive national dialogue, on grounds of lacking conducive environment. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) continued to engage with the Government to help

facilitate the dialogue. Namibian President Geingob as Chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security visited Eswatini on 18 November and was received by King Mswati III. He strongly emphasised the need for dialogue as a peacebuilding tool. The multi-party democracy proponents, including political parties, trade unions, human rights and faith-based organisations (under the "Multi-Stakeholder Forum" umbrella organisation), continued their appeals for the release of the incarcerated MPs and for the national dialogue. The situation of Human Rights Defenders deteriorated in 2022, while gender-based violence (GBV) escalated to very high level with civil society demanding GBV to be declared a national emergency. Sexual minorities were denied by court the registration of a NGO, on moral order grounds. The freedoms of expression of media were challenged with intimidation of journalists.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Throughout 2022, the EU action focused on advocacy towards a comprehensive and inclusive national dialogue as a matter of urgency and priority. The EU called for the opening of the political space, full respect of human rights, fundamental freedoms and rule of law (including fair trial and due process for the two MPs). The EU also highlighted the need to hold all perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses accountable. These issues were included on the agenda of the EEAS high-level visit to Eswatini on 8-10 December. During 2022, the EU actively supported the SADC facilitation role and engaged with SADC in the spirit of "African solutions to African problems". In July, the EU Delegation monitored the above-mentioned by-elections. In October, the EU adopted a new Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP) for 2021-2027 with an initial budget of EUR 32 million and one priority area *"Human Development and Social Inclusion"*, embracing the standard of living and education dimensions of human development. The MIP will focus on two interlinked sectors: market-driven vocational education and training (TVET) and empowerment of disadvantaged youth and women in vulnerable situations. The EU Delegation observed the trial of the two MPs in December 2022. The EU Delegation to Eswatini partnered with local musicians to produce a song and video with a strong message against gender-based violence for the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence 2022.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In September 2022, an EU-Kingdom of Eswatini Political Dialogue under Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement took place. It addressed international affairs, political and legislative matters (including the importance of an all-inclusive and timely national dialogue), freedom of association and expression, access to information, human rights, gender-based violence and the rule of law. The Government provided an update on the law reform process to align all laws with the country's Constitution and efforts to strengthen the administration of justice in Eswatini. Progress was acknowledged as regards the Human Rights Bill, which marked an evolution in the operationalisation of the Human Rights Commission as well as the merger of the Human Rights Commission and the Anti-Corruption Commission. The non-discrimination of people on the basis of gender and sexual orientation and curbing the violence against women and children were also discussed. Whilst commending the Government on the implementation of the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence (SODV) Act, the EU also encouraged the authorities to step up efforts in the area of education and training of law enforcement agencies, to curb the scourge of violence against women and children.

Throughout the year, the EU continued to engage at Ambassador level with His Majesty the King, the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, Cabinet ministers, the Parliament, a wide range of national stakeholders including human rights and faith-based organisations, and the media.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU pursued its support to the implementation of projects aimed at raising awareness and advocating for the protection and promotion of democracy, human rights, rule of law, gender equality and minorities' rights. The "Civil Society Platform for Inclusiveness" project implemented in collaboration with the Coordination Assembly of NGOs (CANGO) supported CSOs and different communities with training on human rights and democratic principles and further facilitated the development of a collective platform to promote human rights. The project successfully conducted community dialogues and trainings in over twelve rural communities, under the administration of traditional authorities.

5. Multilateral context: Despite being an "abolitionist-in-practice" country, Eswatini has not yet formally abolished the death penalty.

Ethiopia

1. Overall human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Ethiopia in 2022 has seen improvements since the beginning of the conflict in Tigray in November 2020. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. The state of the press freedom and the freedom of speech in Ethiopia has deteriorated. Journalists and human rights defenders continue to be arrested. Ethiopia's terrorism law and law on hate speech contain very vaguely worded provisions that include heavy prison sentences and that can be used against outspoken journalists or human rights activists. Nevertheless, as for the long-term trend, the Ibrahim Index of African Governance indicates that over the past ten years, participation, rights and inclusion have seen an increasing improvement.
In January 2022, several high-profile political opposition and Tigray People's Liberation Front's (TPLF) prisoners were released from prison, and charges against them were dropped. The nationwide state of emergency was lifted on 15 February 2022. On 2 November 2022, the government of Eritrea and The PLF signed an AU-brokered Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) in South Africa. Article 2 of the Pretoria Agreement establishes "fundamental human rights and democratic norms [as well as] protection of civilians" as a guiding principle. It is generally assessed that the parties are honouring the CoHA. However, there are reports of continued forced displacement of Tigrayans in Western Tigray and there is no access to this sub-region for the international and humanitarian community.

In other parts of the country than Tigray, throughout 2022, government and regional security forces clashed with Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) armed groups. There are reports of significant human rights violations by all parties, not least the targeting by the OLA of Amharic speakers (or perceived Amharic speakers) living in the Oromia region. Fighting intensified in early November, with civilian casualties, a drastic increase in internal displacement and the destruction of infrastructure reported. There are also reports of authorities arresting several

journalists, holding them without charge for several weeks despite court orders for their release.

2. EU action- key focus areas: Through numerous projects and initiatives, the EU and its Member States supported the following key strategic priorities:

- Protection of vulnerable groups and their rights;
- Promotion of human rights in the context of migration;
- Strengthening the capacity of state institutions working with human rights and electoral activities;
- Supporting civil society organisations (CSOs), local and non-state human Rrghts actors;
- Promoting international legal frameworks and respect of international human rights standards;
- Strengthening the role of media;
- Committing to more joint programmes;

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU welcomed the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) and the commitment of the Ethiopian government to implement it. The EU and its Member States are considering how to support Ethiopia, politically and financially, depending on progress on our three key asks that are embedded in the CoHA agreements: cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of Eritrean troops from the country, humanitarian access, accountability for Human Rights violations. At the January 23 Foreign Affairs Council, the EU agreed to explore a gradual normalisation of the EU-Ethiopian relations.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU has continued implementing its "EU democratic package", which covers the full electoral cycle and is composed of several interventions working with a variety of actors. Implementation started in 2019 and has been extended until October 2023. The total EU contribution amounts to EUR 29.73 million. The EU also supports the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHCR) with two programmes worth EUR 3.5 million.

5. Multilateral context: The issue of accountability for human rights violations and abuses during the Tigray conflict is high on the EU agenda. On 8 July 2021, the EU tabled a resolution expressing support to the Joint Investigation by OHCHR and the Ethiopian Commission for Human Rights, and establishing a reporting obligation for the High Commissioner towards the Human Rights Council (HRC) and mandating her office to continue to investigate the alleged abuses and violations of human rights in cooperation with Ethiopia. On 17 December 2021, the EU called a Special Session at the HRC. At the request of the EU, the HRC adopted in Geneva a resolution establishing an international commission of human rights experts (ICHREE) - extended for a year in September 2022 - to conduct an investigation into allegations of violations and abuses committed in Ethiopia since 3 November 2020. The ICHREE visited Addis Ababa in July 2022. The International Commission presented its first report to the HRC in September 2022. The report finds reasonable grounds to believe that parties to the conflict have committed serious violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law since November 2020. The ICHREE encouraged Ethiopia to investigate alleged violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by non-State and State actors in the conflict, prosecute and punish them, and ensure victims receive full reparation. It urged Ethiopia to protect freedom of expression, citing harassment, attacks, arbitrary arrests, and detentions of dissidents, as well as the use of criminal provisions to silence dissent. It also

noted unjustified and prolonged internet and phone shutdowns and requested that all such restrictions be legal, proportional, and independently overseen. The ICHREE will present an oral update to the HRC in March 2023 and its second report to the HRC in September 2023. The government of Ethiopia views the ICHREE as a politicised instrument, and continues to reject any collaboration.

As a member of the United Nations, the African Union and IGAD, Ethiopia is an important multilateral actor for the European Union and the region. Ethiopia is often aligned with EU positions on different issues like gender, climate and social issues, but voted against the EU position or abstained during key votes at UNGA and HRC pertaining to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Equatorial Guinea

1. Overall human rights situation: In 2022, the overall human rights and democracy situation in Equatorial Guinea remained very problematic, with serious and systematic human rights violations and abuses, political and civic oppression, and high levels of corruption. Freedom of expression, association and assembly were severely curtailed, especially ahead of the Presidential, legislative and local elections on 20 November. Political and human rights activists faced intimidation, harassment and reprisals. Space for opposition groups remained extremely limited. The government tightly controlled press and television. The space for civil society was also extremely narrow, with strict control and manipulation of the registration process. In 2022, Equatorial Guinea adopted a new Criminal Code that abolished the death penalty, following a moratorium since 2014. Capital punishment is still theoretically applicable under military law. Equality between women and men remained a major challenge in Equatorial Guinea in all aspects of social, cultural, economic and political life. Gender-based violence remained a very serious challenge.

2. EU action: key focus areas: The EU's priorities in 2022 were:

- Advocating for the abolition of the death penalty, eradication of torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, and fair access to justice for victims of human rights violations;
- Opening of civic and democratic spaces, good governance and accountability, transparency, and fight against corruption;
- Addressing social inequalities and discrimination as well as promotion of gender equality, women rights and LGBTI rights.

EU actions in 2022 included: "Promovido el Derecho a la Salud de la población de mayor vulnerabilidad socio-sanitaria de Sampaka, to ensure access to quality healthcare for the most vulnerable population by constructing a health centre in Sampaka; "Apoyo, protección y fortalecimiento de activistas y organizaciones de la sociedad civil en su labor de promoción de los derechos humanos" (APROFORT),which has provided support and protection to 20 activists, including legal assistance and capacity building and "Protección y garantía de los derechos de niñas, niños, jóvenes y mujeres en situación de vulnerabilidad en los barrios

marginales de Malabo",which has increased child protection and reduced gender violence in marginalised neighbourhoods in Malabo.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU has been closely following the political, social and economic situation in Equatorial Guinea, especially in the electoral context and has raised human rights and governance issues in high-level exchanges with the authorities.

4**. EU financial engagement:** No bilateral projects were funded from the European Development Fund because Equatorial Guinea is not party to the revised Cotonou Agreement. Nevertheless, it benefited from the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EUR 700 000 committed in 2021 for activities in 2022 and approx. EUR 476 000 under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights 2019 for projects that run through 2022), as well as some regional programs.

5. Multilateral context: Equatorial Guinea is party to some key international human rights treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. It is not a party to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, or to the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court. It has ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights but not the Protocol on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. Equatorial Guinea did not ratify the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance either, despite repeated calls to do so over the years.

Equatorial Guinea was last subject to the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review in May 2019. The review noted the progress made on the recommendations made in 2014 and, in particular, the progress in the ratification of a number of international instruments/conventions. Equatorial Guinea accepted 204 out of 221 recommendations.

In the United Nations General Assembly, Equatorial Guinea has consistently supported the EU-co-sponsored resolution for a moratorium on death penalty, but overall but its priorities on human rights did not match the EU's.

Gabon

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The overall human rights and democracy situation remains one of concern, despite some positive developments. There are numerous opposition parties, many of them small and unstable, which operate relatively freely. Freedom of association and assembly remains very limited in practice. As regards freedom of expression /media, the country's Communication Code includes restrictions that hinder the ability of journalists to work independently, without fear of censorship or even criminal prosecution. It further prohibits any person residing outside the country to manage media published in Gabon. However, newspapers linked to the opposition have been able to continue publishing on any subject of their choice, including criticism of the government and

the President. Fight against corruption remains nominally high on the President's and the government's agenda, however the authorities continue to denounce a widespread corruption in many areas of the administration. The adoption by the National Assembly of the new law on the National Commission for Human Rights remained pending, although the Commission's mandate officially ended in March 2021. The ad-hoc Commission in charge of solving the issue of irregular detentions, set up in November 2020, met several times and more than two hundred persons in irregular detention were released. Harsh prison conditions remain (ill-treatment, poor food and health conditions). An important accomplishment was the creation of a new area for women in the central prison of Libreville. The phenomenon of ritual crimes (abduction and murder of children and women) continues to exist in the country. Cases are unaccounted, convictions are extremely infrequent and sentences rarely served. Legislation has been in place since September 2021 to protect women against all forms of violence and discrimination and to advance gender equality. While these laws constitute significant progress, women still represent 90% of victims of sexual violence and 83% victims of economic violence. Only few services provide medical, psychological and judicial care for victims, but a new Centre for victims of violence was established in the capital in the last quarter. Despite legal provisions on quotas, women continued to be under-represented in political and professional life (public and private sector).

2. EU action – key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, the EU focuses on the following priorities: democracy and governance; fight against corruption; harsh prison conditions and lengthy pre-trial detention; torture and forced disappearances; ritual crimes; women rights and children rights. These go hand-in-hand with the concomitant aims to improve the independence of the institutions, strengthen civil society, guarantee credible, inclusive and transparent elections, ensure freedom of expression and association and the enjoyment of all other civil and political rights, and foster a culture of transparency and accountability. The gender dimension is mainstreamed throughout these actions.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights and democracy were discussed, among other issues, at the annual EU-Gabon political dialogue in July 2022. The EU Delegation continued to be in regular contact with political and civil society stakeholders to promote the rule of law, fundamental freedoms, civil and political rights and good governance. The EU carried out formal demarches on human rights and democracy issues to request support for EU initiatives at the Human Rights Council and the UNGA77 Third Committee in November 2022.

4. EU financial engagement: Most important actions include, among others, support to civil society organisations and human rights defenders and improving their legal and financial framework regarding. Other actions focused on the promotion of gender equality and women's rights, as well as children rights, and combatting all forms of gender based violence against women and girls. The EU's Annual Action Plan 2022 for Gabon provided EUR 890 000 for capacity building of the civil society and EUR 600 000 for strengthening democracy (political parties and elections). EUR 900 000 have been earmarked for cooperation on anticorruption, to be used in a twinning project for capacity building of the Ministry of Justice, in charge of the fight against corruption. In 2022, a TAIEX activity was prepared to support the administration in charge of migration control for identifying persons at risk as part of

integrated border management. This activity will be carried out in 2023 under a strictly human rights-based approach.

5. Multilateral context: Gabon's membership of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2021-2023 term continues to be an occasion for potential cooperation with the EU on human rights. The country's position is usually reflected through its regional groups, both on country and thematic resolutions. However, Gabon's priorities on human rights do not always match the EU's.

Ghana

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Ghana is a peaceful and functional democracy in a fragile West African region. The country is characterised by relatively strong and stable institutions and has a three-decade track record of peaceful and transparent democratic elections. Freedom of expression and a vibrant civil society landscape are also central to Ghana's democracy. However, some challenges persist. The country has experienced a worrying decline in rights and freedoms over past years, significantly dropping in the World Press Freedom Index 2022 from 30th to 60th. Freedom of speech is also increasingly stifled. Despite this shrinking space, civil society organisations (CSOs) remain active and vocal. Oversight institutions such as the Office of the Special Prosecutor and the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) also actively exercise their mandates, albeit with rather limited funding and resources. Corruption is pervasive in both public and private sectors, with the government demonstrating a limited interest in supporting the fight against corruption. Despite general respect for democratic freedoms and human rights in Ghana, certain social groups are inadequately protected and respected. Members of the LGBTI community are increasingly at risk, where the ongoing parliamentary review of the "Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill" is nearing a second reading in Parliament and enjoys significant public support, especially from religious leaders and some prominent members of the opposition party. By continental standards, Ghana has some of the lowest female political representation. The Affirmative Action Bill, first tabled under the 2016 government administration, is yet to be passed by Parliament, despite several assurances to the contrary. Child labour also remains a serious issue.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The six priority sectors of the EU are:

1. Children's rights: Child labour and trafficking is still pervasive in Ghana, in particular in the fisheries and cocoa sectors. To address some of these issues, the EU launched two children's rights projects in 2020. As a result of these projects, civil society implementing partners have worked with state agencies as well as local and traditional authorities to promote sustained public education on the harmful effects of child labour and trafficking. Additionally, rescued children have been placed in technical and vocational training (TVET) programmes, such as tailoring and carpentry.
2. Non-discrimination, including on the basis of sexual orientation and disability: Several minority groups continue to suffer unequal treatment in Ghana, including women and

the LGBTI community. The EU and Member States are actively using public and behind-the-scenes diplomacy to promote the protection of discriminated groups. The Netherlands and the United Kingdom co-chair an ad-hoc working group on LGBTI rights, where a common strategy and support to the community are regularly discussed and coordinated with international like-minded partners, including the UN.

3. Gender equality and women's rights: Ghana continues to suffer from low representation of women in governance and decision-making and persisting violence against women and girls. Through the EU Delegation's newly signed grant contracts under the Human Rights and Democracy programme focusing on the implementation of election observation missions (EOM) recommendations, two Ghanaian civil society organisations will notably engage in advocacy efforts to support the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill in Parliament.
4. Freedom of expression: Press freedom has significantly declined under the current government administration, with Ghana dropping from 30th to 60th place in the World Press Freedom Index. The 2020 EU EOM report included a priority recommendation on strengthening the national media oversight authority, namely the National Media Commission (NMC). Support to safety of journalists may also be included as a priority under the upcoming Human Rights and Democracy call for proposals.
5. An efficient and accessible justice system: The EU's Joint Development Programme 2021-2027 for Ghana includes governance as a priority area of intervention, integrating actions to fight corruption and improve rule of law and accountability. The EU Delegation is launching a programme on Strengthening the Rule of Law, Accountability and the Fight Against Corruption under its AAP 2022.
6. Institutional reform: The EU EOM 2020 made 18 recommendations on electoral reform in Ghana, ranging from increasing transparency of campaign financing to strengthening media oversight institutions. The recently launched EU HRD programme implemented by two local civil society organisations (IDEG and CDD-Ghana) will support the implementation of these recommendations.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2022, the EU stepped up advocacy and dialogue initiatives – such as the EU Cocoa Dialogues – to encourage the eradication of child labour in cocoa farming. The EU Delegation also actively led the 16 Days Against Gender-Based Violence campaign in Ghana, including by organising the "16 Women Speak" panel event. The EU Delegation also organised a public forum on International Human Rights Day together with the UN in Ghana and Czech Embassy, which included notable interventions by the Attorney-General and Commissioner for Human Rights.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU has financial engagements in each of the areas of EU action (see above).

5. Multilateral context: Ghana has signed and ratified most existing human rights instruments, including several International Labour Organization conventions. The next UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) for Ghana is scheduled for January 2023. The EU and its Member States participated in the country-level civil society UPR pre-sessions convened by POS Foundation. The EU Delegation also sponsored POS Foundation's attendance at the Geneva pre-sessions.

Ghana has actively advocated against the Russian invasion of Ukraine within multilateral fora. Ghana has a seat at the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 2022-2023 and held the UNSC presidency in November 2022. Its priorities include regional security and stability and restoring democratic rule in West Africa. Ghana's priorities at multilateral level tend to align with the EU, particularly on democratic governance and peace and security.

Guinea Bissau

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Guinea-Bissau is a fragile West African country of 1.8 million where most people live with less than two euros per day, marred by longstanding political instability, corruption and drug trafficking. The economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was also quite serious. After assuming power in February 2020, President Umaro al-Mukhtar Sissoco Embaló managed to consolidate the regime and the institutions, but suffered a coup attempt on 1 February 2022. The attempt aborted, but showed that the situation is still volatile. Soon after, ECOWAS deployed a force that is contributing to stabilise the country. Guinea-Bissau is facing many challenges impeding the improvement of the living conditions of the population as well as the full exercise of their rights. Besides, the regime, formally a semi-presidential system, showed a tendency towards a presidential system, which further increased after the events of 1 February 2022. In May, the Parliament was closed, and new legislative elections are by now scheduled on 4 June 2023. For more than one year, a Government not subject to parliamentary control will rule the country, though this gap could be beneficial for the opposition as well, which is deeply in need of reorganisation, especially after the crackdown that followed the attempted coup. Several opponents have been arrested, or have left the country and face legal prosecution should they return. Freedom of the media remains a serious issue, with several radio stations and other media threatened or closed. Other significant human rights issues include cases of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; lack of independence of the judiciary; corruption; lack of investigation and accountability for violence against women and girls; trafficking in persons; and the worst forms of child labour. Members of the security forces are reported to commit some abuses – the Government has mechanisms to investigate and punish them, but impunity remains a serious issue.

2. EU action - key focus areas:

- *Protecting and empowering individuals:* Civil Society is very active in Guinea-Bissau but suffers from a lack of resources and capacity, in spite of the support of the International Community, including the EU. The empowerment of women remains a key challenge. The human rights of persons with disabilities and children should also be enhanced, alongside those of LGBTI people. The EU continues to support projects to build the capacity of civil society to combat and prevent child and forced marriage and gender-based violence, with a holistic approach including psychological, legal, health, economic and social empowerment support. Other projects support the right to health and WHO objectives of universal health coverage and the improvement of health professionals performance, the rights of persons with disabilities and access to Justice.

- *Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies*: The six-point road map entitled "Agreement on the Resolution of the Political Crisis in Guinea-Bissau", if correctly implemented following the Conakry Agreement, should pave the way to the reforms of the justice system, the security sector and the constitution, and therefore contribute to building a resilient, inclusive and democratic Bissau Guinean society. Several projects aim at consolidating economic governance and public finance management systems, as well as the rule of law in Portuguese speaking countries.
- *Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy*: Guinea-Bissau should establish an independent human rights commission, which could join the National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) network. Similarly, efforts to be part of Inter-Parliamentary networks should be encouraged. Regarding freedom of the media, an EIDHR project supported the protection and promotion of the human rights of journalists and professionals of social communication in 2021. Another pilot EIDHR project aims to create adapted and formal programmes in the area of citizenship and human rights education. Finally, an EDF project aimed at "Strengthening the resilience of local communities in defence of human rights and consolidation of the rule of law" involves the Human Rights League, as well as relevant actors from civil society and security forces.
- *New technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges*: The main challenge is digital penetration that remains low and commensurate to the low level of development in Guinea-Bissau.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: There is no formal political dialogue between the EU and Guinea-Bissau and no human rights dialogue. Human rights issues are raised on an *ad hoc* basis.

4. EU financial engagement: AAP 2022 for Guinea-Bissau, in line with the MIP 2021-2027, allocates EUR 10 million for human rights, democracy and good governance projects.

5. Multilateral context: Guinea-Bissau is a party to the eight core international human rights instruments and is expected to ratify a number of optional protocols. Once again, Guinea-Bissau has been asked to establish an independent National Human Rights Commission. The last UN Universal Periodic Review took place in January 2020, and Guinea-Bissau agreed to examine 197 recommendations. These include

1) the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT);
2) the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (OPCRC) on a communications procedure;
3) the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
4) the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) on the acceptance of an individual complaints procedure;
5) the Optional Protocol to the International Convention on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights (ICESC);
6) the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention;
7) International Labour Organisation Convention 169;
8) and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Guinea-Bissau should also step up its collaboration with human rights Treaty Bodies by submitting the periodic reports on time and by responding favourably to the visit request made by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

Guinea

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation On 5 September 2021, elements of the Guinean armed forces stormed the presidential palace and captured President Alpha Condé. Their leader, Colonel Doumbouya, installed himself at the head of the 'National Committee for the Rally for Development' (CNRD), and decided to suspend the Constitution and dissolve the government and the National Assembly. On 27September 2021, it was published a 'Charte de la Transition' detailing the transitional institutions, inspired by the transitional charters of Chad and Mali. The Charter specified from the outset that the members of the transition will not be able to stand for any of the upcoming elections. A year and a half after the coup, the authorities of the transition seem to be installed in their functions and the main machinery of the state gives the appearance of a certain normality. Most of the power, however, is retained in the Presidency. An ECOWAS technical mission to Guinea from 16 to 21 October reached a compromise with the Transitional Authorities on a schedule of priority activities and a 24-month transition period for the return to constitutional order. These recommendations were validated at the level of the ECOWAS Heads of State at the beginning of December 2022, including the start date of the 24 months. The main political parties and civil society organisations, which have been behind numerous recent protests, have shown less enthusiasm for the agreement, and the lack of trust between them and the authorities remains one of the main challenges in ensuring an inclusive process for the return to constitutional order.

2. EU action – key focus areas: Due to the above circumstances, the Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2021-2027 has been adapted to this new context, giving more weight to the area of governance and democracy. Since 2010, the European Union has been committed to supporting 450 victims of the 28 September 2009 massacre through a partnership with the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), the Guinean Organization for the Defense of human rights (OGDH) and of the citizen and the main association of victims (AVIPA - Association of victims, parents and friends of September 28). This support has provided legal support for these 450 victims, including FIDH, OGDH and AVIPA as civil parties, but also medical and psychological support. This support has been achieved through five successive projects implemented by FIDH since 2011, for a total of more than EUR 4 million. It took the following forms depending on the project:

- Judicial follow-up, reinforcement of victims' lawyers
- Contribution to investigative work with the OGDH, support for 450 victims, support for the collective of lawyers
- Strengthening of the OGDH
- Medical and psychological assistance to victims
- Support for AVIPA

- Ensure the effective participation and legal representation of the victims of 28 September.
- Compilation of medical records and psychological support for victims involved in legal proceedings.
- Support for logistical and security aspects related to the participation of victims in the trial

The last project started a few days after the start of the trial, to support the participation of victims in the trial over a period of 12 months and with a budget of EUR 300,000. It is entitled "Contributing to the effective participation of victims in the September 28 trial in Guinea", implemented by FIDH, OGDH and AVIPA. It aims to prepare and support victims for trial, in particular by covering their care and by supporting the pool of lawyers mobilized to represent victims, in particular by conducting a high-level judicial mission.

2. EU bilateral political engagement: Political dialogue was almost non-existent in 2022, in particular due to the political situation before and after the coup d'état in September 2021.

3. EU financial engagements: For the implementation of the SDHD, the EU Delegation supported five programmes:

(1) the implementation by Lawyers without Borders, which started in January 2021, aims to ensure close monitoring of human rights violations in Guinea in a context weakened by a political crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. The specific objectives of the project are to establish monitoring and analysis of developments of the human rights situation and to strengthen the capacities of Guinean civil society in terms of research (research methodology, evidence gathering, etc.) and advocacy with the national, international and UN authorities (EUR 0.4 million).

(2) A second ongoing project is being managed by the Belgian NGO, Coginta, in collaboration with the two co-applicants Les Même Droits pour Tous (MDT) and the Organisation Guinéenne de défense des Droits de l'Homme (OGDH). The overall objective is to support civil society organisations in consolidating the rule of law by strengthening access to justice for vulnerable persons and strengthening the fight against impunity (EUR 1.75 million).

(3) The third project, implemented by the local NGO Association pour la Promotion et le Développement de l'Entrepreneuriat Jeunesse (APRODEJ), aims to contribute to the abandonment of harmful practices (early pregnancies, HIV/AIDS, sexual violence, non-spacing of births, non-registration of births, female genital mutilation and child marriages) that violate women's and girls' rights (EUR 0.2)

(4) The main objective of the fourth project, implemented by Les Mêmes droits pour Tous, is to carry out information and awareness-raising activities, as well as advocacy to prevent gender-based violence (GBV). The main activities are directed towards the fight against impunity of the VBG and to ensure that all cases of GBV are brought before the competent judicial and/or non-judicial authorities (EUR 0.3 million).

The last project — signed at the end of 2021 — aims to protect the environment and the right of urban populations to a decent habitat. The project — managed by Enabel — therefore aims to improve access for urban populations to household waste management services. Currently, the collection of waste in these districts is carried out on a small scale and there is no control by the public authorities of the final waste treatment after

collection. This action will support the role of public authorities in adopting environmental regulations to ensure a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment in their application (EUR 10 million).

5. Multilateral context: The EU Delegation has approached the Guinean Government to obtain its support on nine resolutions promoted by the EU at the 75th United Nations General Assembly.

Kenya

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Kenya has maintained comparatively high human rights and democratic standards in 2022. In August, Kenya held its fifth elections since the return of multi-party democracy in 2002. In spite of challenges and the continued need for improvements, the EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) found that the election confirmed Kenya's democratic status. A democratic transition of power happened after the Supreme Court dismissed the losing side's contestation of the presidential election results in September.

Freedom of expression and civil liberties are broadly respected. Kenya's media is free, even if editorial lines maybe influenced by political interests. During the 2022 elections cycle clear signs of biased reporting emerged and independent media continued to experience financial difficulties, undermining to an extend the ability for conducting investigative journalism.

The judiciary is independent; the higher courts function to a high standard. The judiciary as a whole faces financial shortages curtailing access to and execution of justice. Speeding up access to justice is also needed to reduce the population of Kenya's overcrowded prisons.
Corruption and the perception of a culture of impunity in high profile cases remain a problem. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2022, Kenya ranked 123th out of 180 with a score of 32 out of a possible 100.

Human rights organisations continued to trace extra-judicial killings and disappearances. In 2022, 152 cases of police killings and enforced disappearances were reported.

Kenya's gender equality profile has slightly improved in 2022 with the political participation of Kenyan women slightly increased in the 2022 elections.

There were no significant developments or changes in the protection of the Kenyan LGBTI community. Same sex relations remain illegal by law and LGBTI members face regular attacks and discrimination

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The Kenyan Refugees Act, which came into effect in February 2022, forms the foundation of the legislative framework for the protection of refugees in Kenya. The Act reaffirms the commitment by the Government of Kenya to offer protection to refugees in line with the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention.

The Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance ranks Kenya at number 13 out of 54, with an Overall Governance score of 58.7 out of 100 and a positive trend of 3.1 since 2012.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU Delegation and EU Member States had an excellent coordination on the priorities for the UNDP-led basket fund on elections. Core support to the electoral management body IEBC was an EU priority with EUR 2 million. The EU support to the domestic observer group ELOG was a positive and informative element of the EU electoral support.

The implementation of the Civil Society Roadmap 2022-2025 kicked off with a larger civil society call for proposals launched in March and three larger contracts with substantial CSO capacity-building elements and sub-granting components were concluded by December.

The Programme for Legal Empowerment and Aid Delivery (PLEAD) entered into its last year of implementation in 2022 with many results and impact of investments being publicly showcased. This further cemented the EU's position as Kenya's main partner in the Justice sector. The second phase - PLEAD 2 - was formally launched by the EU HRVP Josep Borrell and the Chief Justice in January 2022. The new phase will put a stronger emphasis on the fight against corruption and embedding a human rights based approach with more focus on the fight against sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) and female genital mutilation as well as child protection. Other civil society actions are also continuing their implementation, notably on juvenile justice, women's access to justice, and the abolition of death penalty.

Through a number of projects, the EU supported efforts to monitor reporting and notably disinformation and hate speech in the run-up to and aftermath of the August elections.

The EU Delegation chaired the Gender Development Partners group and co-chaired - together with the State Department for Gender - Kenya's Sector Working Group on Gender until the end of 2022. Implementation of the GAP III Country-Level Implementation plan that focuses on GBV, social, economic and political empowerment of women was launched by including a GBV lot in the CSO call for proposals launched in March 2023.

A number of EIDHR-funded actions continued their implementation on rights of the child and rights of persons with disabilities, including in response to Covid-19. The Delegation closely monitored and coordinated responses, together with implementing partners (UNHCR) on the reported violence against LGBTI in Kakuma camp.

Regular meetings continued to take place in the context of the Human Rights Defenders working group. The Annual Human Rights Defenders Award inaugurated in 2016 continues to honour and publicly recognize the important work of HRDs in Kenya.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Throughout the year, the EU continued to engage actively with Government, including through the launch of the EU-Kenya Strategic Dialogue in January 2022 by the HRVP in Nairobi and engagement with the newly elected President during the HRVP visit in September 2022. An important number of bilateral meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and all relevant line ministries flanked this.

The EU also deployed one of its largest-ever Election Observation Missions (EOM) to Kenya ahead of the August 2022 polls. The final EU EOM 2022 report was handed over during the return visit of the EU Chief Observer in October. A core task for the EU and like-minded partners will be to support the implementation of the recommendations of the EU EOM and other observer missions, in order to foster improvements in the electoral processes.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the EU continued to implement the Multiannual Indicative Programme 2021-2027 for Kenya in which 'Leaving no one Behind' and 'Democratic and Economic Governance' feature as priority areas with substantial funding allocations. Under the MIP a new contract on the fight against corruption was concluded in December. The EU delegation continued implementation of the Programme for Legal Empowerment and Aid Delivery (PLEAD) in Kenya, the largest access to justice programme in Sub Saharan Africa. A second phase of the PLEAD programme to be implemented in 2022-2027 was launched in January 2022 by EU HRVP Borrell and will start in March 2023. The EU support to the UNDP elections basket fund was significant and several EU member states contributed to the fund in 2022. This work will continue in 2023 with attention to EU EOM recommendations.

The Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR/NCIDI) portfolio in Kenya contains projects on a wide variety of human rights and access to justice issues including actions to support persons with disabilities, persons belonging to minorities, death penalty/abolition, and domestic election observation. A new contract on enhancing the inclusiveness of political participation was signed mid-2022. Under the civil society budget, the Delegation signed three new grants in late 2022 of which two focus on the fight against GBV and one will build the capacity of various civil society organisations across Kenya, notably human rights groups at county and community level through sub-granting.

5. Multilateral context

The EU Delegation delivered a number of demarches to the Government of Kenya related to human rights issues, including a certain number on Ukraine. Ukraine-related human rights arose in discussion at UNEP and UN Habitat in Nairobi. On all occasions, the EU took a strong position in defence of human rights.

Kenya voted in favour of the draft resolution condemning Russia's aggression on 25 February 2022. More recently, Kenya supported a draft resolution on Territorial Integrity of Ukraine on 30 September 2022. At the UNGA, Kenya voted in favour of all resolutions on related to the Russian war of Aggression against Ukraine, but abstained on the UNGA resolution on Suspension of the rights of membership of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council adopted by the UNGA on 7 April 2022.

Kingdom of Lesotho

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, Lesotho held its 11th legislative polls to elect a new National Assembly. For the first time in the history of the

country, the European Union deployed an Election Observation Mission to observe the election process. The EOM was warmly welcomed. A generally well-organised, free and fair election proceeded, with 56 parties and 23 independent candidates contesting. However, legal uncertainties and limited funding for the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) in the run-up to the election had a negative impact. Voter turnout of 37.7% represented an all-time low and a continuation of declining voter turnout since the 2012 legislative polls. The Revolution for Prosperity (RFP) party, formed earlier in 2022 by businessperson turned politician Samuel Matekane, won 57 (including a by-election in December) of 120 total seats. Subsequently the RFP formed a coalition government with the Alliance of Democrats (AD) and the Movement for Economic Change (MEC). The new administration took office with the promise to fight corruption, cut government spending and to advance the National Reforms Process.

The National Reform Process advanced but also witnessed some setbacks. The mandate of the National Reforms Authority (NRA) ended on 31 April 2022. It drafted an Omnibus Bill, containing proposed changes to the Constitution of Lesotho and other bills. These mainly political and electoral bills were not approved before the National Assembly was dissolved in July ahead of the General Elections in October.

Observing and respecting human rights remains critical to attaining peace and stability in Lesotho. Brutality by police and other security forces and gender-based violence are two significant human rights challenges that persist in Lesotho. Additionally, a lack of good governance and weak judicial institutions hamper Lesotho's development. Politically sensitive cases in relation to the attempted Coup d'état in 2014 have advanced in 2022. However, only one foreign judge remains and some cases have been re-allocated to national judges instead. In the case against former Prime Minister Thabane over the 2017 murder of his estranged wife, the charges were dropped because the Court was not able to locate critical witnesses.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In 2022, the EU prioritized emergency support to the Lesotho Judiciary, the National Reforms Process and long-term support to Lesotho's Judicial System. This assistance includes the deployment of one foreign judge to manage politically sensitive cases, continued support to a UNDP-implemented programme in assistance of the National Reforms Authority and the process as a whole, and the signing of a EUR 3.8 million agreement supporting the Judicial system to provide better access, transparency and accountability.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Throughout 2022, the EU continued to engage actively with the government of Lesotho, both in structured regular formats and on ad hoc basis. This includes an Article 8 political dialogue on 24 March 2022. Diplomatic staff from EU Member States, based in South Africa and accredited to Lesotho took part in the dialogue. The main issues of discussion included the Russian war against Ukraine, an update on the National Reforms Process and National and Local Elections among others. Furthermore, the EU maintained good working relations with other international partners, such as the United Nations agencies, local civil society organisations, opposition parties and likeminded development partners.

4. EU financial engagement: During 2022, various social protection and development projects received EU funding, through the 11th European Development Fund and thematic

instruments. The largest amount, totalling EUR 21.5 million, support was provided to an UNICEF-implemented social protection intervention, supporting the most vulnerable members of society. Support to civil society organisations remained a priority for the EU's development cooperation. Various organisations received funding. These include Sesotho Media and Development/ She HIVE-Association, Transformation Resource Centre and World Vision Ireland/ Lesotho. In late 2022, a contract under the NDICI Human Rights instrument was signed with World Vision Austria/ Lesotho, extending EU support to civil society. The work of the organisations focuses on children rights, human rights violation by security forces and sensitisation on human rights. In addition, the EU upheld its commitment in supporting Lesotho's judiciary performance in funding the deployment of one foreign judge to manage politically sensitive cases.

5. Multilateral context: Lesotho is not a signatory to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. However, despite having the death penalty still in place, there has been no execution since 1995 and normally, death sentences are converted into life sentences. Lesotho is also a State party to major international human rights instruments even though it did not ratify some of them, including the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure or the Migrant Workers Convention. The country's last Universal Periodic Review session was held on 22 January 2020 and identified considerable strides made by Lesotho such as the adoption of the Anti-Trafficking Bill of 2020, which seeks to combat trafficking in human beings by sentencing convicted perpetrators to life imprisonment. The Government enacted the bill in January 2021. The National Human Rights Commission is expected to be established as soon as the bill is passed in Parliament.

Liberia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Liberia is a country with a functional democracy and a general acceptance of fundamental rights and rule of law. 2022 saw several positive trends in the country, such as significant progress towards legal and de facto abolition of the death penalty and an upward trend on freedom of expression and press freedom. This being said, Liberia remained a fragile country, particularly in terms of its economic and social conditions (low human development, high levels of poverty and inequality, poor services and infrastructure) and also in terms of its deep institutional fragility and governance challenges. While sexual gender based violence (SGBV), including female genital mutilation (FGM), remained the major outstanding human rights challenge, a three-year countrywide ban on FGM was signed by over 150 traditional leaders in February. Rights of LBGTI persons, overcrowded prisons and police violence continue to remain additional significant challenges. A by-election for the Senate in Lofa county in June unfolded peacefully, yet increasing tensions were felt between party youth wings and security forces, which call for close attention to the 2023 elections preparations. An Election Experts Mission/Election Observation Mission (EEM/EOM) is foreseen.

The worldwide negative economic fallout of the pandemic, coupled with the Russian aggression of Ukraine and the food price inflation it ignited, maintained the Liberian economy vulnerable and increased food insecurity significantly. On transitional justice, implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) issued in 2009 on post-conflict reconciliation, including the establishment of a war and economic crimes court remains poor. The slow progress is partially due to some former warlords maintaining a kingmaker role for the 2023 Presidential and General Election. Two Liberian war crime cases were judged in EU Member States with the acquittal of Gibril Massaquoi in Finland and the sentencing to a life term of Kunti Kamara in France for war crimes committed in Liberia. An appeal is expected in the Finnish case with further hearings in Liberia in 2023.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In 2022, as in previous years, issues of good governance, accountability and transparency, as well as human rights (notably SGBV, FGM, press freedom, LGBT rights, death penalty) were included on the agenda of the EU-Liberia Article 8 Political Dialogue held on 20 May.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Delegation (EUDEL) and the EU Member States (EU MS) have been particularly active on the public stage and in the media on the issues of SGBV and FGM, which are addressed through the Liberia Spotlight Initiative. During the 10th EU-Liberia Political Dialogue on 20 May, the EU acknowledged the Government's commitment to fight SGBV but recalled that still too many Liberian women and girls continued to be subject to high levels of SGBV. The EU stressed that FGM is a grave human rights violation, expressed regret that FGM was not included in the Domestic Violence Act passed in 2019, and emphasized that a ban on FGM is also necessary, as other countries in the region have done. Following the three-day protest in Monrovia, in August, which asked for stronger measures to fight SGBV, EUDEL and EU MS issued an EU local statement. All of them were also present at the national conference, in September that validated the two-year roadmap to fight SGBV. In November/December, EUDEL and EU MS supported the 16 Days of Activism against SGBV campaign. The Head of EUDEL participated in the launch and in three radio programs. EUDEL also carried out awareness raising and visibility activities in rural Grand Gedeh county during the campaign, including a school donation of books educating on women's empowerment and SGBV and meetings with women's rights organisations.

Apart from SGBV, the EU conveyed frank messages on the need to improve governance and address corruption at the EU-Liberia political dialogue. The Heads of Liberia's main integrity bodies (Anti-Corruption, Governance, Auditing and Public Procurement & Concession Commissions) were present at the dialogue. The EU recalled that according to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, Liberia was 137th of 180 countries with a score of 28/100. The EU welcomed President Weah's commitment in his State of the Nation address to improving governance and intensifying the fight against corruption, and stressed that a strong political will is crucial. Support to governance institutions included EU and Swedish support to the NEC and EU support to the General Auditing Commission (GAC). Specific conditions facilitating the work and strengthening the mandate of the GAC and the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) are part of the ongoing EU State Building Contract (EU general budget support).

Issues of prison conditions and pre-trial detention were also raised during the political dialogue. The EU expressed concern over prison overcrowding, aggravated by the high number of pre-trial long-term detainees, and urged the Government to address this situation and safeguard the human rights of detainees. The EU recalled that in the political dialogue held in May 2019, the Ministry of Justice announced plans to build a new prison facility and pass legal measures aimed at reducing the number of pre-trial detainees. The lack of separation of juvenile inmates from the other detainees and serious challenges in terms of prisoners' nutrition conditions were other aspects underlined by the dialogue parties. EUDEL participates regularly in the Human Rights in Prison Coordination Platform.

EU positions on human rights issues were published using EUDEL's communication channels (Facebook, website and newspapers, including the publishing of op-eds). Throughout the year, EUDEL has taken an active role to strengthen the capacity of the free media through constant engagement with the press and radio and with support to fact checking, countering disinformation and hate speech. In addition to the structured cooperation programme, several media lunches have been arranged at Head of EUDEL and PPI level. A Peace Forum for media stakeholders, youth and other civil society organisations (CSOs), police and the military was held under the campaign 'Countering Hate Speech, Strengthening Conflict Sensitivity in Journalism and Social Media towards Supporting Peaceful Elections in Liberia'.

Under the 'EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Liberia' adopted in 2018, EUDEL continued to support the organizational and advocacy capacity of Liberian CSOs. The EU also continued to support the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA), strengthening civil society's role in forestry management.

4. EU financial engagement: Liberia is one of the eight African countries chosen to be a Spotlight partner. The four-year programme is implemented by the UN, the Liberian Government, CSOs, traditional actors and the private sector, with an EU contribution of $ 17.7 million for the first two years. The initiative was instrumental in the adoption of a three-year countrywide ban on FGM in February. The EU, in partnership with Sweden and the UNDP, additionally donated forensic equipment to support prosecution of perpetrators of SGBV, although courts continue to reserve the right to not admit DNA evidence in rape cases even when the evidence gathering procedure has been correctly followed by the Police and medical institutions.

Under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), three projects, implemented by local and international NGOs, were active in 2022. They focused on: (i) protecting and empowering the LGBTI community to live lives free of discrimination, violence and stigmatisation; (ii) freedom of information and freedom of expression, addressing the capacities of journalists in ATI, supporting the revision of the Freedom of Information Act (dated 2010), addressing the need of a proper personal data privacy law, and countering hate speech and disinformation; (iii) addressing the human rights of detained people in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice. Additionally, the EU strengthens CSOs capacities to advocate more effectively, and to work with disempowered communities, such as women and rural communities in the South-East (on land rights), or the disabled, via the thematic programme for civil society and local authorities.

5. Multilateral context: Liberia has ratified the main international human rights instruments, but many still need to be integrated into domestic law. Liberia has supported, and in some cases co-sponsored, all UN resolutions on the war in Ukraine. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is adamant that this is not because the EU asks, but because Liberia espouses the values of peace, human rights and multilateralism. Liberia, as the only African country aside Eswatini (the only country in Africa with diplomatic recognition of Taiwan), joined 22 EU MS condemning the situation in Xinjiang. While under considerable pressure from China, and while recognizing a One China Policy at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Liberia has not retracted its concern about the situation in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. On neighbouring Guinea, President Weah has repeatedly made public statements in support of constitutional terms and calling for a return to democratic elections. The Government has also taken initiative to host conferences through ECOWAS and the Mano River Union to that effect.

Madagascar

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The situation in Madagascar presents a number of challenges, including extreme poverty, insecurity in certain areas, poor access to primary healthcare and education, vulnerability to climate change, lack of transparency, widespread corruption, cases of restrictions of freedom of expression and assembly, serious violations in gender equality and the rights of the child, and very poor detention conditions. Some issues have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the deteriorating economic situation aggravated by the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

Despite efforts to reform the judicial system, guaranteeing all detainees access to a fair trial within a reasonable timeframe remains a challenge. In generally overcrowded prisons, detainees often experience psychological abuse, malnutrition, and lack of access to healthcare. Around half of the detainees are in pre-trial detention. Minors are also, quite frequently, detained - the courts rarely use alternative measures in their cases. Decreasing trust of the population in an often corrupt, inefficient and underfinanced judiciary system, has led to an increasing number of (attempted) cases of mob justice. For example, in August 2022 in Ikongo, security forces killed more than 30 people in a confrontation with a crowd, which was trying to storm gendarmerie barracks in order to punish arrested suspects in a kidnapping and murder case involving an albino child and his mother. The spokesperson of HRVP Borrell published a statement. Several other cases of excessive use of force were recorded in 2022, as well as cases of security forces resorting to on-the-spot executions.

Although steps have been taken in the field of empowerment of women, gender-based violence and child abuse remain serious problems. According to UNICEF, many children suffer physical abuse at school and/or in their families. Completion rates and quality of primary education are low, reflecting weaknesses in teachers' training (most of them are not trained teachers) and lack of adequate funding. Basic education is rarely free. Access to basic healthcare can be difficult or unaffordable, and the healthcare system remains affected by corruption and very low quality of services. In many rural areas, the population is vulnerable

to criminal activities, due to a weak presence of the State. In the South, some 1.64 million people continue to face high levels of food insecurity.

The influence of business people and politicians, who own most media outlets, may lead to self-censorship among journalists. Cases of intimidation are reported. Government intentions to strengthen the control of social media are concerning. Limitations to peaceful demonstrations, especially those organised by the opposition, give rise to concern, especially in the run-up to presidential election in late 2023.

A persisting and significant problem is the lack of transparency in public spending. In late 2021, the Malagasy Court of Auditors reported that some 50% of COVID-19 funding in 2020 had been misspent or was unaccounted for. Corruption is endemic. The director of the national branch of Transparency International came under heavy pressure after filing a report with the *Parquet National Financier* in France and the *Pôle Anti-Corruption* in Madagascar, calling on these authorities to open an investigation into possible corruption in the Madagascar lychee trade.

Whistle-blowers and human rights defenders lack efficient protection and a draft law to protect them is still pending. An environmental activist was killed in June 2022 after having revealed illegal exploitation of wood in a protected area.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2022, transparency and the fight against corruption were a focus of EU action, aiming at building a resilient, inclusive and democratic society via support to institutions, NGOs and civil society, including:

- Ministry of Justice: mainstreaming and operationalisation of the digitalisation of courts;
- Court of Auditors:support for the audit of COVID-19 state expenditure;
- Ministry of Finance: support to improving the State Agents Human Resource Management System (AUGURE), preparation of the budget and steps towards the transition to an efficient program-driven budget, especially in health, education and justice sectors;
- Transparency International: strengthening of citizens' education and engagement against corruption and in support of human rights and democracy in Madagascar;
- civil society: capacity building in the areas of budget analysis and efficient lobbying;
- consortium of NGOs: analysis and establishment of a lobbying strategy concerning i) COVID-19 expenditure management and ii) access to and management of funding for health and education at local level;
- Fanainga (formerly "*Fonds Commun Multi-Bailleur d'Appui à la Société Civile*"): strengthening of capacities of Civil Society Organisations (CSO) to become a crucial development player in favour of the most vulnerable and marginalised people and communities in view of triggering sustainable social change;
- Hirondelle Foundation and Studio Sifaka: fostering a culture of dialogue through media contents encouraging the population to participate in public debate;
- Safidy: signature of the grant for a local election observatory established by the EU, consolidating local election observation capacities in view of 2023 presidential elections, promoting the implementation of recommendations by the 2018 EU Election Observation Mission;

- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: supporting the capacities of political parties and civil society, especially youth, in favour of equal and transparent democratic processes.

In addition, the EU organised a social media campaign against gender-based violence. In the framework of the European Film Festival, films on the challenges faced by Malagasy women as well as on LGBTI - related subjects were screened, followed by debates with the public.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Respect for human rights is an essential element of the EU's political dialogue with Madagascar. At the fourth political dialogue meeting under the presidency of Andry Rajoelina in August 2022, the EU encouraged the government to implement recommendations issued by the 2018 EU Election Observation Mission with a view to further improving the elections framework before the 2023 presidential elections. The EU also highlighted specific human rights issues, such as the situation of detainees in prisons, malnutrition, the right to health care (including vaccination against COVID-19), gender equality, as well as the rights of whistle-blowers and human rights defenders. Deforestation, trafficking of natural resources and access to land were also discussed. The EU encouraged further progress in the area of freedom of expression and democratic space. All of these issues have also been highlighted during several meetings with representatives of the Malagasy authorities and of civil society throughout the year.

4. EU financial engagement: The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and CSO country allocations funded various projects accompanying vulnerable populations: persons with disabilities, children, women, youth, delinquents (women, minors). The EIDHR focused on the monitoring by CSOs of the transparency and efficiency of national COVID-19 response and the youth participation, notably through the media with the financing of Studio Sifaka. Regarding funding by the European Development Fund (EDF), the EU has implemented the DINIKA II project to strengthen civil society (EUR 8 million) via the autonomous civil society fund “Fanainga”. A project of EUR 11 million for the period 2014-2022, entitled “Administration for all" ended mid - 2022. It aimed at strengthening the efficiency and integrity of public administration. Additional EUR 10 million was allocated to fight food insecurity as a consequence of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. Under the NDICI-Global Europe framework, new allocations were adopted (to be signed in early 2023), including the important governance strengthening programme ‘We are all accountable’ of EUR 41 million. The programme will work simultaneously with civil society and media as well as public institutions such as the judiciary (digitalisation and inspections of jurisdictions), financial administration (human resources management, budget planning and execution), in order to support Malagasy actors in the fight against corruption, to improve transparency, civic participation and public finance management.

5. Multilateral context: At the Political Dialogue in August 2022, the EU encouraged the Malagasy Government to support the EU priorities at the 77th session of the UN General Assembly Third Committee. Following the 2019 Universal Periodic Review, Madagascar, among other things, pledged to strengthen efforts to combat discrimination and violence against women, to reform the penitentiary system and to strengthen efforts in the fight against corruption. In 2022, several legal initiatives were still pending (e.g. draft Law on Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Whistle-blowers).

Democratic Republic of Malawi

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Malawi throughout 2022 has been relatively stable, with a few notable developments. The governance and rule of law reform agenda embarked on by President Lazarus Chakwera's administration, continued to advance, albeit at a moderate pace. Combating corruption has been a prominent pillar of this agenda. In 2022, this fight was characterised by progress – in terms of high-profile investigations - and setbacks, which are, in the words of Justice Minister Titus Mvalo *"the work of those trying to frustrate the process"*. Thus, for the EU it will remain essential to support the key governance institutions that have a pivotal role to play, in particular, the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), the Financial Intelligence Authority (FIA), the Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC), and the Office of Ombudsman. It is noteworthy that these were granted greater independence and additional resources by the government with the aim of boosting their effectiveness.

As regards economic and social rights, Malawi's economy is in dire straits, and grappling with compounding forex, fuel, food and fertiliser crises in 2022, on top of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of these is most acute for rural families. 20% of Malawians were deemed to be food insecure at the start of the 2022 lean season. In prisons, inmates are also facing food shortages that further worsened their degrading conditions.

With respect to the situation of the estimated 134,000 persons with albinism who are living in the country, notable progress has been achieved to reduce social stigma and to increase their integration in communities. That said, several tragic killings – among which a 3-year old girl – and other violations against PWA still occurred in 2022. The momentum towards the abolition of the death penalty continued. In August 2022, President Chakwera commuted the death sentence of all inmates on death row to life imprisonment. In 2022, Malawi emerged as a transit country for human trafficking with the tragic discovery of 29 deceased migrants in shallow mass graves in a northern forest. The situation of the country's 65 000 refugees housed in overcrowded Dzaleka camp was brought into sharp focus when the government announced a re-encampment policy – potentially uprooting around 8 000 families.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2022, under the flagship Chilungamo (Justice and Accountability) programme, the EU supported seven justice institutions in building their capacities, improving their accessibility to the citizens and enhancing the public's awareness, demand, and capacity to obtain greater accountability from duty bearers. For instance, the programme supported the Legal Aid Bureau (LAB) in providing legal representation to vulnerable and indigent populations in all regions across the country (In 2022, LAB made a total of 921 legal representations). The Programme also supported the Office of the Ombudsman in investigating 491 individual complaints on maladministration in Ministries, Departments and Agencies. To boost accountability, the programme supported the Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC) in conducting a Budget Expenditure Tracking of the National Budget implemented in 2021/22 fiscal year. The MHRC was also assisted in conducting public hearings of alleged violation of human rights in various institutions.

The joint Global EU-UN Spotlight Initiative continued strengthen the meaningful engagement of traditional leaders in Eradication of Violence Against Women and Girls, focusing on district and community levels to ensure that traditional leaders effectively assume their roles. The training of mentees as "Agents of Change to fight Gender Based Violence" in their respective communities was pursued (over 20,000 mentors were trained).

In the area of the fight against corruption, the Chuma Cha Dziko Programme is helping institutional capacity of key Ministries and institutions to build a more transparent and efficient public financial management system, as an enabler for improved public service delivery.

The Delegation hosted the EU Election Follow-up Mission in September and October, at a time when electoral reform was gaining momentum. A package of three reform bills was adopted. Several reforms implement fully or partially the recommendations of the 2019 EU Election Observation Mission, most prominently the establishment of a legal basis for constituency-level tally centers and the harmonisation of the legal framework for the Presidential, Parliamentary and local elections. The reforms have however not addressed the lingering challenge of political participation of women and minorities nor the issue of campaign and political party financing.

The EU in Malawi remains firmly associated with transformative development, the promotion of human rights and democratic values and principles. Malawi's seat on the UN Human Rights Council provides ample opportunity to work together closely on human rights-related matters, and the fight against corruption is testament to the country's commitment to building strong and accountable institutions.

The UNDP National Registration and Identification System (NRIS) Project continued into 2022. The importance of issuing all Malawians with a National Identification card has gained new significance now that this card has become the sole means of valid identification for the purposes of registering as a voter.

The Delegation worked closely with Member States Embassies, other like-minded partners and non-resident Member States to coordinate and share perspectives on developments, which have a bearing on the human rights and democracy situation, coordinating joint approaches for outreaches and meetings with Malawian authorities.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Throughout the year, the EU continued to engage actively with Government, including through two political dialogues held on 18 January and 23 June 2022, flanked by a dense calendar of bilateral meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and all relevant line ministries. The Political dialogues touched on issues of corruption, prison conditions, death penalty abolition, electoral reforms, public finance management and regional developments, among others.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022 the EU continued to support good governance and the rule of law through its programmes focusing on access to justice, support for vulnerable groups (in particular people with albinism and gender-based violence), public finance

management and promoting the civic space in Malawi. In 2022, the EU focused on protecting and promoting the rights of persons with albinism. As part of the awareness raising, the EU Delegation joined a community rally to commemorate the International Albinism Awareness Day on 13 June.

5. Multilateral context: In 2022, Malawi settled into its three-year term of office on the United Nations Human Rights Council, and took every opportunity to spearhead a strong stance. In other international fora, notably at UN-level, it consistently aligned with the EU to supported resolutions condemning the Russian aggression of Ukraine and on other topics such as upholding the moratorium on the death penalty. This illustrates that the partnership between the EU and Malawi remains based on the shared foundations of democracy and human rights.

Mali

1. Situation générale des droits de l'homme et la démocratie: La situation des droits humains s'est globalement dégradée durant une année 2022 qui a été caractérisée par une augmentation spectaculaire des violations des droits de l'homme attribuées en premier lieu aux groupes armés terroristes, puis aux forces de défense et de sécurité, y compris dans le cadre d'opérations conjointes menées avec Wagner, conduisant à des violations massives des droits de l'homme. Celles-ci se sont principalement produites dans le Nord et le Centre du pays.

Bien que les Organisations de la Société Civile (OSC) maliennes évoluent dans un environnement relativement propice garantissant notamment la liberté d'association ; la liberté d'expression et la liberté de chercher des financements au Mali ou ailleurs, semblent beaucoup plus contrôlées, et les financements publics français sont désormais interdits. On assiste à un rétrécissement progressif des libertés individuelles et collectives. Des incidents ont été relevés en 2021 concernant des interruptions des réseaux sociaux, l'intimidations de journalistes et d'animateurs-radio.

La lutte contre la corruption a connu de rares progrès. La mise en lumière de cas emblématiques touchant des anciennes autorités (notamment plusieurs anciens premiers ministres) affiche une volonté de restaurer la soumission de tous les citoyens à la loi, quel que soit le rang. Cependant, il convient de rester attentif au risque d'une justice sélective, qui aurait pour effet de porter atteinte à l'existence même d'une opposition, garante de la vitalité des démocraties. En outre, les cas emblématiques n'ont toujours pas débouché sur l'ouverture de procès, ce qui est problématique en ce qui concerne les suspects placés en détention provisoire. Dans ce contexte les dénonciations conduites par des organisations de défense des droits de l'Homme nationale (principalement la Commission nationale des droits de l'Homme (CNDH) qui est une autorité étatique) et internationales doivent inciter à un suivi particulier. Le budget de la justice représente en 2021 1% du budget national, en légère augmentation depuis 2018, mais demeure très bas et fait toujours de la justice l'un des secteurs les moins bien dotés en termes de financement. Par ailleurs une redynamisation de

la justice militaire semble s'être opérée en 2021. Des audiences se tiennent, mais n'abordent pas pour le moment de cas de violation des droits de l'Homme en opération.

Le rapport de la Commission d'enquête internationale (Sundh), financé par plusieurs États membres, n'a toujours pas suscité de réaction gouvernementale. Pour autant le Ministre de la justice a demandé à ses services de développer une politique pénale ainsi qu'une stratégie des enquêtes et des poursuites concernant la lutte contre l'impunité des crimes contre l'humanité.

2. Action de l'UE - domaines prioritaires : La stratégie démocratie et droits de l'Homme 2021-2024 de l'UE a été adoptée par la Délégation de l'UE et les États membres. Elle est cohérente avec le Programme Indicatif Multiannuel 2021-2027 du Mali, qui vise notamment à soutenir le respect des droits de l'homme et l'égalité des genres, pour renforcer la relation de confiance entre l'État et le citoyen. L'approche de la programmation du NDICI est fondée sur les droits, englobant tous les droits de l'Homme, avec une attention spéciale pour les groupes vulnérables. Au moins 85% des projets et programmes auront l'égalité des genres et l'autonomisation des femmes et des filles comme objectif principal ou comme objectif significatif. L'UE présente les priorités suivantes, dont la mise en œuvre devra tenir compte de l'évolution du contexte politique :

(i) Préservation de l'État de droit et lutte contre l'impunité : L'objectif de l'UE est de renforcer le respect de l'État de droit, tel qu'énoncé dans l'article 8 de l'Accord de Cotonou révisé, y compris dans les zones post-conflit, ainsi que dans l'exercice et la gestion de fonctions et de fonds publics. Cela doit passer par un renforcement de la lutte contre l'impunité des Forces de Défense et de Sécurité (notamment à travers la mobilisation des missions PSDC EUTM Mali et EUCAP Sahel Mali) afin d'accroître la relation de confiance avec les populations. L'UE entend notamment appuyer le dispositif national de promotion et défense des droits humains, comme par exemple la Commission nationale des droits de l'homme (CNDH).

(ii) Les droits des femmes : L'objectif est d'une part d'encourager le développement socio-économique des femmes et d'autre part de renforcer le respect du droit des femmes par les institutions judiciaires. L'atteinte de ces objectifs nécessite la poursuite le dialogue avec les institutions maliennes sur les inégalités entre les sexes et autres discriminations ainsi qu'une implication de l'UE dans la révision du code de la famille et de la personne. Il s'agira, entre autre, de mettre en œuvre le Plan d'Action Genre (GAP) III (2021-2025) de l'UE.

(iii) Les droits des enfants : Conformément à l'article 8 de l'Accord de Cotonou révisé, l'objectif sera de mettre fin au travail des enfants, en particulier dans les mines artisanales tout en éradiquant les comportements en violation claire des engagements internationaux du Mali sur les droits de l'Homme, tels que l'excision, les grossesses et mariages précoces (notamment à travers la révision de l'article 6 du Code des personnes et de la famille du Mali relatif au mariage des filles âgées de 16 à 18 ans). La résolution de la situation des enfants de la rue constituera un autre objectif. En termes d'activités, l'UE appuiera des actions auprès de l'État ainsi qu'auprès de la société civile, visant à lutter contre l'exploitation et abus des enfants.

3. Engagement politique bilatéral de l'UE : Le dialogue politique reste difficile. Il n'a toutefois pas été rompu entre le gouvernement malien et l'UE, sur une base bilatérale. La

communication publique sur les droits humains constitue un élément clef de l'activité diplomatique de l'UE au Mali : l'engagement de l'UE avec différents groupes de la société, via la diplomatie numérique, est un moyen essentiel de promouvoir à la fois les valeurs de l'UE et le travail effectué par les acteurs de la société civile, notamment à travers les médias sociaux (en particulier le compte twitter et la page facebook de la Délégation). L'UE contribue ainsi à sensibiliser le public sur ses activités et ses positions en matière de promotion des droits de l'Homme.

4. Contexte multilatéral : L'année 2022 a été marquée par la décision d'entamer une période de transition d'une durée de 24 mois à compter du 29 mars 2022. Les chefs d'État et de gouvernement de la CEDEAO ont ensuite décidé de lever les sanctions économiques et financières le 3 juillet 2022 et ont exhorté les autorités maliennes à mettre en place un mécanisme de suivi de la transition. Alors que ces développements ont auguré de meilleures perspectives de gouvernance au Mali, de nouveaux incidents ont eu lieu avec des partenaires régionaux et internationaux, démontrant une posture de plus en plus isolationniste de la part du régime de la transition. Dans la mesure du possible, la Délégation de l'UE planifiera et organisera des événements sur les droits de l'Homme, notamment les journées internationales pertinentes, en partenariat avec les États membres de l'UE ainsi que les agences des Nations unies impliquées. Parmi celles-ci, la journée des droits de la femme, des droits de l'enfant, de l'Etat-civil, ou encore des droits de l'Homme et contre la peine de mort, ont fait l'objet ou feront très prochainement l'objet d'efforts particuliers de communication et de visibilité.

Mauritania

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In recent years Mauritania has made concrete progress in the field of human rights, but in 2022, Mauritania lost the three places gained the year before on the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index. Economic indicators also score worst. Several legislative provisions were revised/adopted in 2022 with a view to harmonizing national legislation with international instruments. National strategies have also been defined for humanitarian action and the promotion of civil society; that relating to the promotion and protection of human rights is currently being defined.

In the area of violence against women and girls, a draft law on gender-based violence, supported by the Ministry of Justice, has been twice rejected by parliament and remains pending, therefore no legislative progress has been made. However, progress is to be noted with the effective establishment of the National Observatory for Women and Girl's Rights, created in 2020, as well as multisectoral platforms to combat violence against women and girls in 8 *wilayas* of the country.

The reforms announced to improve prison conditions are slow in coming to fruition, although some progress has been made, particularly in relieving prison congestion. Even if few sanctions are pronounced in application of the law, the government seems committed to the fight against slavery with the training of magistrates, the holding of a multi-actor round table

on the application of the law and the organization by the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) of awareness-raising caravans. While the death penalty is provided for in Mauritanian criminal law, a moratorium on its application has been in place in the country since 1987. On migrations rights, Mauritania has started a regularization campaign of migrants in the country increasing access to basic services and economic opportunities to these migrants strand in the country.

Mr. Tomoya Obokata, UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery completed a 10-day mission to Mauritania. He welcomed the progress made in strengthening the legal framework and the emergence of political will in Mauritania to fight against slavery, but warned that there was still a lot to do. However, descent-based and contemporary forms of slavery still exist in Mauritania, within all major ethnic groups in the country and between some groups. Enslaved people are victims of violence and abuse. Child labor remains a concern, particularly the practice of forced begging, and forced labor practices are common in Mauritania's informal sector, affecting migrants as well as Mauritanian citizens. He called on the authorities to take urgent measures to speed up the implementation of Mauritania's anti-slavery legislation and to resolve the practical, legal and social obstacles that prevent people affected by slavery from going to justice and achieve equality. President Ghazouani's has acknowledged that denying slavery is the wrong approach, and states commitment to ending slavery, bringing perpetrators to justice and promoting social and economic inclusion

2. EU action - key focus areas: Based on the analysis of the human rights situation in Mauritania and the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, eight priority areas have been determined: 1. promoting and protecting women's rights, 2. promoting non-discrimination and equality, 3. improving migration governance, 4. promoting citizen participation, 5. support for the rule of law and the proper administration of justice, 6. the strengthening of economic and social rights, 7. support for civil society and national institutions for the defense of human rights and 8. the promotion of media independence and pluralism and the fight against disinformation. Many activities contributing to the achievement of these priorities were carried out in 2022 by the EU and its Member States (MS) in Mauritania.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2022, the EU Delegation continued to promote human rights through political dialogue and public diplomacy actions. The subject of human rights was included on the agenda of the formal political dialogue meeting (Article 8) between the Mauritanian authorities, the EU and its MS. The political dialogue was an opportunity to take stock of Human Rights issues, to communicate the priorities of the EU and its MS at the highest level and to recall the readiness of the European party to support the efforts undertaken by the authorities in this area. The frank dialogue initiated with the authorities made it possible to deliver strong messages. The bilateral hearings held with the national authorities, in particular the Ministers of Justice and Social Affairs, of Children and the Family, of Islamic Affairs and of Original Education or the Commissioner for Human Rights were the opportunity to engage in strong advocacy on human rights, in particular for the adoption of the law against violence against women and girls and the strengthening of civil society. The visits of the President of the European Council in November 2022 and the EU Special Representative for Human Rights in June 2022 were an opportunity to bring the dialogue on human rights to the highest level and to make EU actions in support of victims of based on gender violence visible

and advocate in favor of the right to education. The main international days were celebrated by publications on social networks or by cultural activities (photo exhibitions, creation of a mural).

4. EU financial engagement: The various financial instruments available to the EU Delegation have contributed to achieving the priority objectives established. We can note under the European Development Fund (EDF) financing, the Justice Reform Support Program (PARJ) which contributes in particular to improving access to justice for vulnerable populations, including young people in conflict with the law, or the Support for the Health Sector whose actions promote non-discriminatory access to social services. Several initiatives and projects have been funded under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) in favour of improving detention conditions, combating gender-based violence, combating slavery or strengthening citizen control of cases of violation of human rights by supporting the simplification of the complaint mechanism with the National Commission on Human Rights.

Several projects funded by the EU Trust Fund (EUTF) have made it possible to support a migration governance approach based on human rights and respect for the rights of migrants and refugees, or to promote decent employment for people from disadvantaged backgrounds through training in sectors such as construction, artisanal fishing or agricultural trades. On the other hand, the inclusive dialogue provided for in the framework of the Roadmap for Civil Society has enabled the EU Delegation to support the capacity building of civil society.

The new Gender Action Plan III 2021-2025 defined with the Member States covers six thematic areas: (i) guaranteeing the absence of all forms of violence against young people and women, (ii) promoting health and sexual and reproductive rights, (iii) guarantee the economic and social rights and empowerment of girls and women, (iv) promote equal participation and leadership, (v) integrate the agenda of women, peace and security, (vi) address the challenges and explore the opportunities opened up by the green transition and digital transformation. Its implementation is ensured by the EU and its MS through numerous actions.

5. Multilateral context: In 2022, Mauritania completed its three-year term (2020-2022) on the United Nations Human Rights Council. The most recent human rights situation in Mauritania revision at UN dated of 19 January 2021 at the United Nations Human Rights Committee on the occasion of its third Universal Periodic Review. The positive evolution of the human rights situation in Mauritania was welcomed while emphasizing that much progress remained to be made. Mauritania accepted 201 of the 266 recommendations received and took note of the remaining 65 considered incompatible or unconstitutional. Recommendations relating to the ratification of the second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aimed at abolishing the death penalty and accession to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court were not retained, but Mauritania has announced to maintain the de facto moratorium on the application of the death penalty in place in the country since 1987.

Mauritius

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Mauritius remains in the top ranking countries in overall governance in Africa according to international standards. Mauritius continues to have a good track-record of human rights and an excellent position in the last Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance (74.9 out of 100.0 in Overall Governance, ranking 1st out of 54 in Africa). However, international benchmark institutions have been pointing to some recent decline (e.g.: World Press Freedom Index), namely a shrinking civic space and an unfavourable climate for journalists, lawyers and activists. No progress has been made concerning the introduction of a Freedom of Information Act and divisive amendments were made to the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Act.

Mauritius has signed and ratified a vast number of international conventions on human rights while domestication could be improved. Domestic and gender-based violence and abuse of children are still a matter of concern. 2022 was characterised by numerous feminicides. The Ombudsperson for Children investigated 468 cases of abuse on children in the period 2021-2022.

A revamping of the legislative framework concerning adoption, protection from domestic violence, gender equality and disability requires prompt follow-up. A positive recent amendment to the gender equality law has made marital rape now an offence.

With regard to LGBTI rights, there are still three cases in Court in relation to criminalisation of same sex relations (sodomy). On a positive note, a recent decision allows the change of legal name of a transgender person.

The disclosure of videos of police brutalities caused a shock wave throughout the country. Concerning detention conditions, the very long remand periods before trial remain a matter of concern as well as consular and family visits for foreign inmates, inadequate amount and quality of food that does not allow for a balanced nutrition, and the reduction in items allowed in prison cells.

As a party to the United Nations Convention against Corruption, Mauritius has taken a commitment to prevent and combat corruption more efficiently and effectively. Corruption cases allegedly involving decision-makers and high-level personalities have surfaced. Investigations by the ICAC progress slowly. Sanctions are mostly of an administrative nature such as removal from the position or obligation to early retirement.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU is promoting human rights in Mauritius through a three-tier approach at the level of Government (legislation), human rights institutions (implementation of human rights in administration and population at large) and CSO/NGOs (addressing vulnerable groups). The High Level Policy Dialogue on Gender and the EU-Mauritius Article 8 Political Dialogue took place in November 2022. These meetings allowed for substantial exchanges on governance and human rights issues. The EU is a key partner on gender equality. In December 2022, the EU brought together government, civil society and international partners on a high-level panel on gender-based violence. The EU supported the

preparation of the Gender Country Profile and it presented it to the parliamentary committee on women's rights.

4. EU financial engagement: Funding is granted to NGOs for actions in the field of gender equality, protection of women's rights, support to women and children in vulnerable situations, as well as advocacy for the rights of LGBTI persons.

Under the 2021-2027 Multi Annual Indicative Programme (EUR 7 million over 7 years), governance has been identified as a priority sector of intervention. Priority sub-sectors are democratic governance, gender equality and promotion of human rights.

The Ombudsperson for Children is benefitting until 2023 from capacity building under an EU-funded project. Training to tackle On-Line Child Sexual Exploitation was also provided to public institutions through the GLACY+ tool.

With regard to anti-corruption and the accountability architecture, the EU-funded project with Transparency Mauritius continued raising awareness among the public on anti-corruption principles.

On 23 October 2022, the EU launched a EUR 3 million call for proposals aiming at reinforcing capacity of civil society active in the field of gender equality and good governance, in addition to climate resilience and the environment. A EUR 510, 000 call for proposals under the Human Rights and Democracy thematic programme was launched in December 2022 focussing on public accountability, freedom of expression and rights of the child.

5. Multilateral context: Mauritius is a key ally on the multilateral stage to support an international rules-based order with the United Nations at its core. Mauritius acknowledges the central role of multilateralism for its prosperity, particularly as a Small Island State. A number of démarches on human rights related matters were carried out in 2022, with Mauritius mostly positioning itself on a convergent pattern with the EU. Moreover, the EU and Mauritius had constant dialogue on regional matters of common interest.

Republic of Mozambique

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The overall human rights and democracy situation in Mozambique remained challenging in 2022. A focus of great concern continued to be the security and humanitarian crisis in the Cabo Delgado province and neighbouring provinces of Niassa and Nampula, where acts of terror and extreme violence resulted in over 4 000 deaths and, approximately, one million of internally displaced people since 2017. The armed groups continued to be accused of severe human rights crimes and abuses, including the recruitment of children, kidnappings, beheadings, and sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls. Mozambican and international journalists continued to report restrictions to their work, in particular in Cabo Delgado. Activists and human rights defenders continued working in a very complex environment with actions of

intimidation, kidnapping and assassinations yet to be investigated. Some potentially restrictive laws (on media, broadcasting and on Non-Profit Organisations) were submitted to the Parliament for approval (still under scrutiny). On the positive side, there was a further commitment of the parties to the implementation of the 2019 Maputo Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, with the expected imminent closure of the last RENAMO base resulting into a total of 5 221 ex-combatants transitioning to civilian life.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2022, the EU continued to focus on key areas such as peace building and good governance. There was also a particular focus on fighting gender-based violence. The EU continued to implement its integrated approach (encompassing humanitarian aid, development cooperation, peace building and security) to support the Mozambican authorities' efforts to address the security and humanitarian challenges in Cabo Delgado, with a strong commitment to the respect for human rights and the rule of law. Under the security component of the integrated approach, the EU military training mission to Mozambique (EUTM) reached its full operational capability on 9 September 2022. In addition to military and tactical training of the specialised units of the Mozambican armed forces, a substantive part of the EUTM training programme continued to focus on human rights and international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians, particularly women and children affected by armed conflict. This was conducted in cooperation with the ICRC and relevant UN organisations. As complementary measures in the spirit of "African solutions to African problems", the EU decided (in September and December respectively) to support the deployment of both SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) and Rwanda Defence Force in Cabo Delgado, equally with strong human rights and rule of law requirements. The EU approved new actions towards the promotion of socio-economic rights of the Mozambican citizens in line with the Northern Mozambique Resilience and Integrated Development Program (PREDIN), adopted by the Government in June.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged with the Government of Mozambique in two Political Dialogues (June 17 and December 5). Their agendas included international human rights and international humanitarian law as overarching principles of the EU integrated approach as well as the overall efforts towards permanent peace and rule of law across the country. Moreover, a dedicated Dialogue on Human Rights was held on 26 May. On this occasion, the authorities committed to exchange best practices with the EU in the fields of human rights, good governance and fight against corruption. The EU discussed the implementation of the 2019 EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) on the basis of the outcomes of the EU Election Follow-up Mission that took place in March 2022. Several high-level visits took place in 2022: President Nyusi travelled twice to Brussels in February and met with the HR/VP Borrell, President of the European Council Michel, Executive Vice-President Timmermans, Commissioners Lenarcic and Urpilainen. The HR/VP Borrell visited Mozambique on 8-9 September, where he had meetings with President Nyusi and with the Foreign and Defence Ministers. At the end of October, the Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Democracy and Demography Dubravka Šuica visited Mozambique in connection with the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU supported a number of projects with a view to strengthening civic and political space:

- The I-IDEA programme on the support to the consolidation of democracy followed up on the implementation of the 2019 EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) recommendations, in particular with the finalisation of a proposal for a legislative reform that would address several of these recommendations. The project also contributed to paving the way for a support to the next electoral cycle, especially in terms of local observation and civic education.

- The ”EU Programme to Support Non-State Actors: Participation for Inclusive Growth – PAANE” continued engaging public authorities and civil society in a constructive dialogue and inclusive participation in the elaboration and monitoring of public policies.

- The EU supported the protection of people in conflict-affected areas, contributing with over EUR 28 million of humanitarian assistance to people of Cabo Delgado. This amount included EUR 8.25 million for scaling-up humanitarian food assistance to newly displaced persons and last-mile delivery of aid in northern Mozambique, to respond to the impact on food security of Russia’s war against Ukraine. The EU’s portfolio of peacebuilding projects in the Northern provinces amounted to over EUR 10 million, amongst them a new project with UNODC (EUR 2 million) aimed to strengthen criminal justice responses to terrorism, including capacities for collecting, preserving and sharing of evidence in line with human rights standards. A specific action “Resilience in the North” (EUR 35 million) to support the development strategies of the Government of Mozambique in an integrated manner was also adopted. One of its key components focused on addressing sexual and reproductive health rights.

- The EU also launched a new project to strengthen the capacities of the National Human Rights Commission so that it can protect and promote human rights, particularly for communities affected by conflict and displacement (EUR 845,873, funded under the EIDHR). In parallel, the EU supported the project ”Building Resilience, Inclusiveness and Capacity of Human Rights Defenders” implemented by the Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network and the Centro para Democracia e Desenvolvimento.

- The EU continued to support the peace process between the Government and the main opposition party RENAMO, notably by contributing to the Peace Process Secretariat Basket Fund managed by UNOPS (total EUR 4 million), and through the “Local Development for Peace Consolidation” (DELPAZ) project with the Austrian and Italian development agencies. In December the EU signed a new project to support national reconciliation.

- The EU concluded the implementation of the State and Resilience Building Contract, as an exceptional short-term emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic with a specific focus on education, social protection and health.

- Finally, the EU sustained its support to the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, through the implementation of several projects with CSOs, including the main Disabled People’s Organisation FAMOD, and with the

opening of a Unit for the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities within the National Human Rights Commission.

5. Multilateral context: On 9 June 2022, Mozambique was elected unanimously as non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the period of 2023-24. Throughout 2022, the EU and its Member States were supportive of the UN agencies, UNHCHR, UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM and WFP, in particular in connection with the security and humanitarian crisis in Cabo Delgado.

Namibia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In general, Namibia has a good track record on human rights and democracy which has continued in 2022. Namibia's democracy is developing and maturing, and as the country is preparing for the 2024 Presidential elections, the ruling party SWAPO voted during its Electoral Congress (end of November 2022) for the incumbent Vice-President to head the party in the elections, as the current President's second mandate is running to its term. She will be the first female candidate to lead SWAPO in the 2024 Presidential elections. As regards human rights, the country is a remarkable example of press freedom, ranked as the number 2 spot for Africa, it rose from 24th to 18th rank globally (out of 180 countries). However, ramping unemployment, poverty and social inequality continue to be key challenges to this Upper Middle Income country, which ranked at 130 out of 189 countries in the last Human Development Index (HDI). The already challenging implementation of social and economic rights has been further affected by the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Namibian society. The impact on women and children has been the most visible. Sexual and Gender Based Violence increased. Inequality remains one of the most widespread challenges across Namibia, taking a toll on the Namibian child, according to a study done by UNICEF, on average, 51.3 percent of the children aged 0-17 years are living in multidimensional poverty, compared to 37.4 percent for adults (18+ years) and the national average of 43.3 percent. A series of new family laws, instrumental in advancing gender equality and economic security for vulnerable women and children in marriage and divorce, are still in the pipeline.

Following the 2021 Namibia's third Universal Periodic Review (UPR), despite overall progress, several areas require targeted action, namely gender-based violence, gender equality, children's rights, indigenous people's rights, discrimination of LGBTI persons, prison conditions, human trafficking, and access to education, adequate housing and access to safe drinking water. As regards corruption, Namibia has dropped by seven positions (from 52nd to 59th out of 180 countries) in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index between 2018 and 2022. The "Fishrot" scandal, allegedly involving individuals linked to the ruling party, is one example that is obviously attracting lots of attention on governance and transparency.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to support human rights and democracy in Namibia through cooperation programmes in the following priority areas: (i) good governance

and accountability, directly relevant to the realization of economic, social and cultural rights; (ii) women's rights, including gender based violence; (iii) children's rights; (iv) rights of minorities with special attention to indigenous/marginalised people, (V) strengthening of the democratic political system, in particular parliamentary oversight and civil society's role and capacities. Examples of EU funded projects in these key areas include:

- The *''Enhancing Participatory Democracy Programme''* strengthens the capacity of CSOs to provide effective support to the Government in the implementation and monitoring of public policies. Various oversight related capacity building workshops for Parliamentarians are being implemented, as well as an online Bill tracking system to enhance transparency. Parliamentary administrative structures are also being strengthened.

- The *"Strengthening the roles of CSOs and women in democracy''* project, which helps CSO's to play an active role in gender policies

- The *''Violence, alternatives to Corporal Punishment and the Child Care and Protection Act"* project, which is implementing fully-fledged outreach and information campaigns against child abuse and gender-based violence.

- The *"Step change in governance and inclusiveness in the most marginalised San conservancies in Namibia"* aiming to help San communities with minority representation on human and land rights, gender, youth involvement, climate change, conservancy law, labour law etc.

- *The "Curbing Gender-Based Violence, Violence, Empowering women and children living in informal settlements by equipping communities, Men and Boys to be human rights defenders and Agents of Change"* project focusses on improving women & children safety and protection in informal settlements, through engagement of communities, in particular men and boys.

- The project *"Improving sanitation in Namibia's informal settlements and containing the spread of Hepatitis E"* tackles the sanitation crisis in Namibians informal settlements through the provision of sustainable low cost sanitation solutions.

- The project *"Amplified: Enhancing the participation of CSO's in the education, life skills sector"* aims at increasing the coverage of Comprehensive Sexuality Education amongst adolescents, youth, parents/guardians, community leaders, men and community members.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 30 November 2022, the EU and Namibia held their annual political dialogue, which included substantive and constructive exchanges on human rights and democracy. In November 2022, the EU Ambassador met with the recently appointed Ombudsman for an exchange on his priorities, challenges and outlook on the future developments in the area of human rights. In May 2022, the EU Ambassador hosted a meeting with the Minister of Justice, joined by the EU Member States. This meeting allowed for a

follow-up exchange on the UPR challenges and perspectives, and confirmed continued strategic relevance of the EU strategy priorities.

4. Multilateral context: Namibia is a strong and active supporter of the multilateral system, sponsoring several thematic resolutions such as the fight against racism. Namibia has joined as a core member of the EU initiated group in support of the UN Secretary-General's appeal on Gender-Based Violence and COVID-19. Namibia is also a leader on the UN agenda of Women, Peace and Security (WPS), under the UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions. It has launched a dedicated WPS centre in Namibia that should offer opportunities for international cooperation. Until the end of 2022, Namibia was a member of the UN Human Rights Council.

Niger

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In an increasingly insecure and fragmented Sahel region, Niger remains a democratic country led by a civilian government intent on promoting dialogue and social cohesion. Maintaining an open society, a diverse civil space and political contestation remains, however, a challenge. The governing party, Niger's National Party for Democracy and Socialism, is in power for the past 12 years. Only one demonstration was allowed in 2022, after a five-year ban. Compared with an increasingly authoritarian region, Niger maintains a better protection of freedom of speech. Laws decriminalizing libel (in cyberspace) and protecting human rights defenders – provided they commit to not diffame and spread fake news – were adopted in 2022. They remain partially not published and not implemented. Among the largest challenges the country faces are the fallout from trans-border insecurity with an ever increasing number of internally displaced, refugees and asylum seekers that the third least developed country on earth can hardly manage protecting. Equally challenging remains the promotion of women's rights and gender equality in a staunchly traditional environment. Niger retains the record of having most girls married off before 18 (76%). Under a visionary political leadership that prioritizes girls' education, the trends are, however, positive: adolescent pregnancies have almost halved in the last decade (from 40.4% in 2012 to 24.7 in 2021). Alongside education, the government has strongly committed to fight corruption and deficient governance. The EU supports these efforts through its budget support programme and accompanying projects. Key institutions in ensuring higher administrative standards and the judiciarization of corruption cases are the High Authority against Corruption and assimilated infractions (HALCIA), the Council of State, and the Court of Accounts, all of which the EU supports and maintains a permanent dialogue with.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU has retained seven strategic priorities in the area of human rights:

1. Promoting gender equality and women's and girls' rights
2. Reinforcing the right to security and the fight against impunity
3. Improving access to basic services and contributing to sustainable and inclusive development
4. Protecting migrants and the displaced and fighting human trafficking

5. Supporting the rule of law and justice
6. Promoting democratic governance and fighting corruption
7. Strengthening civil society and the media

With the Member States, the EU is a key actor in the area of human rights in Niger, promoting them through political action, public diplomacy and development cooperation. On the international stage, Niger denounced Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and demanded unimpeded humanitarian access. Regionally, Niger has remained a reliable partner within ECOWAS on condemning military coups and requiring a return to civilian government when they occurred. The EU Delegation has discussed the human rights situation with many other actors in Niger, including the OHCHR, the National Commission on Human Rights and civil society actors. It has delivered demarches on a number of human rights issues.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU's tailored political priority framework for Niger, based on the Integrated EU Strategy for the Sahel emphasises security, stability, food security, good governance and education as key areas for action.

Governance, human rights, gender as transversal issues in the government's General political declaration were the topic of the EU-Niger political dialogue in July 2022. The dialogue confirmed advances on key governance priorities, such as corruption, demographic control, the death penalty, but also obstacles linked to poor administrative capacities and socio-cultural factors. The efforts – and partners' support – need to be long-term. The dialogue revealed the need for better coordination, especially in the areas of stabilisation and development. The EU has furthermore pursued continuous dialogue on good governance and transparency within its budget support and accompanying projects (see above).

4. EU financial engagement: The EU has continued its implementation of budget support programmes and accompanying projects from the 11th EDF, and from the NDICI financial instruments. These programmes prioritised key state reforms in the areas of good governance, improved public financial management, transparency, education/training, food security / agricultural development and justice/security/ migration management. A number of projects have specifically targeted confidence building between internal security forces and the populations, and training security forces in human rights protection and international humanitarian law. EU member states have implemented a number of projects that sought to empower women politically and economically, strengthen the judicial chain, and improve access to basic services.

The EU Delegation has also started preparing a Roadmap for engaging with civil society in Niger 2021-2024. The objectives of this process are to 1) promote an enabling environment for civil society action; 2) encourage a constructive and structured CSO participation in the Nigerian policy cycle, the EU programming process and in international processes; 3) strengthen local civil society's capacities for them to better exercise their role as independent actors of good governance and development.

5. Multilateral context: Niger's adoption of international human rights instruments has improved in the past years, yet implementation is lagging behind. Niger maintains the application of civil and traditional law, the latter often contradicting universal human rights

principles and standards. This being said, Niger is always present at the two annual meetings of the African Union Human and Peoples' Rights Commission.

Of the 254 recommendations received during the 38th cycle of the Universal Periodic Review, Niger rejected six, all linked to discrimination based on sexual orientation and LGBTI issues. In 2022, the government has prepared an action plan 2022-2026 for implementing the remaining recommendations, under the umbrella of the Ministry of Justice. Holding a continuous dialogue with the National Commission on Human Rights and civil society, the Ministry should present a monitoring report in 2024.

Nigeria

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Nigeria continues to face an unprecedented wave of different and overlapping security crises, including banditry, crime and kidnapping, extremist insurgencies, secessionist agitations, terrorism and farmer/herder conflicts. Almost every part of the country is now afflicted by violence and crime. Security Forces are deployed in 32 out of the 36 States of the Federation. The ongoing surge of insecurity is also a result of poor governance, mismanagement and corruption that has contributed to a dire economic situation, widespread poverty, and increasing hunger and food insecurity, rising inflation and fuel shortages, in spite of the high oil prices caused by the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Insecurity in the Niger Delta region and the subsequent large scale oil theft have also contributed to budget distress. Nigerian security forces have faced several allegations of human rights abuses, including a series of articles by Reuters in December 2022, which focus on abuse of women and children in the North East. Nigeria's military chief has called on the National Human Rights Commission to launch an independent investigation into the allegation. The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, also released a report on violations of the right to life committed by State and non-State actors. Previous allegations have typically ended in long internal investigations that have not led to any trials, however.

In March 2022, the National Assembly rejected five Gender Equality Bills during the fifth attempt to review the 1999 Constitution since its adoption. The rejection of the bills sparked strong criticism by the women's movement, and plans are in the pipeline to re-introduce the bill for the creation of additional seats for women in the National Assembly in March.
There are also a number of on-going controversial individual cases of human rights violations, the most emblematic being Sharif Aminu, Omar Farouq and Mubarak Bala, as a result of a parallel system of Sharia law passing summary death sentences on those accused of blasphemy. Nigeria's democratic landscape remains stable but volatile, and it is expected that this will remain the case in the run up to the General Elections in February 2023.

2. EU action - key focus areas:
(i) Gender Equality and women's empowerment: Gender equality and women's empowerment is mainstreamed in all EU programmes. The EU Delegation also supported advocacy towards the signing of the Mental Health Bill, which was finally signed by the

President in the first week of 2023. The EU Delegation actively participated in the 2022 edition of the 16 days of Activism against Gender Based Violence alongside Nigerian key stakeholders.

(ii) Rights of the Child: In 2021, the EU launched a new project, "Access to Justice for Children on the Move". In 2022, the programme advocated for the enactment of the Child Rights Act and supported implementation and enforcement of laws on child rights and child protection in the North West and North Central.

(iii) Rights of Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI): In 2022, the EU Ambassador hosted a discussion with interlocutors from the LGBTI community in Nigeria on the occasion of International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, with the participation of representatives of Member States. The EU Delegation has started consultations with various LGBTI organisations as a basis for a direct contribution as part of the Human Rights and Democracy country allocation of 2022

(iv) Freedom of Religion and Belief: The EU Delegation has engaged with faith actors and communities across the key priority areas of our development cooperation in Nigeria. In 2022, the EU continued to follow developments around the imprisonment of Mubarak Bala and Sharif Aminu, both charged for blasphemy in 2020. Despite efforts by the EU Delegation, Member States and like-minded countries, to ensure a fair trial for Mubarak Bala, the latter pleaded guilty to all charges and was sentenced to 24 years of prison. The case of Sharif Aminu was transferred to the Supreme Court and a date for the hearing is pending.

(v) Human Security, protection of civilians and the rights of internally displaced persons: The EU has a geographical focus on North East and North West Nigeria, where it implements projects on the protection of civilians and reconciliation efforts, including the implementation of Disengagement, Disassociation, Reintegration and Reconciliation programmes in the North East.

(vi) Democratic consolidation and support for elections: Sustained support to the democratic process is channelled through the EU flagship democracy programme "EU Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN) phase II'. It promotes democratic consolidation in Nigeria by building strong, effective, and legitimate democratic institutions. In 2022, EU assistance focused on supporting INEC's conduct of the 2023 general elections so that it is fair and credible, whilst consolidating the scope and quality of the political engagement of youth, women and other marginalised groups.

(vii) Digital rights: In 2022, the EU launched a project in the Federal Capital Territory, Lagos, Imo and Kano states to build the capacity of the main actors involved in the promotion and the protection of digital rights. It includes the creation of a digital platform for reporting of violations, free legal assistance for victims of digital rights violations or threats, and knowledge building of activists and the general population.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Through the EU-Nigeria Ministerial Roadmap many technical and senior level contacts continue to take place to address cooperation, research and innovation, energy, climate, security sector issues, humanitarian assistance, migration and mobility, and investments. In 2022, the EEAS, Managing Director of Africa, the EU

Ambassador and EU Heads of Mission engaged with key electoral institutions and political figures as part of their engagement for peaceful, transparent and credible elections.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU has financial engagements in each of the areas of EU action (see above).

5. Multilateral context: The most recent Universal Periodic Review (eamination of Nigeria took place in 2018. The next review is due for November 2023. In March 2022, Nigeria voted in favour of the UNGA motion to stop Russia's offensive and immediately withdraw all troops from Ukraine. However in April 2022, it abstained from the vote to suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council. In October, Nigeria voted in favour of the resolution to condemn annexation of Ukraine's regions. Nigeria has advocated against the Russian invasion of Ukraine within multilateral fora.

Rwanda

1. Overall human rights and democracy situation: During 2022, the overall picture of the human rights situation in Rwanda remained broadly unchanged. Rwanda continued to perform quite well on social and economic indicators, in particular on health, education, access to water and electricity, thanks in part, to its increased social spending over the past years. Rwanda also performed relatively well on corruption. However, the effects of the COVID pandemic and recent strong inflation risked jeopardising these positive results. The Government continued to face allegations of serious human rights violations. Human Rights advocates reported arbitrary detentions and use of inhuman or degrading treatments in detention facilities. Freedom of expression remained limited – a number of lawsuits and charges for inciting insurrection, spreading rumours or false information, genocide minimization, and others, stifled public dissent or criticism. There is an environment of self-censorship for journalists, bloggers and citizens who fear reprisal and prosecution. Freedom of association was stifled, with burdensome and discretionary registration processes to create new parties or NGOs. While the legal framework addressing women's rights in Rwanda is generally positive, the weak implementation of laws and policies coupled with discriminatory social norms was a challenge. Rwanda is the only country in East Africa that does not criminalize consensual same-sex relations, but has no provisions to protect LGBTI individuals from discrimination, nor does it recognise unions and partnerships between same-sex individuals. Rwanda maintained its generous refugee policy, hosting around 130 000 refugees from DRC and Burundi, who enjoy the right to work, move and settle freely. It continued to host an Emergency Transit Mechanism for the evacuation and processing of asylum-seekers from Libya pending resettlement, with a capacity of around 700 persons, at a time.

2. EU action – key focus areas: The EU and its Member States action on Human Rights and Democracy were focused on six areas: (i) Non-discrimination and protection of marginalised groups; (ii) Women's Rights and the elimination of Violence against Women; (iii) The right to access to food and the fight against child malnutrition; (iv) Freedom of expression, regulation and capacity-building in the media sector; (v) Freedom of association and promoting an

enabling environment for civil society and citizen participation; (vi) Respect for human rights in the justice system (including countering arbitrary detentions, torture and enforced disappearances).

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to engage on human rights and democracy within the framework of regular political contacts and sectoral dialogues. The dialogue with the Minister of Justice took stock of developments and new initiatives in the justice sector, reviewed priorities under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process and addressed various matters of concern (such as cases of alleged ill-treatment in prisons, freedom of expression and media policy reform, freedom of association and NGO registration procedures, situation of LGBTI persons). During a joint meeting with the National Human Rights Commission, the EU discussed specific issues, in particular follow-up on torture allegations - the action plan and areas of cooperation.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU and Member States supported several projects and initiatives in line with the above priority areas for example a EUR 500 000 project with local civil society aimed to improve youth citizen participation in decision making at local level; a EUR 350 000 project with civil society works with children with intellectual disability; two civil society projects totalling EUR 400 000 aim at fighting sexual and gender-based violence and preventing teenage pregnancies. In general, implementation of human rights projects was smooth. The EU organised a one-day workshop for civil society to enhance capacity in digital security and response mechanisms in March 2022. The EU and its Member States conducted three joint advocacy and communication campaigns; one related to the rights of the LGBTI community and the latter two against sexual and gender-based violence. An ongoing EUR 3 million programme supports the Ministry of Justice to enhance access to justice, in addition to a EUR 580 000 project with a local civil society consortium aiming to ensure rights of vulnerable detainees. Calls for proposals were launched in 2022 with EUR 1 million dedicated to promoting freedom of expression, notably on digital media.

5. Multilateral context: Rwanda has signed all UN Human Rights Conventions, with the exception of the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Statute of the International Criminal Court and most optional protocols. Rwanda finalised the UPR roadmap to implement accepted recommendations and discussed follow-up. Rwanda's was overall aligned with the EU for all resolutions on human rights matters in UN fora.

São Tomé and Príncipe

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The overall human rights and democracy situation in São Tomé and Príncipe is good. However, this overall positive assessment was partially tarnished by the incidents surrounding the 25 November alleged coup attempt with the reported torture and deaths of four individuals. The incident occurred only ten days after the swearing in of the new Government that resulted from the general elections of 25 September, which were observed for the first time ever by an EU Election

Observation Mission. Overall, the elections were peaceful, orderly, and broadly in line with international standards, proving once again the relative stability and resilience of the country's democratic institutions. Nevertheless, the process also showed some vulnerabilities /challenges, such as the non-implementation of the mandatory voter registry update, weak capacity from the state institutions to make information accessible to the public and a reduced participation of women candidates in the highest political positions. A new parity law, including a 40% quota per gender for all elected and appointed positions entered into force in the last quarter of 2022. However, the role of women in the Santomean political life remains very limited and discrimination against women, domestic violence against women and children is still a problem. Other issues of concern are among others violation of children rights, child labour and sexual abuse against children; corruption; access to justice and independence of the judiciary; access to basic rights and services such as health and safe water.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, the EU focuses on the following priorities: strengthening the human rights protection framework; promoting rule of law and improving access to justice, the quality and independence of the justice system; promoting economic, social and cultural rights; support democracy and good governance, including the integrity of electoral processes; rights of the child; women's rights and non-discrimination on the basis of gender; environmental rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU carried out formal demarches on human rights and democracy issues to request support for EU initiatives at the Human Rights Council and UNGA77 Third Committee in November 2022.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, several projects financed under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), CSO/Local Authorities DCI thematic line, continued to be implemented for an overall amount of EUR 1,7 million, These projects include, among others, the strengthening of the human rights protection framework; democratic control and oversight of civil society in the fight against corruption; civil society's participation and capacity to monitor and implement public policies with an impact on food security; strengthening the rights of the child.

The EU's Annual Action Plan 2022 for São Tomé and Príncipe includes an action "Support to the Governance (justice) sector" for the improvement of governance and the consolidation of the rule of law and the accountability of democratic institutions (EUR 1,5 million). The "Support to the water and sanitation sector" action will improve the sustainable and equitable access of the population to drinking water and sanitation (EUR 6,3 million). Both actions contribute to a Team Europe Initiative in the governance sector, which will be mainly implemented with Portugal. The main objective is to strengthen the capacity of the State to improve governance by providing services in a more efficient and transparent manner in the field of justice and public financial management.

São Tomé and Príncipe continued to benefit from the EU co-financed project to Support the Consolidation of the Rule of Law (PACED) in Portuguese Speaking Countries, which ended in June 2022. The project aimed to help strengthen the consolidation of the rule of law through the prevention and fight against corruption, money laundering and organised crime, especially

drug trafficking. Among the main results achieved were training of staff, harmonisation of legislation (corruption, money laundering, drug trafficking), and the provision of online manuals (criminal investigation, judicial system and cooperation).

5. Multilateral context: São Tomé and Príncipe is generally a like-minded country with good convergence with the EU. São Tomé and Príncipe has undergone the third cycle of Universal Periodic Review in January 2021. Further efforts are still needed, among others, to ratify further international human rights instruments and ensure their implementation.

Senegal

1. Overview of the human rights and democratic situation: The overall situation in Senegal remains globally satisfactory, particularly against the background of the situation in other countries in the region. Senegal has ratified the major human rights conventions, and the authorities are open to discuss and engage in positive actions, including on women and children's rights, although the political room for manoeuvre on these topics is hampered by social and cultural resistances. Improvements regarding women and children's rights (early marriage, Female Genital Mutilation) are slow, both due to delayed process on the review of the legislative framework (e.g. the adoption of the "Child Code" or revisions to the "Family Code"), or because of the slow implementation of the existing legislation (e.g. the 2020 law criminalising rape and paedophilia).The situation regarding LGBTI persons remains a matter of concern.

Efforts are being made to improve the detention conditions in Senegalese prisons, but long pre-trial detention, largely responsible for overcrowding prisons, remains an issue. The death penalty was abolished in 2004, but the Second Optional Protocol to International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights has not been endorsed, and Senegal has not supported multilateral initiatives in favour of the death penalty moratoria.

The space for freedom of expression in the media remains open, despite legal provisions in this respect, which include far-reaching powers of the executive, which could be used in a restrictive way. The media landscape is wide and freedom of the press guaranteed by law but the implementing decrees adopted in 2021 maintain very heavy criminal penalties of up to two years in prison for acts of defamation or three years for the publication of "false news" likely to "harm the morale of the population" or to "discredit public institutions". In addition, rising influence of social media on the Senegalese audience, in particular among the youth, combined with an increase in online disinformation, represents a growing challenge.

The impact of the Covid-19 epidemic combined with the 12% inflation in 2022 was significant on the socio-economic situation. Two elections took place in 2022: local elections on 23 January, and legislative elections on 31 July. Some pre-electoral violence (three persons killed and several opposition leaders temporarily arrested during a non-authorised political demonstration in June 2022) took place, highlighting rising political tensions in the Senegalese society which also translated into physical and verbal violence within the newly appointed

National Assembly (with incidents in September and December). The level of confidence of the Senegalese in their judicial authorities and Constitutional court remains low; a challenge in view of next Presidential elections in February 2024. Senegal returned to his 2013 score (43/100) at rank 73/180 (lost eight places) in the corruption perceptions index.

2. EU action on Human Rights – key focus areas: EU action focused on women, children and detainees rights. The EU also supported the fight against impunity, the strengthening of civil society and continued to promote freedom of expression and assembly. It also focused on the impact of and access to digital technologies on human rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagements: In October, a consultation meeting with civil society was held as part of the EU civil society roadmap. The meeting focused on the impacts and progress of Decree 2022-1676 setting the terms of intervention of NGOs and the need to consolidate their involvement in improving civic space.

The EU Delegation supported the 12th training session in international human rights law organised by René Cassin Foundation and the German Friedrich Nauman Foundation, in September. The 2022 session was focused on climate and environmental challenges, from a rights-based approach.

In November, as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, the EU Ambassador met with the Senegalese National Committee for the Fight against Violence against Women (composed of various lawyers, media, women's associations), to demonstrate the EU's support for their cause, and showed in a concrete way the EU's involvement in the defense of human rights, in particular women's rights. The EU also organized a consultation workshop with representatives of CSOs and local authorities in Casamance around the priorities of Team Europe Gender CLIP around gender-based violence. Finally, as part of the activities by the G15 Gender Equality Sub-Committee, the EU also co-organised: (i) a panel and an exhibition on gender stereotypes, based on the awareness campaign introduced in November 2021 #BalanceTonStereotype (2 December), (ii) and a technical workshop on popularizing the law criminalizing rape and pedophilia with rights practitioners (3 December).

4. EU financial engagements: The EU Delegation continued to support the strengthening of the rule of law, through support for the administration of justice, transparency and accountability in public finances and the fight against corruption and money laundering. In particular, the EU has supported (EUR 500 000) the National Office for the Fight against Fraud and Corruption (OFNAC) so that it can carry out its missions and contribute effectively to the promotion of good governance in the public and private sectors. It kept supporting the Senegalese Court of Auditors through a twinning programme. To contribute to the implementation of a judicial map and bring justice closer to citizens, the EU has supported the construction of the Tambacounda Court of Appeal and 12 justice houses across the country. The EU Delegation supported (through a study that ended in 2022) the National Financial Information Processing Unit (CENTIF) for the update of the National Risk Assessment (ENR) 2017. Taking into account the provisions of Recommendation 1 of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), this update will address the strengthening national actions to fight money laundering and terrorist financing.

The Jappal Maa Jaap project (2021-2026) aims to strengthen the development of agricultural entrepreneurship among girls and women from rural communities and the suburbs of Dakar and to promote their social empowerment and their participation in local decision-making bodies.

The EU supports civil society organizations for promotion and protection of human rights. On the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), RADDHO (Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme) received a grant to monitor the implementation of recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), as Samu Social Senegal, in partnership with Empire des Enfants, to contribute to the protection of vulnerable groups in the face of the Covid 19 health crisis.

Through a short-term financial support programme, the EU supported the Senegalese administration (General Directorate of Elections, Ministry of the Interior) in the implementation of the recommendations of the 2019 EU Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) aimed at improving the electoral process. In March 2022, a follow-up mission led by the Head of EU EOM 2019 took place to assess the progress made in the implementation of these recommendations.

5. Multilateral context: Senegal remains an active member of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) since 2018. In 2020, its mandate was renewed until 2023. Senegal underwent its UPR in November 2018 and submitted conclusions in November 2019. Recommendations concerned mainly women's rights, children's rights, rights of persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities or LGBTI persons. In response, the Senegalese government highlighted its exemplarity in certain areas (economic and social rights, rights of persons with disabilities), but also stressed its limitations in relations to certain recommendations based on national traditions and culture (mainly women's rights and LGBTI).

During the year, the EU carried out, in coordination with its Member States and other partners, formal or informal demarches to promote EU priorities in multilateral fora. The purpose was to seek the support of the Senegal, including for the issues debated within the framework of the HRC and the Third Committee on HRD/UNSG.

Senegal has assumed the Presidency of the African Union throughout 2022. In that capacity, President Sall has been particularly active in enhancing the position and participation of the African continent in multilateral Fora (G20, UNSC…). He also organised a number of international and continental event in Dakar, including the 2nd Conference on "Positive masculinity", in line with his intention to prioritise women's rights during his presidency.

The Seychelles

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Seychelles continues to have a good track-record of human rights protection and an excellent position in the last Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance (73.4 overall score, ranked 2nd in Africa out of 54).

Good progress was made in the reporting period to address corruption, also thanks to EU support provided to the Anti-Corruption Commission for investigations and to the Department of Legal Affairs for trials and prosecutions.

Investigation of complaints by the Truth, Reconciliation and National Unity Commission (TRNUC) has advanced. The TRNUC' mandate has been extended until March 2023 to give it more time to finalise its report. The TRNUC was established in 2018 to work on settling past political divisions, grievances and human rights violations committed in relation to the 1977 coup.

Domestic and gender-based violence remains a matter of concern. With EU support, the 2017 Gender GAP Analysis was recently updated and a Gender Country Profile was drafted to mainstream gender in policies, promote women and girls empowerment and address gender-based violence. In September, the above reports were presented to stakeholders including state institutions, NGOs and the private sector, and were officially handed over to the Minister of Foreign Affairs during the EU-Seychelles political dialogue on 5 October 2022. It is key that their recommendations are translated into actions, notably on shelters, on sexual and reproductive health and on political and economic leadership by women.

Additional efforts should be directed to establishing effective mechanisms to promote networking among NGOs and to encourage civil society to play a more active role, thereby contributing to address societal challenges, including drug abuse and teenage pregnancies.

Reinforcing the Access to Information Act of 2018 and its implementation should contribute to further accountability of public institutions and to enhanced participation in the democratic process.

2. EU action - key focus areas:

- Gender Equality and Women's Rights
- Rights of the Child
- Non-Discrimination, including as regards sexual orientation
- Fighting impunity
- Anti-Corruption Architecture

The EU continues to support human rights and democracy in Seychelles through two cooperation programmes in the following priority areas: 1) institutional strengthening of human rights and governance related institutions and combating gender-based violence by supporting the national Human Rights Commission, and 2) fight against corruption, by supporting the Financial Investigation Unit and the Attorney General's Office. The strengthening of these key institutions will continue in 2023. The latter programme allowed the Anti-Corruption Commission to take to Court several major cases in 2021 and 2022. According to the Corruption Perception Index report published on 25 January 2022 by

Transparency International, Seychelles has improved its score by 4 points in 2021 compared to 2020.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The ninth EU-Seychelles Article 8 Political Dialogue took place in October 2022. The parties had substantive exchanges on rule of law, good governance, the protection and promotion of human rights, as well as peace and security. The cooperation between the EU and Seychelles on these topics is pivotal and is bearing fruits.

4. EU financial engagement: Seychelles was allocated a bilateral envelope under the new NDICI-Global Europe instrument, despite its high-income status, also in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the country's economy. This decision indicates the importance of the EU's commitment to the bilateral partnership with the country. Moreover, as we focus on governance, climate resilience and environmental protection, it is essential to keep mobilising regional or global instruments, to complement the bilateral allocation. For example, the regional project "Anti Money Laundering - Counter Financing of Terrorism in Eastern, Southern, Central Africa and Yemen" includes Seychelles as a key partner to ensure that its financial sector contributes to fighting corruption and money laundering in the region.

5. Multilateral context: The EU and Seychelles share the same commitment to multilateralism with the UN at its core, but also agree on the need for a reform of the UN system. Both parties have common willingness to partner on human rights issues, including at global level. According to the Universal Periodic Review's recommendations, and thanks to EU support, the Seychelles now has a fully independent and operational Human Rights Commission, in line with the Paris Principles. Seychelles is also member of the Global Alliance for Torture Free Trade, whose objective is to end trade in goods used for capital punishment and torture. The EU and Seychelles agreed to continue working together at Pan-African and regional levels with the AU, the Regional Economic Communities (such as SADC, COMESA) and with the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) in order to promote peace and stability in Africa.

Sierra Leone

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Since the end of the civil war 20 years ago, Sierra Leone has made significant progress, internationally recognized, in consolidating peace and democracy. Sierra Leone is now a rather stable and peaceful democracy, although the political and socioeconomic context remains fragile, marked by high polarization between the two main political parties (ruling SLPP and opposition APC). Opposition and civil society ask for more inclusive governance. Political and social challenges remain high, in a context of serious deterioration of economic and social conditions, with persistently high inflation (37% in December 2022 as compared to a year before, including 46% in food prices). Human development is an important priority of the Government.

In July, female demonstrators staging a peaceful protest against the worsening economic and social conditions were arrested, denouncing police ill-treatment while in detention. Some opposition politicians were also arrested. On 10 August, protests against the rising cost of

living, which had started peacefully, turned violent in Freetown, Makeni and a limited number of other parts of the country, resulting in loss of lives (around 30 civilians and 6 police officers). Police used excessive lethal force (live bullets). In the aftermath of these events, hundreds of people were arrested, amid concerns regarding the situation of the detainees. The "spreading of incendiary information in social media to destabilise the State", considered as an "act of cyber-terrorism", is threatened with imprisonment for 10 up to 20 years. As the country heads towards general elections on 24 June 2023, political polarization remains high, with several issues fuelling political tensions (contested results of a mid-term census, introduction of a proportional representation system for the Parliamentary elections, challenges of voter registration). In January the Government White Paper on the Constitutional Review was published, an important and long-awaited step in a process aimed at strengthening the human rights and electoral framework. In July, the Parliament approved a new Public Elections Act.

Prison conditions remained a cause of concern, with detention facilities overcrowded and short of minimum international standards regarding access to food, water, sanitation and healthcare. Women and girls remained at risk of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), including rape, female genital mutilation, child marriage and teenage pregnancies. Women continued to face high levels of gender inequality, marginalisation and discrimination, particularly for education, employment, access to and control over resources, decision-making and political participation. The media landscape continued to be pluralist and generally independent, with media criticizing the Government. Journalists worked in a relatively safe environment, though not completely free from police harassment and arbitrary arrests. In 2022 the country moved up 29 positions in the Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom Index. A Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act was approved in Parliament in November and signed into law by President Bio on 20 January 2023, a positive step to address gender inequality (30% quota for women in public institutions and private companies, extended 14-weeks maternity leave, equal pay and training opportunities for women). In April, the Parliament passed into law the Anti-Human Trafficking Act, the first law enacted by Sierra Leone on the matter, which set a legal framework for a newly created National Task Force on Human Trafficking and related prosecution. A Customary Land Rights Act, aimed at addressing inequalities and discrimination in land ownership and management, especially in rural areas, was adopted in October. A Local Government Act was adopted in December with the aim to deepen decentralisation and enhance Local Councils political and developmental authority. A highly consultative review of the NGO Policy and Regulations was launched in 2022 with the aim to amend the 2019 framework and ensure an enabling environment for civil society organisations (CSOs) and human rights defenders.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In 2022, the EU and EU Member States continued to work on the human rights and democracy focus areas of gender equality, women's and girls' rights, rights and role of children and youth, combat against poverty and social exclusion, environmental protection and fight against deforestation, prevention and fight against corruption, integrity of electoral processes and Parliament strengthening.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: EU political engagement with Sierra Leone continued to be intense. In the run-up to the 2023 general elections, EU Heads of Mission intensively engaged with the Government (including at the high-level EU-Sierra Leone Political Dialogue in November 2022, chaired by President Bio), electoral management bodies (including the

Electoral Commission) and political parties, encouraging and supporting a peaceful, inclusive, transparent and credible electoral process. EU Missions participated in electoral diplomatic watches of by-elections (in March in Port Loko, in June in Tonkolili, Kenema and Port Loko).

4. EU financial engagement: The MIP 2021-27 (EUR 245 million for 2021-24) identifies three priorities: (i) a green & resilient economy; (ii) human development; and (iii) good governance and fundamental rights. 15% of the MIP (EUR 36.75 million) are earmarked for actions on governance and human rights. Support to good governance is key to face the multiple challenges that hamper socio economic progress. Democratic institutions, accountability, and checks and balances are essential to consolidate peace and social cohesion. Better government effectiveness and public service delivery at all levels should leave no one behind. Improved economic governance and public finance management will underpin economic and social policies, and therefore enhance transparency and domestic resource mobilisation, reinforce the fight against corruption and improve the business climate. The role of women for national development is particularly recognized and limiting factors that constrain equal opportunities will be addressed.

In 2022, the EU continued to support human rights and democracy through programmes under the 11th European Development Fund, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and instruments in support of CSOs and local authorities. EU financial and technical assistance was provided to State and CSOs-led initiatives to enhance gender equality and women empowerment, including political processes, and in the fight against SGBV; to strengthen public finance management and procedures to prevent corruption; to fight poverty and social exclusion; to promote children rights and youth inclusion; to support the implementation of electoral reforms and the conduct of transparent, inclusive and peaceful electoral processes, as well as domestic observation of electoral operations; and Parliament's strengthening and CSOs' oversight.

5. Multilateral context: During 2022, the EU, EU Member States and the Government of Sierra Leone strengthened their dialogue and cooperation on multilateral issues, including on Ukraine-related resolutions and on Human Rights resolutions and initiatives presented at the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly. The EU and Sierra Leone worked closely together in the UN General Assembly in September during the negotiations for the adoption by consensus of a resolution co-sponsored by Sierra Leone and Japan which for the first time recognised the rights of survivors of sexual violence.

Somalia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Somalia continues to suffer from serious human rights violations in both conflict and non-conflict related settings, the delegation is receiving regular reports mentioning that violations are remaining widespread and largely unsanctioned. Transgressions of human rights and International Humanitarian Law are noted at federal, state and non-state levels, notably by the Salafi insurgent group, al-Shabaab. The insurgent group frequently uses targeted extra-judicial killings, terrorist attacks

on civilian hubs and widespread discrimination in its operations, including the use of sexual violence. With weak governance structures, the country experiences a lack of rule of law, limited access to justice and no guarantees for a fair trial. Death sentences and executions are common throughout the county's civilian and military courts. Similarly, the country suffers from widespread intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrests and intimidation of journalists and independent media. This trend is increasing across the country with particular note to Somaliland.

With Hassan Sheikh Mohamud taking office as President in the spring of 2022, Human rights protection saw a new momentum in the initial stages of the presidency. However, with political grievances, persisting violent conflict, droughts, severe food insecurity and famine-like conditions, human rights have been under significant pressure. The onset of the major security operations against al-Shabaab, Somalia has diverted most of its attention towards security with the clear intents of subduing the insurgency using military, financial and ideological means. These efforts does result in significant concerns over the potential impacts on human rights and international humanitarian law compliance, despite systemic training and sensitising of security forces to these domains. The al-Shabaab is noted to engage in severe punitive actions, poisoning wells and targeting civilians in their response to these operations. The ongoing operations are monitored for human rights transgressions, sexual violence and humanitarian implications.

Regarding freedom of press and civil society expression, Somalia remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists in terms of arbitrary detention and killings, as well as shutting down of media providers. In 2022, there was very high level of violence against journalists and freedom of expression in general is under very great pressure. Arbitrary detention, harassment of media workers continued unchecked and the situation is no easier for other human rights defenders. The government actively engaged in censorship and prosecution of critical voices, while those who commit crimes against journalists continued to enjoy impunity.

2. EU action - key focus areas : EU's key focus areas in Somalia and Somaliland in the area of human rights include:

- Promoting gender equality and women's rights;
- Ending violence against women and children;
- Supporting the democratisation agenda, including electoral processes;
- Promoting freedom of speech and of the press; and
- Improving access to justice through institutional capacity building, support to mobile courts and legal aid provision, as well as the promotion of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The Head of the EU Delegation met with the Somali President on 9 September 2022 shortly before a visit by the visit of the Hugh Representative/Vicepresident on 11 September. This was followed by a visit of the National Security Advisor to Brussels in December. This concludes an unprecedented level of engagement with the new administration since the conclusion of the delayed electoral process in May. Although a formal Political Dialogue has yet to be held, the parties nevertheless had substantive exchanges on rule of law, good governance as well as peace and

security. The EU continues actively involved in Somali state-building, including in restoring stability and building security through a comprehensive engagement encompassing all the EU's foreign policy instruments, i.e. development cooperation, promotion of good governance, rule of law and human rights, humanitarian aid, as well as security assistance, including through the CSDP Missions and Operation in and off the coast of Somalia and support to the African Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS).

4. EU financial engagement Implementation of six projects on support to media and promotion of women and girls' rights, (fight against female genital mutilation and sexual and gender-based violence), for a total of EUR 2.9 million was ongoing in 2022. Other interventions are dedicated to promoting the opening of civil and democratic space as well as culture and inclusion (EUR 1. 9 million). The EU also continued its support to civil society organizations that focus on enhancing political representation of women, minorities, internally displaced people and persons with disabilities. Other new interventions, amounting to EUR 4 million, are dedicated to strengthening civil society organisations' (CSOs) capacities in areas of policy dialogue, and enhancing local governance through their participation in public decision-making processes. Gender equality and inclusion of other marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities are key in all activities. These efforts will be continued throughout 2023 and beyond.

Two new contracts for an overall amount of EUR 1.5 million have been signed in 2022 to start implementation in 2023. The focus is on the media sector, in particular: (i) support to the professionalization of journalists as well as overall media education and digital literacy; (ii) combatting disinformation and fake news; and (iii) safety and security of journalists and improving the awareness among Somali security forces on the rights and existing laws protecting journalists in Somalia.

On democratization, the Delegation has been engaging with the political actors throughout 2022 on Somaliland election stalemate, including the EU Ambassador leading on the IP meetings with Somaliland President to call for dialogue and political consensus, timely elections, stability and respect for freedom of expression. The Delegation actively engages, jointly with other IP, with the government and other local stakeholders on the upcoming local elections in Puntland.

The new phase of the parliamentary support project started in August 2022 (EUR 3.2 million) and focuses on the institutional strengthening and capacity building of the newly elected Federal Parliament and the Parliament of Somaliland. The new component of the project supports the women caucus of the Federal Parliament, to enhance the capacities of women MPs as legislators.

A new FPI project in Somaliland will work on strengthening the political associations and parties in Somaliland and on political space management and conflict prevention around elections.

The EU and EU Member States continued to provide support to fostering Rule of Law across Somalia with a focus on increasing access to justice by providing legal aid and enabling mobile

courts to operate in more remote parts of the country so rural populations can benefit from formal justice dispensation.

Regarding the CSDP missions, human rights courses are systematically provided in EUTM and EUCAP training sessions. EUCAP Somalia has integrated human rights modules into its training activities for maritime law enforcement agencies and legal professionals with the aim to ensure the effective implementation of human rights in the delivery of law enforcement and justice.

5. Multilateral context: In the context of the Rule of Law program, implemented by the UN, there are continuous collaboration and information exchanges on the human right situation at technical level. At political level, when necessary, coordination mechanism is activated amongst international partners (the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia – UNSOM– the United Kingdom, the United States and EU Member States) align political messages.

South Africa

1. Overall human rights and democracy situation: South Africa is a mature and vibrant democracy with a progressive constitutional and legal framework designed to ensure respect for human rights in the society. The government, active and robust media, civil society and an independent judiciary all play their role in monitoring and addressing human rights violations as well as preserving democracy. Corruption continued to be a major threat for development of the country. Despite efforts from both the National Prosecution Authority and the Judiciary to reduce impunity, lack of prosecutions and accountability remains widespread. Realisation of socio-economic rights and elimination of inequalities are still a major challenge, with the situation deteriorating in 2022 due to the impact of the economic and the energy crisis. Patriarchal norms and extraordinary levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality has led to continued high-levels of Gender Based Violence (GBV)/Femicide (F), hate crimes against the LGBTI community and a worrying rise in xenophobic attacks. However, the Government has demonstrated strong political commitment to fight GBV/F. Several positive steps have been taken concerning legislation to protect people against violence and discrimination. In January, three pieces of legislation related to GBV areas were adopted, aimed at strengthening the criminal justice system response to GBV. In March, Cabinet approved the Official Identity Management Policy replacing the Identification Act, 1997 (Act 68 of 1997), to be more inclusive and aligned to the constitutional principles of equality, non-discrimination and human dignity. Cabinet also approved the White Paper on Marriages that will allow South Africans and residents of all sexual orientations, religious and cultural persuasions to conclude legal unions in line with constitutional principles. Also in March, Parliament held the first public hearings on the updated Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill, first introduced in 2018. The Bill created the offences of hate crimes and hate speech and put in place measures to prevent and combat those offences. The Bill remained under discussion in Parliament in 2022. The often difficult situation of human rights defenders (HRD) and whistle blowers remains a matter of concern.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU collective action in 2022 was focused on maintaining dialogue, providing support, offering assistance and engaging a broad range of stakeholders in the areas of (i) elimination of discrimination and exclusion, (ii) protection of human rights defenders, freedom of expression and digital space, (iii) combating inequalities, (iv) closing the accountability gap, and (v) strengthening the partnership with South Africa to advance human rights and democracy.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The seventh South Africa-EU Human Rights Dialogue was successfully held in Brussels in 2022 and the EU continued to engage government, civil society and the broader public in South Africa on human rights both formally and informally. The EU Head of Delegation and EU representatives participated in a number of public events to promote human rights, with a particularly strong focus on women's rights, fight against discrimination and exclusion, including for as regards LGBTI community and refugees and migrants, the role of human rights defenders and the support for democracy. Specifically, this included speaking on behalf of the Gender Development Partners' Group at the second Presidential Summit on fighting GBV/F, as well as participating in a Pride march with EU MS embassies, social media and communication initiatives to mark IDAHOT and the 16 Days of activism against GBV. The Gender Development Partners' Group, chaired by the EU Delegation, continued to hold regular discussions with the South African government and civil society to track developments in this thematic area. The EU Delegation also co-hosted a public webinar on Women and the green transition with City Press media.

4. EU financial engagement: Implementation of projects launched in previous years to support action in different priority areas of the Democracy and Human Rights Country Strategy continued in 2022. The EU Delegation launched a new call for proposals (NDICI, EUR 3.1 million) for civil society projects to enhance women economic empowerment and to prevent GBV/F. In 2022, the Delegation also signed two new grants contracts with civil society organisations to prevent GBV and to address the spread of online hate speech against women and migrants. In addition the Delegation signed an agreement with ILO to address child labour in the agricultural sector in South Arica as part of the EU commitment to support South Africa to address child labour following the fifth global conference, which took place in SA in May 2022. The Delegation also launched a call for proposals for projects addressing child labour and trafficking in South Africa and the neighbouring countries. In 2022, under its "Enhancing Accountability" programme, the Delegation continued to monitor the implementation of four CSOs projects and contracted a technical assistance team which will provide support to organise policy discussions and events (on topics such as transparency, access to information, citizen oversight and inclusive governance processes). Finally under the same programme, the Delegation launched a second call for proposals on improving accountability and transparency and supporting anti-corruption efforts. Grants will be awarded in 2023.

5. Multilateral context: In 2022, South Africa was elected to serve in the Human Rights Council 2023-2025. It chaired the 66th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and went through its 41st Universal Periodic Review with 293 recommendations. South Africa continued to be an active and important player in the Human Rights Council during 2022. Even though most resolutions are tabled by the entire African Group, South Africa is one of the leading voices on some topics, in particular on the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and the rights of people of African descent, inequality and discrimination, equal

pay, the right to social security, discrimination of women and girls in sports, sexual orientation and gender (SOGI), private military and security companies (PMSC), Business and human rights, transnational corporations (TNC).

South Sudan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in South Sudan remained bleak. Subnational conflicts and violence persisted in many parts of the country, in particular in Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei States, and generated horrendous atrocities, grave human rights violation and abuses, including violations of the International Humanitarian Law. The situation requires continuous international scrutiny and monitoring.

Conflict and violence continued to displace civilians, impact access to critical services, disrupt humanitarian operations and constitute the main impediment for structural and sustainable development, including the provision of social services. An estimated 2.2 million people are internally displaced, and 2.3 million are refugees in countries surrounding South Sudan. For many of the displaced persons, return is not an option yet.

The bleak humanitarian situation continued to worsen. In 2022, South Sudan was facing its worst hunger crisis since independence, with three quarters of the population depending on multi-dimensional humanitarian assistance. South Sudan remain the most dangerous place for humanitarian actors, 12 have lost their lives in 2022.

South Sudan's political environment has remained intolerant of criticism of government actions and policies, leading to intimidation, harassment and detention of civil society activists, human rights defenders and independent journalists. This has led to an environment of self-censorship for media and human rights workers where, with the pervasive state surveillance, people no longer feel safe to speak freely and openly about the conflict and the human rights situation. The Government of South Sudan conducts communications and physical surveillance through a widespread, cross-border network of informants and agents, penetrating all levels of society and daily life, by monitoring media and social media, and requiring event organizers to seek permission before holding any form of gathering.

The National Security Service (NSS) operates in contravention of human rights and rule of law standards, carrying out arrests without warrant, arbitrarily detaining citizens for an unspecified period, some of them subject to torture and other ill-treatment, infringing on press freedoms, the freedom of opinion and expression, and the freedom of assembly. Several human rights violations occur in the context of detention by security actors. The prisons are overcrowded, leading to unsanitary conditions and inadequate medical care. One third of the inmates is on pre-trial detention. The police lacks understanding of its mandate being different from that of the military.

Conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls is widespread and systematic throughout South Sudan with most profound impact on victims, their families and

communities. There have been no developments in addressing impunity. Ongoing conflicts across the country, including in the Equatorias, have created a perilous situation of great insecurity for women and girls, exacerbated by a lack of accountability for sexual and gender-based violence. Widespread rape and sexual violence in armed conflict, while complex, can be attributed to a patriarchal society, and is reflected in the inferior status of women maintained by the State and its institutions, creating conditions in which these violations thrive.

In 2022, South Sudan continued to revise its migration policy, including migration statistics and bilateral agreements to provide legal pathways for South Sudanese migrants.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The Human Rights Thematic Programme of NDICI and previously the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) have been essential in South Sudan to support human rights defenders with its flexible procedures. EU action focuses on:

- Supporting Human Rights Defenders in South Sudan and more specifically supporting the capacity building of the South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network and the Union of Journalists given the critical environment they are operating in.

- Supporting democracy and civic participation including the strengthening of the freedom of expression and freedom of press.

- Strengthen advocacy to uphold and protect human rights including the economic, civic and political empowerment of women and girls through advocacy, training, legal aid, microfinance, cooperation with local chiefs/leaders.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Special Representative for Human Rights visited South Sudan in November 2022 to confirm strong commitment for the country's peace process and to advocate for enhanced accountability of the Government for human rights violations/abuses and a stronger role in providing social services to its own population.

The EU continued to support the mandate of the International Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, the UN and the Human Rights Division with the UN Mission in South Sudan as well as the UN sanction regime and arm's embargo. In addition to UN sanctions, it continued to list one more person under its own sanction regime for under-mining the peace process and enflaming violence. The EU supported the monitoring and verification process of the Peace Agreement.

In Juba, the EU organised regular meetings with representatives of civil society and Human Rights events. The EU provides support for activities and engagement with South Sudanese citizens to target audiences, especially youth and women/girls, media, universities and schools, civil society activists and human rights defenders, rights activists, researchers, entrepreneurs and other policymakers.

4. EU financial engagement: Total financial engagement in the area of Humans Rights as listed above amounts to over EUR 15 million, which includes EUR 2.5 million on supporting human rights defenders and journalists, over 7 MEUR on the gender equality portfolio and EUR 6

millin supporting peace in the disputed Abyei Administrative Area, a project financed by the Instrument contributing to Peace and Stability.

5. Multilateral context: In 2022, South Sudan has chaired the Khartoum Process and identified the following priority areas: (i) Climate change (ii) Displacement and mobility (iii) Border management (iv) Protection of migrants and refugees (v) Diaspora. In 2022, South Sudan ratified the IGAD Protocols on Free Movements of Persons and Transhumance.

South Sudan figures on item four and item ten of the agenda of the Human Rights Council. The Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, established by the Council in 2016, is regularly reviewing the situations and issuing important recommendations to improve the respect for and the promotion of human rights in the country.

Sudan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the situation in regards to Human Rights and democracy did not look much different from 2021. Public demonstrations against military rule continue to take place both in the capital Khartoum as well as in the periphery. At the same time unlawful detentions have been taking place and numerous cases of human rights violations have been reported.

On 25 October 2021, Sudan's military forces arrested Prime Minister Hamdok and several civilian figures, including members of the Transitional Government and Transitional Sovereign Council (SC), and placed them under house arrest or detained them in unknown locations. General Burhan announced a nation-wide state of emergency and the dissolution of the SC and the civilian-led Transitional Government. Burhan unilaterally announced the suspension of Articles 11, 12, 15, 16, 24-3, 71, and 72 of the Constitutional Document. Additionally, the military takeover jeopardize the implementation of Sudan's Juba Peace Agreement. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, has condemned the military coup and calls for the release of all those arbitrarily detained and for the return to rule of law and democratic transition. EU High Representative Josep Borrell responded in a similar manner to the political situation in Sudan, stating that *"the actions of the military represent a betrayal of the revolution, the transition, and the legitimate requests of the Sudanese people for peace, justice and economic development."*

The military shut down roads, bridges, and Khartoum's airport, seized control of national television and critical communication centers, and imposed a nationwide partial internet blackout. A Khartoum court ordered the country's three main telecommunications providers to restore internet access to all their customers pending further proceedings. Although communication was restricted following news of the coup, peaceful protests were held to denounce military misconduct and call for restoration of the government as well as a transition to civilian rule. While the military has promised to allow peaceful protests, between 25 and 30 October, at least 14 people were killed and 300 were injured by live ammunition as a result of the unwarranted use of lethal force by security authorities in their efforts to counter

the many protests that erupted in Khartoum. There also has been an increase in cases of harassment, particularly against women. Furthermore, not only government officials, but also political and civil society actors, human rights defenders, and journalists, are being detained in undisclosed locations, with no access to family or legal counsel.

A written report on the human rights situation in Sudan was published in June 2022 by the OHCHR. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk on 16 December 2022 designated Radhouane Nouicer from Tunisia as his expert on the situation of human rights in Sudan, replacing Adama Dieng who stepped down from this position in October 2022.

Before the coup, Sudan's Transitional Government has undertaken several positive steps to improve the situation of human rights in the country. In February 2020, Sudanese authorities indicated their willingness to cooperate with the International Criminal Court (ICC), including ensuring that ICC suspects appear before the Court. In July 2020, the Transitional Government adopted several important legal reforms such as the criminalisation of female genital mutilation. Sudan also approved wide-ranging amendments to its criminal law, including repealing the death penalty for apostasy as well as the movement restrictions on women travelling with children that required them to obtain consent from a male guardian. In August 2020, the Juba Peace Agreement between the Transitional Government and the Sudan Revolutionary Movements was concluded, signifying an important milestone for the ongoing transition and paving the way towards sustainable peace in Sudan. In February 2021, Sudan ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the Convention on Enforced Disappearances.

Notwithstanding the progress achieved, many structural challenges remain such as the death penalty not being fully banned, new and revised legislation needing to be fully implemented and root causes of conflict in Darfur and other conflict-prone regions requiring to be addressed. In addition to extreme poverty and financial exclusion, sexual and gender based violence remained one of the most prevalent and persistent issues faced by women and girls in Sudan.

2. EU action on Human Rights and Democracy - key focus areas: Through numerous projects and initiatives, the EU and its Member States supported the following key areas:

- Protection, legal, medical and psycho-social services to human rights defenders (HRDs),
- Support to the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR),
- Advancing sustainable development through human rights,
- Strengthening the rule of law and accountability,
- Preventing violations and strengthening protection of human rights,
- Gender equality and women's rights,
- Enhancing participation and protecting civic space,
- Capacity building,
- Support to new/informal types of civil society and citizenship groups, especially youth,
- Media freedom,
- Support in the fields of quality primary education,

- Protection and promotion of the human rights of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Meetings with the transitional authorities continued throughout the year to convey EU position on the political process and the need to safeguard human rights, as well as on the role of Human Rights activists, in particular women and youth. In parallel, the EU Delegation held a number of meetings with HRDs to get regular updates on the human rights situation and HRDs´ situation.

4. EU financial engagement: Due to the political impasse in Sudan, it was decided that Sudan would not have an MIP and a phased/gradual approach via Individual measures, which are part of the EU Toolbox, would be used. In practice, this means that due to the military coup, EU Development funds would be channelled directly to support CSOs, NGOs, and local/international partners, while avoiding to interact with Sudanese authorities at this time. A first package of individual measures was approved in 2022, amounting to EUR 48 million supporting human rights and education.

Furthermore, and since December 2021, the EU Delegation to Sudan has active projects on human rights (funded under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights) worth EUR 4 million (including years 2018-2021). This figure does not include the many other human-rights-relevant interventions the Delegation has in other areas of cooperation, i.e.: civil society; migration; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), among others.

5. Multilateral context: The military coup of 25 October 2021 has been widely condemned by the international Community. Following the military takeover, the African Union suspended Sudan's participation in activities until the restoration of a civilian-led authority.

In March 2009, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for then President Bashir – the first incumbent President to be indicted – for crimes against humanity (murder, extermination, forcible transfer, torture, and rape) and war crimes (intentionally directing attacks against civilians, and pillaging) related to the situation in Darfur. A second arrest warrant in July 2010 for genocide, allegedly committed at least between 2003 and 2008. Until Bashir is transferred to the seat of the Court in The Hague, the case will remain in the Pre-Trial stage. In 2020, Sudanese authorities have stated that they will hand over Bashir to the ICC for the Darfur trial and this has still not happened. In late December he was transferred from prison to a hospital for undisclosed medical treatments.

Moreover, following the recommendations of the ICC and the UN, the EU and its Member States' representatives apply an 'essential contacts only' policy vis-à-vis ICC inductees. On 9 June 2020, Sudanese Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-al-Rahman alias Ali Kushayb was transferred to the ICC in the Hague. Ali Kushayb was indicted by the ICC in April 2007 for numerous counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Darfur between 2003 and 2004. Ali Kushayb surrendered himself in CAR with MINUSCA assisting his arrest and eventual transfer to The Hague. In October 2020, ICC Prosecutor visited Sudan, meeting the authorities to discuss different options for cooperation. Notably, in the Juba Peace Agreement, signed on 3 October 2020, Sudan committed to cooperating with the Court. In February 2021, Sudan

signed a MoU with the ICC Office of the Prosecutor for cooperating on the trial of Ali Kushayb. In May 2021, ICC Prosecutor paid another visit to Sudan, including for the first time also Darfur. Since January 2020 Sudan is member of the UN Human Rights Council. The UN Human Rights Council held a special session on Sudan on 5 November 2021 to discuss the implications of the 25 October coup on the human rights situation in the country. At the special session, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution HRC/RES/S-32/1, which requested the High Commissioner to designate an expert on human rights in Sudan. In November 2021, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet designated Adama Dieng as an expert on human rights in Sudan. According to the resolution, Dieng will monitor the developing human rights situation in Sudan with the assistance of, and in close cooperation with, the UN Joint Human Rights Office in Sudan. In performing his duties, he will pay special attention to victims and ensure a gender perspective. In 2021, unfortunately, he was not able to visit Sudan but managed to do so in 2022.

The UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), a special political mission to provide support to Sudan during its political transition to democratic rule, was further extended until 3 June 2023. After the coup in October 2021, UNITAMS' work became complicated, as the Constitutional order was disrupted, and its mandate has been questioned by some political actors. However, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General remained vocal and active during the last months of 2021 and during all of 2022.

Tanzania

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the 30th anniversary of multiparty democracy in Tanzania, saw a revamping of much awaited inter party dialogue. In particular, President Samia Suluhu Hassan has reconnected with opposition parties including the main opposition party CHADEMA. She met with CHADEMA chairman Mbowe following his release from prison in March and with CHADEMA opposition party's former presidential candidate Tundu Lissu. Government launched a national debate on political reforms in the area of elections, political parties, media and constitution culminated in December in important public commitments taken by President Samia on the democratic front. This has created a positive momentum that however still largely needed to materialise in concrete acts.

Overall, the human rights situation of the country still presents significant challenges, in particular for some categories of HR Defenders, such as key vulnerable population, pastoralist communities, women and journalists. During 2022, friction between state organs and Maasai people living in Ngorongoro district culminated in the death of two persons and reportedly several injured, over twenty arrested and up to two thousand fleeing for Kenya due to fear of reprisal. The UN Special Rapporteurs for Indigenous People and for Housing were invited by Government, however the mission has been reported. As is the case in several countries in the region, same-sex relations are illegal and there is no political will to decriminalise and discrimination towards LGBTI is still rooted in the country.

Women and children's rights are recognized and legally protected in Tanzania. However, the Child Marriage Act is not amended yet, with approximately over 30% of girls married under 18. People with disabilities continue to struggle accessing basic services. Indeed, several challenges remain due to widespread poverty and substantial weaknesses in protection systems, especially in the rural areas, also because of weak community awareness about some forms of violence (female genital mutilation, child marriage, corporal punishment, domestic violence, trafficking of minors).

The 2022 Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Day remains an important milestone in the human rights defenders (HRDs) work in Tanzania. President Samia, as the guest of honour, made a number of commitments with regard to protection and promotion of human rights.
Gender equality and women's empowerment is clearly a priority for Tanzania. A number of commitment have been taken since 2021 and in 2022 some advancement in their implementation was noted; among others, the education re-entry policy for pregnant girls, inclusive consultations on the revision of the Marriage Law Act, as well as the preparation of the Generation Equality Forum programme on Justice and social rights. Indeed, the number of women holding top positions (including foreign minister, minster of investment, industry and trade, minister of tourism and natural resources, Speaker of Parliament among others) clearly bears witness to the commitment of Tanzania as a model in women's leadership.

2. EU action - key focus areas:
Protecting and empowering individuals: The EU Delegation and the Member States have taken gender equality and women empowerment as one of the main priority for this period. Moreover, the EU continued the implementation of projects on human rights, in particular related to HRDs and business and human rights in mining sector. A specific initiative on human trafficking was implemented by the EU Delegation with a dedicated campaign focusing on Zanzibar. Through culture, the EU and its Member States conveyed important messages, for example during events such as the Zanzibar International Film Festival and the Zanzibar Music festivals, in particular on women's rights and gender equality.

Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies: The EU Delegation continued projects implementation in the area of Rule of Law, fight to corruption and legal aid, democracy and raising voices of youth and women. Among others, EU partners organised a stakeholders conference on the 2020 elections, engaging on how to improve the electoral cycle process, including conflict mitigation. The three-day symposium provided an important platform for a productive political dialogue.

The Delegation, through one of its partners, facilitated the participation of three Tanzanian youth to attend the fifth East Africa Youth Parliament "Vijana Assembly" in November 2022. This forum assembled more than 100 youths bringing voices of young women and men from across East Africa.

During the NGO forum in Zanzibar, the President of Zanzibar Hassan Mwinyi visited the EU projects on peace building and acknowledged the importance of these initiatives in the archipelago. The two Zanzibar focussed projects launched a media campaign under the banner, "the role of youth in peacebuilding" and series of radio dialogues to discuss the contribution of religious leaders to peacebuilding and national unity.

Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy: There was still no formal follow-up of the EU 2015 election observation mission (EOM) recommendations. However, the EU supported dialogue among civil society engaged during the elections and between civil society and public authorities on recommendations from election observation and monitoring. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations mentioned the necessity to follow up to 2015 EU EOM as well. The EU Delegation also participated to discussions with donor partners, organised by UN Team and with civil society on the outcome of the UPR.

New technologies - Harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges: The EU Delegation's efforts focused the digitalisation sector with a newly approved NDICI programme. EU also continued its support to Media sector including in the digital/on-line sphere through civil society.

Delivering by working together: The EU and its Member States participates actively to the donor coordination mechanism under the aid effectiveness agenda, with high-level meetings, sector groups and related subgroups.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Political dialogue did not take place in 2022; it is scheduled for 2023. In September, the European Parliament tabled an urgent procedure and adopted a resolution regarding human rights violations in Uganda and Tanzania linked to fossil fuel projects. The EU Delegation held sector dialogues on gender equality, under the budget support component of *Gender Transformative Action programme*. Dialogues included the Ministry responsible for Gender, Finance and Planning, Education, Health and Justice.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the bilateral envelope, the EU Delegation started the implementation of the stand-alone programme tackling all six priorities of the EU Gender Action Plan III, for an amount of EUR 70 million and approved the top up of EUR 20 million on girls education (AAP 2023). Specific projects under NDICI-HR / EIDHR and CSO allocations were directed to human rights and business; support to HRDs; strengthening community dialogue and peacebuilding; promote citizen participation to democratic processes.

5. Multilateral context: The EU and its Member States collaborated with UN Women, UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF in activities and campaigns against gender-based violence, including child marriage.

The EU has closely followed the 2021 Tanzania Universal Periodic Review process. Tanzania accepted to implement 167 recommendations, of which 20 recommendations are accepted with partial support, and noted 65 recommendations. Accepted recommendations previously merely noted or deferred include minimal age of marriage; re-entry policy for pregnant students; and freedom of information and the right to political participation. The 65 noted recommendations included issues considered not in alignment with the Constitution, policies, laws and culture, such as same sex relations, the abolition of the death penalty, prosecution of perpetrators of attacks and killings of persons with albinism, among others. Tanzania said it looked forward to support and collaborations in the following key national priority areas: completion and implementation of a second National Human Rights Action Plan; submission of State Party Reports to the relevant committees; increased provision and coverage of legal

aid and access to justice, among others. Civil society organisations have elaborated a matrix to follow up the implementation of UPR recommendations. Donor partners, including the EU and the Member States, are following the implementation via different groups and sector thematic subgroups. The EU Delegation actively participated to the meetings promoted by UN coordinator office after the UPR exercise.

Tanzania has not ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT). Government continued the elaboration of the CEDAW report, due since March 2020; validation consultations were carried out with the support of UN WOMEN, but not submitted yet. The CRPD report (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) is still due – UNFPA is supporting its elaboration. The CRC report, due since 2020, was finalised and submitted in September 2022. On the List of issues prior to reporting related to the CCPR Cycle, the URT report was due in April 2022.

The Gambia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, The Gambia successfully managed to complete the first phase of its transition to democracy by passing the litmus test of historically unprecedented, credible democratic elections that landed the current President a solid mandate for a second term (December 2021) and a short majority at the National Assembly (April 2022). Parliamentary elections took place in a competitive and active environment. Given that these elections were held under the current not yet reviewed Constitution, the legislative framework remained unchanged; it provides a minimal basis for the conduct of democratic elections with important deficiencies persisting. Some issues are under criticism by the Civil Society, the EU, other stakeholders' observation missions and the Human Rights Council (HRC): the five National Assembly members directly appointed by the President, the number of presidential mandates (and the "reset" allowed by a new constitution), and the voting system "First Past the Post", that has so far ruled upon all the elections. Although the fundamental freedoms are treated by the Constitution, there are still legal restrictions that go beyond the limits set out in international standards pertaining to the right to assembly, of association and freedom of speech. Despite a problematic legal framework, media took an active part in the elections, reporting extensively, especially around candidate registration and the ensuing campaign. The freedom of speech has yet to be fully enshrined in a renewed legal framework, although the Access to Information Act now guarantees the access to information as a human right and provides for a legal guarantee to information on government decisions affecting the lives and livelihoods of the Gambians. On LGBTI, The Gambia has still a discriminatory stance. The crime of "aggravated homosexuality" for "serial offenders" is punishable by life imprisonment. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) made a key contribution to the positive conduct of the elections both by actively educating Gambians on the process and by acting as domestic observers. While a Constitutional reform would be a crucial building block for establishing the Gambia as a fully democratic country, a political consensus will be challenging to reach.

In terms of human rights and fundamental freedoms, The Gambia consolidated its overall good record and made significant progress. The Women's Act (2010) was partially revised to repeal some of its most discriminatory provisions (new provision stipulates that 33% of positions in public institutions should be occupied by women). However, women scor.se only 6% of the National Assembly members. Furthermore, the Persons with Disabilities and the Access to Information Acts were enacted. But draft Anti-corruption legislation, drafted in 2019, is still pending before the National Assembly.

The process of transitional justice, the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC), finalised and made public its final report and recommendations on 24 December 2021. The new Government composed in May 2022 issued an ambitious White Paper on 25th May for following-up on the recommendations of the TRRC. The Gambia took a decisive step forward on its road towards justice and accountability for human rights violations perpetrated during the regime of Yahya Jammeh (1994-2016). In response to TRRC's work, the Government announced the implementation of almost all 267 Commission's recommendations, in particular for the criminal investigation and prosecution of 69 identified perpetrators, including former President Jammeh. It foresees the establishment of a special criminal investigations unit and a special judicial entity, the Hybrid Court for The Gambia, under the umbrella of ECOWAS. It will eventually close a difficult and painful truth-seeking process started in 2017 and marks the start of a new crucial phase: implementation of accountability, justice, reparations and memorialisation. Paramount to that though, a special prosecutor office, as well as an implementation plan, will have to be set up by the first quarter 2023 (end of March). Low hanging fruits could start being prosecuted once the office is up and running. A Donor conference would follow.

The report brings back into focus the need for the government to take action on abolishing the death penalty, in line with its stated intentions and the 2019 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations to that effect. In fact, despite the establishment of an official moratorium on executions, and the country's accession to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, courts continued to hand down death sentences throughout 2022. Prison and detention conditions in The Gambia are still a major concern.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, the EU focuses on the following priorities: protecting fundamental freedoms, strengthening the Rule of Law, supporting electoral processes, bolstering governance characterised by transparent, accountable and independent oversight institutions, with a transparent and efficient public financial management. The EU is also helping to combat impunity, to obtain the meaningful participation of women, girls and youth in all spheres of public life and non-discrimination, fostering a pluralistic civil society, abolishing the death penalty.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The priorities for the EU in The Gambia are part and parcel of every engagement with representatives of the relevant Gambian authorities and institutions. It also used public diplomacy, social media to advance certain areas of importance. Particular attention was given to the participation of women in all spheres of public life, to press freedom and freedom of expression. The HR/VP in his congratulatory letter

to President Barrow following his election victory underlined that the EU continues to stand ready to accompany the Gambia through legal and constitutional reforms.

4. EU Financial Engagement: In the context of the elections, EU funding went to support civic education on electoral processes, to supporting domestic observers and to an early warning system and mitigation of potential triggers for electoral violence. The EU was also the main sponsor of the Gambia Press Union's (GPU) National Journalism Awards and presented the awards for Human rights reporting and the Press Freedom lifetime achievement award, thereby firmly underlining the importance the EU attaches to freedom of expression. At the end of the year, the Annual Action Plan for the Gambia was adopted, that foresees, among others, a EUR 9 million intervention with UNDP, including support to the revision of the Constitution and other legal texts. In 2023, the EU is to support the National Assembly, the National Human Rights Commission as well as the GPU's workplan through a dedicated project. The commitments of the Government's White Paper endorsing most of the recommendations of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparation Commission (TRRC) will be an integral part of the forthcoming budget support operation.

5. Multilateral context: Over the last years and despite capacity constraints The Gambia has made serious efforts to comply with its international and human rights reporting obligations. The country underwent the last Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in the framework of the UN Human Rights Council in November 2019. Out of the 222 recommendations, 207 were accepted. Recommendations covered the role of women in society, abolition of the death penalty and non-discrimination of minorities, among others. The Gambia showed a very positive engagement within the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva (member until 2024). The Gambia played a prominent role by filing a case for defending the Rohingyas with the International Court of Justice against Myanmar for alleged violations of the Genocide Convention.

Togo

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy situation in Togo did not really improve in 2022. The country has seen no real political alternation for 56 years, and is ruled with a presidential system. In this context, tensions between the presidential majority and the opposition have persisted, while the freedom of press and media is also limited. Arrest and imprisonment of political opponents, trade union members, and independent or critical journalists have occurred across the year, while the DMK coalition (the main opposition force) keeps on considering the President and his Government as illegitimate, which undermines the attempts of internal dialogue that have been carried out. Independent media are often shut down, and there is evidence that the spyware Pegasus has been used against journalists and human rights activists. Political demonstrations have remained unauthorised during most of 2022, under pretext of COVID-19 restrictions. The ban was eventually lifted in late 2022 but reinstated soon after. The rulings of the ECOWAS Court of Justice condemning the Togolese government for torture and arbitrary detention have not been executed. Three political opponents remain in prison

despite a judicial ruling ordering their release. Space for civil society has also been shrinking, notably with the approval in January 2022 of a Presidential Decree that grants the Government the ability to cut funding, even foreign, to certain NGOs. Regional elections, originally scheduled for 2021, but postponed several times, are now expected to take place in 2023, when legislative elections are also planned. Progress has been made in the promotion of women rights, including the approval in 2022 of numerous legislative amendments removing outdated discriminatory provisions and protecting women from sexual harassment in the workplace.

2. EU action – key focus areas: The EU is actively engaged to promote dialogue, de-escalate political tensions and promote human rights in Togo. The EU Delegation closely follows the evolution of the situation and encourages all the Togolese political actors to choose dialogue in order to reach ultimately sustainable solutions based, as much as possible, on consensus, for the challenges that the country is facing. EU action in support of human rights and democracy in Togo focuses on

- improving social cohesion in the North of the country
- capacity-building of civil society and human rights organisation as well as local authorities on human rights and gender mainstreaming
- promoting women leadership and improving their economic power
- empowering civil society in areas like freedom of expression and freedom of assembly

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 7 November 2022, the EU and its Member States held the 23rd Article 8 Partnership Dialogue meeting with the Togolese authorities. In general, the meeting confirmed the good relations between EU and Togo. While the EU and the represented Member States welcomed the Togolese decision of accepting 80% of the Universal Periodic review (UPR) recommendations, they advised that Togo should adopt also the others, particularly those in the field of gender equality. They also pointed out the worsening of the situation as far as democracy and fundamental freedoms are concerned.

4. EU financial engagements: Consistently with the Programming Joint Document (2021-2027), the EU, Germany and France adopt a joint-cooperation strategy along three priority areas aligned with the Government "Togo 2025 roadmap", and three Team Europe Initiatives (TEI) for the period 2021-2024:

- support for socio-economic inclusion and human development, through support for widespread access to and quality improvement of public services (water, sanitation, education, health, culture, energy, connectivity): EUR 50.75 million
- support for the development of sustainable agro-industries, the management of natural resources and the protection of biodiversity: EUR 50.75 million
- support for the consolidation of a peaceful and resilient society, with a particular support for peace and security, the rule of law, the modernisation of public action and decentralisation: EUR 29 million
- supporting measures for the Cooperation Facility/support to the civil society: EUR 14.5 million
- TEI "energy and connectivity": EUR 35.3 million
- TEI "sustainable agribusiness": EUR 41.1 million
- TEI "Decentralisation and Local Governance": EUR 29.5 million

5. Multilateral context: In promoting human rights and democracy, the EU Delegation and the Member States Embassies work together to build a conducive political dialogue with both Togolese authorities and other stakeholders in the framework of the Cotonou agreement between the EU and ACP countries. The coordination of international engagement in Togo is especially ensured by the so-called "Group of the Five" (G5), which includes the ambassadors of Germany, France, and United States, the UN system coordination mechanism, and the EU Delegation itself.

Uganda

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: There continue to be barriers to respect for human rights and democratic norms in Uganda. Space for independent media, religious freedom and civil society organisations does exist, but important impediments to emerging and alternative political offering remain. Moreover, unaddressed political, economic and social fragilities contribute to weaken the social fabric. Targeted intimidations and violations against the political opposition, as well as legal and societal discrimination against the LGBTI community continues and rates of sexual and gender based violence remain high. There is a progressive policy towards religious freedoms and successful policies to promote women's participation in political life and their economic empowerment. Uganda maintains both in its constitution and penal code the possibility to sentence to death; but the country has not executed any inmate since 1999 for civilian judgement and since 2005 after court martial decision.

2. EU action - key focus areas:

Protecting and empowering individuals: The EU response involved a combination of emergency response grants, trial observation direct engagement with Ugandan authorities and referrals for support from other organisations. Through the Human Rights & Democracy Thematic Programme, the EU Delegation supported one project to provide legal and outreach services to hundreds of vulnerable and marginalised individuals across Uganda. The EU also presented the annual Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) award to Primah Kwagala, a human rights lawyer who made an outstanding contribution to rights in her community over the previous year. In April 2022, The EU Special representative for Human Rights (EUSR) visited Uganda and raised concerns including on torture during a meeting with President Museveni. He also engaged with numerous Ugandan HRDs and civil society organisations (CSOs).

Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies: The EU Delegation and the Member States in Uganda worked extensively on the topic of civic space in Uganda. This included regular engagements with the body responsible for regulating NGOs in Uganda and participation in dialogues with CSOs and government aimed at ensuring an enabling environment for civil society in Uganda. The EU and the Member States also continued to negotiate for the resumption of activities under the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF), the EU's flagship governance programme in Uganda. The DGF resumed activities in June following the lifting of the suspension by the President. The EU Delegation and the Member

States continued to meeting regularly with government ministries to stress the importance of an open and enabling environment for civil society and to find ways to continue supporting the sector.

Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy: The EU Delegation and the Member States have engaged actively with government, civil society, and private sector to raise awareness of business responsibilities on human rights over the past two years. The EU has also organised a number of forums in which companies – both Ugandan and European – have discussed challenges and opportunities related to human rights in their business operations. The EU Delegation and the Member States also supported activities related to Uganda's participation in its third cycle review at the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

New technologies: Various projects strengthen the use and knowledge of digital tools and mechanisms for the protection of human rights by HRDs and CSOs and facilitate the communication of individual citizens with the Ugandan Human Rights Commission. The EU Delegation also engaged with policy makers, including the Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, to raise concerns related to the tightening of laws governing expression online.

Delivering by working together: The EU and the Member States worked closely together on issues related to human rights and democracy during 2022, collaborating through political advisors and human rights working groups at a technical level. These collaborations include regular meetings as well as joint field trips Heads of Mission have strived to agree on joint messaging and lines to take, to use in their political and policy engagements, which has allowed to have a coordinated EU position vis à vis interlocutors.

2. EU bilateral political engagement: While a formal Article 8 Dialogue did not take place in 2022, the EU engaged with Ugandan authorities and civil society on human rights and democracy, as well as civic space. The EU Delegation and the Member States met regularly with regulators and ministries to stress the importance of an open and enabling environment for civil society and to find ways to continue supporting the sector. They have actively called for an end to serious human rights violations (extrajudicial killings of civilians, enforced disappearances, and torture), justice for victims and for perpetrators to be held to account. These issues were also extensively discussed with the government by the EUSR. The EU has also tabled the issue of corporate sustainability and due diligence, at the Uganda-EU Business Forum which attracted over 1 000 representatives from Ugandan and European public and private sector, and was opened by the President.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the EU and the Member States continued to support a wide range of projects related to human rights and democracy in Uganda. A new phase of the Civil Society in Uganda Support Programme (CUSP II) began in 2022 and the EU Delegation signed ten grants under the Civil Society Organisations Thematic Programme. A new EUR 5 million action on Business and Human Rights was adopted in 2022, with implementation to begin in the first half of 2023. The EU Delegation also launched in 2022 a new call for proposals to strengthen evidence-based advocacy to safeguard respect for human rights and freedoms in Uganda and to reduce child labour in the country.

5. Multilateral context: The EU and Member States engaged with Uganda's third cycle of the UPR – consulting local rights groups in advance of Member States' recommendations being made through their missions in Geneva. In 2022, Uganda discussed its country report at the Committee Against Torture (CAT), which was drafted with the support of the EU Justice Accountability and Reform programme. In 2022, the EU also continued to collaborate with UN agencies and the Government in the implementation of the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls.

Zambia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The year 2022 marked the first year of the new administration led by President Hakainde Hichilema, following a peaceful transition of power in August 2021. The new Zambian Government has embarked on a course of wide-ranging political, economic and social reforms. Among the most important human rights achievements are the abolition of the death penalty and the abolition of the offence of criminal defamation of the President from the penal code. The Government has also pledged to modify the controversial Public Order Act (POA), which is currently under review in Parliament, and has already undergone extensive consultations with civil society. Despite some progress, much remains to be done on the structural challenges, such as poverty, and corruption, gender-based discrimination and violence.

In February 2022, the Chief Observer of the EU Election Observation Mission MEP Maria Arena returned to Zambia to present the mission's final report. The report was well received by top Zambian authorities, including President Hichilema. Chief Observer Arena presented 22 recommendations for future electoral reform based on observations, analysis and extensive discussions with Zambian stakeholders. The six priority recommendations are: (1) repealing of the POA, (2) revising candidacy requirements, (3) enacting a Law on Political Parties, (4) removing undue campaign privileges, (5) enacting a Law on Campaign Financing and (6) strengthening/formalising cooperation between the Electoral Commission of Zambia, civil society and the media.

Poverty and vulnerability continued to be key challenges in Zambia, which remains one of the countries in the word most prone to inequality (with fourth highest Gini coefficient). In an attempt to address the social crisis in the short term, but also the economic situation in the long term, the new Government has increased the budget for healthcare, education and social welfare programmes. As promised during the election campaign, the Government introduced a free education policy by lifting school fees at primary and secondary level, followed by the recruitment of 30 496 new teachers, still in progress. The Government also delivered on its campaign promise to recruit 11 000 medical staff. However, a serious shortage of medical supplies persists. Zambians also suffer from a severe lack of employment opportunities, especially among the urban youth.

Corruption remains a structural problem in Zambia permeating all sectors of society, severally hindering good governance, citizen's access to services and business conduct. President

Hichilema has pledged to fight strongly against corruption, including by empowering relevant Government bodies. The budget allocation of key oversight institutions has been substantially increased. The Government has commissioned the IMF to conduct a Country Governance Diagnostic, which will be translated into a time-bound action plan. While a number of high profile arrests and investigations have taken place by the Anti-Corruption Commission (focusing mostly on the previous administration), there is still a lack of judicial follow-up.

Women´s and girls´ rights continued to be restricted in Zambia, with a high prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence and child marriage. Women experienced significant challenges in the political, social and economic spheres. Sexual and reproductive health and rights remained a key issue, reflected in the country's alarmingly high adolescent pregnancy rate. LGBTI persons suffered from violence, stigmatisation and lack of legal protection. Consensual same-sex relations continued to be criminalised.

The rights of persons with disabilities remained restricted with regard to access to basic social services. The Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities (ZAPD) remains poorly funded and unable to perform its duties.

Zambia has not yet enacted an Access to Information Bill, which has been in discussion for 20 years. The new administration has announced its intention to enact the Access to Information Bill. No clear roadmap has been presented to date.

Access to justice is still problematic for the majority of Zambians, mostly due to lack of awareness, financial resources and legal services. The situation in prisons remains very poor.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU human rights and democracy policy priorities in Zambia until 2024 are in line with the EU policies at political and development cooperation level:

- The enhancement of good governance practices, including the fight against corruption, improved civic and political rights, and natural resource management;
- The promotion of a fair, independent and efficient justice system, including the fight against impunity, the right to a fair trial, the rights of persons in detention, and the abolition of the death penalty (achieved during the reporting year);
- The advancement of women's and girls' rights, including sexual and reproductive health rights and the fight against gender-based violence;
- The promotion of economic, social and cultural rights, including for children and their right to good education and good health;
- The cultivation of an environment of non-discrimination, with a focus on the rights of marginalised groups.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2022, the political engagement of the EU Delegation regarding human rights and democracy took different forms and included interactions with key stakeholders as part of the ongoing dialogue (Article 8 Political Dialogue meetings with the President, relevant ministers, etc.). The annual Zambia-EU Article 8 Political Dialogue that took place on 9 June 2022 covered a wide range of bilateral and multilateral issues, including governance, rule of law and human rights. The EU has also engaged regularly with human rights defenders, civil society and media organisations. The EU Delegation hosted a Human Rights Day event in December 2022 with Zambian civil society combined with the

publication of a book by late journalist and human rights activist, Edem Djokoto, supported by the EU.

In 2022, Sweden started their support to the right to assembly and police accountability via DECAF, while they continued their previous engagements in the areas of women and youth participation in politics, media freedom, children's rights and legal aid for women.

The EU applied a human rights based approach to its programmes and projects.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU and the Member States are major development partners for Zambia. They currently support human rights and democracy via grant support to CSOs and to public authorities (Ministries, Judiciary, National Assembly and independent Government bodies – Human Right Commission, Office of the Auditor General, Election Commission of Zambia). In 2022, the EU started conducting a land right audit, signed a new grant under the Human Rights and Democracy budget line to increase transparency and accountability of the National Assembly. The previous projects, including support vulnerable youth, anti-SGBV (EU and Ireland), Strengthening Democracy in Zambia (EU, Sweden, Ireland, Germany, France), follow up on domestic observation, support to the Anticorruption Commission and to the Office of the Auditor General, continued in 2022. Two new access to justice programmes started: Irish support to Ministry of Justice, Anti-corruption commission, and Prisons department and an EU – Germany joint programme EnACT (Enabling Access to Justice, Civil Society Participation and Transparency) via GIZ supporting the Ministry of Justice, civil society and other justice stakeholders.

5. Multilateral context: European Council President Charles Michel visited Lusaka in July for the AU Mid-Year Summit where he held meetings with President Hichilema. The EU reached out to the Zambian Government regarding a number of multilateral initiatives, including UNFCCC COP27 in Sharm el Sheik and CBD COP 15 in Montreal.

Zimbabwe

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, Zimbabwe engaged with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process and announced a national plan to implement the accepted UPR recommendations. The Government also continued the alignment of legislation with the 2013 Constitution and intends to have it completed by the 2023 elections. In addition to the previous pieces of legislation such as the Maintenance of Peace and Order Act (MOPA), with however limited improvement on the ground, or the Freedom of Information Act, the enactment of the Independent Complaints Commission Act in October 2022, and the new Marriages Act establishing the minimum age of marriage at 18 should be noted. Concerning gender-based violence, Zimbabwe is the only country within the global Spotlight Initiative that has adopted a High Level Political Compact at Presidential level and has deployed significant efforts in this area.

Otherwise, there have been no significant improvements in terms of respect for human rights and democratic and civic space in the last year. The perpetrators of violations that occurred in August 2018 and January 2019 are up to date still enjoying impunity from prosecution and, despite Government's own assessment of compliance, the recommendations from the Motlanthe Commission have not been substantially implemented. The democratic and civic space continues to be under threat of shrinking further. Of particular concern is the mounting pressure on civil society. The Public Voluntary Organisations (PVOs) Amendment Bill reached the Senate in December and, if enacted in its current terms, raises serious concerns. In November 2022, the Government approved the Criminal Law Amendment Bill criminalising, among others, "unpatriotic acts" and imposing stiffer penalties on those who would be considered as campaigning against the country and harming national interests. The EU has expressed serious concerns and made consistent efforts to engage with the Government to preserve the space and independency of the CSOs.

In March, by-elections were successfully organised, and results not contested by any party. Acts of violence took place during the campaigns, claiming the life of one person, and injuring several people. Zimbabwe has scheduled to hold harmonised elections (presidential, parliamentary and local) in July-August 2023. Despite the general public appeal by all parties to refrain from political violence, contradicting messages have been spread without judicial consequences, and the anti-violence message has not been effectively transmitted. Sparks of violence linked to political activities have been reported continuing a climate of intimidation.

2. EU action - key focus areas:

i) Protecting and empowering individuals: The EU contributed to the promotion of human rights of persons in vulnerable situations, through civic organisations providing legal support to human rights defenders as well as enhancing accountability, advocacy and education. The EU also strengthened the capacities of civil society organisation dedicated to disabled persons. The EU strengthened transparency and accountability in the mining sector and enhanced capacity of local authorities and communities to defend their rights and to promote local development respectively. Sweden supported access to justice, targeting vulnerable community members, as well as contributing to child protection through UNICEF. Sweden and Ireland contributed to the establishment of a new human rights consortium, providing legal, medical and psychosocial support. The Netherlands supported a project developing innovative ways to empower young people, raising awareness about their rights to free expression and access to information. The Netherlands also supported the provision of legal, medical and psychosocial support services in Zimbabwe.

ii) Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies: The EU continued to provide support to constitutional alignment of elections and media related laws by the Government. The EU worked to strengthen the enabling environment for civil society and non-state actors to enhance their capacities and to participate proactively in policy dialogues at all spheres of governance, as well as to demand accountability and access to information. The EU supported increasing community access to information and participation in governance processes, as well as to strengthen dialogue between community members and duty bearers. The EU, France and Sweden supported voter education activities and enhancing the capacity and the resiliency of the media for reporting on democracy and elections. Sweden worked on

addressing the challenge of low citizen participation in local governance including the inclusion of women and youth in decision-making.

iii) Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy: The EU supported the reinforcement of democratic institutions, including legislative bodies and independent commissions. Sweden, Germany and the EU provided support to the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC). France and the EU also provided support to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) in line with the EU Elections Observation Mission recommendations of 2018. Moreover, the EU supported strengthening the rule of law, and enhanced access to justice in Zimbabwe, aiming for a more efficient and accessible legal system, especially for marginalized groups. Germany supported the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC), Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC), and selected civil society organisations.

v) Delivering by working together: The EU, in partnership with UN agencies and the Government of Zimbabwe, continued to address violence against women and girls through the Spotlight Initiative. Concerning gender-based violence, Zimbabwe is the only country within the EU Spotlight Initiative that has adopted a High Level Political Compact at Presidential level. France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden and Ireland supported a number of interventions for Women's Empowerment and the reduction of gender-based violence and promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights. The EU, Sweden and Ireland contributed to the Health Development Fund, a multi-donors fund, which includes action on sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as on gender-based violence, in collaboration with UNICEF and UNFPA.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The formal political dialogue, which is the main instrument for engagement between the EU and Zimbabwe, took place on 7 June 2022 and included substantive discussions on human rights, democratisation, rule of law and good governance.

The EU Heads of Mission held a series of meetings with human rights NGOs and, separately, with democracy and electoral NGOs. The EU Delegation further held meetings on human rights with the Government and independent Commissions, in particular related to the Private Voluntary Organisations Bill and the Electoral Reforms as per the recommendations of the 2018 Election Observation Mission. In May 2022, the EU deployed an Electoral Follow up Mission (EFM) bringing new impetus to the electoral reforms. Despite the efforts done by the EFM and its follow up by the EU Delegation, significant reforms remain outstanding.

In November 2022, the EU Special Representative on Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore, visited Zimbabwe and met with a wide range of stakeholders. He was able to have meaningful discussions with all the key stakeholders underlining the interconnection of human rights, democracy, rule of law and economic development, trade and investments.

4. EU financial engagement: EU development cooperation in Zimbabwe is channelled exclusively through non-state actors and international organisations. The overall envelope will contribute to improving the civil and political, as well as the economic, social and cultural rights. The NDICI Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2021-2024 amounted to EUR 148 million and is complemented by thematic instruments (e.g. HR&D, CSO, etc.)

5. Multilateral context: The EU and the EU MS participated in the UPR session on Zimbabwe in 2022.

Arabian Peninsula

Bahrain

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Since 2012, Bahrain has taken a number of welcome steps, establishing three Human Rights Institutions: the National Institute for Human Rights (NIHR), the Ombudsman in the Ministry of the Interior and the Committee for the Rights of Prisoners. These institutions record complaints, refer suspected cases of human rights violations to the law enforcement authorities and conduct unannounced prison visits. On their recommendation, in 2022 the Government transferred responsibility for medical care in prisons from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Health. It is also upon their recommendation that since 2017 the country expanded a scheme of alternative sentences, benefitting so far 4,400 people. Alternative sentences may include community service, home detention, exclusion orders, non-contact orders, electronic tagging, rehabilitation programs or compensation.

The country is willing to further enhance engagement on human rights with the EU, including through the well-established annual Human Rights Ddalogue, the last round of which took place in Manama on 27 October 2022. In March 2022 Bahrain adopted a National Action Plan – the first of such document in the region - setting out a roadmap with 102 priorities for the next five years in civil, economic and social rights.

Most death sentences were commuted to life sentences. There are currently 26 individuals on death row - having exhausted all legal remedies. However, there has been no execution in the country since 2019. Same sex relationship remains illegal, as opposing the Sharia law.

In November 2022, Bahrain held elections for the 40 members of the House of Representatives, recording increased participation of voters in comparison to 2018 vote. Previously dissolved opposition political societies ''Al Wefaq'' and ''Wa'ad'' were not allowed to run for elections nor were their former members allowed to run individually. Seven incumbent members were confirmed and 33 members were newly elected. There were some allegations of fraud later dismissed by the judiciary.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In the context of the EU-Bahrain Human Rights Dialogue held in October 2022, the EU raised the cases of dissidents serving lengthy prison terms since their arrest in 2011. The EU welcomed the release of a significant number of Bahraini prisoners amid the spread of the coronavirus and encouraged the Bahraini authorities to extend these measures also to imprisoned political activists with pre-existing medical conditions.

In November 2022, Bahrain renewed its representatives in the *Majlis An-Nuwab*, the lower house of the national assembly. The EU called on Bahraini authorities to ensure that the elections are free and fair. The elections witnessed a high turnout (73%) even though the two main opposition political societies ''*Al Wefaq*'' and ''*Wa'ad*'' were not allowed to run for elections nor were their former members allowed to run individually (in 2016 and 2017, Bahrain's judiciary dissolved Al Wefaq and Wa'ad, country's major opposition parties representing the largest Shiite Islamic opposition organizations in Bahrain due to a number of charges, including "subservience to foreign powers, spreading terrorism and extremism in Bahraini society, and endangering civil peace"). The EU commended the ongoing efforts of Bahrain in promoting interfaith dialogue and committed to continue supporting these efforts to foster inclusiveness and openness of the society. In follow-up to its Human Rights Dialogue, the EU co-organised in Manama on 1 June 2022 a high level conference promoting religious freedom and belief under the title "Broadening the Tent: Freedom of Religion and Belief"

As a follow-up to the sixth informal EU-Bahrain Human Rights Dialogue held on 27 October 2022, several follow-up activities were identified, including on the implementation of the Bahraini National Action Plan for Human Rights.

Bahrain is a party to the core UN human rights treaties but has not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on the abolition of the death penalty, nor the Convention on Enforced Disappearances. The EU delegation has maintained communication with the UN Office in Manama and has coordinated common messages on the ratification of these conventions, as well as on reforms related to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

During its Human Rights Dialogue, the EU stressed to Bahraini authorities that freedom of expression both offline and online remains an important building block of democratic societies, hence, it is important to avoid undue restrictions. The EU welcomes the decision to include 11 projects dedicated to enhancing digital rights in the National Human Rights Plan 2022-2026.

The EU and the Member States worked closely in monitoring the human rights situation in the country, including as a follow up to the EU-Bahrain human rights dialogue.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The sixth EU- Bahrein Human Rights Dialogue covered a broad range of topics, such as freedom of expression and association, rule of law, including the right to fair trial and the issue of death penalty, women's rights and gender equality, labour rights and freedom of religion or belief. Individual cases were also raised with Bahraini interlocutors. The EU welcomed the adoption of the National Human Rights Action Plan covering the period 2022-2026, highlighting the importance of its full and swift implementation. Cooperation in the multilateral fora and preparation for the Universal Periodic Review of the Kingdom of Bahrain in November 2022 were also discussed on various occasions. The EU proposed to upgrade the Human Rights Dialogue from its current informal status to a formal one to give more transparency and visibility to the EU-Bahrain engagement on human rights.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the FPI funded "Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach" project, women empowerment remains one of the priorities identified. During the latest Human Rights Dialogue, the EU confirmed its readiness to provide technical assistance to help implement the country's human rights strategy.

5. Multilateral context: In November 2022, Bahrain was reviewed by the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group during its 41st session.

Iraq

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The EU welcomed the formation of the new government under the leadership of Prime Minister al-Sudani, confirmed at the end of October 2022. The government announced the fight against corruption as top priority. Moreover, the new government's program regarding human rights and women empowerment intends to address human rights violations perpetrated at the police stations/detention centres, investigate the crimes committed against demonstrators during the 2019 Tishreen movement, combat human trafficking and support women empowerment. The political deadlock in Iraq between October 2021 and October 2022, contributed to the deterioration of an already fragile human rights situation. Iraq continued to face challenges, including intimidation of activists and human rights defenders (HRDs). Targeting, intimidation and assassination of activists and intimidation of journalists, as well as of aspiring political actors linked to the Tishreen protest movement continued, despite previous Government's promises to protect them and provide a safe environment to express their views.

The EU continued to express concerns about due process and fair trial standards, discrimination against minorities, as well as gender-based violence. Reports of torture in police detention centres and interrogation cells remained. The death penalty continued to be applied under the Law on Counterterrorism and, despite serious concerns on due process in trials, authorities carried out at least 20 judicial executions.

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) the EU remains concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation, especially as regards freedom of expression, gender equality and equal fights. The persistent conflict between the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the stalemate around the next regional election, initially planned for October 2022, could have contributed to these developments.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU human rights policy in Iraq continued to focus on support to the legitimate democratic demands of Iraqi citizens, strengthening democratic institutions and encouraging socioeconomic reforms. The EU further engaged on the protection of HRDs, women's empowerment, protection of minorities, easing the return of internally displaced persons, as well as national and social reconciliation. The EU regularly advocated for Iraq to adhere to the core tenets of international human rights law and, notably it undertook a demarche on the accession to the International Criminal Court. The EU has

raised the problematic LGBTI legislation draft “Bill on the Prohibition of Promoting Homosexuality” with the authorities.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The political deadlock in Iraq, between October 2021 and October 2022 shaped most of the political agenda. In this context, the EU continued its advocacy for respect for human rights with Iraqi authorities at all levels. The EU issued several statements to call for ending violence and respecting human rights obligations in the context of escalation around the political crisis in summer 2022. The EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) continued to provide support on Security Sector Reform including training to the Iraqi police. Throughout the year, the EU has engaged in regular meetings with civil society organisations throughout the country so as to have a first-hand understanding of the situation on the ground and identify priorities for political engagement and targeted support, notably through specific projects. The EU supported reform programs addressing corruption, public financial management and more efficient public service delivery. The EU supported the government’s efforts on socioeconomic reforms and continued (until June 2022) its role as co-chair of the international Iraq Economic Contact Group.

In the Kurdistan region of Iraq (KRI), the EU also followed closely the evolving situation regarding trial cases against journalist and activists.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the EU supported a vast array of activities through various EU financial instruments:

- *Right to Fair Trial, Detention Conditions, and Abolition of Death Penalty:* a new EU project with Norwegian People’s Aid to increase the access of people deprived of liberty to human rights through fair trials and humane treatment.
- *Protection of Human Rights Defenders.* An EU project with Al-Amal association “Protecting Human Rights Defenders: Securing a movement for Human Rights”.
- *Promoting Gender Equality and Equal Rights.* The EU reviewed all programmes to reinforce the actions for women empowerment and aligned indicators with the Gender Action Plan III Country Implementation Plan.
- *Freedom of Expression, Independent Media and Access to Information.* The EU project with BBC media action “Community Cohesion through Community media’’, aims to secure the work of independent media outlets to offer accurate and correct information.
- *Accountable Institutions and Fighting Corruption.* The new EU project “Support to justice initiatives curbing corruption and promoting commercial dispute resolution”, with UNDP, aims to enhance the legal and strategic anti-corruption framework in Iraq and build capacity for the investigators.
- *Rule of Law and Security Sector Reform.* The UNDP anti-corruption project mentioned above also includes a dedicated component in support of the Iraqi judiciary to enhance integrity standards and foster the justice sector capacity to fight corruption.
- *Economic, social and cultural Rights, including Education.* The EU fund ''Reviving Mosul and Basra Old Cities” with UNESCO. The EU continues to implement several projects in education, social protection, labour governance, private sector development and entrepreneurship, access to finance, agriculture and agri-value chain development.
- *Political Participation, Free and Fair Elections, and a Functioning Parliament.* The EU contributed EUR 5.5 million support the UNDP/UNAMI led project, which provided technical assistance to the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) to organise the October 2021 elections in line with international standards.

5. Multilateral context: Iraq is State Party to the main international human rights instruments. The EU conducted several human rights demarches, in particular in conjunction with UNGA Third Committee.

Kuwait

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Kuwait is the only country in the Gulf with a strong Parliament (National Assembly) and competitive elections. In September 2022 Parliamentary elections were held ,with no significant irregularities noted. Two women (out of the 50 members) were elected, while ultra conservative political trends were strengthened. Kuwait's active public sphere and civil society, notably professional groups like the Chamber of Commerce, still maintain their autonomy from the government.

Kuwaiti women are considered among the most emancipated in the Middle East and although they outnumber men in workforce, their political engagement remains limited. Women's representation in senior Government positions and state owned companies improved in 2022, with the first ever woman, Wadha al-Khateed, appointed CEO of Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC). Women in Kuwait continue to face legal challenges and discrimination related to Sharia, namely under certain provisions in the Penal Code, the Civil Status Law and the Nationality Law. Efforts are underway to abolish Article 153 of the Penal Code on honour killings targeting women.

On 16 November 2022 Kuwait carried out seven executions for murder, ending a five-year *de facto* moratorium. The death penalty remains in the Penal Code for non-violent crimes, such as drug-related offences, with Kuwaiti courts passing several death sentences for smuggling drugs during 2022.

"Kuwaitization" – replacing migrant workers with Kuwaiti nationals in the workforce – has intensified concerns among foreign workers in the country. In 2022 the Government increased measures targeting in particular migrant workers, including termination of contracts in the public sector, as well as a significant rise in administrative deportations – almost 30,000 in 2022 often for minor administrative offences.

While the *kafala* system has not yet been abolished in Kuwait, there have been improvements, such as new provisions for an annual one-month paid leave and a limit on extra working hours. The stateless "*Bidoons*" continued to face significant challenges in securing identification documents ("security card"), indispensable to access basic services in healthcare and education. The "Central Agency for the Remedy of the Situation of Illegal Residents" was often accused by "*Bidoon*" activists of forcing them to claim a third nationality, without actual connection to the country, in order to issue/renew security cards" . In addition, since Stateless "*Bidoons*" do not have the right to participate in public protests, several arrests and pre-trial detentions were reported in 2022.

In 2022 Kuwait witnessed an unprecedented campaign against LGBTI persons, in particular non-Kuwaitis, who continue facing major legal and social challenges, including a growing number of arrests and deportations. More than 3 000 LGBTI expats were deported in 2022 on the basis of their sexual orientation.

Kuwait's media landscape is relatively free compared to other countries in the region, nevertheless freedom of expression is subjected to the control of Kuwaiti state authorities, particularly as regards social media. The 2016 Cybercrime Law, which criminalised the publication of material offending the Emir, neighbouring countries or religion , was used in several cases to prosecute bloggers and activists, some of them already in jail or in exile. On a positive note, in November 2022 the Emir issued a special pardon for crimes related to freedom of speech and expression. "Offensive" content – such as LGBTI characters – remains censored or banned. Freedom of assembly and association is guaranteed, albeit only for Kuwaiti citizens.

On child rights, girls, foreign and stateless children are still faced with discriminatory provisions in the Kuwaiti legislation. In particular, the stateless "Bidoon" children continue being discriminated in their access to essential social services.

The mandate of the National Diwan for Human Rights (NHRI) expired on 16 September 2022 thus reducing the scope of its work until a new Board of Directors is appointed.

2. EU action on Human Rights - key focus areas: The EU engaged on a regular basis with Kuwaiti human rights institutions, mainly in the context of the EU-Kuwait Human Rights Dialogue and worked closely with likeminded countries and international organisations to encourage further advancement of human rights in the country. The EU Delegation organised a public event on the occasion of Europe Day on 9 May 2022 to promote migrants' rights in cooperation with the Kuwaiti Society of Human Rights and used the launch of the EU Cookbook in June 2022 to support gender equality and portray the equal role of men and women in society. In November 2022, the EU Delegation launched a think-tank policy competition in partnership with Kuwait University College of Social Sciences on "the role of Women in environmental policies".

"Kuwait Aid Network", a Kuwaiti NGO that supports and empowers migrant workers and other vulnerable communities, won the 2022 Chaillot Prize for the Promotion of Human Rights in the Gulf Cooperation Council region.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2022 the EU expanded its engagement with Kuwait on human rights. In November, the third Informal Human Rights Dialogue took place in Kuwait City, where developments in the area of human rights and cooperation in multilateral fora were discussed, including sensitive issues such as death penalty and the situation of stateless people.

4. EU financial engagement: In the course of 2022, the EU continued to support the protection of human rights in partnership with local CSOs by financing the LOYAC Academy of Performing Arts to creatively engage with youth through art and dance, under the umbrella of the annual Festival of Art and Dance. Furthermore, the EU Delegation supported financially the project

of the Kuwaiti Society of Human Rights, which seeks to protect and empower migrant workers by educating them about their rights and providing legal support.

5. Multilateral context: Kuwait maintains a constructive dialogue with its international counterparts. The third EU-Kuwait Human Rights Dialogue provided an opportunity to exchange views on the UN Human Rights Council and the UNGA Third Committee activities. Furthermore, the EU Delegation has engaged with the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with the UN Resident Coordinator on ways to support multilateralism.

Oman

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Three years into the reign of Sultan Haitham, the situation of human rights in Oman remained stable. The Omani authorities tried to maintain a delicate balance between the more conservative and the more progressive elements of Omani society. The authorities show respect for individual and social rights. There are no reports of torture. There have been no executions reported publically since 2001. The space for political debate and the freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association and media should be further developed. While socio-economic rights of Omani nationals are widely respected, with rather conservative views on women's role in Omani society prevailing, legal protection of non-Omani citizens remains uneven. Freedom of religion is not an issue of particular concern, with the Omani government and religious leaders encouraging religious tolerance. Same sex relationships remain illegal as opposing the Sharia law.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Although significant progress has been achieved in protecting and empowering women, discrimination in legislation on certain specific issues (e.g. inheritance, divorce, family and nationality law) remains to be addressed. There is a need for enforcement and improvement of the current legislation to improve protection of foreign workers.

During the first EU-Oman Human Rights Dialogue in September 2022, the EU further encouraged Oman to ratify remaining core international human and labour rights treaties and to continue cooperating with UN Special Procedures.

The law restricts free speech online and the government enforces these restrictions. The law allows authorities to prosecute individuals for any message that "violates public order and morals" sent via any means of communication.

Throughout 2022, the EU monitored the human rights situation in the country, including freedom of expression, women's rights and labour rights. The EU Delegation in Riyadh, also responsible for relations with Oman, was in regular contact with resident EU Member States coordinating EU positions on human rights and liaising with the authorities in Muscat.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The first EU-Oman Human Rights Dialogue was held in Muscat in September 2022 focusing on labour rights, freedom of expression and association, women rights, rule of law, as well as cooperation in the international fora. The next dialogue will be held in Brussels in 2023. Human rights issues are raised also in the framework of regular political dialogue meetings with Omani officials at all levels.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the FPI funded "Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach" project, youth empowerment has been one of the priorities identified, especially through education programmes, in an inclusive and gender balanced manner. Other priority areas are tourism, vocational training and environmental protection.

5. Multilateral context: The EU-Oman Human Rights Dialogue provided an opportunity to exchange views on the activities of the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly Third Committee. Both sides agreed to identify areas for closer coordination and cooperation at multilateral fora.

Qatar

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Qatar has continued to make progress on labour rights and reforms, in close cooperation with eh International Labour Organization (ILO). While the most problematic elements of the *kafala* system have been *de jure* dismantled, the EU continued to encourage Qatar to implement in a sustainable and effective way the reforms undertaken and the legislation adopted. According to the 2022 ILO report, due to labour inspections campaigns in summer 2022, 463 worksites were either temporarily stopped or shut down for violations of heat stress legislation. The report also recorded a significant decline in the number of patients admitted to clinics with heat-related disorders, from 1520 in 2020 to 351 in 2022, following the introduction of relevant new laws. Despite the progress achieved, the ILO report acknowledges that more needs to be done to ensure effective implementation of these reforms.

Although the Constitution provides for equality between citizens in rights and responsibilities, social and legal discrimination against women persisted. No reforms or large-scale initiatives were introduced to tackle or limit these discriminations.

In relation to the freedom of assembly, in May 2022 two lawyers received life sentences following their peaceful protest against exclusion of the al-Murra tribe from the October 2021 elections. The EU raised this issue with the Qatari authorities.

While Islam is the state religion according to Constitution, eight registered Christian denominations continued to hold services in dedicated places of worship. Other non-registered religious groups remained unregulated, but were allowed to practice their faith in private. The 14th edition of the Doha International Center for Inter-faith Dialogue was held in Doha in May 2022, discussing freedom of religions and belief. Same sex relationships remain illegal, as opposing the Sharia law.

The National Human Rights Committee continued to monitor and report annually on human rights situation in the country, providing recommendations to the cabinet to strengthen protection of human rights. It also continued to refer complaints by migrant workers to the competent authorities. In the period before and during the World Cup, FIFA set up a "Grievances Mechanism" and deployed a large number of experts, officials and volunteers to monitor implementation of human rights related reforms. Most of the complaints received were related to inconsistent application of the regulation on allowing the rainbow flag into the football stadiums.

2. EU Action – key focus areas: The EU raised human rights issues in various engagements with the Qatari authorities, and in particular in the Human Rights Dialogue framework. The newly established EU Delegation in Doha engaged also with FIFA Human Rights Office. Recurrent topics in discussions were migrant workers' rights, labour reforms, women's rights, non-discrimination of the LGBTI community and freedom of expression. In the period before and during the FIFA World Cup 2022 the EU Delegation monitored closely developments in these fields and raised systematically relevant concerns with local authorities.

In September 2022 the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Hamad Bin Khalifa University held a high-level workshop for women leaders in academia, in partnership with the EU Delegation to the State of Qatar. The three-day workshop aimed at further developing the essential skills and capabilities of Qatari women and creating the necessary conducive environment for women leaders to reach their potential. This activity was conducted with the support of the FPI funded ''Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach'' project.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to engage regularly with Qatari interlocutors on human rights issues, as part of the overall bilateral political relations.

In June 2022, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore, met with the Head of the ILO Project Office in Qatar, Max Tuñón, to discuss progress and challenges as regards the labour reforms introduced to the country.

On September 12 2022, the fourth EU-Qatar Human Rights Dialogue was held in Brussels, with wide range of participation from Qatari Ministries and Justice authorities, touching upon developments in human rights, with special emphasis on expatriate and domestic workers status, death penalty, women's rights and freedom of speech.

On November 14 2022, the Qatari Minister of Labour and former President of the National Human Rights Committee, Dr. Ali bin Smaikh Al Marri, was invited to present before the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) latest human rights developments in the country. On 24 November 2022, the European Parliament issued a resolution "on the situation of human rights in the context of the FIFA World Cup in Qatar"[11], acknowledging Qatar's recent reforms in labour policies, but asking for extended compensation for workers' families and calling for full implementation of the adopted

[11] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0427_EN.html

reforms. Moreover, in November 2022, the Vice-President of the European Commission, Margaritis Schinas, met in Doha the Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar and the Minister of Labour, and raised human rights issues, including workers' rights and the implementation of the relevant reforms. Prior to that, Vice-President Schinas met also the Head of the ILO Office in Doha to be briefed on the latest developments on labour rights and reforms in Qatar.

4. EU financial engagement: There is no EU financial support provided specifically for human rights-related activities in Qatar.

5. Multilateral context: Qatar is member of the Human Rights Council for the period 2022-2024. It did not ratify any the new international human rights instruments in 2022. To be noted though that currently there is only an ILO Project Office based in Qatar, but Qatari officials appear ready to agree on the establishment of a permanent ILO office in Doha. Greater coordination in multilateral fora will allow for a convergence of positions on specific initiatives.

Saudi Arabia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Overall, the human rights situation continued to improve in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in line with the Vision 2030, despite remaining challenges. KSA remains committed to the Human Rights Dialogue with the EU, whose second edition took place in Riyadh in November 2022. The Sakharov Prize winner and blogger Raif Badawi was released after 10 years behind bars. Women empowerment continued to improve, with the removal of the latest restrictions on their freedom to travel. Societal and religious tolerance have also been enhanced, but without major progress on LGBTI rights. At the same time, challenges remain as regards freedoms of expression and association. Media remain centrally controlled and critical voices on social media are scarce. Social media reports allege arrests following criticism of local authorities.

The *de facto* moratorium on death penalty for drug-related crimes was overturned, as executions resumed in November 2022. In total, 149 people were executed – 19 of which for drug offences - double the number of executions in 2021, which nevertheless remains lower than pre-Covid times.

No date was announced in 2022 for municipal elections, the only elections in KSA, after the restructuring of municipal councils. Despite the fact that the Majlis ash-Shura is debating a wide range of social issues, it remains a consultative body. In 2022, Saudi Arabia passed new landmark legislation, notably the Personal Status Law, the Civil Transactions Law and the Law on Evidence, contributing to codification efforts of the Sharia law and increasing the level of integrity and efficiency of judicial institutions, as well as reliability of procedures. Saudi authorities have been working on a new Penal Code for Discretionary Sentences, expected to be adopted in 2023.

Reforms empowering women and labour workers continued. Since October 2022, women are no longer required to be accompanied by a male guardian when visiting Mecca to perform religious rites - Hajj or Umrah. The *kafala* system continued to be progressively dismantled and reforms protecting migrant workers entered gradually into force. It is no longer necessary for migrant workers to obtain permission from their employer to change jobs or leave Saudi Arabia after termination of their employment. However, the *kafala* system still applies in certain sectors, where the employees maintain a close relationship with their sponsors (drivers, gardeners or personal security).

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU actively advocated for the release of individual human rights defenders. Some were released and still remain under travel ban and other restrictions. The EU continued to call for lifting those restrictions. Despite repeated requests, EU diplomats have been denied the right to observe trials, in particular before the Specialised Criminal Court.

In response to several reports of arrests related to critical views expressed in social media, the EU continued to promote freedom of expression online, while rejecting hate speech, and the matter was intensely discussed during the Human Rights Dialogue in Riyadh in November 2022.

The EU welcomed the important justice system reforms, in particular the codification of Sharia law and conveyed its readiness to provide technical assistance on specific aspects of judicial reforms.

The risk of extradition and/or deportation of individuals facing imminent risks in their home countries, including in China and Ethiopia, remained a source of concern and the EU has raised the issue with local authorities on several occasions.

The EU and its member states have coordinated closely in view of the second EU-KSA Human Rights Dialogue. EU Member States have collectively raised issues of shared concern with the KSA authorities, both at local level and in Brussels, including on individual cases.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 6 November the second EU-KSA Human Rights Dialogue took place in Riyadh, co-chaired by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore and the new Chair of KSA's Human Rights Commission, Dr. Hala Al-Tuwaijri. Seventeen EU Member States attended as observers. During his visit to KSA in September 2022, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, raised human rights issues with the Crown Prince, Mohammed Bin Salman. Locally, the EU Delegation and EU Member States Ambassadors have been regularly raising human rights issues with the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Human Rights Commission. Moreover, the EU Delegation organised the annual Chaillot Prize for protecting and promoting Human Rights in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and continued work with previous Saudi winners.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the FPI funded "Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach", women empowerment remains one of the priorities. During the latest Human Rights Dialogue, the EU confirmed its readiness to provide technical assistance on specific aspects of the judicial reforms and development of the country's human rights

strategy. In the spirit of Team Europe initiatives, the EU Member States contributed to events promoting EU human rights priorities locally.

5. Multilateral context: The EU-KSA Human Rights Dialogue provided an opportunity to exchange views on international human rights law and cooperation on multilateral fora. Greater coordination in multilateral fora will allow for a convergence of positions on specific initiatives. In 2022, KSA did not ratify any of the pending UN Human Rights main Conventions (CCPR, CESCR, CAT-OP, CCPR-OP2-DP, CED, CMW). The EU has been urging KSA to ratify the abovementioned conventions. Saudi authorities have been cooperating with the UN Office in Riyadh, as well as UN agencies based abroad to deal with issues related to combatting human trafficking.

United Arab Emirates

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) continued to improve its human rights record, especially in the area of socio-economic rights, largely according to recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2018 and in preparation of their UPR in 2023. The UAE joined the Human Rights Council and UN Security Council in 2022. However, civil and political rights as well as political pluralism continued to face restrictions. Progress has been observed as regards non-discrimination and the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

Given the country's unique multicultural concept of tolerance and coexistence, religious and expatriate minorities can live freely and practice their religion. The UAE have been an important promoter of interfaith dialogue, e.g. the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi (an interfaith centre planned to open officially in 2023) and the new Hindu temple in Dubai (October 2022).

The country sustained progress and ambition on human rights with respect to the elimination of discrimination, in particular in case of women and disabled people (''persons of determination''). Recent laws have strengthened protection of women (including on sexual harassment) and codified equal pay and conditions in the workplace.

On the basis of family law reforms adopted gradually in 2020 and 2021, the UAE decriminalised consensual relationships outside marriage and strengthened protection of children born out-of-wedlock. A new federal law regulating *personal status* matters for non-Muslims was introduced in 2022 (following Abu Dhabi Emirate such legislation a year earlier), offering non-Muslims the option to apply their home country's civil law and hence equal male/female rights on matters such as testimony, estate, marriage, divorce and joint custody. Same sex relationships remain illegal as opposing the Sharia law.

On migrant workers' rights the government made further progress regarding labour standards, in particular ahead of the Expo 2020 Dubai and during the covid-19 pandemic. While the *kefala* system remains broadly in place, reforms eased working conditions for employees (e.g. a longer work-permit transition period or the new unemployment insurance

scheme - in effect since 01/01/2023) and imposed tougher penalties for abusing employers. The new Labour Law (2022) consolidated workers' rights with respect to discrimination, wages and unlimited contracts. Since 2008 the Abu Dhabi Dialogue serves as a forum for dialogue between countries of labour origin and destination.

Building on covid-19 restrictive measures, the UAE ramped up its surveillance capacity and artificial intelligence technologies, with public and on-line spaces remaining closely monitored. While the UAE issued their first federal personal data protection decree law (No. 45/2021), inspired also by EU's General Data Protection Regulation, deficiencies in data protection remain.

Although the UAE constitution guarantees free speech, fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression, restrictions remain in place, resulting in some instances in punitive measures. Authorities can censor local or foreign media if they criticise the UAE and their policies. The death penalty remains a punishment for certain grave crimes. The last execution took place in 2021, after a de facto moratorium since 2017.

To address human rights deficiencies, the UAE embarked on a human rights relevant legislation review and announced the preparation of their National Human Rights Action Plan (by National Human Rights Committee). In 2021/2022, National Human Rights Institution was established as recommended by the UPR in 2018. The UAE did not sign any major international covenants in 2022, such as the ICCPR and ICESCR.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU's human rights work focuses on fundamental freedoms, individuals and groups vulnerable to discrimination (including prisoners); women's and girls' rights and gender equality; the rule of law and administration of justice; UAE's National Human Rights Action Plan, including business and human rights; and finally digital technologies and artificial intelligence.

The EU supported UAE's efforts to promote women empowerment, including in the context of their UNSC and Human Rights Council memberships. The EU cooperation with the UAE on gender equality is in line with the Country Level Implementation Plan (CLIP). In this framework, the EU co-organised dedicated events at Expo 2020 Dubai (2021-2022) and maintained its engagement with state institutions, UN Women and local civil society.

The EU analysed the new Labour Law, Domestic Labour Law, and Federal Personal Status Law (2022) and will continue to monitor their implementation. To promote a global system for human rights and democracy, the EU continued encouraging the UAE to join the main international human rights covenants. Several human rights promotion and public awareness campaigns were coordinated with EU Member States in social media.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In October, the EU and UAE held the 11th informal Human Rights Dialogue. Discussions centred on labour rights, freedom of expression, digital technologies and AI, rule of law and women's rights. The EU also inquired about the situation of human rights defenders and stressed the importance of ratifying major international human rights instruments. Significant progress has been commended in the case of women empowerment, remaining challenges discussed in the field of migrant labour protection

(especially *domestic* migrant labour), while concerns were reiterated on conditions of certain vulnerable individuals and minorities' rights (especially LGBTI).

4. EU financial engagement: Under the FPI funded *Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach* project, the EU organised two events on the occasion of the International Women's Day at Expo 2020 Dubai: "Widening the Pool: Harnessing Women's Talents and Abilities for the Fourth Industrial Revolution" in cooperation with the French Pavilion on 7 March, and "Women's Status in Institutions and Culture: Consolidation and Enhancement" in cooperation with the Pavilion of Italy on 8 March. With support from the same project, Clingendael Institute and the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, hosted the "Training on EU policies and decision-making for Emirati and Kuwaiti diplomats" in Abu Dhabi on 3-6 October.

5. Multilateral context: The UAE has taken up its seat in the Human Rights Council for the period of 2022-2024, as well as a non-permanent member in the UNSC for 2022-2023. This created opportunities for increased engagement and consultations on multilateral human rights issues, including in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and ensuing international repercussions (energy and food insecurity). Building upon its previous support for the UAE's National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the EU continued engaging in advocacy for women's participation in peacekeeping and post-conflict efforts, as well as women and youth empowerment. The EU carried out several demarches towards the UAE, including the EU's thematic, country and regional priorities at the Human Rights Council and UNGA.

Yemen

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Thanks to the UN brokered truce in April 2022, which brought relative calm to Yemen, there was a sharp reduction in a number of civilian casualties. The non-extension of the truce in October, due to maximalist demands by the Houthis, did not lead to a resumption of hostilities. Nevertheless, the economic and social rights of the Yemeni population remain severely challenged after seven years of conflict. Significant human rights violations were committed by various actors. In early 2022, a large scale Houthi military offensive against Marib led to a very large number of civilian casualties. The southern governorates (Shabwa and Marib) witnessed an upsurge in hostilities, that led to the forced displacement of thousands of people. Coalition airstrikes in areas controlled by the Houthis led to the death of dozens of civilians, notably in a detention centre in the Sa'ada region, where more than 80 people died.

Repeated attacks on migrant populations from the Horn of Africa near the Saudi border also increased in 2022, with several hundred reported killed. During the truce, many fell victim to mines or explosive objects, leading to the death or maiming of several dozen civilians.

Following the non-renewal of the truce, the Houthis were responsible for several armed attacks targeting the country's oil infrastructure, leading to a halt in oil exports and

exacerbating the economic and humanitarian crisis affecting the country. Women's access to sexual and reproductive health deteriorated overall in Yemen. In the territories controlled by the Houthis, restrictive measures against women's freedom of movement were taken, requiring women to travel only with a male [Mahram] guard. Restrictive directives regarding women's dress were also issued in territories controlled by the group. Same sex relationship remained illegal, as opposing the Sharia law.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2022, the EU Delegation used the Human Rights and Democracy country allocation to fund two projects protecting and empowering individuals in Yemen. In addition, the EU Delegation made use of the Civil Society programme to focus on promoting an independent civil society and enable civic space, including through a cooperation with the UN agencies. The EU mainstreamed a support to women's rights in all its actions.

The EU Delegation, in consultation with Member States, provided targeted support to Mwatana Organization for Human Rights (local level) and OHCHR.

The EU Delegation continued focusing on support to local institutions and human rights defenders to document and to monitor human rights violations, promoting accountability and fighting impunity, in particular as regards children and women.

3. EU bilateral political engagement : Given the conflict in Yemen, the EU does not have a dedicated bilateral human rights dialogue.

In the Head of Delegation's regular interactions with Yemeni political authorities (Presidential Leadership Council, government of Yemen, Houthis), human rights issues were regularly addressed. The Delegation also coordinated a European initiative to denounce the restrictive measures for the freedom of movement of women taken by the Houthis. A letter signed by Head of Delegation on behalf of EU Heads of Mission was sent to Houthis leadership in Sana'a and several high-level political interactions were held to stress the urgent need to end these discriminatory practices.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU assistance priority was to contribute to in-country initiatives related to monitoring and documenting human rights violations and fighting impunity, especially against children and women. The EU Delegation awarded two direct grants, in close cooperation with EU Member States through a Team Europe approach: (a) Project with Mwatana ("Civilian Harm and Protection in Yemen", EUR 700 000), (b) Project with OHCHR ("Protecting and Expanding Civil Society Space", EUR 710 000).

In addition to the Human Rights country allocation, the EU Delegation addressed human rights issues with the Civil Society country allocation (about EUR 4 million) and mainstreamed them in the programmes focusing on human development and resilience.

5. Multilateral context: The Human Rights Council adopted a resolution in October 2022 requiring the Office of the UN High Commissioner to provide technical assistance and capacity building to the Government of Yemen on human rights issues. Throughout 2022, the UN Security Council received briefings by the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Yemen

Hans Grundberg, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and civil society on the humanitarian situation in Yemen.

Asia

Afghanistan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Since the take-over by the Taliban, a constitutional and legal vacuum prevails in Afghanistan, with no clear indication regarding the legal framework by which the country is governed. The 2004 constitution remains suspended. Despite allegedly accepting international law and treaties as long as they do not violate Sharia law and the Islamic Emirate's principles, there is no indication that the Taliban intend to comply with any international treaty to which Afghanistan is a state party.

2022 saw further deterioration in the areas of human rights and democracy. First and foremost, Afghans, and the international community, were forced to see a dramatic downward trend in women's and girls' rights. This includes systematic and systemic exclusion of women from most aspects of public life, including violations of their right to education (secondary and tertiary levels), work (including the December ban on women working in non-governmental organizations), and freedom of movement (including edicts obliging women to be accompanied by a male guardian when travelling long distance, and preventing their access to public parks, bathhouses and gyms).

Targeted attacks (mainly claimed by ISIS-KP) against religious and ethnic minorities and groups (particularly Shia Hazaras, but also Sunni Sufis) around educational facilities and mosques have put in question the efficiency, but partly also the sincerity, of the Taliban's counter-terrorism measures. In addition to targeted attacks, extra-judicial killings, including targeted and revenge killings, arbitrary detentions, physical abuse, torture, enforced disappearances and ill-treatment of suspects continued throughout the year, despite a general amnesty proclaimed by the Taliban in 2021.

Protestors have been arrested and space for civil society has been curtailed. Freedom of media and freedom of expression was also heavily reduced through media crackdowns, increasing restrictions on national and international broadcasters, attacks on and arbitrary detentions of journalists and media workers, and particularly restrictions on women working in the media.

The Taliban have re-introduced public capital punishments and corporal punishments, such as public floggings, without due process. The Taliban also shuttered various government bodies related to the protection and promotion of the civic space and fundamental liberties in Afghanistan, such as the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, the State Ministry for Parliamentary Affairs, the State Ministry for Peace, and the independent election

management bodies. The Ministry for Women's Affairs was replaced with the de facto Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and the Promotion of Virtue.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The conclusions adopted by the EU Foreign Affairs Council in September 2021 lay down five benchmarks – all directly or indirectly pertaining to human rights and democracy continued to guide the EU's engagement with the Taliban. The situation of women and girls remains a key human rights issue for the EU and for major parts of the international community. In addition, the EU has also put a strong focus on the rights of persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities and on the rights of the child. The EU continues to support Afghan civil society, human rights defenders (HRDs), and media and focused its safe passage operations on Afghans particularly at risk. Of note, in October 2021 an EU Task Force Afghanistan on Safe Passage was established in October 2021 to ensure the safe passage of EU-affiliated Afghans, including HRDs. To date, the Task Force brought to safety more than 100 HRDs (including dependents).

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU does not recognise the Taliban government and no regular political dialogue takes place. The limited engagement with the Taliban by the EU Special Envoy for Afghanistan is guided by the 2021 Council Conclusions. Inclusivity and human rights are key benchmarks, and human rights-related issues are raised in all his interactions with the Taliban. In addition, the EU Delegation's minimal presence in Kabul ensured a channel of communication with the de-facto authorities in Kabul raising individual cases, including cases of human rights defenders. Besides, the EU maintains a very close engagement with Afghan civil society outside the country at headquarters level. The EU-facilitated Afghan Women Leaders Forum aims to ensure that Afghan women have a voice in international fora and access to policymakers. Lastly, the EU has continued its active public diplomacy regarding human rights abuses in Afghanistan, including through public statements and social media outreach.

4. EU financial engagement: Afghanistan remains in a dire humanitarian crisis, with alarming levels of poverty and food insecurity, and limited access to health care, particularly for women and children which impacts also the social and political rights of the citizen. Since the Taliban take-over and after a "pause" to apply humanitarian aid and basic needs assistance, the EU mobilised EUR 419 million for humanitarian aid, EUR 400 million for basic needs and livelihoods, and EUR 17.7 million for additional crisis response since the violent take-over of the Taliban, all delivered through UN partners and local and international organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Gender sensitivity is integrated as a priority across all actions contracted under the Afghanistan basic service and livelihood support. For instance, ongoing actions with a specific focus on women include a EUR 5 million project on advancing women-led agro-businesses to reach economic empowerment and a EUR 15 million UNDP project targeting women-led small and medium-sized enterprises.

As attacks against HRDs increased, at the end of 2021, the EU allocated additional EUR 3.3 million for the protection of HRDs inside and outside Afghanistan. The funding supported more than 400 HRDs (1/3 female) and their family members in and outside Afghanistan (in total more than 1,000 individuals) in 2022. In December 2022, the EU Delegation launched a contracting procedure to ensure continuation of Human Rights Defenders support 2023 onwards. Under the Human Rights and Democracy Thematic programme, the EU Delegation

supports the “Threatened Afghan Students and Scholars Scholarship Programme” for the academic years 2022-2024.

The action “Promoting inclusive dialogue and supporting media resilience in Afghanistan” (NDICI CRISIS FPI EUR 10 million), decided in May 2022, was designed (i) to promote opportunities for dialogue, inclusive governance, accountability and respect for human rights in Afghanistan, (ii) to support media resilience inside Afghanistan, (iii) to improve access to quality and trustworthy public information and minimise the impact of misinformation. One of the interventions, the “EU Afghanistan Inclusive Dialogue Initiative (AIDI)”, co-funded by Sweden, allowed to build on and continue EU supported initiatives e.g. the Afghan Women Leaders Forum (AWLF), and initiatives to help ensure that the voices of CSO representatives are heard in Afghanistan.

5. Multilateral context: An EU-led UN Human Rights Council resolution had established the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett. In October 2022, an enhanced mandate was adopted, with an emphasis on accountability, and additional capacity when it comes to children’s rights and documentation of human rights violations and abuses. The EU has also supported the comprehensive human rights aspect of the UNAMA mandate adopted in March 2021 and will advocate for the mandate’s renewal in March 2023. On 31 October 2022, Pre-Trial Chamber II of the International Criminal Court (ICC) authorized the Prosecution to resume the investigation into the Afghanistan Situation. This will be a key mechanism for increased accountability in Afghanistan.

People’s Republic of Bangladesh

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, Bangladesh entered a pre-election period with intensified political activity, increasing risk of political violence, and arrests, including of opposition supporters. Elections are due by January 2024 at the latest. A notable positive development of 2022 is a dramatic fall of the number of extrajudicial executions, in particular by the Rapid Action Battalion. Reportedly, the forced disappearance cases have not yet been investigated however. Bangladesh remains a proponent of the death penalty, with around 1 500 individuals on death row and calls for capital punishment to be extended to additional offences.

Whilst the media are diverse and have expanded in recent years, there is some degree of self-censorship. Civil society struggles with restrictions, including on the sourcing of funds from abroad. The authorities refused to renew the legal registration of prominent human rights organisation Odhikar in June, a move that was upheld in September.

The authorities have been responsive to input from the international community and civil society on the draft Data Protection Act, which should continue to be revised before adoption in the course of 2023. At the same time, human rights concerns have persisted over the use of the Digital Security Act (DSA) and other legislation to stifle criticism of the authorities.

Another important piece of legislation, a draft anti-discrimination law, has been under consideration in Parliament since April 2022. The bill has received positive support from civil society, though the absence of protection for sexual minorities was one of the shortcomings identified.

The Rohingya refugee crisis has passed its fifth anniversary posing acute humanitarian challenges in spite of the continuing endeavours of the Bangladesh authorities, with support from the international community. There have been several steps forward, including as regards the education of Rohingya children, but concerns remain, including on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence.

There remains a need for progress to implement the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord, 25 years after its adoption, and to ensure that the rights of indigenous communities are fully recognised.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU and EU Member States engage on a wide range of human rights issues with government, civil society, academia and business interlocutors. In the past year, EU Heads of Mission have issued joint statements and social media postings on human rights priorities. Gender equality, women's rights, gender-based violence, freedom of expression and of the media, access to information and the fight against disinformation were amongst the issues in focus.

The EU has followed up with the authorities on the recommendations of the 2018 Election Expert Mission in view of the next general election expected by January 2024 at the latest.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU-Bangladesh Joint Commission and Sub-group on Human Rights held in May 2022 covered numerous human rights issues. Human rights concerns were raised at high-level during the first EU-Bangladesh Political Dialogue on 24 November and during the visit of members of the European Parliament from the Committee on International Trade on 18-20 July, with labour rights and the implementation of the National Action Plan on the labour sector particularly prominent in the parliamentary visit. The EU carried out an official monitoring mission to Bangladesh in March to review the country's progress in the context of the enhanced engagement process under the Everything But Arms (EBA) arrangement. It addressed labour rights as well as compliance with the human rights obligations linked to the EBA arrangement.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU's development and humanitarian partnership with Bangladesh assists the fulfilment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including support to education, decent work, digitalisation, the justice sector, anti-corruption, data protection, nutrition and essential services in the Rohingya camps.

The EU extends substantial support to civil society including in the human rights and democracy domain and has engaged regularly with human rights defenders.

Projects supported by the EU and Member States focused on gender equality, women's rights and gender based violence; rights of the child; Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society Organisations; freedom of expression, independent media, access to information and fight

against disinformation; political parties and the integrity of electoral processes; business and human rights; rights of refugees and minorities; the right to a healthy environment and climate induced internally displaced persons.

5. Multilateral context: On 12 October, Bangladesh was elected member of the UN Human Rights Council for a three-year term beginning in 2023. In seeking membership Bangladesh made several pledges.

Bangladesh also permitted visits by several UN special rapporteurs during the course of the year, including the UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children and the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons. During her visit in August 2022, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called for an independent mechanism to investigate enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, citing a narrowing civic space and the need for conducive human rights conditions in the context of the next elections.
The UN Security Council resolution on Myanmar adopted in December included language on Rohingya and was welcomed by Bangladesh. Bangladesh continued to engage on the resolutions on Myanmar, including Rohingya issues, in the UN General Assembly and UN Human Rights Council.

Kingdom of Bhutan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Bhutan's commitment to human rights is well reflected in its Constitution, and the country's laws are largely in line with international standards. However, Bhutan's resource and capacity constraints combined with the COVID-19 pandemic impeded progress in certain areas during the last two years.

Bhutan continues to make significant progress in reducing infant mortality, and expanding education, resulting in a 93.5% enrolment rate of primary school aged children. In the area of political rights, press freedom registered a remarkable leap in 2022, with Bhutan ranking at the 33rd position on the World Press Freedom Index 2022, compared to being 65th the year before.

Despite favourable amendments to Bhutan's respective Penal Code provisions, domestic and gender-based violence is estimated to have increased by over 50% during the pandemic.

While the Constitution protects freedom of religion or belief and bans sectarian discrimination, cases of institutional discrimination of non-Buddhist religious organisations persisted. Persons belonging to minorities, especially the Nepali speaking Bhutanese, reported difficulties in maintaining their cultural practices. The fate of 6 000 – 7 000 Lhotshampas remaining in refugee camps in Nepal remained unresolved.

Bhutan has ratified and is implementing two out of the nine international human rights conventions listed in the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) trade regime, notably

the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) along with two of its optional protocols. In view of Bhutan's graduation from least developed country status, currently planned for end of 2023, the EU maintained its offer to provide Bhutan with technical assistance for the ratification and the implementation of the remaining conventions including in the labour rights and good governance areas.

2. EU action - key focus areas: During 2022, the EU and Member States continued their engagements on human rights along the following priorities: (i) gender equality and women's rights, (ii) rights of the child, (iii) freedom of religion or belief, (iv) rights of minorities and (v) support to democratisation through the empowerment of local authorities, and the creation of a vibrant civil society, including support to Human Rights Defenders and independent media. Additionally, Members State activities included support to the justice sector programme and the promotion of disability rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The 2022 edition of the EU-Bhutan Annual Consultations took place in February 2022 in Brussels and its rich agenda also included issues of human rights and democracy. A delegation from European Parliament visited Bhutan in September 2022 for the seventh EU-Bhutan Inter-Parliamentary meeting, and held meetings with Government authorities, UN agencies and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). The EU Delegation and EU Member States Embassies based in New Delhi regularly interact with civil society and UN agencies in Bhutan, and since mid-2022 the Delegation carried out three missions to the country.

4. EU financial engagement : A project in support of building capacities of CSOs concluded in December 2022. During the course of its duration, the project sub-granted around 61 small-scale projects, and reached approximately 200 000 direct beneficiaries. Furthermore, 25% of the grants addressed vulnerability and 65% of the funds were allocated to the poorest Dzongkhags/districts.

Bhutanese CSOs benefitted from a EUR 1.4 million grant aiming to improve the environment and operational capacity for civil society engagement in sustainable development and good governance. The project enhances the engagement of civil society and Parliament, and organized several meetings in 2022 to that effect.

Bhutan participated in the pilot initiative of INTER PARES, an EU Global project to strengthen the capacity of Parliaments, funded by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

5. Multilateral context: In March and October 2022, Bhutan joined the majority of countries in the UN General Assembly calling for the respect of Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Brunei Darussalam

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Since the entry into force of the Sharia Penal Code (SPC) in 2019, Brunei has a dual criminal law system based on common law and Sharia law. The SPC foresees capital punishment (death by stoning) or corporal punishment (amputation of limbs, whipping) for crimes such as adultery, extramarital sex or LGBTI relations. Children may also be sentenced to life imprisonment and corporal punishment. Whereas the common law system allows for extenuating circumstances (no whipping for women, men over 50, ill people and persons sentenced to death), women can be sentenced to corporal punishment under the SPC. The SPC also contains death penalty provisions for blasphemy. While whipping is enforced on a regular basis, the Sultan has maintained the de facto moratorium on the death penalty since 1996.

Freedom of religion or belief remains limited, with Shafi'i Islam as the official religion (80% of the population), and restrictions to the practice of other religions (mainly Buddhism 7% and Christianity 7%), or indeed other Islamic theologies. Whereas proselytizing to Islam is strongly encouraged and supported, it is forbidden to convert to non-Islamic faiths (apostasy), which is punishable by death under Sharia law. New places of worship other than Islamic are not registered, and the renovation of existing ones face nearly insurmountable hurdles. Non-Muslims suffer discrimination as regards social benefits, access to the army or public jobs.

Other human rights issues relate to civil and political rights, most notably the absence of democratic elections since 1965. Elections are held at the village level, where only men are elected. The Legislative Council comprises solely appointed or ex-officio members with a consultative role, since legislative powers were transferred in full to the Sultan in 1984. The latter serves as the head of state, prime minister, and the minister of foreign affairs, finance and defence. The country of nearly 450,000 inhabitants has been under a state of emergency since 1962, which restricts freedoms of assembly and expression, while granting the Sultan the right to pass legislation without review. Brunei has no political opposition and almost no independent civil society. However, no evidence has been found of the existence of political prisoners.

Brunei is ranked 144th out of 180 in the World Press Freedom Index 2022. National legislation restricts press freedom and silences criticism of the Sultan and the government. The largest media are state-run. While authorities monitor online speech, Brunei has an active online community. There are important restrictions to freedom of association (e.g. the activities of non-governmental organisations can be suspended at any time for any reason), and freedom of assembly (e.g. strikes are illegal). According to the Freedom in the World Index 2022, Brunei scored 28 out of 100 – i.e. ‘not free’.

Brunei has several laws in place to fight trafficking in human beings (e.g. Women and Girls Protection Act, 2019 Prevention of People Smuggling Order and 2019 Anti-Trafficking in Persons Order). It ratified the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons in January 2020, adopted a national action plan and created an inter-agency anti-trafficking committee. However, the enforcement of regulations continues to be a challenge.

According to the ASEAN Gender Outlook, Brunei has the highest number of women executives in the region, but the lowest representation of women in politics (10% at the Legislative Council). Brunei's Islamic discriminates against women in areas such as divorce and child custody. The SPC criminalises 'indecent behaviour' and makes abortion a capital offence. Brunei legislation denies women the right to confer their nationality on their children. Citizenship is derived through descent, and that is the father's prerogative only. There are an estimated 20,863 stateless persons, categorised into stateless permanent residents and stateless persons without legal status, with varying degrees of rights and benefits. Stateless children do not have free access to education but have to pay a fee, albeit minimal.

2. EU action on human rights and democracy - key focus areas: There is no structured dialogue on human rights with Brunei but human rights concerns are regularly raised by the local EU representation (France and Germany) and during the visits of the non-resident Head of Delegation. No such visit could take place in 2022.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Bilateral relations are limited given that negotiations for a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement remain on hold. The EU Delegation located in Jakarta continues to follow human rights developments on the ground, in liaison with the two EU Member States who have in-country missions.

4. EU financial engagement: There is no direct funding from EU programmes to human rights projects or organisations in Brunei.

5. Multilateral context: Brunei has ratified a number of key human rights conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Even though in 2019 the Sultan had publicly committed to ratification of the Convention against Torture (UNCAT), Brunei had not yet done so at the end of 2022.

Kingdom of Cambodia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In preparation of the local elections in June, Cambodia witnessed a reopening of the political space to some extent. The main opposition party, the Candlelight Party, was allowed to contest the June communal elections, register candidates and campaign for votes. It obtained 22% of votes nationally. The elections took place peacefully, with a high turnout of 80%. Observation by independent civil society organisations (CSOs) was limited, due to legal constraints and their lack of financial means. At the same time, the judicial prosecution of former Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) opposition leaders continued. Three more sessions of the mass trials against opposition leaders in exile and their supporters took place. In these mass trials, the fundamentals of due process were not respected and the accused were not allowed to return to the country to defend themselves. After three years of trial hearings and five years since he was arrested, former co-leader of the CNRP, Kem Sokha, was still undergoing trial in the country

for sedition and treason with a verdict anticipated in March 2023. Human rights defenders and civil society activists working on human rights and environmental issues alleged being under pressure. Freedom of expression and media freedom have been constrained, including through disproportionate use of provisions criminalising defamation, incitement and lèse-majesté. Freedom of assembly was disrupted, such as in the case of the laid off employees of Phnom Penh's NagaWorld casino, striking since 2021, with reported instances of intimidation, arbitrary detention, and the repeated arrest of the NagaWorld union leader.

Limitations of freedom of expression continued, with increased use of criminal law and charges of incitement and defamation to restrain political dissent and critical discourse. However, there was a slight improvement in the relative ranking of Cambodia in the World Press Freedom Index 2022, where the country climbed two positions in relation to 2021 (from 144 to 142). Some positive changes were also observed with the revised Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, persons with psychosocial disabilities in particular still face significant challenges. International media uncovered the existence of a substantial number of human trafficking and forced labour cases in Cambodia linked to online scams.

2. EU action on human rights and democracy - key focus areas: In 2020, the European Commission took a decision to temporarily and partially withdraw the tariff preferences granted to Cambodia under the EU's "Everything But Arms" trade scheme due to serious and systematic human rights violations enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This decision remained in place in 2022.

In line with the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-24, EU activities focused on the protection and empowerment of individuals, notably in the context of political and civil rights. The EU Delegation and EU Member States monitored a significant number of court hearings of human rights defenders, politicians and activists. They maintained continuous engagement with diverse civil society actors. With regard to building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies and to improve social and economic rights, the EU supported the extension of social protection to those in the most vulnerable situations during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the provision of social benefits associated with employment. By working together with the ILO and other UN agencies, the EU supported various programmes related to decent work and workers' rights, including advocacy for the ratification and implementation of ILO conventions, action which also contributes to promoting a global system for human rights and democracy.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In March, the 11th EU-Cambodia Joint Committee took place in Phnom Penh. The EU underlined the critical importance of upholding democratic pluralism, human rights and fundamental freedoms, labour rights and the rule of law. Human rights and democracy related issues were also topics of bilateral contacts in the country and all the policy dialogues with high-level representatives of relevant authorities within EU cooperation programmes. The EU Delegation maintained contacts with a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including political parties, NGOs, CSOs, the business sector and trade unions. The Cambodian Chairmanship of ASEAN also provided enhanced opportunities for bilateral political engagements at all levels, where human rights and democracy issues were also discussed. The High Representative visited the country and met the Cambodian Prime Minister

and Foreign Minister on the margins of the ASEAN Regional Forum. He raised Human Rights and democracy issues with the Prime Minister. The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, met Prime Minister Hun Sen in Tokyo in September and in Phnom Penh in November, in the margins of the East Asia Summit. During the EU-ASEAN Commemorative Summit in Brussels in December, co-chaired by President Michel and Prime Minister Hun Sen, several high level meetings took place: Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn met the High Representative and the Commissioner for International Partnerships, while the Minister of Commerce met European Commission Executive Vice-President Dombrovskis.

4. EU financial engagement: In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU put special emphasis on strengthening social protection. The EU continued to support human rights and democracy in Cambodia through its cooperation instruments by applying a rights-based approach and mainstreaming human rights through all priority areas of intervention. The EU managed 17 grants addressing a broad range of human rights issues including freedom of expression, protection of land ownership, rights of migrants and combating gender-based violence. In December, the last tranche of EU support to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, commonly known as the Cambodia Tribunal or Khmer Rouge Tribunal, was concluded, ensuring the transition of the ECCC to fulfil its residual functions upon the completion of judicial proceedings. The EU also continued to provide support to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to ensure that national and international actors in Cambodia can integrate more human rights information and analysis in development responses, strengthen the rule of law and enhance implementation of outcomes from the international human rights mechanisms.

5. Multilateral context: The EU continued to engage in the Human Rights Council 51st regular session which included an interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Cambodia. Two reports were submitted: the first, by the UN Secretary-General on the role and achievements of the OHCHR in assisting the government and the people of Cambodia in the promotion and protection of human rights; and the second, by the Special Rapporteur, after his visit in August. The latter's report suggested 20 benchmarks to enhance Cambodia's compliance with international human rights standards and highlighted the need to widen political and civic space before the 2023 national elections.

People's Republic of China

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation During 2022 the government's crackdown on civil society organisations, human rights defenders and journalists, and on Chinese citizens at large, notably those belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia, continued. Existing obligations under international and national laws to respect, protect and fulfil human rights and fundamental freedoms for all were not respected. There were three particular developments to highlight: first, the situation of LGBTI persons continued to worsen. Censorship over LGBTI content was tightened in popular culture with the removal of gay storylines in the local releases of foreign TV series and movies. A string of deaths of young people since the end of 2021 sparked national discussions regarding gender norms, homophobic discrimination, and school bullying. Dozens of social

media accounts run by LGBTI groups were suspended. Second, China's existing gender gap further widened: the newly amended law on the protection of women's rights[12] offered few improvements but it rather carried forward a spirit of paternalism and condescendence. Following the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, for the first time in decades, the Politburo of the Party has no female members. Third, the freedom of speech was becoming more and more restricted, both in traditional media and on the Internet. Continued practices such as the Great Firewall, the implementation of censorship, fake news, and specific campaigns are issues of concern. The already severe censorship was tightened even more and the authorities harassed and persecuted citizen journalists, as well as foreign reporters covering topics that until recently were not considered as "sensitive", such as environmental issues, the *MeToo* movement, or adverse poverty reduction results. The number of journalists inside China is steadily decreasing.[13]

China's harsh zero-Covid policies further limited fundamental freedoms. Several spontaneous and unprecedented protests took place in major cities, shortly before the zero-Covid policy was abandoned in December 2022. The application of the zero-Covid measures included, among others, QR code-based tracking apps, surveillance drones and cameras, remote temperature scanning, and the identity recognition of persons wearing masks, offering a convenient tool to control human rights defenders, journalists and the Chinese population at large. Whole-province or whole-city lockdowns have also been used to avoid political problems, e.g., in Tibet and Xinjiang during the 20th National Party Congress.

The dire human rights situation and continued mass detention and oppression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang continued to receive global attention, with extensive evidence-based reports referring to, inter alia, the use of forced labour and forced sterilisation/birth control targeting Uyghurs. In this context, the publication of the so-called "Xinjiang Police Files"[14] on 24 May 2022 was noteworthy. The publication of these leaked documents coincided with the visit of then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, to Xinjiang.[15] The Office of the High Commissioner released its assessment of human rights concerns in Xinjiang[16] on 31 August 2022. The assessment stated that "*The extent of arbitrary and discriminatory detention of members of Uyghur and other predominantly Muslim groups, pursuant to law and policy, in the context of restrictions and deprivation more generally of fundamental rights enjoyed individually and collectively, may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity*." Welcoming the release of the assessment, High Representative Borrell issued a statement on 1 December 2022.[17] In Tibet, similarly to the situation in Xinjiang, increased and intrusive control and surveillance continued to operate; extra-judicial forms of political detention were widespread with political and environmental[18] detainees often held captive, often without the possibility to contact their family members or their lawyers. The reported practice of arbitrary collection of DNA from residents in many towns and villages within the

[12] http://www.china.org.cn/english/government/207405.htm
[13] https://chinamediaproject.org/2022/06/14/steep-decline-for-chinas-journalists/
[14] https://www.xinjiangpolicefiles.org/
[15] https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/05/statement-un-high-commissioner-human-rights-michelle-bachelet-after-official
[16] https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/2022-08-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf
[17] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/china-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-assessment-human-rights_en
[18] https://savetibet.org/environmental-defenders-of-tibet/

Tibet Autonomous Region[19] and of the forcing of Tibetan children into state-run boarding schools are of serious concern to the EU.[20] The Human Rights Dialogue did however take place after the visit of the President of the European Council, Charles Michel in February 2023. [21]

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2022, most of the EU's actions regarding the human rights situation in China primarily aimed at protecting and empowering individuals. The EU, also through its Delegation in Beijing, continued to regularly address, both bilaterally with the Chinese authorities and through public communications, individual cases involving human rights defenders and journalists. The EU continued to spot light on human rights violations occurring across the country, paying particular attention to the secret trials and deteriorating health situation of human rights defenders in detention. The listing of four individuals and one entity from China for their involvement in serious human rights violations and abuses in Xinjiang, as part of a wider package of listings under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime (EUGHRSR) has been extended for another year on 5 December 2022. Despite the difficult circumstances related to China's zero-Covid policies, the EU Delegation in China and EU Member States organised and supported a number of public diplomacy activities, such as panel discussions, film screenings and social media campaigns, to mark the most significant human rights anniversaries, including the International Human Rights Day, and the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia. The EU Delegation organised periodical events on gender equality, rights of LGBTI persons, media freedom, death penalty and protection of human rights defenders.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU-China Human Rights Dialogue did not take place in 2022 either, following China's unilateral suspension of the dialogue in March 2021, due to the imposition of EU sanctions under the EUGHRSR, and as part of China's countersanctions. At the 23rd EU-China Summit, held on 1 April 2022, an in-principle agreement was reached about the resumption of the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue that was reconfirmed during the visit of President Michel to China on 1 December 2022. Both bilaterally and multilaterally, the EU continued to call on China to fulfil its obligations under the UN Charter and international law, including international human rights law, as well as under China's own Constitution. EU interlocutors continued to systematically raise the EU's human rights concerns in China throughout the year.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU continued to implement several projects to support and promote human rights in China. These projects take shape through official government cooperation, with local partners and with grassroots support. The projects continued to focus on a wide array of social topics, including death penalty, the rights of women, child victim of sexual abuse and migrant workers, to enhancing access to justice for persons with disabilities and victims of domestic violence, and supporting the rule of law.

[19] https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/05/china-new-evidence-mass-dna-collection-tibet
[20] https://tibetaction.net/colonial-boarding-school-report/
[21] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/china-38th-human-rights-dialogue-european-union-takes-place-brussels_en

5. Multilateral context: The EU, through its Item 4 and Item 2 statements[22] at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC 49 and 51 and 50 respectively) and its Omnibus statement at the UN General Assembly's Third Committee, continued to urge China to abide by its obligations under national and international law to respect, protect and fulfil human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, including persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities across China, especially in Xinjiang, Tibet and Inner Mongolia. Furthermore, the EU continued to promote and defend the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights. In this spirit, the EU exercised the utmost vigilance as regards attempts by China to introduce non-consensual language, inconsistent with international human rights law, in initiatives and resolutions negotiated in the Human Rights Council and the UNGA Third Committee.

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2022 was marked by the 25th anniversary of the handover of Hong Kong to China (with the visit of President Xi Jinping), by the second anniversary of the imposition of the National Security Law (NSL) on Hong Kong, as well as the swearing in of John Lee, the first elected Chief Executive after the implementation of sweeping changes in the Hong Kong electoral system. He was the sole candidate.

During 2022, the human rights situation in Hong Kong continued to deteriorate. Freedom of speech and freedom of assembly were under increased pressure. The NSL was used to stifle political pluralism and the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms that are protected under Hong Kong law and international law. The space for civil society continued to shrink and most independent media was shut down. In addition to the NSL, the colonial-era sedition law continued to be used in relation to many arrests, increasing the pressure on freedom of speech and media freedom in general.

Although Hong Kong still enjoys freedom of the internet, the practice of blocking sensitive content/websites was used. For example, the authorities blocked the website of an NGO, a decision taken under the NSL. Several other laws have the potential to threaten internet freedom, such the 'anti-doxing' law and the copyright law, the planned cyber-security law as well as the 'fake news' law.

The year ended with the first-ever National People's Congress Standing Committee's interpretation of the NSL, providing for the Chief Executive and the National Security

[22] https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/113208/hrc-49-general-debate-human-rights-situations-require-council%E2%80%99s-attention_en
https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/hrc-51-eu-statement-item-4-general-debate-human-rights-situations-require_en?s=62
https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/hrc-50-eu-statement-item-2-interactive-dialogue-high-commissioner%E2%80%99s-annual_en

Committee to take over the ruling from Hong Kong's Court of Final Appeal and take the final decision on the admissibility of overseas lawyers in trials concerning national security offences.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Despite the severe shrinking of space for civil society organisations in Hong Kong, the EU Office has stepped up efforts to highlight the need to combat all forms of discrimination in Hong Kong.

In the context of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the EU Office participated in an event raising awareness about the difficulties faced by migrant women. In January 2022, the EU Office organized a workshop focusing on international trends relating to the fight against human trafficking involving forced marriage within ethnic minority communities, anti-money laundering, financial investigation and assistance to the victims. As in previous years, the EU Office worked closely with the Bureau of Security on preparations for the event aimed at protecting the rights of victims and preventing the potential infringement of human rights. In 2022, the EU office also organised art events related to human rights, including the annual EU Film Festival, and continued to co-organise the 'EU-Asia Docs film festival' to shed light on social issues including the struggles of the LGBTI community.

The Council Conclusions of July 2020 on Hong Kong mandated the continued observation of the trials of pro-democracy activists. The EU Office and the EU Member States in Hong Kong have conducted more than 60 trial observations in 2022. In May 2022, the European Parliament and the Council also published a joint annual report for 2021 on the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.[23]

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Office team has regular meetings with the Hong Kong authorities, during which concerns on the evolution of rule of law in Hong Kong, on the implementation of the NSL, and on the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine are expressed. The EU Office is also in contact with the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China (OCMFA).

4. EU financial engagement: The EU is working on possibilities to step up its engagement and support for civil society, in line with Council Conclusions and taking into account practical limitations on the ground.

5. Multilateral context: The EU regularly expresses concerns regarding Hong Kong in Item 4 statements on situations that require the Human Rights Council's attention. In July 2022, after the UN Human Rights Committee released findings on Hong Kong's implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights[24], the EU spokesperson issued a statement to support the Human Rights Committee's recommendations, in particular to repeal the NSL and the colonial-era sedition law, and to refrain, immediately, from applying them[25]. During

[23] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/hong-kong-annual-eu-report-political-and-economic-developments-2021_en

[24] https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/07/un-human-rights-committee-issues-findings-hong-kong-macao-georgia-ireland

[25] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/hong-kong-statement-spokesperson-civil-and-political-rights_en?s=166

the UN General Assembly, on 19 October 2022, the EU shared concerns about Hong Kong in the Omnibus statement read at the Third Committee.

Macao Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) remained completely closed to the outside world due to restrictions related to the strict management of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this context, the authorities enabled a system of digital applications that was similar to the one used in mainland China. It involved installation of intrusive software of geolocalisation and collection of personal data, enabling close tracking of the users. During 2022, the authorities amended the National Security Law (NSL), without any public consultation, aligning it with the NSL of Hong Kong, further weakening the rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Basic Law.

The Legislative Assembly passed in July an amendment to the Legal System Governing the Interception and Protection of Communications. The law allows the police to intercept telecommunications in cases of additional suspected crimes such as terrorism, crimes endangering national security or cybercrimes. Under 'urgent' circumstances, the police can instruct telecom operators to provide phone logs without prior approval of a judge. Freedom of expression and freedom of assembly continued to be under threat.

The Democratic Development Union (DDU) renounced to organise a candlelight vigil for the anniversary of the Tian An Men massacre on 4 June. Former lawmaker and member of the DDU Au Kam San declared that participants could have been at risk of arrest.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued monitoring signs of closing civic space and democratic backsliding. In 2022, the EU Office used its Instagram account, its Twitter account and its Facebook account to share and repost human rights related information. In May 2022, the European Parliament and the Council also published a joint annual report for 2021 on the Macao Special Administrative Region.[26]

3. EU bilateral political engagement: During 2022, political engagement was not possible due to Macao's closure as a result of strict Covid-19 control policies.

4. EU financial engagement: There is no EU financial engagement in Macao.

5. Multilateral context: Macao SAR enjoys a very limited role in multilateral fora, but Macao is a party to international treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In July 2022, Macao underwent its second periodic review under the ICCPR. In its concluding remarks, the Human Rights Committee (HRC) urged the government to establish

[26] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/macao-annual-eu-report-political-and-economic-developments-2021_en

an independent human rights body with a "comprehensive mandate and appropriate powers". The HRC expressed concerns about possible violations of the ICCPR regarding freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, migrant workers' rights (notably non-resident workers) and asylum seeking. The HRC also questioned the government about the exclusion of pro- democracy candidates during the 2021 legislative elections. The Macao government opposed some of the conclusions and suggested that the UN institution "avoid the politicisation of the assessment" and keep a "constructive dialogue"[27].

Taiwan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Taiwan is a vibrant democracy with a system of governance based on the rule of law and the respect of fundamental freedoms. Elections are held regularly in a fair and transparent manner. The last local elections took place in November 2022. Taiwan has one of the most progressive human rights policies in Asia, being notably a pioneer of the rights of LGBTI persons. In 2022, Taiwan released its first 2022-2024 National Action Plan on Human Rights. However, some issues of concern remain, such as the slow progress towards the abolition of the death penalty and the lack of a transparent legal framework for refugees. Further efforts are also needed to improve the protection of migrant workers' and fishers' rights and to ensure proper working conditions. In this context, ongoing work on the integration of ILO Convention n° 188 (ILO C188) - Work in Fishing Convention - into domestic law and the adoption in 2022 of the National Action Plan on Fishing and Human Rights are important steps forward.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU action focused on protecting and empowering individuals and building a resilient, inclusive and democratic society. The EU and Member States present in Taipei identified the following priorities: promoting Taiwan's compliance with international human rights law, including by developing its human rights institutional framework and domestic legislation to protect refugees; improving the human rights situation and working conditions of migrant workers; promoting the abolition of death penalty in Taiwan, including working towards a moratorium on executions and towards sensitising public opinion and judicial practitioners; supporting independent and pluralistic media and the fight against disinformation; and supporting and protecting human rights defenders in the region, including by contributing to the safety and protection of journalist and media workers.

The EU continued its consultations with Taiwan with a focus on migrant workers' rights and working conditions, the death penalty, and non-discrimination against persons in the most vulnerable situations. The EU remained in contact with several agencies in charge of human rights related issues. Within the EU-Taiwan Gender Equality Cooperation and Training Framework, the EU and Taiwan organised events to promote rights of LGBTI persons. Contacts with major civil society organisations also continued, allowing for the exchange of information and gathering ideas on how to further promote human rights in Taiwan.

[27] https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2022/07/experts-human-rights-committee-commend-macao-special-administrative-region-china

In the context of its continued efforts to promote the abolition of the death penalty, the EU organised with Member States the EU-Taiwan Judicial Exchange Workshop for judicial experts and a film festival.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The fifth EU-Taiwan Human Rights Consultations took place on 5 October 2022 in a virtual format. Discussion focused on gender equality and rights of LGBTI persons, business and human rights, migrant workers' rights, the death penalty, and human rights in the digital sphere. The EU and Taiwan also discussed human rights in the EU-Taiwan annual consultations held in November 2022. The EU remained engaged on the working and living conditions of migrant workers, that have been further affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and on the abolition of the death penalty, raising this issue on a regular basis with the Taiwanese authorities.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the European Economic and Trade Office in Taiwan (EETO) organised, promoted or supported a number of events and initiatives on human rights. These activities resulted in increased public awareness and enhanced exchanges between the EU and Taiwan, both with NGOs and with the Taiwanese authorities. More activities on human rights and democracy have been planned under the EU-Taiwan Engagement Facility, launched in September 2022, with a budget of EUR 400 000. The facility will cover areas such as the abolition of the death penalty, media freedom, migrant workers' rights and support to human rights defenders from the region, and exchanges with the National Human Rights Commission.

5. Multilateral context: Although not a member of the UN, Taiwan voluntarily incorporated the provisions of five of the UN's nine human rights treaties into its domestic laws, notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In 2022, Taiwan was in the process of aligning domestic law with the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT). Taiwan was also working to adopt the International Convention on the Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the International Convention for Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Taiwan regularly published reports on the implementation of these treaties and invited international experts to review them. The third reviews of the implementation of ICCPR and ICESCR were held in May 2022.

Iran

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The situation of human rights in Iran remained a matter of concern in 2022. The Iranian regime's response to the protests sparked by the death in police custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini on 16 September 2022 (which resulted in a nationwide uprising in favor of wider freedoms and respect for fundamental rights) has been a cause for great concern. The widespread, brutal and

disproportionate use of force by the Iranian authorities against peaceful protesters, as well as the use of the death penalty against protesters, was a breach of the fundamental principles enshrined in international law. Iran carried out executions at an extremely high rate. A major source of concern continued to be the use of death penalty also for juvenile offenders, protestors and dissidents. Restrictions to civil freedoms persisted, notably lack of guarantees of fair trial, violations of freedom of expression, religion or belief and of women's and girls' rights. Abuse and torture in prison, the detention and conviction of foreign and dual nationals and the situation of human rights activists remained matters of serious concern. At the same time, it is commendable that Iran continued to host a great number of Afghan refugees (which has even increased since the crisis in Afghanistan), and to provide them with access to basic services, in particular health care and education for children.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In the Council Conclusions of December 2022, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to a comprehensive policy approach: critical where necessary, and ready to engage, on the basis of mutual respect, where interests align. As part of its comprehensive policy approach, the EU followed the situation of human rights in Iran very closely, including in the context of the 2022 protests. As a result, it continued to address all relevant issues using a mixture of public and private diplomacy as well as bilateral and multilateral tools. This included *inter alia*: the use of death penalty in particular for juvenile offenders, protesters and dissidents; Iran's disregard for its international human rights obligations, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to both of which Iran is a party; freedom of expression and assembly; restrictions on communications, including Internet shutdowns.

3. **EU bilateral political engagement:** Human rights continued to be an integral part of the EU's policy vis-à-vis Iran. On 25 September 2022, in the context of the Iranian government's response to the protests sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini, the High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP) issued a Declaration on behalf of the EU 27 EU calling on Iran to immediately stop the widespread and disproportionate use of force against nonviolent protestors, to ensure free flow of information, to release all non-violent protestors and to provide due process to all detainees. The HR/VP Declaration paved the way for more coordinated actions between the EU and its Member States and led to the adoption of targeted restrictive measures in response to the events in Iran. At the same time, the HR/VP used its direct channels up to the highest Iranian political level to firmly demand respect for the fundamental rights of Iranian men and women. In addition, the EU repeatedly called on Iran to pursue a consistent policy towards the abolition of capital punishment and strongly condemned the use of death penalty in particular for juvenile offenders, protesters and dissidents including through public statements. The EU also expressed concern regarding the situation of political prisoners and that of EU and EU-Iranian dual nationals arbitrarily detained in Iran, urging the Iranian authorities to ensure that all prisoners are kept in safe conditions in compliance with the applicable international law, and that they are granted medical and consular assistance whenever needed. Furthermore, the EU continued to urge the Iranian authorities to guarantee the full range of fundamental rights for their citizens irrespective of religion, belief or any other status. Through this political engagement, the EU continued to urge improvements in the human rights situation in Iran and continued to insist, both privately and publicly, that there must be accountability for abuses whenever they occur.

4. EU financial engagement: In implementing projects in the framework of the Iran Multiannual Indicative Programme for 2021-2027, the EU always takes into account its human rights commitments.

5. Multilateral context: The Government of Iran received 329 recommendations following Iran's Universal Periodic Review in November 2019, including from 26 EU Member States. At the 43rd session of the Human Rights Council convened from 24 February – 20 March 2020 Iran accepted 143 of the 329 recommendations it received in 2019. The EU continued to be a strong supporter of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran and encouraged Iran to fully cooperate with the latter's mandate. As in previous years, the EU supported the resolution on the human rights situation in Iran tabled by Canada during the United Nations General Assembly in New York, as a resolution that is fact-based and free of unverified allegations. The EU also urged Iran to cooperate with the Independent Fact-Finding Mission created by the Human Rights Council in November 2022.

Republic of Korea

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Civil society remained robust and vocal in promoting causes from all sides of the political spectrum. The government's intention to follow up on an election pledge to transfer the responsibilities of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family to other government departments provoked debate on the direction of gender equality policy. While organisations representing people who are LGBTI and people belonging to minorities were able to campaign for full enjoyment of human rights, political leaders did not engage in substantive support for these objectives and a longstanding bill for an anti-discrimination law did not progress. Longstanding concerns remained regarding aspects of the National Security Law and the continuing existence of the death penalty on the statute books despite the de-facto moratorium on executions.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU's action in the Republic of Korea in 2022 focused on combatting all forms of hate and discrimination on any ground, promoting gender equality, and rights of older persons.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged the government and human rights civil society organisations (CSOs).

The EU Ambassador attended a hearing of the Constitutional Court on the death penalty. EU Heads of Mission published a joint local statement to mark the European and World Day against the Death Penalty. EU diplomatic missions participated in LGBTI Pride festivals and parades in Seoul and provincial cities as well as marking the IDAHOT day. To mark DUO Day, EU and Member State diplomats interacted with athletes at the Korea Paralympic Committee's Incheon Athletes' village. The EU Delegation co-hosted the ASEM Forum on the Rights of Older persons. The EU Delegation also hosted the EU-Korea Women in Science and Technology Forum to exchange ideas with Korean partners on encouraging more women to choose careers in that area. The EU interacted with civil society organisations working to

counter online gender based violence. Representatives from many of these organisations came together for a discussion to mark International Human Rights Day at the end of the year.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the EU Policy and Outreach Partnership (EUPOP) project, the EU aimed at promoting human rights and societal resilience by supporting activities of mutual interest to the Republic of Korea and the EU. The project specifically addressed topics under the theme of discriminations, raising awareness about EU and international human rights frameworks, and broadly addressing gender equality across its activities. Through the project, the EU carried out targeted outreach, dialogue and communication actions and explored concrete partnerships with local CSOs.

5. Multilateral context: There is a high degree of convergence between the EU and the Republic of Korea as regards the priorities for the promotion of human rights in international institutions. The EU and the Republic of Korea exchanged views on draft resolutions ahead of the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Third Committee. The Republic of Korea resumed co-sponsoring resolutions on human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Republic of Korea concluded its membership of the Human Rights Council.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: There were no indications that the DPRK engaged in constructive action to address the findings of the International Commission of Inquiry's conclusions in 2014 that *"systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations have been and are being committed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, its institutions and officials. In many instances, the violations of human rights found by the commission constitute crimes against humanity".* The substantially reduced number of people escaping across the border and the absence of most diplomats and international humanitarian staff from the country decreased the level of first-hand information about the human rights situation. The government continued to refuse to engage the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the DPRK and limited engagement with other UN human rights bodies and mechanisms. The government maintained the closure of the border to most travellers and a large amount of goods, which it has said since January 2020 is necessary to prevent the spread of COVID. In May, the authorities announced an outbreak of COVID, but did not accept offers from several UN Member States for COVID related assistance. While there were signs that some parts of the population were vaccinated later in the year, the majority of people appear to remain unprotected against COVID. Several organisations outside the country presented indications obtained within the DPRK that the government threatened and implemented severe penalties, including the death penalty, for breaches of regulations said to be intended to prevent the spread of COVID 19 or for access and dissemination of information from outside the country. Outside observers continued to express concern that the reduction of imports, controls on market transactions and suspension of projects by international humanitarian agencies, together with the long-term effects of poor economic management and previous natural disasters, were leading to increased food insecurity and a potential humanitarian emergency.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU addressed all areas of concern through resolutions at the Human Rights Council and the United Nations General Assembly. Frequent communication took place between the EU and the United Nations Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights as well as like-minded international partners. This included a side-event in the margins of the UN General Assembly together with the new Special Rapporteur and the government of the Republic of Korea on ways to pursue a dual track approach of promoting accountability for perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses while maintaining a readiness to engage with the DPRK government to improve the situation. The EU also kept up close cooperation with civil society organisations working on the issue. The European Parliament held a debate and passed a resolution on the human rights situation in the DPRK including the persecution of religious minorities.

The EU renewed sanctions against two senior DPRK officials and the Central Public Prosecutor's Office under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU maintained limited contact with the DPRK authorities through diplomatic channels in Europe, including on issues related to human rights.

4. EU financial engagement: It was not possible to implement humanitarian assistance and food security projects in the DPRK in the context of the withdrawal of international staff from the country.

5. Multilateral context: The EU initiated country-specific resolutions on the human rights situation in the DPRK at the Human Rights Council and the United Nations General Assembly. Both resolutions were adopted without a vote and served to maintain international attention on the situation. The Human Rights Council Resolution focuses, *inter alia*, on the work of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights and the Council itself, whereas the United Nations General Assembly Resolution focuses, *inter* alia, on the work of the Security Council.

Human Rights Council Resolution 49/22 stressed the importance of following up on the recommendations contained in the report of the Commission of Inquiry, expressed deep concern about the systematic, widespread, and gross human rights violations in the country and the humanitarian situation in the country, which may have further deteriorated in the contest of COVID-19. Underlining the need for accountability, the resolution welcomed steps taken by the Office of the High Commissioner, including its field-based structure in Seoul. Furthermore, the text was updated on three important issues. The preamble paragraph on the issue of abductees was strengthened, a new operational paragraph on COVAX was included, and the operational paragraph on the accountability work of the OHCHR, including the Soul office, was strengthened by encouraging cooperation with a wide range of stake-holders in the procurement of evidence that could be used in future criminal proceedings. The High Commissioner was requested to provide an oral update on the progress made in this regard, and the mandate of the Special Rapporteur was extended for a period of one year.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 77/226 expressed deep concern at the grave human rights situation, the pervasive culture of impunity, and the lack of accountability for

human rights violations and abuses in the DPRK. It condemned in the strongest terms the long-standing and ongoing systematic, widespread and gross violations of human rights and expressed its very serious concern about numerous human rights violations of both political and civil and social, economic, and cultural rights. The text introduced new language on developments related to the COVID 19 situation.

India

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: India's Constitution, as well as other laws and mandated institutions, serve to safeguard the human rights of the country's over 1.4 billion inhabitants. India's economy has grown significantly in the past decade, which resulted in a substantial reduction of extreme poverty. However, socio-economic inequality persists. In terms of gender equality, notably in the areas of education and the political empowerment of women, the situation slightly improved in 2022 – as noted in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2022.

Several independent reports and UN bodies noted that space for civil society and societal diversity continued to shrink. In the World Press Freedom Index, India's ranking dropped by eight places from 2021 to 2022 to a position of 150th out of 180 countries. UN Special Rapporteurs highlighted an increasing use of anti-terror laws such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) against journalists and human rights defenders (HRDs), which they defined as the Indian government's attempt "to restrict civil society". Similarly, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), a law providing immunity to armed forces personnel, currently applied in some parts of North-East India and in Jammu and Kashmir, was described by UN Special Rapporteurs as a "symbol of excessive state power" with "no role to play in a democracy".

The broader civil society movement in India continues to be significantly affected by the 2020 amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Act (FCRA), regulating the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contributions by individuals, NGOs and not-for-profit organisations. The year 2022 started with almost 6,000 organisations losing their FCRA license. Others are still operating while waiting for their renewal to be granted (the Ministry of Home Affairs extended the deadline for completion of this process seven times already). This led to uncertainty among CSOs, affecting planning and implementation of their activities, and self-censorship for fear of reprisals. CSOs can lose their FCRA license from one day to another, and consequently, get their FCRA bank accounts frozen immediately. A number of reputed CSOs – including OXFAM, Socio Legal Information Centre (SLIC), the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) – had their FCRA suspended or cancelled. EU support to CSOs in India became more complex: in particular, the prohibition of sub-granting of FCRA funds makes it difficult to support smaller, rural CSOs and ensure support to grassroots' communities. Together with some Member States, the EU also faced an increased risk of non-recovery of unutilised funds and seizure of assets purchased with EU funds – a potential loss of our tax-payers' money. Efforts by CSOs to engage with the Ministry of Home Affairs on the FCRA issue has not been very productive.

Freedom of religion or belief deteriorated in recent years, based on international reports. This negative trend was highlighted by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief in a report submitted to the Human Rights Council in April 2022. Some central and state government policies and actions have a direct negative impact on religious freedom, such as laws prohibiting so-called "forced conversions" passed in 13 states (three of which passed such laws in 2022).

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU and EU Member States engaged on a wide range of human rights issues with government, civil society, academia and business interlocutors. The rights of children, women and minorities, freedom of expression, of religion or belief, the protection of Human rights defenders, and access to justice, as well as caste based discrimination, forced labour and slavery, torture and the death penalty were among the issues in focus.

The EU also worked on promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment and supported women's participation in the climate change agenda and digitalization.

With regard to maritime movements of Rohingya refugees, the EU continued to urge the governments in the region, including India, to fulfil obligations to rescue distressed boats within their search and rescue areas, allow disembarkation and access to humanitarian assistance, and work with UNHCR and civil society to arrange safe community hosting arrangements.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The 10th edition of the EU-India local Human Rights Dialogue took place in July 2022, and proved again a useful bilateral platform with frank discussions.

Following an invitation to speak at the Raisina Dialogue, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights (EUSR) had a four-day mission to India in April 2022. The EUSR met with the Minister for Minority Affairs, the Chair of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the Home Secretary, as well as with representatives of civil society and Human Rights Defenders (HRDs).

On the FCRA, the EU Delegation and EU Member States Embassies regularly reached out to the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Home Affairs. On allegations of human rights abuses, the EU contacted several times the National Human Rights Commission.

During their visit to Delhi in May 2022, members of the Council's Asia-Oceania Working Party had several interactions with human rights activists and defenders in order to get insights on the situation in India and inform their discussion in Brussels.

In 2022, the EU Delegation organised, together with EU Member States, more than 15 meetings with civil society representatives covering all different spheres of human rights.

4. EU financial engagement: Through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), eight projects supported the protection of fundamental rights; three multi-

country projects benefited India, focusing on strengthening indigenous people's HRDs and promoting freedom of religion or belief.

Under the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) thematic programmes [Civil Society Organisations (CSO), Global Public Goods and Challenges (GPGC)], six projects received support, focusing on addressing economic inequalities, labour standards and workers' rights in sectoral supply chains. Three of these were multi-country projects.

In a Team Europe approach, the EU together with its Member States supported rights-based projects in India during 2022. The majority of these projects focused on gender rights and were conducted in partnership with Indian CSOs.

Under the Partnership Instrument, one project supported business and human rights.

In 2022, the EU Delegation also launched a call for proposal focused on promoting gender equality and women's rights and contracted two new projects.

5. Multilateral context: On 10 November 2022, India underwent its fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council (HRC). India received 339 recommendations from 130 countries, including 22 EU Member States. India will present its formal responses to the recommendations received at the 52nd session of the HRC. In the run-up to the UPR session, the EU Delegation organised several rounds of consultations between EU Member States and civil society.

India traditionally votes against or abstains on country-specific resolutions in the UN HRC, the resolution on the human rights situation in Afghanistan being a notable exception in the 51st session of the HRC, which India supported.

Indonesia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Indonesia is a stable democracy with competitive elections, media pluralism and a vibrant civil society. Basic human rights are guaranteed by the Constitution and a strong institutional human rights framework. Notwithstanding the impressive strides made since the fall of the authoritarian Suharto regime in 1998, some governance challenges remain. Compared to 2021, the country's performance deteriorated both on the World Press Freedom Index (from 113th to 117th out of 180 countries) and on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (from 96th to 110th out of 180 countries).

A major development was Parliament's unanimous adoption of a new Criminal Code in December. The Code will enter into force in three years, allowing the authorities to adopt implementation regulations. At this stage, the Code contains provisions that criminalise extra-marital sex and cohabitation (de facto outlawing LGBTI relations), while expanding the punishable scope of libel, slander, and insults to the president and vice-president, as well as

blasphemy. The Code also opens the door to the recognition of discriminatory customary laws. Notable improvements include a legal definition of rape and marital rape, while expanding the definition of violence to include harassment. Whereas abortion remains a criminal offence, the Code provides exemptions for survivors of rape and other forms of sexual violence; in these cases increasing the time limit for abortion from 40 days to 14 weeks. These provisions followed the adoption of the Sexual Violence Bill of 2022, which created a legal framework for the prosecution of sexual crimes with a survivor-centred approach.

No executions were carried out in 2022 and the *de facto* moratorium on the death penalty was upheld, with the last executions dating back to 2016. Meanwhile, at least 118 people were sentenced to death (a marked increase compared to 35 in 2021), mostly involving drug offence cases. At the end of 2022, 394 persons (including 10 EU nationals) were on death row. The new Criminal Code also allows for the death penalty to be commuted to life in prison. Those serving a life sentence can have their sentence commuted to a 20 years' custodial sentence after 15 years of imprisonment. With occasional outbreaks of armed violence in 2022, the situation in the provinces of Papua and West Papua resulted in civilian casualties and internally displaced people. In November, the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) brokered a 'humanitarian pause' signed with the United Liberation Movement for West Papua, the Papuan People's Council and the Papua Church Council, with the aim of providing a humanitarian corridor for six months. It was the first mediation attempt in years, though unsuccessful to date. The attorney general carried out an investigation into the 2014 killings of civilians by the army. The resulting trial led to the acquittal of a former army major, but the attorney general appealed against the ruling.

Although freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in the Constitution, 64 Sharia-inspired local bylaws discriminate against religious minorities, targeting women and girls. The minister of education issued a national regulation on state school uniforms, stressing the freedom of students to choose whether or not they wear the hijab. LGBTI individuals continued to face discrimination and harassment. While homosexuality is not criminalised (although it is prohibited by Sharia law in Aceh), anti-LGBTI rhetoric and actions have increased in recent years.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU monitored the human rights implications of ongoing legislative work, including the new Criminal Code, the sexual violence bill and the Electronic Information and Transactions Law. The EU Delegation and EU Member States' missions worked together with the government, parliament and civil society organisations on freedoms of expression, of religion and belief, discrimination against minorities (including LGBTI persons), human rights defenders (including journalists and ethnic minorities), as well as on women's empowerment and gender equality issues. This work contributed to protect and empower individuals and build resilient, inclusive and democratic societies. To promote a global system for human rights and democracy, the EU commemorated the various International Days for Human Rights: for Women; for the Elimination of Violence Against Women; for Press Freedom; Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia; for Refugees; in Support of Victims of Torture; for Indigenous Peoples; Against the Death Penalty, as well as the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. Initiatives included the EU4Wartawan Journalists' Writing Competition on the theme of 'Climate Crisis and Human Rights', '100% Human Film Festival', and a talk show called 'Anyone Can Be a Human Rights Defender.'

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Within the framework of Indonesia's G20 Presidency, there was ample scope for the EU and EU Member States to consistently raise bilateral and multilateral human rights issues with Indonesian officials at all levels. This included a visit by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights in October 2022. Throughout the year, the EU Delegation and EU Member States carried out 18 EU demarches related to democracy and human rights, including with regard to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Indonesia and the EU held their sixth Joint Committee on 29 July 2022 in Bali to review bilateral relations and cooperation as mandated by the Indonesia - European Union Partnership and Cooperation Agreement including on human rights and democracy. On this and other occasions, the EU reiterated its readiness to hold the annual EU-Indonesia Human Rights Dialogue. With regard to Rohingya refugees at sea, the EU urged regional governments to allow disembarkation and access to humanitarian assistance, and welcomed Indonesia's actions in this regard.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the EU continued to work closely with Indonesian civil society organisations and local authorities through 17 projects supported with over EURO 21.5 million. These projects covered a wide spectrum of the EU's human rights priorities including the prevention of torture and other ill-treatment, business and human rights, access to health, the socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on vulnerable groups (such as children, youth, women, and persons with disabilities), sustainable and rights-based urban governance, food security, protection of human rights defenders and access to justice.

5. Multilateral context: Indonesia served as a member of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2020-2022 term. The EU engaged with Indonesia as one of the countries under review during the fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the UN Human Rights Council. The UPR's recommendations are due in the Council's 52nd session. The EU also engaged with Indonesia on human rights issues in the context of its G20 Presidency.

Japan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Japan is an active promoter of fundamental values and respect for international human rights obligations. It has an important role in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee and in 2022 it was a member of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). Despite this, Japan continues the use of the death penalty.

There is positive momentum in the area of gender equality; however, Japan continues to lag behind (ranking 116th out of 146 in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index in 2022). While there is movement also in the area of the rights of sexual minorities, Japan does not recognise same-sex marriage. In 2022, at national level, Japan undertook some positive measures on gender equality, such as the narrowing of the gender pay gap. Japan also hosted the World Assembly for Women (WAW) 2022 in Tokyo on 3 December. On the issue of same-sex marriage, the Tokyo District Court noted that the lack of legal provisions to recognise marriage equality amounts to a "state of unconstitutionality" that infringes upon human rights.

Measures were taken also to address child abuse. On the issue of parental child abduction, which is common in Japan, the Ministry of Justice organised a public consultation on a proposal to review family legislation concerning divorce and related systems, including the option for Japan to either introduce a joint custody system or maintain the existing system, which gives custody to one parent only.

As an exceptional emergency measure responding to the Russian aggression against Ukraine, Japan accepted over 2200 Ukrainian "evacuees" by the end of 2022.

On 26 July 2022, the government of Japan executed convict Tomohiro Kato, who had killed seven people in Tokyo in 2008 during a stabbing rampage; well over one hundred people remain on death row. In June, the Penal Code was revised for the first time in 115 years, facilitating a shift of emphasis from punishment to rehabilitation.

In the area of business and human rights, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry published in September voluntary guidelines - based on OECD and ILO standards – for human rights due diligence in supply chains for Japanese businesses. On 19 July 2022, the Japanese government deposited with the International Labour Office the instrument of ratification of the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, becoming the 177th ILO Member State to ratify this Convention.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The priority areas of focus on human rights activities are: (i) Death penalty, criminal justice system and prisoners' rights; (ii) Gender equality and women's empowerment; (ii) LGBTI rights; (iv) Rights of the child; and (v) Business and human rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement:

- *Death penalty, criminal justice system and prisoners' rights:* The EU continued to work towards the abolition of the death penalty, issuing immediately a local statement after the execution in July 2022 (with Iceland, Norway and Switzerland). The EU Delegation continued to run a project to stimulate civil society-led activities on the criminal justice system in relation to the death penalty.
- *Gender equality and women's empowerment:* The EU Delegation ran a series of online workshops to promote collaboration and networking in the areas of economic, social and political participation and leadership, as well as gender based violence, and on women peace and security. On International Women's Day on 16 March, the Delegation organised a Diet event on Gender Equality and Sexual & Reproductive Health & Rights, with the participation of ambassadors of several EU Member States.
- *LGBTI rights:* In 2022, the EU Delegation and several EU Member States embassies provided support to organisations and events such as the Pride House Tokyo, Rainbow Pride in Sapporo and Kyushu, Pride Centre Osaka and Tokyo Rainbow Pride.
- *Rights of the child:* The EU Delegation continued working to organise an expert workshop to exchange experiences, best practices and challenges in the enforcement of judicial decisions under the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.
- *Business and human rights:* The EU Delegation reached out at various levels to work with Japan towards ratification of the ILO conventions C105 on Abolition of Forced Labour (with

success) and C111 on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation. It also organised meetings with METI on discussion on the draft guidelines on human rights due diligence.

EU Member States made substantial contributions in all areas and in particular on gender equality and LGBTI rights.

4. EU financial engagement: In terms of financial contributions, the EUDEL allocated funding for the following activities: In the area of the death penalty, criminal justice system and prisoners' rights a new two-year project will give continuity to the EU's support to CrimeInfo: the EUR 150 000 Project "Veritas- Evidence-based advocacy on the Death Penalty – Japan". On gender equality and women's empowerment**,** the EU Delegation launched two bilateral projects: (i) EU-Japan Joint Project on Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in and with Japan in the Post-Pandemic Era, with a budget of EUR 240 000 and (ii) Project for Promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Japan towards G7 2023, with a budget of EUR 120 000.

5. Multilateral context: The EU Delegation and Member States' embassies cooperated to request support from the Japanese government for human rights related resolutions in the UNGA and the HRC. In the 77th session of the UNGA Third Committee, Japan co-sponsored the EU-led resolution on the DPRK. It continued voting against the resolution on the moratorium on the death penalty. Japan was a member of the HRC during 2020-22.

As part of the of the fourth cycle of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the human rights record of Japan was reviewed during the 42nd UPR session in Geneva on 31 January 2023. One of the main recommendation was related to the abolishment of the death penalty. Other recommendations focused on the establishment of a national human rights institution (NHRI); combatting discrimination and hate speech based notably on race, sexual orientation, or gender identity; ensuring gender equality; combatting human trafficking; ensuring good working and living conditions for foreign workers and ensuring safe discharge of nuclear waste from the Fukushima plant. States also recommended to Japan to ratify a number of international treaties.

Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Based on recommendations from the 2020 Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the government adopted a National Action Plan in June 2022, including a commitment to accept a visit of a UN Special Rapporteur before the end of 2025. Lao PDR has supported actions against gender-based violence and in favour of child-rights protection, and has made efforts to increase anti-trafficking capacity. The government of Prime Minister Phankham Viphavanh (replaced on 30 December 2022 by Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone) indicated a commitment to improve governance and strengthen the rule of law, improve administrative efficiency and public finance management, and prevent fraud and corruption. The Lao PDR slightly improved its rank in the World Press Freedom Index from 172nd in 2021 to 161st out of 180 countries in 2022.

Despite a long-standing official commitment to gradual progress on human rights, there are continuing reports of deficiencies in the implementation of key international human rights norms and instruments. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a single-party state with no political opposition. Freedom of expression is limited and media and cinema are subject to censorship. The fight against "false information" has led to tightened controls of social media. Similarly, the space for civil society to operate is limited. Strict laws regulating the functioning of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (Decree 238/2017 and Decree 013/2010) are in place. Individuals have been detained and arrested for publicly criticising the government. No updates have been made available on the investigation concerning cases of enforced disappearance, notably that of Mr Sombath Somphone, missing since 2012. In October an evangelical pastor, Mr Sy Seng Manee, was found beaten to death near his home; investigations into the case continue. Cases of displacement of local communities due to development activities in agriculture, mining and electricity production continue to be reported. Little or no consultation or impact assessment appears to be carried out, and difficulties in obtaining adequate compensation for lost land are encountered.

2. EU action on human rights and democracy - key focus areas: In 2022 the EU continued to focus on the situation of human rights defenders and empowering individuals through consultations with, and support to, civil society. Progress was made in the government systems and practices for the implementation of the regulatory framework related to local civil society organisations (CSOs), with the average time for CSO registration reduced from 595 working days in 2018 to 151 days in 2022. The EU participated in quarterly Civil Society Working Group meetings between CSOs, government and development partners, with the aim of broadening engagement and dialogue. In terms of promoting the global system for human rights and democracy, the EU supported capacity building for ministries and National Assembly members relating to human rights conventions. The EU and EU Member States have also continued to promote women's rights including through a campaign to mark the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence. For the first time, this campaign was combined with a CSO fair, funded by the EU and France and gathering more than 40 local CSOs and International NGOs in Vientiane. Regrettably, permission to hold the planned 11th Asia Pro Bono Conference intended to emphasise the importance for the ASEAN region of pro bono legal advice and access to justice was withdrawn a week before the event was to take place.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The 11th EU-Laos Human Rights Dialogue took place in July in Brussels, which was an opportunity to discuss human rights matters as outlined above in a frank and open manner. A number of follow-up actions were agreed as reflected in a joint press statement. The EU continued to co-chair the Sub-Sector Working Group on Legal and Institutional Oversight as a member of the Governance Sector Working Group (GSWG), a policy dialogue forum between the government and development partners. The EU also worked with Switzerland, the Ministry of Home Affairs and UNDP on priorities and opportunities for engagement of local civil society within the GWSG. A growing number of CSOs are invited to actively participate in GSWG discussions and workshops, and a more diverse presence of CSO representatives is now observed in various meetings, workshops and consultations organised by the government. Concerns continue to be raised by the EU Delegation on the requirements and procedures applied to international and local NGOs, which often affect timely implementation of EU projects.

4. EU financial engagement: Using a 'Team Europe approach', EU financial and operational support focused on good governance and was primarily channelled through the project "Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and the Rule of Law (CEGGA)", co-funded by the EU, Germany and Switzerland. In 2022, CEGGA worked to strengthen civil society engagement, to support accountability processes led by the National Assembly and to facilitate the integration of international human rights obligations into domestic law. After the reopening of Lao PDR in May, the EU-funded project "Civil Society Action to Prevent and Mitigate COVID-19" worked on socio-economic recovery, notably by supporting skills development and income generation activities for unemployed and vulnerable women. The project was implemented by Plan International and two Lao CSOs, under the umbrella of the Lao PDR Civil Society Coordination Committee. More than 45 local CSOs and INGOs received EU financial support, directly or indirectly through sub-grants. In 2022 projects addressed inter alia the promotion and protection of the rights of women and children, social protection and labour rights, access to justice, victims of trafficking and access by ethnic groups to participation in policy shaping and public services.

5. Multilateral context: In June, the government approved an action plan for the implementation of the UPR. It also submitted the state reports on the Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In July, a UN Special Procedures Joint Allegation Letter was sent to the government in relation to the human rights consequences of the 2018 Attapeu dam collapse. The government replied in November 2022, but there are still some pending issues related to housing reconstruction and compensation for damages. However, no reply has been given to three UN Special Procedures Joint Allegation Letters sent in 2021 concerning Mr Sombath Somphone, alleged attacks on the Hmong minority in the Phou Bia area, and arbitrary detention and continued imprisonment of human rights defenders. In 2022, the government neither invited nor received any UN Special Procedure country visit.

Malaysia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation saw little change from 2021, though some positive signs were recorded. The government decided to abolish the mandatory death penalty in relation to 11 crimes including murder and terrorism and the relevant bills passed their first reading in parliament. However, the Parliament was dissolved and the bills will have to be tabled again. Malaysia also showed positive signs in terms of strengthening the rule of law and political pluralism. A general election in November resulted in a new coalition government. Women and LGBTI people still face many challenges. Moreover, women remain underrepresented, with only five women ministers out of 28 cabinet ministers. On the positive side, the Lower House of Parliament passed an amendment to the Employment Act 1955 safeguarding the rights of women in the workplace. In March, Malaysia ratified ILO Protocol 29 to the Forced Labour Convention.

Overall, freedom of expression has improved according to the World Press Freedom Index, from 119th in the world in 2021 to 113th in 2022. There continue to be prominent free and independent media outlets as well as a dynamic social media sphere. Malaysia also continues to have an active civil society, even though authorities tend to limit free speech through laws such as the Sedition Act and the Communications and Multimedia Act. Investigations and arrests under these laws increased in 2022. Rights and living conditions of migrants and refugees continue to be a severe problem. As of November 2022, there were 182,990 refugees and asylum-seekers registered with the UNHCR, with refugees from Myanmar accounting for 86% of the total. Since April, Malaysia has returned over 2,000 Myanmar nationals, including some military defectors. In October, UNHCR appealed to the Malaysian authorities to abide by their international legal obligations and ensure the full respect for the rights of people in need of international protection. Malaysia has repeatedly stressed that it cannot afford to accommodate more Rohingya refugees and has called upon the international community to help find a solution. Overcrowding in the detention centres and detention of minors have also raised concerns.

2. EU action on human rights and democracy - key focus areas: The EU's human rights priorities in Malaysia include youth and democracy, labour rights, freedom of expression, support to human rights defenders, ratification of core human rights conventions, and the promotion of gender equality, including LGBTI rights. In terms of protecting individual rights, a key focus for EU action remains advocacy for the abolition of the death penalty and support for individual human rights defenders.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In December, the EU and Malaysia signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) which will reinforce political dialogue with Malaysia on a range of issues, including the promotion of human rights and international justice. With the signing of the PCA, respect for human rights and democratic principles were recognised as one of the cornerstones of the EU-Malaysia partnership. In August in their eighth Senior Officials' Meeting the EU and Malaysia discussed areas to step up cooperation in human rights protection. The EU Delegation engages regularly with government agencies, the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (SUHAKAM) and the Malaysian Bar Council.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU provides financial support to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). It has funded projects and the capacity building of local CSOs that work to promote the rights of migrants and asylum-seekers. Several CSO projects re-directed activities to support target groups with emergency needs, while larger regional projects focused on vulnerable communities not reached through official channels, such as migrant workers and stateless or indigenous people. The EU co-funded the project "Safe and Fair: Realizing women migrant workers' rights and opportunities in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region" as part of the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls.

The project "Business and Human Rights, Malaysia", as part of a broader regional project, seeks to enhance common understanding and policy convergence in implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the capacity of the government to draft and implement national action plans on business and human rights. Under the programme "Protecting children affected by migration in Southeast, South and Central Asia", UNICEF

Malaysia, in partnership with the EU, is working with the government and other stakeholders to ensure children are protected and their rights promoted including through strengthened child protection services. The EU also worked with SUHAKAM, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and think tanks on human rights issues, including international human rights conventions. Crosscutting aspects like gender and democratic governance were included in all actions as well as the capacity to use media and technology to support the work of human rights activists and organisations. At the end of 2022, three new contracts were concluded to support the widening of the democratic space, strengthen democratic institutions to promote reforms and the rule of law, and ensure the protection of human rights in general.

5. Multilateral context: Malaysia was elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council for the term 2022-2024. This could create momentum for increased engagement on human rights issues and ratification of international conventions. For example, Malaysia has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and has no domestic or administrative framework that governs refugees and their rights. Child advocacy groups have urged the Malaysian government to submit its long overdue official state report to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Committee in line with its obligations under the convention.

Malaysia made no visible progress on accession to the six international core human rights conventions that it has not yet ratified (the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Convention on the protection of the rights of all migrant workers and members of their families; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.) Although a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Malaysia has not withdrawn its reservations to CEDAW, CRC and CRPD, nor has it fully implemented the CEDAW and CRC Committees' recommendations. As in 2018, Malaysia supported the most recent UN General Assembly resolution regarding the moratorium on the use of the death penalty in December 2022.

Maldives

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2022 saw the election of the Maldives to the UN Human Rights Council for the term 2023-2025, and some efforts to advance and promote human rights domestically. In 2022 Maldives also entered a pre-election period. In December 2022, former President Abdulla Yameen and opposition presidential candidate for 2023 Presidential election was found guilty of corruption and money laundering and sentenced to 11 years of imprisonment by the Criminal Court. The opposition organised a series of protests against Mr. Yameen’s sentence.

Several local and international NGOs expressed concern about a provision in the Evidence Act, ratified in July, which compelled journalists to reveal sources on court orders. Authorities proposed amendments, which were welcomed by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). IFJ noted however that the development of a full and vibrant independent media in the country was nevertheless still impeded. The Maldives is currently ranked 87 in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Press Freedom Index, down from 72 in 2021. Online threats and intimidation against human rights activists had a significant impact on civic space and freedom of expression.

Same-sex relations remain criminalised in the Maldives. 2022 saw a further setback with regard to the LGBTI rights: for the first time, dozens of individuals who allegedly engaged in same-sex relations were arrested and charged.

Concerns persist with regard to the rights of women and gender based violence. While welcoming the Government's commitment to gender equality in law and policy, the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls noted that long-standing provisions were still discriminatory and punitive, denying women and girls full human rights and freedoms. Gender-based violence is still widely prevalent and tolerated, with survivors facing barriers in accessing justice.

August 2022 marked eight years since the abduction of outspoken journalist and human rights defender Ahmed Rilwan. Despite some progress in the case, concerns remain about the weak police investigation and the willingness of the state to bring all perpetrators to justice. In December, the Presidential Commission on Disappearances and Deaths presented the findings of their investigation, which confirmed that the journalist was forcibly disappeared and murdered after being harassed and threatened by extremists.

In November, the worst ever fire incident killed 10 migrant workers. Civil society organisations called out the Government for their "failure to ensure equal rights for migrant workers, ensure basic safety standards and codes, both in the workplace and living quarters," noting that migrant workers were facing disproportionate impacts from natural and man-made disasters.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, the EU action in the Maldives focused on building resilient, inclusive and democratic society; protecting and empowering individuals notably through support to the rule of law, fair administration of justice, and support to transitional justice; promoting fundamental freedoms, media development and space for civil society and human rights defenders; promoting gender equality and women's rights; promoting human rights, transparency, accountability and environmental justice in business practices; and providing support to strengthening economic, social, cultural and labour rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Delegation and Member States carried out several high-level political dialogues throughout the year. The third Senior Officials Meeting took place in Malé in October, discussing, inter alia, governance, democracy, human rights, rule of law, security, and sectoral cooperation. The sixth EU-Maldives Policy Dialogue was held in November in a hybrid format, with the participation of 16 Heads of Missions, which was

preceded by a meeting with the President. The EU and Member States also continued to work closely with civil society, human rights defenders, and media.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU, through its programmes, continued providing support towards judicial reform and anti-corruption efforts, as well as security cooperation and environmental protection.

5. Multilateral context: The Maldives continued to demonstrate its commitment to multilateralism through engagement with international and regional fora. Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid's one-year tenure as the 76th President of the United Nations General Assembly ended in September. Senior officials participated in high-level meetings throughout the year, including at the 27th Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP27). The Maldives was elected member of the UN Human Rights Council for a three-year term beginning in 2023 and announced its candidature for membership of the UN Economic and Social Council (2027 – 2029) and UN Security Council (2033-2034). The Maldives also became a full member of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) in December.

Following a 10-day visit, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, cautiously welcomed the Government's commitment to bring women and children home from Syria, but called for more action on repatriation and reintegration.

Mongolia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Mongolia is committed to democracy, human rights and the rule of law, being able to look back at three decades of progress in those areas. Mongolia has also demonstrated its commitment to cooperation with international partners in these fields. Implementation of the relevant laws has however encountered challenges. During the reporting period, the reform of the judiciary has remained an important priority, with institutional capacities remaining low but continued positive normative and organisational developments. The public protests of December 2022 have shown the immense public interest in good governance and in fighting widespread corruption. Relevant amendments to the Criminal Code have been adopted, though the anti-corruption laws remain only partially implemented and investigations are perceived by public opinion as politically motivated.

The controversial proposals for new NGO laws were presented in the Parliament's agenda in January 2022, but were withdrawn for further deliberation following concerns expressed by civil society. In 2022, the Commissioner in charge of the National Preventive Measure against Torture within the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia (NHRCM) was appointed. Mongolian authorities also strive to counter gender-based violence and gender inequality, which remain to be tackled. A new law on labour and sexual harassment entered into force on 1 January 2022. The new Labour Law regulates non-discrimination and introduces a clause on no harassment and violence in the workplace. However, concerns remain related to the

lack of data on sexual harassment and on the low number of investigation and prosecutions in this area. Mongolia dropped by around 20 positions in the World Press Freedom index in 2022 (from 68 in 2021 to 90 in 2022 out of 180 States).

2. EU action - key focus areas: As regards protecting and empowering individuals, a major focus of activities in 2022 has been on gender equality and women's rights (including the fight against domestic violence and sexual harassment), the rights of the child, non-discrimination and rule of law. Action took various forms (project work, participation in conferences, social media activities).

During the reporting period, the EU's Budget Support Programme (Main objectives: 1. Promoting Employment; 2. Improving Transparency in Public Finance) provided a platform for supporting the creation of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. In addition, technical assistance was provided aiming at aligning Mongolian domestic legislation with international labour standards.

In line with the objective of promoting a global system for human rights and democracy, the EU implemented a joint initiative with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on business and human rights in 2022. The EU also supported several projects in favour of civil society (empowerment of young people, strengthening women's participation in community-level decision-making and in economic activities).

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights related topics were officially discussed by the EU and Mongolia in the Human Rights Dialogue that took place on 16 June 2022 in Ulaanbaatar. There was a particular focus on the complete abolition of the death penalty (removed from the Criminal Code, but still mentioned in the Constitution) and on child labour (need to prohibit the use of child jockeys in local horse races). The Human Rights Dialogue was followed by the fourth Meeting of the EU – Mongolia Joint Committee on 17 June 2022. Human rights issues were also discussed (from a GSP+ perspective) during the Trade Subcommittee held on 10 March 2022 by videoconference.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the EU continued implementation of its sector budget support programme to boost employment/TVET reforms and improve transparency in public finances in Mongolia. A tranche of EURO 6,5 million was disbursed in December 2022. An EU supported technical assistance project with UNDP, FAO and, ILO and UNIDO, continued its implementation with focus on transparency and oversight of the budget; employment creation in the non-mining sectors for youth and for persons with disabilities as well as compliance with international labour standards. In 2022, the EU continued to support human rights and democracy through several ongoing projects, carried out with Member States or other partners. The focus included: support to the governments commitment to ratify international human rights conventions; the fight against child labour; stakeholder consultations for possible future support to the reform of the judiciary; human rights due diligence through the business and human rect and civil society empowerment.

5. Multilateral context: In October 2022 the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention visited Mongolia. They issued a preliminary finding that the Mongolian justice system had progressed significantly. The Working Group however also found that arrests without a judicial warrant

were still the norm rather than the exception, and individuals were routinely interrogated in police custody without the presence of a lawyer. Adequate implementation of the law could not be taken for granted and decisions need to be effectively translated into practice. Courts were short of staff with case overload. A final report on the visit will be presented to the Human Rights Council in September 2023.

The Committee on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) and the Committee under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) also issued reports and concluding observations on Mongolia in 2022. The CEDAW observed that the absence of any court cases of discrimination against women and girls tried under the Criminal Code over the past five years may indicate that the definition of discrimination is too narrow and the burden of proof too heavy. The Committee called on Mongolia to adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation to prohibit all discrimination against women and girls in public and private spheres. The Committee also recommended that Mongolia adopt a comprehensive strategy to eliminate discriminatory stereotypes about women's roles and responsibilities in the family and society. The ISECR welcomed the legislative, institutional and policy measures taken to increase protection of economic, social and cultural rights in Mongolia, such as the Law on Prevention, Combat, and Reduction of Social and Economic Impacts of COVID-19 (2020), and the National Programme on Reducing Air and Environmental Pollution (2017). In general recommendations focused on the seemingly lack of awareness of the covenant among the authorities and the public.

Myanmar

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Myanmar has continued to deteriorate in every area. The military coup of 1 February 2021 initiated a cycle of violence, human rights violations and abuses that is likely to continue in the near future. Over the last two years, the Myanmar military has plunged the country into a deep political, economic and humanitarian crisis. The Myanmar military has sustained its violent crackdown on any form of dissent, including mass political detentions, extrajudicial killings, and the enforced disappearance of opposition supporters. The use of torture and sexual abuse as tools of terror are endemic.

According to the figures provided by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, since the coup, over 2 800 civilians have been killed while over 17 400 people have been arrested, with more than 13 600 still incarcerated. In July, the junta executed four political prisoners, including a former National League for Democracy lawmaker and a prominent pro-democracy activist, putting an end to a 30-year moratorium on the death penalty. Expanded military operations involved the indiscriminate use of artillery and airstrikes, killing civilians, damaging essential civilian infrastructure -including schools, hospitals and religious buildings- and forcing hundreds of thousands to flee. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported that since the coup, at least 382 children have been killed, with 111 reported cases where victims were burned alive, in apparent attempts by the security forces to destroy evidence. According to the Special Rapporteur, when the junta's attacks occur in

the context of armed conflict, they constitute probable war crimes. Over 17 million people are now in humanitarian need and almost 1.5 million people have been displaced from their homes, 1.2 million of which have been displaced in the last year alone. The military has continued to systematically deny humanitarian access to people in need in conflict areas. According to data collected by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, Myanmar ranked second in terms of fatalities from political violence (19,000) in 2022, behind Ukraine, and tops the global list in terms of weighted severity.

Internet shutdowns and the harassment and prosecution of journalists and individuals reporting on human rights have severely limited information flows and civic space. According to the 2022 World Press Freedom Index, the country fell from 136th to 176th of 180 countries worldwide. Myanmar ranked as the world's third worst jailer of journalists, with 42 behind bars when the Committee to Protect Journalists conducted its annual prison census in December 2022. The new "Registration of Associations Law" of October 2022 criminalizes non-compliance of national and international NGOs operating in Myanmar, hindering their ability to operate. In January 2023, the junta also enacted a new "Political Parties Registration Law", imposing draconian administrative obligations on political parties willing to run for election.

2. EU action on human rights and democracy - key focus areas: The EU further extended its restrictive measures on Myanmar and imposed two additional rounds of sanctions in February and November, expanding the list of individuals subjected to travel bans and asset freezes. By the end of 2022, this included 84 individuals and 11 entities and mirrors sanctions of like-minded countries. Human rights and democracy continue to be the cornerstone of the EU Delegation's work in Myanmar in line with its human rights and democracy strategy; however, the crisis has led to a suspension of all cooperation with government actors, making it increasingly challenging to collaborate with local civil society organisations (CSOs).

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Given that all formal interaction with the military regime was put on hold after the coup, no human rights dialogue took place during 2022, including the regular development cooperation and 'Everything But Arms' monitoring missions. The EU Delegation however engaged in dialogue with numerous local and international CSOs in order to align support and better understand the challenges they face since the coup, in terms of internally displaced persons and humanitarian needs. The engaged with the pro-democracy movement, including National Unity Government (NUG) representatives and other stakeholders. This included meetings at senior level. The EU Special Envoy for Myanmar engaged regional governments, the NUG, and other stakeholders throughout the year. Myanmar was not represented at the EU-ASEAN Commemorative Summit in December in Brussels.

4. EU financial engagement: Following the military coup in February 2021, all support channelled to the government was suspended. In line with the Council Conclusions of February 2021 enjoining the EU to support the population of Myanmar through the crisis, the EU adopted a 'back to basics approach' focused on supporting local communities and vulnerable populations and working through civil society and international organisations. Since the coup, the EU has allocated EUR 125 million to support programmes focusing on the Peace-Development-Humanitarian Nexus, on education at all levels, and on rural livelihoods,

labour rights of vulnerable workers, access to energy for the rural poor. Additional funding (EUR 8 million) supports displaced Myanmar populations along the Thai-Myanmar border. The EU also supported human rights defenders, journalists and independent media outlets, documentation of human rights abuses, and capacity building in international humanitarian and human rights law.

5. Multilateral context: At the UN, the EU engaged in the preparation of resolutions and statements at the General Assembly and Human Rights Council. The UN Security Council passed its first ever resolution on Myanmar in December 2022. The EU and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference also co-sponsored their annual resolution on the rights of minorities in Myanmar, including the Rohingya. EU and ASEAN leaders also agreed to redouble their collective efforts towards a peaceful solution in Myanmar.

Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2022 was a year of elections in Nepal, with local elections in May, and federal parliamentary and provincial elections on 20 November. The elections were orderly, but there is much scope to improve inclusivity for future elections, notably through a better representation of disadvantaged communities, and enabling the voting of millions of Nepali workers abroad and millions of undocumented Nepali people inside the country.

The year was also marked by parliamentary inactivity, leaving a huge legislative backlog for after the elections. Extensive consultations and in-depth preparatory work were carried out on the Transitional Justice bill. Its swift adoption by the new parliament and subsequent implementation would be a distinctive achievement in view of the completion of the peace process.

Overall, Nepal's human rights record remains on a positive trajectory, although - given the many challenges the country is still facing - progress remains slow. Discrimination related to caste, gender, ethnic or religious background, is the most crucial issue and together with corruption, the biggest impediment to development in Nepal.

Despite remarkable legislative achievements to ensure the rights of Dalits, discriminatory practices are still prevalent. For civil society organisations (CSOs) the applicable regulatory frameworks include various administrative hurdles imposed by federal and provincial authorities. The impacts of climate change, i.e. rapid warming in the Himalayas, pose growing problems in Nepal in the areas of health, safe water and sanitation, food, adequate housing, etc.

On a positive note, the Government of Nepal adopted the long awaited Phase II of the National Action Plan on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in August 2022. Also, Nepal registered significant progress on the World Press Index, rising from the 106th place in 2021 to the 76th in 2022.

2. EU action - key focus areas:

- *Protecting and empowering individuals*: A project implemented with the National Human Rights Commission contributed to the protection and promotion of Human Rights Defenders (HRD) and also helped the development of a new law on HRDs.
- *Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies*: The EU Delegation organised a roundtable on the representation of marginalised and disenfranchised communities during the election process and beyond, with a focus on the Dalits.
- *Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy*: The EU's ongoing projects made use of the recommendations issued during the 2021 Universal Periodic Review of Nepal.
- *New technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges*: Another roundtable on the growing phenomenon of gender-based violence (GBV) online resulted in the identification of the main issues at stake and some possible ways to tackle the matter in a more effective way.
- *Delivering by working together*: The EU, Germany, Finland and France implemented programmes in the areas of gender equality and the socio-economic empowerment of women; education; water and sanitation; support to victims of conflict and of GBV; support to HRDs; and the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda, including the training of police officers. Some of these programmes were implemented jointly, in a Team Europe approach, by the EU Delegation and EU Member States' Embassies on the ground.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2022, the EU Delegation continued to play an important role as the co-chair of the International Development Partners' Group, a member of the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Working Group, and of the Elections Working Group, as well as the chair of the Human Rights Defenders Working Group. All these mechanisms provided fora for assessing the human rights situation and following up with appropriate authorities.

The EU's significant sector budget support operations in the country continued to enable regular policy discussions with the government, including on mainstreaming human rights across all interventions.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU's sectoral programmes in the areas of water and sanitation, nutrition, education, green growth and local adaptation to climate change all contributed to the promotion of socio-economic rights. The ongoing federalism support programme focused on strengthening the capacities of provincial and local governments. Additionally, two new EU-funded projects were launched on an inclusive electoral reform process and for creating an enabling environment for CSOs.

5. Multilateral context: In the UN General Assembly, Nepal voted in favour of resolutions in March and October, defending the principles of the UN Charter and Ukraine's national sovereignty and territorial integrity. In the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in March, Nepal supported Ukraine's call for an urgent debate and condemning Russia's military aggression, and also voted favourably for establishing an independent Commission of Inquiry to investigate all alleged human rights violations in the context of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. However, Nepal abstained on the vote to suspend Russia's membership in the HRC.

During the 51st session of the HRC, Nepal abstained on the country-specific resolutions addressing the human rights situation in Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Russia, and voted against a resolution concerning a debate on human rights in Xinjiang.

Pakistan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The Constitution of Pakistan provides the necessary legal framework for fundamental rights, provincial autonomy and local governance to be guaranteed. However, the democracy and human rights situation in the country continued to present a mixed picture in 2022. Although a number of legislative measures have been initiated or adopted, political turmoil or weak institutions precluded their adoption or enactment. In many areas where legislation exists, relevant human and financial resources have not been sufficient to enforce existing laws, to train officials and to raise awareness within the public at large. The National Commission for Human Rights continues to play a crucial role in improving the human rights situation in Pakistan. Its capacity of operation should be further strengthened.

2022 saw a constitutional crisis around the ousting of former Prime Minister Imran Khan; a political crisis followed. However, the country managed a peaceful transition of power, for the third consecutive time, in April 2022.

In October 2022, the Pakistan Senate passed legislation further reducing the crimes punishable by a death sentence, by eliminating the death penalty for railway sabotage. An amendment to the Narcotics Bill striking off the death penalty for all narcotics offences was also passed by the National Assembly, and awaits Senate approval. Nevertheless, death penalty remains applicable for more than 30 crimes – including for non-lethal offenses – and is still pronounced regularly. Although no executions have taken place since 2018, nearly 4 000 people remain on death row or are awaiting the results of appeals, often for more than a decade, while a comprehensive revision of the mercy petition procedure has not been implemented.

Violence against women continues to remain widespread. However, Pakistan adopted the Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace (Amendment) Act 2022, which significantly expands the definition of workers and workplaces to cover domestic workers. The adoption of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill is still pending. Pakistan has yet to enact a law at federal level to increase the minimum age of marriage for girls to 18 (currently only the province of Sindh has such legislation in force). The Transgender Person (Protection of Rights) Act 2018, a landmark bill to secure transgender rights, has been challenged in front of the Federal Shariat Court in 2022.

In November 2022, Pakistan adopted the long awaited Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention & Punishment) Act 2022, which criminalises acts of torture, custodial death and rape addressing a major problem reported by human rights defenders. Enforced disappearances remain a worrying practice, which targets mainly human rights activists,

journalists and people voicing criticism of the authorities. According to the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, as of 31 October 2022 at least 2,210 cases remain unresolved. Legislation criminalizing and prosecuting enforced disappearances is still missing. A law drafted by the previous government has not materialised in the Parliament. Civil society organisations and activists notified additional restrictions, problems with registration processes, and other administrative burdens being introduced to limit their capacity to operate.

Freedom of religion or belief and rights of persons belonging to minorities continue to be areas of serious concern. Religious intolerance, forced conversion and hate speech often lead to discrimination and violence; the stringent blasphemy laws are reported to be continuously abused. Religious minorities report regularly cases of discrimination and threats, in particular the Ahmadiyya Community whose religious self-identification as Muslims is denied. Further concerns remain regarding freedom of expression and freedom of media. The Pakistani Media Authority filters internet traffic and occasionally blocks access to websites or social media platforms. Pakistan continues to rank among the most dangerous places for journalists and media workers. In 2022, seven Pakistani journalists were killed in line of duty, whereas the perpetrators of such attacks often enjoy impunity.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The European Union Delegation addressed human rights issues through engagement at various levels, including with government and other key stakeholders, civil society organisations and human rights activists. Particular fields of activity were access to justice and rule of law; freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression, as well as labour rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore, visited Pakistan in February 2022 emphasising the EU's position on human rights questions. Pakistan continued to be a beneficiary of the EU's preferential trade regime (GSP+) and undertook to implement 27 international conventions covering human and labour rights, environmental protection, and good governance. As part of the last monitoring process under the current legal regime, a monitoring mission visited the country in June 2022 calling for the implementation of the commitments by Pakistani authorities. The EU-Pakistan Joint Commission in October 2022 and its Sub-group on Democracy, Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights in September 2022 assessed and encouraged progress in the key areas of human rights and democracy. In September 2022, Members of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights visited Pakistan, and discussed various human rights issues and called for necessary reforms. In November 2022, the EU-Pakistan Political Dialogue took place, providing opportunities to exchange on matters of common interest, including on human rights and democracy. At the same time, the Chairperson of The National Commission for Human Rights, Rabiya Javeri Agha, visited Brussels exchanging views with EU institutions and civil society organisation on human rights issues, notably in the context of the GSP+ monitoring process.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU continued its financial support to projects aiming at increasing awareness and capacities among stakeholders around death penalty, prison and torture reforms. In December 2022, the Delegation of the European Union signed a three-year project to increase compliance with human rights standards enshrined in the Constitution and

Pakistan's international treaty obligation and to protect vulnerable prisoners from wrongful executions and unsafe prison conditions. The EU supported a project to encourage women's participation and leadership in public life in the Sindh province. The EU also funded a project to foster public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms. Through the programme 'Promoting the Rule of Law and Enhancing the Criminal Justice System', the EU is working with the federal Government to strengthen access to justice and enhance capacities of the rule law and justice institutions for better service delivery for all. Further, the EU supported in October 2022 the Asma Jahangir Conference, the most important platform in Pakistan creating a space for the legal community and the civil society to exchange on issues related to civil and political rights.

5. Multilateral context: Pakistan is a member of the Human Rights Council until December 2023, hence providing an opportunity for the country to engage actively on human rights issues. As part of the Like-Minded Group, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation, Pakistan served as chair within the Geneva fora. In particular, Pakistan abstained on all resolutions related to Russia's war in Ukraine.

Philippines

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation in the Philippines: Since the Marcos administration took office on 1 July 2022, some positive developments in the area of human rights and democracy were noted. The new administration has shown willingness to engage with the international community on human rights, having actively participated in multiple mechanisms of the UN Human Rights Council and having invited UN Special Rapporteurs to the country. Moreover, the government has stated that it has no intention of reintroducing the death penalty. While President Marcos has vowed to continue the 'war on drugs', he has indicated it will focus more on prevention and rehabilitation and happen in accordance with international human rights commitments. The government has also made statements on its intention to dispel the notion of impunity. These initial steps and statements by the government, as well as the implementation of any new legislation, will need to be assessed in practice.

Some progress was made under the Duterte administration in terms of, among others, increasing the protection of children against rape and sexual abuse by banning child marriage and raising the minimum age of consent from 12 to 16 years. Additionally a new Anti-Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children Law ensures better protection of minors from online exploitation. President Marcos has also maintained continuity in the government's approach to peace in Mindanao's Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. However, press freedom and the space for civil society remain under pressure, as human rights defenders (including environmental defenders, journalists, union activists, church workers, and humanitarian workers) are often legally and physically harassed, and in some cases even killed. The high-profile cases of former Senator Leila de Lima and of Maria Ressa have not been finalised. The government took some initiatives to advance accountability for human rights violations and abuses though progress is slow. Extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances,

impunity and red tagging remain important challenges, as well as lengthy pre-trial detention, and limited access to justice for victims of human rights violations. Additionally, disinformation was a matter of concern especially in the context of the 2022 electoral campaign.

2. EU action on human rights and democracy - key focus areas: The EU's human rights and democracy priorities in the Philippines include fighting impunity, promoting accountability and the rule of law, including the support to an evidence-based approach to the fight against illegal drugs; strengthening the civic and democratic space; support for freedom of expression online and offline, access to information and combating disinformation; promoting the rights of the child, and eliminating inequalities, combating discrimination and empowering women and indigenous people.

To protect and empower individuals, and to build resilient, inclusive and democratic societies, the EU Delegation has publicly advocated for human rights defenders and press freedom and supported initiatives to fight disinformation and restrictions of the civic space. The EU Delegation and Member States' embassies have monitored the trial of Senator de Lima and closely followed developments restricting media workers, as well as the abuse of cyber-libel legislation. In the case of Maria Ressa the EU raised concerns over the respect for freedom of expression, as well as for the rule of law. The EU's advocacy against the reintroduction of the death penalty continued. The EU continues to engage with the Philippines in the context of the country's commitments to core human rights conventions through the monitoring process of the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) scheme.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The Second Sub-Committee Meeting on Good Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights under the EU – Philippines Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was convened in Manila on 6 October 2022. Both the EU and the Philippines reaffirmed their commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, while recognising the need for further action on a number of human rights issues. The GSP+ monitoring mission of February 2022, assessed the progress, and provided an additional platform for continued engagement, on human rights and labour rights issues. The renewal of GSP+ was also discussed in October 2022 at the 12th Inter-Parliamentary Meeting between the EU and the Philippines.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU's financial engagements with the government has focused on the areas of justice reform and support to national human rights institutions especially to increase their capacity to investigate, resulting in more effective prosecution of serious human rights cases. The EU and some Member States have committed funding to support the first Philippines/UN national joint programme on human rights. The EU is supporting two projects on the protection of journalists and addressing the issue of disinformation. The EU has also supported the Mindanao Peace Process and action to prevent violent extremism. The EU also provided support to civil society, such as two grant contracts signed in December 2022 that will provide support to environmental human rights defenders and two grants that will implement activities to combat the continuing issue of child labour. The EU is also funding a new project called "YNFORM: Youth-led Network for the Right to Information," which aims to support and strengthen critical youth engagement in promoting democratic processes.

5. Multilateral context: The Philippines underwent a review by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Human Rights Committee (HRC) treaty bodies. The High Commissioner for Human Rights (HCHR) published a report on the progress of human rights in the Philippines and called for a transformative approach to issues such as drug law enforcement and counter-terrorism, and to end rhetoric that puts human rights defenders at risk. The report was followed by an Enhanced Interactive Dialogue with the UN Resident Coordinator. The fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) also took place, highlighting the concerns mentioned above. The Philippine government accepted 200 of 297 UPR recommendations, mostly in the area of economic and social rights. However, it downplayed the impact of red-tagging and made clear that recommendations regarding same-sex marriage, abortion and divorce will not be accepted. A visit of the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children took place in November and December, and visits of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and the Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial summary or arbitrary executions were agreed for 2023. In the UN General Assembly the Philippines voted to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council. It systematically disassociated from any references to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in resolutions. It supported the resolution regarding the moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

Singapore

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, Singapore repealed the colonial era Section 377A of the Penal Code that had criminalised sex between men. Parliament concurrently approved an amendment to the Constitution to prevent the definition of marriage as a "union between a man and a woman" from being challenged in the courts. After more than 100 consultations over two years, the government released a White Paper on Singapore Women's Development with 25 action plans to tackle gender inequality. The extent of the consultation exercise and the ambition of the agenda marked a significant evolution in the government's approach to gender equality. In 2022, after a halt during the pandemic, Singapore resumed executions of at least eleven death row prisoners, all convicted of drug trafficking. At least 10 new death sentences were pronounced during the year and a large number of prisoners remain on death row. Concerns regarding freedom of assembly remained, but as the country reopened its so-called "Speakers' Corner" in the end of March 2022, over 400 Singaporeans participated in a protest against the death penalty on 3 April 2022. While Singapore's relative ranking on the World Press Freedom Index improved from 160th in 2021 to 134th in 2022 (out of 180 countries). The Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act (FICA) partially entered into force on 7 July 2022, giving the government power to order social media companies and internet service providers to investigate foreign "hostile information campaigns". As of May 2022, 121 requests were registered under the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), whereby any Singaporean Minister can request false information to be removed from the internet or corrected. Migrant rights continue to be restricted. However, the government updated the rules for the transport of migrant workers in October 2022 and the Ministry of Manpower announced in September that companies in higher risk sectors for workplace

fatalities are required to conduct a mandatory safety time-out to review safety procedures. The fourth Enabling Masterplan to ensure greater inclusion for persons with disabilities was approved in August 2022.

2. EU action on human rights and democracy - key focus areas: On 22 August 2022, a statement by the spokesperson commended the government of Singapore for announcing the repeal of Section 377A of the Penal Code. The EU continued its advocacy for a moratorium on the death penalty and called for a review of the use of capital punishment. In 2022, six joint local statements preceding executions and five statements by the spokesperson after carrying out the executions were published. The EU flew the rainbow flag at the EU Residence on the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. On 7 December 2022, the EU Delegation organised its annual Human Rights Day seminar, focusing on the "Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities". The EU Delegation also actively supported the implementation of the conventions that Singapore has already committed to, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In the domain of new technologies, it organised a human rights seminar on "Women in the Digital Age: Gender equality in the digital sphere" in April.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The death penalty was raised at the annual EU-Singapore Senior Officials' Meeting, which took place in April. The gradual lifting of COVID-19 safe management measures over 2022 brought back in-person meetings and events, providing the opportunity for more frequent interactions and engagement also with civil society. The EU Delegation together with the Embassy of France screened the film "The Apprentice" about the Death Penalty in January, followed by a discussion with the filmmaker. Through the #EUatYourSchool initiative, the EU Delegation and Member States' embassies reached out to over 10,000 pupils in 30 schools across Singapore and presented the European Union.

4. EU financial engagement: Financing of civil society organisations by foreign entities remains prohibited in Singapore. The EU Delegation's activities consisted of monitoring and reporting, coordinating closely with Member States and international partners, as well as organising meetings and events with members of local civil society and supporting discussions on human rights in Singapore.

5. Multilateral context: Singapore has taken a strong stand to condemn Russia's aggression against Ukraine based on international law and respect for the UN Charter. It co-sponsored UN General Assembly resolutions condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine, as well as the UN Human Rights Council Resolution 49/1 on the "Situation of human rights in Ukraine stemming from the Russian aggression". Singapore was the only country in ASEAN to adopt financial sanctions against Russia in response to its aggression. Singapore came under increased international criticism, including by members of the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, for the increase in executions. Singapore continued to lead in advocating at the UN General Assembly Third Committee for retention of the death penalty. It voted against the biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, which received 127 votes in favour. Singapore introduced an amendment in defence of the sovereign right of states to apply capital punishment, which gathered 103 votes in favour.

Sri Lanka

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2022 was marked by an unprecedented economic crisis that led to a massive and mostly peaceful social movement "Aragalaya" ('struggle') from April to July 2022. Thousands of Sri Lankan citizens rallied across the island irrespective of ethnic, gender and class divides against the Rajapaksa government's perceived mismanagement of the economy, corruption and lack of accountability. Demonstrations led to the resignation of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and of the cabinet in May and of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in July. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, who was then elected President by Parliament in accordance with the Constitution, took a hard stance against the protesters from the outset of his presidency.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act with its wide-ranging powers has long been one of the key concerns to the EU. After 43 years since its enactment, the amendments to the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) of March 2022 were welcomed as a positive first step. However, a number provisions of the act and its use against student leaders of the Aragalaya movement remained of concern. Three demonstrators were arrested under the PTA in August 2022. This went against the commitments and reassurances by the Government to the EU in early July 2022 that a de facto moratorium on the use of the PTA was firmly in place, pending further review of the legislation. The Minister of Justice announced in August 2022 that a National Security Act was being drafted to replace the PTA and appointed an expert committee to hand over a draft legislation at the beginning of 2023.

A significant benchmark was reached with the 21st amendment (21A) to the Constitution in October 2022. 21A aims at reversing the effects of the 20th amendment, with which Gotabaya Rajapaksa had centralised power with the Presidency. Most importantly, 21A re-establishes the Constitutional Council, over which the president has influence but no unilateral power, and which shall make nominations to key independent institutions and commissions. The Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission, downgraded in 2022 for lack of accountability and conflict of interest during 2021, had made commendable efforts after the appointment of a new Chair in December 2021, and will see new appointments.

The EU continues to encourage the Sri Lankan government to cooperate with the UN Human Rights Council (UN HRC) to address transitional justice. Sri Lanka however continues to reject UN HRC resolutions (i.e. 51/1 at the 51st session) insisting on domestic mechanisms, which, however, are not effective.

The controversial "One Country, One Law" Task Force under the leadership of a Buddhist monk Gnanasera Thero, known for his radical views, ended its mandate in June 2022 and was not extended. Aiming at a solution to the ethnic issue, the President launched an all-party dialogue at the end of 2022, but many communities remain sceptical.

The women's rights saw a step forward with a draft bill on the protection of women's rights and gender equality, introduced by the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus. The Bill aims to establish an independent "National Women's Commission" to lead on legal and policy reform, and establish independent Ombudsman for women's rights.

According to Transparency International Corruption Index, there has not been much progress in terms of fighting corruption in Sri Lanka: in the latest data covering 2021, Sri Lanka ranked 102/180. Its related score (37/100) is close to the result from the previous four years (38/100 from 2017 to 2020).

2. EU action - key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, EU action in Sri Lanka focused on building resilient, inclusive and democratic society, protecting and empowering individuals and promoting a global system for human rights and democracy. In particular, and i.a. through dedicated programmes on justice and reconciliation, the EU continued supporting - the rule of law and access to justice; promoting space for civil society, human rights defenders, and media; supporting the rights of persons belonging to minorities for an inclusive and peaceful society; promoting gender equality and women's rights, social and environmental rights in business, as well as labour rights. Eventually, the EU led its public diplomacy through the strategic use of longer campaigns, including in 2022, on peace and reconciliation, gender-based violence, as well as specific ad hoc actions promoting peaceful solution to conflicts.

With regard to maritime movements of Rohingya refugees, the EU noted Sri Lanka's efforts in rescuing distressed boats within their search and rescue areas in 2022. The EU continues urging authorities in the region to continue working with the UN Human Rights Council (UNHCR) and civil society to arrange safe community hosting arrangements.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Delegation and Member States carried out dialogues throughout the year with the President(s), Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and other representatives of government on issues impacting long-term peace, political stability and economic recovery in Sri Lanka. In the meetings with the Minister of Justice, specific reforms and possible avenues for meaningful action on human rights were discussed. The issues related to upholding human rights, promoting the Rule of Law and fostering reconciliation were discussed in-depth in the EU-Sri Lanka Working Group on Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights in October, and were addressed in the EU-Sri Lanka Joint Commission in February 2022.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU has funded several projects promoting social cohesion (e.g. Strengthening Social Cohesion and Peace in Sri Lanka (SCOPE), EUR 11 million total, co-financed by the German Federal Foreign Office with EUR 3 million), countering disinformation and hate speech, and providing support to the justice system focusing on groups in vulnerable situations (e.g. Justice Reform programme (JURE), EUR 18 million EU contribution, co-financed by UNDP with EUR 1 million), as well as women's rights and gender equality (e.g. *Speak Out; Women-led Human Rights Promotion; Women in Learning and Leadership (WILL); Let the Women Decide the Margin)*.

5. Multilateral context: At the 51st session of the UN HRC in September-October 2022, the EU reiterated in a statement its support to Sri Lanka in recovering from the economic crisis and moving forward on the reconciliation agenda. The EU called for further reform of the PTA in compliance with international standards and called for upholding the right to freedom of expression. The EU encouraged the government to cooperate with the UN HRC and its mechanisms to address issues such as impunity and discrimination faced by minority groups.

Thailand

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, some steps were taken towards Thailand's alignment with major international human rights conventions. For example, the revision process of the draft amendment to modernise the Labour Relations Act was announced and could pave the way for alignment with international standards and ratification of the ILO core conventions. In October, the Law on the Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearances was passed. Despite Civil Society Organizations' (CSO) criticism that the law had been partially watered down, it was nonetheless an important step towards Thailand's alignment with international human rights conventions. Restrictions under the Emergency Decree, in place since 2020, which had been criticised to impact negatively on the freedom of expression and assembly, were gradually lifted and the Decree finally terminated on 1 October. Thailand saw smaller student-led protests throughout 2022.

During the APEC Summit, there were reports of disproportionate use of force against protesters by the authorities with rubber bullets fired at close range. CSOs expressed concerns that the authorities continued to arrest and prosecute anti-establishment activists, including minors, under the lèse-majesté law, with sedition or contempt of court charges, for violations of the Emergency Decree, and under the Public Assembly and the Computer Crimes Acts. Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP) allegedly continued targeting human rights defenders. CSOs also observed a trend of stricter bail conditions and prolonged pre-trial detention of some activists. CSOs also feared that a draft law on the operations of not-for-profit organisations (NPO) could jeopardise the right to freedom of association. Some journalists raised concerns about the draft law on media ethics and professional standards promotion entailing the establishment of a regulatory body with powers to issue and revoke media licenses. Progress on bills aimed at legalising same-sex unions stalled in parliament. On the death penalty, notwithstanding a decrease in the number of death row prisoners, Thailand has seen no significant step towards abolition. Since the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021, cases of refoulement and forcible return of refugees and asylum seekers were reported, while Thai authorities claim that these returns are voluntary. Progress in the third round of peace talks held in January 2022 between the authorities and the main separatist group in the Deep South seem to have stalled and violent incidents occurred more frequently.

2. EU action on human rights and democracy - key focus areas: With a view to protecting and empowering individuals, the EU has made efforts to promote the protection of civil and political rights as well as the business and human rights agenda. The EU continued regular dialogue with various interlocutors in the government, civil society, human rights defenders and the business sector. Demarches, dialogues, public diplomacy campaigns, and attendance or participation in discussions and diplomatic briefings were conducted. With the objective to support resilient, inclusive and democratic societies, the EU remained committed to working towards inclusive, participatory, and rights-based approaches to development by supporting the improvement of the legal framework to protect non-Thais, marginalised groups and

individuals in vulnerable situations, as well as paying close attention to gender issues. With regard to increased maritime movements of Rohingya refugees, the EU continued to urge the Thai authorities and other regional governments to fulfil obligations to rescue distressed boats within their search and rescue areas, allow disembarkation and access to humanitarian assistance, and work with UNHCR and civil society to arrange safe community hosting arrangements. The EU Delegation and Member States' embassies actively coordinated and increased the amount of diplomatic trial observations in 2022.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In December 2022, the EU and Thailand signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which will enhance political dialogue on a number of issues of mutual interest. With the signing of the PCA, respect for human rights and democratic principles were recognised as one of the cornerstones of the EU-Thailand partnership. At the 16th Senior Officials' Meeting in November 2022 the EU and Thailand looked forward to the implementation of the PCA and discussed areas for cooperation on human rights. Locally, the EU Delegation and EU Member States Embassies resumed in-person engagement with the government on human rights. Meetings were held with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee and the House of Representatives Committee on Law, Justice and Human Rights to voice concerns over the draft not-for-profit organisations (NPO) law. The EU Delegation also regularly met the Ministry of Justice to enhance cooperation.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation worked with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which cooperated with the Ministry of Justice and local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) on refugees, minorities, LGBTI, migrant workers and human rights defenders. The EU continued to provide legal aid and advocacy support for activists including minors who faced serious criminal charges in relation to their participation in political protests. The EU also financially supported the OHCHR to continue its work with stakeholders including key government agencies, civil society and the diplomatic community to enhance the alignment of the Thai legal framework, policies and practices with international human rights norms and standards. In 2022, six projects (EUR 12 million) financed UNHCR and NGOs to support nine refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border while ECHO committed a further EUR 2 million of humanitarian assistance for the Myanmar crisis.

5. Multilateral context: The EU Delegation worked with Member States and others to raise human rights and democracy concerns with government bodies. The EU Delegation led and joined several demarches, including on the UN Call for Humanitarian Action, the universalisation of the Arms Trade Treaty, the Hague Code of Conduct, the moratorium on the use of the death penalty, EU priorities at the UN General Assembly Third Committee, and on the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Following the resumption of in-person meetings, the EU Delegation was able to conduct two successful public diplomacy campaigns related to human rights. A public outreach campaign on the abolition of the death penalty was launched in October. Another was conducted on 10 December 2022 to mark Human Rights Day.

Timor-Leste

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2022 was an important election year. Timor-Leste elected a new President, and the EU deployed and Election Observation Mission (EOM). In a competitive, but peaceful political environment, the electoral process was credible and transparent. Timor-Leste has always been a like-minded country sharing with the EU the values of democracy, fundamental freedoms and human rights. With the arrival of Nobel Peace Prize winner Jose Ramos-Horta at the Presidency, Timor-Leste has become more vocal and active on human rights commenting publicly human rights situations in other parts of the world, and advocating for improved social and economic rights of vulnerable segments of the population such as people with disabilities, children, and the LGBTI community. The human rights challenges include: poverty and inequalities; gender violence; decent work; high youth unemployment; deficient health and education systems; malnutrition and stunting of children.

2022 saw progress in the area of democracy and human rights. Freedom of religion and interreligious dialogue gained more prominence and attention in the public discourse thanks to the strong involvement of the President in the works of the "Abu Dhabi Declaration"[28], and the Timorese Parliament adopting a resolution in support of the Declaration. In May 2022, the government approved the long-awaited ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities along with the Optional Protocol. The National Human Rights Institute (Provedoria) played an important role during the Presidential elections, monitoring actively the respect of human rights during the electoral process.

2. EU action - key focus areas:

- *Human rights education*: With financial support from the EU the National University of Timor-Leste built the first ever Human Rights Centre of the country, hosted within the premises of the University. This programme went a long way in creating awareness and educating about the importance of human rights.
- *Gender equality and women* empowerment: With support from the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, Timor-Leste continued making tangible progress in sharpening awareness about gender-based violence (GBV), initiating behavioural change and equipping authorities and communities with policies, systems, skills, and practices to accelerate the fight against GBV, to support survivors and to empower women and girls.
- *Children:* Through support in the nutrition area, the EU targeted children suffering from very high levels of malnutrition and resulting stunting. Through a multisector approach, outreach programmes were organised and nutrition services were implemented in health facilities.
- *People with disabilities and LGBTI:* With the help of EIDHR, the Delegation supported several initiatives to protect the rights of, and to empower vulnerable people, such as people with disabilities and LGBTI who were the beneficiaries of a targeted call for proposals in 2022. It was the very first time that a development partner in Timor-Leste launched a specific call for these two segments of society focusing on their social and economic rights.
- *Democratic foundations:* Timor-Leste benefitted from an Election Observation Mission (EOM) for its fifth Presidential elections held in two rounds in April/May. The exercise

[28] A joint statement on "culture of mutual respect" and peaceful co-existence signed by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, in 2019.

confirmed the excellent collaboration from past elections. The Timorese authorities ensured a smooth operation and engaged actively with the Observers, eager to build further reforms on the recommendations offered by the final report.
With the help of EU in the areas of decentralisation and public finance management, the country could also take action to further strengthen its governance institutions and processes. Institutional and legal frameworks were built in both areas, capacities were reinforced to perform tasks and responsibilities at local level.

- *Decent work*: Work has progressed with the formulation and adoption of a Regional Trade Programme which, through its support to Timor-Leste's ASEAN and WTO accession efforts, will indirectly contribute to the improvement and standardisation of labour conditions thanks to legislative reform and upgrading.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU and its Delegation were actively monitoring the preparation and conduct of the 2022 Presidential elections. The EU was actively engaged in the follow up and the implementation of the recommendations stemming from the EOM's final report. The EU's support contributed to the creation of a real movement for the elimination of violence against women, in particular domestic violence, which continues to be one of the human rights challenges in the country.

4. EU financial engagement: EU financial engagement is in line with Timor–Leste's strategic priorities to become an upper-middle-income country by 2030 based on sustainable and inclusive growth, enabling it to improve infrastructure, worker skills, education, training and health systems, and combat poverty and malnutrition. Under the joint EU-UN Gender Spotlight Initiative's, EU support (EUR 15 million) contributed to making tangible progress in awareness raising and fight against gender based violence.

5. Multilateral context: There was a high degree of convergence between the EU and the Third Committee in New York and at the Human Rights Council in Geneva. In July, Timor-Leste joined the "LGBTI Core Group" in New York, an informal group of 41 states and the Delegation of the EU, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, and OutRight Action International, which collaborate in mainstreaming LGBTI equality at the UN headquarters with special focus on the elimination of discrimination and violence against the LGBTI community.

Vietnam

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Restrictions on political and civil rights in Vietnam continued in 2022, especially as regards freedom of expression and association. The space for civil society is continuously shrinking. Several new laws and decrees introducing further restrictions in areas of cybersecurity, the work of NGOs and freedom of religion were either issued or under preparation. Journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders, as well as environmental activists, continued to be arrested and prosecuted on vague charges of crimes against national security or tax evasion and given long jail sentences in trials with little or no public access. During the year, appeal courts upheld several high

profile convictions. There continue to be numerous allegations of unfair trails, including denial of legal representation; harsh physical and administrative conditions in prison, including prolonged incommunicado pre-trial detention; denial of adequate medical treatment; denial of family visits including through punitive transfers; and solitary confinement. Vietnam has continued to address the implementation of labour rights. It has committed to ratify the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention N. 87 in 2023 and to present a decree on workers' representative organisations, to implement the 2019 Labour Code. It has also increasingly been making efforts to combat child labour and to promote gender equality and LGBTI rights. The death penalty remains a serious concern and continues to be applied in a non-transparent fashion, with data on executions not published by the authorities. Concerns over the rights of religious minorities and the administration of land rights remain. Media freedom is still severely limited: print, broadcast, online and electronic media are heavily controlled; access to politically independent websites is blocked, and social media companies are forced to close accounts or remove content critical of the government. Vietnam is ranked 174th out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders 2022 World Press Freedom Index.

2. EU action on human rights and democracy - key focus areas: EU priorities focus on freedom of expression, including for human rights defenders; access to information; freedom of religion or belief; civil society and participative democracy; equal rights and respect for diversity (including gender-related issues, people with disabilities, LGBTI); rights of the youth and child; the rule of law and fair administration of justice; abolition of the death penalty; compliance with international human rights law, and effective implementation of human rights mechanisms. In terms of action, the EU gave particular attention to protecting and empowering individuals. The EU Delegation was also actively engaged in actions aimed at supporting human rights activists. The EU together with EU Member States, who share the commitment to delivering by working together, arranged various social media campaigns, activities and events to promote human rights, including on the occasion of the World Day against the Death Penalty, International Human Rights Day and International Women's Day. Member States also arranged various events on gender equality, LGBTI rights and the situation for civil society, with the aim of helping build a more resilient and inclusive society.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights have been mainstreamed in bilateral discussions at all levels with the Government of Vietnam. The EU, in close coordination with EU Member States and like-minded countries, maintained regular exchanges on human rights with Vietnam and reiterated requests for full implementation of all international human rights obligations and for the release of all persons detained for exercising their freedom of expression, both online and offline. The EU and Member States submitted many requests to observe trials of human rights defenders, to have access to prisoners, and on the provision of legal aid, medical support and for allowing family visits. However, almost all of these requests went unanswered or were denied. On 25 August, the EEAS spokesperson issued a statement on the conviction on appeal of Pham Doan Trang and other activists. The EU-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue and the EU-Vietnam Committee on Good Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights took place after a hiatus due to the Covid pandemic.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU continued in cooperation with Vietnam to implement the EU programme for Justice and Legal Empowerment (EU JULE), which supports, *inter alia*, justice

sector reform, access to justice for the most vulnerable, and the implementation of the international human rights conventions to which Vietnam is a party (including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights the Convention Against Torture, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Women and the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities). The EU also supported actions of civil society organisations in various domains, including gender equality and prevention of gender-based violence, ethnic minority rights (including land rights), children's rights, business and human rights, civil society empowerment, environmental rights, promotion of information on human rights issues online, freedom of expression, rights of migrants/returnees and informal workers, Covid-19 response and cultural rights. Throughout the year, the EU substantially advocated for providing technical assistance to support the revision of the labour code and the ratification of all core ILO Conventions and their implementation. The EU also continued to offer technical assistance for the implementation of the accepted recommendations under the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The EU is currently discussing a new programme on Rule of Law and Human Rights (EU JULE+) with the government.

5. Multilateral context: In terms of cooperation in multilateral fora, the EU has maintained a dialogue with Vietnam on international human rights issues, including in the context of the 77th UN General Assembly. Vietnam has refrained from condemning the Russian aggression and has abstained from all UN votes on the issue, apart from the vote to suspend Russia's membership of the Human Rights Council where it voted against. Dialogue on implementation of the recommendations to Vietnam under the third cycle of the UPR continued in 2022. Vietnam has accepted 241 of the 271 recommendations proposed. In March 2022, Vietnam submitted a voluntary mid-term report on implementation of the recommendations. Although the submission was a positive sign of engagement, the report was lacking in substance and clarity. On Human Rights Day in December 2022, Vietnam organised an event to launch the UPR process for the fourth cycle. However, a planned presentation of the involvement of NGOs was cancelled.

Oceania

Australia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation Australia continued to have a positive and solid human rights record and remained engaged in advocating progress on human rights issues in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. Key measures undertaken by the Australian Government in 2022 include a proposal for a referendum on an Aboriginal Voice to Parliament; the appointment of Bronte Moules as first Ambassador for Human Rights and of Stephanie Copus-Campbell as Australia's next Ambassador for Gender Equality; the long-awaited National Anti-Corruption Commission Bill; the Human Rights Commission Legislation Amendment Bill; the release of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 and the creation of a National Strategy Advisory Group under the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030. Australia presents the following key human right

challenges: the overall condition of Australia's indigenous population, the treatment of people in detention, the unresolved status and condition of migrants trying to enter Australia by sea, including refugees/asylum seekers –Australia has announced a review of the migration system- and the still very low age of criminal responsibility.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Based on the five strands of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-24, the EU and EU Member States undertook the following action:

- *Protecting and empowering individuals:* the EU Delegation raised awareness on indigenous rights, including by hosting a lecture by prof. Peter Yu, Vice-President First Nations at the Australian National University.
- *Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies*: the EU Delegation promoted International Women Day and mediated a meeting on online safety regulation and child online protection; EU Member States were also very active in the organisation of human rights-related activities, such as the organisation of an event Celebrating Women in Science, the launch of a network for professional women primarily working in STEM and other male dominated spheres or a virtual 'visible women' campaign.
- *Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy:* the EU Delegation engaged with the UN Human Rights Regional Office on relevant updates in the Pacific Region, sponsored the 2022 Kep Enderby Memorial Lecture, held by the Australian Human Rights Commission to debate about the Racial Discrimination Act, racism and human rights and EU Head of Delegation delivered the 2022 Schuman Lecture at Australian National University (ANU), highlighting the values of democracy and human rights. Several Member States joined European efforts in International fora (66th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, UNGA 77 Third Committee).
- *New technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges:* the EU Delegation monitored and raised awareness on fake news and information manipulation, as well as on child abuse and cyberbullying through its social media channels.
- *Delivering by working together:* the EU Delegation, in cooperation with several Member States, sponsored initiatives aimed at raising awareness in Australia on the human rights violations perpetuated in Ukraine on account of Russia. Several Member States joined European efforts in advocacy campaign with Australia in international fora (e.g. UNGA 77 Third Committee). Several MS participated in gender issues initiatives, such as the #orangetheworld campaign and "Girls run the world" initiative.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Main actions of the EU focused on engaging with Australian officials on human rights issues through high level meetings/dialogues, demarches and outreach for common actions at international level. EU engagement with Australia on human rights and development issues in the region continued. The last formal EU-Australia human rights consultations took place on 31 August 2022 and were followed by an informal round of consultations on 10 September ahead of the Human Rights Council session.

The EU regularly engages with the Australian Government, the country's human rights agencies and bodies, and NGOs to promote good human rights policies and support initiatives to counter racism, gender equality, and other human rights promotion activities. The EU supported and participated in international human rights-related days and events, especially via social media engagement, alone and in cooperation with Member States. The EU and several Member States engaged in activities aimed at raising awareness on gender equality

and domestic violence, such as the Orange the World campaign, and an International Women's day concert.

4. EU financial engagement: There is no significant EU financial engagement in Australia.

5. Multilateral context: There is a high degree of convergence between the EU and Australia in relation to priorities for the promotion of human rights in international institutions. Engaging with the multilateral system is a key pillar of Australia's foreign policy. As part of the so-called "JUSCANZ++", Australia is part of a close circle of likeminded countries comprising Japan, US, Canada, and New Zealand with which the EU liaises very actively and regularly at the United Nations. In 2022, Australia co-sponsored 25 resolutions of the 77th UNGA Third Committee, 19 resolutions at the Human Rights Council (HRC) 49, 13 resolutions at HRC 50, and 27 resolutions at HRC 51. Australia joined other UN member countries in condemning China's serious abuses in Xinjiang.

Cooperation in UNGA Third Committee between Australia and the EU is commendable, in particular in the core group of co-sponsors on resolutions on the country situation in DPRK and on human rights in Iran. Australia has been particularly vocal on climate change, being a priority of the new government at the UNGA Third committee session in the context of its effects on indigenous peoples and youth. Australia is also leading the Interregional Task Force on the biennial resolution on the death penalty moratorium. Australia has supported all Ukraine-related human rights initiatives.

Australia is a signatory and has ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in 2017. However, the UN Committee Against Torture accused Australia of breaching its human rights obligations, after UN inspectors cancelled a tour of detention facilities due to a lack of cooperation.

The UN Human Rights Committee has found that Australia has in the past failed to adequately protect indigenous Torres Islanders against adverse impacts of climate change, and that Australia's negligence violated their rights to enjoy their culture and be free from arbitrary interferences with their private life, family and home. However, since their election in May 2022, the Labor government has made significant commitments to the indigenous communities at home (the Indigenous Voice to Parliament), and is working on streamlining indigenous affairs in all its policies, including foreign affairs and multilateral engagement.

Fiji

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: At this moment, Fiji is at a crossroads as a new coalition government entered into power in December 2022 after 16 years of single-party rule. Access to political rights and civil liberties in Fiji is assessed as partly free by the Freedom House. The repressive climate that followed a 2006 coup has eased since

democratic elections were held in 2014, 2018 and 2022. The relatively smooth transition of power in December 2022 marks a crucial moment in Fiji's democracy.

Fiji has abolished the death penalty and ratified all core human rights instruments (so far as the only Pacific country). Alongside Fiji's active multilateral engagement on human rights, a number of human rights challenges persist in the country. Widespread gender-based violence, restrictions to freedom of expression, freedom of press and freedom of assembly, as well as allegations of voter registration constraints, police brutality and deteriorating prison and detention centre conditions continue to raise human rights concerns.

Issues that impact women's development, in addition to high prevalence rates of violence against them, include low representation of women in formal sector employment, women's health and women's equal representation at all levels of government and civil society. Fiji has made continuous progress in terms of corruption control since 2010, ranking 49th (score 53) in the 2022 Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.

The Constitution provides for freedom of expression, freedom of press, as well as the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association. However, some provisions of the Public Order Amendment Act and the Media and Industry Development Act remain of particular concern. The new government has publicly promised to review the Media Act from 2010.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU action continued to promote access to justice and respect for human rights including fostering gender equality, and supported civil society organisations (CSOs) in various areas of activity.

Through a budget support operation on rural livelihoods, the EU is promoting the fundamental values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law but also progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and is encouraging an accountable and effective public administration.

Fiji also benefits from several initiatives promoting human rights, gender equality and addressing gender-based violence, supporting economic rights, climate change adaptation and mitigation and improving the management of natural resources.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU will follow up on the issues raised in the last Political Dialogue (held in October 2020) and will continue promoting access to justice and respect for human rights. The Political Dialogue encourages the government to progress towards making Fiji's legislation fully compliant with international human rights standards. The EU Delegation will continue carrying out outreach activities to promote EU values and priorities.

In 2022, the EU Delegation for the Pacific carried out a number of demarches and outreach activities inviting Fiji to support EU human rights initiatives and priorities at the UN level. Fiji is at the forefront of international climate action advocacy, and the EU and Fiji enjoy a strong partnership on global action on climate change. With climate change and human rights inextricably linked in the Pacific region, the EU Delegation for the Pacific will continue to actively promote climate change awareness and action through its interactions with Fiji.

4. EU financial engagement: Fiji also benefits from the regional programme Pacific Partnership to End Violence against Women and Girls for which the EU has allocated EUR 12.7 million. It is implemented by UN Women in collaboration with the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS). In addition to this, the EU addresses protection of women's rights and prevention of violence through the Spotlight Initiative, an unprecedented effort in the global fight to end violence against women and girls through its level of funding (EUR 50 million for the Pacific region).

Funded by the EIDHR instrument (EUR 878 750), Fiji benefited from an initiative aimed at tackling human trafficking, as well as the Strengthening Collaboration, Accountability, Law and Empowering Stakeholders (SCALES) programme addressing issues related to sexual reproductive health, gender equality, access to justice and social inclusion. The EU also supports the work of CSOs in Fiji. Five actions supported by the CSO-LA instrument (for a total of EUR 2 875 196) will contribute to increasing the participation of CSOs in addressing climate change, both in terms of mitigation and adaptation.

5. Multilateral context: Fiji completed its third Universal Periodic Review in November 2019 in which it supported 207 of the 242 recommendations made. It became a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council – also as the first Pacific Islands Country - in 2019 for the three-year term.

Fiji is a strong supporter of Ukraine and in 2022 played a key role as the Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum in advocating support for Ukraine within the Pacific Island Forum. Fiji supported all UN General Assembly resolutions regarding Ukraine in 2022 and encouraged other Pacific Islands countries to do the same.

The Federated States of Micronesia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Regular democratic elections, combined with an independent judiciary and media ensure that basic human rights are respected in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). FSM will return to the polls on 7 March 2023 to elect all 14 members of the unicameral national Congress, as well as for referenda on nine proposed constitutional amendments — including establishing an Office of the Independent Prosecutor for corruption, and enshrining a Constitutional right to a healthy environment. FSM's judiciaries are independent, and civil liberties are generally respected.

The legislative framework assures women equal rights in FSM, including with regard to property ownership and employment. FSM's National Constitution, as well as the four State constitutions, all prohibit sexual discrimination. Despite of this, socio-economic discrimination and violence against women continue to be the most prevalent human rights problems facing the country, with no national legislation criminalising spousal rape. Domestic violence offenders usually receive light sentences in the rare instances of prosecution. Cultural factors in the male-dominated society limit women's representation in government and politics.

FSM remains a source country for human trafficking, including forced labour and sex trafficking. Climate change continues to present significant human rights issues in FSM, particularly for women. As a country with many low-lying atolls, FSM is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, notably sea-level rise, changing weather patterns and increased frequency and intensity of storms and disasters.

An independent National Human Rights Institution in line with the Paris Principles has not yet been established, although a scoping study was completed in 2019.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Human rights concerns in FSM regarding domestic violence, sex discrimination and human trafficking (as well as exploitation of migrant workers) continue to demand attention. EU actions focus *inter alia* on supporting the ratification of or accession to the remaining core human rights instruments, promoting gender equality and women rights, and supporting the engagement of civil society organisations (CSOs) in FSM society. Upholding and promoting citizens' protections and rights in these areas is in line with the EU's objective of protecting and empowering individuals as well as of building inclusive and democratic societies.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Through policy dialogues and a number of different financial instruments, the EU continues to promote human rights, gender equality and the increased participation of women in decision making. In 2022, the EU Delegation for the Pacific carried out demarches and outreach activities inviting the Pacific island countries, including FSM, to support EU human rights initiatives and priorities at the UN level.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU remains committed to supporting and raising awareness of civil society and non-state actors in FSM as an essential element of the implementation of the regional roadmap for CSOs in the Pacific. The EU works closely with government and civil society actors, as well as other regional organisations and donor partners to this end.

Through the 11th European Development Fund, a EUR 1 million grant contract was signed with the Micronesia Conservation Trust to support increasing the participation of women and CSOs in the energy sector.

FSM ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and completed consultations and reporting for the Convention on the Rights of the Child with support received through EU-funded projects. FSM is currently working on its new Disability Policy after the previous policy expired in 2018.

FSM benefits from the EU-funded regional Spotlight Initiative promoting gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence.

5. Multilateral context: The Federated States of Micronesia underwent their third Universal Periodic Review in January 2021. FSM received 154 recommendations, of which it supported 141 and noted 13, mostly relating to ratification of international instruments and LGBTI rights. Recommendations pointed to challenges such as human trafficking, addressing gender discrimination, gender-based violence and women's rights, establishing a National Human

Rights Institution, as well as the rights of children, including their access to health and education.

FSM has condemned in international fora Russia's war in Ukraine, having supported all five Ukraine-related resolutions in the UN General Assembly, and been a co-sponsor in all resolutions but one at the UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council and Security Council. FSM is not party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Republic of Kiribati

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Since its independence from the UK in 1979, Kiribati has maintained a stable and democratic government. In September 2022, Kiribati underwent an institutional crisis, caused by a dispute between the President and the Judiciary about the firing of a number of Australian judges, which left Kiribati without a high-level court. The crisis was temporarily solved after the Attorney General was appointed Acting Chief Justice on 28 October 2022, awaiting the recruitment of a new Chief Justice.

Overall, the Human Rights situation in Kiribati remained stable in 2022. Human rights violations typically include violence against women such as spousal abuse, child abuse and sexual exploitation of children that remain serious challenges to tackle effectively in spite of the national legislation condemning it. Sexual and gender-based violence continues to be prevalent throughout Kiribati. The COVID-19 pandemic, combined with pre-existing social norms, gender inequalities, restricted travel and social isolation measures, aggravated the situation.

Violence against children and child malnutrition remain serious concerns. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is incorporated into national legislation through the Children, Young Persons and Family Welfare Act 2013, and the Education Act prohibits corporal punishment in schools. However, corporal punishment is still practised and is considered socially acceptable.

The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of race or origin. However, only native Kiribati can own land. Gender discrimination is prohibited only when it pertains to employment. The law does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or social status. Consensual sex between males is criminalised in Kiribati, but there were no reports of prosecutions. Women's participation in political life remains relatively low. Following the 2020 election, only four of the 46 members of the national legislature are women, one more than in the previous period.

The government of Kiribati has not yet established a National Human Rights' Institution in compliance with the Paris Principles, but human rights are gradually being mainstreamed into national legislation. A Human Rights Taskforce and a Human Rights Unit based at the Ministry of Justice provide human rights training and monitoring and coordinate implementation of ratified human rights treaties.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Regional programmes implemented in Kiribati focus also on the eradication of domestic and gender-based violence. Other key areas aim at upholding and promoting citizens' protections as well as of building inclusive and democratic societies.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights and gender equality are promoted through policy dialogue and financial instruments. The EU is committed to supporting government and non-state actor efforts to reduce gender-based violence. During 2022, the EU Delegation for the Pacific reached out numerous times to the Kiribati government via demarches, in order to support the EU's human rights priorities and initiatives at the UN and other international fora.

4. EU financial engagement: Kiribati benefits from two EU-funded regional initiatives promoting gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence: the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls and the Spotlight Initiative. Kiribati is one of the target countries from the regional component of the Spotlight Initiative.

The Ministry of Education in Kiribati revised curricula that incorporate social citizenship education (SCE) in mainstream subjects. An SCE Policy Handbook for Schools has been developed for Kiribati and other Pacific Islands.

The Pacific Partnership also facilitated access to services for survivors of violence against women in Kiribati to continue through adaptation of national reporting and referral pathways during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included technical support to adapt Gender Based Violence and COVID-19 procedures, information, education and communication materials for the public on how to get help, and direct support to safe shelter and counselling for women and girls.

5. Multilateral context: Kiribati's third Universal Periodic Review took place in January 2020. Of the 129 recommendations received, Kiribati accepted 88 and noted 41. Kiribati is party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Kiribati has condemned in international fora Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Kiribati co-sponsored the vetoed UNSC resolution of 25 February 2022 and voted in support of all five Ukraine-related UNGA resolutions. Kiribati is also a key ally together with other Pacific Islands Countries in the fight against Climate Change.

Nauru

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Nauru, the world's smallest republic (population of about 12 500), gained its independence in 1968. It has a long history of political instability, with nearly 20 different governments ruling the country over the last decade. Nauru does not have formal political parties. Independent members of parliament will typically form a majority government through alliances, based on individual and family interests.

While Nauru citizens generally enjoy political rights and civil liberties, the earlier Baron Waqa government stood for an increasingly authoritarian rule, until Waga was voted out in 2019. The government's capacity to ratify and implement international human rights treaties remains constrained by financial and administrative capacity considerations, as well as the reporting burden. Nauru has not yet established a National Human Rights Institution in line with the Paris Principles.

Nauru is hosting the Nauru Regional Processing Centre, an Australian offshore immigration facility. According to the Refugee Council of Australia, refugees currently on Nauru are all living in the Nauruan community, with no one living in the Regional Processing Centers since the end of March 2019.

Domestic violence, poverty and limited women representation in Parliament, remain the most serious impediments for the progress in the area of women's rights in Nauru. The COVID-19 pandemic had negative impacts on Nauru as on other Pacific Island Countries, particularly in economic and social terms, despite avoiding the worst of the health impacts at the height of the pandemic.

Eliminating domestic violence is a national priority. The 'Nauru National Women's Policy' assists in reflecting the gender performance indicators in the National Sustainable Development Strategies 2005-2025 and provides direction for all levels of society regarding Nauru's gender priorities. The government has a Directorate of Women's Affairs within the Department of Home Affairs that is responsible for monitoring and improving the status of women and the quality of their lives. Nauru has a National Action Plan for Women focusing on issues such as women's health, violence against women, education and training for women, women in decision-making, and women's participation in the economy.

As regards freedom of press and media, the criminalisation of criticism towards the government remains an important concern. The government requirement for hefty visa application fees for media personnel poses difficulties for foreign media to report on Nauru's domestic affairs. Some human rights groups see this as a covert way of restricting access for foreign journalists. Moreover, the Crimes Act 2016 introduced criminal charges for defamation, punishable with up to three years in prison. Several newspapers ceased activities in the past decade, and currently there are only government-operated media and information outlets.

Climate change has become an important human rights issue in Nauru. As the climate crisis in the Pacific further escalates, Nauru citizens may soon start experiencing reduced access to water, food and other basic services. This may lead to an increase in migration pressure.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Presently, there is no key focus area in Nauru as the EU is not providing any bilateral support to Nauru under the new programming.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: During 2022, the EU Delegation for the Pacific reached out numerous times to the Nauru government via demarches in order to foster support for the EU's human rights priorities and initiatives at the UN and other international fora.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU is no longer providing bilateral support to Nauru under the new programming cycle. However, Nauru remains eligible to participate in regional programmes, such as a new Public Finance Management, Oversight and Accountability programme, a project on integrated ocean management, and activities of the Regional Pacific Nationally Determined Contribution Hub.

5. Multilateral context: Nauru completed its third Universal Periodic Review in February 2021.

Nauru has condemned in international fora Russia's war in Ukraine. It voted in support of all five Ukraine-related UNGA resolutions. Nauru is also a key ally together with other Pacific Islands Countries in the fight against Climate Change.

Nauru is party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Nauru is party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

New Zealand

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, New Zealand continued to rank highly in annual international assessments on human rights and democracy. New Zealand also continued its active involvement in the promotion of human rights and democracy at multilateral level.

Regarding areas where improvements can be made, child poverty reduction remained a political priority for the Government. Child poverty decreased from 2018 to 2021, while poverty rates remain higher for Māori and Pasifika children. Concerning gender-based and domestic violence, family related harm calls increased in the last five years, though the Government stated the increase shows rising awareness and willingness to report. Regarding social inclusion and anti-discrimination, the Ministry of Ethnic Communities released its first strategy for 2022-2025, which aligns with the recommendations of the December 2020 Royal Commission of Inquiry into the 2019 terrorist attack on Christchurch Mosques. On LGBTI rights, New Zealand adopted legislation criminalising the performance of conversion practices on anyone aged under 18, or with impaired decision-making capacity. As regards disability rights, New Zealand Government launched the new Ministry for Disabled People in July 2022. New Zealand continued to face a rise in disinformation and anti-vaccination protests saw an increase in threats towards journalists.

In November, the Supreme Court of New Zealand ruled that the current voting age (18 years) was unjustified discrimination on the basis of age under the Bill of Rights Act. The Government announced a legislative proposal to reduce the age to 16 years old (which would require the support of two thirds of MPs or a referendum).

2. EU action - key focus areas: Given the overall very high level of human rights protection and democracy in New Zealand, the EU's main focus is on cooperating with New Zealand to uphold and protect human rights and democracy internationally (see points 3 and 5 below).

As regards activities within New Zealand, the EU has focused on sharing good practices, awareness raising and policy dialogue.

As regards protecting and empowering individuals, the EU Delegation participated in the global 'Orange the World' campaign condemning violence against women and girls. The Netherlands Embassy hosted an event on LGBTI rights to mark UN Human Rights Day. The EU Delegation and a number of Embassies also marked the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT). Concerning building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies, and promoting a global system for human rights and democracy, the EU and New Zealand held an expert dialogue on disinformation.

As regards building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies, and promoting a global system for human rights and democracy, the EU delegation organised a policy dialogue with New Zealand parliamentarians on tackling disinformation and on human rights sanctions regimes. One EU Member State hosted a documentary and debate on Human Rights Day to promote freedom of expression and media freedom, with a number of New Zealand journalists participating

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In May 2022, the EU and New Zealand held their annual Human Rights Consultations. These consultations focus on exchanging views on trends in the area of human rights and coordinating positions in multilateral fora.

4. EU financial engagement: There is no EU financial engagement in New Zealand.

5. Multilateral context: The EU and New Zealand exchanged views on draft resolutions ahead of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly's Third Committee. There is a high degree of convergence between the EU and New Zealand in relation to priorities for the promotion of human rights in international institutions. New Zealand imposed further travel bans on Myanmar individuals responsible for human rights violations. New Zealand co-sponsored Ukraine's successful resolution at the UN Human Rights Council establishing a Commission of Inquiry to investigate all alleged violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law. New Zealand also announced NZD 1 million of funding for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in regards to its support for Ukraine. In September 2022, New Zealand stated its deep concern over the conclusions of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' report on Human Rights in Xinjiang. New Zealand also appointed former MP Louisa Wall as Pacific Gender Equality Ambassador, tasked to form new partnerships and programmes to support equal opportunities for women and LGBTI persons in the Pacific.

Palau

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Basic human rights are generally respected in Palau, with regular democratic elections, combined with an independent judiciary and media, and no substantial reports of irregularities. There are, however, human

rights' concerns that still demand attention, such as addressing gender-based violence, corruption and tackling human trafficking, including due care of trafficked persons, migrants and asylum seekers.

Although Palauan society is matriarchal and matrilineal, women have continued to be under-represented at higher levels of public life and the civil service. Women have close to equal status in public and private sector employment, education as well as in public participation. Sexual harassment and rape, including spousal rape, is illegal in Palau and punishable by fine, imprisonment or both. Domestic violence is a criminal offence, but there is still a level of reluctance for victims to involve law enforcement due to cultural and societal pressures. There are no laws addressing sexual orientation and gender identity. Same-sex sexual activity was decriminalised in 2014.

Palau's Penal Code includes trafficking offences as well as child exploitation offences. The Ministry of Justice's Anti-Human Trafficking Office is active in investigating human trafficking offences, but both investigations and convictions have stagnated in recent years, although in 2022 the Courts made their first human trafficking conviction since 2018.

High-level corruption continues to be an issue in Palau, with a number of high-profile convictions made in 2022, including former state Governors and staffers.

Palau's national legislation does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status and there is no formally established system for providing protection to refugees in Palau.

Climate change continues to stand as a major human rights issue in Palau. While the Office of the Ombudsman reviews complaints and reports to the Parliament, and a Reporting Committee on UN Conventions on Human Rights was set up, the establishment of a National Human Rights Institution in line with the Paris Principles, as recommended during Palau's previous UPR cycles, is still in progress.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Persisting human rights and democracy concerns in Palau include gender inequality and gender-based violence. EU actions focus *inter alia* on supporting the ratification of or accession to the remaining core human rights instruments, promoting gender equality and women's rights, and supporting Civil Society Organisations' (CSOs) engagement with the Government of Palau on policy dialogue and governance.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights were discussed on the side-lines of the Pacific Islands Forum in July 2022. Through this dialogues and through a number of financial instruments, the EU continues to promote human rights, gender equality and the increased participation of women in decision making.

During 2022, the EU Delegation for the Pacific carried out a number of démarches and outreach activities inviting Palau to support EU human rights initiatives and priorities at the UN level. Gender equality and human rights are shared values and common challenges between the EU and Palau in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals dialogue. The EU Delegation for the Pacific will continue to actively promote climate change awareness and environmental protection, for which Palau is a vocal advocate.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU remains committed to supporting and raising awareness of civil society and non-state actors in Palau as a key component in implementing of the regional roadmap for CSOs in the Pacific. The EU works closely with government and civil society actors, as well as other regional organisations and donor partners in Palau to this end. In the National Indicative Programme for Palau designed under the 11th European Development Fund a EUR 0.2 million financial allocation was set aside to support civil society organisations in Palau.

Palau benefits from the EU-funded Spotlight Initiative promoting gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence. Through this project, the Pacific Sexual and Gender Diversity Network formed a consortium with Living All Inclusive in Belau, Palau's first LGBTI advocacy organisation and resource to promote equality and develop partnerships within the private and public sectors.

5. Multilateral context: Palau underwent its third Universal Periodic Review in May 2021. Palau received 142 recommendations, of which it supported 67 and noted 75. Recommendations pointed to challenges such as participation in international human rights treaties, human trafficking, addressing gender discrimination, gender-based violence and women's rights, establishing a National Human Rights Institution, the human rights implications of climate change as well as the rights of children, including their access to health and education.

Palau has been a strong and consistent voice in condemning Russia's war in Ukraine at international fora. Palau is not a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Independent State of Papua New Guinea

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, tribal conflicts remained important challenges, deeply rooted gender inequality, violence against women and children, sorcery related violence, weak institutional capacity of the law and order structures. A number of positive developments were also noted: the most important progress was the decision of the Papua Nueva Guinea (PNG) Parliament to abolish the death penalty, which was welcomed by the EU. General elections were held between June and July. Following the Bougainville referendum on independence, the consultation process between the two parties continued, with by the post-consultation phase dedicated to the preparation of a constitutional regulation. In 2022, village court officials were trained on resolving conflicts and violence, on child protection, and victim protection. Furthermore, youths in Lae (the second largest city in PNG) were trained and mentored to be peace champions among their peers and in their communities. Peace Clubs are now established.

2. EU action on Human Rights and Democracy - key focus areas: All EU supported actions in PNG integrate commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment. On 20 January 2022, the Parliament decided in unanimity to amend the 1984 Criminal Code to replace death

penalty with live imprisonment. The EU was the first to welcome this decision. The EU continued to support PNG towards enhancing more human rights based and gender-responsive good governance, justice, integrity and law and enforcement.

In 2022, progress was made towards adopting a human rights defenders protection framework. Throughout 2022, all actions addressing gender-based violence continued to be carried out in collaboration with human rights defenders.

Environment protection and human rights continued to be at the core of EU's actions. An EU Elections Expert Mission was deployed between June and August 2022 to monitor the general elections and make recommendations. The Bougainville Peace Process continued to be supported by the EU through peacebuilding activities.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights, democracy and good governance featured as priorities for bilateral engagement in 2022. Throughout the year, the EU has consistently been raising the need to establish the long overdue Independent Human Rights Commission. The EU maintained its commitment to further support the PNG Government in its efforts to bring peace to the Highlands region.

The EU was the first to welcome the replacement of the capital punishment with live imprisonment. Throughout 2022, the EU has been actively encouraging PNG to support the universal abolitionist move in the multilateral context. As regards the Bougainville post-referendum consultation process, the EU maintained its commitment to support a credible process leading towards a negotiated solution and a number of meetings were held to explore the potential EU technical support. The EU Delegation continued to liaise with relevant government authorities as part of the EU Climate Adaptation Campaign.

4. EU financial engagement: EU programmes continued to play a significant role in improving the human rights situation in PNG. In 2022, the initial programming process has started for a gender action (with EUR 10.3 million), which will focus on gender-based violence, protection of survivors and enhancing referral pathways and access to justice and human rights. The EU-UN Spotlight Initiative has enabled several campaigns on gender-based violence reaching over 2.7 million people. Three projects addressed Sorcery Accused-Related Violence (advocacy and awareness raising).

The action to Support Implementation of the EU-PNG Cooperation (EUR 5.5 million) on Good Governance was launched in 2022 aiming at enhancing more human rights-based and gender-responsive governance, justice and law and enforcement. The implementation in 2022 of the PNG Anti-corruption Project (EUR 5.4 million), aimed at supporting the implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Plan of Action 2020-2025, including the full establishment of the Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC). The EU provided technical assistance to the Department of Justice and the Royal PNG Constabulary in the design of an efficient and effective anti-money laundering system (EUR 286 028).

A pilot project on conflict prevention and implementation of a peace building and crisis preparedness project in the Highlands region (EUR 1 million) continued in 2022. Another project on peace building and social cohesion in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea (EUR

1 million), was implemented throughout 2022. The Bougainville Peace Process continued to be supported by the EU through the "*Bougainville Capacities for Peace*" project (EUR 1 million) implemented by the Conciliation Resources. In 2022, the project continued to provide remote peacebuilding advice to local authorities and communities.

5. Multilateral context: PNG voted in favour of resolutions referring to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The EU further encouraged PNG to ratify remaining international conventions (Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers, Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Convention against Torture), the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (abolition of the death penalty). Throughout 2022, the EU has been actively encouraging PNG to support the universal abolitionist move in the multilateral context

Republic of Marshall Islands

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Regular democratic elections, combined with an independent judiciary and media ensure that basic human rights are respected in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). Marshall Islands will return to the polls on 20 November 2023 to elect members of the *Nitijela* (parliament) as well as for referenda on eight proposed constitutional amendments — including establishing an Office of the Ombudsman to investigate high-level corruption and fraud.

The Marshall Islands are viewed as a promoter of and leader on human rights in the Pacific region, especially regarding climate change (to which they are very susceptible), and anti-nuclear testing.

Current human rights and democracy concerns in the Marshall Islands include gender-based and domestic violence, corruption, child abuse, cases of human trafficking, and the rights of prisoners and detainees. Awareness of children's rights issues remains low in RMI, with cases of neglect and abuse still pervading. Corporal punishment is illegal in schools, but is still permitted at home.

The Marshall Islands is one of the most active countries among the Pacific islands in terms of participation in core international human rights treaties. The Marshall Islands is particularly an active and vocal participant in climate change negotiations, being a strong partner for the EU in climate action in international fora. It also actively advocated for climate change-related human rights issues through its role on the Human Rights Council (HRC).

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU actions focus *inter alia* on elimination and prevention of violence against women and girls and supporting civil society organisations' engagement with the government on policy dialogue and governance.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: During 2022, the EU Delegation for the Pacific continued working closely with the Marshall Islands in promoting and upholding human rights. The EU

Delegation carried out demarches and outreach activities with the Marshall Islands to support EU human rights initiatives and priorities at the UN level, particularly in its role as a member of the HRC. With climate change and human rights inextricably linked in the Pacific region, the EU Delegation for the Pacific will continue to actively promote climate change awareness through its interactions with RMI.

4. EU financial engagement: Through different financial instruments, the EU promoted human rights, gender equality and the increased participation of women in decision making. The Marshall Islands benefits from two EU-funded regional initiatives promoting gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence: the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls, and the Spotlight Initiative. Under the Pacific Partnership, the Marshall Islands' Ministry of Education endorsed revised curricula that incorporate social citizenship education in mainstream subjects. As a result, over 13 000 students in 111 schools across the Marshall Islands and will be exposed to the principles of human rights, gender equality, and elimination of violence against women and girls in support of new norms and behaviours. Through the Spotlight Initiative, work in the Marshall Islands has focused on sexual and reproductive health for girls and young people, increasing access to menstrual products for women and stimulating entrepreneurship for locally made products via women-led businesses.

The EU remains committed to supporting and raising awareness for civil society and non-state actors in the Marshall Islands as a key component in implementing of the regional roadmap for CSOs in the Pacific. The EU works closely with government and civil society actors, as well as other regional organisations and donor partners in the Marshall Islands to this end.

5. Multilateral context: 2022 was the Marshall Islands' last of their three-year mandate as a member of the HRC, where they were active and vocal proponents of respect for human rights. The Marshall Islands presented a number of joint statements on behalf of Pacific island countries and other African, Caribbean and Pacific countries to the HRC. In October 2022, Marshall Islands successfully saw a resolution adopted unanimously at the HRC on Technical assistance and capacity building to address the human rights implications of the nuclear legacy in the Marshall Islands. The Marshall Islands have also been a strong and consistent voice in condemning Russia's war in Ukraine at international fora.

The Marshall Islands underwent their third Universal Periodic Review in November 2020. The Marshall Islands received 171 recommendations, of which it supported 161 and noted 10, mostly relating to ratification of international instruments and LGBTI rights. Recommendations pointed to challenges such as addressing gender discrimination, gender-based violence and women's rights, as well as human trafficking

The Marshall Islands has condemned in international fora Russia's war in Ukraine, has supported all eight Ukraine-related resolutions in the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council, and been a co-sponsor in all but one.

Samoa

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The overall human rights situation in the Independent State of Samoa is stable and there are no systematic human rights abuses. Samoa's government generally respects and enforces human rights provisions of the country's Constitution and legislative framework, and is committed to continue improving the human rights standards. However, there are some persisting human rights concerns.

A traditional system of governance co-exists with democratic processes in Samoa, affecting the participation of women in politics and public decision-making. While there is universal suffrage for all Samoan citizens aged 21 and over, still only chiefs of villages (*matai*) may contest the elections. The number of women holding *matai* title is low. Despite of this, Ms Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa was elected as Samoa's first female Prime Minister on 9 April 2021 and in addition to her five other women held a seat in the Samoan parliament in 2022.

On 15 December 2020, the Constitution Amendment Bill 2020, the Land and Titles Bill 2020 and the Judicature Bill 2020 were passed into Law by the Samoan Parliament. The Bills raised concerns among the Samoan Judiciary, legal community and media, particularly concerning their potential impact on the independence of the judiciary, and potential legal conflict in upholding individual rights. The Constitutional Amendment Act 2017 had changed the country from a secular to a Christian nation.

Physical and sexual violence against women and girls, discrimination, and gender inequality remain the most significant human rights abuses in Samoa. However, there is a political will in the country to advance national action to end domestic violence. Male homosexuality is illegal in Samoa, although there are no reports of the law being enforced.

Samoa is the only Pacific Island State having an "A Status" National Human Rights Institution (Samoa's Office of the Ombudsman) under the Paris Principles. The National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) identified domestic violence as a priority human rights concern. There is a political will in Samoa to advance national action to end domestic violence.

Violence against children, generally tolerated as a form of discipline, is another human rights concern. The NHRI set out a list of recommendations towards elimination of family violence including, inter alia, establishment of a Family Violence Prevention Office, National Family Violence Prevention Strategy and Communications Strategy, Family Violence Prevention Council and Taskforce. A Family Violence Court and a Drug and Alcohol Court have been established to oversee cases regarding all forms of violence in Samoan families.

Climate change has also become a serious human rights issue in Samoa, as it threatens the effective enjoyment of a range of human rights including those to life, water and sanitation, food, health, housing, self-determination, culture and development.

Samoan civil society is robust and active on developmental agenda, gender/human rights, health, and environmental issues.

2. EU Action - key focus areas: Through dialogue with the Government and non-state actors / civil society organisations (CSOs) in conjunction with various financial instruments, the EU has been promoting and advocating for the respect for human rights, gender equality and prevention of violence against women and girls, as well as strengthening the capacity of the CSOs.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Issues related to human rights and democracy were addressed during the Enhanced EU-Samoa Political Dialogue under Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement. With climate change and human rights inextricably linked in the Pacific region, the EU Delegation for the Pacific will continue to actively promote climate change awareness and action through its interactions with Samoa.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU provides support to CSOs in Samoa to strengthen the engagement between civil society and the Government. Samoa is a focus country under the regional Pacific Partnership to End Violence against Women and Girls programme, funded primarily by the EU with targeted support from the Australian and New Zeeland Governments and cost-sharing from UN Women. The action is implemented in partnership with national governments, CSOs, communities and other partners to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and girls, and increase access to quality response services for survivors. Moreover, the project aims to transform attitudes and behaviours on gender equality and violence against women. UN Women worked in close partnership with the rugby associations Oceania Rugby and Lakapi Samoa to increase the visibility of women and girls in rugby through strategic communications, advocacy and festivals.

In addition to this, protection of women's rights and prevention of violence is addressed through the Spotlight Initiative. It takes a comprehensive approach, going from prevention and awareness raising to shifting stereotypes, providing protection, access to services, legislation, support to women's organisations and ensuring reliable data collection.

5. Multilateral context: Samoa underwent its third Universal Periodic Review in November 2021. It received 145 recommendations and it supported 112 recommendations at the adoption of its Universal Periodic Review outcome. Samoa is a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Solomon Islands

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Solomon Islands (SI) is a constitutional monarchy with King Charles III as Head of State and a unicameral Parliament. The next Parliamentary elections were foreseen in 2023 but were postponed to 2024, through a Constitutional amendment voted on 8 September 2022. The justification given was that elections and hosting the Pacific Games in 2023 would put too much drain on the country's resources.

Corruption in the political and government sector is a serious concern. While the law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials it is implemented inconsistently and corruption is pervasive in the Government. The constitution provides for an independent Office of the Ombudsman with power to subpoena and investigate complaints of official abuse, mistreatment, or unfair treatment, but the Office lacks resources and its effectiveness is limited.

Solomon Islands' civil society organisations (CSOs) continue to express serious concerns about the SI government's attempts to restrict access to information and freedoms of expression and speech. In May 2022, journalists in SI faced numerous restrictions while trying to report on the visit of China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi to the region. The authorities have threatened to ban or deport foreign journalists deemed disrespectful of the country's relationship with China.

Several reports indicate that Solomon Islands is a source, transit, and destination country for local and South-East Asian men and women subjected to forced labour and forced prostitution, and local children subjected to sex and labour trafficking. The SI government, with donor support, has however been making significant efforts to combat human trafficking. Climate change has become an important human rights issue: as the climate crisis in the Pacific further escalates, Solomon Islanders may soon start experiencing reduced access to water, sanitation, food, health and other basic services. As a result, this may lead to serious migratory pressure.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU actions focus *inter alia* on supporting the ratification of, or accession to the remaining core human rights instruments, promoting gender equality and women rights, and supporting CSOs engagement with government on policy dialogue and governance.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The ninth EU-SI Enhanced Political Dialogue was held on 30 November 2022 in Brussels, focusing on issues of mutual interest of EU and SI, such as human rights, rule of law, fight against climate change and biodiversity loss and protection of the seas.

Solomon Islands supported three United Nations General Assembly resolutions on Ukraine, but it did not take part in the vote of the UNGA Resolution on the suspension of Russia from the Human Rights Council.

The EU is committed to supporting government and non-state actor efforts to reduce gender-based violence. Regarding the fight against corruption, the EU Delegation for the Pacific manages an on-going Budget Support programme involving vigilant monitoring of government spending, in particular the Constituency Development Funds.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU signed with UNDP the new Pacific Democracy Initiative at the end of November 2022. This action is expected to progress participatory digitalisation processes in four target countries – Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Solomon Islands and Tonga – in order to harness Information and Communication Technologies for more inclusive, rights-based democracy and development. Another programme is titled Strengthening the

Capacity of Civil Society Organizations in Solomon Islands to Prevent Trafficking in Persons and Gender-Based Violence and to Protect Survivors. It aims at strengthening awareness and advocacy to combat human trafficking at the community level and enhancing first responder support to victims and survivors of human trafficking and gender-based violence.

Under the recent three-year project Protecting and Promoting of Civil, Social, Economic and Human Rights for People with Disabilities in Solomon Islands, co-funded by the European Union, and the International Women's Development Agency, implemented in a partnership with Disabled Peoples Association of Solomon Islands, the EU aims to advance the implementation of the Solomon Islands National Disability Policy.

Solomon Islands benefit from two regional initiatives promoting gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence: (i)) Pacific Partnership to End Violence against Women and girls, a regional programme of EUR 12.7 million implemented by UN Women in collaboration with the Pacific Community and the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat; (ii) Spotlight Initiative, an unprecedented effort in the global fight to end violence against women and girls (EUR 50 million for the Pacific region).

5. Multilateral context: Solomon Islands completed its third Universal Periodic Review in May 2021. Following up on the recommendations of the UN Country Team, SI ratified two out of three Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, i.e. the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (August 2022) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict (20 January 2023).

Tonga

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Tonga is a Kingdom with a highly stratified patriarchal system. The King retains important powers, including the authority to veto legislation, dissolve the parliament, and appoint judicial officials.

Tonga's Constitution provides for the protection of certain fundamental rights and freedoms. The Constitution and its revisions do not specifically guarantee women equal rights to men. While there is no discriminatory legislation concerning participation of women in politics, the traditional system and cultural factors limit participation of women in political processes and local government.

The level of domestic violence remains a critical human rights issue in Tonga and has been identified by the Government as a major impediment to gender equality. There is a political will in the country to address the problem. The Family Protection Act 2013 recognises domestic violence as a legal offence and provides a legal framework for preventing domestic violence. Tonga made significant progress in the legislative arena at the end of 2022 with the adoption of a changed definition for rape allowing for a more comprehensive definition to include marital rape and rape between partners.

The Constitution guarantees freedom of press, and there are independent media outlets in Tonga. There is however a record of lawsuits by politicians against media outlets, exposing them to the risk of heavy damages. Same-sex relationships are not legally recognised in Tonga and consenting same-sex relationships between adults remain criminalised by law, although there are no reports of the law being enforced. There is a *de facto* moratorium on the application of the death penalty since 1982. Tonga does not have a National Human Rights Institution. The Ombudsman's office is empowered to investigate any decision, act or omission by government services or relevant organisations.

Climate change has also become a serious human rights issue in Tonga, as it threatens the effective enjoyment of a range of human rights including those to life, water and sanitation, food, health, housing, self-determination, culture and development.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Through a budget support operation on energy, the EU promotes progress towards sustainable development and encourages an accountable and effective public administration.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In bilateral engagement under Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement, the EU urges Tonga to formally abolish the death penalty, accede to the Rome Statute and core Human Rights Conventions, and to decriminalise same sex relations.

In 2022, the EU carried out demarches and outreach activities inviting Tonga to support the EU's human rights initiatives, to support Ukraine and other priorities at the UN level.

4. EU financial engagement: Out of the EUR 10 million EU contribution to energy budget support, EUR 6.65 million are implemented through budget support. This modality promotes the right to participate in public affairs and accountable and effective public administration.

The 11th European Development Fund EUR 1.1 million allocation to the Technical Cooperation Facility and Support to Civil Society has contributed to facilitating policy dialogue between the Government of Tonga and civil society organisations and promoting a meaningful and effective participation of the civil society in public affairs.

Tonga benefits from the regional Pacific Partnership programme which tackles root causes of gender inequality and violence against women in the Pacific. In Tonga, this programme, *inter alia*, provides support to the Government's Women's Affairs and Gender Equality Division to develop a national referral pathway and standard operating procedures to guide multisector service provision to women and girls who experienced violence, and offers technical and financial support to national crisis centres and hotlines. Tonga also benefits from the joint EU-UN regional Spotlight Initiative' Pacific window (EUR 50 million).

5. Multilateral context: Tonga's last Universal Periodic Review was completed on 15 January 2018.

Tonga has extended a standing invitation to the special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council. Tonga is not a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Tuvalu

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Tuvalu is a Constitutional monarchy. King Charles III is the Head of State, represented by a Governor-General. The country held its last four-yearly election to Parliament on 9 September 2019, with a peaceful and orderly political transition. Tuvalu has approximately 6 000 eligible voters and does not face serious governance issues, however a frequent use of the parliamentary vote of no confidence is a source of instability.

There have been no reports of systematic violation of human rights in Tuvalu in 2022. Human rights are widely respected in Tuvalu, the rule of law is sound, and the principles of good governance are generally adhered to. The National Human Rights Institution Act 2017 created an independent rights body by giving the Ombudsman power to receive complaints and initiate inquiries into human rights issues, as well as undertake activities to promote awareness of fundamental human rights. Tuvalu has become the first Pacific country to launch a National Action Plan on Human Rights, developed with the support of the EU, Australia and the Pacific Community. Tuvalu's Association of Non- Governmental Organisations - TANGO - is an umbrella organisation for its 48 members, which play active role in developmental and human rights issues.

However, a few areas of concern remain, in particular increased gender violence due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although Tuvalu's legislation does not prohibit discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation, consensual same-sex relations between men remain criminalised under the Penal Code (although there are no reports of law enforcement).

Gender-based violence is rooted in traditional behavioural norms of a patriarchal society and often remains unreported due to the "culture of silence". Tuvalu has a normative framework in place against violence against women and a Domestic Violence Unit has been established within the police. However, the social and economic consequences of COVID-19 crisis have led to an increase in gender–based, sexual and domestic violence. According to UN Women, the percentage of Lifetime Physical and/or Sexual Intimate Partner Violence in Tuvalu was at 37%. A number of Tuvalu NGOs promote awareness on women's rights, gender equality and economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and rights. The government has established a Family Protection Fund to support victims of violence and arranged a system of psychological support Tuvalu has also adopted legislation prohibiting corporal punishment.
However, women's rights and gender equality continue to be areas which need further improvement, including, inter alia, employment discrimination, land inheritance aspects or local governance arrangements. Women remain underrepresented in the Parliament (only one woman Member of Parliament).

There is no private or independent media. The Tuvalu Media Departments, under the Office of the Prime Minister, is the only media outlet in Tuvalu. Internet access is expanding, but limited due to communication facilities and high costs. While there were no government

restrictions on press and media freedom and the law provides for freedom of expression, there is lack of media ownership diversity. Tuvalu Media Corporation is a semi-public company, controlled by the government.

There are a number of policy documents in place, including the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016-202, and the National Human Rights Action Plan 2016-2020, capturing Tuvalu's commitments under human rights international instruments and the Universal Periodic Review. In 2017, National Human Rights Institution Act was adopted by the Parliament to provide a mechanism to ensure protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Tuvalu is one of the most environmentally fragile countries in the Pacific. An adverse impact of climate change is affecting human rights such as the rights to life, development, food, health, housing, water and sanitation.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continues assisting Tuvalu to tackle root causes of violence against women and girls, providing support to civil society, encouraging Tuvalu to accede to the key international human rights instruments and help addressing the adverse impact of climate change.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The second High Level Enhanced EU-Tuvalu Political Dialogue under Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement was held in Funafuti on 26 April 2019. The parties discussed, *inter alia*, preparation to the General Election, progress in the area of human rights, accession to the core Human Rights Conventions and some outstanding human rights issues in Tuvalu, including domestic violence and empowerment of women, as well as the impact of climate change challenges on human rights. Areas for political engagement have been further discussed in bilateral meetings at various levels, including in the margins of the Pacific Islands Forum summits.

During 2022, the EU carried out demarches and outreach activities inviting Tuvalu to support human rights initiatives, to support Ukraine and other priorities at the UN level. The EU is also committed to addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Tuvalu.

With climate change and human rights inextricably linked in the Pacific region, the EU Delegation for the Pacific will continue to actively promote climate change awareness and action through its interactions with Tuvalu.

4. EU financial engagement: Awareness-raising and support to civil society and non-state actors were essential elements for the implementation of the regional roadmap for CSOs in the Pacific. One of the focal areas for EU assistance to Tuvalu is environmental protection, more specifically waste management, implemented through the 11th European Development Fund EUR 6.8 million (of which 5.9 million for budget support) programme Sustainable Waste Programme in Tuvalu. Civil Society Support component of the programme includes measures to support to CSOs to actively engage in the programme and promote its sustainability.

The future EU assistance to Tuvalu under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), based on the Commission Decision adopted in 2022, is to

focus on Tuvalu Coconut Sector Rehabilitation. The action will support resilience in economic activities and ecosystems. From a human rights-based perspective, the action will finance activities that contribute to reducing social imbalances, by providing food security and new employment opportunities to the rural communities.

Tuvalu has become a focus country under the regional programme Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls, launched in November 2018 and bringing together governments, CSOs, communities and other partners to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and girls and increase access to quality response services for survivors. Tuvalu, in particular, benefits under the components focusing on enhancement of formal in-school and informal education on gender equality and prevention of violence against women and girls, and on empowering national and regional CSOs to advocate, monitor and report on regional institutions and government commitments to enhance gender equality and prevent violence. In addition to this, protection of women's rights and prevention of violence is also addressed through the Spotlight initiative regional programme.

5. Multilateral context: There is limited administrative capacity due to the low population (approximately 10 000 citizens), and this creates particular constraints with regard to reporting requirements under UN instruments. Tuvalu's report to the CEDAW Committee is due since March 2019.

Tuvalu is a party to three core international human rights instruments:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Tuvalu underwent its third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in May 2018. Recommendations focused largely on increasing the accession to core human rights treaties; introducing into legislation (including at Constitutional level), a prohibition against discrimination based on gender, disability and sexual orientation, proceeding with establishment of the National Human Rights Institution; implementing policies aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change, taking into consideration a focus on human rights, decriminalisation of homosexuality and full implementation of the national Human Rights Action Plan. Tuvalu's government received a total of 127 recommendations; it accepted 78 and noted 49.Tuvalu's next UPR review is scheduled for November 2023.

In April 2013, Tuvalu extended a standing invitation to the special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council and in September 2019 it received the visit of the Special Rapporteur on cultural rights.

Tuvalu is not a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Vanuatu

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Since its independence in 1980, Vanuatu has been politically volatile, with frequent motions of no confidence filed against the government. Following the dissolution of the Parliament on 19 August 2022, a snap election took place on 13 October 2022. The elections were carried out without any major security incidence and no observer, political party agent or candidate reported issues with access to the process.

Climate change has become a serious human rights issue in Vanuatu. In 2022, Vanuatu initiated a proposal for a UN Resolution requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on states' legal obligation for climate action.

Otherwise, societal discrimination and violence against women remained the most significant human rights concern in Vanuatu. Although no laws limit participation of women and/or members of minorities in the political process, traditional attitudes regarding male dominance and customary familial roles have hampered women's participation in political life, and affect access to employment.

Implementation of the human rights instruments to which the country is a party is hampered by lack of adequate enforcement mechanisms and limited technical, human and economic capacity within public institutions – especially on outer lying remote islands.

Corruption remains an endemic problem, given the close ties between politicians and the business community. In that situation, the independent judiciary constitutes a balancing element.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Through the bilateral budget support operation on value chains, the EU promotes fundamental values of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, progress towards all 17 Sustainable Development Goals and encourages an accountable and effective public administration. The bilateral Support to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) would have a positive impact on access to food and gender equality.

EU actions in Vanuatu focused on preventing gender-based violence, promoting climate actions and better management of natural resources.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The seventh annual Political Dialogue under Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement between the EU and Vanuatu was held in virtual format on 3 May 2022, hosted by Vanuatu. The Political Dialogue addressed key political, economic and social developments on both sides.

After the general elections in October 2022, the newly elected Prime Minister, Ishmael Kalsakau, visited Brussels in early December 2022. He met with HRVP Josep Borrell, Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen for International Partnerships and Commissioner Ylva Johansson for Home Affairs.

During 2022, the EU Delegation for the Pacific outreached numerous times to the Vanuatu government, via demarches, to foster support for the EU's human rights priorities and initiatives at the UN and other international fora. Vanuatu is an important partner in the

Pacific, particularly on climate change, disaster risk reduction and ocean governance. While Vanuatu voted in support of Ukraine in most UN resolutions last year, Vanuatu abstained in the vote at the UN General Assembly on the suspension of Russia from the Human Rights Council.

4. EU financial engagement: Cooperation with CSOs is laid down by the June 2020 Financing Agreement 'The Vanuatu Civil Society Organisations Support & Technical Cooperation Facility Programme' (which allocates EUR 4 million for the support of CSOs). The initiative aims to enhance the institutional capacity of CSOs and support their initiatives towards food security and economic empowerment of women.

Vanuatu has also benefited from two regional initiatives promoting gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence: (i) Pacific Partnership to End Violence against Women and girls, a regional programme of EUR 12.7 million implemented by UN Women in collaboration with the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat; (ii) Spotlight Initiative, an unprecedented effort in the global fight to end violence against women and girls through its level of funding (EUR 50 million) for the Pacific region), its holistic approach and its support for multi-stakeholder partnerships. Under this joint EU-UN initiative, a specific country programme of EUR 2.2 million has been defined for Vanuatu.

5. Multilateral context: The country successfully completed its third Universal Periodic Review in January 2019. Vanuatu supported recommendations regarding the establishment of a National Human Rights Institution compliant with the Paris Principles and the prevention of discrimination and violence against women and girls. Vanuatu is a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

The Americas

Republic of Argentina

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Argentina remained positive overall in 2022 and the country continues to be one of the most advanced in Latin America in terms of human rights and democracy. All main human rights legislation is in place and in some cases, such as the anti-discrimination laws (including concerning LGBTI people), is very advanced. Political rights, as well as rights of expression and association are guaranteed and generally respected. The press is largely free although to some extent concentrated in big media groups, and highly polarized. Civil society and human rights organisations are active and vocal in expressing their concerns. Elections are free and fair, as exemplified by the latest electoral cycle in 2021 (mid-terms).

Despite the general positive situation, there are a number of significant obstacles towards a fuller enjoyment of human rights in Argentina, among which: (i) The pandemic´s negative

effects, coupled with the economic crisis Argentina has been undergoing since 2018 (in particular the high levels of inflation), continued in 2022 to impact negatively on the implementation of social policies and enjoyment of social rights. (ii) An implementation gap of the generally advanced legislation mainly because of institutional weaknesses at federal and provincial levels and insufficient interaction between Government agencies and civil society. The partisan approach of human rights issues in the context of extreme political polarization has not been helpful in providing efficient implementation of laws. And (iii) Political actors do not always respect the principle of the independence of the judiciary. The partisan use and abuse of the concept of "lawfare" when dealing with the trials for corruption of major political figures is a major issue in this sense, as is the permanent confrontation between the executive and judiciary powers. This can have an impact on the rule of law principle.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Eu action focusisses on the following areas: (i) democratic governance and institutional strengthening; (ii) gender issues: the fight against violence and for equality; (iii) children's rights and protection; (iv) building a more equal society free of any type of discrimination against minorities or vulnerable groups; (v) environmental rights and the right to live in a healthy and sustainable environment; (vi) new technologies / digitalization, including media freedom. Below are some examples:

Based on the Civil Society Road Map approved in 2021, and after a long process of consultation and engagement with numerous actions including hundreds of NGOs, international organizations and EU Member States' embassies, the EU Delegation signed in December 2022 a contract for a second phase of the project "Sociedad Civil en Red", which supports the first ever national platform of civil society organisations in Argentina. There are also two other projects signed in December 2022 that support NGO networks. One will work with Redes Chaco, a network of 23 organisations working in the north, that will also follow up and solidify the results to be achieved by the aforementioned initiatives on indigenous people Rights projects. The other is with the Foro para la Proteccion del Mar Patagonico.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In June, The EU Delegation and Member States' embassies held the 7th local Human Rights Dialogue with the Argentine government, which included a dedicated gender chapter. The dialogue was preceded by a meeting with civil society representatives for a round of consultations**.** In addition to the formal dialogue, the EU continued its broad political contacts, meetings and initiatives with both state and non-state actors engaged with human rights issues. The EU Delegation, in particular, coordinates its actions in building post-pandemic resilient societies and encouraging the inclusion and participation of civil society in public policies, with Members States through the Team Europe approach.

4. EU financial engagement: Support to civil society organizations in Argentina continued growing in 2022 with four new projects for a total value of EUR 11 million in areas including human rights, biodiversity and digitalisation. The total value of EU´s support to civil society organisations in on-going projects currently amounts to over EUR 29 million, of which EUR 6 million, specifically promote human rights.

One of the main projects on gender was the project “Equipo Latinoamericano de Justicia y Género - Cerrando Brechas II: Desnaturalizando violencias ocultas para erradicar la violencia de género promoviendo la igualdad”, which was able to make great advancements in building networks, supporting civil society organisations (CSOs) and providing legal support to vulnerable women and girls. The project ended in December 2022.

Another issue that the EU has been closely following in Argentina is indigenous peoples’ rights. For instance, the project “Reaching the North: The human rights debt to the indigenous communities in the north of the province of Salta” addresses primarily the issue of nutrition in the Wichi Communities in the poorest areas of the country, where in 2019, a state of emergency was declared following the tragic deaths of children for malnutrition and poor access to water.

Still on social inclusion, there is also a focus on addressing the rights of people with disabilities. The Project TRAMA- Red para la inclusión laboral Sostenible” carries out a remarkable work in the city of Rosario with young people with mental disabilities, trying to discover their unique hidden talents and finding suitable jobs, together with a network of likeminded entrepreneurs.

At the end of 2022, the Delegation launched a new call for proposals to strengthen CSOs and promote human rights in Argentina with a total budget of EUR 6 136 000. The call, with a focus on environment and digital rights, will support 10 new projects. The Spotlight Initiative for prevention of gender violence benefited from approximately USD 6 million for its activities in Argentina.

5. Multilateral context: The EU Delegation and Member States’ embassies conducted joint demarches ahead of each of the three regular UN Human Rights Council (HRC) sessions in 2022, as well as ahead of the special session on Ukraine in May. Argentina presided the HRC in 2022, and continues being a member until 2024. Those demarches, as well as those related to the UNGA’s Third Committee, served to confirm that Argentine positions are in general aligned with the EU’s.

There are however some exceptions, in particular when human rights situations in China are concerned. Argentina in any case does not co-sponsor country-specific resolutions. In 2022 a shift was observed concerning Russia, whose aggression against Ukraine, including the human rights implications, was clearly condemned by Argentina, while previously the country had avoided criticising Russian human rights violations (in Crimea, for instance).

Argentina also plays an active role in promoting the rights of women and sexual minorities. During 2022, the country held the Vice-Presidencies (representing GRULAC) of the Bureau of the UN Women Executive Board, the Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women and co-chair the UN LGBTI Group. In the regional arena, Argentina held the 15th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAC). In December, the country started to work on the implementation of UNSC Resolution N° 1325/2000 concerning the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

The Bahamas

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The Bahamas maintained its stature as a stable democracy with a record of accomplishment of inclusive and transparent elections. The centre-left Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) defeated the centre-right Free National Movement (FNM) in the general election on 16 September. The PLP secured 32 out of 39 seats, thereby continuing the tradition of one-term governments in The Bahamas. The Commonwealth, Organization of American States (OAS) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) all fielded observer groups. They all assessed the election as being free and fair and commended the electorate for exercising their franchise despite the challenges posed by the third wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

Prior to demitting office, the FNM-administration fulfilled two pledges to improve public administration and good governance. The Public Procurement Act was activated, which has created a mechanism to digitise and streamline procurement activities within and across government bodies and to make core processes more transparent. The Freedom of Information Commissioner and a Deputy Commissioner were appointed, which will help to operationalise the Freedom of Information Act and in turn, improve public access to government documents. Furthermore, The Bahamas scored 63/100 on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index for 2020, down from 64/100 in 2019, making it the second best placed Caribbean country behind Barbados. Nevertheless, media reports continue to suggest that corruption is an ongoing problem in the country.

Crime was a major issue in 2021 as the police recorded 119 murders, a 75% increase over the 68 murders reported in 2020 (the Bahamian homicide rate went from 17.2 murders/100 000 inhabitants in 2020 to 29.8 in 2021, a critical level). Notably, the killing of a four-year-old girl in November, as well as incidents of domestic violence captured attention in the public domain and prompted calls for more sustained action to address family violence.

The treatment of Haitian migrants remains an area of concern, within the context of the ongoing political instability following the Haitian President's assassination and earthquake in July and August of 2021. A revised Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill, which was drafted in 2018 to replace the Nationality Act and the Immigration Act, is yet to be passed into law. The proposed law is intended to address the long-standing problem of statelessness and the rights of Bahamians to pass on their citizenship.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 – 2024, the EU closely monitors human rights issues, with keen focus on undocumented migrants, women's rights and gender equality.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The Head of EU Delegation, Ambassador Marianne Van Steen, presented her credentials to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Governor General in February and July, respectively. Demarches were carried out to seek support for EU priorities at the 46th session of the UN Human Rights Council, among others.

4. EU financial engagement: The Bahamas continues to benefit from a series of regional projects, some of which related to human rights such as on access to health and energy following the 2019 Dorian hurricane.

5. Multilateral context: The most recent Universal Periodic Review within the framework of the UN Human Rights Council was held in January 2018. The country's next review is due in January 2023.

Barbados and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines)

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines are multiparty parliamentary democracies upholding civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. They operate under the rule of law with strong democratic institutions. In the administration of justice, backlog of cases remains a concern prevalent across the Eastern Caribbean. All seven countries still have the death penalty on the books. Other crosscutting human rights challenges pertain mainly but not exclusively to LGBTI rights, domestic and gender-based violence and child abuse. Increasing occurrence of gun violence is also an issue of concern.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 – 2024, the EU focuses on the following areas:

Domestic and gender-based violence: Incidences of gender-based and domestic violence remain a recurrent phenomenon in the Eastern Caribbean States countries. Cases are not always reported due to various reasons, including community pressure, shame and fear of reprisal. The broader pattern also includes male victims and violence between same-sex partners, both categories often overlooked due to social stigma.

Child abuse: Child abuse remains a challenge in the forms of sexual abuse, neglect/abandonment, verbal abuse, physical punishment and family dysfunction. As a common trend in the region, the procedures of reporting to the authorities are often too complicated and not victim-centric. Corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool in schools remains legal in several states, although not commonly enforced. Barbados is currently in the process of adopting child protection legislation, making the reporting of child abuse mandatory.

LGBTI: Consensual same-sex intimacy is illegal across the region with punishment ranging from five years to life imprisonment under the outdated so-called "buggery" and "indecency" laws. Although legislation is not strictly enforced, its impact is significant as it continues to fuel

episodes of hate speech and crosscutting discrimination against people who engage in consensual same-sex intimacy. In 2019, the civil society umbrella group Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality (ECADE) launched litigation against the so-called "buggery" and "indecency" laws in several states of the OECS. A significant development in 2022 was the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court's ruling on the unconstitutionality of the anti-buggery laws in Antigua and Barbuda and St. Kitts and Nevis'. Barbados' High Court also ruled on the unconstitutionality of the anti-buggery laws in the country. These rulings are the result of local and regional civil society efforts to challenge anti-LGBT legislation in the Eastern Caribbean region. No judgments yet have been rendered on Dominica, Grenada and St. Lucia.

Gun violence: Over the past year, several Eastern Caribbean states have struggled with an increase in gun violence and gang-related crime. In St. Lucia related to this is the increase in drug smuggling in the past year.

Indigenous people: Dominica is home to the largest indigenous population, the Kalinago, in the Eastern Caribbean. With a community of approximately 3 500 persons, their rights are protected by law and they actively participate in decision-making on issues which directly affect them. Despite improvements, the Kalinago people experience some societal discrimination, creating economic hurdles. The EU supports the Government of Dominica through budget support (approx. EUR 20 million) to relocate housing stock in the Kalinago territory from vulnerable areas to safer ones, and to build back better within the communities after they were severely affected by hurricane Maria in 2017.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 17 May 2022, the EU Delegation displayed a rainbow flag on its building on the occasion of the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT). The EU Head of Delegation recorded a video in support of IDAHOT, which was posted on social media. The EU Delegation participated in the worldwide awareness campaign related to the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence, displaying its priorities and activities in the fight against gender-based violence as well as by posting messages against gender-based violence on social media. In addition, the EU Delegation and Member States use social media to disseminate Human Rights priorities and concerns.

4. EU financial engagement: To combat discrimination against the LGBTI community the EU Delegation launched a project ("Caribbean LGBTI Initiative for Promoting Solidarity Outcomes – CALIPSO") of the LGBTI sub-regional umbrella Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality (ECADE), aimed at building a stronger LGBTI civil society in all seven countries.

Another project funded by the EU Delegation is the DECIDES project of the Interarts Foundation ("DECIDES for LGBTI and Child Rights in Antigua and Barbuda") and has a mainly youth-centred, agenda to build the capacity of CSOs and advocate with public authorities for changes of legislation and policies regarding LGBTI rights. The project contains a smaller component on child abuse, aimed at increasing young people's awareness of child abuse and its consequences, improving their knowledge of services for abused children as well as at enhancing capacities of teachers and staff within youth clubs and other relevant organisations to better recognise and report abuse and offer effective counselling.

The Livity Project of the University of the West Indies ("Supporting Eastern Caribbean CSOs for Social Change") supported by the EU is aimed at inclusion in a broader sense, fighting marginalisation, discrimination and exclusion of persons with disabilities, LGBTI citizens, youth and the elderly in national and regional decision-making processes in all seven countries.

To support change of approach to the use of the death penalty, the EU Delegation continued to support London-based ethical law firm Simons Muirhead and Burton LLP's Death Penalty Project ("Building a platform for abolition: Strengthening the anti-death penalty movement in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean").

The EU Delegation supports the joint EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, which aims at preventing and responding to gender-based violence both through a country programme in Grenada and a regional programme across the Eastern Caribbean. In Grenada, money is disbursed to further strengthen the support and services available to victims and survivors as well as improve prevention activities and awareness raising campaigns.

To support the judicial reform in the region, the EU Delegation is finalizing a major EU assistance programme of EUR 14 million ("Support to the effective administration of Criminal Justice Systems in the Caribbean"), expected to launch in the first quarter of 2023. This project is mainly aimed at reducing case backlogs in nine Caribbean countries (including Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia).

5. Multilateral context: Barbados and all OECS countries have strongly spoken out against the Russian invasion in Ukraine. Voting in favour of the UN General Assembly's Resolution demanding Russia to withdraw its military forces from Ukraine, Barbados and all OECS sent a sign of its strong commitment to human rights and democracy.

The death penalty is still on the statute books in Barbados and all OECS. While the last executions took place years ago, there has not been any political initiative or national discussion towards abolishing the death penalty in 2022. To the contrary, PM Gonsalves of St. Vincent and the Grenadines expressed his intention to reintroduce the death penalty because of increasing crime and gun violence. Barbados and all OECS voted against the resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, presented in front of the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in November 2022.

Belize

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Belize celebrated 40 years of nationhood in 2021, which coincided with the People's United Party's (PUP) first year in power.

It was a major year for Belize in terms of gender and democracy. Froyla Tzalam, a highly respected Mopan Maya community leader, anthropologist and gender advocate was sworn in as Belize's first Governor General (Head of State). At the regional level, Dr Carla Barnett, an experienced economist and former government minister, was appointed as Secretary General

of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). She is the first woman and Belizean to be elevated to the post.

Belize's murder rate increased in 2021. According to data from the Belize Police Department, 125 murders were reported in 2021, representing a 23% increase over 2020 (102 murders). Insight Crime ranked Belize as having the fifth highest homicide rate in Latin America and the Caribbean, with 29 murders per 100 000 inhabitants in 2021. At the same time, drug trafficking, trafficking in human beings, gang violence and high levels of violence against women and girls continue to command attention.

Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index did not rank Belize for the 12th consecutive year, due to an absence of data. However, media reports suggest that corruption is a major issue. Notably, the Commission of Inquiry into the sale of government assets between October 2019 and November 2020 held five public hearings. There were 22 witnesses, including former Prime Minister, Dean Barrow. The report has been forwarded to the Office of the Attorney General and Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for action as deemed necessary.

The Government of Belize took steps to comply with the Caribbean Court of Justice's Consent Order of 2015, with a plan of agreed actions to recognise and protect the rights arising from the Maya customary land tenure system. The government continues to engage in agreed consultations to develop the appropriate legal mechanisms and abstain from measures that adversely affect Maya interests regarding land.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 – 2024, the EU continues to focus on:

- the rights of indigenous peoples;
- women's rights and gender equality;
- abolition of the death penalty, among other areas.

Human rights and political dialogues, as well as financial assistance are the main routes of engagement.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The Head of EU Delegation visited Belize twice. In February, she had introductory meetings with the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration. In September, the Head of EU Delegation attended Belize's Diplomatic Week, which coincided with the country's 40th anniversary of independence celebrations. The EU-Belize Article 8 Political Dialogue was also held in September and the EU Delegation carried out formal demarches on human rights and democracy issues throughout the year.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU has partnered with the Pan American Health Organization to implement the five-year Health Sector Support Programme. The EUR 10 million programme aims to build efficient and disaster resilience health facilities; optimise the organisational structure of health services and support digitalisation of health information systems.

Additionally, the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, which was launched in August 2020, continues to work with the government, civil society organisations and other stakeholders to address family violence in a sustainable way. Spotlight has funding support of EUR 3 million.

Through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the EU delegation continues to support the Sarstoon Temash Institute for Indigenous Management in promoting and protecting the economic, social and cultural rights of Mayan women in Belize.

5. Multilateral context: Belize underwent its last Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in the framework of the UN Human Rights Council in November 2018. Out of 124 recommendations presented, Belize supported 100 and took note of 24. Recommendations covered, *inter alia*, abolishing the death penalty and setting up a human rights institute. The next UPR is expected in 2023.

Plurinational State of Bolivia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Despite successfully organised elections in 2020 resulting in a Government enjoying support from a majority of the electorate, Bolivia has continued along a path of persistently high levels of polarisation. The country remains affected by the conflicts surrounding the 2019 elections; the much awaited reconciliation process has not gained momentum, and progress on reparation and redress to victims has been limited. The mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Bolivia was not extended beyond the end of 2022.

The EU continues to work on a judicial reform, since international bodies have repeatedly pointed to issues such as: limited budget allocations to the judicial organ, high levels of individuals in pre-trial detention and precarious conditions, weakness of the judicial career, as well as difficulties in access to justice. Following a visit to Bolivia in February 2022, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers noted that the country's long-standing patterns of interference in the judiciary had not been sufficiently addressed.
Violence against women and children and LGBTI, child labour, freedom of expression and impunity for human rights violations continue to be central issues.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-24, the EU in 2022 focussed on promoting the rule of law, access to justice, support and protection of human rights defenders, the rights of indigenous peoples and LGBTI groups, as well as elimination of gender-based violence.

The 'EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society' for 2019-2022 was implemented through dialogues with civil society organisations (CSOs), and studies to identify the challenges faced by CSOs when promoting human rights and democracy. With the gender country-level implementation plan (CLIP), the EU advanced on the integration of the topic of gender equality in all its programmes. Collaboration with Member States and a common approach were resulted in the development of joint actions, such as one with AECID (Spain) on territorial

rights of the indigenous populations and one with Sida (Sweden) on human rights, environmental rights and territorial rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights and democracy issues were addressed in regular dialogue with Bolivian authorities, the international community and civil society, as well as through public diplomacy. In addition, in the framework of GSP+ monitoring, the EU was in constant exchange with Bolivian authorities regarding human rights and democracy.

In May 2022, a High Level Dialogue was held between Bolivia and the European Union. During this dialogue, the EU presented its new Multiannual Indicative Programme, which aims to assist recovery and sustainable economic development, through promoting fundamental rights, democracy, reconciliation, the rule of law and peace and security. Bolivia and the EU declared their interest in facing the challenges of the 21st century together.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU is supporting Human Rights and Democracy through a number of projects, the new MIP (2021-2024), and thematic instruments, like EIDHR. Access to justice, support to human right defenders, trafficking in human beings, elections, and fight against discrimination of vulnerable people and against gender-based violence are tackled with stand-alone projects for an amount of EUR 16.6 million.

Regarding the fight against gender-based violence, the EU continued to implement a project with AECID/Spain that includes support to the Vice-Ministry for Equal Opportunities (EUR 600.000 incl. co-financing by Spain). It also supported two projects implemented by a consortium of NGOs and universities, led by OXFAM, to promote women's participation in political parties, combat political violence and promote intercultural democracy (the first phase for an amount of EUR 1 million ended in 2022).

In 2022, the EU supported the closing phase of a regional project aimed to promote the rights of LGBTI persons in Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia (EUR 2 million). One of the main impacts of this project is the strengthening of a regional network of LGBTI human rights associations, which has achieved a stronger involvement of the Andean parliament on this topic. The EU also continued to support a project aiming at extending the right to comprehensive health for indigenous peoples, implemented by two local NGOs (worth EUR 610 000).

To strengthen the nexus “environmental rights and human rights”, the EU continued to support a regional project implemented in Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador by a consortium of NGOs (EUR 1.5 million) that aims to promote human rights and environmental protection in the mining sector. In 2022, in collaboration with a Colombian University, the project developed and published a scientific investigation that proved mercury accumulation in the hair of indigenous people living in an isolated community close to gold mines.

5. Multilateral context: Bolivia is a member of the Human Rights Council (HRC) and will hold the vice-presidency during 2023. Bolivia underlines its unwavering commitment to human rights; however, it tends to abstain or vote against on country-specific resolutions. Notably, Bolivia has voted against suspending Russia from the HRC.

The UN Human Rights Committee, in its March 2022 concluding observations of the fourht periodic review on Bolivia, noted with concern the continued prevalence of gender-based violence and the low conviction rates. In October 2022, the UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights visited Bolivia. He confirmed the connection between gold mining and the levels of mercury among a Bolivian indigenous group.

The EU is providing support to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). The IACHR and the Bolivian government signed an agreement in 2019 establishing an Inter-disciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI) to investigate the violent events that occurred in Bolivia in late 2019. An EU-funded regional project (EUR 300 000), will support the IACHR in the follow-up of the GIEI recommendations. In 2022, the EU also supported the mission of the OHCHR in Bolivia.

Federative Republic of Brazil

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The 2022 presidential parliamentary and state elections have clearly shown the strength and resilience of Brazil's democratic institutions. Amidst a climate marked by strong polarization, the proliferation of hate speech, attacks against the free press, civil society and the judiciary, further amplified by social media, the Superior Electoral Tribunal ensured the organisation of transparent and free elections.

Significant concerns remained in the human rights area, including the discrimination against black people and the LGBTI community, the violation of indigenous rights, violence against women, land conflicts, attacks against human rights defenders and against journalists. The killings of Bruno Perreira, an indigenous expert and Dom Phillips, a British journalist, in the Amazon in June 2022, were testimony of rising environmental crimes, attacks against environmental defenders and the rapidly deteriorating habitat of indigenous peoples. A key concern are also social inequalities, amplified by the fallout of COVID-19 and rising food and energy prices, leading to a doubling the number of people with hunger, affecting more than 30 million Brazilians, according to Brazilian Network of Research and Sovereignty and Food and Nutritional Security – Rede Penssan.

The results of the Presidential elections in October 2022 would very probably change the situation, as in his electoral programme President Lula insisted that combatting social inequalities would be a main priority for his Government. He has also stressed the importance of the respect of indigenous rights, the sustainability agenda and his political movement will be very closely associated with Human Rights defenders and civil society movements.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Based on the 2007 Strategic Partnership, the EU and Brazil have continued a regular dialogue on human rights, both at bilateral and multilateral levels.

In line with the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-24, key EU policy priorities in Brazil include: rule of law and good governance, freedom of association, freedom

of expression, non-discrimination, including gender equality, human rights defenders, business and human rights, and new technologies and human rights. During the Bolsonaro Government, the EU focussed its action on States, Municipalities and civil society, in addition to the regular dialogues with the Government.

Following the adoption of the 2020 EU Gender Action Plan III, the EU prepared a Brazil-level action plan, which started implementation in 2022. Key priorities include combatting all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, and promoting social, political, economic and cultural rights of women and girls.

The EU continued to implement the EU Roadmap for the engagement with Civil Society in Brazil, adopted in August 2020. The main priority areas include overcoming social and economic inequalities, promoting an enabling environment for civil society, promoting their human rights protection, strengthening rights related to the environment and climate, as well as the development of a sustainable economy.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The 11th EU-Brazil Human Rights Dialogue, co-chaired by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights (EUSR), Eamon Gilmore, took place in June 2022 in Brussels. The dialogue included the protection of vulnerable groups, freedom of expression, business & human rights and cooperation in multilateral fora. Back to back with the dialogue, the EU organised a meeting with European and Brazilian civil society organisations.

The mission by the Commissioner for Environment Sinkevicius in April 2022 was also an occasion to engage in discussions with the federal and state authorities, indigenous peoples' organisations and human rights and environmental defenders. The EU Delegation also held regular meetings with Brazilian civil society, including representatives of indigenous communities. After a series of dedicated dialogues with Human Rights Defenders was kicked off on the occasion of EUSR Gilmore's visit to the state of Pará in 2021, two further dialogues were held in 2022, in Rio de Janeiro and in Brasilia respectively.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the Dialogue Facility of the Foreign Policy Instrument, the EU continued the joint work with the Superior Electoral Tribunal in the area of fight against disinformation. Several exchanges of best practice have been organised between EU experts and with the National Council of Justice, the National Commission for Human Rights and the Ministry for Family, Women and Human Rights.

Furthermore, the EU published two calls for proposals for civil society organisations under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument and Foreign Policy Instrument, with priorities including the promotion of an enabling environment for civil society organisations, digital inclusion of vulnerable populations, the protection and promotion of freedom of expression, press freedom and conflict prevention. A total of ten new projects amounting to almost EUR 8 million have been selected and will start implementation in 2023.

Through UNHCR and IOM, the EU also continued to support Brazil's 'Operation Welcome' for the protection and integration of Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

5. Multilateral context: As member of the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2020-2022 and as non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2022-2023, Brazil continued being an active player at multilateral level. The EU has maintained a constructive engagement with Brazil, including in the context of the Russian invasion in Ukraine and in the run-up to the 66th session on the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Since 2001, Brazil has a standing invitation to UN Special Procedures. The last visits took place in April and May 2022, by the Special Representative on violence against women and the Special Representative on Freedom of Assembly respectively. However, 12 visit requests are still pending.

In November 2022, Brazil went through the fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Brazilian civil society and the congressional observatory for human rights assessed that the Brazilian state had not implemented most of the 246 recommendations of the previous UPR exercise (2017). UN Member States formulated 306 new recommendations. The EU carried out an intense work with the Brazilian Government and with the Brazilian civil society in order to better prepare for this UPR.

A Brazilian judge took office at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for the mandate 2022-2027 and Brazil hosted in 2022 the ordinary sessions of the Court. In January 2022, Brazil promulgated the 'Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Forms of Intolerance'. In February, Brazil adhered to the Ibero-American Initiative to Prevent and Eliminate Violence Against Women.

Canada

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Canada continues to enjoy a strong global reputation as a defender of human rights at home and abroad, but continues to struggle with a number of longstanding human rights issues, mostly related to the rights and treatment of indigenous peoples. The discovery of the remains of indigenous children in mass graves on the sites of former residential schools highlighted the suffering and discrimination inflicted on Indigenous Peoples in Canada in recent history with impacts still felt to this day. The federal government continued to push forward with its reconciliation efforts. In 2021, the government notably passed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Act, Canada's first substantive step towards ensuring that federal laws reflect the standards set out in UNDRIP. Prime Minister Trudeau also included the issue of reconciliation in the marching order to all his cabinet ministers.

Other important human rights issues include: Canada's House of Commons unanimous vote to ban LGBT conversion therapy, as well as the public debate over the sale of Canadian-made military technology to countries with a record of human rights violations. In 2021, Canada notably cancelled the export permits for drone technology that was sold to Turkey, and reportedly used by Azerbaijan in its 2020 war with Armenia.

2. EU action – key focus areas: A number of activities were organised by the EU delegation and Member States in Canada, in line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024). In the spring of 2021, EU activities centred on the continued promotion of meaningful collaboration and exchanges of best practices between the EU and Canada on human rights issues around the world.

Protecting and empowering individuals: Gender equality and the empowerment of women are shared priorities for the EU and Canada, promoted through a number of activities, as well as through the mainstreaming into regular bilateral dialogues. The Head of EU Delegation, who chairs the group of Women Heads of Diplomatic Missions in Ottawa, along with the Heads of Missions of Denmark, Greece, Hungary and other non-EU states, participated in a panel discussion on women in diplomacy and the empowerment of women.

The EU delegation together with EU Member States supported the rights of LGBTI persons by advocating through numerous social media posts international days and events such as IDAHOT and Pride Week. In the run up to the International Human Rights Day, the Dutch Embassy also organised the visit of the *"Amsterdam Rainbowdress*" with activities involving the local LGBTI community. This event saw the participation of Canadian ministers and other officials and gained a lot of media exposure.

Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies: The German Embassy has continued its support to a project of a Canadian NGO that addresses the impact of COVID-19 and climate change on the right to housing. The project aims at advancing the right to housing legislation in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, researching the intersection of climate change and the right to housing.

Inspired by the success of the two previous editions and in order to support the implementation of the UNFCCC gender action plan adopted at COP25, France and Canada have committed to working on the organisation of a new capacity building workshop for women climate and biodiversity negotiators (in their renewed climate and environment partnership.

Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy: During 2021, the EU deepened its coordination with Canada and other like-minded countries on sanctions against serious human rights violations – in Belarus, in China's Xinjiang Province, and in Myanmar.

The EU delegation and EU Member States conveyed advocacy messages on their online platforms throughout the year on issues ranging from arbitrary detention, to the treatment of Uyghurs, the situation in Hong Kong, the death penalty, and human rights violations in Belarus and Myanmar. The HR/VP on behalf of the European Union endorsed Canada's *Declaration Against Arbitrary Detention in State-to-State Relations* launched on 15 February 2021. The Head of EU Delegation and the EU Member States diplomats also joined Foreign Affairs Minister Garneau in a march marking the 1,000th day of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor's arbitrary detention by China.

New technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges: During the EU-Canada Summit in June 2021, EU and Canadian leaders committed to deepening digital cooperation through the EU-Canada Digital Dialogue and the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence

(GPAI). Still under this pillar, the Netherlands financially supported the organisation of the second annual Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights Forum organised by the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies, Concordia University, which also included the participation of the Dutch Ambassador and two speakers.

France and Canada, founding members of the GPAI, continued their work for the development of responsible artificial intelligence that respects human rights at the GPAI summit held in Paris on 11 November.

Delivering by working together: The EU policy priorities in Canada also foresee a strong cooperation between the EU and its Member States and Canada on human rights issues around the world. To promote these efforts, the EU delegation organised a training for EEAS and Global Affairs Canada officials on the use of open source intelligence in the context of sanctions. The EU delegation also facilitated bilateral cooperation with specific focus on EU and Canadian human rights sanctions regimes.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The last human rights dialogue foreseen under the Strategic Partnership Agreement took place in June 2020. Human rights issues were nevertheless discussed during regular geographic dialogues, and at the highest political levels throughout the year, including during several phone calls at the ministerial level (devoted to the situation in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Venezuela and Belarus, as well as to human rights violations by Russia and China). Moreover, during the EU-Canada Summit in June 2021, leaders agreed to continue their efforts to defend human rights and support multilateral institutions. EU Member States representatives also raise consistently human rights issues in their respective high-level meetings with their Canadian counterparts.

4. **Multilateral context:** The EU delegation, together with EU Member States, delivered a demarche to Global Affairs Canada in support of EU priorities at the 76th session of the UN General Assembly Third Committee. The exchange confirmed the strongly likeminded approach by Canada and the EU on the agenda of the UNGA Third Committee. A few Member States used the opportunity to highlight their priorities, notably the German resolutions on 'The human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation,' and the 'National Human Rights Institutions,' and Austria's resolution on 'effective promotion of the declaration on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.'

Canadian interlocutors indicated that priorities include the Iran resolution and the resolution on the rights of the indigenous peoples; worries about pushbacks on human rights defenders and the Pakistan-led resolution on disinformation. Canada also highlighted the importance of engaging non-traditional partners in the UN context.

In 2021, Canada took over the hosting of the International Donors' Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants, building up on the efforts of the EU and Spain, which co-hosted the conference in 2020.

Republic of Chile

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Chile reached OECD high-income status in 2018 and a "very high" ranking in the 2021 Human Development Index (42 out of 191 countries). Chile continues to feel the political, economic and social effects of the October 2019 social crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, both of which highlighted the country's continuing fight against inequality[29] and presented multiple human rights challenges.

The year was marked by the change of government – with a renewed focus on human rights and gender equality – and by an intense constitutional process, which culminated with the rejection of the proposed constitution in September 2022. The process itself set a new threshold for political representation of traditionally excluded groups with a Convention that had gender parity, seats reserved for indigenous peoples, greater access for independents, and attempts to enhance citizen participation. The process initially appeared to raise the bar with respect to guaranteeing the rights of historically excluded groups, but the Convention produced a maximalist document that a large majority of Chileans (62%) considered went too far in its transformation of the country's political, judicial, and economic systems.

In the aftermath, the political discussion on human rights has become more polarised, particularly in light of the upcoming 50th anniversary of the military coup. Although the new government has prioritised fact-finding and reparations for both historic human rights violations and those committed during the social crisis, human rights groups still see problems with the lack of accountability for the 2019 violations and warn that it contributes to a culture of impunity. Significant legal and political progress was made to protect vulnerable groups, particularly about the political representation of women and indigenous peoples, the creation of a new child protection system and the legal recognition of the equal rights of LGBTI people. Relevant gaps in protection remain however, with regards to violence against women and their economic empowerment, the rights of migrants, and the violence in the region of La Araucanía.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-24, the EU focused on the implementation of the following five strands of action through a mix of political dialogue with relevant stakeholders, cooperation projects with civil society and public diplomacy activities: (i) Strengthening institutional framework of human rights, rule of law and accountability, (ii) Supporting the rights of groups in vulnerable situations, including: (a) Women and girls, (b) Children and adolescents, (c) Indigenous peoples, (e) LGBTI, (f) Migrants, and (g) Human rights defenders; (iii) Economic, social, cultural rights, (iv) Human rights and business, and (v) Strengthening access to information and fight against disinformation and corruption.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Chile and the EU share a deep and regular bilateral political dialogue on Human Rights, which culminated in the 11th local Human Rights Dialogue on 5 December with the participation of high level representatives of Chilean Ministries and EU Member States. The dialogue, was opened by the Chilean Minister of Foreign Affairs, Antonia Urrejola, and the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore.

[29] When adjusted for inequality, Chile's 2021 HDI falls 15.6% and it ranks 45 (income inequality is 28.3%).

Minister Urrejola stressed the government's commitment to a feminist and environmentalist foreign policy and the willingness to cooperate closely with the EU in multilateral fora, in particular at the Human Rights Council following Chile's election. Several meetings with civil society in order to exchange on the main topics of the dialogue and hear their perspectives preceded the dialogue.

The EU, along with Member States, maintained a fluid dialogue with relevant authorities on human rights and democracy throughout 2022. It was an important feature of high-level political dialogue and visits from EU officials, including HR/VP Josep Borrell who met with the President, ministries, parliamentarians, universities and civil society.

The EU Delegation carried out multiple activities to promote the EU's commitment to Human Rights and democracy. On International Women Rights Day (8 March), four podcasts "Experiences in Europe on Gender Equality" were broadcasted on *Radio Cooperativa*. In June 2022, EU Ambassadors participated in a beach-cleaning activity (the first of its kind by the EU in Chile) in the region of Antofagasta, attended by local authorities and students in order to raise awareness about the protection of the environment. On International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November), the EU Delegation sponsored the organization of a theatre play and EU Ambassadors broadcasted messages on the radio. Finally, the conclusion of the EU-Chile Advanced Framework Agreement in December, which includes new articles on democratic principles, human rights and rule of law, will provide a unique opportunity to deepen cooperation on Human Rights.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the Civil Society Organization thematic line, the EU oversaw four active projects in 2022, with a total budget of EUR 2 million. These projects spanned a range of thematic areas, including women's leadership and digitalization (with Fundacion Por Todas), democracy and political participation (with Fundacion Avina and Fundacion Ciudadania Inteligente), as well as capacity building for civil society organizations (with Fundacion Colunga).

Under the Human Rights and Democracy thematic line, the EU oversaw two projects in 2022, with a total combined budget of EUR 860 000. These projects spanned a range of thematic areas linked to the priorities of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy: democracy and participation (Tayu proyect with Fundacion Terram) and access to justice for human rights defenders (NEwÉN project with Cooperazion Internazionale Sud Sud).

The EU financed several civil society projects in the context of the constitutional process to support citizen's access to information and participation with a focus on women and Indigenous Peoples. In addition to the work carried out on exchange of experience in the framework of the constitutional process, the regional programme EUROsociAL+ continued supporting Chile through activities on democratic governance, social policies, and gender equality.

The EU Delegation also continued to support the implementation of the INTER PARES programme with the National Congress. Specific work plans were established for the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, in areas such as climate change, inclusion, gender equality, and included the holding of dialogues with EU Member States parliaments.

5. Multilateral context: Chile and the EU are close partners in the field of Human Rights at the multilateral level and continue to sustain similar positions in multilateral fora, in particular in condemning the Russian aggression of Ukraine. In addition, the EU maintained a regular political dialogue with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other line Ministries as appropriate, including by carrying out formal demarches on UNGA First and Third Committees or the Commission on the status of Women. The EU also welcomed the election of Chile at the Human Rights Council for the period 2023-2025 in order to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

Republic of Colombia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2022 was marked by legislative and presidential elections held during the first half of the year. The legislative elections represented a step forward in terms of diversity, with a historic level of women elected to Congress (29.4%, compared to 18.9% in 2018), as well as for marginalised populations, with eight indigenous and 31 Afro-Colombians elected. They were also a milestone in the implementation of the Peace Agreement since, for the first time, 16 special transitional peace constituencies elected delegates to the House of Representatives, chosen from candidates originating from civil society and being registered victims of the armed conflict. The Presidential election brought to power a representative from the left, long-time opponent Gustavo Petro, for the first time in Colombian history. It went smoothly and results were accepted by all sides of the political spectrum. For the second round of the Presidential election, both vice-presidential candidates were women and Afro-Colombian. It is the second time in a row that Colombia elects a female Vice-president.

The armed conflict, fought between several illegal armed groups over control of illegal economies, causes high levels of insecurity at local level, in particular for social leaders and human rights defenders (HRDs), including environmental defenders, and results in forced displacements and confinements of communities. Afro-Colombian, indigenous and rural communities are particularly affected. During 2022, 127 massacres took place (defined as the simultaneous killing of three or more civilians), 199 HRDs were killed (the highest figure since 2016) and 50 ex-FARC combatants murdered[30]. There are also worrying figures regarding homicides and sexual violence in the country.

As of 2022, 2,477,588 Venezuelan migrants were present in Colombia. The country's response to the migration crisis has been widely recognised as an international example of promoting dignity, human rights and long-term perspectives for migrants and refugees. However, the humanitarian and human rights situation for migrants remains of concern.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU action on human rights and democracy is focused on seven priority areas: (i) prevention and protection from violence against social leaders,

[30] Respective sources: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Colombian Ombudsman's Office (Defensoría del Pueblo) and UN Verification Mission (UNVMC).

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: The comprehensive implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement is a central part of the EU's bilateral engagement with Colombia in democracy and human rights. During his visits to the country in February and December, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and Special Envoy for the Peace Process in Colombia, Eamon Gilmore, discussed the human rights situation and the policy of "total peace" of the new Government, meeting with State authorities and civil society. The EU has continued supporting the three institutions of the transitional justice system set up under the Peace Agreement: the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the Unit for the Search of People Deemed as Missing and the Truth Commission, which presented its final report in June 2022.

The EU maintained and deepened its engagement with key national authorities related to democracy and human rights. The 13th edition of the EU-Colombia Human Rights Dialogue was held in February 2022. The EU celebrated the third anniversary of the its campaign #DefendamosLaVida that continues to be the core and strategic branding for the EU and its Member States' joint commitment in support of threatened HRDs and organisations who defend human rights. The EU Delegation, the 16 EU Member States' Embassies plus Norway and Switzerland participate in the campaign, which has supported so far a total of over 40 threatened leaders and organisations. #DefendamosLaVida is well known among civil society, HRDs and the new government, many members of which benefitted from the campaign in their previous roles as HRDs and social leaders, and is well reflected in national and local media.

An EU election observation mission (EOM) was present in the country throughout the legislative and presidential electoral processes, upon invitation by the Colombian electoral authorities. The EOM presented its final report and recommendations in September 2022 and several of the key recommendations have been taken into consideration in the proposed political reform, which should be voted by Parliament in 2023.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU supports human rights in Colombia with a wide range of instruments and projects, both regional and bilateral. The bilateral country programme, thematic instruments and the EU Trust Fund (EUTF) for Peace all include support to human-rights-related activities. Through EIDHR, the EU has provided vital support to social leaders and persons qualified as HRDs. Projects are aimed at monitoring the situation of violence in the regions, building HRDs' protection and self-protection capacities, providing access to justice, and supporting the adoption of an efficient and effective public policy guaranteeing the 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 accompanies 10 social organisations in developing plans for self-protection and collective protection. 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.

The EUTF and other programmes on agriculture and environment prioritise Colombia's Amazonian region and 'ark of deforestation', directly supporting formalisation of land property and sustainable productive projects for rural communities. Under these programmes, ownership titles were granted by the National Land Agency in an area of 100 467 ha for 13 579 families, as well as 39 collective ownership titles for ethnic communities equivalent to an area of 163 344 ha benefiting 7 124 indigenous and afro-descendent families. The EUR 1.2 million project 'Trade with local identity' funded the Colombian National Network of Local Development Agencies (Red Adelco) to enable artisans to participate in exhibitions and sell and export their products. Other projects like "ABRIGUE" promote the agro-ecological transition of the agricultural, forestry and artisanal fishing sectors. With a budget of EUR 3.3 million, this project aims at strengthening the regional capacities of producers and their local organisations, as well as to improve value chains, profitability and resilience to climate change.

In 2022, the EU continued its humanitarian support to migrants from Venezuela and their host communities through several regional and bilateral projects. Other projects focus on their social integration, such as the EUR 8.5 million programme to the Ministry of Trade for the economic inclusion of migrants. Access to health, education and the respect of labour rights are also part of the existing projects. During his October 2022 visit to Colombia, Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarčič announced an additional EUR 34 million in humanitarian aid in Colombia, of which EUR 22 million will support those affected by the Venezuelan crisis. He also announced that the EU and Canada would co-organise a new Solidarity Conference for Venezuelan migrants (March 2023).

In addition to the work of the EU EOM, the EU Delegation accompanied the first electoral process for the 16 peace constituencies (created by the Peace Agreement in the 16 territories most affected by the armed conflict). With EIDHR resources, the EU organised field missions to facilitate meetings between candidates and local and national authorities.

In March, under the NDICI Rapid Response Pillar, the EU started a EUR 2 million project for the promotion of the Final Report of the Truth Commission created by the 2016 Peace Agreement. The project supports the follow-up to the Report and the monitoring of the implementation of its main recommendations focused on reparation, access to justice and truth for the victims and non-repetition.

5. Multilateral context: The EU works very closely with the UN in Colombia to promote human rights. Several joint visits were organised to territories of Colombia to highlight the human rights situation and promote adequate state responses. The EU Ambassador, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative and the Head of the OHCHR's country office jointly visited Northern Cauca (deeply affected by killings of HDRs) in January and February. They also made a joint mission to the rural area of Tumaco on the Pacific coast, to express support to the Awá indigenous community. The EU Ambassador and the UNSGSR also make regular joint visits to communities of reincorporated ex-FARC combatants (AETCRs).

In October, the UN Security Council unanimously extended the mandate of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia. The Colombian government and representatives of the former FARC-EP also requested the Council to broaden the Mission's mandate to include monitoring of the implementation of sections 1 (rural reform) and 6.2 (ethnic chapter) of the Peace Agreement. The UNSC approved this request in January 2023.

The OAS' Mission to support the peace process (MAPP-OEA), deployed in Colombia since 2004 with a strong focus on peace, democracy, human rights and justice and supported by several Member States, is an important partner and interlocutor in the EU's efforts to support the Colombian peace process. The OAS' electoral observation mission coordinated closely with the EU's.

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. Yet challenges persist and some have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the economic crisis having increased unemployment (11, 6% in November 2022) and poverty (23%). Migration, gender violence and rights of indigenous people continue to be a challenge.

There is growing pressure on Costa Rica's immigration, asylum and refugee system, particularly in light of repression in neighbouring Nicaragua to the north and arrivals who cross from the south after entering Panama via the Darien Gap. The migrant population in Costa Rica represents 11, 5% of the total population, the share of asylum seekers/refugees being 4% of the national population.

Violence against indigenous and afro-descendant communities remains a concern with no progress made in 2022. There has also been an increase in reported crime in 2022, including sexual assaults against women, especially in tourist areas.

In November 2022, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, while visiting Costa Rica, commended the country's strong institutional legal framework, but urged to improve its implementation to prevent and address exploitative working conditions, human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU action in Costa Rica focuses on the protection of the international human rights system and the upholding of the rights of vulnerable groups (such as the LGBTI community, women and girls, human rights defenders, migrants and refugees). The EU and UN agencies are major donors working on inclusion of migrants and refugees in the country.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: During the EU-Costa Rica Political Dialogue in December 2022, both parties underlined their commitment to continue defending and

strengthening effective multilateralism. The government has stepped up calls for financial assistance from the international community to deal with the migratory phenomenon in Costa Rica. Recently, access to the refugee determination system has been tightened, in response to concerns over reported “abuses” of the system on the part of economic migrants. The EU has redoubled its efforts to provide support to the international protection system in Costa Rica.

In 2022, the EU Delegation continued its political and diplomatic work to maintain regular communication with exiled Nicaraguans in the country.

In the field of gender equality, the EU has an implementation strategy for Costa Rica based on the Gender Action Plan III – 2021-2025. In 2022, the EU Delegation gave its annual Gender Equality Award to the RAHAB Foundation for its work on preventing sex trade and trafficking of people, as well as helping victims’ families.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the EU continued to implement several cooperation projects with a strong human rights component.
The EU is presently providing approximately EUR 1 million via DG ECHO (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations) to Central American projects, which directly benefit Costa Rica, delivering specific support to the Government in disaster preparedness, displacement and protection of persons of interest. Under the Latin America regional programmes financed under its Development and Cooperation Instrument (DCI), the EU inaugurated a EUR 2.5 million project with the Spanish Cooperation Agency, AECID, to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and to address the regional impact of the Venezuelan crisis. The project aims to provide access to social security, employment and regularisation to thousands of beneficiaries. A second EUR 2 million migration project was launched through the "Lives in Dignity" Global Fund. The project “*Arcoíris de Esperanza*” aims to support the socioeconomic inclusion of displaced people, additionally focusing on the resilience of host communities in Costa Rica (including climate adaptation).

A joint call for proposals for the human rights and democracy, and civil society instruments has been published to reinforce the participation of civil society in the protection of democracy and human rights in Costa Rica, with a budget of approximately EUR 2 million.

The EU Delegation continued to provide protection and temporary relocation to Central American human rights defenders through the project “Shelter City Costa Rica”, ensuring a safe recovery space and (if possible) return to their countries of origin.

Finally, Costa Rica participates in regional programmes to tackle gender inequality such as the Latin America Regional Spotlight Initiative, aimed at preventing, responding to and eliminating violence against women and girls, as well as *Centroamérica Diversa*, a regional programme executed with the support of the national LBGTI network (Mulabi).

5. Multilateral context : Costa Rica was elected in October 2022 by the UN General Assembly to the Human Rights Council for the period 2023-2025. It is the second time that Costa Rica holds a seat in the Human Rights Council since its creation in 2006. In July, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution recognising the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable

environment as a human right, originally proposed by Costa Rica. UN Secretary General António Guterres welcomed the resolution as a "landmark development".Within different UN bodies, Costa Rica continues to advocate resolutions on nuclear disarmament, the fight against statelessness, etc. In December 2022, Costa Rica, together with Australia, led support for a global moratorium on the death penalty in the UN General Assembly.

Republic of Cuba

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The situation of human rights in Cuba remained a matter of concern in 2022 given the enduring limitations on the effective exercise of some key fundamental rights and freedoms, with restrictions and undue pressure still reported on the activities of human rights defenders, journalists, academics and critical voices. The severe economic and financial crisis, aggravated by the COVID pandemic, has undermined progress regarding economic, social and cultural rights and led to a new increase of migration outflows. The already dire situation is further exacerbated by the US embargo and its extraterritorial restrictive measures, with a tangible impact on the standards of living of the population and on a much-needed modernisation, including in the emergent private sector.

Cuba has developed public policies in sectors such as non-discrimination, gender equality, protection of the rights of the child, as well as the rights of persons with disabilities. New policies and actions have been backed by positive indicators including on sexual and reproductive rights and robust participation of women in parliament, universal access to education and health and high vaccination rates (although the quality of health provision and related indicators has lately deteriorated).

The new Family Code, approved by referendum, introduced significant legal advances as it institutionalized same-sex marriage and contained other progressive measures for the LGTBI community, the elderly, women and children. However, the full exercise of notably political and civil rights and fundamental freedoms, but also of some economic, social and cultural rights is far from guaranteed. In particular, freedom of expression, association, assembly and movement, continued to be subject to important restrictions, with reports of alleged harassment, arbitrary arrests, uncommunicated detention, travel-restrictions, poor conditions in detention centres and disproportionate criminal sentences to peaceful protesters, independent journalists, human rights defenders and pro-democracy activists.

The issue of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience is also of concern. In this respect, Cuba had received international attention in connection to the harsh repression of 11-12 July 2021 protests, and the worrying situation persisted in 2022 with the severe sentences imposed on protesters and restrictions on pluralism. Cuba is a one-party State and organised political opposition is not legal.

The new Criminal Code, which entered into force on 1 December, retains the death penalty (although it has not been applied since 2003). Despite introducing some advances, it may be

potentially used to further prevent citizens from expressing their dissent and to criminalise international funding of artists, journalists and activists, in particular those using social media. Additionally, some relevant 2019 constitutional provisions have not yet been transposed into law.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Throughout 2022, the EU remained engaged in monitoring the situation and maintaining a constant dialogue with authorities, including on human rights, in the framework of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA).

In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, the EU remained engaged to discuss all issues with the authorities through a critical but constructive engagement. Topics covered included: the application of international law, including on human rights and fundamental freedoms such as freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, principles related to separation of powers, rule of law, due process and proportionality of sentences; the promotion of good governance, economic, social, cultural and labour rights; promoting equal opportunities (women empowerment and gender equality, racial non-discrimination, persons with disabilities, LTGBI); supporting pluralism and inclusiveness; advocating for the *de jure* abolition of the death penalty**,** beyond the *de facto* moratorium.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights continued to be an integral part of the EU's policy towards Cuba and the EU continued to closely monitor the situation. There is a regular policy and political dialogue in the framework of the EU-Cuba PDCA. The latest Human Rights Dialogue was held in 2021.

In 2022 the EU and its Member States organised a number of activities around Women's Day and the Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Day of People with Disabilities, and financed projects and initiatives that promoted equal opportunities, gender equality, and LGTBI rights. The EU continued to implement the Gender Action Plan (in order to strengthen the dialogue and cooperation on gender equality and women's empowerment) and a Roadmap for engagement with civil society. As part of this, the EU and its Member States were in regular contact with human rights defenders, journalists and representatives of civil society and international organisations. The EU continued to raise specific cases with the authorities in bilateral meetings and meetings held under the PDCA.

4. EU financial engagement: The Multi-annual Indicative programme for Cuba 2021-2027 focuses on decentralization and the new economic actors as the main entry points to revamp the economy and the participation of civil society. In 2022 EUR 48 million were approved to support economic empowerment, biotechnology and the digital transformation of the public administration.

As part of its cooperation, the EU launched the call to support the work with Civil Society Organisations with EUR 4 million until 2024, with a special focus on gender and the fight against gender violence, but also cultural actions in support of diversity and non-discrimination.

EU projects implemented in 2022 aimed at promoting economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, including projects fostering gender equality and against gender-based violence. There was a specific focus also on youth and persons with disabilities. Economic modernisation, promoting the participation of SMEs and the inclusion of new actors, especially the private sector, in the Cuban economy are also supported. Scientific research, as well as addressing food and energy security, disaster-preparedness and cultural heritage were also part of key objectives of the EU's cooperation. The ongoing portfolio amounted to EUR 135 million.

Improved access to the internet since 2018 has been a very positive development, reducing citizens' limitations in accessing information and fostering plurality by allowing debates on social media and access to media content from abroad. However, there is room for improvement on free and open internet as a number of websites remain inaccessible in Cuba and there is a risk of digital divide. For this reason, the EU Delegation is supporting projects related to capacity-building on data privacy and simplification of administrative burden for citizens´ services, trade and investment.

5. Multilateral context: Cuba is a Member of the Human Rights Council (HRC) for the 16th cycle with its term expiring by 2023 (5th term in the past 15 years). Cuba will undergo its Universal Periodic Review foreseen in 2023 (4th cycle). The EU carried out demarches before authorities on different multilateral issues, in particular ahead of HRC Sessions and ahead of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee sessions.

Significant outreach towards Cuban authorities was carried out in the context of the war in Ukraine, and authorities were receptive towards the concerns put forward. The UNGA adopted on 3 November 2022 the Resolution against the US embargo with the unanimous support of all EU Member States calling for an end to the embargo and for the exclusion of Cuba from the list of countries sponsors of terrorism for its impact on Cuban's livelihood.

Dominican Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The Dominican Republic is a stable democracy. During 2022, President Abinader continued to enjoy one of the highest approval rates in the LAC region, thanks to successful policies on economic growth, legislative reforms, and the fight against corruption and impunity.

The fight against corruption has been one of the key campaign promises and the government is taking decisive steps to deliver. This year saw the approval of the Asset Recovery Law, further institutional strengthening with a programme to cut red tape and over 100 investigations opened against corruption and money laundering networks by the Prosecutor General Office (PGO). The government also has prepared a new law on public procurement, currently debated in Congress. The President continues to pledge zero-tolerance on corruption practices with the slogan '"no one above the law", not halting to pursue members from his own party or to expect them to leave their posts until proven innocent. So far, 42

senior officials were removed or resigned from their posts due to corruption allegations, including seven Ministers.

The Abinader Administration is also committed to improving the human rights situation in the country. The Government continues to work to increase citizen security through a substantial Police Reform: a salary increase of 20%, improved working conditions, revamping the police training and an internal top-down evaluation of the police staff (that led to dismissals of 5 000 officials) have been among the first steps. The PGO also opened various investigations against human trafficking networks. In December 2022 a new law against human trafficking was introduced in Congress (the previous law dates more than 20 years back). In another positive development, the Government formalized domestic work, complying with ILO obligations. Domestic workers now benefit from rights, such as social security, minimum wage and access to pension schemes. Curbing gender-based violence has been another Government priority alongside with female empowerment, both economically and politically. In December, the government submitted a new law on the elimination of violence against women to Congress.

The Dominican Republic is heavily affected by the crisis in neighbouring Haiti. With its 400 km land border, it is struggling to control irregular migration. In search of affordable healthcare, Haitians, and in particular pregnant women, come in increasing numbers to Dominican hospitals were care is free, also for foreigners. Faced with the increasing pressure at its borders, the Dominican government accelerated the construction of a demarcation fence and increased surveillance in order to better control movements, trafficking, smuggling, the possible arrival of members of armed gangs as well as most recently also to prevent the spread of cholera on Dominican territory. With the raise in irregular migration, repatriation has unfortunately also increased. At the same time, the Dominican Republic has worked towards the regularization of migrants: the PNRE (*Plan Nacional de Regularización de Extranjeros*) offers a framework to regularize irregular migrants (of all nationalities) in the country. So far some 290 000 immigrants benefitted from the PNRE.

Conditions in prisons and detention centres remain highly precarious, with overcrowded facilities, high numbers of prisoners in pre-trial, non-separation of men and women, and poor healthcare. The government has also recognised the need to improve the quality of the educational system.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU's work focuses on promoting women's rights (including elimination of child marriage and gender based violence), and on the elimination of all forms of discrimination (including LGTBI, migrants and disabled people). Another priority has been supporting the rights of migrants, including safeguarding rights of deportees, as well as the rights of detainees and their reinsertion into society. Other cooperation areas included the strengthening of civil society organizations and capacity building for human rights defenders, as well as on normalising the promotion of human rights as part of a healthy, democratic society.

The EU Delegation is in contact with relevant United Nations (UN) agencies to monitor closely the situation especially in the border region, and to actively support the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups, including irregular Haitian migrants. The EU will continue to monitor, to defend and to protect the rights of migrant workers in the Dominican Republic.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU implemented the following means or instruments: demarches and outreaches (including thematic and country resolutions on human rights at the UNGA Third Committee); advocacy and lobbying (e.g. for the elimination of child marriages, the elimination of sexual- and gender based violence, respect for LGBTI, migrant rights, and the rights of detainees); alignment with UN agencies and like-minded partners (amongst others, UN agencies, the OEI, and OAS representations in loco as well as like-minded non-EU countries); dialogue with line Ministries (one political dialogue is foreseen every year); dialogue with civil society organisations (CSOs) working in the field of human rights (regular meetings with CSOs, especially on the fight against corruption and impunity, migration and nationality issues, women, children, and LGTBI rights).

4. EU Financial Engagement: The EU funded with EUR 5 million the Government's efforts to the effective reduction of gender violence and inequality. The strategy is based on the National Development Strategy 2030.

As a means to strengthen the Dominican democratic system, the EU is providing technical assistance and financing a EUR 1 million twinning project with the Supreme Court of Justice (first one ever to be launched in Latin America and the Caribbean) to support the increase of the efficiency and quality of justice.

Other projects include:

- Promoting rights, strengthening capacities and creating integration opportunities for former female detainees (EUR 390 000)
- Prevention of arbitrary detention and/or deportation of migrants and their descendants. (EUR 380 000)
- Promotion, protection, and application of institutional guarantees for vulnerable groups (EUR 398 530).

Several projects are funded by the EU on issues affecting Haitian migrants with a large scope including referral mechanisms to improving their protection; preventing arbitrary detentions and promoting dignified treatment of migrants; promoting non-discriminatory access to health rights. The EU also supports the Dominican Republic on projects preventing human trafficking and sexual exploitation of girls, youth and adolescents, women and the smuggling of migrants.

5. Multilateral context: The Dominican Republic is very active in multilateral fora, such as the UN, the Ibero-American Conference, the Alliance for Democracy and Development, and SICA. The country has shown its unequivocal support to the Western Alliance and Ukraine, taking a clear stance against the Russian invasion. During 2022, the Dominican Republic has shown its commitment to democratic strengthening and its willingness to seek solution for human rights. For the first time, the country is campaigning for a seat at the UN Human Rights Council 2024-2026. Dominicans have no access to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR), as the Dominican Constitutional Court rejected the IAHCR’s jurisdiction in 2014.

Republic of Ecuador

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2022 was marked by structural crisis in the prison system and the indigenous nationwide strike. Situation in prisons has deteriorated due to rapid growth of the prison population; lack of prison safety, effective crime prevention and social rehabilitation policies; and precarious conditions of deprivation of liberty. A series of prison riots and clashes between criminal gangs left a considerable death toll among inmates and prison officers. In response, the Government has mobilized resources for the National Police and armed forces to re-establish order inside and outside prisons. The State intends to transition from a punitive to a human rights-based approach focusing on social rehabilitation. On 21 February 2022, the Government adopted a policy on social rehabilitation for the period 2022-2025, with contribution from persons deprived of liberty.

Following a period of nationwide strikes and unrest, on 7 June 2022, the National Assembly passed a bill with rules for the appropriate use of force based on the principles of legitimacy, necessity and proportionality. An indigenous unrest of three weeks has had a paralysing effect on the country and caused the death of six people while leaving more than 300 persons injured. In the subsequent debate, the lack of respect for human rights and impunity were criticized. Together with the UN, the EU Delegation made efforts to promote dialogue between the parties during and after the conflict.

Sexual and gender-based violence remains another prime issue of concern requiring efforts to encourage victims to seek help or file a report. Official statistics are likely merely a glimpse of real figures. Ecuador has adopted a Comprehensive National System for the Prevention and Eradication of Violence, implemented protocols on the provision of care and provided services adapted to the situation after the pandemic.

Inequality remains an issue of concern as it affects the enjoyment of various economic, social and cultural rights. The national equality councils tasked with safeguarding equality and non-discrimination have drafted national agendas until 2025. Trainings for police officers have focussed on issues of interculturality and plurinationality and promoted equality and the principle of non- discrimination. A manual was prepared on best practices in health care for LGBTI persons and educational materials on gender and human rights for transgender women.

In 2022, Ecuador created an inter-institutional committee to revitalize indigenous languages.

A policy has been enacted on prevention and eradication of child labour. The government's 2021–2025 Opportunity Creation Plan prioritizes the fight against all forms of malnutrition, especially chronic child undernutrition. A national early childhood strategy for the prevention and reduction of chronic child undernutrition called "Ecuador Grows without Child Undernutrition" has been elaborated.

Another area of importance are the rights of migrants, the majority of which are from Venezuela. A new law was passed containing a framework for prevention of trafficking in persons, smuggling of migrants and victim protection.

In the realm of freedom of opinion and the press, the entering into force of a new “Organic Law on Communication” can be noted. This new law advances freedom of expression. The main novelties include more autonomy for media outlets in their regulation; less control, oversight and interference by state and politics; more pluralistic character of news reporting; protection of freedom of opinion online and the right to response in reaction to any publication affecting a person in their moral integrity and dignity.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU human rights and democracy priorities for the country include: (i) Human rights defenders, including environmental defenders; (ii) Gender equality and women's rights; (iii) Non-discrimination on any grounds; (iv) Fighting impunity, improving quality and access to justice; (v) Support independent media, access to information and fight against disinformation; (vi) Business and human rights; (vii) Integrity of electoral processes; (viii) Civil society oversight and accountability functions.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2022, follow-up action was taken in relation to the second Human Rights Dialogue from 2021. For instance, a workshop was facilitated for exchange of experience on business and human rights through the FPI dedicated dialogue facility. The third Human Rights Dialogue with Ecuador had to be postponed and is scheduled for the end of January 2023. As a response to the protest actions of June 2022, the Delegation offered its availability to support the dialogue initiated between the Government and the indigenous organisations with the mediation of the Episcopal Conference.

4. EU financial engagement: A new Penitentiary Reform Project has been launched in September 2022 jointly with Member States with an EU contribution of EUR 1.5 million. With a duration of 18 months, the project will focus on three particular detention centres, and seeks to restore order in the prison facilities and provide training to prison guards to improve the quality of prison management. Respect for human rights features as a central pillar of the project, perceiving the provision of human conditions as a main guarantor for peace and stability and, at the same time, a deterrent for unrest and crisis.

The EU is also supporting the dialogue between the indigenous groups and the government through two specific projects, one EIDHR project of a budget of EUR 1 million to be implemented by GIZ and a second one financed by FPI of a budget of EUR 2.5 million aiming at improving dialogue capacity of indigenous groups on extractive issues.

5. Multilateral context: Ecuador supports multilateralism and rules based international order and has been member of the Human Rights Council (HRC) for three terms in the past: 2006-2007, 2011- 2013, and 2016-2018. In November 2022 Ecuador was submitted to its fourth Universal Periodic Review and presented its efforts and progress in improving the situation of human rights, notably for women, children, and indigenous people.

Ecuador has extended a standing invitation to all UN special procedures since 2003 and is the first country in the region having signed all 29 UN legal instruments on human rights. Ecuador leads discussions within the United Nations on the possible development of an international agreement (legally binding instrument) on business and human rights.

Ecuador has co-sponsored the resolutions on Ukraine during HRC49 and HRC Special Session 34.

Guatemala

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Guatemala faces considerable and structural human rights challenges related to poverty, inequality, discrimination, impunity and insecurity. In particular, challenges persist for the adequate protection of the rights of migrants, human rights defenders, women and girls and LGBTI persons. Gender-based violence is a perennial problem.

Despite Guatemala's relative macroeconomic stability, access to basic social human rights such as water and sanitation, food, health, education and decent work remains very problematic for large segments of the population.

At national level, 2 273 attacks have been reported from January to October 2022 against human rights defenders during 2022 (including two murders)[31]. Concern was also expressed about attacks on women defenders (702 attacks), maintaining the same trend of around 31% which was observed in 2021 with characteristics of gender violence[32].

Journalists continued to be at high-risk in Guatemala. According to the 2022 worldwide Annual Report by Reporters without Borders, Guatemala scored 47,94 out of 100 on freedom of press classification, holding the 124th position out of 180 countries. The security of journalists has decreased in recent years and there are no public policies in place for their protection. Defamation campaigns, police harassment and physical and verbal aggression are the main violations reported.

The EU has serious concerns over the deterioration of the rule of law and judicial independence in Guatemala. Under the supervision of the General Prosecutor, who was re-appointed by President Giammattei in May 2022, the Public Ministry has initiated legal action against several independent judges, lawyers and prosecutors involved in investigating high-level cases of corruption. This has resulted in their arrests and loss of their judicial immunity.

The gradual weakening of human rights has negatively impacted in particular those segments of society that have been historically excluded and discriminated against, such as women, indigenous peoples, girls, children and youth, victims of the internal armed conflict and others. This had an adverse effect on democratic life and has forced many judicial actors into exile (24 persons during 2022).

2. EU action - key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, the EU continued focusing on the following six priorities:

[31] Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala.

[32] Ibid.

(i) Fostering a comprehensive agenda to promote inclusive Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
(ii) Supporting the Rule of Law, access to justice, inclusive and effective administration of justice;
(iii) Enhancing protection mechanisms for human rights defenders;
(iv) Strengthening the implementation of legal frameworks to prevent and sanction all forms of violence against women and gender based violence;
(v) Strengthening the mechanisms of child protection against all forms of violence;
(vi) Promoting full implementation of international conventions and ratification of pending conventions to reinforce the equity and development of vulnerable groups.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued its political monitoring of the human rights situation in the country. In 2022 this included the monitoring of the processes to appoint the General Prosecutor and the Head of the Public Ministry, as well as of the Human Rights Ombudsman. The EU Delegation held several meetings with human rights organisations, human rights defenders and civil society leaders. Human rights issues, particularly the concerns regarding the deterioration of the rule of law and judicial independence, were raised in the relevant meetings with government and other state authorities.

The Filter Group (led by the EU Delegation and composed of EU Member States, Canada, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America, the OHCHR and UNHCR country offices) has supported the work of human rights defenders. Its activities include periodic meetings with defenders, justice operators and institutions in charge of the protection of human rights defenders.

3. EU financial engagement: The Multi-annual Indicative Programme 2021-2027 (EUR 141 million) is focused on economic, environmental, cultural and social rights. However, fundamental freedoms and civil and political rights continue to be at risk. Thus, the thematic Human Rights and Democracy Programme focuses on the protection of human rights defenders, freedom of expression and of association, the fight against impunity, access to justice for the most vulnerable groups and the electoral process. This programme has 13 projects implemented by civil society organisations (EUR 4 million).

5. Multilateral actions: The EU Delegation provides financial support to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Guatemala to foster dialogue and concrete actions for effective implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

The EU Delegation and its Member States delivered demarches and outreaches in view of Guatemala's commitment to support a number of human rights resolutions ahead of the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly and for ambitious action against climate change in the framework of the relevant multilateral conferences held during 2022, such as the COP27.

Co-operative Republic of Guyana

1. Overview of the human rights and democratic situation: Guyana is a parliamentary democracy. The democratic process and rule of law suffered a major crisis in 2020, following the general elections which were marked by attempts of electoral fraud and a protracted legal battle. The process was completed five months later, and credible election results were ultimately announced, leading to a democratic and largely peaceful transition of power.

Guyana's overall human rights track record is broadly positive. Persistent human rights challenges in 2022 continued to include women's rights, gender-based and domestic violence (including femicide), child abuse and corporal punishment, homophobia and trafficking in human beings. Conservative religious lobby groups remain successful in obstructing the rights to LGBTI persons. Several aspects of the country's legal framework continue to stymie the development of human rights, such as the Death Penalty Law and the Criminal Offences Act prohibiting adult same-sex relations. Harsh prison conditions, lengthy pre-trial detention, judicial backlog and police violence against detainees also form part of the pervasive institutional weaknesses.

While death penalty remains in the penal code, there is a de facto moratorium since 1997. No death sentences were handed down since then, but there are still 11 prisoners on death row. Guyana has ratified most, but not all of the main international human rights treaties. The exceptions are the Optional protocol of the Convention against Torture, the Convention against Enforced Disappearances and the Protocol on the Death Penalty

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the existing human rights issues. The impact on low-income households and rural and indigenous communities was particularly severe. Digitisation of education presented a challenge for families without access to the internet and/or to computers. Guyana is a pioneer in indigenous peoples' rights. However, some allege that legal loopholes place indigenous peoples at a disadvantage when it comes to land rights and mining encumbrances. Economic poverty and the struggling village economies negatively affect indigenous people's livelihoods.

2. EU action – key focus areas: The EU prioritises its action in the areas of women's rights and the rights of the child, including domestic violence; the fight against homophobia; good governance; electoral reform; conditions in detentions centres; death penalty; and the strengthening of the role of the civil society.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to engage with authorities, civil society and stakeholders to support human rights and democracy progress. In December 2022, the EU-Guyana Political Dialogue in the framework of Article 8 of the ACP-EU Cotonou Partnership Agreement took place in Georgetown. The EU human rights priorities were discussed during the meeting. The EU highlighted in particular the issue of gender-based violence, non-discrimination of LGBTI persons, and asked about concrete measures to be taken to abolish death penalty. Guyana was encouraged to establish the independent human rights office in line with Paris Principles during the Political Dialogue.

The first-ever fully-fledged EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) was deployed in the general elections in 2020. The EU EOM concluded that overall, the elections were competitive and contestants could campaign freely, even though the process took place in a deeply polarised environment. However, the integrity of the electoral process was compromised by the non-transparent and non-credible tabulation of results in the decisive Demerara-Mahaica Region that contains the country's capital. The EU EOM has provided Guyana with 26 recommendations to improve future electoral processes. The EU is committed to continue to take active part in the electoral reform process and an Election Follow-up Mission is foreseen in 2023.

In December 2022, the EU Delegation delivered its annual Human Rights Award to Mr. Anand Persaud, the Editor in Chief of a local newspapers Stabroek News for his stellar work in highlighting international issues in his published writings and the promotion of the values of the European Union.

3. EU financial engagement: Under the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, Guyana benefits from a EUR 4.5 million envelope, with a focus on violence against women and girls. Implementation of the 3-year project started in November 2020. The Initiative already has produced significant results: a dedicated national 24 hours gender-based violence hotline service was launched; a new Domestic violence bill was drafted; and a specialised course "Resilience against and Disruption of Gender-Based Violence" was launched by the University of Guyana.

The rights of the child are central to EU funding in Guyana. There are currently three ongoing projects implemented by the NGO ChildLink, addressing the protection of the rights of the child. One new project was approved in December 2022, to promote human rights of the indigenous peoples. The EU Delegation also participated in several high-profile events with civil society organisations, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, and other stakeholders. In addition, the EU Delegation focused on supporting CSOs' work on other important challenges including Amerindian rights, through support to the Amerindian Peoples Association.

5. Multilateral context: Guyana is a like-minded country sharing with the EU a strong believe in upholding a multilateral system and voting for UN resolutions that are important for the EU. Guyana is a candidate for the UNSC as a non-permanent member.

In its Universal Periodic Review statement at the UN Human Rights Council Working Group on 5 October 2020, Guyana reiterated its commitment to implement another round of constitutional reform and to strengthen legislation to enhance protection for all human rights, as well as electoral reform. The national consultative constitutional reform process was supposed to commence in 2021 and examine all areas of the Constitution including human rights, but has not yet started. The electoral reform was launched in 2021 and continued during 2022.

Haiti

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, Haiti suffered a protracted and extremely acute human rights crisis, resulting from the political instability that followed the assassination of President Moïse in 2021 and the consequent substantial expansion of armed gangs in Port-au-Prince and in certain provincial towns. Gangs' criminal acts have severely affected Haitians' fundamental rights, starting with the right to life and to physical integrity. The increase in violence by armed groups, including sexual violence (mostly against women), has not only increased levels of terror among the population but also led to hundreds of deaths in the capital. Detention conditions have further worsened due to a cholera outbreak in the country, leading to dozens of additional deaths in prisons (suffering from pre-existing poor sanitary and malnutrition conditions). Out of the more than 11 000 detainees, 85% are in (illegal) pre-trial detention, under prison conditions that can be described as amongst the worst in the world, with more than 150-detention related deaths p.a.

The justice sector remains non-functional and law enforcement through the justice system at the local level remains extremely arbitrary and affected by corruption. Social and economic rights continue to be severely constrained. A drastic increase in food insecurity, challenging access to health facilities (whereby fuel shortages led to reduced availability of medicines, repeated and prolonged hospital closures in the capital and countryside, with severe repercussions on the already very limited capacity of Haitian health services, specifically with regard to birth-related services to women), loss of employment and purchasing power due to "peyi lock" (the severe fuel crisis which affected the country at the beginning of November 2022 led to an almost complete paralysis of Haiti), destruction of habitats, and widespread reduced access to education due to the postponement of the academic year caused by the on-going multifaceted crisis.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The five strands foreseen for EU action in line with the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-24 are: (i) Protecting and empowering individuals; (ii) Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies; (iii) Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy; (iv) New technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges; (v) Delivering by working together.

The majority of actions carried out via our projects have been mainly linked to the first strand of EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024), which is "Protecting and empowering individuals". A number of projects where, thus, oriented toward the protection of vulnerable communities, notably the LGBTI, and other vulnerable groups as women. Legal assistance represented another key point of our action, aimed at vulnerable detainees and female detainees. The EU Delegation also worked closely with local organizations in order to help preventing violence against women and young girls. Nonetheless, most of the actions planned by the EU were hampered, or suspended in their implementation. This was due both to the aggravated social, political and economic crisis and the ensuing temporary evacuation of the staff.

2. EU bilateral political engagement: The politico-institutional instability of the country did not allow for a formal political dialogue with the Haitian authorities. Very limited political contacts occurred with Prime Minister Ariel Henry's government on human rights in 2022. The

Delegation managed to maintain contacts with relevant authorities (such as the OPC - the Haitian "Ombudsman" office), until they were ruptured by the political crisis that led to the Delegation's temporary evacuation in June 2022.

There has been no formal dialogue with the government on human rights in 2022 nor regular consultations with an inclusive mix of human rights groups. The Delegation did however maintain contacts with the various components of Haitian civil society, fostering discussions on the possible options to end the crisis and human rights issues, but this became virtually impossible after the mentioned staff evacuation. In these exchanges, several human rights NGOs pointed out the increasing violence and threats perpetrated against specific groups, referring notably to sexual violence against women, but also against the LGBTI community (especially trans) and journalists.

Before the evacuation in June 2022, the Delegation initiated a successful and dynamic donor group on the prison situation with Canada and the US, which also helped identify quick humanitarian responses when cholera cases were detected in prisons.

3. EU financial engagement: In 2022 a number of human rights projects were still active, focusing on legal assistance to vulnerable detainees, fight against sexual violence against women and girls, as well as support to the Haitian LGBTI community. The EU supported also a project aimed at freeing a large number of prisoners in pre-trial detention and support their social reintegration. The EU also approved a new EUR 4 million project to support the economic and social rights through small-scale revenue generation and other forms of empowerment for the young deprived urban youth in Port-au-Prince, with a view to reducing community violence.

5. Multilateral context: In the first half of 2022, Haiti had to report on the human rights situation in the context of the Universal Periodic Review. During the preparatory phase, the government made considerable efforts with strong support by United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), to consult with and implicate human rights organisations in drafting Haiti's UPR documentation. However, the country's instability and crisis repercussions prevented the UPR exercise from leading to the intended improvements.

The EU Delegation has been working very closely with the Human Rights Service of BINUH (ensuring also the representation of OHCHR in Haiti) on UPR issues, working also on specific initiatives, such as the release of 75 prisoners through *Habeas corpus*.

Honduras

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In January 2022 and after a competitive electoral process, characterised by high and peaceful turnout n 28 November 2021 (as declared by the EU Election Observation Mission), the first woman president of Honduras, Xiomara Castro (from the left party LIBRE), took office. The high expectations raised by 12 years of government by the (centre-right) National Party and by its ambitious electoral

programme, with promises of economic efficiency and social justice, the fight against corruption, impunity and organised violence, and respect for human rights, have been tarnished by the lack of significant progress so far. Economic development - hit by the pandemic and the adverse effects of climate change - does not generate sufficient capacity to address the poverty suffered by three out of four citizens. Education and health remain the sectors where investment is most needed to achieve social and inclusive development.

The signature of a non-binding agreement with the United Nations to study the setting-up of an international anti-corruption mission is seen as an important step towards tackling this scourge. However, this process is currently not complemented by the necessary dismantling of the legal framework that shields corruption. The declared state of emergency, established as a measure against violence and extortion, has not yet borne the intended results, and the potential consequences on the State's responsibility for the protection of human rights are observed with concern. The age-old conflict between defenders of land and territory on one side and the agro-industrial business on the other continues to cause displacement, intimidation and killings, and the government has not yet initiated an effective process that could offer any hope of resolution. Indigenous and Afro-Honduran peoples continue to demand the protection of their territories, languages and cultures. Honduras continues to be one of the most restrictive countries in terms of women's sexual and reproductive rights, and the violence and discrimination against LGTBI people persist.

2. EU action – key areas of focus: The current EU action in Honduras is structured around six axes: (i) Strengthening the rule of law and democracy; (ii) Women's and girls' rights; (iii) Protection of LGBTI rights;(iv) Indigenous and African Honduran peoples (PIAH) and the forced eviction from their land and territory; (v) Protection of the human rights defenders' action and integrity; (vi) Protection of the most vulnerable populations' economic, social, cultural and environmental rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The European Union and the Member States present in the country (Germany, Spain and France) continue their efforts to support human rights defenders by maintaining open channels of communication with civil society, in a structured manner and in close collaboration with the United Nations and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In addition, frequent field missions are organised all over the country for a better understanding of the country's reality. Special mention should be made of the visit to Bajo Aguan to learn about human rights, the defense of the territory, and the agro-industry. The EU Delegation has also participated in the "Honduras for Escazú" Forum, advocating for Honduras's ratification of this important agreement. The EU has observed trials and met with representatives of emblematic cases of human-rights violations such as those of the Guapinol defenders. On social media, the EU Delegation and Member States regularly react on the human rights situation in Honduras and on cases of particular concern.

On the International Day of Human Rights, the European Union and its Member States awarded the "EUROPA Prize for Human Rights 2022" to human rights defender María Felicita López. The prize was awarded in recognition and support of the work and contribution she made since her early years in defence of human rights, land and territory, and the rights of Lenca women. The ceremony was accompanied by a presentation of the European Union

funded projects in this field and counted with the participation of the Honduran Minister of Human Rights and the National Commissioner for Human Rights.

The EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) presented its final report in March 2022, with 23 recommendations covering the following issues: legal framework, election administration, election justice, right to vote and voter registration, election campaign, media, digital communication and social media, political participation of underrepresented groups, election disputes, tabulation of results and post-election environment, and election technology. An election follow-up mission is due to take place in 2023.

During 2022, Honduras received a visit from the European Parliament, which held meetings with the National Congress, members of the government, political parties, civil society and private sector representatives. Shared values, such as democracy, human rights, sustainable development, rule of law and resilience against climate change, together with the recommendations from the EU´s Election Observation Mission were the main subjects of conversation.

3. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the European Union in Honduras implemented 20 programmes and projects for an amount of approximately EUR 37.8 million in line with the current Strategy on Human Rights and Democracy of the EU.

The EU main programme is ProDerechos, aiming to support the consolidation of a human rights system. Through a comprehensive approach the programme: (i) ensures strengthening and coordination of government institutions at national and local level for the protection and promotion of human rights and (ii) supports the participation of non-state actors (civil society and the private sector) on the human rights agenda. The programme provides assistance for capacity building of human rights institutions and business associations and to improve civil society technical capacities to establish dialogue spaces with the State and the private sector. In 2022, the programme supported the updating and implementation of strategic plans for key human rights institutions.

At the same time, projects carried on providing significant results in the field of elections and civic participation in the democratic activity. Project activities included capacity building of political parties to become more transparent, inclusive and respectful of democratic values, strengthening of the electoral institutions in line with the EOM recommendations, increasing inclusion of under-represented groups in the electoral process, and ensuring civil society organisations' participation in the fight against corruption to improve transparency and freedom of expression with the aim of fostering independent media.

The global joint EU-UN Spotlight Initiative to combat violence against women and girls continued to work on legislative and policy frameworks, strengthening key institutions and preventing violence through changes in norms and behaviours.

On the support to the rights of Indigenous and African Honduran peoples, the European Union supported the National Congress in the execution of the Plan and Strategic Agenda of its Liaison Commission with indigenous and Afro-Honduran persons.

The SER project, finalised in 2022 and contributing to an inclusive COVID-19 response in Honduras, resulted in a study on tax incentives for vulnerable populations and a public dialogue held with young people and women entrepreneurs, banks, the government and institutions working for the development of MiSMEs.

5. Multilateral context: Honduras is currently one of the 47 members of the Human Rights Council, serving a three-year term as of January 2022. Honduras was elected together with Argentina and Paraguay, as a part of the Latin American and Caribbean region that is entitled to eight seats in the Council.

Jamaica

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Jamaica has a strong democratic tradition with constitutional protection of fundamental rights. Yet it continues to struggle with a major crime problem that threatens to derail the country's growth and human development agenda. The country has one of the highest homicide rates in the Latin American and Caribbean region at 49.4 deaths per 100 000 inhabitants. The government has employed enhanced security measures - Zones of Special Operations (ZOSOs) and States of Public Emergencies (SPEs) with extraordinary power given to the security forces to fight this problem, which Prime Minister Andrew Holness has described as a "national emergency". Because of the high crime rate and the threat it poses to human security, support for the death penalty is high. This became a point of heated debate in the case of the infamous "Cocoa Piece Killer." On 28 June, Director of Public Prosecution Paula Llewellyn filed the death penalty notice on Rushane Barnett, charged with the murder of a young mother and her four children in the rural parish of Clarendon. He was subsequently sentenced to five concurrent life sentences.
Other important human rights issues include adoption and implementation of a new Firearms (Prohibition, Restriction and Regulation) Act, which establishes a framework that prohibits illicitly traded firearms and ammunitions. 2022 also saw the enactment of the long awaited 2014 Disabilities Act, which makes provisions to safeguard and enhance the welfare of persons with disabilities across Jamaica. The Sexual Harassment Protection and Prevention Act also came into effect in 2022. It aims to protect all citizens in various spheres including at the workplace and while doing business. In addition, the government extended maternity leave for public sector workers from 40 days to three calendar months and introduced paternity leave and family leave for adoptive parents. These came into effect on 1 January, 2023. The state also introduced several pieces of legislation in 2022 aimed at improving human rights, such as a new Domestic Violence Act, which aims at providing greater protection for gender-based violence victims, and amendments to the Trafficking in Persons Act. In 2022 the government also introduced two orders that increased the national minimum wage and the minimum wage for industrial security guards.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights support was provided to government and civil society organizations. The EU focuses on protecting and empowering individuals, building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies and promoting a global system for human rights and democracy.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The sixth EU-Jamaica political dialogue was held in July 2022. During the dialogue, Jamaica affirmed its commitment to fundamental rights and freedoms. The Dialogue reinforced the bilateral partnership between Jamaica and the EU, which are like-minded democratic partners with an interest in preserving the rules-based world order and effective multilateralism.

The EU Delegation is in constant dialogue with local stakeholders on human rights related issues. Likewise, member states consistently raise human rights issues with their high-level government partners during their meetings.

4. EU Financial engagement: A number of EU projects were implemented in 2022, promoting economic, social, cultural and environmental rights with emphasis on protecting the rights of vulnerable groups, including members of the LGBTI community, youth, people in violence prone communities and rural populations with emphasis on forest areas. Support was also provided to the government's health system strengthening programme and to end gender-based violence.

5. Multilateral context: The Delegation carried out demarches to seek support for EU priorities, notably the condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and affirmation of Ukraine's sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity. Jamaica supports multilateralism, territorial integrity and sovereignty and the rules based order. The government of Jamaica was among the many countries that condemned Russia's attack on Ukraine both individually and as part of the CARICOM group.

Although the death penalty remains on the law books, Jamaica has had a long-standing de facto moratorium on its application. To mark the International Day against the Death Penalty and as part of the advocacy aimed at abolishing the death penalty, the EU Delegation hosted a Twitter space discussion with high level representatives from the legal professions, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and civil society.

Mexico

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Mexico faces serious challenges in the protection of human rights but the government shows willingness to build positive cooperation with international partners including the EU. Mexico approved legalisation of same sex marriage in all its 32 states in 2022 while abortion is legal in one-third of them. The government started consultations to reform the general law for the protection of human rights defenders (HRDs) and journalists to define co-responsibility and competences at the different levels of government and public institutions and create a national protection system. Following the publication of the report on Mexico by the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances in April 2022, the Government announced the creation of both a national follow-up mechanism for international recommendations on the subject and the National

Centre for Human Identification. Mexico's civil society space remains vibrant although organisations sometimes face hostility for their criticism of government.

In 2022, the registered number of victims of enforced disappearances exceeded 100 000 with sustained high levels of serious crimes (homicides, femicides, kidnaps and extortions). With at least 11 assassinated journalists in 2022 (according to UN figures), Mexico remains the most dangerous place in the world to exercise the profession. HRDs and environmental activists suffer regular attacks and threats. Various factors contribute to this state of affairs: increased presence of organized crime including collusion with and infiltration of institutions particularly at municipal and state level as well as weak justice and law enforcement systems that maintain impunity levels high. While investigations of assassinations of journalists resulted in some arrests in 2022 and a more consistent implementation of the strategy to identify missing persons can be observed, the scale of the security problem nation-wide requires a more comprehensive strategy. A constitutional amendment in 2022 extending the Armed Forces' role in public security until 2028 means further delays in a return to a civilian model of security. Meanwhile, transparency and accountability remain a concern in the context of an August government report on the *Ayotzinapa* Case that revealed the involvement of military personnel in the perpetration of crimes, some of whom are now under arrest.

Migration and internal displacement of persons remain big challenges amidst an inconsistent US migration policy and persisting root causes in Central America such as poverty, insecurity and natural disasters. Mexico received over 100 000 asylum requests in 2022. Despite a generally welcoming policy towards migrants, frontline institutions (e.g. the Commission for the Attention of Refugees) often have to rely on international aid (including EU). Win-win schemes, as the one currently supported by the EU and implemented by UNHCR that seeks to meet Mexico's job vacancy needs in various regions of the country while regularising the status of irregular migrants, are a good basis for more future cooperation.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2022 the EU focused on protection of HRDs, women's rights, including fight against gender-based violence, as well as the protection of journalists.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU sustained its engagement with Mexican authorities, civil society organisations (CSOs) and international actors (e.g. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNHCR, Inter-American Commission for Human Rights).

The EU-Mexico High Level Dialogue on Human Rights took place on 4 July and was preceded by the EU-Mexico Civil Society Seminar (1 July). The agenda included access to justice, impunity and the rule of law, migration, enforced disappearances, protection of journalists and HRDs, rights of groups in vulnerable situations, hate speech and freedom of expression, gender equality, business and human rights (including the impact of illicit traffic of firearms), digital technologies and human rights including surveillance.

A visit of 14 EU Member States' Ambassadors to Chihuahua in October 2022 focused on the precarious environment for HRD and journalists due to a growing presence of organised crime and its collusion with businesses and local authorities, human rights violations of indigenous communities, gender-based violence, enforced disappearances and migrants' rights. Several visits from the European Parliament took place to discuss issues, such as the Rule of Law,

protection of human rights defenders and journalists, rights of women and vulnerable groups, business and human rights.

The EU Delegation conducted social media campaigns on international days. For 25 November (Elimination of Violence against Women) the Head of Delegation accompanied two women (a journalist and a HRD) for a live radio interview to highlight the EU's commitment to the issue. On 9 May (Europe Day), the EU announced the joint initiative #ProtejamosSusVoces ("Protecting Their Voices") in which Embassies of some EU Member States, Switzerland and Norway accompany in a structured and systematic manner Mexican HRDs and journalists to raise the profile of their work and the importance of protecting their voices. The EU Delegation also presented its support for the work of three artists which resulted in the song "*Quién Cuida al Pueblo*?" ("*Who cares for the people?"*) to raise awareness of the issue. In November 2022, EUDEL organised an event focused on advocacy and communication training for HRDs. Testimonial footage recorded during the program was used for the communication campaign for International Human Rights Day (10 December).

A public EU-Mexico Think Tank Dialogue on "*Disinformation as a threat to democracy: risks and policy options*" (September) compared approaches in the EU, its Member States, Mexico and the wider LAC region to address this subject of growing global relevance and identified areas for future cooperation. The European and Mexican experts also discussed the topic with members of Congress, the National Institute for Access to Information and with university students.

In 2022, the EU issued local statements to condemn 11 assassinations of journalists and HRDs and a statement welcoming a Government initiative to meet with the diplomatic community and discuss progress on human rights protection.

The EU-Mexico High Level Dialogue on Multilateral Issues took place on 1 December. The meeting showed a joint commitment to multilateralism and support for the UN system in a tense geopolitical context. The parties discussed the importance of human rights-centred approaches to digital and emerging technologies that also reduce inequalities while acknowledging their shared ambitious agenda on gender equality and the need for joint action to counter negative trends and progress on Women, Peace and Security agenda.

4. EU financial engagement: Human rights protection, governance, social cohesion and fighting inequality are among the priorities under the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework. The EU is currently working on security and justice (El PAcCTO programme), human rights, fighting gender violence ('Spotlight' programme) and migration, with a focus on HRDs and journalists and enforced disappearances in partnership with CSOs. The EU has also supported threatened HRDs through EU emergency grants.

The EU also contributes to the social and economic integration of young people in Mexico, supporting them through several programmes implemented by CSOs. Social cohesion is addressed through support to job formalization and decent work, notably for people on the move and other vulnerable categories, as well as support to optimise the management of public finance (tax revenues and spending). The health sector features among the EU's priorities in Mexico through several actions in support of the Latin-American Health Plan of

ECLAC (UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), aimed at ensuring medical self-sufficiency for the region and addressing the fight against pandemics similar to Covid-19.

5. Multilateral context: A strong advocate of multilateralism, Mexico had a dense agenda in 2022 as a member of the UNSC (2021-2022), HRC (2021-2023), ECOSOC (2021-2023) and G20, and its participation in COP16 (Biodiversity) and COP27 (Climate Change). Mexico's membership of the Security Council was an opportunity to promote gender equality in line with its feminist foreign policy, women, peace and security, and to address small arms trafficking, corruption and poverty.

From the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Mexico adopted a clear position in the UN by voting in favour of all resolutions against the invasion and its consequences though differing on imposing sanctions on Russia, removal of Russia from UN bodies and the delivery of lethal weapons to Ukraine. In the G20 meeting in Bali, Mexico was very vocal on the importance of adopting a G20 statement that in the end condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Nicaragua

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, the overall climate of oppression intensified. Persistent problems included arbitrary detentions, severe restrictions on freedom of expression and association, and crackdown on political opposition, journalists and human rights defenders, among others. As a result, outward migration to neighbouring countries continued.

The number of political prisoners rose from 167 in January 2022 to 225 in December 2022 (26 women and 209 men)[33], which includes relatives of detained political opponents. Detention conditions remain precarious, falling short of international standards. At the same time, only a handful of family visits were permitted, and those generally took place under humiliating conditions, including strip searches. There were documented cases of torture.

In April, the National Assembly passed a law allowing for cancellation of the legal status of groups that ostensibly "promote campaigns to destabilise the country", and to seize the assets of associations that ostensibly commit "unlawful acts," violate "public order," or hinder the Interior Ministry's "control and surveillance." As a result, over 3 000 national and international NGOs were shut down, almost half of which since September alone, leaving countless people without access to basic services or assistance, especially the indigenous and Afro-descendent communities.

Throughout 2022, the regime closed eight private universities and seven international universities. Furthermore, over 26 national and three international news outlets were closed

[33] According to the organisation Mecanismo por el reconocimiento de personas presos politicos and La Prensa. In these counts, a dozen or so people who could be considered political prisoners are not recognised, while an estimated 20-30 people are not listed because of families' reluctance to do so for fear of repercussions.

by the Government. In October, a new law was adopted requiring registration and Government authorisation for the production, filming and exhibition of any audio-visual material in the country.

Additionally, a wave of arrests and dismissals of political opponents was observed in the months leading up to November municipal elections. Political parties whose legal status was cancelled in 2021 were excluded from participating. Election day was rife with intimidation, with checkpoints set up around the polling stations to track voters while people perceived as political opponents were denied access to the polling stations. After the elections, riot police repressed supporters of the indigenous political party YATAMA, which reportedly had won in the municipality of Waspam, on the Northern Caribbean Coast.

The regime arrested at least eleven members of the Catholic Church, including Bishop Rolando Alvarez of Matagalpa diocese, accusing him of spreading false news and "undermining national sovereignty", while the Apostolic Nuncio was expelled in March.

In 2022, the Women's Network against Violence reported 67 femicides while 155 women's associations were closed. The political representation of women increased following the municipal elections, though it should also be noted that, overall, these elections were deeply flawed from a democratic standpoint, as indicated above.

2. EU action – key areas of focus: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, the EU focused on the following areas: (i) protecting and empowering individuals: human rights defenders; protecting girls and women against violence and promoting gender equality; rights of indigenous peoples and the environment; social and economic rights of the population's most vulnerable groups; (ii) building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies: resisting the rollback of freedom of expression and information.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Engagement with the authorities has been challenging, especially in the aftermath of the unwarranted decision of the Government to declare the Head of the EU Delegation to Nicaragua as *persona non grata* on 28 September, followed by the EU's declaration of the Head of the Mission of the Republic of Nicaragua as p*ersona non grata* on a reciprocal basis.

On 13 October 2022, the Council prolonged the EU's restrictive measures in view of the situation in Nicaragua for an additional year. These measures target persons and entities responsible for serious human rights violations or abuses, or for the repression of civil society and democratic opposition in Nicaragua, as well as persons and entities whose actions, policies or activities undermine democracy and the rule of law in the country. The EU has nevertheless reaffirmed its continued commitment to the Nicaraguan people, including through development cooperation, and to defending democracy, the rule of law and human rights, and the EU's openness to dialogue provided it is conducted in a respectful manner.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the EU approved a series of new projects designed to support the protection of human rights defenders, civil society and youth capacities, fight against gender based violence and support to media and indigenous people. These actions support new and different types of partners working in a diversified portfolio addressing

human rights in the broad sense, working closely with Member States with a view to reduce and mitigate potential risks. The EU continues to use the rights-based approach and to mainstream human rights and democracy issues through all of its development actions in the country.

5. Multilateral context: In 2022, the EU's cooperation with and in support to international human rights institutions and instruments continued to promote coordinated multilateral action in support of human rights and democracy in Nicaragua. The current human rights situation in Nicaragua is widely addressed in the multilateral fora such as the Organization for American States and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). Since 2019, the High Commissioner has been regularly updating the Council on the human rights situation in Nicaragua, where the EU continued to raise its concerns regarding the human rights situation in Nicaragua in its general debate statements, most recently in December 2022. Earlier in March, the UN HRC established a group of human rights experts with a one-year mandate to investigate human right violations committed in Nicaragua since April 2018. Supportive of its mandate, the EU works closely with the group of experts.

Republic of Panama

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The promotion and protection of human rights is a publicly recognized priority within the political system of Panama, giving to international standards aimed to promote and protect human rights a constitutional rank. Panama has not signed nor ratified important international instruments that protect and guarantee the fulfilment of economic, social and cultural rights. Civil and political rights are substantively more observed and respected.

With respect to Democracy and the Rule of Law, Panama ranked globally 72nd across 140 countries in 2022[34]. Panama attaches importance to meeting its human rights obligations and shows proactive attitude in fulfilling its commitments towards international monitoring mechanisms. However, during 2022, the country witnessed heavy protests against the high cost of the basic basket, medicines and fuel prices, mainly due to the global consequences of the Russian invasion against Ukraine with implications for Latin America and the Caribbean. The Ombudsman of Panama played an important mediating role during the protests registered between May and August.

One of the major human rights challenges during 2022 continued to be the delicate situation of irregular migrants under the custody of the Panamanian State in the provinces of Chiriquí and the Darién Gap. This was a record year in terms of migration pressure for Panama with nearly 250 000 migrants entering the country through the jungle. Panama continued making significant efforts in supporting decent living conditions for these migrants, including nutrition, healthcare and shelter.

[34] World Justice Project Rule of Law Index for 2022: https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/Panama.

Some other areas of attention are the right to personal integrity, especially of those who are under the custody of the Panamanian State[35], the rights of people with disabilities, discrimination against people with HIV, and systematic discrimination against the LGBTI community, including girls, boys and teenagers, especially aggravated during the COVID-19 pandemic[36]. In fact, the pandemic situation in the country has been detrimental to human rights and democratic values, having a negative impact on the freedom of assembly, the freedom of the press, accentuating gender-based violence against women and girls, and endangering transparency of government decisions.

In terms of women's rights, the Ombudsman of Panama has called on state institutions, non-governmental organizations and the civil society that make up the Panamanian Observatory against Gender Violence to revive their social actions.

When it comes to the right to education, Panama is in need of improving school infrastructure, as well as applying the guidance on sexuality and relationships to achieve equal and inclusive education given the high level of early pregnancy, with a greater impact in the remote areas of the country and among disadvantaged groups. In terms of health, Panama needs to improve the quality of its healthcare system, by shortening waiting lists, improving appointment protocols, expedite procedures, and supplying medicines to pharmacies nationwide and in due time.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Some of the strategic political and operational priorities for the EU human rights action in Panama, for the period 2021-2024, are as follows:

- Continuing the cooperation with the Panamanian State to promote and protect human rights by building an inclusive and resilient democratic society;
- Empowering civil society organizations in promoting human rights, supporting vulnerable groups, including the LGBTI community, migrants, refugees and minorities, especially indigenous and afro-descendants groups;
- Focusing on digital rights and inclusion, connectivity and capacity building of vulnerable populations;
- Taking action in combating all forms of discrimination, sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, including the promotion of gender equality and women's rights;
- Cooperating to reinforce the institutional framework focusing on the Judiciary, combating corruption and increasing transparency.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The commitment to promote, protect and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms by generating inclusive spaces for coordination of government actors, non-governmental organizations and the organized civil society is a key element of EU-Panama relations.

[35] The human rights situation of prisoners and persons deprived of their liberty is also an issue in the already deficient Penitentiary System of the country.

[36] The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) called on the State of Panama to guarantee the human rights of trans and gender-diverse people in the context of the restrictive measures in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The EU Delegation to Panama has been actively communicating, raising awareness and promoting human rights and democracy through its events and public communications, such as social media actions and public interventions.

4. EU financial engagement: During 2022, two projects financed under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) were in execution in Panama. The two actions received a total of close to EUR 700 000 of EU funding and covered child protection and migrant rights. In addition, a further EUR 400 000 were allocated to support actions related to transparency and accountability, as well as up to EUR 300 000 for a follow-up action to the EU's INTER PARES – "Parliaments in Partnership" project that fostered inter-parliamentary cooperation in a variety of countries and continents, including Panama, and concluded in late 2022.

5. Multilateral context: During 2022, Panama remained active internationally on human rights, including at UNGA Third Committee. Panama remained a reliable partner of the EU in promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief, condemning gender-based violence against women and girls, and supporting the Programme of Action to advance responsible State behaviour in the use of information and communication technologies in the context of international security.

Republic of Paraguay

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Paraguay generally has a good legal basis for the protection of human rights, but the National Plan for Human Rights that is vital for the necessary institutional strengthening remained unimplemented also in 2022. Although strict COVID-related confinement rules are no longer in place, the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic are still present. Violence against women and girls continues to be a widespread issue. Teenage and child pregnancy rates are among the highest in the region. Several high-profile assassinations shocked the country in 2022, while anti-narcotics operations confirmed close links between some politicians and public institutions and organised crime. Other challenges include corruption, pressure on independent journalism, as well as lack of protection of vulnerable groups, such as children, indigenous communities, landless farmers, persons with disabilities, and LGBTI persons. The weak functioning of the justice system, including overcrowding and violence in prisons, and the excessive use of pre-trial detention continue to be of concern.

There is, both in politics and the media, an increase in fundamentalist and anti-rights discourse, with strong support from "pro-life" and pro-family" groups, rejecting not only sexual and reproductive rights, but also the fight against discrimination and rights-based approaches more generally, as well as the Agenda 2030. In November, this lobby presented a draft law to terminate the Financing Agreement between Paraguay and the EU for support to education (EUR 80 million), claiming that EU-financed cooperation fostered "gender ideology". The bill was adopted by the Chamber of Deputies, and remains at the level of the Senate for approval.

2022 was marked by the run-up to the April 2023 general and presidential elections, with nationwide primary elections held on 18 December 2022. Unlike the 2021 municipal elections that saw a significant increase in political violence, the primaries went largely smoothly and were held in a peaceful atmosphere. There was some, albeit limited, progress in implementing the recommendations of the last EU Election Observation Mission, like granting hearing impaired persons the right to vote, expanding accessibility facilities for persons with physical disabilities, and allowing pre-trial detainees to vote. These legal reforms to the electoral code constitute an important step forward for an inclusive democracy in Paraguay.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, the EU focussed its efforts in Paraguay on: (i) consolidating democracy, including through improving electoral processes; (ii) transparency and fight against corruption; (iii) promoting and protecting vulnerable groups (children, indigenous people and persons with disabilities), gender equality and prevention of discrimination. Other EU priorities included promoting institutionalisation of human rights, judicial reform, fighting corruption and organised crime, and further enhancing transparency.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2022, the EU continued to maintain contacts with all relevant stakeholders, including the government, human rights institutions and civil society organisations. It used its regular political dialogue with the government to communicate the importance it attaches to human rights and democracy. The EU continued to call for the implementation of the recommendations of the 2018 EU Election Observation Mission (EOM), in particular regarding the representation of women in elected positions, the accompaniment of electoral processes by civil society, and the facilitation of the exercise of the right to vote for disadvantaged groups. The EU also stressed that much remained to be done on the rights of indigenous peoples, women's rights, gender discrimination and violence.

4. EU financial engagement: During 2022, the EU and its Member States continued to devote financial and non-financial means to support the EU human rights and democracy priorities.
Via an ongoing programme with International IDEA, in 2022 the EU supported political training for women, promoted political-electoral participation for young people, supported bills to enfranchise disabled people and to provide a framework for national electoral observation, and provided assistance to implemented new political financing rules.

In 2022, the regional 'EL PAcCTO' programme remained highly relevant to Paraguay, which is considered as one of the most active partner countries, notably in the fight against organised crime, trafficking in human beings and money laundering. On the fight against corruption front, the programme provided technical assistance to the Judiciary, the Public Prosecutor's Office, and SENABICO (National Secretariat for the Administration of Seized and Confiscated Goods). During 2022, Paraguay also hosted the Annual Meeting of the EU-Latin America-Caribbean cooperation programme on drugs – COPOLAD III. The high-level meeting coincided with technical seminars organized by Eurofront and EL PacCto. In addition, a High Level Meeting of the CELAC-EU Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs was organised in Asunción. These meetings provided analysis and visibility to the issue of drugs and organised crime in the country.

Within the framework of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), the project 'Right to identity through access to official documentation of indigenous people in Paraguay' aims to increase the political participation and access to public policies of the indigenous population. This project is implemented in cooperation with the Superior Court of Electoral Justice and the Paraguayan Indigenous Institute INDI and is linked to one of the EU EOM's recommendations from 2018. In 2022, important activities were carried out, such as the organization of 30 training talks on electronic voting, as well as five departmental meetings with the participation of leaders and members of various indigenous communities. At the end of the project, there will be a census and the provision of official identity cards for nearly 38 000 indigenous peoples belonging to 19 ethnic groups. Two other EIDHR projects implemented in 2022 focussed on improving networking and communications of human rights organisations and their articulation with public institutions, as well as on enhancing access to justice and human rights of detainees.

The Team Europe Gender Action Plan 2021-2025 started its implementation in 2022, contributing to promote dialogue on gender equality in a society very much polarised on this issue.

5. Multilateral context: Paraguay has ratified all core international and regional human rights conventions and is a member of the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2022-2024. At the UN, there was a large degree of like-mindedness between Paraguay and the EU on country-specific resolutions, if not always on thematic files. Notably, Paraguay consistently voted in favour of resolutions condemning Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its impact on the human rights situation in Ukraine.

Paraguay in 2022 received visits from two UN Special Procedures. The UN Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights visited the country in October 2022, observing that the excessive use of pesticides in Paraguay was seriously affecting the lives and health of its people. He also regretted the lack of ratification of the Escazú Agreement. The UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues carried out a mission to Paraguay in November; he commended the country's efforts, but called for stronger measures and further resources to enhance the effective protection and inclusion of indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants. Both Special Procedures pointed to the lack of enforcement of relevant legislation.

Republic of Peru

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: At the end of 2022, the Peruvian democracy and human rights faced serious challenges. In early December, former President Castillo was impeached and arrested after his attempt to dissolve the Congress and establish a "government of exception". His vice president, Dina Boluarte, was sworn in as Peru's new president. The political crisis led to violent protests and road blockades in several parts of the country. Human rights NGOs, the Office of the UNHCHR and the Peruvian Ombudsman reported cases of non-proportionate use of force by the security forces. During the protests in the last days of the year, 27 civilians died, among them minors, and more than 500 ended

up wounded including 120 police officers. The Peruvian government has declared it is committed to investigate and punish any alleged wrongdoing and has invited the UN and OAS to visit the country to assess the situation and provide recommendations.

The situation of environmental defenders remained a source of concern. During 2022, eight indigenous environmental defenders have been killed and dozens are living under threat and harassment by organised crime. Gender violence is still very high and the measures taken by the State are still insufficient to guarantee access to justice for victims and to address the structural causes of violence against women. The Peruvian state has important policies and laws guaranteeing the respect and protection of human rights but the main challenge continues to be lack of implementation and funding.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU action on human rights and democracy in Peru is focused on five priority areas: (i) Democratic stability; (ii) human rights defenders (particularly environmental defenders); (iii) Prevention of gender violence and discrimination (Women and LGBTI); (iv) Economic and social rights (particularly indigenous population and migrants) and (v) Press freedom and new technologies.

2. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged in support of national efforts to strengthen democracy. Under the initiative of UNDP, an electoral governance working group has been established with the EU, other international actors, electoral institutions, Ombudsman and civil society organisations (CSOs). Its aim is to coordinate actions, exchange best practices, agree on fundamental common lines and avoid duplications in projects. The experience so far has been very positive.

The EU has constant contacts with the Ministry of Justice, Ombudsman, OHCHR, CSOs and indigenous environmental defenders to assess the implementation of the national policies on human rights defenders, as well as to show support and hear their concerns. The EU has mentioned its concern over the deterioration of safety conditions of environmental and human rights defenders in its dialogue with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In terms of women's rights, contacts with government authorities and CSOs have been channelled through MESAGEN, the space of gender coordination among 32 embassies and international organisations. It has been a good initiative to amplify EU's and other MS voices on the issue. MESAGEN has voiced concern over legislation backslashes against women's rights through letters to authorities and joint statements.

2. EU financial engagement: Protecting human rights defenders has been a principal topic for the EU in Peru. Projects with CSOs aimed at strengthening the organisation, protection and work of human rights and environmental defenders in the Amazon and in rural communities. The EU has also supported the Ministry of Justice in setting up and strengthening its mechanisms for protection of human rights defenders with a particular emphasis on the most affected regions of Loreto, Madre de Dios and Ucayali (all Amazonian). To do so, it has launched a project with Defensoría del Pueblo (Ombudsman) to strengthen its presence and capacity to attend cases in the field. A second project, together with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, aims at strengthening the institutional capacity and coordination of the Mechanism. In addition, the bilateral programme "EU support in the Fight

Against Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime" supports the establishment and consolidation of an multidisciplinary task-force (Police and Prosecution) to investigate homicides of human rights defenders.

Considering the deterioration of political stability in Peru, in 2022 the EU designed two initiatives, which will be launched in early 2023. The first one is a EUR 2.5 million programme "Consolidation of Peruvian Democracy" implemented by International IDEA to support the strengthening of democracy, accountability and inclusivity in line with the recommendations from the EU Elector Expert Mission in 2021. Activities include legislative improvements in the electoral and political framework, promoting political participation of women, youth, indigenous and LGTBI people and strengthening the capacities and role of journalism in democracy. The second one is a EUR 1 million UNDP-implemented project aimed at strengthening the communication and conflict prevention capacities of electoral institutions, subnational authorities and CSOs.

The EU is implementing as well a EUR 5 million project with the objective to eradicate gender violence from a two folded perspective: prevention and access to justice. The beneficiaries include the Ministry of Women, CSOs, academia and the justice sector (judges, prosecutors and police force).

EU's support to the inclusion and integration of migrants through emergency or development activities includes: health sector support to the National Universal Health Assurance Policy; strengthening of the integrated health network of Northern Lima; promotion of inclusive communities and conflict prevention; regularization of migrant population; employment generation and ECHO emergency relief.

The EU bilateral indicative programme 2021-2027 allocates EUR 15 million for human development, in particular social protection and migration.

5. Multilateral context: Peru has supported EU's initiatives condemning the illegal invasion of Russia against Ukraine.

In July, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) visited Peru and stated that there were "troubling indications that an anti-rights movement is gaining ground" and showed concern over hate speech and discrimination. She recalled that efforts were needed to ensure implementation of human rights policies. She stressed the need to develop measures to face food insecurity and highlighted the impunity in cases of murders and attacks against indigenous human rights defenders.

In the context of the political crisis in December, President Boluarte announced that the UNHCHR, as well as the Inter American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC) were invited to assess in situ the reports of human rights violations allegedly committed by the police and army during the repression of the aggressive citizen's protests. A first visit by the IAHRC took place in December.

The EU is supporting the establishment of a UNHCHR office in Lima. There has been constant dialogue and coordination with their representatives who closely followed the events during the political crisis of December.

El Salvador

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: El Salvador is facing two main challenges: insecurity and pressure on the rule of law. The year 2021 was marked by a progressive concentration of powers in the hands of the Executive and by the weakening of checks and balances. President Bukele's party obtained a two-thirds majority in Congress after democratic elections in February. The day of its taking function, the new Congress quickly dismissed the Attorney General and magistrates of the constitutional chamber of the Supreme Court. The anti-corruption commission (CICIES), a campaign promise of the President, was dismantled at the time it was starting to deliver results. A few weeks later, a law regulating the judiciary forced into retirement nearly 200 judges. The newly appointed Constitutional Chamber paved the way for the President to stand for re-election despite its explicit prohibition in the Constitution. This concentration of power took place as a new draft Constitution was prepared by the Vice-President.

Press freedom and freedom of expression are well established in El Salvador with the existence of investigative and critical media outlets. Nevertheless, harassment of journalists, by portraying them as political opponents, is frequent on social media and is on the rise. The Salvadoran Association of Journalists (APES) received 209 complaints in 2021 representing a 65% increase from 2020 and a 130% increase from 2019. Evidence was found that Pegasus spyware had been implanted on a number of journalists and activists' digital devices. The government denies involvement. Critical civil society organisations have reported targeted harassment by tax or labour authorities and are working in an increasingly hostile environment. In November, a draft Foreign Agents Law was rushed through the parliamentary committee for external relations without consultation. However, the law has not been discussed by the plenary.

A total of five protests took place in the streets of San Salvador since September 2021. A relatively small number of protesters criticised various non-related topics: the introduction of Bitcoin as a legal tender; the lack of political action on enforced disappearances; concerns about the rule of law and freedom of expression. Demonstrations took place peacefully without police presence. Nevertheless, roadblocks on the access ways to the capital may have had a deterrent effect.

Transitional justice remains a pending issue in a country where the trauma of the civil war that caused 75,000 casualties is still strongly felt. Former administrations in the past decades never seriously committed or managed to establish a legal framework to end impunity for crimes committed during the civil war. Currently, a draft law is being formulated in Congress. Emblematic cases like the massacre of El Mozote remain stalled despite engagement by the authorities to address them.

In 2021, El Salvador saw the lowest number of homicides in decades with 1,140 cases (20.8 for 100,000 inhabitants), a 15% drop since 2020 and a 50% drop compared to 2019. Youth are particularly affected by violence representing 53.13% of homicides. The reported number of femicides has declined (97 in 2021, from 130 in 2020 and 230 in 2019). However, the rising number of enforced disappearances is increasingly worrying, with twice as many unsolved cases in 2021 compared to 2020 (488 in 2021 vs. 200 in 2020). Extortion, rape and robbery have also increased in 2021 amid the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected children, who experienced precarious schooling conditions and numerous dropouts. An increasing number of children witnessed or were victim of domestic violence. Adolescent pregnancies slightly decreased in 2021, (9889 until September 2021, 199 less than for the same period in 2020).

Abortion remains criminalised in El Salvador in all circumstances. Reproductive rights saw progress at the end of 2021 with the liberation of five women imprisoned for murder after suffering obstetric emergencies. However, another five women are standing trial on similar charges and seven remain imprisoned. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has found El Salvador responsible for the death in prison of a Salvadoran woman by the name of Manuela.

Poverty continuously decreased until 2019 but increased in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic (+23.3% since 2019). Structural imbalances in the distribution of wealth between rural and urban areas remain strong. The government increased the minimum wage by 20% and daily working hours were reduced for employees of private security companies.

El Salvador's location in the Central American Dry Corridor renders it particularly vulnerable to climate change. The right to a healthy environmental is increasingly under threat. A quarter of the rural population lacks access to running water.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, the key focus areas are:

- building a resilient, inclusive and democratic society: including support to civil society, support to independent media, the promotion of access to information and countering disinformation;
- promoting a global system for human rights and democracy: including improving accountability and transparency, promotion of good governance and strengthening of democratic institutions;
- protecting and empowering individuals: including empowerment of human rights and environmental defenders, advocacy for non-discrimination, gender equality and women's rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU has successfully engaged with stakeholders – including civil society organisations – on key policy areas such as elections, human rights, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights. It has stressed the responsibility of the authorities to uphold and safeguard human rights, separation of powers, freedom of expression, and the fight against corruption and impunity. An EU Election Follow-up Mission

(EFM) was deployed in October to assess the state of implementation of the recommendations issued by the EU Election Observation Missions in 2018 and 2019 and to help improve the electoral framework ahead of the 2024 elections. The EFM maintained the priority recommendations, including the need for improved supervision over political financing, depoliticisation of electoral staff, enforcement and bolstering of campaign and media rules.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU is currently reformulating its strategy as regards budget support programmes. A total of 19 projects were ongoing in 2021, seven of which were funded by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights for EUR 3.2 million, and 13 under the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities Programme for EUR 8.7 million. The second implementation phase of the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative on violence against women has started.

5. Multilateral context: El Salvador was elected co-chair of the Bureau of the 54th and 55th Commission on Population and Development and co-chair of the Working Group on the Revitalisation of the Work of the UN General Assembly. The country co-sponsored the Resolution on the Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2023.To date, El Salvador has not signed the Escazú agreement, a regional agreement on access to information, public participation and justice in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean. The country made steps towards the wider fight against climate change.

Republic of Suriname

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Suriname is a presidential republic with a relatively favourable human rights situation. Fundamental rights are generally respected and credible, transparent and inclusive elections were held in 2020. Suriname has abolished the death penalty and is relatively advanced on the protection of the rights of LGBTI persons. There is no legal prohibition of same-sex relations. However, elements of discrimination remain, such as the lack of legal provision for a same-sex registered partnership. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated certain human rights issues, especially sexual and gender-based violence, which remains a major challenge. Other main problems concern the rights of the child (including widespread abuse, corporal punishment and child labour in the informal sector), trafficking in human beings, prison conditions, stigmatisation of persons with HIV, widespread public sector corruption and the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples, including implementation of legal recognition of their land and collective rights.

On August 5, 2022 the Constitutional Court declared that the Electoral Regulations violate provisions in the Constitution as well as provisions in the Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the UN Convention on Human Rights and the American Convention on Human Rights. The Court noted that it has no jurisdiction to propose a different electoral system. The government has taken note of this review by the Court and President Chan Santokhi established a review group on August 30. The group is charged with reviewing the decision of

the Constitutional Court regarding the review of the Electoral Regulations in order to deliver the required recommendations.

The government has declared a firm commitment to improve the human rights situation in the country and some progress has already been achieved. In November 2021, Suriname became part of the United Nations Convention against Torture and joined the United Nations Convention against Corruption. Suriname has approved the Bill amending abolishing death penalty in the Military Penal Code in 2021.

The international community has noted that the Government lacks the resources to effectively combat trafficking in human beings, especially in hard-to-reach forested areas. As a result, the full scope of trafficking in human beings occurring in Suriname is unknown, with most cases believed to be going unreported or un-investigated. Initiatives to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and to combat domestic violence generally have remained at the level of policy formulation and the establishment of coordination structures between ministries and agencies, but have failed to be properly implemented.

2. EU action – key focus areas: The EU prioritises its action in Suriname in the following areas: (i) Women's rights and the rights of the child, including domestic violence; (ii) Social and economic rights of indigenous communities; (iii) Good governance; (iv) Conditions in detentions centres; (v) Strengthening the role of the civil society.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to engage with authorities, civil society and stakeholders to support human rights and democracy progress. The EU human rights priorities were discussed with the Surinamese side in various settings. The EU has been highlighting in particular the issue of gender-based violence, the situation of children, excessive police violence, conditions in prisons and detention centres, non-discrimination of LGBTI persons, and equal treatment of tribal and maroon people, and asked about concrete measures taken.

The EU Delegation to Suriname's human rights award was delivered in November, 2022 to Mr Aniel Koendjbiharie, chairman of Stichting 'Wan Okasi', an organization for people with disabilities. Himself visually impaired, he is seen as a spokesperson not only for the visually impaired, but for all people with disabilities.

4. EU financial engagement: In order to underpin the EU support to strengthen the rights of the child, the EU signed in 2021 the project 'Change Nickerie' (EUR 155 000). This project addresses an integrated prevention and support system for victims of violence, particularly children and women. The project is in line with government priorities, and was designed in collaboration with the Bureau of Gender Affairs.

To attenuate the negative factors influencing the LGBTI community, the EU launched the project 'The Stand with Us' (EUR 402 000). The project establishes broad support for the rights of LGBTI persons in Suriname.

In order to empower indigenous and tribal communities, the EU started the project 'Local Actors for Change in the Hinterland' (EUR 849 000). The project strengthens local hinterland

civil society organisations to mitigate climate change through effective, community-managed forests by developing a sustainable forest and environmental management programme. The EU continued the implementation of the Trio and Wayana Indigenous Community Empowerment project (EUR 285 000). The main objective of this project is to socially and economically empower the Trio and Wayana indigenous communities.

5. Multilateral context: Suriname is a like-minded country sharing with the EU a strong believe in upholding a multilateral system and voting for UN resolutions that are important for the EU.

Suriname is party to most UN and Organization of American States human rights treaties. Suriname accepts the right of individuals within its jurisdiction to present complaints to the United Nations Human Rights Committee. Suriname recognises the original jurisdiction of the Caribbean Court of Justice for the interpretation of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas and the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court on Human rights. Suriname has ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, but its national legislation has not been brought in line with the Rome Statute yet.

The 2022 Suriname's report of the Universal Periodic Review Third Cycle was adopted at the 49th regular meeting of the UN Human Rights Council on 23 March. Of the 147 recommendations made on human rights, Suriname adopted 124. Suriname confirmed its commitment to ratify: International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances; Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Convention against Discrimination in Education; Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.
[1]

Trinidad and Tobago

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The latest Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index 2021 categorizes Trinidad and Tobago as a flawed democracy. The country's human rights record is considered good in most respects. Various regional organizations and multiple UN agencies operate in the country, with which Trinidad and Tobago generally cooperates and is supportive of its mandate. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are able to operate without restrictions or fear for their safety. They are however faced with lack of financial resources and of a legally established mechanisms to engage in formal dialogue with the Government.

2022 was marked by 605 homicides, the deadliest year ever, with a 13% detection rate by the police. More than half are gang and drug-related killings, while 33 were victims of domestic violence. The Prime Minister declared violent crime, including cases of gender-based violence a public health emergency. The Government is eager to address the overall issue of gender-based violence. However, some key policy is yet to be finalized, most notably the National

Gender Policy. LGBTI persons are still deprived of the protections provided under the Domestic Violence Act. There are strongly and openly expressed feelings against the LGBTI community, in particular from religious groups of all denominations. Various CSOs promote and advocate for LGBTI rights and raise the issue, which is slowly gaining more acceptance in the general population.

Trinidad and Tobago has significant numbers of persons held on remand awaiting trial. The delays in the Courts procedures mean that accused persons can be held for years without being informed of a trial date. They represents two thirds of the total prison population. There has been limited progress in the last year to improve the difficult conditions for prisoners. Particularly, physical infrastructure remains an issue and has come under increased scrutiny due to COVID-19 pandemic. Trinidad and Tobago retains the death penalty, but a de facto moratorium on the death penalty is in force since 1999. Whilst it has not been applied in recent years, persons convicted of capital crimes are still sentenced to execution. If not carried out within a 5-year period, the sentence is commuted to a life sentence.

According to reports from the Children's Authority, abuse and maltreatment of children in their own homes or in institutional settings remains a serious problem. The most represented category of child abuse and maltreatment is neglect (29.3%), followed by sexual (23.3%) and emotional abuse (17.4%). Although the child protection system has received a boost with the launch of an innovative, globally recognised case management system, report on children's homes, under the purview of the Children's Authority, has revealed allegations of sexual and physical abuse, overcrowding, poorly maintained facilities and even instances of self-harm. Trinidad and Tobago has allowed the repatriation from detention camps for Islamic State (ISIS) suspects and their families in northeast Syria of only two children, with an estimated 70 children and 25 women remaining in the camps.

The law prohibits discrimination based on disability, but does not mandate equal access for persons with disabilities. However, persons with disabilities continue to face, discrimination, stigma, and denial of opportunities, including lack of access to employment, education, and civic participation. Trinidad and Tobago's press freedom level remains relatively high. Media outlets perform an effective watchdog function, holding power to account and reporting on public interest issues. Regarding internet access or restriction, the government does not engage in disruptions, or online censorship. The lack of accountability of perceived corrupt public and private sector actors continues to threaten to erode the public's trust in the public sector. The prosecution service's work against corruption and human rights abuses suffers from overburdened bureaucratic procedures, inefficiencies and backlogs that riddle the justice system.

In recent years, on a per capita basis, Trinidad and Tobago found itself among the top countries for refugees and migrants from Venezuela. Main concerns of migrants and refugees include: detention and deportation; irregular status and limited access to documentation; exposure to crime, violence, and other safety issues: obstacles to accessing healthcare: limited safe and secure job opportunities, (because most refugees and migrants express the wish to work); exclusion from education; food insecurity; insufficient access to information about rights and services; and inadequate local integration, which endures because of xenophobia and language barriers.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU has continued to focus on the following priorities: the abolition of the death penalty; gender equality and women's rights; rights of the child; LGBTI rights; migrant and refugee rights; prisoners' rights; and the anti-corruption architecture.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: For International Women's Day, the Delegation collaborated with the British High Commission under the banner of our annual #LetsTalkTT campaign. A special thirty-minute discussion on #BreakingtheBias[37] and eliminating violence against women and girls was broadcast on 8 March on a local television channel, featuring the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago in dialogue with the students and the public participants.

The Delegation collaborated with PrideTT on a number of initiatives during 'Pride Month' including participation in the 'Pride Film Festival' with European films. Together with likeminded countries, the Delegation prepared and secured publication of a joint statement on the Privy Councils' decision on the constitutionality of the Death Penalty.

In addition to International Days campaigns the Delegation also finalised the production of three videos on *'A Sexual Culture of Justice', 'The Prisoner Pre-release and Resettlement Programme' and 'Response to Recovery – COVID-19: Reducing Vulnerability: Enhancing Resilience for Migrant Population'*.

4. EU financial engagement: The project *Response to Recovery – COVID-19: Reducing Vulnerability: Enhancing Resilience for Migrant Population* ended in 2022 after surpassing its target by 145% and reaching a total of 726 families. It utilized the global Red Cross network to achieve targets, specifically related to facilitating the foundation training in 'Psychological First Aid' for Spanish-speaking volunteers. Two 'Child Friendly Spaces' were constructed to provide opportunities for Volunteers trained in 'Play Therapy' to interact with the children of beneficiaries, thereby addressing their psychosocial needs. Two health clinics were also operationalised to meet the continued health needs of migrants and other vulnerable groups. The European Union pays special attention to the position of women and the problem of violence against women in society. Trinidad and Tobago is one of six Caribbean countries where the 'Spotlight Initiative' is implemented. Independently of this EU-funded and UN-implemented project, the EU uses other forums to warn about this cross-cutting social problem. The Spotlight Initiative commenced Phase II activities during the reporting period.

5. Multilateral Action: The key Trinidad and Tobago government stakeholders were engaged through the delivery of demarches encouraging the country to vote on several resolutions that relate to human rights at the 77th UNGA Third Committee. Trinidad and Tobago abstained on several country-specific resolutions (Iran; Ukraine; Syria) and voted against the moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

[37] Theme for International Women's Day 2022

United States of America

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, efforts towards ensuring accountability following the attack on the US Capitol on 6 January continued, with the US Congress House Select Committee releasing its final report in December. The US mid-term elections were successfully held, confirming the credibility of the electoral system. The US also took a leading role in promoting democracy and human rights abroad, responding firmly to Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, while mobilising international support for democracy under the US-led Summit for Democracy process, announcing that a Second Summit would be held virtually in March 2023.

Although the US Administration maintained its moratorium on the federal death penalty, 18 persons were executed in six states (Alabama, Arizona, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas). There were seven more executions in 2022 than 2021, primarily due to Oklahoma's scheduling of monthly executions and Arizona's lifting of its eight-year de-facto moratorium. 27 States still maintain capital punishment as no more new States passed legislation to repeal the death penalty in 2022, and Congress did not pass proposed legislation to abolish capital punishment. The US voted against the bi-annual United Nations General Assembly Resolution "Moratorium on the use of the death penalty."

In June 2022, the US Supreme Court repealed the constitutional right to an abortion through its *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision. By the end of the year, 13 States had completely banned abortion and civil society groups believe that at least 26 states will eventually outlaw abortion completely or impose severe restrictions. As a result of *Dobbs,* one-third of people of reproductive age in the US face severe restrictions or bans on abortion access.

At the end of the year, Congress passed the *Respect for Marriage Act,* which codifies interracial and same-sex marriage into federal law. However, 13 States signed anti-LGBTI bills into law, including laws that prohibit healthcare for transgender youth and limit school officials' abilities to discuss LGBTI rights with students. Migrants and asylum seekers continued to face challenges entering the US and securing legal status due to Title 42, the Remain in Mexico Programme, and general backlog of asylum cases in immigration courts. The Department of Defense resettled four former Guantánamo Bay detainees this year; 35 detainees remain at the facility, including 20 detainees who have been cleared for release.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU and Member States organised a full programme of activities to advance human rights goals, in line with the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024). The EU remains one of the most engaged international actors (alongside like-minded states such as Mexico and Switzerland) on advancing abolition of the death penalty in the US, with the active support of Member State embassies and consulates across the country. In 2022, the EU submitted written interventions in five individual cases and sent a letter with 26 Member States' Ambassadors to the Governor of Oklahoma to protest the state's scheduling of 25 executions between August 2022 and December 2024. Additionally, counsellors from the EU Delegation, nine Member States and Switzerland travelled to Columbus, Ohio in September to demonstrate EU support for the state's proposed legislation to repeal capital punishment.

The EU Delegation organised several briefings for Member States with civil society groups and Administration officials on capital punishment, restrictions on internet freedom, US priorities at the UN Human Rights Council, transnational repression, voting rights and consular assistance for foreign nationals on death row. The Head of the EU Delegation also met with numerous human rights defenders, including the recipients of the 2022 Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk.

In addition, the EU Delegation and Member States worked together to promote human rights through a variety of events to mark International Human Rights Day, including on death penalty, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health rights, LGBTI, antisemitism, climate change and human rights, corruption and legal issues.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU maintained an open and productive dialogue with the US government on a wide range of human rights issues, during a year marked by Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. This included, amongst others, coordinating closely on further accountability for human rights violations in Ukraine, the death penalty, migrant and asylum seekers' rights, and the promotion of human rights in multilateral fora. In March, the EU and US held their annual consultation on human rights, which provided an opportunity to discuss domestic developments, and to explore EU-US collaboration and synergies, while also conveying EU concerns on some aspects of US policy such as the death penalty. The EU Special Representative for Human Rights represented the EU and engaged with a number of US government and civil society representatives.

The Delegation also facilitated and participated in a meeting of the EU-US Migration Platform in June, meetings of the EU-U.S. Trade and Technology Council working group on Misuse of Technology Threatening Security and Human Rights, as well as regular meetings on the Summit for Democracy and on gender equality and equity.

3. EU financial engagement: The EU Delegation promoted EU values on death penalty abolition, democracy, and human rights protection by financially supporting the World and Europe Day Against the Death Penalty event with the Swedish Embassy organising a discussion on the societal repercussions of the death penalty, as well as a film screening and panel discussion during the annual death penalty outreach trip to Ohio. The Delegation also financed an event in honour of Pride celebrations that featured a panel discussion on the importance of LGBTI visibility.

5. Multilateral context: The EU and the US strengthened coordination on UN affairs, particularly in response to Russia's illegal and unprovoked military aggression in Ukraine, including through a more systematic monitoring of key resolutions and coordinated efforts to promote and defend the UN charter. This included the establishment of the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group to provide expertise and assistance to the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine. In January, the US joined the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), leading on several resolutions and successfully promoted efforts to suspend Russia from the HRC.

There was increased EU engagement with the US Office of Global Criminal Justice to support progress on accountability mechanisms. Additionally, the EU and the US worked together with other partners to advance the Summit for Democracy's "Year of Action".

The Oriental Republic of Uruguay

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Overall the human rights situation in Uruguay remains positive and stable, human rights defenders enjoy a good legal and political environment to operate in. The country continues to be one of the most democratic countries in the region according to various rankings.

The high rate of domestic violence against women and girls remains a serious concern. There was an increase in the number of complaints and femicides in 2022 and experts warn that the cases of violence also revealed more brutality, even against minors. Gender inequalities in public and business decision-making persist.

The conditions and overcrowding in prisons are also of concern. Uruguay has a prisoner incarceration rate of 413 per 100 000 inhabitants, which places it ninth in the world. High rates of institutional and interpersonal violence persist, as well as homicides and suicides. Social reintegration of prisoners remains a pending issue.

Discrimination against afro-descendants, LGBTI community, immigrants and other minorities continues to be present in the society (particularly in income, education, health and work opportunities) despite legislative and policy initiatives. The government is to take measures to accomplish the 8% annual quota for the participation afro-descendants in education and work.

2. EU action –key focus areas: The human rights and democracy priorities for Uruguay include: (i) Combating all forms of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls; promote gender equality and combat discrimination and increase political participation of women; (ii) Promoting the protection of children from all forms of violence, abuse and neglect; (iii) Raising awareness about the poor living conditions of people deprived of liberty, to encourage their economic and social reinsertion and to strengthen civil society organisations (CSOs) on the matter; (iv) Promoting the protection, access and use of natural resources; to support communities affected by environment and climate change and monitoring by NGOs and to promote citizen's participation and the access to environmental justice.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2022, the EU Delegation hosted a civil society dialogue meeting, attended by representatives of various CSO including individual NGOs, NGO platforms and networks and cooperative sector. The meeting tackled current issues impacting CSOs, including the changing space for civil society. Several CSO representatives expressed concern about the scarce dialogue with the government, the growing hate speech towards members of civil society and the lack of resources for monitoring public policies. The EU Delegation also held specific dialogues with organisations linked to gender and environment

issues, and the European Parliament Delegation for relations with Mercosur also met with representatives of CSOs and the social partners.

The EU Delegation approved a project to cooperate with the Uruguayan Parliament, in order to strengthen the basic functions of the Parliament and its capacity to promote the issue of the anticipated governance and to increase the role of the Parliament for the exchange of best practices regional and globally.

4. EU financial engagement: The total value of the EU Delegation´s support to civil society organisations in on-going projects amounts to nearly EUR 3 million, of which 1 625 300 specifically promote human rights, particularly women's rights. At the end of 2022, the Delegation launched a new call for proposals (total budget EUR 1 675 000) to strengthen CSOs, promote agroecology and protect biodiversity in Uruguay. This will allow to finance three to five new projects. Additionally EUR 250 000 will be oriented specifically to promote human rights.

Three ongoing EU-funded projects under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) seek to strengthen the capacity of CSO to influence public policies on gender based violence, generate knowledge about it as a risk factor in the suicides of women, children and adolescents and to achieve local responses. They also aim at empowering women victims of domestic violence through their reintegration in the labour market and developing their effective access to justice. In the framework of one of these projects ("Por una convivencia en paz"), special activities aim to train children (of victims of domestic violence) to solve problems peacefully.
The EU and Uruguay cooperate to promote the labour insertion of women in the Uruguayan ICT sector. The EU is also providing technical assistance to the National Women Institute with the cooperation of UN Women.

Several projects supporting CSOs focus on (i) the economic and social reintegration of women deprived from liberty and (ii) strengthening the role of the cooperative system in promoting employment and income generation, fostering sustainable production and consumption to face climate change.

5. Multilateral context: Uruguay is committed to and engaged with multilateralism. It is a UN founding member and is one of the world largest per capita contributors of forces to UN peacekeeping missions. The EU Delegation and EU Member States Embassies conducted joint demarches about the Russian invasion to Ukraine. Those demarches, as well as those related to the UNGA's Third Committee, served to confirm that Uruguay positions are in general aligned with the EU's. However, some exceptions were noted during Uruguay's membership in the UN Human Rights Council when it preferred to avoid voting against certain human rights-related resolutions tabled by China.

The country is also a staunch supporter of the Inter-American Human Rights system. The Uruguayan Ricardo Pérez Manrique is the President of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights until 2023.

Republic of Venezuela

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2022, Venezuela continued suffering from a serious multifaceted crisis that hinders its human rights situation and democracy. The resumption of the Venezuelan-led negotiations between the opposition and the government in November 2022 in Mexico was an encouraging development.

In January 2022, the 2020 National Assembly reformed the Organic Law of the Supreme Court of Justice, reducing the number of magistrates and allowing serving judges to reapply for the post. Most of the members of the new Supreme Court of Justice have close ties with the ruling party and some have even been part of its ranks. These actions further consolidated the lack of judicial independence.

The crackdown on political dissent and independent civil society, the lack of effective mechanisms to hold accountable perpetrators of human rights violations, the corruption networks or the abuses committed against opposition candidates running for office, are some of the impediments that hinder the restoration of the democratic order in Venezuela and the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms. As of December 2022, there were reportedly 274 political prisoners and over 9 000 individuals with restriction of liberty orders. Attacks against human rights defenders appear to have decreased from 743 incidents in 2021 to 396 in 2022. The OHCHR continues receiving allegations of killings of indigenous peoples and threats to indigenous leaders in particular in mining areas and areas controlled by non-state armed groups.

Civil and political rights were often undermined by censorship, the lack of independent media covering political and economic news in TV and radio, or the fear of repression by security forces. In 2022, there were 227 documented cases in which freedom of expression was compromised, a decrease from 244 the year before. As of 6 December 2022, Nicolas Maduro's government had closed 78 radio stations, the most in a single year since records began in 2001.

As reported by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as national and international civil society organisations, in 2022, millions of Venezuelans continued with limited access to basic healthcare and adequate nutrition.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2021-2024, the EU focused in Venezuela on the following areas: (i) Promoting fundamental freedoms and strengthening civic and political space; (ii) Reinforcing economic, social, cultural and labour rights; (iii) Promoting transparent, inclusive, accountable, participatory, and representative decision-making; (iv) Supporting independent and pluralistic media, access to information and the fight against disinformation; and (v) Enhancing democratic, accountable and transparent institutions.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU has not spared its efforts to contribute to a peaceful and democratic solution to the Venezuelan crisis. In this context, it is key to properly follow-up to the recommendations of the 2021 EU Election Observation Mission.

On 14 November 2022, the European Council extended the validity of the targeted restrictive measures on 55 Venezuelan officials responsible for serious human rights violations and/or undermining democracy and the rule of law in the country.

In Venezuela, the EU and its Member States actively engage in public diplomacy to promote the EU's democratic and human rights values, prioritising the support to independent civil society and relevant stakeholders.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2022, the EU Delegation had a portfolio of 37 projects, of them 15 carried out activities contributing directly to the priorities of the Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy. The projects focused on strengthening civic and political space, and covered issues such as: capacity building of organisations to participate in public policies, building resilience of civil society to carry out their human rights work and strengthening their self-protection capabilities, supporting initiatives of human rights organisations and women human rights defenders, human rights education among young people, and monitoring the levels of violence throughout the country by building a network of national violence observatories.

Two additional projects support media freedom and fight against disinformation. The first one focuses on comprehensive support to improve the capacity of independent media and journalists in Venezuela to safely exercise their role and provide their diverse audiences with high-quality, accurate and relevant information. The second project, implemented by a Venezuelan civil society organisation (CSO), implemented a mechanism of combating disinformation. Other projects covered economic and social rights: provision of food security for vulnerable populations, promotion of water and sanitation and community resilience. The projects strengthened as well health services throughout the country.

For the third year in a row, the EU was the main donor to the OHCHR work in Venezuela since the office established a presence in the country in September 2019. EU support is focusing mainly on the OHCHR's work with civil society and human rights defenders.

At the end of 2022, two new projects were approved with CSOs dealing with strengthening the capacity of CSOs to build an inclusive agenda. Additionally, one project focuses on strengthening women's participation at community level and three others work on inclusion, community and territorial participation and sustainability.

5. Multilateral context: The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has a field presence in Venezuela since 2019. The OHCHR has published several reports on the human rights situation in Venezuela, its latest in June 2022. The Human Rights Council has renewed the mandate of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission in October of 2022, for a two year period.

On 25 January 2022, Venezuela participated in its third Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council. It received 328 recommendations, among which the authorities expressed support for 119, stated that it had already implemented or was implementing 102, noted 48 and did not support 59. Several of the recommendations dealt with the following issues: the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, extrajudicial executions, women´s rights, judicial independence, due process, separation of powers, and freedom of the press.

In a UN General Assembly vote, on 11 October 2022, Venezuela did not obtain the minimum necessary 97 votes in order to keep its seat in the 47-member UN Human Rights Council.

[i] https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2022-eastern-europe-central-asia-growing-security-risks-authoritarianism-threaten-progress-corruption