

The State of the World's Human Rights; France 2025

Background

Political turbulence dominated the year with ongoing fall-out from the 2024 dissolution of the National Assembly contributing to several changes in government.

Anti-rights statements openly questioning the rule of law became increasingly pervasive.

Discrimination

The increase in racist hate speech, including from political leaders, and crimes, including antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents, raised serious concerns. Meanwhile, the government continued its refusal to address systemic racism, its failure to collect reliable data, and its persistence in discriminating against Muslim women and girls wearing headscarves.

Following the 2024 Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games, in which French women athletes were banned from wearing sports hijabs, authorities increased gendered Islamophobic measures and rhetoric. In February, the Ministry of Sports published a guide on “secularism and religion in the field of sports”, anchoring disproportionate and discriminating limitations to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and expression.

On 18 February, the Senate passed a bill banning the wearing of religious signs in sports competitions and swimming pools. On 5 March, a National Assembly investigative mission into “communitarian and Islamist tendencies in sport” published a report calling for the adoption of the ban. The National Assembly had not yet discussed the bill.

In May, the Senate rejected a bill aimed at tackling discriminatory identity checks by the police.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

April marked the 200th anniversary of France requiring Haiti to pay compensation for the loss of colonial profits from enslaved labour. In April, President Macron announced the creation of a Franco-Haitian joint commission tasked with examining the countries’ “shared past” and making “recommendations to both governments so that lessons can be learned and a more peaceful future can be built”. Although a positive step towards reparation for slavery and

colonialism, the declaration failed to put affected communities at the centre of this process or to recognize France's duty under international human rights law to provide reparations. Following long overdue calls for reparations, in June the National Assembly adopted a resolution aimed at the recognition, reimbursement and reparation by France of Haiti's "double debt".

On 29 July, France issued a new arrest warrant against former Syrian president Bashar al-Assad for the 2013 chemical weapons attacks. The new warrant followed the annulment in July of a previous warrant, which France's highest court ruled as invalid since he had personal immunity as president at the time it was issued.

Freedom of expression and assembly

Those expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people faced excessive and disproportionate restrictions. Authorities placed pre-emptive blanket bans on multiple demonstrations in several cities. In Paris, a demonstration was rerouted after a partial ban by the Paris police prefect.

Three Sciences Po university students were expelled and 10 suspended after protesting against Israel's genocide against Palestinians and expressing concerns about the university's partnerships with Israeli academic centres. Conferences on Palestine were cancelled at several universities, including in Strasbourg and Paris.

In March, the Paris police prefect banned a feminist march organized by the collective Insurrection Trans on the grounds of risks to public order, but it was reinstated following an urgent judicial appeal.

Other groups were also targeted. In July, the Tarn prefect pre-emptively banned gatherings of opponents to the A69 motorway. Environmental activists were subjected to criminal prosecution. In September, two activists were sentenced to prison terms (one with a suspended sentence) for spraying paint on the prime minister's office as part of a campaign calling for energy-saving renovation measures (one of the most severe penalties ever imposed in France for an act of civil disobedience).

Authorities announced the dissolution of the collective Urgence Palestine. This had not been implemented by year's end, but the bank accounts of the group's main leader, Omar Alsoumi, had been frozen.

On 10 September, the Ministry of the Interior issued an Operational Guide on Urban Violence with the stated aim of distinguishing the management of "urban violence" from that of demonstrations.

In September, a parliamentary commission of inquiry published its report into the psychological effects of TikTok on children and young people. The report underscored concerns about the platform's recommendation system and recommended a ban on social media for children under 15 years. This was despite concerns that a ban risked unduly

restricting young people's rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly online. The president and the minister delegate for artificial intelligence and digital affairs also called for a ban to be implemented.

Unlawful use of force

Security forces were accused of using excessive force during demonstrations on 10 and 18 September and preventing some journalists from doing their work reporting on the protests. In May, the UN Committee against Torture expressed concern over the reported use of less lethal weapons, including stun grenades and projectile launchers, which regularly caused serious injuries.

The committee further noted particular concern at the number of deaths resulting from the use of firearms by law enforcement during traffic stops. It highlighted that Article L.435-1 of the Internal Security Code appeared to have expanded the scope of self-defence for police officers beyond reasonable limits, contributing to an increase in deaths caused by police firearms. It also emphasized that cases of excessive use of force disproportionately affected members of minority groups, particularly people of African or Arab descent, Indigenous Peoples and migrants.

In June, the police officer who shot and killed Nahel Merzouk, a 17-year-old French boy of North African descent, in 2023 was charged with murder.

Irresponsible arms transfers

A lack of transparency continued to shroud arms transfers, with the government failing in its legal requirement to report on the previous year's transfers by the end of May. France continued to license war material exports to Israel despite calls by UN experts for the immediate cessation of such transfers, which likely violated international humanitarian law. Authorities stated that France did not export equipment that could be used in the Gaza Strip, South Lebanon or in the Occupied Palestinian territory; however, persistent lack of transparency rendered this information hard to verify.

Impunity

Despite ICC arrest warrants pending for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, France allowed his aircraft to fly over its territory three times.

Unlawful surveillance

In May, the government introduced a bill on the 2030 Winter Olympic Games allowing the use of mass video surveillance technology powered by AI until December 2027. This bill

renewed the use of surveillance technology at the 2024 Olympic Games, despite serious human rights risks, particularly to racialized individuals, underscored by civil society.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

French migration policies perpetuated a system of exploitation of and harm to racialized foreign workers. Research published in November reaffirmed previous findings that the migration system and rules governing the right to work and stay in France perpetuated the exploitation of racialized foreign workers.¹ The system directly violated their human rights in multiple ways and made them vulnerable to secondary, related rights violations due to delays and other systemic problems.

Many politicians continued to use harmful and xenophobic rhetoric against migrants, especially racialized migrants. This rhetoric also permeated debates surrounding laws adopted by the National Assembly reducing refugees' and migrants' rights. A reform adopted in July facilitated the detention of migrants convicted for "very serious offences" and "at a high risk of reconviction". Other reforms increased obstacles to obtaining French nationality for children born in the territory of Mayotte.

France and the UK continued to forge agreements that focused on "deterrents" and undermined migrants' rights, failing to create alternative legal and safe routes. More than 41,000 people attempted to cross the Channel by boat, the second highest number since 2022. By year's end, according to Agence France-Presse, at least 29 people had died trying to reach the UK by boat from France, a decrease on 2024, but higher than 2023.

In July, the National Asylum Court found that Palestinians from Gaza qualified for refugee status because they would be at real risk of persecution by the Israeli armed forces on grounds of nationality if returned. However, in August, France temporarily stopped receiving Palestinians fleeing the occupied Gaza Strip.

Gender-based violence

In October, parliament approved a law amending the legal definition of rape to include the concept of consent in line with international standards.

According to official figures published in October, 107 women were killed by their partners or ex-partners in 2024. Data from feminist organizations covering the same period indicated that 141 women had been killed. According to feminist organizations, 164 women were killed in 2025.

Right to a healthy environment

The government's third National Adaptation Plan, published in March, was criticized by civil society and the High Council for the Climate for its lack of concrete measures to protect

vulnerable populations and largely insufficient funding. In April, 14 climate disaster victims and associations sued the state for failing to protect people from the impacts of climate change.

In July, the High Council on Climate's annual report judged France's climate action in 2024 as insufficient, stating that the pace of decarbonization needed to double to reach the 2030 target. Rather than strengthening climate action, authorities proposed or adopted several setbacks to climate and environmental policies, including budget cuts or conditions to the adoption of the EU NDC, thereby threatening the Paris Agreement.

