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Enlargement countries

Republic of Albania

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Albania's legal framework sets out a generally good basis for respect, protection and fulfilment of fundamental rights. Progress during the reporting period included the adoption of a new strategy for the protection of crime victims, the adoption of the bylaws relevant to the implementation of the framework law on the rights of persons belonging to minorities as well as the preliminary results of the national population and housing census published in June. Implementation efforts need to intensify overall, particularly in the areas of freedom of expression, violence against women and property rights. The electoral framework remained conducive for organising democratic elections. Parliament adopted amendments to the Electoral Code, partially in response to Constitutional Court rulings, thus enabling out-of-country voting by Albanian diaspora, introducing partially open candidates lists (mixed candidate lists) and changes to the party quotient. However, there has been limited progress in addressing outstanding recommendations from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Venice Commission, as the mandate of Parliament's ad-hoc committee on electoral reform expired without any results. Parliament exercised its powers in a mostly satisfactory way. However, its oversight role over the executive remained to be strengthened. Parliamentary activities were affected by strong political polarisation. Confrontation between the ruling majority and a part of the opposition continued to be harsh until March 2024, with the latter disrupting a plenary session with barricades due to alleged restrictions on their rights. Despite the return to normal functioning of the Parliament in March 2024, political polarisation remained high. This continued to negatively impact Parliament's key legislative and oversight roles and extended delays in appointing individuals to key positions, including the Ombudsperson and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination. Civil society organisations (CSOs) operated in a challenging environment, including in relation to registration requirements and limited public funding for CSOs. The structures for consulting civil society were not reinforced to be fully operational. The conditions necessary for effective VAT exemption need to be put in place without further delay.

Albania continued implementing the justice reform and the vetting process, which led to significant improvements in the functioning of the judiciary. The vetting process in first instance has been completed, which is a major milestone. Concerns remained about attempted political interference and pressure on the judicial system and shortcomings in the merit-based appointments of non-magistrate members of the High Judicial Council and the

High Prosecutorial Council and their integrity. The new judicial map was implemented, but challenges remained with the quality and efficiency of justice. Some preparatory acts were adopted on the roll-out of an integrated case management system, but the necessary budget allocations were lacking, especially for the court component.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's: Albania Report 2024 - European Commission (europa.eu).

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to monitor the entrenchment of democracy and respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights, with particular attention to access to justice, independence of media and freedom of expression, protection of minorities and persons in vulnerable situations, LGBTI persons, as well as registration of properties and transitional ownership rights. The EU also followed developments in the areas of citizenship rights, gender equality, right to life, prevention of and accountability for torture and ill-treatment in the prison systems, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Regular political dialogue continued mainly in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement as well as in the dynamic context of accession negotiations. These meetings provided an opportunity to take stock of the progress that Albania made in the preparations for EU membership with a focus on rule of law aspects, including fundamental rights. Human rights and democracy remained a central focus of the political dialogue with the authorities. In September 2024, the Council endorsed the Commission's assessment that Albania fulfilled the benchmarks for the opening of accession negotiations on the Fundamentals cluster, including the adoption of a roadmap on the rule of law. This led to the opening of the cluster in October and to the presentation by the EU to Albania on the Interim Benchmarks.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU continued the implementation of a wide array of projects in the field of human rights and democracy. The funding allocation from the EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance 2021 – 2027 (IPA III) of EUR 80.6 million continued supporting actions on justice, consolidation of democracy, fundamental rights as well as access to water, the right to education and access to employment of young people. With the support of the Programme on Social Inclusion (EUR 70.65 million) under IPA III, the EU continued providing support to families in vulnerable situations, including Roma and Egyptian families and older persons. Four new projects were launched under the NDICI Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy supporting elections, human rights, transitional justice and media freedom (EUR 1.35 million).

Under the IPA Civil Society Facility and Media Programme, support continued to civil society and media actors, mostly in areas covered by the fundamentals cluster under the accession negotiations, including rule of law, good governance, human rights and access to justice, gender equality and rights of LGBTI persons, freedom of expression and media pluralism (EUR 6,3 million). The new projects started to support civil society organisations in areas where the role of civil society in the accession negotiations is key such as environment, culture, food safety and consumer protection (EUR 3.2 million). The EU also awarded a direct grant to support the National Resource Center for Civil Society Organisations in Albania (EUR 0.7 million).

Cooperation with the Council of Europe continued, including under the Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye – Phase III with a total budget of EUR 5 million for Albania focusing on promoting equal treatment, freedom of expression and social inclusion. The

programme assisted with further upgrading the Central Election Commission's Electronic Platform on Financial Monitoring and Reporting in the run-up to the May 2025 parliamentary elections, drafting improvements to the laws on conflict of interest and on establishing an asset recovery office. It also supported the relevant agencies in processing compensations for properties confiscated during the communist regime, and in implementing judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

5. Multilateral context: Albania continued its dialogue and cooperation with European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies, notably with the UN, Council of Europe and the OSCE. Albania continued playing an active role in the UN Security Council since October 2023 and took a strategic role in the new geopolitical context marked by the war in Ukraine and in Gaza. Albania has an observer status in the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, the functioning of democratic institutions continued to be undermined by persistent discriminatory elements in the constitutional structure, and the *Republika Srpska* entity continues not to implement the decisions of the Constitutional Court. Local elections took place on 6 October 2024 based on the state-level election law.

The general framework for fundamental rights is largely in place but needs to be improved. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to urgently adopt constitutional and electoral reforms to ensure equality and non-discrimination of all citizens, implementing the ECtHR *Sejdić-Finci* case law. Parliamentary oversight over the executives remained weak. The executives continued having little capacity for coordination and policy planning. Independent institutions remained weak. There is no parliamentary monitoring of compliance with their recommendations. Political pressure, intimidation and harassment against journalists continued, including physical and verbal attacks, with no appropriate institutional follow-up. All prosecutors' offices and law enforcement agencies have appointed contact points for journalists. Political influence over public broadcasters persisted, the relevant legislation was not implemented, and their financial sustainability was ever more in danger. In the *Republika Srpska* entity, freedom of assembly remained restricted and civil society organisations continued operating in a constrained environment. While *Republika Srpska* withdrew its draft law on targeting civil society groups as 'foreign agents', the criminal penalties for defamation in the entity continued to have a chilling effect. Six cantons adopted legislation aiming to align with European standards on freedom of assembly, following the example of the Brčko District. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to implement court rulings to end divided education and ensure inclusive and non-discriminatory education for all, eliminating the practice of 'two schools under one roof'. Gender-based violence, including femicides, ill-treatment of detainees and the insufficient protection of minorities, including the Roma, continued to cause concern.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's: Bosnia and Herzegovina 2024 Report.

2. EU action – key areas: The EU continued to closely monitor the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights, including the freedoms of assembly, association, and 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. Half 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 of the media, improve the protection and inclusion of groups in vulnerable situations, and promote an environment conducive to reconciliation.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In March 2024, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina and invited the Commission to prepare the negotiating framework with a view to its adoption by the Council the moment all relevant steps set out in the Commission's recommendation of October 2022 are taken. In parallel, the Commission was preparing the screening exercise. The Commission regularly held meetings with Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU support via the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) continued focusing on the areas of judiciary (EUR 6.4 million) while support to civil society and the media through the Civil Society and Media Facility amounted to EUR 7.8 million for the capacity building of civil society organisations in the areas of health, social inclusion and social entrepreneurship, environment, youth, culture, local economy, women's rights, freedom of expression, anti-corruption, elections integrity as well as a civil society resource centre. The Civil Society Facility also continued to contribute to building the capacities of governments to include civil society into decision-making (EUR 944,750).
EU funding contributed 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 provided support to the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, including on the monitoring and reporting on the needs of those in vulnerable situations (Human Rights Database) through the EU4Inclusion project (EUR 279,500). The EU also provided support to improve the living conditions women living in vulnerable situations (EUR 500,000). The Regional Housing Programme delivered 2,778 homes to families in very vulnerable situations, benefitting some 9,000 persons.

The NDICI Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy continued to support initiatives addressing women victims of violence, promoting equal enjoyment of human rights by LGBTI persons, the rights of the child, the rights of Roma women and girls, supporting the implementation of the UN Guiding principles on businesses and human rights, supporting independent media and freedom of expression, strengthening access to information and promoting reconciliation and transitional justice (EUR 2.3M).

In parallel, the EU – Council of Europe Horizontal Facility (Phase III) with EUR 4.498 million for Bosnia and Herzegovina financed activities aimed at strengthening human rights, including the treatment of persons in detention, preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings, supporting an equal, inclusive and tolerant society, quality education for all, and freedom of expression and of the media. Among several concrete deliverables, the EU-CoE Horizontal

Facility supported the fifth Pride March in Sarajevo (around 2,000 participants), and the establishment of the first LGBTI shelter.

5. Multilateral context: Bosnia and Herzegovina continued its dialogue and cooperation with European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies (UN, OSCE, Council of Europe). No significant progress was made towards addressing most of the 204 accepted recommendations from the November 2019 Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Bosnia and Herzegovina still needs to address a significant number of recommendations by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UN Committee against Torture and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Republic of North Macedonia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The legal framework on the protection of fundamental rights remained partially aligned with the EU *acquis* and European standards. The country continued to meet its general obligations on fundamental rights, but legislation was not implemented in a systematic manner.

The Macedonian Association of Young Lawyers and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights appointed by the Parliament in 2023 to serve as the civil control mechanism within the Ombudsman's office did not start functioning due to lack of funds. There were no significant improvements in implementing the Ombudsman's Office recommendations by the public authorities, and the Parliament did not complete the long-awaited revision of the Law on the Ombudsman's Office. The services for victims of gender-based violence still required improvement and proper budgeting to meet the standards laid down by the Istanbul Convention. Mechanisms for implementing and monitoring gender equality policy was not effective and still required strengthening. There was no progress in adopting a national action plan for LGBTI persons. Persons with disabilities continued to face discrimination, social exclusion and barriers. No progress was made on the protection of personal data. The overall situation in the penitentiary system remained dire and prisons overcrowded. Some infrastructures were renovated and improved in several prison facilities. However, the lack of adequate healthcare remained an issue of serious concern. The recommendations of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (on the treatment of detained and convicted persons) were not addressed. The government remained committed to the Poznan Declaration priorities, however further efforts are still needed to fully promote the inclusion and protection of Roma and tackle anti-gypsyism.

Media freedom faced challenges despite some progress in legal reforms and institutional oversight. Attacks and threats against journalists persisted, highlighting the need for stronger protective mechanisms. The strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) exposed vulnerabilities in defending press freedom. Challenges persisted regarding the transparency of media ownership and concentration.

The functioning of democratic institutions was mostly satisfactory. The OSCE/ODIHR concluded that the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2024 were competitive, and fundamental freedoms were respected. The election legislation provides a suitable framework for holding democratic elections. However, campaign rules, access to the media and distribution of State funding are not adequately regulated.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's: North Macedonia 2024 Report

2. EU action on Human Rights and Democracy - key focus areas: The EU continued to monitor closely human rights in North Macedonia within the framework of the EU accession negotiations. Key focus areas included freedom of assembly and association, freedom of expression and freedom of media, the work of the Ombudsman Office and implementation of its recommendations, non-discrimination, including the rights of LGBTI persons and of persons in vulnerable situations, Roma inclusion, measures undertaken to prevent and ensure accountability for torture and ill-treatment within the prison system, respect, protection and fulfilment of the rights of the child, rights of persons with disabilities, as well as gender equality and combating gender-based violence.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Regular political and economic dialogue between North Macedonia and EU continued mainly in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The 18th meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Subcommittee on Justice, Freedom, and Security provided an opportunity to take stock of the progress that North Macedonia made in the preparations for EU membership, with a focus on rule of law aspects, including fundamental rights.

4. EU financial engagement: North Macedonia continued to benefit from funding under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III). Under the IPA III Civil Society Facility and Media Programme, support continued for Civil Society's efforts to bolster participatory democracy, EU integration, empowering women and youth and promoting human rights (EUR 3.3 million). Media associations implemented initiatives on freedom of expression, including enhancing the support for journalists, social and economic rights, and supporting the quality of local journalism. An EU-twinning project supported the media regulator in the implementation of the Media Directive, as well as the public broadcaster to expand audience through improved internet and social media use (EUR 788,000). The EU-funded grant on rule of law continued to support strengthening of human rights capacities and awareness across various sectors (EUR 10 million). Efforts to combat gender-based violence, enhance child rights policies, improve the probation system and non-discrimination marked significant steps.

Under the NDICI Thematic Programme on Human Rights and Democracy, ten new grants (EUR 1 million) were awarded to civil society organisations, aiming to improve the equal enjoyment of human rights by LGBTI persons, gender equality and gender-sensitive education, investigative journalism, conditions for participatory democracy, services for marginalised groups and those in vulnerable situations, the situation of non-majority communities, and inmates in correctional facilities and migrants.

Cooperation with the Council of Europe continued under the Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye – Phase III with EUR 4.765 million for North Macedonia focusing on rule of law, democracy and human rights and fighting organised economic crime.

5. Multilateral context: North Macedonia continued its active cooperation with international organisations, notably the UN, Council of Europe and the OSCE. The country was reviewed during the 4th cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) dialogue at the Human Rights Council and received 205 recommendations, of which it approved 193. Most

recommendations concerned gender-based violence and gender equality, independence of justice, penitentiary conditions, right to education, rights of persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups as well as trafficking in human beings. They also encouraged to strengthen the independent Human Rights Institutions and accede to further International Human Rights instruments. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) published in May 2024 the report of its periodic visit to North Macedonia. North Macedonia has an observer status in the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

Georgia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy situation in Georgia deteriorated significantly in 2024. The adoption of several legislative packages and amendments severely undermined the legal framework for upholding fundamental rights, infringing in particular the rights to freedom of association, expression and privacy, as well as the right to take part in public affairs and the prohibition of discrimination. This included the law on 'transparency of foreign influence', the legislative package on 'family values and protection of minors', as well as additional legislative amendments to laws on assemblies and demonstrations, on police, on administrative offences and on public service. Peaceful protesters, civil society activists, opposition leaders and media representatives participating in demonstrations faced threats, intimidation, arbitrary detentions and excessive use of force by the authorities, there were several reports of torture. The situation deteriorated following the Parliamentary elections and a statement by the Georgian authorities of their intention not to pursue the opening of accession negotiations until the end of 2028. Reports from civil society organisations, the Public Defender of Georgia and preliminary findings of the United Against Torture consortium indicated recurring, severe and intentional violence by the police, lack of accountability for acts of torture and ill-treatment, and suggested a systematic and coordinated policy of repression.

The conduct of the 2024 parliamentary elections was marked by irregularities, political polarisation and their results were not recognised by the opposition. The OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission report identified several irregularities and procedural inconsistencies and raised concerns about the effects of adopted legislation on the election process, as well as the lack of independence of institutions involved in the elections. The recent amendments reversed some of the previous positive provisions, such as the abolition of gender quotas, other temporary special measures, and amendments to the composition of the Central Election Commission. Further changes were introduced to the Electoral code with a view to favouring the ruling party in the 2025 local elections. A comprehensive electoral reform requested by the EU and recommended by the Venice Commission's opinion was not initiated.

The key provisions of the Strategy on the Protection of Human Rights and the Action Plan require amending, including on LGBTI persons and the protection of privacy. As a result of legislative activities and the continued prevalence of homophobic hate speech, LGBTI persons were facing an increasingly hostile and stigmatising atmosphere. Tbilisi Pride did not take place due to fear of violence. Backsliding also occurred in judiciary with several negative developments undermining the independence and integrity of the judicial system. In particular, judicial appointment procedures and some newly introduced legal provisions did

not comply with recommendations of the European Commission and the Venice Commission. Important legal gaps on fundamental rights remained, including in the law on administrative offences, the law on counterintelligence and the law on criminal procedures. The parliamentary oversight over the security sector remained limited. Freedom of expression was further restricted through legal changes. Threats and verbal and physical assault against civil society representatives and journalists multiplied. Discrediting rhetoric against media professionals by high-level public officials and politicians created an increasingly hostile environment. The Parliament did not take steps to engage in dialogue and involve civil society in policy-making processes.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's: Georgia 2024 Report

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU consistently called on the Georgian authorities to uphold fundamental rights and the rule of law. It underlined the need for progress on the implementation of the nine steps set by the 2023 Enlargement Communication of the European Commission and for repealing the law on transparency of foreign influence, the legislative package on family values and the protection of minors. The EU condemned the repressive actions against protesters, media representatives and opposition leaders, and called for the release of detained individuals, accountability, and ending the repression against citizens. Following a request by the Foreign Affairs Council, on 20 December the Commission proposed to the Council to suspend visa-free travel for Georgian diplomats and officials.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: At the EU-Georgia 8th Association Council, the EU called on Georgia to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms and ensure the full independence of human rights institutions. Because of Georgia's persistent democratic backsliding, the EU downgraded political contacts. The June European Council concluded that the course of action taken by Georgian authorities jeopardises Georgia's EU path leading to a *de facto* halt of the accession process. This position was further endorsed by the European Council's conclusions of December. The EU-Georgia Human Rights Dialogue did not take place in 2024.

4. EU Financial engagement: As a result of the democratic backsliding, EU assistance directly benefiting the Georgian authorities was halted and redirected, including for supporting civil society and independent media. The EU continued to implement the 'EU4Human Rights' programme supporting also the Public Defender's Office (EUR 11million). Georgian civil society, including human rights defenders benefitted from support through the regional Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility. The EU financed new actions on fundamental rights (EUR 18 million). Ongoing support focused on gender equality and combating gender-based violence, child rights, election observation, support to justice, rights of persons with disabilities, the rights of LGBTI persons, peacebuilding, tackling disinformation, foreign interference and manipulation and targeted support to CSOs, independent media and investigative journalism (circa EUR 27 million). The EU-Council of Europe 'Partnership for Good Governance' PGG III continued to focus on support to the justice sector, combating hate speech and fight against economic crimes (EUR 3.07 million). Georgia benefited from an EU co-funded project implemented by the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) supporting modernisation of court management in Georgia.

5. Multilateral context: Georgia continued to ensure good cooperation with the European Court of Human Rights but faced some delays in implementing its judgments. Georgia continued to be an elected member of the UN Human Rights Council. According to findings of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2024, Georgia violated child rights. Georgia co-sponsored most UN resolutions initiated by the EU. Georgia was active within the OSCE and pursued good cooperation with ODIHR during their election observation mission. At the 57th Human Rights Council, Georgia tabled a resolution on the human rights and humanitarian situation in the occupied breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Following the violent repression of protests in November, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Council of Europe called on the Georgian authorities to adhere to their obligations under international human rights treaties. On 20 December 2024, 38 OSCE participating states invoked the OSCE Vienna Mechanism stressing human rights violations in Georgia.

Kosovo*

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, the functioning of democratic institutions was affected by some challenges. The government held a solid majority in the Assembly, but disagreements and lack of cooperation within the majority and with opposition parties continued to prevent significant progress on EU-related reforms. These disagreements hindered the Assembly's ability to adopt legislation, to appoint members of public bodies and to provide effective oversight. Srpska Lista members of the Assembly boycotted the Assembly's work. The centralisation of executive decision-making and lack of interministerial coordination also negatively affected the delivery of reforms. Kosovo held a recall vote for mayors in the municipalities of Mitrovica North, Zvecan, Leposavic and Zubin Potok, the organisation of which was not free from challenges, including a boycott of the recall vote by the Srpska Lista party. This resulted in a series of difficulties, including some polling station committees being set up without any Kosovo Serb members. Kosovo continued to consolidate its new electoral legal framework adopted in 2023, which implements recommendations from successive EU election observation missions.

In general, the legal framework guarantees the protection of fundamental rights and is in line with European standards. Kosovo continued to improve interinstitutional coordination on human rights. Nonetheless, key institutions' human and financial resources remain limited. The rate of implementation of the Ombudsperson's recommendations remained very low, particularly regarding equality and non-discrimination. The Constitution protects against discrimination of the basis of gender or sexual orientation. Nevertheless, hate crime and hate speech remained a significant concern. Adoption of the Civil Code remained pending.

The legal framework on gender equality is mostly in line with international treaties and the EU acquis, however the capacities of Kosovo to draft policies, to monitor and evaluate their implementation remained limited. Kosovo needs to adopt a new Programme for Gender Equality and a new National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security. Institutional efforts

* 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.

led to improvements in the system of prevention and combating gender-based violence, but domestic violence and other forms of violence against women remain prevalent.

The government took some decisions advancing the rights of non-majority communities, including the adoption of the Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Communities and their Members for 2023-2027. Kosovo finally implemented the 2016 Constitutional Court decision on the Dečani Monastery land ownership. However, several government measures undermined the rights of non-majority communities and adversely affected their living conditions.

The media environment in Kosovo remained pluralistic with legislation generally in line with international standards, but the sector continued to lack transparency and financial sustainability. The functioning and transparency of the Independent Media Commission (IMC) improved. A new Law on the IMC was adopted. However, some concerns remained over the independence and powers of the media regulator. Attacks against journalists were given due attention by the police and the judiciary, but some level of impunity remained. The environment in the north of Kosovo remained restrictive and conducive to self-censorship for the public, the media and civil society organisations.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's: Kosovo* 2024 Report

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

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In line with the 3 June 2023 statement by the High Representative on behalf of the EU, the EU has been implementing reversible measures vis-à-vis Kosovo. As stated in the December 2024 Council conclusions on enlargement, the EU will gradually lift these measures in parallel with further steps by Kosovo to de-escalate the tensions in the north, while the Council will remain seized of these matters. The EU-facilitated Dialogue on normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia continued. Both Parties committed to fully implement all their respective obligations stemming from the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and its Implementation Annex reached in 2023.

4. EU financial engagement: Kosovo continued benefitting from ongoing assistance under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III). A project on protecting children in vulnerable situations is implemented by UNICEF (EUR 2.2 million). The EU measures put on hold the implementation of the joint programme with the Council of Europe focused on training legal professionals in Kosovo on European human rights standards (EUR 800,000), as well as the adoption of IPA 2024 programme comprising an action supporting justice reform and enhancing the fight against domestic and gender-based violence. Under the NDICI Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy, important projects continued supporting child rights, countering discrimination, hate speech and gender-based violence, promoting access to justice and supporting women's political participation (EUR 1 million). Additionally, EU provided support for transitional justice and the fight against discrimination towards vulnerable groups (EUR 1.2 million).

Under the Civil Society and Media Facility Programme (2021-2023), the EU continued to support media independence and professionalism (EUR 350,000), strengthen the role and capacities of investigative journalism (EUR 500,000), and promote a diverse and sustainable media ecosystem to support informed democracy (EUR 500,000). EU funding through the regional strand for the Western Balkans, including Kosovo (EUR 17 million) continued supporting freedom of expression and media independence. The European Endowment for Democracy (EUR 600,000) continued support to promote and protect democracy and safeguard human rights. Under the NDICI Thematic Programme for Civil Society Organisations, the EU continued to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations, media pluralism as well as to promote better relations and dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia (EUR 1.9 million).

The EU funded Council of Europe Horizontal Facility III for the Western Balkans and Türkiye continued to strengthen the quality and efficiency of justice in Kosovo (KoSEJ III) (EUR 779,000), combating discrimination and hatred (EUR 450,000), and protecting freedom of expression and strengthening the media regulatory authority (PRO-FREX) (EUR 550,000).

5. Multilateral context: Kosovo continued its dialogue and cooperation with European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies, including UN bodies, the OSCE and Council of Europe, including through participation in most regional forums. The incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was pending. Kosovo's application for Council of Europe membership is awaiting a decision by its Committee of Ministers.

Montenegro

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, the legislative and institutional framework on fundamental rights was largely in place in Montenegro. However, the necessary efforts to implement this framework in its entirety were not fully undertaken. Some legislative changes were needed, in particular in the area of non-discrimination. The Roma and Egyptians, persons with disabilities and LGBTI persons - continued to be subjected to discrimination, hate speech and hate crime. Montenegro needs to improve its mechanisms for reporting to the UN human rights mechanisms and follow up on their recommendations, as highlighted during the universal periodic review in 2018. The newly enacted media legislation provided a number of legislative improvements, including the alignment with the EU's Audiovisual Media Services Directive.
Overall, the government accelerated preparations on EU accession and worked effectively, in particular on meeting the requirements stemming from the interim benchmarks of chapter 23 on judiciary and fundamental rights and chapter 24 on justice, freedom and security. The 16th meeting of the Accession Conference with Montenegro confirmed that Montenegro overall met the interim benchmarks for these chapters and adopted the closing benchmarks for them. The government was operating in a generally stable political environment, with less polarisation compared to recent years. However, the country and its institutions remained fragile and vulnerable to political crisis and potential institutional blockages. Local elections in five municipalities were conducted overall satisfactorily. Further efforts were however needed to fully meet international standards. Overall, the electoral framework still requires comprehensive reform and alignment with EU law of the election legislation, voting and candidacy rights restrictions, transparency, mechanisms of dispute resolution, and oversight of campaign finance and media. Most pending OSCE/ODIHR recommendations were

addressed. The parliament operated regularly, largely with consensus on key EU related reforms. However, tensions and inter-ethnic polarisation resurfaced, having an adverse impact on political stability. During the summer, the Parliament took some hasty legislative initiatives failing to apply the necessary transparency. The role of civil society in policy making remained not formalised and purely symbolic at times. Further efforts remained necessary to ensure genuine and meaningful cooperation between the government and Civil Society Organisations.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's: Montenegro 2024 Report.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU's action in Montenegro continued to focus on the key areas described in the interim benchmarks on fundamental rights in chapter 23 judiciary and fundamental rights of the accession negotiations. They 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 closely monitor the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights in Montenegro within the framework of the EU accession negotiations under chapter 23 judiciary and fundamental rights. There was a regular policy dialogue at political level – from monitoring developments in Chapter 23, the interim benchmarks, EU funded projects as well as engagement with international organisations and civil society. In June 2024, the Council endorsed the Commission's assessment that Montenegro had met the interim the benchmarks under Chapters 23 and 24, thereby opening a new phase in the accession negotiations to proceed with provisionally closing further chapters. Montenegro continued to broadly implement its obligations under the Stabilisation and Association Process.

4. EU financial engagement: Montenegro continued to benefit from funding under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III). An EU-funded action implemented by UNDP focused on confidence building in the Western Balkans supported the Montenegrin authorities for drafting the War Crimes Investigation Strategy 2024-2027 and its Action Plan. Under the IPA III Civil Society and Media Facility, the EU provided grants to support the Government of Montenegro for cooperation with civil society and for gender equality (EUR 500,000), as well as for capacity building of small CSOs and development of social economy in rural areas (EUR 750,000).

Under the NDICI Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy, the EU continued to support the electoral reform, fight against violence, combatting and prevention of impunity and gender-based violence, as well as protection of journalists against violence, including online and capacity building of investigative journalism (EUR 1.072 million). Under the NDICI Thematic Instrument on Human Rights and Democracy, the EU also provided support for independent and professional judiciary (EUR 150 000).

Cooperation with the Council of Europe continued under the Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye – Phase III with EUR 5 million for Montenegro focusing on ensuring justice, fighting corruption and organised crime and promoting human rights, including diversity, equality, freedom of expression and social inclusion. The programme enabled the adoption of amendments to the Criminal Code in line with the Council of Europe recommendations on anti-discrimination and countering hate speech. It also contributed to development and amendment of the important strategic documents and pieces of legislation,

adopted in June 2024, as part of 'Interim Benchmark Assessment Report (IBAR) package': the Anti-corruption Strategy 2024 -2028 and its Action Plan, the Law on Prevention of Corruption of Montenegro, the Law on Seizure and Confiscation of Assets Derived from Criminal Activity, the amendments to the Law on State Prosecution Office, amendments to the Law on Judicial Council and Judge, and amendments to the Law on Free Legal Aid. With this support, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights finalised the new draft Law on Anti-Discrimination. In addition, the action supported the Working Group, which prepared the first draft of the Law on Legal Gender Recognition.

5. Multilateral context: Montenegro continued to meet its international obligations on human rights. The country continued its dialogue and cooperation with 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 war of aggression against Ukraine. Montenegro is a member of the UN Human Rights Council. Montenegro continued to ensure good cooperation with the European Court of Human Rights. Montenegro has yet to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, the 2014 Protocol to the ILO 1930 Forced Labour Convention, and the 2019 Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics of the UN World Tourism Organization. Montenegro needs to improve its mechanisms for reporting to the UN human rights mechanisms and following up on their recommendations, as highlighted during the universal periodic review in 2018.

Republic of Moldova

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, Moldova continued to show determination to implement reform efforts to strengthen democracy and the rule of law despite significant challenges arising from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and hybrid attacks against Moldova itself.

On fundamental rights, Moldova continued to progress in several areas. It adopted new legislation to align its national framework with the EU General Data Protection Regulation, established two new agencies on the fight against gender-based violence and introduced the term 'feminicide' in its legislation. Moldova adopted new legislation enhancing freedom of expression and establishing a media subsidy fund to support media pluralism. Further efforts are needed to extend ownership transparency requirements to print and online media and to review the mechanism for suspending media licences. The capacities of relevant institutions involved in the promotion of respect, protection and fulfilment of fundamental rights require significant strengthening. Detention conditions (chronic overcrowding, inadequate medical services, precarious living conditions in prisons and inter-prisoner violence) remained a concern.

In 2024, Moldova organised presidential elections and a referendum on enshrining EU accession in its Constitution in accordance with democratic standards. On justice reform, the vetting process of top judges and prosecutors continued. Moldova also achieved some progress in the fight against corruption.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's: Moldova 2024 Report

2. EU action on Human Rights and Democracy – key focus areas: In 2024, the EU continued to closely monitor the, respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights, with particular attention to the prevention of and accountability for torture and ill-treatment in the prison system, access to justice, the rights of persons in vulnerable situations, including persons belonging to minorities, as well as gender equality and women's empowerment. The EU followed closely developments related to the presidential elections and referendum as well as the right to freedom of expression during the electoral cycle, and Moldova's efforts to counter electoral corruption and interference. The EU actively supported civil society, independent and pluralistic media, access to information and the fight against disinformation.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged in a regular political dialogue with Moldova throughout 2024, with regular meetings in the context of the Association Agreement. The political dialogue intensified due to the EU's opening of accession negotiations with Moldova, including the screening process for the fundamentals cluster. The EU encouraged Moldova to ensure a balance between measures aimed at countering foreign interference and upholding fundamental freedoms, to bring the conditions of detentions in line with international standards and to continue systemic engagement with civil society. The EU welcomed Moldova's progress on the vetting process, commended Moldova for the professional and impartial conduct of the Presidential elections and constitutional referendum on EU accession.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, the EU continued to provide financial support to reforms aimed at strengthening democracy, rule of law and enjoyment of human rights. Two ongoing projects supported the implementation of the justice reform and the vetting process in Moldova in line with European and international standards (above EUR 3.9 million). Activities funded included policy recommendations for the justice reform strategy and increasing the capacity of key Moldovan institutions. The EU's engagement to further enhance the integrity, efficiency, and independence of the justice system continued under two projects (EUR 3.3 million and EUR 445,000). Other ongoing projects aimed to increase access to justice for persons in vulnerable situations (EUR 446,500) and strengthen the rights of persons belonging to minorities (EUR 800,000). In December 2024, President of the European Commission von der Leyen announced an increase of EU support to EUR 10 million to accelerate the vetting of top judges and prosecutors' positions. In addition, Moldova benefitted from the EU-funded technical expertise from the High-level advisers in the field of rule of law.

The NDICI regional programme, co-funded by the EU and implemented by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) (EUR 6,14 million for the entire region) launched to support building stronger democratic institutions in Eastern Partnership countries assisted the Parliament of Moldova in the drafting of the draft Law on status, conduct and ethics of the Members of Parliament. The third phase (2023-2026) of the Regional Facility Partnership for Good Governance for Eastern Partnership countries (PGG), implemented by the Council of Europe, continued. It supported Moldova to fight against discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes (EUR 560,000), to enhance the anti-money laundering and asset recovery regime (EUR 510,000), to further modernise the court management (EUR 635,000), to promote equality (EUR 500,000 for the entire region) and women's access to justice (EUR 1 million for the entire region). The EU also supports resilience and capacity of independent media and civil society organisations to monitor elections and promote democratic accountability mechanisms in Moldova under the actions for the Eastern Partnership region.

5. Multilateral context: In 2024, Moldova ratified the ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the workplace and the CoE Convention for protection of Audiovisual Heritage, signed the CoE Framework Convention on artificial intelligence, human rights, democracy and rule of law, acceded to the Ljubljana-The Hague Convention on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of the Crime of Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes and Other International Crimes, and put forward its candidature as a member of the Human Rights Council (HRC) for 2027-2029. The CoE has published a positive assessment on Moldova's implementation of the Tromsø Convention on the Access to Official Documents. The Council of Europe adopted the 2025-2028 Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova to bring the country's legislation further in line with European standards. Moldova has not finalised the ratification process of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and of Protocol no. 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The issue of low compliance rate with decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) needs to be addressed. Moldova ranks 5th out of the 46 CoE members in terms of the number of applications submitted per capita inhabitant.

Republic of Serbia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, Serbia's general framework for fundamental rights was broadly in place but still required improvement as concerns proper enforcement of the legislation. The Ombudsman was not sufficiently vocal in addressing violations of human rights and his cooperation with civil society was not at an adequate level. Implementation of the new strategies and action plans on gender equality, anti-discrimination and the Roma inclusion started, although monitoring bodies were not in place for most of the reporting period. The new Action Plan for the Realisation of the Rights of National Minorities was not finalised. The action plans and related funding as regards combating violence against women and deinstitutionalisation of children care were not adopted. LGBTI persons, and in particular transgender persons, were subject to violence, abuse and discrimination.

Regarding freedom of expression, the police and the prosecution services reacted swiftly to several cases of attacks and threats, working with the standing working group on the safety of journalists. However, cases of threats, intimidation, hate speech and violence against journalists remained a concern, as was the increase of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), notably launched by members of national and local authorities. Overdue work started in late 2024 to further align the legislative framework on media freedom and media policy with the EU *acquis*. Public broadcasters had limited financial and institutional independence, which impacted their editorial policies. The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) did not publish comprehensive media monitoring reports on the 2023 and 2024 elections. The process of election of the new REM Council members was not finalised and attracted criticism from stakeholders over its transparency and legitimacy. Serbia did not take any action to counter foreign information manipulation and interference, quite the contrary, in December 2024 RT Balkans received a cable licence and has since launched its TV programme in Serbian language. Concerning the implementation of the law on public information and media, though beyond the legal deadline in a number of cases, most local municipalities did launch the media co-funding calls, and significantly reduced public funding was awarded through processes that were not fully transparent.

The conduct of elections requires tangible improvement and further reform. The OSCE/ODIHR recommendations for future elections still need to be implemented. This includes issues such as the audit of unified voter register and those ensuring a level playing field for all contestants, and access to media and ensuring compliance with media legislation. The political polarisation deepened and was illustrated by frequently harsh and intolerant debates and hate speech in the Parliament. Civil society organisations in Serbia operate in a difficult environment. Verbal attacks and smear campaigns against some CSOs intensified, including by high-level officials, allegations of police brutality, including against journalists as well as of the illegal use of spyware. In June, the Ministry of the Interior failed to meet its obligation to ensure a safe environment and instead banned the 'Mirëdita, Dobar Dan' festival in Belgrade, a civil society initiative that contributes to building bridges between the people in Kosovo and Serbia through cultural activities. Following protests against lithium exploitation throughout Serbia during the summer, there were reports of arrests, house searches and seizures of IT equipment of ecological activists. Following the tragic accident at the Novi Sad railway station on 1 November, several mass protests took place in various cities, including student blockades of major universities. While freedom of assembly was ensured by the authorities and protest were allowed to take place, there were some violent incidents against demonstrators and safety of participants was not always ensured.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's: Serbia 2024 Report

2. EU action - key focus areas: The key focus areas in 2024 included freedom of expression, human rights institutions (Ombudsman, Commissioner for the Protection of Equality and Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection) and the rights of persons belonging to minorities, including the Roma. The EU continued to focus on key areas described in the interim benchmarks of chapter 23 of the accession negotiations: judiciary and fundamental rights. As regards the latter, benchmarks related to the effective application of human rights, procedural safeguards, the rights of persons belonging to minorities and cultural rights, protection against racism and xenophobia and data protection. The EU closely monitored Serbia's continuous implementation of its action plan for chapter 23.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: There is a regular policy and political dialogue, including in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. This dialogue is based on monitoring of the implementation of the action plan for chapter 23 in the framework of the EU accession negotiations.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III), EUR 27 million were disbursed for the improvement of living conditions of the Roma, internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities and woman victims of domestic violence. Further, 14 new grants of EUR 6.7 million have been awarded. Support on freedom of expression and media freedom continued with EUR 16.2 million worth grants, including on quality journalism and the Press Council of Serbia. Under the IPA III Regional Civil Society and Media Facility, EUR 14.4 million worth of grants were awarded to strengthen the capacity of CSOs. The NDICI Thematic Programme on Human Rights and Democracy continued to support the right of persons belonging to minorities, gender equality, rights of the child and human rights defenders (EUR 4.2 million). Cooperation with the Council of Europe continued under the Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye – Phase III with EUR 5.52 million for Serbia focusing on support to justice, fighting against discrimination, against organised crime,

the rights of persons in vulnerable situations, including LGBTI persons and persons belonging to minorities, and freedom of expression.

5. Multilateral context: Serbia continued its dialogue and cooperation with European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies. Recommendations from the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment's 2023 report on its ad hoc visit to Serbia, which identified shortcomings in the investigations of torture and other forms of ill-treatment were not implemented. Serbia did not align with restrictive measure against Russia, nor with the majority of the statements of the High Representative related to Russia and Ukraine. Serbia also did not align with a number of other statements of the High Representative on behalf of the EU and of EU restrictive measures. The EU expects Serbia to step up its efforts towards full alignment with EU CFSP positions and restrictive measures as a matter of utmost priority.

Republic of Türkiye

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, the situation for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Türkiye did not improve and remained an issue of serious concern. Türkiye's refusal to implement certain rulings of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) further increased concerns regarding the judiciary's adherence to international and European norms and standards. The independence and quality of the judiciary remained challenged by the control exercised by the executive power over judicial governing bodies. Trials and convictions of journalists, writers, lawyers, academics, human rights defenders and other critical voices for alleged support for terrorism continued.

The 2021-2023 Human Rights Action Plan, which did not fully address the serious shortcomings in Türkiye's judicial and human rights sphere, expired and was not replaced. Türkiye still needs to align its anti-terror legislation and its implementation, as well as practices against terrorism with European standards, the ECHR, the ECtHR case law, the Venice Commission's recommendations, and the EU acquis and practices. Türkiye needs to ensure a political and legal environment in line with European standards that allows the judiciary to carry out its duties independently and impartially, strengthen the separation of powers, and effectively implement ECtHR jurisprudence, including as matter of priority judgments in the case of Kavala vs Türkiye. It also needs to improve the legislative framework and its implementation to effectively tackle all forms of violence against women, all forms of racism and discrimination, including against LGBTI persons, and ensure respect, protection and fulfilment of the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

Serious concerns remained about freedom of expression. Broad restrictions on the activities of journalists, writers, lawyers, academics, human rights defenders, politicians and critical voices had a negative effect on the exercise of their rights. The implementation of the criminal laws relating to national security and anti-terrorism contravened the ECHR and diverged from ECtHR case law. Türkiye needs to revise its legislation, in particular the anti-terror law, the Criminal Code, the data protection law, the internet law, the so-called 'disinformation' law, and the Radio and Television Supreme Council law, to bring them in line with European standards, and has to ensure that they are implemented in a proportionate manner. As regards freedom of assembly, several demonstrations for human rights, environmental rights, and political and socio-economic rights were banned and dispersed by the police. Gender-

based violence, discrimination and hate speech against non-Muslim minorities and against LGBTI persons remained a matter of serious concern.

Despite certain shortcomings during the electoral campaigns, local elections in Türkiye in 2024 were well organised overall and respected the will of the people. However, the functioning of Türkiye's democratic institutions remained severely hampered by the constitutional architecture, which centralises power at the level of the Presidency and does not ensure a sound and effective separation of powers. Owing to ineffective checks-and-balances mechanism, the accountability of the executive branch can be ensured only through democratic elections. Most regulatory authorities remained directly linked to the Presidency, while public administration continued to be highly politicised. Political pluralism continued to be undermined by frequent restrictions to freedom of assembly targeting opposition parties, especially in the south-east of Türkiye. The government's pressure on the opposition continued to weaken local democracy, as six trustees were appointed to replace elected Mayors in three provinces and three sub-provinces.

In March 2025, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Mayor and opposition presumptive presidential candidate, Ekrem İmamoğlu, was arrested along with 99 others, including CHP district mayors and senior municipal officials. The EU has urged the Turkish authorities to provide full transparency and to follow due process.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's: Türkiye 2024 Report 2024

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU actions in Türkiye remained focused on supporting civil society, on building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies, and on addressing challenges deriving from new technologies. They also focused on combatting disinformation and false narratives by means of training aimed at raising awareness to their inherent risks. The EU continued to support human rights defenders, refugees, persons belonging to minorities, access to justice, as well as freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and media pluralism, and increasing the capacity of civil society organisations to monitor human rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to closely monitor and report on human rights violations and developments in the judicial sector in Türkiye. Policy and political dialogue as well as engagement with international organisations and civil society continued. The relevant EU-Türkiye Sub-committee, under the framework of the Association Agreement, which covers, *inter alia*, the functioning of the judiciary, fundamental rights and freedoms and home affairs, was held in November 2024.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, the EU continued the implementation of human rights and democracy related actions in Türkiye. Within the bilateral cooperation under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III), the project strengthening environment for women friendly cities and gender equality at local level of EUR 5 million, was launched.

Under the Civil Society Facility and Media Facility, six new projects (EUR 24.6 million) were launched to support civil society, press freedom and freedom of expression, freedom of association, promotion of cultural rights and support human rights defenders. Projects within the programme continued to support CSOs in the areas of environmental rights, green deal, climate change, disaster risk management, gender equality, empowerment of women and girls, as well as rights of LGBTI persons. Financial support continued also through projects aimed at monitoring and increasing advocacy capacities of human rights organisations.

Under the NDICI Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy, four new projects for an overall amount of EUR 2.7 million were launched to contribute to strengthening freedom of assembly, freedom of information and data activism, combating censorship and discrimination of journalists and rights of persons in vulnerable situations, women and child migrants. In addition, 22 ongoing actions continued to support women's rights, rights of the child and rights of persons belonging to minorities, promotion of youth participation, access to justice and rights to fair trial, non-discrimination, combating impunity and human rights in the penitentiary system.

Cooperation under the EU-Council of Europe Horizontal Facility – phase III with EUR 3.25 million for Türkiye continued to provide capacity-building activities and fostering dialogue between public actors and civil society with satisfactory results in the areas of fight against corruption, economic and organised crime; promotion of anti-discrimination and protection of the right of persons in vulnerable situations; fostering women's access to justice and strengthening human rights in the context of migration.

5. Multilateral context: The EU Delegations to the Council of Europe, to the UN and to the OSCE continued, on multiple occasions, to express the EU's concerns over the human rights and fundamental freedoms situation in Türkiye, including in the EU's item 4 statements at the UN Human Rights Council. The EU closely followed the developments related to the non-implementation of the ECtHR rulings and the infringement procedure against Türkiye for failing to release human rights defender Osman Kavala.

For the first time, the European Parliament Rapporteur for Türkiye was granted authorisation by the Ministry of Justice to visit four prisoners, including Osman Kavala and Selahattin. Demirtaş in December 2023. Due to time constraints, he was able to visit only Osman Kavala. After his re-appointment as Rapporteur, he visited Türkiye in December 2024.

Ukraine

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: While the government of Ukraine has in the previous year shown commitment to its obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, the overall situation has significantly deteriorated since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. In 2024, Ukraine's human rights and humanitarian situation remained in a state of crisis as a result of the full-scale Russian aggression. Russia continued to violate international human rights law, international humanitarian law and principles of the laws of war, acting without military necessity, causing unnecessary suffering. Attacks on civilian infrastructure surged, leading to the highest civilian casualty rates since the start of the full-scale invasion. Millions of Ukrainians were displaced, become refugees, or were deported to Russia.

The situation in the temporarily occupied territories was of particular concern. Russia continued deporting children to Russia and Belarus, often forcibly separated from their families, and accompanied by the falsification of their identity documents, their acculturation and re-education, including training of children in military skills, in violation of international law. In 2024, international organisations, including the UN, have documented widespread cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, extrajudicial executions, and widespread and systematic torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual violence against civilian detainees and prisoners of war by Russian armed forces in occupied territories, revealing gross violations

of IHRL and IHL. Currently, Ukraine's law enforcement agencies are investigating 53 criminal cases regarding the execution of 177 Ukrainian soldiers. The majority (80 percent) occurred in 2024.

Despite Russia's war of aggression, Ukraine's government continued to function effectively. Ukraine advanced rule of law reforms and the alignment of its legislation with the EU acquis, European and international human rights standards.

Ukraine ratified the Rome Statute and adopted a series of draft laws commencing the alignment of the country's national legislation with it. The EU supported Ukraine in the process of ratification, following recommendations in the Enlargement Report and the Human Rights Dialogue, and in line with the commitment taken under the Association Agreement.

The introduction of martial law in February 2022 imposed temporary restrictions on citizens' rights and freedoms, but its application remained overall proportionate. Elections could not take place due to martial law. The Law on National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine has been in the process of implementation in 2024, which should continue in close cooperation with national minority representatives. More efforts are needed regarding the situation of Roma and the implementation as well as monitoring of Ukraine's Roma Strategy and Action Plan.

The general trend of increasing tolerance and acceptance of LGBTI persons continued. However, despite renewed efforts to codify rights of LGBTI persons, no progress was achieved on key pieces of legislation. Further efforts are needed to implement accessibility policies and uphold the rights of persons with disabilities in terms of proper infrastructure, community-based services, inclusive education, and facilitate access to employment. There is still remaining work as regards the application of European and international standards on torture and ill-treatment, including with respect to the detention conditions in Ukrainian prisons.

Despite restrictions under martial law, CSOs continued their activities unhindered. The government continued to support civil society with a multi-year civil society development strategy adopted in 2021 and the action plan for the Civil Society Strategy adopted in February 2023 with measures to strengthen the enabling environment for civil society organisations, such as improvements to legislation regulating the work of volunteers and related to the delivery of humanitarian aid. The Law on public consultation was adopted, integrating international standards related to public consultation and stakeholders' participation. Despite the progress, instances of alleged pressure on CSOs and investigative journalists were reported.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's: Ukraine 2024 Report.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2024, the EU actions concerning fundamental rights focused on accountability, war crimes documentation, promoting respect, protection and fulfilment of fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and of media, countering hate speech and promoting equality and non-discrimination, with a particular focus on the rights of persons belonging to minorities and those in vulnerable situations. Key EU communication strategies focused on the support to civil society, visibility of Russian war crimes, countering war propaganda, supporting victims of the war, and advocating for women's rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human Rights continued to be on the agenda of the political dialogue between the EU and Ukraine, including under numerous high-level visits to Ukraine, involving EU Council Presidencies, High Representative and the Commission. The EU-

Ukraine Annual Human Rights Dialogue took place to discuss priorities and recommendations by the EU. The political dialogue intensified due to the EU's opening of accession negotiations with Ukraine, including the screening process for the fundamentals cluster, and building on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement.

4. EU financial engagement: The Human Rights Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (HRMMU) of the UN OHCHR, supported with EU financial contribution (EUR 5 million), continued monitoring, documenting, as well as collecting information on international human rights and international humanitarian law violations in Ukraine. The liquidity injected through the macro-financial assistance loans and through the Ukraine Facility helped financing the functioning provision of basis public services and paying public wages and pensions. Additionally, under the Global Rights Compliance project funded under the Foreign Policy Instruments (EUR 3.7 million), and the Pravo Justice project (below EUR 100,000), the EU contributed to broader international efforts aimed at ensuring accountability for international crimes committed during the full-scale invasion, including by building Ukraine's capacity to investigate and prosecute them.

The NDICI Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy continued to support civil society actions on documentation and accountability of war crimes (EUR 1 million). Grant support for EUR 1.3 million was provided for human rights defenders' operations in Ukraine. These actions were complemented by three grants supporting national minorities of Ukraine and combatting antisemitism (EUR 10 million). The third phase (2023-2026) of the Regional Facility Partnership for Good Governance for Eastern Partnership countries (PGG), implemented by the Council of Europe, continued.

5. Multilateral context: The EU continued to support Ukraine also within the multilateral context. Ukraine actively mobilised international bodies and organisations raising awareness about human rights violations committed by Russia. The EU supported various multilateral initiatives, including on accountability. This included ongoing support for the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine and the EU-US-UK Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group. The EU also joined the International Coalition for the Return of Children, launched in February 2024. The EU remained committed to support the establishment of the register of damage caused by Russia's aggression, contributing to efforts on a claims commission and compensation mechanism and participated in the work to create a special tribunal for the crime of aggression.

The EU backed another significant initiative concerning the rights of the child, in particular addressing the unlawful deportation and forced transfer of Ukrainian children by the Russian Federation. The Ministerial Conference on the Human Dimension of Ukraine's 10-Point Peace Formula in Montreal concentrated on the return of prisoners of war, deported children, and unlawfully detained civilians. Moreover, the EU supported the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children and the 'Bring Kids Back UA' initiative led by the Office of the President of Ukraine.

EEA/EFTA Countries and non EU Western European Countries

Swiss Confederation

1. Overview of human rights and democracy situation

Switzerland has high standards of human rights domestically and an active role in on human rights on the international stage. The Swiss government remains committed to addressing ongoing issues and obstacles that hinder the full realization of human rights for all individuals within its borders. The Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation explicitly stipulates that in its foreign relations Switzerland must promote respect for human rights and democracy and the peaceful coexistence of peoples. In this context on 1 May 2004, the Swiss government adopted the Federal Act on Measures pertaining to Civil Peace Support and the Promotion of Human Rights took effect.

On gender equality despite having a robust legal framework to promote gender equality, including the enshrinement of 'equal pay for work of equal value' in the Federal Constitution since 1981, substantial challenges remain. According to the Federal Office of Gender Equality (FOGE), women in Switzerland earned approximately 18% less than men as of August 2023. Key issues include wage disparities**,** under-representation in leadership and domestic violence. Starting in 2024, FOGE has also spearhead initiatives on LGBTI equality, including the formulation of a national action plan aimed at combating LGBTI-hostile hate crimes. In this role, the office addresses specific parliamentary mandates and coordinates cooperation with other federal offices dealing with LGBTI issues. It also maintains contact with the cantons and communes that are actively addressing these issues and promotes dialogue with specialised and non-governmental organisations. One of its primary tasks is to develop a national action plan against LGBTI-hostile hate crimes.

The Swiss Federal Council adopted a national action plan for 2022-2026 for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. This plan focuses on public information awareness-raising, developing training programs for professionals and volunteers as well as addressing issues related to sexualised violence. The Council of Europe's monitoring body (GREVIO) published its first evaluation report on Switzerland in 2022 highlighting progress but also areas needing improvement, in particular ensuing equal protection across all Swiss cantons, increasing resources for victim support services and continuing improving legal definitions of sexual violence to align with the Istanbul Convention's consent-based standard.

In the run-up to the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration in 2025, the Federal Council adopted in June 2024 the Beijing+30 Report, Switzerland responding to the UN's request to set out recent developments in equality policy and to highlight areas for improvement. The Gender Equality Strategy 2030 focuses on four areas of action: promoting equality in professional and public life, improving work-life balance, preventing gender-based violence and combating discrimination.

In 2024, Switzerland continued efforts to combat racial discrimination, but the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and human rights groups raised concerns about ongoing issues such as racial profiling, discrimination against migrants, and xenophobia

In April 2024, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that Switzerland's inadequate action on climate change violated the rights of its citizens, particularly the elderly, under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. It also criticised Switzerland for

rejecting family reunification applications by refugees because they were dependent on social assistance. Switzerland's liberal stance on assisted suicide faced scrutiny following the first use of the 'Sarco' suicide pod in 2024.

2. EU action - key focus areas

Switzerland maintains close cooperation with the European Union on human rights and democracy through various international bodies, including the UN, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE. The EU and Switzerland often support each other's resolutions/statements in the UN Human Rights Council.

3. EU bilateral political engagement

The EU and Switzerland are also like-minded partners on human rights matters. Recent consultations in April 2024 highlighted ongoing efforts for multilateral cooperation and high level of alignment. The EU and Switzerland have a regular practice of exchanges ahead of sessions of multilateral human rights fora.

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, Switzerland is committed to promoting human rights as a principal aspect of its foreign policy. The Foreign Policy Strategy 2024-2027 is focused on strengthening human rights globally. The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) has developed Human Rights Guidelines for 2021–2024 to ensure effective human rights diplomacy across various fields, including peace, security, and sustainability.

On 9 October 2024, the UN General Assembly elected Switzerland to the Human Rights Council (HRC) for the 2025-2027 term. Switzerland's priorities focusing mainly on strengthening participation and voices of civil society representatives, raising awareness of the role of human rights in the prevention of conflict and supporting global monitoring and investigations of gross human rights violations.

In December 2024 the Human Rights Council has elected Ambassador Jürg Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations Office at Geneva, to serve as its President for a one-year term beginning on 1 January 2025.

In 2023- 2024 Switzerland was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. In the context of the UNSC, Switzerland has developed four thematic priorities, which were closely linked to human rights: building sustainable peace, protecting civilians, enhancing effectiveness in the work of the UNSC, and addressing climate security.

In July 2023, Switzerland engaged in its 17th round of human rights dialogue with China, emphasising the importance of international dialogue in promoting respect, protection and fulfilment on human rights. Switzerland currently holds a non-permanent seat on the UNSC with priorities focusing on civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, the rights of national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, as well as the rights of women and LGBTI people.

While Switzerland has a strong human rights framework and an active international presence in advocating for human rights, ongoing challenges persist, particularly in gender equity and racial discrimination. Addressing these challenges comprehensively through dialogue with international bodies, civil society engagement, and rigorous enforcement of human rights laws is essential to uphold Switzerland's commitment to human rights for all individuals. The country is expected to maintain transparency and accountability through regular reporting on the implementation of the accepted UPR recommendations and to continue fostering an inclusive society that respects and promotes the rights of all its citizens and residents. Moving forward, Switzerland's ability to effectively address these human rights challenges will be crucial in reinforcing its status as a leader in human rights protection both domestically and internationally.

Kingdom of Norway

1. Overall human rights situation: Norway is one of the most robust democracies in the world, a strong supporter and promoter of human rights. Norway has ratified all the main UN conventions on human rights, and the national framework of respect, protection and fulfilment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights is strong. Norway is considered as one of the most gender-equal countries globally, ranked third in the WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2024[2]. Norway has more women in work than most other European countries.[3] On 1 January 2024, conversion therapy became legally banned within Norway.

Human rights are a key component of Norway's foreign and humanitarian policy.

In Norway, stakeholders and civil society are concerned about excessive application of solitary confinement in prisons; of the functioning of Child Protection Services; the rights of indigenous peoples' rights, hate speech and hate crimes as well as the use of coercive measures in mental health/prisons.

On 1 November 2024, the Norwegian Parliament issued an official apology for the injustices committed under the 'Norwegianalisation' policy. The Government should continue its efforts to ensure the protection of indigenous peoples' rights. During 2024 the Government was working on a national action plan to combat hate and discrimination against the Sámi people (2025-2030), which will be presented in January 2025.

The United Nations Expert Mechanism for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) concluded a mission to Norway in 2024. The mission was undertaken in response to a request from the Sámi Council, supported by the Sámi Parliament, concerning the rights of Sámi people in Norway. The mission was aimed at providing technical advice on the rights of Sami people, with a focus on their right to land, territories and resources, and on their free, prior and informed consent.

2. EU Action – Key Focus Areas: In Norway, a key priority is to highlight relevant EU and international initiatives through social media, official institutions, and schools, while also

[2] https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2024.pdf
[3] https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/cb19f3a18c354e3e81efea720bc8d926/report-on-the-norwegian-governments-follow-up-of-beijing-declaration-and-platform-2020-2024.pdf

providing targeted information to relevant Norwegian stakeholders. The Delegation also maintains contact with the Norwegian National Human Rights Institution.

The EU Delegation in Oslo undertook several public diplomacy and information activities during the course of 2024, including:

- #StandWithUkraine – continuous coverage throughout the year on EU solidarity with Ukraine, as well as updates on sanctions against Russia (X, Instagram, Facebook and website)
- World day against death penalty (Instagram story, X)
- Worlds children day (Instagram story)
- Disability rights week/International day of people with disabilities (Instagram story, X)
- Day Against Death Penalty (Instagram story, X)
- UN Day (X)
- International Human Rights Day (Instagram story, X)
- World Humanitarian Day (X)
- Youth Day (Instagram story, X)
- Indigenous Peoples Day (X)
- Sámi National Day (X)
- International Women's Day (X, Instagram Story, Facebook post)

3. EU Bilateral Political Engagement and their impact: Norway and the EU have similar views on human rights issues. Close cooperation takes place in various multilateral fora (UN, Council of Europe, OSCE), where Norway is active on human rights issues. The EU and Norway cooperate locally on country-specific strategies around the world. The latest EU-Norway consultations on human rights and multilateral affairs took place in 31 May 2024.

The Head of Delegation delivered a démarche in support of EU priorities at the 79th session of the UNGA Third Committee to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 21 October. The EU Delegation cooperates closely with EU MS locally on outreaches and démarches.

4. EU Financial Engagement and their impact: Norway is not included in any operational projects or programmes funded by the EIDHR or other EU instruments.

5. Multilateral Context: Norway is active on human rights issues in multilateral context (UN, OSCE, CoE) and it often provides added value to the EU/Member States efforts. Norway is the lead sponsor of a biannual resolution on human rights defenders in the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly.

Norway participates actively in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, not only by submitting comprehensive national reports but also by engaging constructively with recommendations made during the reviews.

As part of the of the fourth cycle of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the human rights record of Norway was addressed during the 47th UPR session in Geneva from 4 November to 15 November 2024. Norway submitted its national report ahead

of the review.[4] The EU Delegation prepared a submission with an update on the key human rights developments in Norway, in particular in light of the progress/lack of progress in the implementation of the previous UPR recommendations of 2019. In the fourth review, Norway received a total of 285 recommendations focusing on strengthening the overall human rights framework, including establishing mechanisms for implementation and reporting, ratifying complaint mechanisms, and incorporating disability rights into law. There are also suggestions on improving Sami and minority rights, enhancing inmates' access to healthcare, combating violence and abuse, addressing discrimination and hate crimes, and taking more action on climate change

Norway's priorities at the 79th UN General Assembly focus on upholding international law, combating climate change, supporting sustainable development goals, and promoting peace and security, especially in response to conflicts like the war in Ukraine.

Iceland

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Iceland maintains a high standard of human rights, a high level of cooperation with the European Union and with international organisations . Human rights and equality form a key pillar of Iceland's foreign policy with emphasis amongst others on promoting gender equality, the fully and equal enjoyment of human rights of LGBTI persons, children's welfare and rights, freedom of speech and media. Domestically, human rights and equality issues are actively prioritised and promoted by Icelandic authorities. As a result, Iceland ranked as the most gender-equal country in the world for the 15th year in a row and placed second in the ILGA Europe's Rainbow Map and Index in 2024. Iceland, was elected to the UN Human Rights Council by the General Assembly on 9 October 2024 for the 2025-2027 term.

In 2024, Iceland faced human rights challenges, notably in areas such as solitary confinement practices, treatment of asylum seekers, and gender-based violence.

2. EU Action – key focus areas: In 2024, the EU Delegation and EU Member States' Missions in Iceland focused on showcasing the EU's efforts on human rights and equality within Europe and beyond. The Delegation focused on strengthening its partnership with Icelandic authorities and main human rights organisations active in the country, as well as EU-Iceland cooperation on human rights issues in the multilateral fora.

3. EU Bilateral political engagement: In terms of human rights, Iceland is a like-minded partner of the EU and there is close cooperation between Iceland and the EU in the multilateral fora including the United Nations, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, among other international platforms.

4. EU Financial engagement: Although Iceland is not included in any operational projects or programmes funded by the EIDHR or other EU instruments, the EU Delegation included human rights and equality issues in its public diplomacy and outreach activities throughout 2024. The Delegation emphasised the EU's leading role in promoting human rights globally and did so

[4] https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/142/56/pdf/g2414256.pdf

through various social media campaigns and by publishing op-eds in main media outlets in connection with international or local human rights days. In line with the EU's commitment to disability inclusion, the Delegation focused on accessibility and inclusion measures in its cooperation with Reykjavík Pride by co-sponsoring viewing/wheelchair ramps and sign language interpretations with other EU Member States' Missions to maximise inclusivity at Reykjavik Pride 2024.

5. Multilateral Context: Iceland is a global frontrunner in the field of human rights and actively participates in the multilateral fora. Iceland was elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council in October 2024 for the term 2025 – 2027. Iceland also took over the Presidency of the Nordic Council with a stipulated focus on peace and security in the Arctic, gender equality and rights of marginalised communities.

Principality of Liechtenstein

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Liechtenstein has robust human rights standards. The country follows democratic principles and adheres to international human rights treaties and respects democratic principles, individual freedoms, and the rule of law. However, it is unique in Europe because of the strong powers of the monarchy. The Prince of Liechtenstein has significant influence, including the power to veto laws, dissolve Parliament, call for referendums and appoint judges with the approval of the Parliament.

Liechtenstein ratified the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence and in October 2022, submitted its first state report regarding the implementation of the Convention. Key efforts in this regard have involved working with relevant authorities such as the National Police and financially supporting civil society organizations, including the Liechtenstein Women's Shelter. The Experts group GREVIO's first country visit to Liechtenstein took place in February 2023. Their report published pointed out that Liechtenstein's law enforcement authorities and the judiciary have all the necessary tools to hold to account persons who commit violence against women, due to the robust legal framework.

Liechtenstein recognizes same-sex registered partnerships since September 2011 and same sex marriage has been legal since 1 January 2025. Simultaneously, Liechtenstein advocates for the protection of LGBTI individuals from violence and discrimination in multilateral forums.

In its recent assessment, the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) noted that Liechtenstein achieved a "very low level of compliance" with its anti-corruption recommendations, having fully implemented only 1 out of 16 recommendations, with 6 partly implemented and 9 not implemented. In November 2024 GRECO Plenary Meeting adopted the Fifth Round Evaluation Reports on Liechtenstein and set the deadline of 31 May 2026 for the submission of situation reports on measures taken to implement GRECO's recommendations. It also invited the authorities of Liechtenstein to authorise, as soon as possible, the publication of the report.

On May 10, 2024, the UN CAT reviewed Liechtenstein as part of its evaluation of several states. The Committee raised significant concerns about Liechtenstein's practice of transferring

convicted prisoners to Austria and Switzerland, urging a review of the treaty with Austria to guarantee fundamental legal safeguards against torture and ill-treatment for detainees abroad. The Committee emphasised the necessity for Liechtenstein's authorities and the national preventive mechanism (NPM) to conduct visits to these detainees and to clarify the country's responsibilities under the Convention, particularly regarding the investigation of torture allegations and the provision of redress. While acknowledging efforts to improve conditions at Vaduz National Prison, the Committee expressed concerns regarding limited employment integration opportunities and the living conditions of women detainees, who may face isolation.

In a report published on 2024, the Council of Europe anti-racism commission (ECRI) calls on the Liechtenstein authorities to develop specific anti-discrimination legislation and establish an information and support centre for migrants.

While the legal framework prohibits discrimination on various grounds, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has recommended that Liechtenstein ratify Protocol 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights, which provides a general prohibition of discrimination.

2. EU Action - Key Focus Areas: Liechtenstein is a like-minded partner of the EU in human rights initiatives, engaging collaboratively in various multilateral forums, including the UN, Council of Europe, and OSCE. The Principality remains a strong supporter of the International Criminal Court, particularly concerning investigations in Ukraine.

3. EU Bilateral Political Engagement: Liechtenstein has established effective mechanisms to safeguard human rights domestically. Ongoing concerns are addressed through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process at the UN Human Rights Council.

4. EU Financial Engagement: Currently, Liechtenstein does not participate in operational projects or programs funded by the EU's European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights or other EU initiatives.

5. Multilateral Context: Liechtenstein's foreign policy emphasizes the protection of human rights and the rule of law. The Principality has been an active advocate in multilateral forums, especially in support of the ICC. In December 2024 the Principality reiterated its commitment to victims of Rome Statute crimes renewed support to the Trust Fund for Victims (TFV) through a voluntary contribution. During its chairmanship of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers from November 2023 to May 2024, Liechtenstein prioritised human rights, democracy, and rule of law.

Additionally, the Veto Initiative, launched by Liechtenstein, has garnered support at the UN General Assembly, ensuring that the Assembly meets within ten days if a veto is exercised in the UN Security Council, thereby enhancing transparency regarding human rights issues. Moreover, Liechtenstein plays a crucial role in the Finance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAST) initiative, which focuses on leveraging the financial sector to combat modern slavery and human trafficking.

During its fourth Universal Periodic Review cycle in October 2023, Liechtenstein received generally positive feedback. The review resulted in 184 recommendations, with 132 accepted and 52 noted. Notable recommendations focused on strengthening children's rights and promoting gender equality across various societal sectors, especially in politics and the economy. The government reaffirmed its commitment to implementing policies that support a balance between family life and career and combat gender role stereotypes, while also pledging to continue efforts aimed at eradicating violence against women.

Liechtenstein maintains high human rights standards, actively engages in multilateral frameworks to promote these rights, and is proactive in addressing both domestic and international human rights challenges.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The UK maintains a robust rights framework, which ensures democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Following the general elections in July 2024, the Labour government has taken steps to rescind legislative and other initiatives that had raised concerns by UN bodies, the Council of Europe, as well as by human rights defenders. It has adopted a political discourse in support of international law. In July 2024, the government abandoned the previous government's policy of deporting illegal migrants and asylum seekers to Rwanda. It also re-committed the UK to honouring its obligations under the ECHR, which the Rwanda deportation policy had been found to be inconsistent with by the UK Supreme Court. In July, the government announced its intention to put forward a new Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, designed to 'modernise' the asylum and immigration system and underpin the creation of the Border Security Command by creating new counter-terrorism style powers to support the law enforcement authorities in dealing with migrant smuggling.

As the UK is bound by the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement, including the so-called Windsor Framework and its provisions on 'Rights of individuals' (Article 2), there is a requirement for the UK to ensure that there is no diminution of rights, safeguards or equality of opportunity, as set out in the relevant part of the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the EU. Over the reporting period, the distinct role of Article 2 of the Windsor Framework in Northern Ireland's equality and human rights protections has been highlighted in three major court judgments in Northern Ireland. Notably, in two cases, the High Court disapplied provisions of Westminster legislation that it found conflicted with Article 2. While these rulings are subject to appeal, the proceedings underscore the ongoing legal debate on the scope of the provision. The Labour government has made a commitment to repeal and replace one of the contested pieces of legislation, the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023. On another of the contested pieces of legislation, the Illegal Migration Act, the government has proposed to substantially amend the legislation.

Concerning people's right to peaceful protest, in May 2024, the High Court determined that certain anti-protest provisions enacted in the Public Order Act adopted in April 2023 constituted an unlawful restriction on the right to protest. The government, however, opted to pursue the legal challenge initiated by the previous administration. The government has not taken forward an 'anti-boycott bill' in parliament introduced by the previous government.

On social and economic rights, concerns continued to be raised about the limited access to social housing, as well as child poverty and social exclusion exacerbated by the cost of living crisis. In May 2024, the UN Human Rights Committee issued findings condemning the UK's practice of arbitrarily detaining and subjecting individuals, including children, with disabilities to involuntary treatment under the Mental Health Act. In response, the Labour government pledged to implement legislative reforms aimed at curtailing such involuntary detention.

Regarding anti-discrimination, in July and August 2024, the UK witnessed racist and Islamophobic violence fuelled by online misinformation, across the country, targeting migrants and ethnic minorities. In response, a large number of people also took part in anti-racism demonstrations. There was also a rise in anti-Semitic hate incidents over the reporting period. In October 2024, the government made a commitment to facilitate access to compensation to members of the 'Windrush generation' who were denied access to employment, healthcare and housing between 1948 and 1973.

On gender-based violence, the government has pledged to halve violence against women and girls in a decade. To address low prosecution rates for rape, the government has pledged to fast-track rape cases through the criminal justice system by introducing specialist rape courts at every Crown Court location in England and Wales. There have been calls to strengthen protections against sexual harassment at work. In May 2024, following an expert assessment of gender identity services for children and young people, the National Health Service banned puberty blockers for that age group. Rights groups and expert groups have raised concerns about the ban and the spread of misinformation on the issue.

2. EU action on Human Rights and Democracy - key focus areas: The EU and the UK enjoy close and frequent cooperation within international institutions and multilateral fora regarding human rights and democracy promotion, in particular the UN. The Delegation has regular contacts with UK civil society and promotes EU human rights priorities through social media campaigns as well as by participating in outreach events, including London Pride.

3. EU bilateral political engagement (political, human rights and sectoral policy dialogues): In 2024, horizontal human rights issues, including in third countries, were touched upon during a range of political consultations and sectoral policy dialogues.

4. EU financial engagement:

There are no EU projects or programmes related to human rights currently covering the UK.

5. Multilateral context:

The UK remained committed to multilateralism in 2024 and was eager to cooperate with like-minded countries to push forward human rights and democracy in an international context. In human rights fora, in particular the UN General Assembly Third Committee and the UN Human Rights Council, the EU and the UK continued to pursue constructive coordination.

Regarding the International Criminal Court, the Labour government has also repeatedly reiterated the UK's support for the independence of the court.

Following the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling in 2019 that the UK's continued control over the Chagos Islands was unlawful, the United Kingdom and Mauritius announced a political agreement on 3 October 2024, subject to finalization, recognizing Mauritius' sovereignty over the Chagos Islands.

The UK has continued to sanction human rights abuses under its Human Rights Sanctions regime, which targets 115 individuals and 20 organisations as of 19 December 2024.

European Neighbourhood Policy

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Presidential election took place on 7 September 2024. Only three candidates were allowed to run, including the incumbent president. The final results announced by the Constitutional Court confirmed the re-election of President Tebboune with 84.3% of the votes and an official turnout rate of 46.1%. Amnesty International expressed concerns for the climate of intimidation ahead of the election and for arbitrary arrests of activists and opposition members. The reduction of civic space and freedom of expression, press and association is in fact an important concern. Algeria ranked 139th out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index in 2024, a drop of three places compared to the previous year. Reportedly, in November 2024, Algeria had at least 200 prisoners of conscience. On 1 November, 2024, President Tebboune signed two presidential decrees granting pardons to over 4,000 prisoners, with well-defined categories. These measures concerned persons convicted of ordinary criminal offences and those convicted of public order offences. Several journalists and activists from the Hirak movement were released. On 25 December, 2024, President Tebboune announced a presidential pardon and "measures of appeasement" for 2,471 prisoners. Reportedly, only five prisoners of conscience had been released. In April 2024, amendments to Algeria's Penal Code introduced alternatives to detention and measures addressing gender-based violence. However, the scope of Article 87 bis on terrorism has been expanded, hence raising the risk of potential judicial abuses. Amendments to the Penal Code also de facto restrict freedom of expression and press, targeting dissent and criticism under vague provisions. The 2020 Algerian Constitution affirms gender equality. While some progress has been registered in the country in terms of education of girls and government efforts to address gender-based violence, violence against women remains present, with at least 38 feminicides reported in 2024, according to the Feminicides Algérie collective. The female employment rate remains low at 18%, despite 60% being university graduates. Ethnic and religious minorities, including Amazigh and Christians, continue to face discrimination and the full and equal rights of LGBTI persons are restricted including the criminalisation of consenting same-sex relations, according to ILGA World. Algeria retains the death penalty but in practice does not carry it out, with the last known execution having taken place in 1993. Human Rights Watch reported arbitrary and collective expulsion of migrants.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2024, the EU continued to promote respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights in Algeria in the context of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights

and Democracy 2020-2027. A key focus area was promoting democratisation, governance and rule of law. This includes freedom of expression and right of access to information, and freedom of peaceful assembly and association. The EU also focused on facilitating a favourable environment for civil society and reinforcing its participation and its contribution to the political, economic and social development of the country. Furthermore, the EU emphasised the promotion of gender equality, the fight against gender-based violence and the strengthening of youth participation. This includes contributing to create conditions that empower women and youth and ensure their full, effective and meaningful participation in all areas of life, including by eliminating gender stereotypes and addressing structural inequalities. Another key area for the EU was the prevention of all forms of discrimination, violence, and persecution against individuals including for exercising their freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief, and for their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Respect for human rights and democratic principles are enshrined in the Algerian Constitution, as well as in the EU-Algeria Association Agreement and in EU-Algeria Partnership Priorities. On this basis, the EU closely follows the situation of human rights in Algeria, which has been regularly raised with the Algerian authorities. Regular discussions of the human rights situation also took place with various civil society organisations and human rights defenders, both in Algeria and in Brussels. On 25 November, on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the EU Delegation launched a two-week communication campaign on social media as part of the global '16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence' campaign. On 17 December, the EU Ambassador's residence hosted a meeting on the effects of climate change and ecological transition, attended by representatives of civil society, activists and experts in the field of climate and environment. Several topics were discussed including environmental justice and the role of civil society and women in the ecological transition.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, two projects were launched to support CSOs working in the areas of youth development and of territorial development. A third project supported CSOs working on the rights of children in vulnerable situations, while also supporting coordination and the search for synergies between associations and relevant state bodies. Several EU-funded projects are also aimed at fighting against gender-based violence. The aspect of gender equality was taken into account across the board in all the projects currently being implemented with EU funding. In addition, refugee protection is an integral part of EU-funded humanitarian projects in five Sahrawi refugee camps in south-west Algeria. Since 2023, the EU has allocated EUR 10 million in humanitarian funding to the UN World Food Programme for the monthly food distribution in the Sahrawi refugee camps.

5. Multilateral context: Algeria has ratified most 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. As a member of the UNHRC during its 2023-2025 term, Algeria was actively engaged in discussions and initiatives. In the September HRC session Algeria delivered a statement on behalf of a group of countries addressing the human rights impacts of anti-personnel mines, highlighting their devastating consequences on affected populations. In addition, Algeria consistently supported initiatives focused on economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development as well as older persons. Through its participation, Algeria sought to position itself as a proactive member of

the Human Rights Council. Algeria has not aligned with the EU's positions regarding resolutions that address human rights violations in various countries, where the EU MS members of the Council have voted in favour. During the 57th session of the Human Rights Council (9 Sep-11 Oct 2024), the voting patterns of Algeria and the EU never aligned on the ten proposals for resolution that were submitted to a vote. Algeria has not extended a standing invitation to UN Special procedures. Algeria started its mandate as non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in January 2024. In this context, Algeria was very active on the situation in Gaza and, together with the other nine non-permanent members, proposed resolution 2728 demanding an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza and the liberation of all hostages.

Republic of Armenia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Over the course of 2024, Armenia continued to advance its reform agenda in the justice sector and to strengthen the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights. The civic space for CSOs remains relatively enabling, although it has deteriorated compared to the period 2018-2020. Media freedom overall improved, but the country is facing an unprecedented level of disinformation, false narratives and hate speech, especially related to the security situation. Despite progress on the legislation related to gender equality and fight against domestic violence, gender equality and women's empowerment remain critical. LGBTI persons continue to face discrimination, stigma and even violence. Armenia made efforts to improve the rights and quality of life for persons with disabilities and the rights of the child, but challenges still remain on deinstitutionalisation and ensuring community based services. In the justice sector, progress was noted, inter alia, through the introduction of regular integrity checks for judges and prosecutors, but concerns remain about transparency in judicial appointments and further policy and system change is needed. The Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for Armenia registered a one-point improvement.[5] However, progress in fight against corruption has stalled, primarily due to the limited enforcement of the new policies. Public trust in the police has improved, although accountability for disproportionate use of force needs to be strengthened. The Ministry of Internal Affairs continued to advance strategic reforms. Concerns remain over the treatment and conditions of Armenian military personnel, particularly non-combat deaths.

In 2024, the government continued its action to safeguard the human rights of over 100 000 Karabakh Armenians displaced in autumn 2023. Their reception and integration has put strain on housing, childcare support and employment situation, notably in the border areas.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU assisted Armenia in the implementation of the National Human Rights Action Plan (HRAP) for 2023-2025 through policy dialogue and assistance.

The European Union continued to support justice and police reform. The EU continued advocating for gender equality, labour protection, media freedom and non-discrimination and equality, notably through efforts to advance the rights of children, persons with disabilities, LGBTI persons and persons in a vulnerable situation. The EU also provided humanitarian

[5] Transparency International. (n.d.) 'Corruption Perception Index.' https://transparency.am/en/cpi

support and assists the Armenian government in the socio-economic integration of the displaced persons. The EU and its Member States joined forces, for instance on socio-economic development of Syunik region, in a Team Europe approach. The EU Mission in Armenia (EUMA) contributed to the monitoring and reporting on human rights issues in the conflict-affected areas.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Armenia stepped up its implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the EU, and committed to setting joint, ambitious priorities for its cooperation in a new Partnership Agenda, including in the field of democracy, human rights and good governance.

In September 2024, Vice-President of the European Commission Schinas launched the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue, which will include human rights-related commitments.

An agreement on legal cooperation between Armenia and Eurojust on judicial cooperation in criminal matters was signed on 5 April 2024 and ratified on 10 September 2024. The corresponding working arrangement was signed on 23 September 2024.

The 14th EU-Armenia Human Rights Dialogue and the 14th EU-Armenia Sub-committee on Justice, Freedom and Security were held in Brussels on 17 and 18 February 2025. The parties discussed non-discrimination including gender identity, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and information, electoral l reform, refugee rights and labour rights. At the Justice Freedom and Security subcommittee, discussions focused on judicial reforms and cooperation, reforms in the security sector, data protection, the fight against corruption, law enforcement and crime prevention.

The EU-Armenia Civil Society Platform continued its work in 2024, and held its fifth meeting on 15 October 2024.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU provided EUR 17.7 million in humanitarian aid to support the displaced Karabakh Armenians in addition to EUR 15 million budget support for socio-economic needs. The EU programmes supported for instance community-based social services in the Syunik region bordering Azerbaijan; improved access to social services for refugees; put in place accessible mechanisms for identifying and addressing the specific human rights vulnerabilities of refugees; and fostered sustainable livelihoods for displaced and host communities.

EU assistance further contributed to fostering equality and access for persons with a disability; supporting the development of a comprehensive mental health framework; providing capacity-building for CSOs; empowering youth including through education; promoting gender equality; and strengthening the protection of labour rights. The EU remained the primary donor on justice reform. Media quality and resilience, too, remained an important priority for EU assistance.

5. Multilateral context: Armenia continued to work towards fulfilling its international human rights obligations. In February 2024, the country became the 124th State Party to join the Rome Statute. In February 2024, Protocol No. 13 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, abolishing the death penalty in all circumstances entered into force in Armenia. On 16 May 2024, Armenia signed the Oviedo Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (ETS No. 164). Armenia has yet to ratify the Istanbul Convention, signed in 2017. The Sub-Committee on Accreditation of the Global

Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions reaccredited the Human Rights Defender of Armenia with A-status.

Republic of Azerbaijan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The overall state of human rights and democracy in Azerbaijan deteriorated further in 2024, as reflected by the unprecedented crackdown on critical voices, reduced space for civil society and independent media, and continuous limitations to civil liberties. The international attention in the context of the COP29 international climate conference in Baku did not result in any improvements in the human rights situation in the country.

In 2024, Azerbaijan held snap presidential elections on 7 February and snap parliamentary elections on 1 September. The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Missions concluded that both elections took place in a restrictive political and legal environment that did not enable genuine pluralism and resulted in a contest devoid of competition. Both statements also acknowledged the existence of longstanding severe limitations on fundamental freedoms, namely of association, expression and peaceful assembly, both in law and in practice, which run contrary to standards for genuine democratic elections[6]. The overall electoral legal framework remains to be revised to align it with international standards and obligations.

The crackdown on journalists, human rights defenders, and civic and political opposition activists, which had started in September 2023, further intensified. More independent journalists, human rights defenders and political activists were arrested on charges of money laundering. Restrictions of freedom of expression, including online, continued to be of concern. According to the 2024 Press Freedom Index, Azerbaijan ranks 164th out of 180 countries (151st in 2023). According to the Freedom House 2024 Freedom of the Net Report, Azerbaijan is still among the 'unfree' countries. Defamation remains a criminal offence that can lead to imprisonment, despite calls to decriminalise it.

Activities of non-governmental organisations remain restricted, including by the obligation to register grant agreements in a complex and arbitrary procedure. The deterioration of Azerbaijan's ranking on the Global Gender Gap report in 2024 (place 104 out of 146 countries) is illustrative of the huge challenges in terms of gender equality[7]. The prevalence of domestic violence remains high. The rights of LGBTI communities are not fully respected, protected and fulfilled[8]. Corruption is a systemic problem.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The promotion and support of human rights and fundamental freedoms is an important element of the EU's action in Azerbaijan, along the following priorities: To strengthen the rule of law and democratic institutions, the EU is supporting steps in the direction of an independent, fair and efficient justice system, as well as supporting the fight against corruption. The EU supports CSOs and strongly promotes the elimination of legal provisions (such as registration obligations) that currently hamper CSOs space and action in the country.

[6] https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/azerbaijan/562473
[7] See https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024/in-full/benchmarking-gender-gaps-2024-2e5f5cd886/#country-coverage
[8] https://rainbowmap.ilga-europe.org/

The EU supports the freedom of press and the plurality of opinions, advocating against the prosecution of individuals on political grounds. 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 rights, equal opportunities and equal participation in the public and political life of women, youth, persons with disabilities, displaced persons and persons belonging to minorities.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: To the EU continued to address concerns related to human rights and democracy with the relevant competent national institutions, notably the Presidential Administration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ombudsperson, State Committee on Family, Women and Children Affairs, State Committee on Religious Associations, State Committee for Refugees and IDPs, General Prosecutor's Office, and Agency for State Support to NGOs.

The EU Delegation organised meetings with representatives of NGOs, think tanks, political parties' members, human rights lawyers, human rights defenders, journalists, bloggers as well as with representatives of religious organisations and the LGBTI community. The EU Delegation and some EU Member States conducted trial monitoring in several cases. The EU Special Representative for Human Rights raised the EU's concerns with the Azerbaijani authorities on several occasions.

The European Parliament adopted three[9] resolutions devoted to the human rights situation in Azerbaijan, notably the violations of international law, as well as the repression of civil society and independent media.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU continued to support civil society. However, due to further restrictions in grant registration procedure introduced in 2024, no direct EU grants were registered at the Ministry of Justice in 2024. The EU financial support to Azerbaijani CSOs was provided via contribution agreements.

5. Multilateral context: On 25 January 2024, the parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) decided in a resolution[10] not to ratify the credentials of the Azerbaijani delegation, citing the country's failure to fulfil its major commitments as a CoE member. On 3 July, the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) issued a public statement[11], addressing the persistent lack of cooperation by the Azerbaijani authorities with the CPT. The proposal to ratify the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention remains under consideration.

Republic of Belarus

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, the human rights situation in Belarus has further deteriorated. Reports indicate that at least 1721 people were sentenced to prison in politically motivated cases, out of which 1019 people were convicted for having participated in protests. At the end of December 2024, Belarus had still more than

[9] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0369_EN.html
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2024-0029_EN.html
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2024-12-19_EN.html
[10] https://pace.coe.int/en/files/33333/html
[11] https://rm.coe.int/1680b0ccc5

1200 political prisoners arbitrarily detained. Political prisoners continued to be exposed to particularly harsh conditions, including torture and other forms of ill-treatment. Some political prisoners are subjected to arbitrary punishment, including solitary confinement and prolonged incommunicado detentions. Four political prisoners died while in detention in 2024. Around 250 people were released on pardon.

The institutionalisation and legalization of repressive measures continued to expand. In the run-up to the presidential elections (26 January 2025), the authorities engaged in a state-led widespread and systematic repressive campaign, aimed at preventing and repressing any civic space and any actual or perceived dissent in the country. The control of the information space by the authorities was consolidated. The security sector was reinforced as part of the institutionalisation of repressive practices. The arbitrary use of force against civilians was further increased. In 2024, pressure on Belarusians forced to leave the country increased. Among the practices used by the authorities are trials in absentia, seizure of property, threats, pressure on relatives, and persecution for participating in protests abroad.

Belarus remains the only country in Europe that retains the death penalty.

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 to support actions with a view to holding perpetrators of human rights violations accountable for their crimes. The EU Delegation in Minsk, in cooperation with Member States embassies and like-minded partners, engaged in several initiatives in support of political prisoners and their families. This included public awareness-raising campaigns as well as targeted official démarches with the Belarusian authorities. The EU and like-minded countries continued to observe politically motivated trials, despite very challenging circumstances. The EU also continued to support the International Accountability Platform for Belarus.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2024, Belarus was high on the EU's agenda. The EEAS and the European Commission, in cooperation with the European Parliament, organised and hosted 'Belarus Days' on 9-13 December 2024, a series of events devoted to democratic Belarus and the Belarusian people. The initiative demonstrated the EU's solidarity and continued commitment to the Belarusian people. The continuing repression and the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus were addressed by the Foreign Affairs Council, the European Council, and raised in numerous contacts, including with third countries. In 2024, two rounds of sanctions over continued human rights violations were adopted, in August (28 individuals) and in December (26 individuals and 2 entities). On 29 June 2024, in view of the regime's involvement in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU adopted new sectoral sanctions against Belarus targeting the trade, services and transport sectors. The sanctions aim to mirror several of the restrictive measures already in place against Russia to prevent sanctions circumventions. The EU held two meetings of the Consultative Group with Belarusian democratic forces and civil society in June and December 2024. The HRVP and Commissioner Kos addressed the situation in the EP plenary on several occasions and held bilateral meetings with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya.

4. EU financial engagement: In line with the Council Conclusions on Belarus of 12 October 2020, the EU has redirected assistance from the Belarusian public authorities to non-state actors. The EU's commitment to supporting the people of Belarus was further enshrined in the Council Conclusions of February 2024. So far, EUR 170 million has been mobilised for civil society, human rights defenders, independent media, educational and cultural institutions,

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

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

Arab Republic of Egypt

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[13] https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/8976/2025/en/.

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

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

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

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

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

State of Israel

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

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

and its democratic participation and activity. The independence of the Supreme Court is also being challenged. Freedom of speech and freedom to work were also impacted after the anti-terror laws. Use of social media is monitored.

Organised crime is a growing problem in the Arab communities of Israel and in mixed cities, and is mostly unchallenged.

Israel was ranked 101 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index 2024, a drop of four places compared to the previous year. The independent Israeli media landscape is being challenged. In 2024, a number of bills have been advanced in the Knesset, which would impact foreign media (especially Al Jazeera).

In 2024, the EU has listed nine individuals and five entities under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime for serious and systematic human rights abuses against Palestinians in the West Bank. Since 7 October 2023, Palestinian workers from Gaza and the West Bank officially have not been allowed to work inside Israel. Although the Israeli Government would be favourable to let Palestinian workers in, due to public opposition the decision is still on hold.

The social situation in Israel is expected to pursue the same downward tendency in 2025 as well; with the changes in taxation and budget cuts coming into effect, which will impact especially marginalised and disempowered communities. People with disabilities, women, especially single mothers, people from the LGBTI community, people living in the periphery will see a degradation of public services and support with a steep rise in the cost of living. Israel is the only country in the region where rights of LGBTI people are guaranteed.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU focused on five strategic priority areas: 1) Israel's responsibilities as an occupying power; 2) upholding democratic values; 3) combatting discrimination against the Arab minority; 4) rights and protection of persons in vulnerable situations; and 5) engagement with the United Nations. In addition, in response to the 7 October 2023 Hamas terrorist attacks, the EU has funded trauma support for victims of the attacks, including victims of sexual violence.

Considering the conflict in Gaza and also the increasing terrorist activities in the West Bank that led to Israeli military operations there as well, the environment was not conducive to improvements in the five strategic areas. On the contrary, in most of these areas, the situation worsened. Israel withheld significant tax revenues from the Palestinian Authority, making it more difficult for it to exercise its governance role. Settler violence in the West Bank and the expansion of settlements also generated tensions with Palestinian communities.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU's bilateral engagement with Israel is guided by the EU-Israel Association Agreement which stipulates that EU-Israel relations are based on respect for human rights and democratic principles. Since 7 October 2023, the EU – at all levels – has regularly engaged with Israel about the need to facilitate humanitarian assistance and

access in Gaza and has consistently reminded its Israeli interlocutors of Israel's duty to respect international law and international humanitarian law.

In 2024, the EU Delegation to Israel organised a number of démarches/outreach on issues such as humanitarian access in Gaza, UNRWA, the advancement of several housing units in settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, punitive measures against the Palestinian Authority, an accelerating level of demolitions of EU-funded structures in the West Bank and alarming levels of settler violence. The Delegation continues to openly support the 'Solidarity' human rights film festival in Tel Aviv. Some of the films screened at the festival are very critical of Israeli politics and society, having led in the past to accusations of the EU promoting 'anti-Israel narratives'. The Delegation has been actively involved in Pride activities and raised the rainbow flag outside the delegation and communicated extensively about LGBTI rights on its social media channels. This was well-regarded by the public.

On the anniversary of the 7 October terrorist attacks, the Delegation commemorated the victims of the terrorist attacks and paid tribute to individuals, human rights defenders and civil society organisations that stepped forward in the time of crisis. Multiple meetings were held with hostage families and organisations representing them (Hostages and Missing Families Forum) both in Israel and in Brussels.

4. **EU financial engagement:** In 2024, the EU provided financial support to four new human rights projects implemented by local NGOs. The overall EU contribution to these projects is EUR 1.89 million. Another nine human rights and democracy projects contracted in 2021 and 2022 continued their implementation during 2024 with an EU contribution of about EUR 1.49 million.

5. Multilateral context: Israel has ratified seven of the nine international human rights treaties. Israel underwent its fourth Universal Periodic Review in 2023 and received 320 recommendations, supporting 171 (in whole or in part) and noting 149 (including all those made in relation to the occupied Palestinian territory). Israel cooperates with UN Treaty Bodies, submitting reports on the implementation of international conventions such as on civic and political rights (2022), or torture (2020). Whereas Israel engaged with the UN Human Rights Council by taking part in the dialogues, and participating in the core group presenting the resolution on countering cyber-bullying at HRC 57 in September 2024 (57/6).

In 2024, the Human Rights Council adopted four resolutions related to Israel: the yearly ones (Human rights situation in oPt and accountability, Israeli settlements, Palestinian self-determination, occupied Syrian Golan).

Furthermore, the Human Rights Council received reports on the grave human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory from the UN Secretary General, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Rapporteur and Commission of Inquiry. The human rights situation in Israel and the occupied territories was also raised by the High Commissioner, his office, various HRC mandate holders and treaty bodies in a number of statements and communications, especially numerous during the months of war in Gaza following 7 October 2023 Hamas terrorist attacks. Israel has not renewed the issuance of visas for OHCHR international staff, and has not agreed to a visit by the Special Rapporteur nor the Commission of Inquiry.

OHCHR continued work on updating the database of enterprises operating in Israeli settlements (HC report on implementation of HRC res. 31/36), where yearly updates were mandated by resolution HRC53/25 in year 2023. Staff recruitment delays due to the UN liquidity crisis meant that OHCHR was still analysing the results of the call for submissions of May 2024 on additions to the database. Thus the database update of 2023 remained in force, while OHCHR was taking an approach of continuous updates and deletions to and from the database.

In 2024, Israel's relationship with the United Nations deteriorated further. Due to allegations that UNRWA employees were involved in the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023, the Knesset adopted laws which would significantly limit the activity of the agency in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Jordan is a parliamentary hereditary monarchy, where the King continues to hold considerable executive powers. An elected Lower House (House of Representatives; 130 seats) and an appointed Upper House (Senate; 65 seats) adopts legislation put forward by the government and provides scrutiny over the government, but effectively holds limited power. The last elections took place in September 2024 in the context of a political modernisation drive initiated by the King. An increasing share of the seats is reserved for national party lists (30% in these elections). An EU Election Observation Mission was deployed that delivered an overall positive assessment of the poll concluding that the elections were overall well-run.

Jordan continued its political modernisation agenda in 2024 with the first legislative elections organised under the new laws on elections and on political parties, designed in particular to enhance political participation of women and youth. In parallel, civic space in Jordan remains restricted, with curbs on freedom of expression and of assembly denounced by civil society organisations. While women saw increased representation in parliament, they continued to face legal discrimination in personal matters. The 2023 Cybercrime Law caused serious concern among human rights organisations, and a statement by the EU, due to its possible use as a tool for stifling freedom of expression online. Press freedom remains restricted, with also self-censorship by media professionals. While Jordan was ranked 132 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index 2024 — a worsening of 14 places from the previous year. Jordan retains the death penalty. While new death sentences continue to be issued, there have been no known executions since 2017. Jordan is a regional leader on the rights of persons with disabilities, illustrated by its co-hosting of the Global Disability Summit with Germany in 2025. In its fourth UPR, Jordan accepted 204 recommendations out of 279, indicating commitment by the government to enhance the protection of human rights in the country.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU actively promoted gender equality, with programmes ranging from awareness raising and economic empowerment to fighting gender-based violence. Member states also aimed to support women's participation in elections, the judiciary, and police departments. Other programmes aimed to address issues regarding sexual and reproductive rights, labour rights and childcare.

The EU supported the government's strategy for the deinstitutionalisation of persons with disabilities, which promotes inclusiveness through independent living. The EU also worked on advancing the National Social Inclusion Strategy, while EU member states' programmes focused on inclusion of persons with disabilities in the school system, public life, electoral process and labour market. Jordan and Germany will co-host the Global Disability Summit in Berlin on 2-3 April 2025.

EU assistance to the justice sector aimed at improving the rule of law in Jordan, enhancing access to justice for all, improving fair trial guarantees and legal safeguards. Other related projects strived to establish a rule of law culture at grassroots level. The EU supported the strengthening of civil society including capacity development initiatives, activities and projects to empower marginalised groups and address pressing challenges. Particular attention was given to Syrian and Palestinian refugees.

The EU supported media freedom, journalist training and independent media development through various activities, from tailored capacity building to fact-checking workshops. Initiatives also included projects to improve media literacy, counter FIMI, and foster investigative journalism. The EU also supports digital transition in Jordan by assisting the government in the fields of data protection and AI.

The EU and MS carried out dedicated EU projects aimed to strengthen the capacities of civil society organisations in Jordan, particularly outside of the capital, and provided training to empower civil society for advocacy on public policies.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU's bilateral engagement with Jordan is guided by the EU-Jordan Association Agreement, which stipulates that EU-Jordan relations are based on respect for human rights and democratic principles. During the 15th EU-Jordan Association Council, held on 15 July 2024 in Brussels, both parties renewed their commitment to shared values and concerns regarding human rights matters were discussed. The EU reiterated its support to Jordan's political modernisation process, illustrated by the deployment of an EU Election Observation Mission for the legislative elections that took place on 10 September 2024 as well as various cooperation programmes.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU supports Jordan's political modernisation agenda through the programme 'Support to Democratic reforms in Jordan' (EUR 10 million) focusing on increasing the ability of political parties, strengthening the participation of women and youth, and building the capacities of democratic institutions in Jordan. The EU rule of law and access to justice programme (EUR 39 million) works to improve fair trial guarantees and legal safeguards. Several EU programmes promote the rights of persons with disabilities (overall more than EUR 10.3 million) supporting deinstitutionalisation, access to services, rehabilitation and inclusion in schools and in public life. The EU 'support to the quality of education and TVET' programme (EUR 65 million) fosters inclusive education. The Accelerating Access to Education Initiative, co-funded by the EU (EUR 14 million/year) and Germany (EUR 22 million/year) provides for education of refugee children in Jordan.

5. Multilateral context: During its fourth Universal Periodic Review in January 2024, Jordan accepted 204 recommendations out of 279, a record for the country. In the UNGA Third Committee, Jordan voted in favour of the death penalty moratorium for the third time. Jordan presented its fourth periodic report to the Committee against Torture in November 2024, with

main recommendations focusing on adapting the definition and categorisation of torture in the Penal Code, as well as procedural safeguards.

Lebanese Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, Lebanon continued to stand out in the region for generally upholding civil and political rights. However, persistent institutional fragility – with no president and a caretaker government throughout the year – was compounded by the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel and delayed meaningful reforms, thereby impacting social and economic rights notably for marginalised communities (including children, elderly, women, persons with disabilities, refugees migrant workers and IDPs). The conflict-induced displacement further strained an already overstretched public service delivery system, with IDP figures reaching over one million at the peak of the military escalation between late September and the conclusion of a ceasefire agreement on 27 November 2024. The war particularly impacted access to education for children, and led to large population movements between Lebanon and Syria. Municipal elections were postponed for the third time following a decision by Parliament in April, and no significant progress was recorded in the implementation of electoral reforms following the parliamentary elections of May 2022 or towards increasing the political representation of women. End-2024, the ceasefire and the decision to hold the presidential election and form a full-fledged government finally created conditions for resuming a reform agenda concerning Human rights and Rule of law.

Despite adverse circumstances, Lebanon remained among the most liberal countries in the region for freedom of expression and the overall guarantee of the freedom of assembly was generally observed. Nevertheless, restrictions on journalists have tightened, with also smear campaigns on independent journalists, and press freedom has declined. Lebanon was ranked 140 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index 2024, a drop of 21 places compared to the previous year. No substantial progress was recorded on the independence of the judiciary, and the investigation into the 4 August 2020 Beirut Port explosion continued to suffer political interferences. Discrimination under the various sectarian personal status laws remained a reality, as did sexual and gender-based violence as well as discrimination and aggressions against the LGBTI community. The adopted Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has yet to be ratified. Syrian refugees faced increasing restrictions of movement, with some municipalities imposing curfews and new registration obligations, and Syrian children denied access to schools. Labour migrants predominantly engaged in domestic work remained subject to a sponsorship system (*Kafala*) rendering them vulnerable to exploitation. According to ILGA World consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised. Lebanon retains the death penalty in law, but there have not been any executions for more than 20 years. Concerns remain however over the detention conditions of those on death row.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU supported children's right to education, focusing on access for the most vulnerable, support to the functioning of public schools, inclusive education for children with learning difficulties and disabilities and alternative forms of learning for children who dropped out, support to the Child Protection Policy and the National Action Plan on Prevention and Response to Child Marriage.

The EU continued to support programmes to improve the living conditions of refugees and host communities, including in education, health, social protection and assistance, as well as water, hygiene and sanitation. The EU responded to the financial difficulties of UNRWA through bilateral support and by mainstreaming support to Palestinian refugees in all programmes. The EU initiated a project to address forced labour and exploitation for migrant domestic workers.

The EU supported a project for key election management bodies to organise high-quality elections and coordinate CSOs' advocacy, communication, democratic participation, accessibility, youth engagement, women's representation, and media monitoring. The EU notably advocated a gender quota in the electoral law and gender mainstreaming.

The EU supported community policing, notably through a rights-based collection and use of digital evidence.

The EU continuously advocated freedom of expression, assembly and media through public outreach events, notably the Samir Kassir Award for freedom of the press. The EU funded a project on media law reform, legal standards and media governance during elections.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU's bilateral engagement with Lebanon is guided by the EU-Lebanon Association Agreement, which stipulates that EU-Lebanon relations are based on respect for human rights and democratic principles. In the very challenging institutional, economic and security context faced by Lebanon throughout the year, the EU bilateral political engagement on Human rights notably focused on the need for institutional accountability and legitimacy, the independence of the judiciary, governance reforms and the fight against corruption. Through high-level meetings with the Lebanese Government, the EU has consistently raised critical human rights concerns, including the protection of refugees from forced returns and right to education. These efforts underscore the EU's strategic commitment to fostering accountability, safeguarding rights of refugees and upholding other obligations that Lebanon has under international law.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, the EU maintained its commitment to a human rights-based approach across its programming through a range of targeted initiatives. The EU funded projects aimed at improving justice and accountability, women's rights and empowerment, the rights of the child, media freedom, anti-corruption as well as initiatives aiming to protect migrant workers and improving the legal framework (notably on public procurement). As part of this commitment, the EU launched a new call for proposals under its human rights thematic instrument, supporting projects that enhance access to justice, promote the rights of the child, and address the misuse of digital technologies. The EU supported an initiative aiming to strengthen women's participation in political and public life, foster an inclusive work environment, and enhance legal protections GBV**.**

The EU consolidated its dialogue on justice sector reform with the Ministry of Justice, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, the main judicial bodies and civil society, through enhanced coordination with international donors and a dedicated EU-funded project. The EU also continued to support the National Anti-Corruption Strategy and grassroots organisations active in this field. The EU has been a strong advocate for the rights of refugees, with a particular focus on ensuring adherence to the principle of non-refoulement.

5. Multilateral context: Lebanon is a signatory of the main international HR conventions, but has not signed or ratified any major international human rights conventions recently. The EU

has underscored the imperative to end the culture of impunity in Lebanon, stressing the need for a transparent investigation into the Beirut Port explosion of August 2020. The EU carried out diplomatic démarches and made public statements in support of human rights in a multilateral context notably for the 68th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, and for the 79th session of the UNGA Third Committee or in support of the UN convention on cybercrime.

State of Libya

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, Libya's human rights and democracy situation remained deeply affected by political uncertainty, institutional fragmentation, and violations and abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this challenging context, arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances continued, with no substantial progress toward accountability or the rule of law. The municipal elections, held without disturbances on 16 November marked a positive step showcasing coordination between Libya's eastern and western regions while also revealing some shortcomings, such as limited participation of women and allegations of vote tampering. Women's organisations and human rights defenders continued facing threats, affecting their participation in political and public life. Libyan media also suffered from a lack of legislative protections, leaving journalists and activists vulnerable to harassment, intimidation, and violence. Libya ranked 143 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index in 2024, up 6 places compared to the previous year. The announced creation of two 'morality policing' agencies in October 2024 — the Public Morals Protection Agency (PMPA) under the Presidential Council and the General Directorate for the Protection of Public Morals (GDPPM) under the Ministry of Interior of the Government of National Unity further underscored a growing trend towards restricting and violating women's rights. Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers remain among the persons in the most vulnerable situations, frequently subjected to human rights violations, including violence, exploitation, abuse, inhumane conditions, torture, forced labour, sexual assault and human trafficking. Libya retains the death penalty with thirty articles in Libya's penal code providing for capital punishment, including for acts of speech and association. No executions have been carried out since 2010 but military and civilian courts continued to impose the death penalty. According to Human Rights Watch, as of September the total number of people under confirmed death sentences were 105, including 19 who were detained. According to ILGA World consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised in Libya.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2024, the EU continued to promote respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights in Libya in the context of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, which has been extended until 2027. Key focus areas included strengthening democracy, rule of law and legitimate national institutions in Libya, including efforts to reform the banking sector and address fiscal transparency. Another key focus area of EU action was addressing impunity and strengthening accountability for human rights violations, and violations and breaches of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The EU also focused on fundamental freedoms and strengthening civic and political space, including the participation of Libyan women in political, economic and social life, and their representation in government positions. Lastly, in 2024, the EU also focused on enhancing the protection of

internally displaced persons (IDPs), minorities, migrants, irregular migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, in particular those in vulnerable situations.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU's advocacy centred on reinforcing Libya's international human rights obligations, democratic values and governance reforms. The EUDEL established a direct dialogue with Libyan authorities to enhance human rights-compliant migration management, support community stabilisation and protection, and facilitate the voluntary returns of migrants to their countries of origin in full respect of the principle of non-refoulement. Migration Advocacy Talks hosted by the EUDEL, along with regular meetings with CSOs and INGOs were key components of these efforts. The EU also supported the UNSMIL's engagement with Libyan institutions to address enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and strengthen legal representation for victims. In 2024, the EU successfully established a strategic dialogue with Libyan authorities on migration and coordinated several high-level engagements, including four technical visits, and a political visit by European Commission Vice President Schinas to attend the July Tripoli Trans-Mediterranean Migration Forum. As part of its broader efforts to promote gender equality and to uphold human rights, the EUDEL intensified its role in the yearly awareness campaign "16 Days of Activism" to address violence against women. On 3 November, in the context of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists (2/11), the EUDEL also launched the EUDEL Press Freedom Talks, fostering dialogue with Libyan journalists and civil society to address media freedom and human rights challenges.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU has renewed its funding for the 'Libya Permanent Political Platform' project, which aims to broaden participation in the Libyan-led political dialogue surrounding the Peacemakers' 'Multi-Track Roadmap'. Additionally, EU funding has continued to support the High National Elections Commission through UNDP technical assistance for the electoral process throughout 2024. The EU also funded a project that aims to contribute to peace and stabilisation in Libya by informing policy dialogue on gender justice. In addition, the EU funded a border management programme of the IOM, which provided health support and facilities in the south of the country. Whilst decriminalising irregular migration and ending arbitrary detention are longer-term objectives, the EU has been working on encouraging the governance of labour migration in Libya, through funding a capacity building action targeting the Ministry of Labour for the development of and procedures for the regularization of migrant workers.

5. Multilateral context: Libya has ratified most major international human rights treaties, albeit with notable exceptions and reservations, including as regards the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. Moreover Libya is not party to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, although it is party to the Organisation of the African Union Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. In 2024, UNSMIL's Human Rights Service continued to monitor and report abuses, advocating for accountability and the rule of law in Libya. On 12 June 2024, during its 56th session, the Human Rights Council considered the report of OHCHR on the situation of human rights in Libya followed by an interactive dialogue with calls for accountability and justice to human rights violations and abuses, and institutional and judicial reforms to combat impunity. In August 2024 UNSMIL/OHCHR published its report 'Tarhuna – mass graves and related human rights violations and abuses in Libya' warning that continued lack of accountability and years of

impunity for human rights violations and abuses risk fuelling more instability and division. In May, Resolution 2733 of the UNSC renewed measures to enforce the arms embargo, including authorisation for vessel inspections. In August, the UNSC urged Libyan leaders to de-escalate tensions and avoid unilateral actions that could destabilise the situation. By October, it welcomed progress in resolving the Central Bank of Libya crisis, urging swift implementation of agreements endorsed by the House of Representatives (HoR) and the High Council of State (HCS). A number of visiting requests issued by UN Special Procedures are pending.

Kingdom of Morocco

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Morocco is a monarchy with the King having executive powers, an elected Parliament, and a government proceeding from the Parliament. In 2024, Morocco continued with the reform of its social protection system. In 2024, the Law 58/23 provided 3.9 million households with direct social aid every month. Legislative reforms of the Penal Code and the Family Law (*Moudawana*) are still under discussion. Announced changes would include the prohibition of marriage for minors, stricter rules regarding polygamy, as well as rights of the mother in case of a divorce. International human rights organisations and experts remarked that the space for press freedom is shrinking with journalists constrained to apply self-censorship. Morocco ranked 129 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index in 2024, which found that independent media and journalists face significant pressure. The royal pardon remains an integral part of religious and national celebrations in Morocco. This year's royal pardon on the occasion of the Throne Day in July also included prominent journalists Omar Radi, Soulaiman Raissouni, and Taoufik Bouachrine, whose cases were addressed in the European Parliament's resolution on the situation of journalists in Morocco in January 2023. Reforms towards the judicial power in Morocco are ongoing. Currently, 20 proposals are at different stages of the legislative process, including the Code of Civil Procedure, the Penal Code or the Code of Criminal Procedure. However, the law has not yet been adopted. Morocco retains the death penalty in law, but there have been no executions for more than 20 years. Consensual same-sex relations continue to be criminalised and can lead to imprisonment. In Morocco's current legislative framework, 48 provisions allow for the death penalty although the Kingdom has been observing a de facto moratorium on executions since 1993.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2024, the EU continued to promote respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights in Morocco in the context of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027. EU action in the country revolved around strengthening the rule of law and promoting civil society space and freedom of expression. Other priorities for EU action included gender equality, women's rights and the rights of the child as well as the abolition of the death penalty.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU's bilateral engagement with Morocco is guided by the EU-Morocco Association Agreement, which stipulates that EU-Morocco relations are based on respect for human rights and democratic principles. The EU actively engaged in the international and local human rights campaigns to mark the Day against the Death Penalty on 10 October. The EU delegation joined the 16 Days of Activism Against-Gender Based Violence

'Orange the World' between 25 November and 10 December. Moreover, the Human Rights Day was marked through a joint campaign with the EU Member States on social media on 10 December. The Delegation has also discussed the human rights situation in the country with the National Council for Human Rights (CNDH), with civil society actors and local and international human rights defenders.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU provided technical support to Morocco through the Human Rights Support programme (2020-2024), which aims to contribute to the capacity building of the CNDH in the fields of protection, promotion and prevention of human rights violations. This capacity building also works towards the abolition of the death penalty. Additionally, the programme supports the National Torture Prevention Mechanism. A new justice programme (MA JUST) was signed with the Council of Europe in 2024. The overall objective of the action is to strengthen the rule of law through a more accessible, independent and internationally compliant justice system. The EU also supports civil society actors in Morocco through thematic programmes and the implementation of the four-year strategic support programme for civil society, which began in January 2023. It aims to promote more participatory and inclusive sectoral governance through greater involvement of CSOs in defining, implementing and evaluating priority programmes and public policies. Furthermore, the EU funded various projects to improve the effective integration of gender issues into public policies in Morocco, such as support for the formulation of the new 2023-2026 equality government plan. Finally, a new action signed with UNICEF aims to provide an integral approach and promote access to rights for vulnerable children.

5. Multilateral context: Morocco is a state party to all major UN conventions on human rights. For the period 2023-2025, Morocco is a member of the UN HRC, marking its third term. In 2024, Morocco's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva held the Presidency of the HRC. During his mandate, the President endeavored to facilitate discussions on new technologies, artificial intelligence and the digital divide – all from a human rights' perspective. In addition to that, Morocco launched both an advisory board on gender equality, a gender focal point to whom sexual harassment cases can be reported, and a campaign against sexual harassment together with UN Women. Morocco also joined the core group on the resolution on 'Technology facilitated sexual and gender-based violence'. In a significant shift in the country's position, Morocco voted in favour of UN resolution A/RES/79/179 on the moratorium on the death penalty for the first time in December 2024. Morocco often voted differently from the EU position on resolutions that addressed human rights violations in third countries. The voting patterns of Morocco and the EU only aligned in one of the ten proposals for resolution submitted to a vote during the 57th session of the Human Rights Council (9 Sep-11 Oct 2024). Morocco initiated démarches in 2024 to join the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. On 9 October, the UN CED issued its findings on Morocco. The Committee welcomed Morocco's Equity and Reconciliation Commission and its work on past disappearances (1956-1999) but noted the lack of full implementation of its recommendations, including as regards the prosecution of perpetrators.

Occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The year 2024 saw the continued deterioration of the human rights situation in the oPt on a large scale, mainly due to the conflict in Gaza, and the increased instability and worsening security situation in the West Bank. The lack of access of humanitarian aid into Gaza, displaced persons (up to 90% of the population several times over), combined with water scarcity, inadequate sanitation services and hygiene challenges and a near total breakdown of law and order (which was under the control of Hamas), led to reports of pervasive gender-based violence and psycho-social problems amidst a full-blown protection crisis. By the end of the year, over 90% of all healthcare facilities had been damaged or destroyed. According to OCHA using the Palestinian Ministry of Health data[14], 52,653 Palestinians were killed and 118,897 wounded between 7 October 2023 and 7 May 2025. A UNHCR report from September 2024 suggests that close to 70% of verified victims of the Gaza conflict over a six-month period were women and children. According to OCHA, in total, since 7 October 2023, at least 412 aid workers, including 291 UN staff, and 208 journalists have been killed in Gaza. . The International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued arrest warrants in relation to crimes against humanity and war crimes in Gaza and the ICJ has a case ongoing – Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel).

The West Bank also saw unprecedented levels of violence in 2024 with almost 700 people killed, a sharp increase in terrorist activities, Israeli military operations, settler violence, demolitions and land seizures, and displacement. Approximately 10,000 Palestinians (number doubled since October 2023) are detained, including women and girls, in Israeli prisons and detention centres, with alleged cases of torture and other inhuman and degrading treatment as reported by OHCHR, Human Rights Watch and others[15]. The ICJ Advisory Opinion of July 2024 stated that the Israeli occupation of the oPt is illegal under international law.

Freedom of expression, assembly and press are reduced by the PA, whilst they struggle to control the security developments in the West Bank. In the absence of a parliament, President Abbas rules by decree.

OPt was ranked 157 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index 2024, a drop of one place compared to the previous year. It has become the world's most dangerous country for journalists: More than 100 reporters were killed in six months in Gaza since 7 October 2023, including 22 in the line of duty. In the West Bank, where journalists were already the victims of violations and abuses by both the PA and Israel, pressure has intensified since 7 October, with an increase in arrests of reporters and obstructions to their work.

Gender equality and women's rights and empowerment have taken a hit during the conflict. The status of the Family Protection Bill and the implementation of the CEDAW remain key issues, despite their presence in the EU-PA reform programme. There is still no legal framework for women's rights in the oPt. In the West Bank, women and girls suffer from the

[14] https://www.ochaopt.org/content/reported-impact-snapshot-gaza-strip-7-may-2025

[15] https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/08/israels-escalating-use-torture-against-palestinians-custody-preventable; https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/israel-and-palestine; https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/23/israel-detainees-face-inhumane-treatment.

deteriorating security situation. Incidents of domestic gender-based violence are increasing. Anti-rights campaigns have been mirrored by similar campaigns and violent repression of cultural events featuring LGBTI persons.

The rule of law and the justice system in the West Bank were significantly undermined by the concentration of power. The judiciary's autonomy has been challenged through legal manoeuvres including appointing judges and public prosecutors based on political loyalty. This tendency extends beyond the judiciary, impacting unions, non-profits, and social movements, thereby eroding Palestinians' civic space.

In Palestine, the death penalty remains in domestic legislation. Despite presidential statements, there is no official moratorium on the application of the death penalty. Amnesty International was unable to confirm executions in 2024 but believed they continued to be imposed. According to ILGA World consensual same-sex acts are legal only in the West Bank while remaining illegal in Gaza.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In 2024, the EU continued its support for Palestinian state building, rule of law and justice, as well as for service delivery to those in most vulnerable situations and 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. CSDP mission EUPOLCOPPS has continued to contribute to the establishment of effective and sustainable civil policing arrangements, advising Palestinian counterparts on the wider criminal justice chain.

The EU continued to engage in human rights and democracy discussions with the Palestinian Authority. The EU also continued its structured dialogue with the PA on human rights issues through European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) mechanisms. 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.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU's bilateral engagement with the PA is guided by the EU-Palestine Interim Association Agreement, which stipulates that EU-PA relations are based on respect for human rights and democratic principles. In 2024, 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.

4. EU financial engagements: In 2024, the EU provided financial support to 33 human rights and democracy-related programmes and projects implemented by UN agencies, local and international NGOs. The overall EU contribution to these projects is EUR 26 million.

5. Multilateral context: Since its recognition as a 'non-member observer State' by the United Nations General Assembly in 2012, Palestine has acceded to seven core human rights treaties.

To date, the PA has submitted its initial reports under seven of the international human rights treaties. Four of the UN treaty bodies CEDAW, CERD, CRC and CAT have so far reviewed submissions and provided concluding observations to the PA, who drafted action plans to implement these recommendations on CEDAW, CERD and CRC. The CEDAW Action Plan is in place, while CERD, CAT and CRC is a final draft, pending adoption by the Cabinet of Ministers, and/or the President. Despite some movement on the CAT's recommendations and requests during 2023, no movement has been observed in 2024 and none of these treaty bodies have been implemented effectively. In a joint effort between the EU, the UN, and the World Bank, the final draft of the Interim Damage Needs Assessment (IRDNA) was submitted in December for sign off. It covers the period until October 2024 and assesses the impact of the conflict in Gaza on the population, physical assets, infrastructure, and service delivery and conducts an estimate of physical infrastructure reconstruction, sectoral recovery and service delivery restoration needs in all affected sectors. The IRDNA estimates circa USD 29.9, 19 and 53 billion of damages, needs and losses, respectively.

Western Sahara

The United Nations has listed Western Sahara 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 aims to assist 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.

In October 2024, the UNSG Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura, visited the refugee camps near Tindouf (in Algeria) to meet with the Sahrawi representatives ahead of his briefing to the UN Security Council (UNSC). In its Resolution 2756, the UNSC extended the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO – Mission des Nations Unies pour l'Organisation d'un Référendum au Sahara Occidental) by one year until 31 October 2025. As regards human rights, the UNSC stressed the importance of improving the human rights situation in Western Sahara and the Tindouf camps, encouraging the parties to work with the international community to ensure full respect of human rights, including the freedoms of expression and association. The UNSC expressed concern regarding the continued hardships faced by Sahrawi refugees and their dependency on external humanitarian assistance, which is, unfortunately, insufficient. The humanitarian and human rights situation in Western Sahara and the Tindouf camps is also extensively described in this year's report of the UNSG on the situation in the region.

The situation in Western Sahara continues to be characterised by low-intensity hostilities between Morocco and the Polisario Front, creating challenges for MINURSO's operational environment. However, MINURSO reports that the level of hostilities seems to be decreasing in the last years. Furthermore, MINURSO was able to sustain its team sites east of the berm more regularly and reliably given Front Polisario's better cooperation, which is however claimed to be provisional.

Freedom of assembly and association remain a sensitive issues in Western Sahara. According to information provided by international NGOs, local NGOs continued to encounter obstacles to their legal recognition, as well as impediments to their right of assembly and association.

In addition, there are isolated reports of increased surveillance of local activists, supporters of Sahrawi self-determination and journalists. On the other hand, other local organisations maintain that the legal framework guarantees the freedom to create associations in Western Sahara, and that the Moroccan authorities cannot refuse to issue the registration receipt, except in cases of clear violation of the procedural requirements set out in the law on associations.

The EU continued to support the UN process and encouraged the parties to return to the UN-led talks as well as promote and protect the human rights in Western Sahara.

Syrian Arab Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 has created an immense hope and an opportunity for advancing truth and justice for the Syrian people, and for putting an end to the massive violations and abuses of human rights and humanitarian law committed by the regime and other actors. Violations included civilian casualties, attacks on vital centres, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, lack of access to medical care and food in detention, sexual violence, no access to legal counsel or representation and recruitment of children in armed forces and armed groups , and violations against returning internally displaced persons, refugees, and returnees. The Assad regime continued to apply the death penalty in 2024, while credible minimum figures remain unavailable. Before the fall of the regime, civil space continued shrinking due to the regime's efforts to control activities of CSOs. Civilians were arbitrarily detained by the state security apparatus for expressing views on social media. In 2024, humanitarian needs were at their highest since the start of the conflict with more than 16.7 million persons in need of humanitarian assistance (15.3 million in 2023). Access to shelter, healthcare, electricity, education, public transportation, water, and sanitation worsened.

In 2024, Syria was ranked 179 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index 2024, a drop of four places compared to the previous year. According to ILGA World consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised.

Following the fall of the Assad regime, the security situation in Syria remained volatile, with reports of violence and acts of revenge, particularly in coastal areas and central Syria. While Assad himself and many of his acolytes left the country, legal action against former regime figures is still being sought through diverse mechanisms, including now by the country's transitional authorities. The authorities have vowed to respect the rights of all Syrians and to conduct an inclusive political transition leading to democratic elections. They have also committed to initiate transitional justice and to ensure accountability for all serious crimes.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to support free speech, including through free and independent media, particularly at local level. It also supported access to justice mechanisms, as well as housing land and property rights and civil documentation.

The EU actively supported Syrian civil society organisations, including through the work of the UN's Civil Society Support Room and the Women's Advisory Board, and promoted a series of

online campaigns highlighting key topics such as humanitarian and non-humanitarian aid, political advocacy, and countering disinformation.

The EU continued to support financially the work of the OHCHR on Syria and to work to ensure accountability for war crimes, human rights violations and abuses as well as violations of international humanitarian law, including the use of chemical weapons. It continued to support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) for Syria as part of its efforts to fight impunity so all those responsible for war crimes or crimes against humanity can be held accountable. The EU actively supported the establishment of the Independent Institution for Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP).

The EU organised a workshop for young journalists from inside Syria and the diaspora focused on combating disinformation and promoting fact checking, critical to ensuring accurate reporting on human rights issues, and empowering a resilient journalistic community.

The EU and Member States showed continued commitment to address the Syrian conflict and its many human rights violations and abuses, including by organising of the annual Brussels Conference for Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, by continuously addressing human rights concerns in meetings, including in Damascus, and by organising discussions with experts such as the OHCHR and CSOs.

3. EU bilateral political engagements and their impact: The EU did not have bilateral political engagement with the Assad regime. The EU continued to enhance its dialogue with human rights activists both inside and outside Syria and with 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 regularly exchanged on the human rights situation with other like-minded actors on the ground.

4. EU financial engagements and their impact: The EU has continued to have a leading role in mobilising international funding in support of the Syrian crisis, one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters. The EU and its Member States remained the largest donors in support of Syrians in Syria and across the region since the beginning of the conflict in 2011 mobilising over EUR 35 billion. In 2024, the European Commission budget amounted to EUR 163 million in humanitarian aid to assist millions of people inside Syria.

5. Multilateral context: The EU has been a staunch supporter of UNSCR 2254 and the efforts of the UNSE to bring about a political solution, which had been constantly blocked by the Assad regime. In New York, the EU intervened in the UNSC debates on the Middle East, as well as in the UN General Assembly's Third Committee (November 2024).

In Geneva, the EU participated in the Humanitarian Task Force and the Ceasefire Task Force, fostering international cooperation in favour of humanitarian interventions and reductions in hostilities. The EU is also a member of the Core Group of the Syria resolution in the HRC and delivered joint EU27 statements at all Interactive Dialogues in the Council with the UN Commission of Inquiry. The EU engaged during the 57th session of the HRC in the Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on Syria (September 2024) and ensured support by all 27 member states to the Syria resolution.

For the past fourteen years, the EU has been leading on the international efforts to keep Syria high on the political agenda, to mobilise international funding, and to support Syrian civil society. The EU hosted the eighth Brussels Conference, gathering the UN as well as key international stakeholders on supporting the future of Syria and the region. The total amount pledged by the EU and its Member States amounted to almost EUR 6 billion (EUR 2.12 billion were pledged by the European Commission) for 2024 and beyond, reaffirming the EU and its Member States as the largest donor to support Syrian people.

Republic of Tunisia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Presidential elections took place on the 6 October 2024. President Saied obtained 90.69% of the votes cast, with a very low voter turnout (28.8%). Controversies around the electoral process included limited electoral observation, the exclusion of candidates through a string of administrative obstacles, legal challenges, harassment and arbitrary decisions of the Independent High Authority for Elections of Tunisia (ISIE). According to Human Rights Watch, repressive practices intensified in the run-up to the presidential elections as arrests ahead of the vote have brought up the number of people detained in October 2024 on political grounds or for exercising their fundamental rights to around 170. On 15 October, 2024, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, called on Tunisia to uphold the rule of law and democratic freedoms. Additionally, on October 14, 2024, UN experts raised alarms over the safety of migrants, refugees, and victims of trafficking in Tunisia. In 2024, CSOs continued to express their concerns regarding a narrowing space for freedom of expression as they have faced harassment including the hindering of activities. The work of international partners working with migrants and asylum seekers has become increasingly difficult. Since June, UNHCR had to suspend registration activities of new asylum seekers. Tunisia retains the death penalty but has observed a de facto moratorium since 1991. Courts however still continue sentencing people to death. According to ILGA World consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2024, the EU continued to promote respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights in Tunisia in the context of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024. The EU's key focus laid on promoting gender equality and women's rights and tackling discrimination against migrants and asylum seekers through the boosting of protection mechanisms and human rights monitoring. The EU also continued to support access to quality social services, including health and education. Other important EU focus areas included the support to the rule of law, separation of powers, and an independent, impartial and accountable justice system as well as fighting impunity. Furthermore, the EU focused on promoting the integrity and transparency of electoral processes to foster democratic governance, and supported independent media and access to information. They EU also placed emphasis on the strengthening of parliamentary institutions and the fight against corruption.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU's bilateral engagement with Tunisia is guided by the EU-Tunisia Association Agreement, which stipulates that EU-Tunisia relations are based on respect for human rights and democratic principles. After the wave of arrests of journalists and civil society actors in May, concerns were raised publically through an HRVP statement.

Furthermore, following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on a renewed partnership between the EU and Tunisia in July 2023, an EU monitoring mission to Tunis took place in October 2024. As part of the annual '16 Days of Activism' campaign, the EU Delegation organised a Team Europe event highlighting the role of art in the fight against gender-based violence. Despite growing restrictions to press freedom, the EU Delegation managed to publicly demonstrate EU's support to freedom of expression through the organisation of the fifth edition of the Lina Ben Mheni prize, rewarding best articles defending the principles and values of democracy, rights and freedoms.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU sustained its support to CSOs. For instance, funding to the SILA programme sustained EU efforts to help marginalised women and girls to exercise their rights. Furthermore, the EU also continued to fund the EMNA programme: '*Pour une réponse intégrée aux violences fondées sur le genre',* which delivers technical and financial support to seven shelters and listening centres throughout the country. The EU was also engaged in supporting the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers through its grant to UNHCR, and providing assistance to migrants and persons in vulnerable situations through the Promitad project. Furthermore, a new partnership with the European Endowment for Democracy was established to support pro-democracy actors to operate and survive, and facilitate the emergence of new ones. In 2024, the EU also funded projects that support access to basic education as well as vocational training and higher education. In addition, the EU continued to support infrastructure, transport and digitalization of schools and the modernisation of the security sector. The REDEVAB programme also promoted accountability and the active monitoring of reforms by civil society.

5. Multilateral context: Tunisia is a state party to most international human rights treaties. While Tunisia has continued to vote in favour of the resolution on a *Moratorium on the use of the Death Penalty* ('moratorium resolution') since 2012, Tunisia has not ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. In addition to periodic démarches concerning the EU priorities during the 68th session of the UN Committee on the Status of Women and the 79th session of the UN Third Committee, the EU Delegation reached out to Tunisian authorities with regard to the negotiations on the International Convention on Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Humanity. In 2024, the UN Human Rights Council expressed concerns about Tunisia's human rights situation. The EU mentioned Tunisia under Item 2 at the 57th Human Rights Council session in September 2024.

Russia and Central Asia

Republic of Kazakhstan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Kazakhstan presented in 2024 a complex picture marked by both substantial progress and significant challenges. Following the reforms initiated after the tragic January 2022 events, the government's emphasis remains on economic reforms and the establishment of a 'presidential republic with a strong President, strong Parliament, and accountable Government'. The ongoing struggle to balance governance with respect for human rights

remains a critical concern and 2024 has seen political reforms stagnating. On positive developments, Kazakhstan has taken significant legislative steps including the partial criminalisation of domestic violence, the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the adoption of a new law combating human trafficking. In February 2024, Kazakhstan launched a comprehensive Human Rights Action Plan, aiming to combat gender-based violence, prevent torture, and reform the criminal justice system. Despite some progress achieved in the field of citizen's participation, the limited level of political pluralism and limitations of media freedom are still a severe impediment for the development of civil society in general. Public debate and freedom of expression were for instance hindered during the referendum on the nuclear power plant in October 2024. The newly adopted law on mass media does not reflect Kazakhstan's international commitments and can further restrict the independent work of media agencies. 2024 also witnessed a worrying increase of cases of persecution of journalists under criminal and administrative articles on 'dissemination of knowingly false information'.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU and its Member States continued to focus their activities on the five strands of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027. The EU continued to implement the country's Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society Organisations in Kazakhstan in 2024, covering the period until 2027. The Roadmap reflects all the lessons-learned from past engagement with CSOs in Kazakhstan and takes into account the political changes that happened since January 2022. The EU focussed *inter alia* on allegations of torture, concerns with regard to the law on public assemblies, and changes to the draft law on media. Other important EU focus areas included obstacles to freedom of expression, freedom of the media, freedom of assembly and association, anti-discrimination and the protection of vulnerable persons, as well as combatting sexual and gender-based violence. While acknowledging the continued reform process in Kazakhstan, the EU underlined the importance of its effective implementation with the active participation of civil society. The EU supported several joint human rights campaigns, including on women's right and LGBTI rights and actively engaged in the preparations for the Universal Periodic Review scheduled for January 2025.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: As part of the EU's structured dialogue with Kazakhstan provided for by the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA), the Human Rights Dialogue and the Justice and Home Affairs Subcommittee were held in Astana in April 2024. The EU and Kazakhstan also discussed human rights and democracy related topics during the EU-Kazakhstan Cooperation Committee in June 2024 and the EU-Kazakhstan Cooperation Council in October 2024. In continuity with previous years, the EU Ambassador and Ambassadors of EU Member States held regular dialogues with the Ministry of Justice on human rights and democracy. It provided a useful platform for human rights advocacy and raising both systemic and ad hoc issues. Furthermore, the EU Delegation together with Member States and like-minded Embassies raised individual cases with the authorities. On 11 December 2024, the Delegation organised an end-of-year reception, where the EU Ambassador mentioned the importance of joint human rights work in Kazakhstan and thanked the partners of the EU Delegation for their efforts.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, the EU Delegation implemented six bilateral human rights related projects under the EU Human Rights and Democracy Programmes for a total amount of more than EUR 3.4 million. Out of the six, four projects (with a total budget of more than EUR 2.9 million) were newly launched in 2024. The projects under implementation aim

at: promoting and protecting the fundamental freedom of expression; promoting human rights in the media; improving the quality of human rights protection in Western Kazakhstan; contributing to eradication of torture; promoting fundamental freedoms and rights; and responding to challenges in the criminal justice system in Kazakhstan. These projects also contribute to the development and institutionalisation of interactions between civil society and public authorities. Through the bilateral cooperation facility, the EU organised coordination events between the civil society and national authorities aiming at identifying areas in needs of technical support (in the area of rule of law and detection and investigation of latent crimes).

5. Multilateral context: Throughout 2024, the EU Delegation (in some cases with like-minded countries) presented several démarches to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan on numerous human-rights-related issues. Those démarches related to both the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly Third Committee. 2024 was also Kazakhstan's final year as member of the UN Human Rights Council. During its mandate Kazakhstan initiated two adopted resolutions: on children's rights in education, and on the elimination of domestic violence.

Kyrgyz Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Kyrgyzstan has been deteriorating since 2020, in particular with regard to restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, freedom of the media, including the closure of independent media outlets and the harassment of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), activists, journalists and bloggers. A 'Foreign Representatives' law, adopted in April 2024, resulted in widespread anxiety among civil society organisations causing some to self-liquidate and others to restrict their activities to avoid possible repercussions. National minorities continue to face discrimination in access to employment, services and education. The rights of religious minorities, while legally recognised, are not always respected, and proposed amendments adopted by Parliament to the law on freedom of religion would impose additional restrictions on freedom of religion or belief. LGBTI persons continue to face discrimination. Other concerns include allegations of the law enforcement officers' use of arbitrary arrest and torture and violations of fundamental procedural protections throughout the judicial process. Corruption also remains of concern. Some positive developments include the removal of criminal liability before the adoption of the 'Foreign Representatives' law and the revision of a draft 'Mass Media' law. Measures were taken to address torture and ill-treatment in prisons, to tackle gender-based violence, and to strengthen gender equality and the rights of persons with disabilities.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to work towards implementation of the Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2021 - 2025 (GAP III) as an important priority. The annual EU-Kyrgyzstan Human Rights Dialogue took place on 21 November 2024, and addressed controversial legislative initiatives related to non-governmental organisations and freedom of the media. Other issues raised included good governance, rule of law, rights of minorities, anti-discrimination, the rights of women and children, the rights of LGBTI persons, efforts to address domestic violence, and the prevention of torture and ill-treatment. The EU continued to assist the Ombudsman Office and expressed

support for the independence of the National Preventive Mechanism in line with the UN Convention against Torture. In the framework of its development cooperation, especially within the focal sectors of rule of law and human rights, important project activities financed by the EU focused on strengthening democracy, legal and judicial reform, civil society organisations, anti-discrimination and human rights. The EU project 'Rule of Law in the Kyrgyz Republic' supported the ongoing legal and judicial reform, and the establishment of more professional, independent, accountable and transparent court system. The EU Generalised System of Preference Plus (GSP+) monitoring mission took place in Bishkek from 18-22 November 2024 to assess the implementation of 27 international conventions, related to human rights, good governance, labour rights and environment, to which Kyrgyzstan has committed to as a GSP+ beneficiary.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights are an integral part of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA), signed on 25 June 2024, and GSP+. The EU continued to raise, at all levels, concerns about the overall human rights situation in Kyrgyzstan, including the crackdown on freedom of expression, freedom of the media, and restrictions on civil society. These concerns were raised extensively during a GSP+ monitoring mission that took place in Bishkek from 18-22 November 2024, and the EU-Kyrgyzstan human rights dialogue on 21 November 2024. The EU issued several statements in 2024; in January, following the detention of 11 investigative journalists from 'Temirov live' and the raiding of the offices of '24.kg', an internet-based news agency, the EU issued a local joint statement calling for the protection of freedom of expression and the integrity of journalists and media outlets. In April 2024, the EU issued a statement in relation to President Japarov's signature of the controversial 'Foreign Representatives' law. In October 2024, a local statement was issued to express concern in relation to the verdict of 11 investigative journalists from 'Temirov Live'. The EU monitored numerous court hearings. In relation to the draft 'mass media' law and the 'foreign representatives' law, the EU regularly called on Kyrgyzstan to adhere to international standards and to take into consideration recommendations made by the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR.

4. EU financial engagement: EU programming and financial engagement on human rights advanced significantly in 2024. The Action 'Youth Empowerment, Gender Equality and Human Rights for All' was adopted (EUR 5, 4 million) and two new projects were contracted: 'Youth Rising: Kyrgyzstan's Change Makers aiming at empowering youth-related organisations' and 'Support to Human Rights Mechanisms in the Kyrgyz Republic' to increase the capacity of the Ombudsperson and of the National Committee for the Prevention of Torture. The EU continued to implement the project 'to promote fair and inclusive society in Kyrgyzstan' (almost EUR 1 million), promoting investigative journalism and fundamental freedoms and to empower women to pursue fair treatment and gender equality with the involvement of youth, especially in rural areas, irrespective of ethnicity, religion or disability. Implementation also continued for the following projects: 'Sustainable Economic Development, Empowerment and Protection of vulnerable young women' and 'Youth Empowerment for Digital Governance' empowering civil society, including informal groups of activists and rural youth. To strengthen civil society through digital skills and engage in youth inclusion and empowerment, the implementation of the following three projects continued; 'Digital Technologies for Civic Empowerment in Kyrgyzstan', 'Youth Empowerment as an Important Socio-Economic Driver', and 'to Make Invisible Vulnerable Children and Youth Visible'.

5. Multilateral context: In recent years, Kyrgyzstan has progressed in meeting its international human rights obligations relating to promoting equality, preventing violence against women, and fostering human rights in all domains of life. The EU carried out regular démarches to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan on EU priorities and initiatives at the UN General Assembly Third Committee. The EU, in cooperation with the UN, monitored the implementation of international commitments related to human rights, labour rights and good governance, including as part of GSP+. The EU continued to cooperate closely with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Russian Federation

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The situation of human rights in Russia has significantly deteriorated over the past years and continues to do so. The wave of repression persisted in 2024 without any significant signals of reversal. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, 'systematic human rights violations are part of a government strategy to control all spheres of life, both public and private, and to suppress dissent towards its aggressive foreign policy of waging war'. The number of political prisoners in the country is on the rise and varies from 800-1200 (officially) to 3 000 (unofficially) depending on the source. According to Special Rapporteur report on torture in the Russian Federation, this activity is used as State-sanctioned tools for systemic oppression. The right to fair trial is almost completely limited and human rights lawyers have become a vulnerable to persecution, as in the case of three Alexei Navalny's defence lawyers, who were prosecuted and sentenced on politically motivated grounds. The most prominent internal development of 2024 was the sudden death of opposition politician Alexei Navalny, serving a long-time imprisonment on trumped-up charges.

The authorities used existing legislation, including, inter alia, 'foreign agent' law, 'undesirable organisations' law, to stifle any dissent and stigmatise opponents of the current regime. The Criminal Code articles prohibiting 'discrediting of the army' and 'spreading false information about the army' were widely used to prosecute those opposing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and enabling wartime censorship in the country. Throughout 2024, the restrictions against dissenting citizens were strengthened by introduction of laws banning placing advertisements on 'foreign agents' resources, prohibiting 'foreign agents' to participate in elections at all levels or enabling the confiscation of property of individuals convicted under anti-war or public calls for sanctions charges. Russia also tries to take control of the Internet space by intensifying crackdown on online communication platforms and services, restricting access to VPNs or attempts to oust YouTube from Russia. According to digital rights defenders this serves the goal of restricting free speech and dissent. The government-backed ideological offensive resulted in introduction of the laws banning the so-called childfree propaganda and restricting adoption of Russian children by families from countries with legal gender transition. Since the Supreme Court declaring 'the international LGBT movement' as 'extremist' of November 2023, LGBTI individuals have been at constant threat of prosecution. The 'extremist' label was widely used to prosecute those perceived as opponents, ranging from politicians to representatives of religious minorities such as Jehovah's Witnesses. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine negatively affected the situation of Indigenous Peoples and ethnic minorities. Many of their organisations have been

outlawed or stigmatised with labels of 'foreign agents' or 'undesirable organisations'. According to independent studies, the minorities' representatives are more likely to be drafted to the Russian army, and subsequently killed or injured, than ethnic Russians. Situation in the North Caucasus, particularly in Chechnya, is marked with grave human rights violations that include cases of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings or torture and serious limitations of women and LGBTI rights.

Numerous Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war are held in arbitrary detention on the territory of the Russian Federation and are subjected to widespread torture and ill-treatment.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Support for Russian independent media, civil society and human rights defenders inside and outside Russia is crucial in light of the constantly deteriorating human rights situation in Russia and constitutes one of the key elements of EU's approach to Russia.

In the absence of a human rights dialogue and other political contact with Russian authorities, the EU has frequently reached out to consult with Russian civil society organisations, international organisations and like-minded countries with regard to the situation of human rights in Russia. Raising public awareness, keeping the topic on the agenda in international human rights fora and using several instruments such as trial observation and attempted visits of political prisoners in prisons are important EU actions.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: As a response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU suspended all bilateral engagement with Russia, including programmes and projects with Russian public bodies and state-owned enterprises.

After the sudden death of Alexei Navalny, a new sanctions regime targeting those responsible for human rights violations in Russia was adopted on 27 May 2024. The listings under this regime include individuals and an entity responsible for persecution of Alexei Navalny, Oleg Orlov and Alexandra Skochilenko. This sanctions regime is a part of the EU's response to the accelerating and systematic repression in Russia. Furthermore, the new sanctions regime introduces trade restrictions on exporting equipment, which might be used for internal repression, as well as on equipment, technology or software intended primarily for use in information security and the monitoring or interception of telecommunication. At the same time, the EU Global Human Rights sanctions Regime includes listings in connection to numerous grave human rights violations in Russia, namely Vladimir Kara-Murza's case, human rights abuses in Chechnya, the misuse of facial recognition technology by Moscow authorities.

The EU continued raising concerns over the human rights situation, individual cases and legislative developments using public statements and social media. The EU Delegation in Moscow reached out to the Russian authorities regarding the human rights issues on several occasions, however, with no meaningful response from the Russian side.

4. EU financial engagement: Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, all activities with Russian state-linked entities were suspended. The EU continues to engage directly with Russian civil society, human rights defenders and independent media inside and outside Russia, since they are a crucial channel to Russian audience.

5. Multilateral context: In 2024, the UN Human Rights Council continued to address the human rights situation in Russia. On 12 October 2024, the resolution extending for an additional year the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Russia was adopted. All the EU Member States taking part in the vote supported the resolution.

On 13 September and 28 October, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Russia presented detailed reports to the UN. They concerned the general human rights situation in the country and torture as a tool of repression. It was the first time the UN Human Rights Council and the General Assembly raised the issue of the human rights situation in a member of the UN Security Council.

Republic of Tajikistan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Tajikistan's poor human rights situation remained unchanged, particularly in the area of freedom of expression, freedom of the media, freedom of association and rights of persons belonging to minorities, women's rights and refugees. In addition, Russia's increased restrictions on Tajik migrants, including deportations and heightened harassment, have raised not only human rights issues but also economic and security concerns.

Scrutiny and pressure on human rights defenders and civil society organisations remained high. The space for political participation remained extremely limited in a country with a highly centralised political system and tight control over political, economic and civil rights. Several prominent Tajik human rights defenders and activists remain in prison with long sentences. The funding for civil society organisations remained very limited.

In 2024, the Freedom House recorded a deterioration in the field of freedom of expression and belief. Tajikistan's Freedom House World survey rating declined from 1 to 0 as the authorities prosecuted and intimidated activists and bloggers for their online and offline activity, which makes ordinary people applying self-censorship to avoid reprisals.

Freedom House also recorded intensified government efforts to suppress Pamiri ethnic identity as well as applying a pervasive discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and other factors while the scope for the exercise of freedom of religion or belief falls short of the guarantees of international human rights law. In June 2024, the Tajik Parliament amended a protocol bill practically banning religious clothing such as the hijab from public space labelling such attire as 'foreign to Tajik culture'. This move is seen as a part of a broader campaign against public displays of religiosity. These measures took place as part of a counter-terrorism response to the terrorist attacks in Russia, Turkey and Europe at the beginning of 2024 committed by Tajik citizens.

In the Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), only a handful of independent civil society organisations remain operational. The Aga Khan Development Networks lost its diplomatic status in Tajikistan in October 2024 and is in the process of re-registration. Several prominent Tajik human rights defenders and activists remain in prison with heavy prison sentences, especially in connection with the GBAO 'special operation' of 2022. Among them is Manuchehr Kholiqnazarov, a Pamiri human rights activist and lawyer, convicted in 2023, who received the Martin Ennals Award for human rights defenders in 2024 while serving his 16 year-long prison sentence.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2024, EU action focused on issues such as media freedom and freedom of expression, support to independent civil society and human rights defenders, and the promotion of gender equality and women's rights, with a particular focus on access to justice and gender-based violence. The EU persistently called on the authorities to take necessary steps to criminalise domestic violence. The EU opposed the practice of holding

behind-closed-doors trials that bear significant human rights concern, and demanded Tajik authorities to open judicial procedures to observation, including to the diplomatic community.

In October 2024, the EU facilitated a dialogue between the Tajik state and civil society on the protection and promotion of human rights in Tajikistan. The dialogue gathered close to 100 participants and indicated the importance of the ratification of the OPCAT and of the establishment of the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) to ensure facilitating dialogue for reform and improving the situation in places of deprivation of liberty.

The EU, together with local partners, reacted to the UNHCR reports of a forcible return of 77 Afghani nationals, stressing the importance of respecting human rights obligations under international conventions.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to monitor human rights developments in Tajikistan and to address them in its working and high level meetings and dialogues. It facilitated a platform for dialogue between civil society and government, supported Tajik local authorities in discussing human rights issues, amplifying the importance of human rights and engaging civil society and international organisations (in particular UN and OSCE), in cooperation with its bilateral partners, in addressing issues. The EU-Tajikistan Human Rights Dialogue planned for 2024 was postponed for the first quarter of 2025. The EU keeps urging the authorities to uphold its human rights commitments and international obligations, including the international fair trial standards. The issue of human rights and fundamental freedoms was one of the key conditions for the EU for extending the period to assess the Tajik application for the Generalised System of Preference Plus (GSP+). The lack of willingness of the Tajik authorities to address specific human rights issues proved to be a main obstacle for achieving progress on Tajikistan's GSP+ application. The negotiations of the EU-Tajikistan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA), launched in February 2023, provided another platform for engaging Tajik authorities on human rights issues. The EU continued to raise concrete individual human rights cases in bilateral exchanges with the government, notably the imprisonment of human rights defenders, journalists, and lawyers on politically motivated charges and called for their immediate and unconditional release.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, the EU supported a number of human rights projects. As a result of an open call, the EU signed five new, 2.18 million EUR worth, projects with local and international NGOs focusing on women empowerment, victims of domestic violence, torture prevention, penitentiary system reform, strengthening CSOs, supporting youth, women, and people with disabilities.

Additional EU-funded projects contributed to the upholding the rights of the child, including the repatriation of children and their caregivers returning from Syria and Iraq. The EU financially supported efforts to strengthen women's rights, including their access to justice and labour market, also providing support to national minorities, youth and media professionalism, in addition to raising awareness about laws and international human rights obligations related to detainees and refugees.

5. Multilateral context: In March 2024, the UN Human Rights Council discussed the Report of Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, in which she indicated that many human rights defenders and civil society organizations have reported that they are facing increased administrative burdens, including inspections, that may be particularly crippling for smaller, under-resourced, and grass-roots organizations. The report criticized Tajikistan for dissolving 700 non-governmental organisations during an 18-month

period and urged the government to reconsider its stance towards civil society as well as to view human rights defenders as allies rather than adversaries. EUDEL and EU MS representatives delivered in a Team Europe spirit démarches on EU priorities at the 79th session of UNGA's Third Committee at the MFA of Tajikistan (on the Resolution on the Human Rights situation in the DPRK; on the human rights situation of Rohingya Muslims and other Minorities in Myanmar; on the Freedom of Religion or Belief; and on the resolution on a Moratorium on the use of the death penalty).

Turkmenistan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, the overall human rights situation in Turkmenistan remained difficult. Restrictions to the freedom of movement (internal and external), violations of freedom of association, assembly, as well as freedom of expression and the media, persisted. Concerns remained regarding restrictions to freedom of religion or belief; children's rights; the situation of the LGBTI community (inter alia consensual sex between men remained criminalised); cases of torture and ill-treatment in prisons. Some improvements were noted in the areas of the rights of persons with disabilities, addressing gender equality and gender-based violence, and the cooperation with the ILO on eradicating forced labour. Turkmenistan became the second country globally (after Kyrgyzstan) to eliminate all known cases of statelessness. The reported practice of refusing to issue passports to Turkmen citizens abroad has hindered access to birth registration, and implied the risk of the reverse trend. Turkmenistan continued the implementation of the second National Human Rights Action Plan and the second Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2021-2025.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU and its Members States continued support to capacity building of Turkmen authorities to implement international human rights conventions and domestic legislation. A number of workshops, seminars, trainings and events were organised through regional and bilateral programmes. The areas included good governance and access to justice; revision of the Civil Code; promotion of accession to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; human rights education for legal professionals; training for diplomats; drug policy; combatting cybercrimes, terrorism and countering drug trafficking.

The EU continued advocating for reforms of the judicial and prison systems. A number of actions were held through the Law Enforcement in Central Asia (LEICA) program, and dedicated events through the Central Asia Drug Action Programme (CADAP).

The EU continued its actions in supporting civil society and human rights defenders, including journalists. Diplomatic action was taken in the number of individual cases, and a series of events were held in Turkmenistan and in the region.

In 2024, for the first time, local Turkmen civil society organisations started implementing projects funded under the EU thematic CSO programme: Ynanch-Vepa – Your ECO Infoteque, Ashgabat Club Ynam - Stop Human Trafficking, and the Union of Economists of Turkmenistan - Improving the competitiveness of women in the private sector of the labour market in Turkmenistan.

Gender equality and women's rights were at core of the EU action in Turkmenistan. Targeted actions included a workshop on gender-sensitive communication held in Turkmenabad, organised jointly by the EUDEL, BOMCA, and the Office of the Ombudsperson; a training for

women entrepreneurs under the EU-funded project 'Improving the Competitiveness of Women in the Private Sector of the Labour Market', which included a legislative review and a survey; an awareness campaign under the 'Stop Human Trafficking' project. In October 2024, EU Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen met with women entrepreneurs in Ashgabat.

Turkmenistan participated in the EEAS 'Inspire Inclusion Portrait Gallery'; on the eve of the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris, an exhibition 'Les Elles des Jeux' opened at the French Institute in Turkmenistan. Participants from Turkmenistan benefited from regional programmes and projects, including the EBRD's 'Advice for Small Businesses project', the Regional Conference on Gender and Energy, organised by SECCA; and the Young Women 4 Peace Initiative.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU voiced its concerns about a number of individual cases through accessible diplomatic means, including verbal notes and démarches. Human rights were raised during bilateral engagements, including in the framework of the annual Joint Committee meeting and the Human Rights Dialogue. For the latter, the EUSR for Human Rights travelled to Ashgabat, and the level of the chair on the Turkmen side was raised to Deputy Foreign Minister.

4. EU financial engagement: The protection and promotion of human rights, with particular emphasis on the rights of women and persons with disabilities, has been mainstreamed across all projects that the EU implements in Turkmenistan, both at bilateral and regional level.

The EU-funded project 'Stop Human Trafficking', implemented by the Turkmen CSO Ynam is a pertinent example of an initiative with a ground-breaking effort to raise public awareness about the risks and challenges of migration, the rules of staying in foreign countries, and address irregular migration and human trafficking. By addressing vulnerabilities at the root, the project strengthened Turkmenistan's ability to counter human trafficking and protect its citizens abroad. The 'Stop Human Trafficking' project exemplified the positive impact of EU-supported initiatives in addressing global challenges at the local level. Its success sets a benchmark for similar initiatives across Central Asia.

5. Multilateral context: Turkmenistan maintained a low level of engagement with multilateral human rights institutions. Turkmenistan has never been a member of the HRC and is not substantially active as an observer. No UN Special Procedures visited the country since 2008 despite standing invitation extended in 2018. Turkmenistan participated in the OSCE ODIHR HDIM in September 2024. Human rights concerns were raised by the European Parliament, the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, as well as within the OSCE and UN frameworks. The EU continued encouraging Turkmenistan to seek advice of specialised international bodies, to study best practices of other countries, and to involve civil society in the process of reforms as well as drafting or amending legislation and implementing the human rights instruments.

Republic of Uzbekistan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The general picture for human rights and democracy in Uzbekistan in 2024 was mixed. There were some steps forward, notably the strengthening of protection measures from domestic violence and the ratification of several ILO Conventions. However, the space for political participation remained limited and legislative and local elections, held on 27 October 2024 and observed by an OSCE mission,

lacked political pluralism. The elections did result however in a significant increase of women representatives in both houses. Pressure on independent journalists and bloggers increased and further restrictions on the freedom of association could be observed. Other key concerns remain the criminalisation of consensual homosexual relationships, torture in pre-trial detention, forced evictions, restrictive registration requirements for NGOs and the lack of independence of the judiciary. Full transparency and accountability following the violent unrest in Nukus in July 2022 continued to be lacking. While the Investigative Commission presented its report to the Oliy Majlis, only the summary was published so far. It follows the official narrative and does not address the allegations of torture of protesters in pre-trial detention.

2. EU action - key focus areas: During 2024, the EU and its Member States continued to focus their activities on the five strands of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027.

The EU Delegation in Tashkent kept in constant touch with human rights defenders, civil activists and registered NGOs. The EU Delegation worked closely with like-minded partners, including UN agencies and third country embassies, to coordinate their activities. Human rights and democracy were a regular item on the agenda of the monthly EU Heads of Mission meetings as well as observing the local and legislative elections. Staff from the EU Delegation also attended and observed key trials in cases involving human rights defenders.

A prison visit (together with the embassies of the UK and the US) was organised on 13 June 2024. While the visit was largely symbolic in nature, it represented a major first step towards further engagement on this issue.

On 11 December 2024, to mark International Human Rights Day, the EU Delegation (jointly with the US, UK and Swiss Embassies) hosted a round table on 'Registration, Functioning and Financing of the Civil Society Organisations in Uzbekistan'.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: As part of the EU's structured dialogue with Uzbekistan, the Human Rights Dialogue and Justice and Home Affairs Subcommittee were held in Tashkent in June 2024. The EU used this opportunity to engage in a detailed discussion with the government of Uzbekistan on a broad range of human rights and democracy-related issues, including concerns over the freedom of expression, pressure on civil society activists, perceptions that the space for civic engagement in Uzbekistan is shrinking and on forced evictions.

The GSP+ monitoring cycle 2024/2025 provided a further opportunity to engage with Uzbekistan on human rights.

The (then) EU Special Representative for Central Asia, Ambassador Terhi Hakala, visited Uzbekistan three times in 2024. In her meetings with President Mirziyoyev and other members of his government human rights issues were regularly raised. The EUSR also engaged with civil society and media representatives during her visits.

4. EU financial engagement: The projects under the EU's Human Rights and Democracy Instruments mentioned in last year's report are ongoing. As a result of the call for proposals in 2024, five new initiatives were selected for funding for a total amount of EUR 2 million. These new initiatives, implemented by CSOs, are focused on issues such as women empowerment, gender-based violence, youth engagement, enhancing civic participation, media skills and others.

Following the 2023 call for proposals under the CSO Thematic Programme, seven EU-funded projects with a total value of EUR 2.9 million started their activities. Projects are focussing on enhancing the capacities of civil society organizations for inclusive development, advocating for gender equality, advancing the Green Agenda, and on enhancing gender-responsiveness. They are expected to be implemented between 2024 and 2026. In addition, a series of capacity-building trainings for nearly 60 CSOs was successfully concluded in October 2024.

5. Multilateral context: In the UN General Assembly, Uzbekistan abstained on all country-specific resolutions, with the exception of those relating to Gaza. The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Balakrishnan Rajagopal visited Uzbekistan from 18 to 30 August 2024. The final outcome report of the fourth Universal Periodical Review (UPR) of Uzbekistan was adopted by the UN Human Rights Council in its 55th session in June 2024. Uzbekistan has, however, not yet presented a roadmap for the implementation of the 2023 UPR recommendations.

Africa

Republic of Angola

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Angola continues to face challenges in democratic governance and human development, with the socio-economic situation suffering because of years of economic recession, concomitant worsening of health and quality-of-life indicators, and the first local elections postponed *sine die*. The country has made progress with the implementation of the Angolan National Strategy for Human Rights, adopted in 2020. Efforts to finance, staff and operationalise the network of Local Human Rights Committees are ongoing. So far, 124 out of 164 municipal committees are operational, as are the provincial committees in 18 provinces[16].

Throughout 2024, concerns have been raised regarding the reduced space for civil society with the consequent limitation of freedom of expression, assembly and association. This might be a consequence of a number of laws approved or under discussion, which also bring further potential restrictions to freedom of expression, association and assembly. These include the Law on National Security and the Law on Crimes of Vandalism of Public Goods and Services already adopted and in effect; the Draft Law on the Statute of NGOs, which has been 'frozen' for more than a year in the National Assembly. Presidential Decree No. 214/24, approved on 18 October, creates the Institute for the Supervision of Community Activities, which has the mandate and powers of 'monitoring, supervision and evaluation of programmes and projects implemented by Non-Profit Organizations that operate in Angola and their financial flows'.

Pluralism and inclusiveness in the information environment in Angola are limited. Nevertheless, in 2024, Angola's position in the annual World Press Index improved, moving from 125th out of 180 in 2023 to 104th in 2024. Despite considerable female representation in politics, gender inequalities remain. As for child rights, the situation is dire, with about 30% of new-borns not registered and education and health rights not universally guaranteed. The

[16] The number of provinces raised to 21 from January 2025.

same applies to young people, who suffer from high levels of unemployment and limited means of expression beyond social media. Angola has made progress in recognizing and addressing domestic violence. Despite these efforts, cultural norms, especially in rural areas, often justify domestic abuse, making it challenging for survivors to report incidents. The LGBTI community faces discrimination, in spite of important legal reforms. The 2019 Penal Code decriminalises consensual same-sex sexual activity and prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continues to support human rights and democracy in Angola in partnership with the government and civil society. The Multiannual Indicative Programme for the period 2021-2027 identifies transparent, accountable and effective governance as a priority area. The EU also supports important judicial and public administration reforms as well as the expansion of the national social-protection system.

The thematic budget line dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy, funded under NDICI's Human Rights & Democracy thematic line, complements the bilateral cooperation envelope with specific actions in favour of people in vulnerable situations. In 2024, two new grant contracts were signed for the implementation of actions dedicated to the protection and promotion of the rights of the child–a key area of cooperation.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The Annual Human Rights Dialogue with the Minister of Justice and Human Rights and the Heads of Mission of EU Member States took place on 14 March 2024. The agenda of the Human Rights Dialogue included the following topics: an update on Angola's National Human Rights Strategy and the EU priorities on human rights, including the rights of the child; GBV; business and human rights; freedom of expression; as well as freedom of assembly.

The meeting allowed the EU and its MS to raise specific concerns related to human rights and to reiterate the offer to help protect and promote human rights and defend fundamental freedoms, such as the freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of assembly.

During the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign, from 25 November to 10 December, the EU promoted a calendar of activities, including numerous EU-funded projects implemented by CSOs, aimed at raising awareness of GBV and the need to eradicate it.

4. EU financial engagement: A number of EU-funded human-rights projects have been satisfactorily implemented in 2024. Their key objectives include: supporting freedom of expression and media freedom; contributing to economic and social inclusion of persons with disabilities; fight against GBV; protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights, among others. At the end of 2024, the EU signed two new grant contracts for the implementation of actions dedicated to the protection and promotion of the rights of the child.

PASCAL, the EU programme to support civil society and local government, is supporting a new model of dialogue and participation between the government and civil society, following a bottom-up approach. ProReact, the EU programme to develop an effective system to combat illicit financial flows, assisted Angola in developing an effective system to combat illicit financial flows.

5. Multilateral context: Angola has made efforts to cooperate with UN bodies in order to promote human rights, including by engaging with several UN special procedure mandate holders. As part of the fourth cycle of the UN Human Rights Council's UPR, the human rights record of Angola was addressed during the 48th session in Geneva. During the third cycle, Angola had received 270 recommendations, of which it accepted 259 and noted 11. To date, Angola has not yet ratified the Rome Statute of the ICC or the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Republic of Benin

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: With the return of opposition parties to Parliament since January 2023, there has been more space for pluralism and debate. However, the electoral code was modified and tightened again in March 2024, raising further concern that the Opposition could be *de facto* virtually barred from competing in the presidential and legislative elections of 2026. The year 2024 also saw previous close advisers to the President arrested and accused of preparing a coup. At the same time, two prominent Opposition members, Reckya Madougou and Joël Aïvo, remain in jail on charges related to terrorism (Madougou) and breaching state security (Aïvo). Restrictions to civic space and freedom of expression remain. Nevertheless, Benin has progressed in the 2024 RSF ranking (from 112 in 2023 to 89 out of 180 in 2024). In the run-up to the 2026 general elections, tension is rising and freedom of assembly is undermined. Conditions in prisons are deplorable due to overpopulation, filthiness, lack of water and medical treatments, among others. Authorities have committed to improving this situation. Since 2021, children's and women's rights as well as good governance have seen positive developments. Legislative progress was made on women's rights and gender equality. However, women are still exposed to various forms of discrimination and inequality, both in their professional and personal lives. Sexual minorities are sidelined. Lastly, Benin's education and health sector still face serious challenges as well.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The action of EU and Member States in Benin focuses on the following three strategic priorities defined in the Country Strategy: The fight against inequalities–including women, children and minority rights; reinforcement of civic and politic space–namely freedom of the press, speech, opinion, assembly, space for civil society and access to information; and accountability of public institutions–including good governance, the fight against corruption, and support to the Benin Human Rights Commission.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: 2024 was particularly dense in terms of EU bilateral political engagement. A visit of the EU Council's Africa Working Party (COAFR) in February-March 2024 provided the occasion for several high-level meetings on, among others, the promotion of human rights and democracy. These meetings confirmed the closeness and trust established between Benin and the EU. The President of the European Council visited Benin in April. The Partnership Dialogue on 13 June 2024 saw a large participation from both the Benin Government and EU MS. Another key moment in the bilateral political engagement between EU and Benin was a joint visit to Benin by the President of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) David Mac Allister and representatives of DG INTPA in March 2024.

The EU and Member States individually take part in the technical financial partners (PTF) sectorial groups. EU maintains a regular dialogue with Beninese CSOs, 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 partly covered by the DH&D instrument. Under this instrument, the EU financially supported the Beninese Commission on Human Rights until August 2024. In 2024 also, support to human rights education reached its end on a positive note. Two projects are still ongoing: support to the role of civil society in the UPR process and support to the pacification of electoral processes. The EU pledged new funds to support civil society observation and pre-electoral actions for the 2026 general elections and validated a G2 project to support women's and girls' participation and leadership. Several projects on the rights of women, children and minorities are funded via bilateral co-operation programmes of BENELUX, France and Germany, respectively.

5. Multilateral context: Benin was re-elected as a member of the UNHRC for the period 2025-2027. Benin is aligned with the EU and its Member States within international fora when it comes to human rights. For instance, Benin's vote at the UNGA was aligned with the EU Member States six times out of seven since the beginning of Russia's aggression on Ukraine.

Republic of Botswana

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Following a historic general election on 30 October 2024, Umbrella for Democratic Change under the leadership of Duma Boko assumed power a few days after the elections. Congratulating President Boko and the people of Botswana on the peaceful exercise of their civic rights, the EU welcomed the exemplary transition of power, after outgoing President Masisi conceded defeat. The historic election outcome and peaceful transition of power confirm the strong democratic traditions of Botswana.

While human rights and fundamental freedoms are generally upheld in Botswana, concerns remain, such as the death penalty, GBV and gender inequality, rights of minorities and rights of refugees and asylum seekers. There are moreover challenges with trust in law enforcement, police violence, corruption, and transparent and free media. After the elections and the commitment of the new authorities to apply a human rights-based approach to governance, it remains to be seen whether this will have concrete impact.

Following Zimbabwe's abolition of the death penalty in December 2024, Botswana is the only country in the region of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) still applying capital punishment, a position reconfirmed on 17 December 2024, as Botswana voted against the UN resolution calling for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. Since 2021, there have been no executions while 17 individuals are on death row, some of whom have exhausted their appeals.

GBV remained a serious concern, together with broader gender inequality. Statistics of murder, rape, defilement cases are on the rise. According to UNFPA, in Botswana over 67% of women have experienced abuse.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2024 the EU Delegation, in conjunction with EU MS, continued to promote the main dates of the international human-rights calendar, including the World Day against Death Penalty, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the International Human Rights Day. To mark the International Human Rights Day on 10 December 2024, the EU Ambassador attended a commemoration event coinciding with the funeral of Pitseng Gaborekwe in Metsiamanong Settlement in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. EUDEL also participated in the Botswana Pride event, and the informal Women's Network launched by the EU Ambassador remained active and is growing steadily.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU as a whole engages the Botswana Government on human rights within the Partnership Dialogue, which is organised annually in line with the Samoa Agreement. The latest Dialogue took place on 23 May 2024 addressing a broad range of issues from EU-Botswana partnership and trade to regional and multilateral issues. The 2024 general elections, human rights and the death penalty were discussed in an open and constructive atmosphere. The EU, along with other development partners, continue to offer their support to the Government in the implementation of the recommendations of the UPR mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council.

4. EU financial engagement: Four thematic grants to CSOs for a total amount of EUR 780.000 started implementation in 2024. It includes a project called 'Think Twice!' to strengthen the capacity of CSOs active in the field of sexual education and gender equality through educational theatre and drama in the district of Ghanzi. Two other projects on strengthening CSOs' institutional and operational capacity to respond to gender inequalities and violence will strive to improve gender equality and contribute to the prevention of GBV at the local level in different districts of the country.

5. Multilateral context: Botswana has ratified or acceded to most of the main international human rights instruments , including the ICCPR, CRPD, CEDAW, ICERD, and CAT, but not the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

Given President Boko's legal and human rights background, it is expected that he will conduct an active international policy in the areas of human rights and democracy, including in fora such as SADC, African Union and the UN'.

Burkina Faso

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Burkina Faso continued to face serious challenges with regard to human rights and democracy in 2024. The insecurity generated by terrorist groups has led to the highest number of victims of terrorism globally in 2023–8.571 people–according to the Global Terrorism Index. The authorities estimate that the government controls 70% of the national territory. Some 40 urban centres remain under blockade by the terrorist groups.

On 31 March 2023, 2.062.534 IDP were registered according to official statistics; there has been no update since. The government announced in December 2024 that more than one million IDPs would have returned. In March 2024, some 2.7 million people were estimated to experience food insecurity.

According to the OHCHR, terrorist groups are perpetrating most of the human rights violations in the country. The OHCHR reported 802 violations and abuses of human rights between January and August 2024 with 3942 civilian victims, which amounts to a 79% increase from 2023. A number of massacres by terrorist groups took place in 2024, especially against civilian populations. It is estimated that an attack in Barsologho, Centre-North province, on 24 August 2024 resulted in hundreds of fatalities, overwhelmingly civilian. The fight against impunity remains a major challenge.

On 25 May 2024, the Assises Nationales decided on the extension of the transitional period following the 2022 military coup by a period of up to five years to be counted from 2 July 2024. This transition may end and elections may be held sooner if the security situation allows. The preparation of reforms of the electoral code and legislation for political participation is ongoing but has not yet been shared with the Transitional Legislative Assembly (ALT).

The activity of political parties remained suspended in 2024. The difficulties for the media continued, e.g. several international news outlets were temporarily forbidden to broadcast in Burkina Faso. Pressure is exerted on journalists, opposition figures and magistrates, some of which are enrolled as Volontaires pour la Defense de la Patrie (VDP), i.e. auxiliaries of the defence and security forces. Several cases of opposition activists disappearing – or, in certain instances if they were living abroad, the disappearing of their relatives – were denounced.

The stigmatisation, discrimination and violence against LGBTI community continued in 2024, in particular in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso. On July 10, 2024, the government transmitted to the Transitional Legislative Assembly a bill to reform the Code of the Person and the Family (CPF), which, among other dispositions, criminalises homosexuality and assimilated practices. According to the same bill, individuals acting or behaving against the interests of Burkina Faso can be stripped of their citizenship.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to support the priorities set out in the strategy for Human Rights 2021-24 for Burkina Faso. These priorities encompassed security and human rights, including IHL; justice; gender and rights of women and girls; children's rights; strengthening of democracy and governance in the area of human rights; strengthening of civil society and the media; as well as new technologies in the framework of promoting democracy and safeguarding human rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged on human rights issues in different ways, such as via dialogue between EUDEL and the authorities, as well as between the EUSR for the Sahel and the authorities; through the celebration of Human Rights Day together with the OHCHR and the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH), or via statements, e.g. the Spokesperson declaration of 29 April (on the HRW report of 25 April), and the HRVP statement of 24 August (on the terrorist attack on Barsologho). The EU continued its partnership with the OHCHR and the CNDH throughout the year.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU's work took place in close cooperation and coordination with the present Member States, with focus on seven areas of action: security and human rights, including IHL; justice; children's rights; women's and girls' rights; strengthening of democracy and governance in the area of human rights; strengthening of civil society and the media; as well as new technologies in the framework of promoting democracy and safeguarding human rights.

Some examples of EU-supported projects carried out in 2024 go hereunder. The FASOVEIL (Facilitating Accountability and Citizen Monitoring with Civil Society) programme supports the local civil society in its monitoring of the quality of formulation and implementation of public policies. In 2024, this monitoring work led to the publication of an 'alternative' report highlighting good performance as well as areas where improvement was needed. The report was presented to the authorities and a dialogue on the way forward ensued. The 'Young Leaders' programme provides training and support each year for a selected group of committed young leaders from different regions and communities across the country. Training includes field trips, coaching to develop their own initiatives and projects benefitting their local community as well as the country more broadly, awareness raising sessions on citizen engagement and inclusive and accountable governance, as well as human rights. In 2024, 45 young leader thus received support for their personal initiatives. In addition, the EU supported awareness-raising on human rights as well as the fight against impunity through the justice system and bodies such as the CNDH. Lastly, the EU financed human rights training programmes, implemented by the OHCHR.

5. Multilateral context: The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, visited Burkina Faso in March 2024. The EU continued its cooperation with the OHCHR as well as with the CNDH. On March 26 2024, a high-level dialogue between members of the Gender consultation framework (*Cadre de Concertation Genre*), where the EU is represented, and ministers responsible for Gender equality took place.

Republic of Burundi

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy situation remained problematic and structural reforms are needed. Shrinking civic, media and political space marked 2024. Challenges to the respect of human rights and the rule of law remained, including in the fight against impunity, and access to justice and information. A positive development in 2024 was the Government's announcement to release up to 5000 prisoners, a decision that should be fully implemented in 2025. Another encouraging event was the release of journalist Floriane Irangabiye in August 2024, following a presidential pardon, after she had been detained since August 2022. Nevertheless, other journalists are still imprisoned.

Impunity remained rampant: the Imbonerakure militia, the armed branch of the ruling party, acted without any accountability, although slightly less evidently than in the past. CSOs and human rights defenders continued to be under pressure and to be subjected to arbitrary arrests and intimidations. While the Burundian government continued to show its ambition in the areas of economic and social rights, it also continued to face serious allegations of killings, enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment, rape and sexual violence, as well as arbitrary arrests and detention of opponents throughout 2024, in particular in the run-up to the legislative elections in 2025. Extensive pressure was put on the Burundian population to register to vote in October-November, with those not registering being blocked from accessing public services, markets, schools and other facilities, and sometimes even imprisoned. Burundi's political opposition is finding it difficult to play its role to the full, under the dual constraint of the restriction of democratic and political spaces by those in power and a lack of internal leadership.

While the legal framework addressing women's rights in Burundi is solid, the weak implementation of laws and policies coupled with rampant corruption and discriminatory social norms hamper the realisation of women's rights and equal opportunities. Despite ongoing stigma and limited access to services for persons with disabilities, Burundi's Disability Policy marks a significant step towards an inclusive, rights-based society by integrating disability issues across government departments. Burundi hosted more than 88000 Congolese refugee and asylum seekers, living in precarious conditions both in the five camps (63%) and in urban areas (37%). Since 2017, the Government, together with hosting countries and the UNHCR through the Tripartite Commissions, assisted the voluntary return of more than 178 000 refugees. Nevertheless, the number of Burundian refugees in the Great Lakes region remained–with around 255,700-high. Despite the ongoing efforts of the Government in adopting an Action plan for the reintegration of refugees and IDPs in Burundi, challenges on reintegration still exist.

2. EU's action - key focus areas: The EU's actions focused on five areas: support to the reform of the justice sector; women's rights and the elimination of violence against women; children's rights; freedom of expression and regulation and capacity-building in the media sector; and strengthening the democratic culture and the rule of law. Concerning the justice sector, a positive development worth highlighting is that the Government organised, with EU support, a competition to recruit judges, its first in ten years, which culminated in the recruitment of 169 judges in December 2024.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Since 2021, bilateral exchanges on human rights with the Government and stakeholders have intensified. The EUSR for Human Rights visited the country in February and engaged with the Government at the highest level as well as with political and civil society stakeholders. The EU-Burundi Partnership Dialogue continued to be key in reviewing progress linked with human rights, good governance and the rule of law. The EU maintained an autonomous restrictive measures regime in place in view of the situation in Burundi, which applied against a Burundian citizen due to, inter alia, his involvement in the violent repressions of 2015 and links to the Imbonerakure militia. The EU carried out formal démarches on human rights and democracy issues to request support for its initiatives in UN fora. It also supported the renewal of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights situation in Burundi, Mr Fortuné Gaetan Zongo, in the autumn of 2024.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, the EU funded human-rights related actions for a total of EUR 22.5 million focused on its key priority areas, namely access to fair and impartial justice, children's rights, fight against GBV, democratic governance ahead of the 2025 elections, and the protection and promotion of fundamental rights. Key initiatives included ongoing support for a human rights-based criminal justice system, with programmes aimed at rehabilitation, reintegration, and improving access to justice for vulnerable groups, alongside a new project promoting children's rights, 'Nkingira Nkure Neza' which aims to strengthen child protection committees. The EU also funded a project to monitor hate speech and disinformation, though it was suspended. The AHEAD (Action for Holistic Electoral Approach for Democracy) project worked on electoral participation and conflict prevention, supporting both citizens and institutions involved in the electoral process. Additionally, the EU focused on gender equality, providing systematic support for gender mainstreaming across all programs, and launching projects to combat GBV and promote the political participation of women and youth. These initiatives included the creation of a national observatory on gender-based violence within the ministry in charge of gender equality, and a project to support the participation and

representation of women and youth in the upcoming elections. The EU organized campaigns against GBV in the framework of the 16 Days of Activism campaign, and supported peacebuilding efforts through the 'Building Peace from the Inside' project.

5. Multilateral Framework: Burundi is party to several key international human rights instruments. However, the country withdrew from the ICC Statute in October 2017. Based on a resolution proposed by the EU, the UNHRC in 2024 extended by a year the mandate of the UNSR on the situation of human rights in Burundi. The Burundian government continued to refuse any cooperation with the Special Rapporteur. No progress was achieved for reopening the OHCHR office in Burundi. In UN fora, Burundi did not align with the EU's positions on human rights. Burundi is a member of the UN Human Rights Council. So far, Burundi has not released any voluntary pledges regarding its membership. Since 6 June 2025, Burundi chairs the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee of the UNGA.

Republic of Cabo Verde

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Throughout 2024, Cabo Verde (CV) maintained good compliance with international human rights standards. Positive developments compared to last year's report were noticeable. The country has enjoyed a good degree of political stability and has maintained a solid position in human rights and corruption perception indexes. CV is widely recognised as a reference for the sub-region and the continent for achievements in the area of human rights and democratic governance, including fair and transparent elections. The implementation of the 2019 Gender Parity Law contributed to a significant increase in the participation of women in Parliament from 23.6% to 38.8%. However, CV continues to face challenges on gender equality and on GBV. The number of GBV complaints remains high and harmful stereotypes continue to be a persistent problem in a patriarchal society, though CV has scaled up efforts to counter GBV and support victims. In 2023, the state budget included, for the first time, an allocation of around EUR 385.000 to the 'Victims Support Fund', as well as education and awareness-raising campaigns. Another remaining challenge concerns a draft law on non-discrimination of vulnerable groups, including of LGBTI, which is still to be discussed in Parliament. Child protection, including from sexual exploitation, remains a serious concern and is increasingly gaining public attention. Prison conditions also continue to be a concern and are one of the most reported issues in complaints received by the CNDHC (*Comissão Nacional para os Direitos Humanos e a Cidadania*), the national commission for human rights and citizenship. On human trafficking, the Government is currently drafting a National Strategy and Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2023–2026).

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU budget support programme includes an indicator on the development of a plan aimed at keeping girls in the school system or in vocational training and preventing school dropouts due to early pregnancy. Following a call for proposals to CSOs, three projects aimed at developing sustainable tourism in four islands (Santo Antão, São Vicente, Fogo and Brava) were selected. Implementation should begin in 2024 and include a crosscutting objective to prevent the sexual exploitation of children. The EU organised a high-level political dialogue in 2024 on sexual abuse and exploitation of women and children in the tourism sector. Interlocutors included the President of the National Assembly and other members of Parliament, as well as the Secretary of State for Family and Social Inclusion, the CNDHC and the Cabo Verdean Institute for Children and Adolescents (ICCA), as well as CSOs.

A number of recommendations resulted from this dialogue, including the need to produce specific materials and develop training for teachers. Meanwhile, a partnership between ICCA, the EU and the UNDP has been established for that purpose.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The joint communique issued after the Ministerial Meeting of 31 January 2025 confirmed the commitment of both EU and CV to human rights and democracy. The EU and its MS actively support gender equality and women and girls empowerment in Cabo Verde. Gender is a crosscutting priority in all political and policy dialogues between the EU and Cabo Verde. As in previous years, the EU public diplomacy activities and communication gave special attention to Human Rights issues. The EUDEL also communicated actively during IDAHOBIT. The EU continued to use cultural events as a way of promoting human rights. A highlight was the open-air concert organised in collaboration with the UN to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice participated in the event. Other cultural activities, carried out with the support of PROCULTURA beneficiaries, a component of the EU-PALOP/TL regional programme, included messages on gender equality, children rights and social inclusion. Human rights are also featured prominently in EU interventions at other public events.

4. EU financial engagement: Assisting the Government in its goal to eradicate extreme poverty is at the core of the EU ongoing budget support programme. A national strategy for the eradication of extreme poverty is in place, targeting the most vulnerable. Women-headed households represent 85% of the extreme poor and children below 15 years represent 37%. The number of cash transfers beneficiaries reached more than 9000 families in 2024, as the 'Fundo Mais', a social fund financed through a percentage of the tourism tax, enters into full operation. This is increasing the chances of Cabo Verde achieving Sustainable Development Goal 1: No Poverty by 2026–four years ahead of schedule and with EU support.

5. Multilateral context: Cabo Verde has ratified almost all of the core international human rights treaties and their optional protocols. In November 2023, the country submitted to its fourth UPR. The Government confirmed its willingness to accept visits from all UN Special Procedure mandate holders. It also confirmed a desire to present its candidature for membership to the UNHRC for the period of 2025-2027. Several NGOs and the CNDHC presented shadow reports and provided input for the UPR pre-session with civil society. Cabo Verde received 205 recommendations mainly concerning violence against women, discrimination against LGBTI persons, the situation of people with disabilities and human trafficking.

In November 2023, in the framework of the GSP+ system, the European Commission published a positive assessment of CV's implementation of 27 international conventions in the period from 2020 to 2022. This includes core human rights and ILO conventions. Moreover, CV has made a number of commitments on drawing up and submitting initial and periodic reports on the implementation of international human rights treaties. An Inter-ministerial Commission established for this purpose was reinforced. In October 2023, the Government submitted the II Report on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to the UN CESCR Secretariat.

Republic of Cameroon

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, the situation of human rights and democracy remained problematic. The government continued to restrict opposition parties and civil society in the exercise of their rights to assemble, to demonstrate peacefully and to express freely their opinions. Many political opponents and activists are still in prison since 2020, after having been arrested during peaceful protests. Five Cameroonian NGOs were banned from carrying out their activities in 2024, two of them permanently. Press freedom and freedom of expression were restricted. Independent journalists were particularly exposed to intimidation and violence, and several journalists were killed with impunity. Two years after the murder of radio host Martinez Zogo, the trial is still in the procedural phase, with lawyers having limited access to the case documents. The circumstances of the murder of the journalist and priest Jean-Jacques Ola Bébé remain unclear. As the security crises in the far north (Lake Chad Basin) and in the Anglophone North-West and South-West (NO/SO) persist, human rights violations–including extrajudicial killings, murders, sexual violence and abductions–continue, mainly against civilians. The authorities have not been effective in protecting populations and ensuring accountability for serious violations and abuses by non-state armed groups and security and defence forces. Several proven cases of torture and inhuman treatment have come to light throughout 2024. The authorities undertook a series of regulatory and institutional reforms with a view to preventing acts of torture and punishing the perpetrators. They also put in place a new system of toll-free numbers to report human rights violations. The situation of HRDs, academics, lawyers and journalists who speak publicly against human rights violations continued to deteriorate. The right to a fair trial was frequently infringed, especially in cases in military courts for 'terrorism-related' or 'national security' offenses. LGBTI people were victims of discrimination and under constant social and public pressure. The country continued to face systemic weaknesses in terms of protecting the most vulnerable groups, notably women, children, LGBTI and displaced people. The country hosted almost half a million refugees and asylum seekers from Nigeria and the CAR. There were approximately 1 million IDPs.

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

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU is actively engaged with the Cameroonian authorities and civil society on human rights and democratic governance issues. On these issues, the EU continued to hold consultations with Government, in particular the Ministers of Justice and Women's Empowerment, the National Commission for Human Rights, and the National Electoral Commission, CSOs and UN agencies. The EU organised events in Cameroon with the objective to advocate for the abolition of the death penalty, to support the UNGA's 10th resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, and to support the promotion of gender equality and women leadership. The EU carried out formal démarches and outreach activities on human rights and democracy issues to request support for its initiatives in UN fora. The EU continued to organise several consultations with Government

and UN bodies to discuss the implementation of the recommendations made in the framework of the UPR for Cameroon, held in November 2023.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, the EU remained committed to reinforcing the promotion of civic and democratic spaces and good governance, including decentralisation and transparency. A EUR 44 million budget support EU programme aiming at promoting decentralisation effectiveness is now ongoing and ten municipalities are being equipped to manage local development plans in a more inclusive and participative way. The EU project aiming at supporting the role of civil society in the organisation of credible and transparent elections in 2025 has enabled the enrolment of thousands of people. The implementation of a EUR 21 million contract began, with German cooperation, aiming at reinforcing the role of civil society in protection, conflict prevention and the fight against GBV, in the North-West and South-West Anglophone regions. In 2024, the EU also signed two contracts (EUR 0.93 million) aiming to supporting the Government in the implementation of the latest UPR recommendations.

5. Multilateral context: Cameroon is party to several key international human rights treaties. It has ratified seven of the nine international core human rights treaties aiming at respecting, protecting and promoting human rights, under the supervision of the competent UN Committee. In 2024, Cameroon ratified the CAT. Cameroon is not party to the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, nor the African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, the CPED, and the ICMW. The country has been a member of the UNHRC since 2019, and was re-elected to a second term until end 2024. The latest UPR took place in November 2023 and Cameroon received 291 recommendations. The most prominent topics raised therein were women and children rights, refugees, persons with disabilities, LGBTI, ethnic and Indigenous minorities, and the security situation in the South-West and North-West regions of the country. A large number of the remaining recommendations concerned the right to health, the right to education, as well as freedom of expression and the protection of journalists and other members of civil society. In 2024, the EU organised four consultations with civil society to exchange on the human rights situation in Cameroon, with the participation of UN agencies. The EU in Cameroon cooperated with UN Agencies and other entities to provide support tosurvivors of GBV. In 2024, in most of the UNGA votes on human rights issues, the Cameroonian position differed from the EU position.

Central African Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: During 2024, the human rights situation remained concerning, while the political space continued to shrink. Opposition leaders were targeted in various ways, such as the sentencing of a member of the National Assembly to one year in prison for ‘complot’, or the arrest of a political opponent on charges of contempt of court, after a press conference in which he had accused four judges and the Minister of Justice of corruption. There was some progress in the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation (APPR*, Accord Politique pour la Paix et la Réconciliation*) and its merging with the *Feuille de route de Luanda*, with the dissolution of nine Armed Groups. Although this contributed to decreasing exactions against the population, human rights abuses and IHL violations continued to be committed by all parties to the conflict. Sources continued to testify about the brutality of the mercenaries of the Wagner

group against civilians, but also against members of the *Forces Armées Centrafricaines* (FACA) and the Internal Security Forces (ISF). Human rights abuses by the Ti Azande, an ethnic militia supported by the Wagner Group, and by the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) were reported in the southeast of the country. The armed group Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation (3R) launched attacks on civilians along the northwest border with Cameroon. In May 2024, the government released a handbook for the training of magistrates regarding sexual and gender-based violence, opening the way to a reform of the penal code and the procedural penal code. In June 2024, 60 magistrates received training based on this handbook. The Decree 23.198 on the national human rights policy was adopted on 26 August 2023; in December, the National Assembly adopted the law on the protection of HRDs. In September 2024, the government tabled a draft law on foreign agents, bearing resemblances with a similar law earlier adopted in Georgia. The National Assembly sent the draft back to the government. This text would have endangered or curtailed the work of humanitarian missions, NGOs, and foreign diplomats in CAR. On 31 December 2024, the President announced the liberation of 400 prisoners, among whom was one political prisoner, in the context of prison overcrowding and the deterioration of detention conditions.

2. EU action – key focus areas: The EU strategy on human rights and democracy is implemented in the framework of the Gender Action Plan CAR 2021-2025 (CLIP/GAP III) and the roadmap for the engagement of the EU with civil society. In 2024, the EU focused on: protecting and empowering individuals–namely via supporting HRDs, promoting a safe and enabling environment for civil society, protecting and promoting freedom of expression, media freedom and pluralism, and supporting the elaboration and reinforcement of the child protection system; supporting transitional justice and an independent judiciary, supporting state authorities in providing a legal identity for all, in particular ensuring universal birth registration, and promoting non-discriminatory access to affordable health care and to quality education; building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies–namely via encouraging dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts, improving the integrity of electoral processes, and capacity building of organs managing elections.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued advocating for a greater respect for human rights in the country, in particular during the partnership dialogue held on 15 May 2024, and through engagement with civil society and stakeholders.

The EU remained the leading partner in the coordination and implementation of the Justice Sector Policy adopted in December 2019 by the CAR Government. Both EU CSDP missions, namely the EU Advisory Mission in the Central African Republic (EUAM RCA) and the European Union Training Mission in Central African Republic (EUTM RCA), implemented activities to foster EU values, promote EU action and expose violations of human rights and IHL.

Under its global human rights sanction regime, the EU continued to apply a series of restrictive measures to several individuals and entities linked to the Wagner group involved in human rights abuses in CAR.

4. EU financial engagement: The supported activities were worth approximately EUR 8 million, including the implementation of a grant to a consortium of CSOs, to support HRDs, and support to the Special Criminal Court (SCC).

As part of a Team Europe Initiative (including Austria, Belgium, France, Germany and Switzerland), the EU supported the Special Criminal Court (SCC), a war-crimes court supported by the UN. It is part of the domestic justice system but has both, national and international staff. The EU is supporting the SCC with EUR 4.3 million. In 2024, the SCC intensified its activities, arresting and charging former Séléka leader Abakar Zakaria Hamid for alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes. The SCC also started its third trial, related to crimes allegedly committed in 2020 by the Popular Front for the Renaissance of the Central African Republic, and in April, the SCC issued an arrest warrant for former president François Bozizé, charged with crimes against humanity.

5. Multilateral context: CAR is party to multiple key human rights treaties. CAR has not ratified the second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR for the abolition of the death penalty.

In July, the UN Security Council lifted the arms embargo imposed on the country since 2013.

In January 2024, CAR underwent its fourth UPR in the UN Human Rights Council. CAR was congratulated for abolishing the death penalty and encouraged to ratify the second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR. CAR was also encouraged to reinforce its fight against impunity, in particular through securing the autonomy of the Special Penal Court. The civil society presented a report for the first time.

In February, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reviewed the situation of women's rights in CAR. NGOs raised issues concerning the situation of sexual and gender minorities, women's under-representation in political life, and discrimination against Muslim women. The Committee praised CAR's efforts to combat harmful traditional practices, and raised questions about conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).

CAR's stance in UN fora did not match the EU's human rights priorities.

Republic of Chad

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy situation in Chad remained problematic in 2024. Structural deficiencies were exacerbated by tensions stemming from the ongoing transition and the presidential and legislative elections. In February 2024, the headquarters of an opposition party was attacked by the security forces, which resulted in the death of an important political opponent of the president. The presidential election held in May, won by transition President Mahamat Déby, the son of the former President, faced numerous technical shortcomings. EU-trained CSOs that wanted to monitor the elections were not accredited. Legislative and local elections held in December 2024 were boycotted by significant parts of the Opposition and suffered from a low turnout. Both elections were criticised by parts of the Opposition for lack of inclusiveness, lack of transparency and technical shortcomings.

The enjoyment of social and economic rights, notably access to healthcare and education, remained limited. Local conflicts, mostly between pastoralists and farmers but also for access to mining resources, continued during the year. Insecurity remained widespread, with an important rise of kidnappings for ransom in southern provinces of the country. Furthermore, Boko Haram's operations in the Lake Chad area were responsible for numerous human rights

violations. One attack by Boko Haram in October 2024 resulted in the death of some 40 Chadian soldiers; the authorities reacted by launching an extensive military operation against Boko Haram. Freedom of speech has deteriorated over the 2024 electoral year, with frequent intimidation and persecution of journalists, civil-society defenders and public personalities, including religious figures. Extra-judicial involvement of the Chadian intelligence services has become common practice. Chad hosted over 1 million refugees and asylum seekers from the region–a number rapidly increasing due to the conflict in Sudan. Chad also had more than 450,000 internally displaced persons.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2024, the EU focused on transition to democracy; civic education and literacy; fight against impunity; reform of the security forces; governance of natural resources; freedom of expression; vulnerable groups; and HRDs and CSOs.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights were included in bilateral political exchanges, and a formal partnership dialogue took place in February 2024. The EU repeatedly shared with authorities its expectations that the transition would be peaceful and that a transfer to a civilian-led, democratic government and the return to constitutional rule would be accomplished as soon as possible, while respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. The EU also actively engaged with civil society, including HRDs.

The EU continued its efforts to help ensure respect of human rights by the Chadian forces overall and in particular those engaged in the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad Basin.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU's specific human rights-related activities totalled EUR 3.8 million and addressed citizen participation and dialogue, women's rights, access to justice, the protection of children and the management of land rights, often linked to local conflicts. The EU also provided approximately EUR 80 million in support to the transition process and democratisation.

5. Multilateral context: Chad is party to most key human rights treaties, but not to the Optional Protocol to the CAT, the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR aiming at the abolition of the death penalty or the CPED. Chad completed its ban on the death penalty in 2020. In UN fora Chad's priorities on human rights overall did not match the EU's.

Union of the Comoros

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The overall situation of human rights and democracy in the Union of Comoros remains of concern. Human rights infringements relate to restriction of freedom of assembly, expression, and movement, human trafficking, arbitrary arrests, and the general weakness of the judiciary. Food security is also a point of concern, with the FAO considering that approximately a third of the Comorian population experiences food insecurity.

On 14 January 2024, Comoros held presidential elections. Violent demonstrations followed those elections, leading to the death of a protester, shot as he was trying to enter a Minister's home. The EU deployed an Election Experts Mission at the request of the Government, but electoral experts were denied an accreditation by the Electoral Commission on Election Day.

Many trained civil society observers were also denied the accreditation without explanation. There was an important discrepancy between the provisional results announced by the Electoral Commission and the final results proclaimed by the Supreme Court, also without official explanation. On 13 September 2024, President Azali Assoumani was attacked. His assailant was found dead in his cell the morning after the attack. No formal investigation was launched on the matter. Several politicians, including former President Sambi, remained deprived of liberty. The judicial system is perceived as slow, corrupt, and lacking independence. Efforts were made in the field of detention conditions through the opening of new detention centres.

Gender-based violence against women and minors remains a major issue. Laws criminalize consensual same-sex relationship between adults. Two young women have been imprisoned since June 2024 for allegedly wanting to formalize their relationship. Comoros retains the death penalty but has had a de facto moratorium since 1997.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2024, key focus areas of EU action related to media capacity-building, empowerment of women, GBV, and civil society. Ambitious communication activities have promoted the EU's values, including human rights, throughout the year, among other things a campaign on women and children's rights. Human rights are constantly present in the EU's social media and cultural activities, such as the European Film Festival.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU made various official representations to the authorities on the issue of human rights. Women's rights are central to EU action in Comoros, based on the strategic gender action plan for the promotion of equality between men and women, established in a participatory process. A roadmap for civil society guides EU action to promote civil society in the country.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, the EU financially supported several projects in the area of human rights, including support to civil society organisations (EUR 400.000); improvement of detention conditions (EUR 400.000); strengthening media and information quality (EUR 350.000); support to domestic election observation (EUR 310.000); and support to women, youth and civil society (EUR 3.850.000).

5. Multilateral context: The EU regularly raises human rights issues concerning Comoros, especially regarding freedom of expression, human trafficking, death penalty, and GBV, with UN representatives at regional and international level. Possible synergies are being explored in the framework of EU projects.

The Union of Comoros underwent the UPR in May 2024. Participating States, including ten members of the European Union, issued 237 recommendations relating to the fight against GBV, women's rights, judicial reform, support for human rights organisations and the abolition of the death penalty.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The internal socio-political situation remained fragile with increasing challenges for human rights, fundamental freedoms and rule of law. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) ranked as the fifth most fragile

country worldwide in the Fragile States Index 2024. Despite some progress in the normative sphere improving the framework for protection and promotion of human rights in previous years, 2024 has seen a clear backsliding in the rule of law and respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The most illustrative element of this tendency was the suspension of the moratorium on the death penalty decided by the government on 9 February. Other negative trends include restrictions to fundamental freedoms and civic space, as well as an increase in hate speech, the unlawful imprisonment of a number of HRDs and opposition figures, the use of torture, and an alarming level of overcrowding in the penitentiary centres. The overcrowding in the Makala prison for example led to a serious incident on 1-2 September, with around 130 persons killed, hundreds wounded, and many female prisoners raped.
2024 was also marked by the continuing insecurity and conflict in the East, with armed groups and government forces alleged to have committed a series of serious human rights abuses, including sexual and gender based violence, massacres, recruitment of child soldiers, etc. The continuous military expansion of M23 in North Kivu has led to an additional two million of IDPs–overall, the DRC had 7.3 million IDPs at the end of 2024.

In 2024, the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) placed the DRC on 48th place out of 54 countries examined. The country was also placed among the 10 most deteriorated countries, following a path of a slowing deterioration since 2014. Transparency International ranked the DRC 163 out of 180 countries in its Corruption Perception Index for 2024.

The DRC went through its fourth cycle of the UPR in November 2024, with overall negative findings. The DRC received 267 recommendations; out of these, the DRC accepted 239 recommendations and noted 28. The main topics centred around the strengthening of the judicial system, the protection of HRDs and journalists, the need to combat sexual and gender-based violence, the detention conditions and the promotion of children's rights.

The number of people affected by acute food insecurity continued to increase nationwide, especially among children under five and pregnant women. In 2024, the DRC has the world's highest number of food insecure people, with 25.6 million people affected.

2. EU action on Human Rights and Democracy: EU priorities remained the same as in previous years, namely: promotion of the freedom of expression, assembly and association; 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; promotion and entrenchment of a fair and easily accessible justice system, including the fight against impunity, in particular for those implicated in sexual violence; and promotion of gender equality, particularly in public life, and respect for women's rights, especially for the survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2024, the EU engaged in a wide array of political action in support of human rights. It maintained a constructive contact with partners, including government counterparts, the national human rights committee, UN agencies, NGOs, HRDs, women's rights and LGBTI rights activists, and others. The EU raised human rights issues in their interactions with the government. The EU furthermore engaged in trial observation in selected human rights cases, in cooperation and coordination with individual EU MS and like-minded non-EU countries.

The EU maintained an autonomous regime of restrictive measures aimed against individuals involved in human rights violations in the country.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU provided financial support to a number of human rights and democracy-related programmes and projects in the DRC, including: Restore II, contributing to the fight against torture; PARJ 2, which supports a justice reform and PARP 3, the police reform programme, as well as a project to support transitional justice and the fight against impunity from massive crimes, the protection of human rights defenders, civil society organisations.

Moreover, the EU implements an ambitious Security Sector and Justice Reform Programme that aims to strengthen rule of law and promote democracy in the DRC, including through the creation of more conducive conditions for fighting corruption, widespread impunity and for addressing insecurity. The above-mentioned PARJ 2 (EUR 1.2 million) helps to strengthen the independence of the judiciary and improve the performance of the Ministry of Justice to fight impunity and corruption and promote the respect of human rights. In addition, the EU supports local NGOs and civil society organisations active in advocacy for electoral reforms. Finally, the EU supports a project that aims to strengthen the independence and economic autonomy of local media. This support is of high importance in the fight against fake news spreading in the Congolese society.

The EU's local protection mechanism covers the entire territory of the country. In 2024, it provided direct protection to over 153 HRDs, out of which 27 were women. The programme serves to document human rights violations, torture and other cases of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and provides support measures such as physical and judicial assistance to the victims. Since the start of the project (EUR 2.46 million), at least 250 HRDs reported that they work now in a more secure environment due to the local protection mechanism. Since 2021, almost 4 million people were reached by activities raising awareness of their fundamental rights. The EU also supported a programme aimed at preventing torture in detention centres in Kinshasa.

The EU's support to media through its multiannual project *'Unis pour la démocratie – des medias citoyens et engagés pour la culture démocratique en RDC'* (EUR 2 million) contributed positively to shaping the media environment during the elections.

The EU also implements a Transitional Justice project (EUR 1.3 million), which provides legal, judicial and psychosocial support to victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity. In 2024, the project supported 932 victims of conflict-related crimes (415 women and 517 men) in obtaining justice before national courts.

The EU was also active on promoting gender equality and strengthening women's rights: the project *'Tujenge Amani Leo'* promotes resilience of vulnerable women and youth in crisis-affected territories in the Eastern DRC (EUR 0.9 million); the EU's support to the Panzi Foundation enabled over 4000 victims of sexual and gender-based violence to receive medical, socio-psychological, legal and economic assistance. A new action called *'Unis pour l'égalité du genre'* (EUR 20 million), launched in November 2022, aims to reduce vulnerability to GBV, including through vocational training, awareness-raising and wider protection measures.

5. Multilateral context: The DRC is party to many key international human rights treaties. However, it has not signed or ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR aiming to the abolition of the death penalty, the CPED nor the ICMW. In the UNHRC, 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 Group of Experts on the DRC for a further period of one year. At the end of 2024, the DRC was elected to the Human Rights Council for the 2025-2027 term.

The DRC did not vote on any of the human rights-related resolutions in 2024 in the UNGA. In most of the UNGA votes on human rights, the DRC's vote therefore differed from the EU's.

The EU carried out formal démarches on human rights and democracy issues to request DRC's support for EU initiatives in UN fora.

Republic of the Congo

1. Overall human rights situation: The human rights and democracy situation in the Republic of the Congo remained problematic. There were reports of serious violations of human rights and limited space for the opposition as well as enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and arrests, especially related to the police operation *'Coup de poing'* to crack down on juvenile delinquency. The use of torture, especially in police stations and prisons, remained widespread. Conditions of pre-trial detention continued to fall short of international standards. Respect for the economic and social rights of the population deteriorated due to a lack of investment in the social sector. Corruption remained a major obstacle to good governance. The country lacks an independent judicial system. Violence against women remained a serious challenge. National legislation does not criminalize sexual minorities, but no particular efforts were made to protect them against discrimination, e.g. same-sex marriage is not allowed. CSOs faced difficulties and intimidation, especially when dealing with human rights, mismanagement of national resources or democratic shortfalls. The country hosted over 68,000 refugees and asylum seekers predominantly from the Central African Republic (50 %), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (42 %) and Rwanda (5 %).

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2024, the EU focused its action on: effective functioning of institutions and monitoring mechanisms for democratic political life and human rights; good governance, respect for the rule of law and the implementation of the necessary reforms in different areas; citizen participation in decision-making and oversight of governance, including through strengthening the role of civil society and local authorities; as well as improving the situation of vulnerable populations, including Indigenous peoples, and gender equality.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged with a wide range of stakeholders on human rights, including the Government, HRDs, CSOs, universities, and media, with a particular focus on youth.

The EU carried out formal démarches on human rights and democracy issues to request support from the Republic of the Congo for EU initiatives in UN fora.

4. EU financial engagement: The 13 projects, in total supported with approx. EUR 4.6 million and financed through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and the NDICI thematic Program on Human Rights and Democracy, made satisfactory progress in their

implementation in 2024. These projects cover a variety of topics such as the rights of Indigenous peoples, children's rights and the fundamental rights of people in detention. In addition, four projects funded by the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities instrument (OSC-AL) successfully continued in 2024. Their areas of work included revitalising civil society as a development actor and improving the living conditions of homeless kids in Brazzaville. Through the bilateral NDICI envelope, the EU is also supporting civil society's contribution to gender equality for an inclusive economic and social development (EUR 5 million). Furthermore, the 'Police +' project (EUR 5 million), aimed at improving respect for human rights by the police in pilot police stations, continues making progress. The EU, in the context of promoting social and economic rights, supported the informal private sector through projects targeting local economic initiatives. The EU also engaged with young people through the launch of an initiative that aims at establishing a Youth Advisory Group.

5. Multilateral context: The Republic of the Congo is party to several key human rights treaties but it has not ratified the CPED or the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR aimed at abolishing the death penalty, despite abolishing the death penalty in 2015. In 2024, the country ratified the Optional Protocol to the CAT.

The fourth cycle of the UPR for Congo took place in January 2024. The country received 200 recommendations and noted almost all of them. Reports from civil society groups signalled the low level of implementation of the recommendations from the previous UPR in 2018. The Ministry of Justice has drafted an action plan to implement the recommendations of UPR 2024. The country's priorities on human rights in UN fora did not match the EU's.

Republic of Côte d'Ivoire

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Overall, the human rights situation has slightly improved. However, as indicated in the UPR undertaken in 2024, some challenges remain such as access to basic social services, prison overpopulation, gender inequalities and unequal access to economic, social and cultural resources especially in rural areas, violations of freedom of expression and assembly and attacks on civic space as well as persistence of child labour. 2024 also saw significant tensions in Abidjan following evictions by the Ivorian authorities. Last summer, Côte d'Ivoire experienced an unprecedented anti-LGBTI movement in the form of an online campaign, followed by dozens of acts of violence.

Civil society remains fragile and needs support in terms of structuring, capacity-building, and independence. Following the Civil Society Organisations Ordinance, adopted in June 2024 to replace the 1960 Law on Associations, several CSOs have seized the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, sharing their concerns about the shrinking of the right of association.

In view of the presidential elections scheduled for October 2025, Côte d'Ivoire undertook the revision of the electoral list, an essential step to ensure inclusiveness of the electoral process. Although almost one million new voters were registered, the target of registering more than four million voters was not met - a significant deviation from the initial forecast. The International Electrotechnical Commission plans to publish the provisional list by end February, followed by a period of litigation. The final list will be drawn up three months before the elections.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In terms of cooperation and in line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 and the Country Strategy for Human Rights and Democracy 2021-2024, eight strategic and operational priorities identified have been implemented: tackling child labour, child trafficking and forced labour; contributing to the eradication of torture and improving detention conditions; preventing GBV; strengthening the rule of law, the independence and functioning of the judiciary, and supporting the integrity of electoral processes; strengthening the role of CSOs; contributing to equal opportunities for women and men and fighting against all forms of discriminations; improving access to public services, including through digital technologies; and promoting freedom of expression and countering disinformation and hate speech.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: EUDEL has regular meetings with CSOs as well as with Côte d'Ivoire authorities and political parties. The EU and Côte d'Ivoire hold annual Partnership Dialogues, the latest in December 2024. Several topics related to the human rights situation, good governance, as well as the rule of law and the fight against corruption were discussed. During this Dialogue, parties were able to reaffirm their commitment towards shared values and interests.

The EU, with support of the EU MS represented in Côte d'Ivoire, carried out several formal démarches on human rights and democracy issues in 2024 in the framework of the 79th UNGA and the 55th session of the UNHRC.

4. EU financial engagement: EU cooperation focuses on human capital with actions on technical and vocational education and training; social protection and migration; sustainable and inclusive growth with actions on business environment, agriculture, and low-carbon transition; as well as democratic governance, peace and security and digital governance. The European Union has developed a wide range of projects to support its political engagements towards Côte d'Ivoire. In 2024 and among other, the EU defined an 'elections package' which will support the country in holding transparent and inclusive elections in 2025 (presidential) and 2026 (legislative). The EU also supports CSOs and launched a new support project in January 2024 in close cooperation with the five Regional Civil Society Support Centres.

5. Multilateral context: Côte d'Ivoire is a member of the Human Rights Council (2024-2026) and has ratified almost all international UN and AU instruments. The Government has adopted policies to combat child labour and trafficking in human beings. The ratification procedure for the Second Optional Protocol to the IICPR, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, has been finalized. However, implementation of international instruments and reporting requires further improvement. There are no specific legislative provisions governing compensation to victims of torture. The national mechanism for the prevention of torture, which was to be established in March 2024 in accordance with Côte d'Ivoire's international obligations, has not yet been established.

Côte d'Ivoire participated in the UPR exercise in 2024. Multiple recommendations have emerged from the UPR, including recommendations on the prison living conditions, on gender equality, as well as on children's rights, education, civil and political rights, including the right to demonstrate and associate, and LGBTI.

Republic of Djibouti

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, the human rights and democracy situation has been stable. According to the World Press Freedom Index, Djibouti has slightly improved its performance in the area of freedom of expression. It now ranks 161st (against 162nd in 2023) out of 180 countries assessed. In the Freedom in the World Index by Freedom House, Djibouti received the same score as in 2023–24 points; 5 out of 40 in the area of political rights and 19 out of 60 in terms of civil rights, which translates into 160th place out of 210 states and territories put under this survey. The Economist Democracy Index places the country as 134th out of 167 overall, marking a small improvement (3 places higher than in 2023 and with an improved score of 2.81). V-Dem Democracy Index keeps Djibouti's score rather low (0,253) granting it 137th place out of 179 countries screened in 2024.

During the year of reporting, the Government has made further progress in improving access to basic services for citizens. Positive developments have also been observed in the areas of gender equality and mainstreaming disability. However, the activities of the political opposition, HRDs and civil society continue to be largely restricted.

Despite its having to cope with further regional tensions and the economic fallout of the Red Sea crisis over 2024, Djibouti remains a beacon of stability in a troubled region. Djibouti should also be commended for taking care of a large refugee and migrant population, which is estimated at 210,000 people at least–on a population of 1.1 million. With numbers of refugees and migrants rising, Djibouti asked for international assistance to cope with the burden on its public spending to which the EU has responded favourably by way of a dedicated project, involving both the authorities and CSOs. There have been minor tensions between two main ethnic groups, the Somali Issa and Afa, mostly as a spill over of clashes between those two groups in Ethiopia between February and April 2024. Maintenance of ethnic and social balance in the country remains a firm paradigm, especially in view of the upcoming presidential elections scheduled for March 2026.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) remains a key regional bloc headquartered in Djibouti. Despite its high potential–especially in the area of peace and security, several mediation strands conducted under IGAD's Djibouti Presidency, mostly in Sudan and South Sudan, have yielded only limited results in 2024. However, the adoption of a new IGAD Treaty is expected to foster institutional reform. This, coupled with the EU's financial support for conflict mediation, should help IGAD in reclaiming its place as a viable regional peace-enabler.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The global EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027 focusses on five key areas: protecting and empowering individuals; building resilient, inclusive and democratic society; promoting a global system for human rights and democracy; new technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges; and delivering by working together.

The mid-term review (MTR) of the NDICI-GE programming for Djibouti confirmed a continued strong emphasis on the primary sector of water and sanitation/energy. There was also consensus on keeping governance as a second priority area, with particular focus on gender equality, inclusivity as well as migration.

In 2024, the EU continued preparations for doubling the capacity of the desalination and drinking water production plant in Djibouti. This unique installation is the first of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa. Financed by the EU, this Global Gateway project produces drinking water through renewable energy–PEPER, supported with EUR 73 million during the first phase and EUR 79 million in the second phase, which is still to be rolled out. The unit supplies nearly 250,000 of the capital's inhabitants with drinking water. This figure will double after phase II of the project, financed with an EIB loan. Furthermore, the EU has financed solid and liquid waste management programmes. In December 2024, EU signed the construction of a technical landfill centre in Chebelley (EUR 5 million), while the construction of the Balbala Water Treatment Plant was completed in September 2024 (EUR 14 million). Finally, the extension of capacities of Douda wastewater treatment plant (EUR 5, 5 million) was launched.

Throughout the last decade, the number of judges in Djibouti has increased from 35 to 150, which significantly improved the access to justice for the population. In 2020, the National Judicial Training School (*Ecole Nationale d'Etudes Judiciares*, ENEJ) was established, tasks include the training of judges, justice officials (lawyers, notaries, bailiffs, court clerks and police officers) and any other professionals working in the legal or judicial field. The School, which has been operational for three years, has trained in 2024 the first cohort of judges, court clerks and lawyers. The EU-funded PAJ project (EUR 4 million) has been able to, *inter alia*, reach out to rural areas with justice caravans.

In 2024, the signature of the Flexible Mechanism (EUR 11 million) and approval of the support for migration governance under the AAP 2022 (EUR 1.5 million) have considerably increased the EU-funded migration portfolio in Djibouti. Both actions seek to continue the EU's assistance to the migration sector in Djibouti already provided and strengthen the political dialogue with the authorities on this issue.

In the framework of the ongoing Women and Girls Empowerment Project, the 'FEMFI project' (EUR 7 million), the capacities of the Ministry of Women and Families are strengthened, and a national programme has been put in place to promote literacy, vocational training and professional integration. Existing nurseries and quality family planning services have also been strengthened. Girls and women benefit from quality prevention and holistic protection services, particularly related to Female Genital Mutilation.

Throughout 2024, the EU has also been supporting decentralisation through the 'ADIL project' (EUR 12 million). The project aims at promoting inclusive local development and strengthening of the local governance system. The EU also actively participates in discussions on the potential future Public Finance Management (PFM) reform aiming at achieving greater efficiency and transparency of the national budget. It is planned to fund this sector with EUR 900,000. Along the lines of the EU global priorities, the support of the digitalisation agenda plays an important role in Djibouti. During 2024, the relationship between the citizen and the public administration has improved thanks to the EU Initiative of Digital Governance and Cybersecurity program (EUR 3 million). The latter has achieved remarkable results, such as the operationalisation of an e-permit software, which in turn has allowed citizens to interact digitally with the public administration regarding permissions relating to urban planning. The launch of the National Cybersecurity Strategy in December 2024 constituted yet another critical milestone of this action.

Several EU-funded projects continue to empower youth through their insertion in the job market. The most prominent of those focuses on the training of youth in port-related and service-oriented professions (EUR 10 million, TRANSFORM project). Through its support to the private sector (EUR 4 million) the capacities of local entrepreneurs are strengthened by improvement of their access to training and financing. Another project is to foster establishment of an SME (Small and Medium-sized Enterprise) incubator in Djibouti, the Center of Excellence and Leadership.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU and Djibouti discuss the human rights situation in the country as well as opportunities for cooperation, including in the framework of the annual Partnership Dialogue, which took place on 17 March 2024. High-level political engagement with Djibouti was stepped up in 2024 with several engagements at Ministerial level and the visit of the HRVP to Djibouti in July. With a view to strengthen civil society, EUDEL has started to establish a more structured dialogue with civil society organisations.

4. EU financial engagement: Specific financial engagement in the area of human rights exceeds EUR 2 million, mostly for a programme that encourages democratic governance and an inclusive and equitable civic culture. This comes on top of other projects and programmes with a clear human rights component–as outlined above.

5. Multilateral context: Djibouti's human rights situation was examined before the UNHRC as part of its UPR cycle in 2023. Major concerns tabled by the international community revolved around the freedom of expression and freedom of the press; the freedom of association and peaceful assembly; freedom of belief; the independence of the national human rights commission; human trafficking; discrimination against women and girls; GBV and FGM in particular; and discrimination of persons with disability. Djibouti has taken a constructive attitude towards the implementation of most UPR recommendations (228 out of 269), deemed 'uncontroversial' to authorities. This refers also to strengthening of the operational capacity of national human rights institutions, which remain largely underfunded and partial.

In the area of promoting a global system for human rights and democracy a variety of multilateral platforms (e.g. United Nations System Organisations, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Horn of Africa Initiative, and like-minded partners' consultations) have been used by the EU to better coordinate and streamline joint responses. The EU and the UN Resident Coordinator hold regular meetings to discuss strategic matters of common concern. The EU has also been actively engaging in discussions and consultations with the OHCHR during official visits of its representatives conducted throughout 2024. Djibouti has ratified the major international UN conventions on human rights and remains the only country in the IGAD region that has abolished the death penalty.

Republic of Equatorial Guinea

1. Overall human rights situation: The overall human rights and democracy situation in Equatorial Guinea remained extremely problematic, with systemic human rights violations and abuses, political and civic oppression, and high levels of corruption, limited space for civil society and opposition parties. The use of torture, especially in prisons, continued to be reported as widespread. Prisons continued to be overcrowded and incarceration conditions remained harsh, in particular with regard to access to food, sanitation and health care.

Freedom of expression, association and assembly were severely curtailed. Political and human rights activists faced intimidation, harassment and reprisals. The process to create and register civil society organisations remained extremely complicated and dissuasive. Lack of equality between women and men remained a major challenge in all aspects of social, cultural, economic and political life. GBV continued to be a serious concern.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU focused on the full abolition of the death penalty–which was banned from the Criminal Code in 2022 but remains theoretically applicable under military law, the eradication of torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, and fair access to justice for victims of human rights violations; the opening of civic and democratic spaces, good governance and accountability, transparency, and fight against corruption; and addressing social inequalities and discrimination as well as promoting gender equality, women's and LGBTI rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Equatorial Guinea has not signed the Samoa Agreement and it was not party to the revised Cotonou Agreement either. In spite of not having a regular political dialogue based on these agreements, the EU has been closely following the political, social and economic situation in Equatorial Guinea and has raised human rights and governance issues in high-level exchanges with the authorities.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, new projects were launched under the NDICI Human Rights and Democracy Thematic Programme (approximately EUR 900,000) to work on empowering civil society in Equatorial Guinea in the area of women's rights and female survivors of GBV and promoting the rule of law and gender equality. The country continued benefiting from the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (approximatively EUR 700,000) with projects aimed at promoting gender equality and assistance to HRDs and other vulnerable groups. Two projects–financed through the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities Thematic Programme (EUR 2 million)–made progress in 2024 in their respective areas of work: strengthening the capacities of civil society groups and providing them with access to financial and technical resources to advance in their role as development agents, and on the fight for women's rights with the objective of promoting gender equality and providing women and girls with care resources in situations of violence or vulnerability.

5. Multilateral context: Equatorial Guinea is party to some key international human rights treaties. However, the country is not a party to the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, nor to the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court. It has not ratified the Protocol on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights nor the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

Equatorial Guinea's last UPR was in November 2024, where the country received 218 recommendations, including: the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and the International Convention for the Protection of all persons from Enforced Disappearance; to accept requests from the UNSR on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to visit Equatorial Guinea in accordance with their respective mandates; improvement of the conditions of detention in the country's prisons and to take all necessary measures to guarantee that journalists, civil society and HRDs can exercise their right to the freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

Equatorial Guinea's priorities on human rights in UN fora did not match the EU's.

State of Eritrea

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Despite the stability of the country and progress in the socio-economic areas highlighted by the last Universal Periodic Review (see below), Eritrea's human rights situation, in particular as regards civil and political rights, remains concerning. The government's focus on maintaining strict control over the population results in a lack of fundamental freedoms, such as media freedom and freedom of expression and opinion or respect of *habeas corpus.* International organisations, including the United Nations and human rights NGOs, have repeatedly called on Eritrea to improve its human rights record. The EU Sanctions Regime was renewed in December 2024.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Nineteen EU projects in Eritrea are dedicated to human rights issues. Three projects support child health services and one works on women's empowerment. The remaining fifteen are in support of people with disabilities, especially individuals who are hard of hearing and persons who have vision impairment or an intellectual disability. One contribution agreement with UNICEF addresses FGM and Child marriage. Internet connection for the wider public is practically non-existent, which makes it almost impossible to organise any online event or devise and implement a social media communication policy on human rights issues.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: There is no formal political dialogue on human rights between Eritrea and the EU for the time being. Some exchanges on human rights issues take place at the UNHRC in Geneva.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU provides support to CSOs through grants under thematic programmes CSO, human rights and democracy, and the Global DeSIRA Initiative. In 2024, the EU Delegation managed 20 projects (grants) for a total value of around EUR 10.8 million; 18 grants are funded through two thematic budget lines (CSO and HR&D) and one under the Global DeSIRA initiative (Agriculture). Among CSO and HR&D projects, four are dedicated to human rights issues: three projects in support of children (health sector) and one for women empowerment.

5. Multilateral context: A UPR process was undertaken in 2024. During this process, progress was highlighted concerning the following issues: promotion of human rights and institutional reform–especially efforts to strengthen the legal and institutional tools for human rights promotion were emphasised; rule of law and justice reforms, including some efforts to improve the justice system, e.g. through strategies to enhance access to justice and protect detainee rights, such as regular inspections of detention facilities; women's rights–the government has launched initiatives, such as the National Strategic Plan to protect children's and women's rights; children's rights; socio-economic development, with specific achievements noted in public health improvements and literacy rates; and lastly, combating human trafficking, where Eritrea has taken steps to combat the issue, particularly among vulnerable groups such as women and children.

In 2024, a report from the UNSR for the situation of human rights in Eritrea was released and submitted to the 56th session of the UNHRC. In parallel, the UN Human Rights Council

extended the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in Eritrea for a further period of one year. The main conclusions of this report were that Eritrea continues to supress basic rights, including the freedom of expression and opinion, and the freedom of religion, with heightened restrictions in the context of forced mass conscription.

Kingdom of Eswatini

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The political and security situation in the Kingdom of Eswatini remained stable in 2024, notwithstanding a polarised society still recovering after the protests of 2021. After the assassination of human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko in 2023, the EP adopted a resolution, strongly condemning Maseko's murder and calling for prompt, independent, impartial, transparent and thorough investigations. The Government replied to the European Parliament in early December 2024, accusing 'communist interests overseas' of financing and steering the violent protests in 2021, but defending the role of Maseko as a representative of constructive political forces. In the letter, the Government encouraged the MEPs and the EU to support efforts to de-escalate conflict and strengthen democracy in Eswatini. To date, the investigation on Maseko's murder did not bring concrete results. The more than 20 activists arrested in 2023 whom authorities allege to have been behind the unrest and political killings committed between 2021 and 2023, remain in jail and no application for bail has been successful.

In July 2024, former pro-reform Members of Parliament Mduduzi Bacede Mabuza and Mthandeni Dube, previously convicted on murder, terrorism and sedition charges and incarcerated since July 2021 with three bail applications rejected, received a prison sentence to 25 and 18 years respectively. The EU published a statement of concern for the sentence and appealed for a fair trial and appeal of the two MPs. Since then, Mabuza has appealed the sentence while Dube withdrew.

The situation of GBV remained at pandemic levels with relevant CSOs requesting GBV to be declared a national emergency. The Government declared poverty as a national emergency, affirming that GBV is linked to it.

After the Supreme Court issued its negative decision in 2023 regarding the registration of an NGO representing sexual minorities (Eswatini Sexual and Gender Minorities), the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Trade in 2024 refused registration on the same (formal) arguments as on previous occasion. The organisation is still considering possible legal options as follow-up.

The Government launched in late 2024 a draft Non-Profit Organisations bill, currently in consultation before adoption by Cabinet. One of the Government's arguments for presenting this bill is setting a clear framework for governance and financial rules to be respected by non-profit organisations, with an eye to, among others, prevent money laundering and the financing of terrorism, according to the Government.

The Commission for Human Rights and Public Administration, a constitutionally mandated body, remains severely understaffed, underfinanced and thus unable to effectively assume its role. CSOs confirmed that civic space in the country is shrinking ever since the 2021 civil unrest, and that the number of citizens who report violations of human rights is increasing.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Throughout 2024, the EU continued to engage in dialogue with the King, Government, Parliament and all relevant actors in the country, including human rights, civil society and faith-based organisations, on the wide range of pressing human rights issues in Eswatini. Specifically, the EU action focused on GBV, advocacy for the protection of human rights defenders, opening of the political space, upholding human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, due process and fair trial, including for the two incarcerated Members of Eswatini's Parliament, and holding all perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses accountable. EUDEL continued to observe the trial of the two Members of Parliament.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In July 2024, the first EU-Eswatini Partnership Dialogue under the Samoa Agreement addressed a wide range of issues among which human rights including freedom of association and expression, access to information, the enforcement of legislation to curb GBV, the rule of law and judicial matters. As a way forward, the EU renewed the proposal of an annual Human Rights Dialogue. Prior to the political dialogue, in a Team Europe approach, the EU and its MS conducted wide consultations with civil society and the Commission on Human Rights and Public Administration on the state of human rights, democracy, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms in the country.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU pursued the implementation of projects aimed at raising awareness and advocating for the protection and promotion of democracy, human rights, and rule of law, gender equality and rights of minorities. Among the different programmes funded by the EU addressing the question of human rights are, for example, the 'Back to School: Supporting the human rights of children and youth with disabilities in Eswatini' programme, aiming to provide children and young people with disabilities with a comprehensive package of interventions to alleviate the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, notably in education; the 'HLONIPHEKA: thriving for dignity programme' that deals with the prevention of and response to violence against women and girls as well as persons with disabilities; and 'YES - Youth and Women Empowerment & Support – Together we can', which aims to strengthen capacities and opportunities of civil society and grassroots organisations that promote social inclusion of women and youth, with a special focus on GBV. Another programme is the 'Civil Society in Action' project, which aims to promote and protect fundamental freedom, good governance, and human rights through empowerment of civil-society organisations.

5. Multilateral context: In 2024, the concerning situation of human rights in Eswatini featured on the agenda of international bodies. For example, the ILO addressed six recommendations to Eswatini and pointed out the deteriorating situation regarding trade union rights and a culture of impunity for perpetrators of crimes against trade unionists. The Government replied in September 2024 to ILO.

Eswatini has not ratified a number of international treaties, including the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR and the Optional Protocol to the CAT, the Optional Protocol to the ICESCR, as well as the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the crime of Genocide and the Rome Statute.

Despite a de facto moratorium on executions since 1983, Eswatini has not formally abolished the death penalty. Same-sex relations for men are still illegal, despite the law not being applied.

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2024 saw a further deterioration in the human rights situation in Ethiopia, mainly due to continued conflict in Oromia and Amhara regions as well as a shrinking democratic space. Throughout the year, but with varying intensity, Government and Regional Security Forces clashed with factions of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), Fano factions and other armed groups. There are reports of significant human rights violations by all parties.

Civic space continued to erode in the country, with the federal government tightly controlling the environment for reporting on critical issues. Authorities have harassed and detained critical voices, forcing journalists, opposition members, and civil society activists into silence or exile.

The Government of Ethiopia's efforts to establish credible, victim-centred transitional justice and accountability mechanisms for past human rights and IHL violations continue, seeking to strike a balance between calls for urgent action and the need to prepare such a complex undertaking with the required level of groundwork.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU and its Member States supported the following key strategic priorities: rights of persons in vulnerable situations; human rights in the context of migration; strengthening the capacity of state institutions working with human rights and electoral activities; supporting CSOs, local and non-state human-rights actors; promoting international legal frameworks and respect of international human rights standards; strengthening the role of media; and committing to more joint programmes.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU adopted Council Conclusions on Ethiopia in April 2023. They re-emphasised the call for accountability and transitional justice for human rights violations during the conflict in northern Ethiopia, also as a central component in the process of normalising EU relations with Ethiopia. The EU has expressed to the Government of Ethiopia its concern regarding 'the high number of human-rights violations and abuses by both state and non-state actors' during the 57th session of the UNHRC in Geneva.

Key high-level EU visits to Ethiopia in 2024 were conducted by the EUSR for Human Rights in January; the EU Commissioner for Health Food and Safety in February; the Political and Security Committee in March and November; the EU Commissioner for International Partnerships in June and October; EEAS MD Africa in October; and EEAS DMD Africa, also in October.

4. EU financial engagement: In October 2023, EU Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen launched the EU's Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) with Ethiopia for the period 2024-2027, structured around three areas: Green Deal (EUR 260 million), Human Development (EUR 228 million), Governance and Peacebuilding (EUR 156 million). 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 March 2024. The total EU contribution amounts to EUR 29.73 million.

The EU supported the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) with two programmes worth EUR 3.5 million. The assistance focused on supporting this body in gaining full independence as well as becoming an effective organisation holding enough expertise to strategically lift its 102 mandated tasks, and supporting the EHRC in enhancing its capacity to provide oversight, redress for victims of human rights violations of users of the criminal justice system, and to hold justice institutions to account. It also aims at increasing the coordination of the provision of legal aid in criminal cases by NGOs, university-based law clinics, and other legal aid service providers.

The EU has been Strengthening Civil Societies' Capacities, including victims, to contribute to the transitional justice process in Ethiopia through an EUR 493,000 project and engaged EUR 750,000 on a second phase lasting until January 2026. The goal is to promote accountability and rule of law through increased engagement between policymakers and CSOs, and establish a basis for CSOs' ability to influence the process and lead to victim-centred strategies.

5. Multilateral context: Concerning the numerous serious human rights violations witnessed on the ground and based on the outcomes of the joint Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights/Ethiopian Human Rights Commission report of 3 November 2021, on 17 December 2021, at the request of the EU, the UNHRC adopted in Geneva a resolution establishing an international commission of human rights experts (ICHREE) to conduct an investigation into allegations of violations and abuses committed in Ethiopia. The ICHREE issued its final report in September 2023, in which it identified grave and systematic violations of international law and crimes committed in Tigray, as well as Amhara, Afar and Oromia regions. Violations include mass killings, rape, starvation, forced displacement and arbitrary detention.

Ethiopia was elected to the UNHRC for 2025-2027.

Gabonese Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The overall human rights and democracy situation in Gabon, where a *coup d'état* took place at the end of August 2023, remained concerning, despite some positive developments. The law to reform the National Human Rights Commission and designate it as Gabon's National Preventive Mechanism, an independent body specifically dedicated to the prevention of torture and ill-treatment, was adopted. As regards freedom of speech and freedom of the media, the World Freedom Press Index ranked Gabon 56th, which represents a significant improvement compared to 2023 (94th rank). The country's Communication Code includes restrictions that hinder the ability of journalists to work independently. It prohibits any person residing outside the country to manage media published in Gabon. Newspapers linked to the Opposition were able to publish on any subject of their choice, including criticism of the government and President. A new constitution was adopted by referendum observed by national and international observers, including the EU. The new constitution bans, among other things, same-sex marriage, but has stopped short of criminalization of homosexuality. Ill-treatment, poor food and health conditions in prisons remained a challenge, despite ongoing efforts to improve detention conditions. No citizen was reportedly imprisoned for political reasons. The phenomenon of ritual crimes–the abduction and murder of children and women–continued. Legislation has

been in place since September 2021 to protect women against all forms of violence and discrimination and to advance gender equality. 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 such as the centre for victims of violence. Despite legal provisions on quotas, women continued to be under-represented in the public and private sector. As part of the fight against corruption, a 'task force on internal and external debt' has been reactivated, but raises concerns about the extrajudicial nature of its operation. Gabon hosted 268 refugees and asylum seekers.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In 2024, the EU focused its action on democracy and governance; fight against corruption; harsh prison conditions and lengthy pre-trial detention; torture and forced disappearances; ritual crimes; and women and children's rights. These priorities went hand-in-hand with action aimed at strengthening civil society, support to credible, inclusive and transparent elections, freedom of expression and association and the enjoyment of all political rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights and democracy issues were addressed during the Partnership Dialogue in October and in regular exchanges with the authorities and stakeholders. The EU carried out formal démarches on human rights and democracy issues to request support for its initiatives in UN fora.

4. EU financial engagement: A new EU action under the HRD thematic programme supported the improvement of prison conditions (EUR 500,000). EUDEL launched a project to combat all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, including the improvement of care for victims, and the protection of children (EUR 1.05 million), and a project to support capacity building of institutions and civil society in light of the transition and the 2025 elections (EUR 2 million).

5. Multilateral context: Gabon is party to almost all key human rights treaties. It has not yet ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. Gabon abolished the death penalty in 2007. On UN votes on human rights issues, Gabon usually aligns itself with the position of the African Group, on both country and thematic resolutions. These did not always match the EU's priorities.

The Republic of The Gambia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Less than two years before the next presidential election in The Gambia in 2026, the country is at a turning point of its democratic consolidation process that started in 2017 after two decades of dictatorship. The Gambia presents a mixed picture. The country has undergone a successful democratic transition allowing the civic space to grow, human rights standards to improve and a full electoral cycle completed in line with democratic standards. However, some more concerning signs have been observed in 2024 with the gazetting of a non-inclusive Constitutional project drawing the perspective of a regime which reduces checks and balances, undermines the separation of powers, limits financial oversight on the government and facilitates political appointees. Moreover, while freedom of expression widely prevails, isolated cases of restrictions to freedoms of speech and media have been observed. Sections 5 and 6 of the Public Order Act, which foresee limitations on freedom of assembly and peaceful protest,

remain controversial. The transitional justice reform advances steadily but at a slow pace. Two important bills were adopted, the Special Accountability Mechanism Bill and the Special Prosecutors Office Bill creating the legal framework to investigate and prosecute the crimes committed under the Jammeh regime. On 15 December, at the Economic Community of West African States 65th Ordinary Summit in Abuja, the establishment of The Special Tribunal was approved for The Gambia to prosecute perpetrators of human rights violations in The Gambia between July 1994 and January 2017. In May, using the principle of universal jurisdiction, a Swiss federal criminal court convicted the former interior minister Ousman Sonko for crimes against humanity over his role in repression committed by the Gambian security forces under Yahya Jammeh and sentenced him to 20 years. The political polarisation between the ruling party NPP and allies and the main opposition party UDP grows and becomes more violent while President Barrow unveiled his intention to run for a third mandate in 2026. An Electoral Bill is being discussed at the National Assembly and is expected to be voted soon. At the end of 2024, even if reforms are underway, none of the 20 recommendations of the EU Election Observation Mission deployed for the Presidential election in December 2021 have been implemented. The repeal of the FGM ban, tabled at the National Assembly in 2023, was finally rejected in July 2024. In August 2024, the Commission for the Access to Information (ATI) was set up which represents a positive development. While corruption and governance issues remain key points of concern, the Gambian authorities publicly committed to upgrade their engagement. While an anti-corruption law was passed in December 2023, an independent anti-corruption body is still to be set up for investigating and prosecuting corruption cases in an effective manner.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU overall development portfolio is fully in line with the priority strands of action of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights & Democracy 2020-2027, in particular on protecting and empowering individuals, especially young people and women; building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies, through a significant support to the three key reforms underpinning democratic consolidation since 2017–constitutional, transitional justice and security sector reforms; and promoting a global system for human rights and democracy through a close cooperation between The Gambia and the EU in international in support of a rules-based international order.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU actively engages with the Gambian authorities on the human rights situation at the occasion of its periodic Partnership Dialogues and diplomatic démarches. In parallel, the EU engages locally with the main civil-society organisations, the local authorities and institutional actors (e.g. the National Human Rights Commission) for supporting a positive agenda on human rights across the country.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU allocation for The Gambia on 2021-2024 period was EUR 119 million, which represents one of the highest amount per capita of EU intervention in Africa. In the field of support to human rights and democracy, the EU intervention supports many relevant projects and actions: The EU-UNDP GREAT initiative (NDICI, EUR 9 million) focuses on equitable justice systems, healing and reconciliation post-conflict, as well as enhancing local governance. The EU CODE project (H&D thematic funds, EUR 1.5 million) supports key democratic institutions, including the National Assembly, the National Human Rights Commission, and the Gambia Press Union, reinforcing legislative functions, human rights protection, and press freedom. This project also addressed the recent attempted setback on the FGM debate. The Security Sector Reform (SSR) projects (NDICI, EUR 6 million),

in collaboration with the German development agency GIZ and the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), are advancing into their second phase. These projects concentrate on civilian oversight of security institutions, combating sexual and gender-based violence, and establishing model police stations both in the urban and rural areas. Budget support indicators (the State Resilience Building Contract IV) are aligned to the Truth Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) White Paper's commitments. This adds an extra incentive to the implementation.

The EU-UNDP Insider Mediation (FPI regional) project also plays a role in conflict resolution, promoting peace and stability by empowering national mediators. The CSO Watchdog (NDICI – SRBC 3 - 400,000 EUR) project empowers CSOs to oversee the National Development Plan.

5. Multilateral context: There is a close cooperation between The Gambia and the EU on the international stage in support of a rules-based international order and effective multilateralism with the UN at its core. The Gambia is member of the UNHRC with its mandate extended in 2024, and proved to be very active.

Under the UPR mechanism, The Gambia should take action on abolishing the death penalty, in line with its stated intentions and the UPR 2019 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 ICCPR aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, courts continued to hand down death sentences. Prison and detention conditions in The Gambia can still be inhuman and degrading. Under the UPR mechanism, several countries, including African countries, recommend The Gambia to intensify the application of the 2015 and 2016 laws that criminalize child marriage and FGM.

Republic of Ghana

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Ghana remains sound, both by law and in practice. Following a smooth election process on 7 December 2024, Ghana enters 2025 with confirmed democratic credentials. Ghana demonstrates a generally strong record in upholding human rights. Ghana's media space remains vibrant, with general freedom of press and expression. CSOs remain vocal and proactive and freedom of Assembly is generally respected. Ghana is steadily progressing towards a full abolition of the death penalty. Presidential assent to one of the relevant bill amendments remains pending, however, for this partial abolition to be legally binding. Capital punishment also remains a legal penalty for high treason under the Constitution, so total abolition of the death penalty would ultimately require a change of constitution.

Nevertheless, some challenges remain regarding the rights of persons in vulnerable situations–including the situation of journalists; the marginalisation of ethnic groups; the situation of refugees, Fulbe, women and children as well as sexual minorities; and the issue child labour, mainly in the informal sector. Ghana's overall ranking in the World Press Freedom Index improved in 2024, moving from 62 (in 2023) to 50. However, the level of political ownership of media outlets remains a challenge. Corruption also remains common at all levels. In spite of isolated government efforts, Ghana's ranking (70 out of 180) on the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index remained unchanged in 2024.

The passage and presidential assent of the Affirmative Action Bill, which commits to advance women inclusion and gender equity, presents an encouraging development but lacks an implementation strategy to reach any tangible progress.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027, the six priority sectors of the EU in Ghana are: children's rights; non-discrimination, including on the basis of sexual orientation and disability; gender equality and women's rights; freedom of expression; an efficient and accessible justice system and institutional reform.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Over the past year, the EU has significantly strengthened its operational support to conflict prevention and mediation in Ghana. Consultations with various stakeholders, including Ghana's government and CSOs, highlighted a particular need to prevent conflict between farmers and herders. In August–September 2024, the EU funded a successful dialogue, which resulted in the unification of the Fulbe community.

The EU continued its advocacy and public diplomacy on human rights as Ghana celebrated the passing of an Affirmative Action Bill, as well as its first year on the UN Human Rights Council. In 2024, the EU organised several events and activities on human rights in Ghana, through awareness raising campaigns around world day against the death penalty and interactive discussions marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

The EU was recognized as 'outstanding development partner' by Ghana's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a distinction awarded at the inaugural 'Diplomatic Honours' ceremony.

4. EU financial engagement: Since 2012, the European Union has focused the call for proposals under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights on the rights of the child. Specific themes covered are the fight against child labour, child marriage, as well as child trafficking and exploitation.

5. Multilateral context: As Ghana assumed its seat at the UNHRC in 2024, the country voted in favour of a resolution that expressed grave concerns about the human rights situation in the Russian Federation, and a resolution on the human rights situation in Ukraine stemming from the Russian aggression. Ghana did abstain from few resolutions, for example on the human rights situation in Burundi and Eritrea.

While Ghana is a party to relevant international treaties, such as the ICCPR, the country is yet to sign the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, which deals with abolishment of the death penalty.

Republic of Guinea

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: This year was supposed to be the last year of the democratic transition in Guinea after a military coup in September 2021. The timeline agreed with ECOWAS has not been respected, and preparations for the return to constitutional order are well beyond schedule. So far, only a draft constitution was issued but has still not been adopted, and there is no clarity about dates for elections.

Despite a positive development with the withdrawal of the restrictions on the internet, the civic space in Guinea shrunk considerably. This year, the pressure intensified on journalists and on political parties, including the dissolution of about fifty of them. Registration of new NGOs and renewal of registrations of existing ones were suspended for four months. Additionally, the prohibition of demonstrations has been maintained and any attempt to demonstrate in the streets was met with violent repression, often with deadly consequences.

Disappearances and arbitrary arrests have continued this year. For example, two prominent activists were arrested in July. A journalist was arrested in December 2024. Their whereabouts remain unknown.

Conversely, a positive development has been the issuance of the first-instance verdict in the trial of the September 28, 2009 massacre. Nearly 15 years after the events in Conakry's stadium, where 156 people were killed, over 100 women raped and more than 100 people reported missing, former transitional president Moussa Dadis Camara and six high-ranking officers were sentenced to heavy prison terms ranging from ten years to life imprisonment. Despite these convictions, challenges remain, notably the question of financial reparations for the victims. Almost six months after this first judgement, the next stages of the trial remain to be announced.

The position of women in Guinean society remains a cause for concern. There is a very low level of representation and inclusion of women within the transitional institutions. None of the 33 prefects and 304 sub-prefects appointed since the start of the transition is a woman. GBV, including sexual violence and FGM, remain real scourges. Efforts to combat these crimes, the survivors of which are very often underage girls, remain largely inadequate despite sporadic progress. Whilst relatively protective legislation is in place, implementation leaves much to be desired. Guinea still lacks a strategy for promoting human rights.

2. EU action - key focus areas: promoting fundamental freedoms and strengthen civic and political space; promoting an enabling a safe environment for civil society; protecting people, ending inequality, discrimination and exclusion; promoting democratic, accountable and transparent institutions; strengthening the links between human rights and the environment; strengthening economic, social and labour rights; encouraging health promotion; and strengthening a participatory, rights-based approach to conflict prevention and crisis resolution.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU actively promotes respect for the rule of law and fundamental rights in Guinea. The EU publicly expressed its concern over the shrinking of civic space and the disappearance of activists and engages the Guinean authorities on those matters. The EU renewed its restrictive measures taken against the perpetrators of the massacres of the Stade du 28 Septembre in 2009, including against Dadis Camara and Colonel Pivi.

4. EU financial engagement: For the period 2024-2027, the EU funds two programmes aiming at better countering GBV in Conakry, Kankan, Mamou, Kindia and Labé. EU assists in combating the impunity of perpetrators of GBV and in providing support to survivors. Besides, between 2019 and 2024, the EU supported the fight against human trafficking and migrant smuggling networks in Guinea by helping enhance the capabilities of the Guinean authorities to protect victims. Owing to the importance of this work, the EU has decided to continue its

engagement. The protection of children is another major priority for the EU in Guinea, notably the protection of unaccompanied child migrants and children in conflict with the law. The EU also supports the fight against forced labour of children. The EU supports the empowerment of women through the support of woman entrepreneurship - by helping to tackle gender-based obstacles and by facilitating the access of women to funding. The EU supports a new Public Expenditure and Financial Assessment, which is to include a module on gender equality in the management of public finances. At the end of 2024, the EU launched a support programme, facilitating repair of the sections for women and minors in the main detention facility of Conakry, which had been affected by the explosion of a fuel depot in December 2023. This initiative aims at improving the sanitary conditions of detainees and at providing psychosocial support - notably by facilitating reintegration of women and minors after their release.

The Framework for a Structured Dialogue (*Cadre de dialogue structur*é, CDS) was launched on 30 September with EU support. Twenty CSOs gathered to discuss 18 topics related to democracy and human rights. A monitoring committee was put in place in order to maintain these exchanges and to ensure dissemination of the CDS elsewhere in the country. The EU supports reinforcement of the main enablers of the transition in Guinea: institutions such as the Supreme Court, political parties and civil society. From August 2023 to July 2024, 513 agents of national institutions have been trained, 142 of which women. 599 agents of national institutions received training in Leadership and Conflict Management Skills for Electoral Stakeholders (LEAD), including 160 women. This programme further facilitated training for 140 journalists and equipment of two media services . 176 individuals received training aimed at fostering dialogue mechanisms involving civil society and youth organisations.

A few years ago, EU MS present in Guinea have put in place a Gender Task Force in charge of the implementation of the Gender Action Plan III. This task force works very closely with the Guinean authorities in order to strengthen the fight against GBV. Several EU MS are important donors to multilateral organisations, including members of the UN family (WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA) and international financial institutions.

5. Multilateral context: Guinea was discussed at the UPR 49 this year. Main issues to be addressed include the shrinking of civic space, enforced disappearance, gender-based violence and transitional justice. Business and human rights, notably in connection to natural resources, will be discussed as well.

Republic of Guinea-Bissau

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Guinea-Bissau remains a fragile country, where most people live with less than two euros per day, facing many challenges that hinder improvement of living conditions and full enjoyment of human rights. After the clashes of December 2023, during which the President denounced an ‘attempted coup’ and dissolved the Parliament, in 2024 the country has been ruled by a ‘Government of Presidential Initiative’ solely accountable to the president. The Opposition considers the dissolution of the Parliament illegal and this Government illegitimate. Legislative elections planned for November 2024 by Presidential Decree have been postponed, and are now (tentatively) expected to occur in November 2025, together with presidential elections. In the last three

years, several opponents of the PR have been arrested or left the country. Freedom of the media remains a concern, with several radio stations and other outlets at risk of closure. This is notably due to the strongly increased costs for the renewal of operating licences. This, together with certain comments made by key political actors about some high-profile journalists, has increased self-censorship and weakened independent journalism. Other significant human rights violations have been reported, including cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrests and detentions; a judiciary lacking independence; widespread corruption; lack of investigation of and impunity for crimes of violence against women and girls; human trafficking; and the worst forms of child labour. While Government mechanisms exist for the oversight of the security forces, allowing investigation and prosecution of cases of abuse of power, impunity remains a serious problem. The ban on public demonstrations and gatherings, imposed by the Ministry of Interior in January 2024, has garnered strong criticism from human rights activists, who claim that it is enforced unevenly.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU action focused on protecting and empowering individuals: Civil Society is very active in Guinea-Bissau but struggles with limited resources and capacity, in spite of support from the EU and other members of the international community. The empowering of women and the fight against GBV remain key challenges, alongside the need to enhance the respect for the human rights of persons with disabilities, children and LGBTI people. The EU continues to support projects aimed at building civil society's capacity to combat and prevent child and forced marriage, human trafficking, with special attention to the issues that certain *'talibé'* children face, as well as GBV, including female genital mutilation. These efforts include psychological, legal, health, economic and social empowerment support. In addition, the EU funds other projects that promote the right to health, advance WHO universal health coverage objectives, improve the performance of health professionals, and enhance access to justice for vulnerable people, including persons living in remote areas.

Furthermore, the EU promoted a global system for human rights and democracy: Regarding Freedom of the Media, an EIDHR-supported project signed in 2024 aims to promote respect and protection of freedom of expression, media freedom and safety of journalists, as well as combating misinformation and hate speech. Another pilot EIDHR project aims to develop structured programmes focusing on citizenship and human rights education. Finally, an EDF project titled 'Strengthening the resilience of local communities in defence of human rights and consolidation of the rule of law' engages the Human Rights League, as well as relevant actors from civil society and security forces. Guinea-Bissau has not yet established an independent human rights commission and, consequently, does not adhere to the NHRI network. Similarly, the country does not adhere to Inter-Parliamentary networks.

The EU was also active in the field of new technologies, by harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges. The main challenge is digital inclusion that remains low, commensurate to the low level of development in Guinea-Bissau. Expanding access to digital technologies is essential for fostering inclusive growth and strengthening democratic participation. In 2024, the EU helped expand access to health services, including for the most vulnerable citizens, through the establishment of the first telemedicine platform for maternal and child health. It also has strengthened the e-governance national system, by setting up an integrated citizen registration and statistics system, as well as installing a new border control system. All these

systems use document security technologies that contribute to safe access to basic services and the prevention of human trafficking.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Since 2015, there has been neither a formal political dialogue nor a human rights dialogue between the EU and Guinea-Bissau. Human rights issues have been addressed on an *ad hoc* basis. Recently, Bissau-Guinean authorities have expressed interest in resuming political dialogue, now called Partnership Dialogue, following Guinea-Bissau's signing of the Samoa Agreement in 2024. Preparations are ongoing to hold the first session in 2025.

4. EU financial engagement: The Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2021-2027 for Guinea-Bissau allocates EUR 25 million to support human rights, democracy and good governance projects. This funding is divided into EUR 14 million for the action 'Strengthening the security and justice sectors to ensure quality service delivery in Guinea-Bissau', EUR 5 million for the action 'Transparent and accountable economic governance', EUR 1 million for the action 'Support to the Electoral Cycles of Guinea-Bissau 2023-2025', and EUR 5 million for the action 'Strengthening Democratic Governance in Guinea-Bissau'. Some key achievements are listed hereunder:

Human Rights and Rule of Law: the EU launched the Improving Inclusive Access to Justice (EUR 5.85 million, implemented by UNDP), which bridges formal and traditional justice systems, promotes gender-sensitive legal frameworks, and enhances legal aid services for vulnerable groups, including women and persons with disabilities.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: the EU integrated gender-sensitive approaches across various programmes. Under the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) initiative (EUR 10 million, implemented by UNESCO), targeted measures were introduced to increase women's participation in skills development and economic empowerment, building on a previous action concluded in 2024, which has trained and accompanied to integrate the labour market more than 2000 young people, half of which are women.

Combatting GBV and Harmful Practices: several projects provided support services for GBV survivors, including vocational training for economic reintegration. The 'Born Perfect' campaign against Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting was implemented in the most affected regions, complementing legal advocacy efforts.

Freedom of Expression and Media Rights: the EU launched the Protecting Freedom of Opinion and Expression (EUR 0.7 million) project, supporting journalist safety, media independence, and combating disinformation.

5. Multilateral context: As a staunch supporter of effective multilateralism, the EU actively works with individual EU MS and other partners, particularly the UN family. Guinea-Bissau is a signatory to eight core international human rights instruments and is expected to ratify a number of Optional Protocols. Additionally, it has been asked to establish an independent National Human Rights Commission.

Republic of Kenya

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Kenya is widely perceived as a peaceful and functional democracy, characterised by relatively strong and stable institutions. However, the overall democratic governance and human rights situation deteriorated in 2024, especially with the government's response to the Gen-Z demonstrations in the summer of 2024, including the excessive use of force, abductions, enforced disappearances and other violent attacks on civilians. In the aftermath of these protests, there was little effort to establish responsibility and accountability. These events also confirmed the trend of continuous undermining of respect for the 2010 Constitution and its progressive Bill of Rights. Kenya benefits from a strong legal framework, but oversight institutions in charge of upholding the rule of law and good governance face serious difficulties in delivering on their mandate due to underfunding, lack of capacity and increasing political interference. Kenya continues to have one of Africa's more active media landscapes, and a vibrant civil society. However, media outlets and journalists continue to report increased occurrences of political interference, intimidation and harassment, which result in increased self-censorship of the media. Violence against HRDs and youth activists increased. Corruption and the perception of a culture of impunity at all levels of government have also remained a major issue. Sexual and gender-based violence, including femicide cases have surged in 2024 compared to 2023. Kenya maintains a restrictive legal and social environment for LGBTI individuals, and Kenya's Penal Code criminalises same-sex relations.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2024, the EU has continued implementing the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy and focused its human-rights engagement with Kenya on six key thematic areas: democratic governance and elections; rule of law; freedom of speech and of the media; rights of the persons in vulnerable situations; HRDs and civil society; and rights in response to climate change as well as business and human rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Throughout the year, the EU continued to engage actively with the government, in particular through the EU-Kenya Strategic Dialogue. On 8-9 October, the EUSR for Human Rights Olof Skoog visited Kenya and had high-level engagements with the Kenyan authorities to discuss democratic governance and human-rights protection. In October, the EU and Kenya held a new iteration of their joint sectoral consultations dedicated to security and defence matters. Many high-level bilateral meetings and visits took place throughout the year between Kenyan government officials and EU Commissioners, as well as EU Heads of States and Ministers.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, 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. A new EUR 4 million programme to fight FGM was signed in December 2024 alongside seven new grants focused on structured civil-society dialogue, electoral reforms, youth empowerment, business and human rights, independent media and investigative journalism and environmental protection/climate change with a total value of EUR 8.835 million. In addition, a EUR 1 million regional diversity project funded under the human rights facility was transferred to the Kenya delegation during the first quarter of the year. Furthermore, a new EUR 3 million contract to strengthen the national cybersecurity strategy was signed with Expertise France in partnership with EstDev and two contracts to support the implementation of the national strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) with the National Counter-Terrorism Center (EUR 5

million) and a complementary action with GCERF to facilitate community engagement on PCVE (EUR 2 million) was also concluded in 2024. Finally, a EUR 6.5 million contract was concluded with GIZ to support performance management of approximately 14 counties for improved service delivery and accountability as well as to continue EU support to devolution in Kenya.

5. Multilateral context: Kenya was among several African countries elected to the UNHRC on 9 October 2024 for the period 2025-2027. The country's election attracted criticism of CSOs over human rights concerns. Kenya is however not the only country with a contentious human rights record elected to the UNHRC. Membership of the UNHRC mandates the country to promote respect, protection and fulfilment of rights globally, while addressing its human rights record at home.

Kenya will undergo its fourth UPR of its human rights record at 49th session (28 April – 9 May 2025) of the Human Rights Council. The National Report on Kenya's human rights record is due on 1 February 2025. Under the Special Procedures of the UNHRC, two Special Rapporteur visits have been requested. A visit of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions in 2025 has not yet been accepted by government, while a visit of the by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of assembly has been agreed for 2026.

Kingdom of Lesotho

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The Government that came out of the 2022 elections took office with a programme to curb ineffective and corrupt spending. However, national reforms, including ensuring independence of the judiciary from the executive branch, did not progress. This eroded and destabilised the Government's political basis. In 2024, international human rights organisations and the media observed a recrudescence of brutality, torture and unlawful killings by the security forces. Access to justice and conditions of detention in prisons remained matters of concern. The rate of GBV is amongst the highest in the world, with over 86% of the Basotho women having experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. Although gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution, customary law subordinates women to men. On the positive side, the Government increased the funding dedicated to the efforts related to anti-trafficking law enforcement and rule of law training, victim protection and awareness-raising efforts. Eswatini retains the death penalty but has not carried out executions since 1983. Consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In 2024, the EU focused its human rights engagement with Lesotho on two key areas: Concerning the aim of protecting and empowering individuals, the EU supported communities, especially vulnerable groups of the population, with a series of actions targeting women and girls, victims of trafficking, people with disability, and children. With regard to building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies, the EU supported the Ministry of Justice with a programme aimed at increasing efficiency and quality of justice delivery, improving access to justice for all, in particular for women, children and groups in vulnerable and marginalized situations and increasing accountability, transparency, integrity and credibility of justice and governance institutions. The EU also supported national authorities for the enhancement of social assistance and protection, especially for households with children under five.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to engage with the Government and other political stakeholders at the highest level. In particular, the EU underlined the urgency of progress on the reform agenda, including fast-tracking the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission. The EU-Lesotho annual Partnership Dialogue in May 2024 allowed in-depth discussions on the National Reforms Process, follow-up on the recommendations of the 2022 EU Electoral Observation Mission, as well as on issues concerning human rights and GBV in particular.

The EU continued its support to the most vulnerable through the Equitable Lesotho programme, which was launched in 2023 to improve the well-being and development for children under five, enhance the effectiveness of social assistance, and ensure the quality of the data and statistics related to the policies and programmes implemented by the Government and international partners in the area of social protection. Empowerment of CSOs in the framework of the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (PPHR) action is ongoing. The aim is to strengthen community structures and foster a national coalition of organisations of people with disabilities. This should enhance oversight in the fight against human rights violations and abuses, and raise awareness of and response to trafficking in human beings.

The EU has also invested in tailored campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the multifaceted dimension of human rights, namely under a four-month EU Governance campaign under the #JusticeForAll hashtag concluded in March 2024, and a second #JusticeForAll initiative launched during the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence in November 2024.

Gender mainstreaming is a significant objective in the formulation and execution of EU programmes in Lesotho. The EU reviewed and updated the Country Level Implementation Plan (CLIP) of the Gender Action Plan III (2021-2025), in consultation with national authorities, Member States, international partners and CSOs.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU remained committed to supporting a wide range of priorities, including the implementation of the National Reforms Process, a EUR 2.5 million programme suspended until the passing of the constitutional amendment bills. The EU supported the justice system, by implementing a support programme to the justice sector, including oversight bodies, amounting to EUR 5.15 million. In the field of human rights and democracy, the EU continued to provide support to national and international CSOs through the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) as well as through the thematic instruments on Civil Society, Democracy and Human Rights (NDICI) for a total of EUR 5.5 million. In July 2024, EUDEL launched a call for proposal for CSOs amounting to EUR 2.3 million to support CSOs in being advocates for gender equality, women's economic empowerment, and climate justice. The EU supported better service delivery and access for the vulnerable population. It approved a EUR 27 million programme that supports sanitation systems and water supply to vulnerable and rural population. It will also contribute in improving the access of disabled children and girls to schools. The EU continues its engagement (EUR 6 million) in support to social protection with the aim of enhancing the effectiveness of social assistance and improving the well-being and development of children under five.

5. Multilateral context: Lesotho is a signatory to core human rights treaties and a member of the International Criminal Court. However, Lesotho did not ratify the Optional Protocol to the

Convention against Torture, the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR on abolition of death penalty, 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. The country's last UPR session held in 2020 commended the progress made by Lesotho, such as the adoption of the Anti-Trafficking Bill of 2020.

Republic of Liberia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The peaceful and transparent elections in Liberia have made the country a beacon of democracy and stability in a region where coups have multiplied in the recent years. These elections were the first without direct international election assistance or peacekeeping forces since the end of the 2003 civil war. The new government was elected on a 'no business as usual', end impunity, increase accountability, fight corruption platform. On May 2 2024, President Boakai adopted an Executive Order creating an Office to establish a War and Economic Crimes Court to 'investigate, design, and prescribe the methodology, mechanisms, and the processes for the establishment of a Special War Crimes Court for Liberia as well as for the establishment of a National Anti-Corruption Court for Liberia' and to implement the recommendations made by the UN-designated Truth and Reconciliation Committee 15 years ago. The justice system still needs to be strengthened in order to enhance the rule of law in the country. The customary system still cohabits with the formal system especially in rural areas where this traditional way of resolving conflict is widespread. For instance, the Independent National Commission on Human Rights points out the practice of trial by ordeal ('sassywood') as still occurring despite being prohibited.

The final endorsement of the draft bill abolishing death penalty remains pending at parliamentary level despite the fact Liberia has been under a de facto moratorium since 2000. The upcoming UPR in 2025 will be an opportunity for Liberia finally to achieve legal abolition of the death penalty.

Women's rights remain an important challenge in Liberia. Women are underrepresented in politics and in many of the public institutions. Despite promises by the two major parties to fulfil the 30% gender quota, ultimately the numerical representation of women in the legislature remained low–10.7% following the 2023 General Elections. The level of participation for women as candidates was also low, with only 152 of the 1,130 candidates–14%–being women. At the same time, women's participation as voters was high, a success for civil society, the National Elections Commission and others who put in great efforts to increase female voter turnout. Sexual and gender-based violence, including FGM as well as child marriage and teenage pregnancies, are still very frequent. In February 2022, the head of the National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia (NACCEL), Chief Zanzan Karwor announced a three-year suspension on FGM. Subsequently, he announced a national ban in February 2023. These are positive steps with respect to women and girls' rights.

Liberia has a relatively longstanding tradition of freedom of expression and press freedom without any major incidents since 2020-2021. Despite the fact that libel was decriminalised in 2019, HRDs do not benefit yet from a protecting legal system. A National Policy to Protect Human Rights Defenders draft has been submitted to the Ministry of Justice. With the decision

on the establishment of the War and Economic Crimes Court there is an increased urgency to protect HRDs in defending the rights of those who are seeking justice. Liberia has launched its first National Action Plan (NAP) on Business and Human Rights (2024-2028) in August 2024. The NAP is a key initiative by the government led by the Ministry of Justice and Labour respectively. This first Liberia NAPBHR focuses on six key thematic areas as identified by stakeholders: land and natural resources, labour issues, access to justice, environmental concerns, transparency and accountability, and gender-related issues. The NAP strives to ensure compliance with national laws and international human rights standards by the state and the business community. Main challenges are the informal economy as the primary source of employment and income for almost 90 % per cent of the population, and the lack of awareness of the guiding principles and the business and human rights agenda. Liberia signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012. There is a high number of persons with physical disabilities, particularly following the civil wars. People with disabilities in Liberia often face discrimination and marginalisation.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU focused on gender equality and women's rights; transparent, inclusive, credible and peaceful electoral processes; rule of law, transitional justice, access to justice and prison conditions; non-discrimination; HRDs and civil society organizations; as well as business and human rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU held its first Partnership Dialogue with Liberia under the Samoa Agreement in August 2024 during which civil society organizations participated officially. This was an opportunity for these organizations to advocate for the inclusion of civil society, HRDs, victims and legal experts into the transitional justice process, in particular in the establishment of a War and Economic Crimes Court. The discussions also included the abolition of the death penalty, the rule of law and non-discrimination, reinforcing the shared commitment to democratic principles and justice in Liberia.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU supports the Government of Liberia, the National Elections Commission, and the legislature in strengthening democratic governance and promoting a more inclusive and participatory democracy. The EU and its MS are committed to consolidating the progress achieved through electoral cycle-oriented projects, notably to enhance the participation and inclusion of women and marginalised groups in political processes. This includes creating more opportunities for political and civic engagement, in particular for women and youth. The EU maintains regular contacts with HRDs and their networks, notably on transitional justice and discrimination issues.

Several EU-funded programmes focus on defending the fundamental rights of detainees, notably by providing counselling, legal support and representation for those held in prolonged pre-trial detention. These initiatives also include actions on rehabilitation paths and awareness of detainees' rights, legal aid, and support to fast-track trial for pre-trial detainees. In 2024, the EU has been particularly active in public discussions and the media on human-rights concerns, such as SGBV and FGM.

In line with the adoption of the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, the EU has developed several programmes to support stakeholders involved in the Kimberley Process. Other initiatives include training on Environmental Monitoring and Control Standards, diffusion of the OECD Due Diligence Guidance and other social and environmental Standards, and support to the Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

5. Multilateral context: While all steps were taken to legally and fully abolish the death penalty throughout 2024, the final endorsement of the draft bill by the House of Representatives remains pending, although the country has been under a de facto moratorium since 2000. Full legal abolition would be achievable ahead of the fourth UPR in 2025.

Under the new administration, Liberia seeks to play a more active role in shaping global peace and security discussions, particularly on issues affecting Africa.

In 2023, for the third consecutive year, Liberia aligned with EU Member States in a joint resolution on the human rights situation in Xinjiang.

Republic of Madagascar

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The situation in Madagascar presents a number of challenges, including extreme poverty, widespread corruption, poor access to basic needs such as water and energy, primary healthcare and education, and very poor detention conditions.

Legislative and local elections took place on 29 May and 11 December 2024. IRMAR, President Andry Rajoelina's political party won both elections. Safidy, a civil society observation platform, noted a number of irregularities including reports of pre-checked ballots, use of Government's means for campaigning and late inclusion of voters in key constituencies. Potential candidates complained about obstacles linked to the cost of legal deposit and to the refused delivery of essential documents by fiscal administration. Opposition candidates denounced serious restrictions to the freedom of peaceful assembly. The influence of business people and politicians, who own most media outlets, remained an obstacle to impartial coverage of national events.

The environment for civil society [activism] remained fragile amid cases of pressure and intimidation, in particular through abusive legal proceedings. A law introducing compulsory surgical castration for rapists of children under 18 and implementing decrees were adopted in contradiction with international standards.

Insecurity remained high, including kidnapping for ransom in rural areas. Arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings by security forces, were reported, especially in the western part of the country. Efforts to address the problem of overcrowded prisons and prison condition were undertaken but current detention conditions do not respect international standards. A persisting and significant problem is corruption. In May 2024, a former chief of staff of the President was found guilty of corruption by a British court. Transparency International ranked Madagascar 145 out of 180 countries with a score of 25.

In many cities, including the capital Antananarivo, access to water and energy was limited during several months, due to a lack of investment in infrastructures. Trafficking in human beings, including children, remains a major problem.

Some progress was registered in the field of women's rights: the number of women appointed to high-level positions, including in Government, increased, and efforts were made to promote family planning.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Human right are a key component of EU engagement in Madagascar. This is reflected in the Multi-annual Indicative Programme under the first priority: governance and human development. EU action aimed at building a resilient, inclusive and democratic society via support to institutions and civil society, including in the context of the legislative and municipal elections.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Upholding human rights is an essential element of the EU's political dialogue with Madagascar. Human rights issues have also been highlighted during several meetings with representatives of the Malagasy authorities and of civil society throughout the year. The EU worked with various like-minded actors via co-ordinated or joint meetings and démarches.

4. EU financial engagement: The European Union is supportive of a number of initiatives pertaining to the human-rights agenda, under the NDICI Multi-annual Indicative Programme as well as under budget lines dedicated to civil society organisations. Projects are funded in a number of areas, including active citizenship, elections, freedom of expression, protection of journalists, the fight against corruption, gender equality, gender based violence, social protection and child labour .

5. Multilateral context: The EU worked with various like-minded actors via co-ordinated or joint meetings and démarches in the area of elections, and other human rights related issues.

Madagascar has ratified the main international human rights instruments , including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. At regional level, Madagascar is a signatory to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights as well as the African Charter on Democracy, elections and governance. Throughout 2024, the EU and its Member States continued to cooperate with and be supportive of the UN agencies represented in Madagascar.

Madagascar will undergo the Universal Periodic Review in 2025.

Republic of Malawi

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Malawi throughout 2024 has been challenged compared to previous years. Some legislative advancements were made on accountability, yet public focus shifted toward basic needs amidst a declining socio-economic situation. Malawi continued to experience persistent economic and social crises, including fiscal, foreign exchange, fuel, food, pharmaceutical, and fertilizer shortages, alongside high inflation and slow growth. These challenges strain budgets, hinder human rights fulfilment, and may hamper progress in support to democratic governance. The fight against corruption stalled with the departure of the Anti-Corruption Bureau Director-General. A new Director-General has not been appointed since.

In terms of preparations for the 2025 general elections, the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) conducted a satisfactory voter registration. Progress was achieved in the implementation of the recommendations of the 2019 EU Election Observation Mission (EOM). However, political and legal challenges emerged. The pre-election period saw freedom of expression coming under pressure, with peaceful protests denied permits and journalists facing harassment. A positive highlight was the continued strong commitment of Malawi to multilateralism and rules-based international order in international human rights fora (Malawi was re-elected to the UN Human Rights Council in 2023).

Regarding rights of LGBTI persons, the Constitutional Court confirmed that the country's prohibitive same-sex laws were consistent with the Constitution's Bill of Rights, leaving it open for Parliament to decide on the next steps. Consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised. With respect to refugee rights, Malawi upheld the hard stance adopted through its 2023 re-encampment policy, which sparked protests and a complaint filed with the African Union Human Rights Court. With elections on the horizon, the momentum towards the abolition of the death penalty has slowly dwindled but the de facto moratorium has remained in place. Prison overcrowding continues to be an issue with custodial sentence being the preferred punishment even for petty crimes.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued its activities to protect and empower persons in vulnerable situations, with the aim of eliminating violence against women and girls, advancing girls' education, addressing discrimination based on sexual orientation, upholding the rights of refugees and supporting persons with disabilities and persons living with albinism. The EU also focused on Governance and the fight against corruption. In view of the 2025 elections, the EU, together with UNDP and other partners, embarked on an electoral support project, which is carried out in parallel with initiatives supporting civil registration and voter education. The fight against corruption continued to be a key focus area of intervention for the EU with the aim of fostering capacity-building for key Ministries and Institutions and of improving transparency and efficiency of the management system of public finances.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU has continued to work closely with the Malawian authorities on developments related to human rights, and on coordination of positions and voting intentions in multilateral fora, both bilaterally and in conjunction with Member States and like-minded partners. In particular, the EU has engaged actively with the Government on democracy and human rights matters through political dialogues in March and November 2024.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU supports greater accountability and tackling corruption. The EU signed a direct grant of EUR 8.3 million with the Ministry of Justice in October 2024 under the EUR 17 million Chilungamo II ('Access to Justice II') Programme. The grant will support the Ministry and six other justice institutions in enhancing their effectiveness in service delivery and improving access to justice for all. It will continue supporting oversight institutions, particularly the Office of Ombudsman and Malawi Human Rights Commission. In the framework of the EUR 17 million Malawi Democratic Governance Programme, the EU is contributing towards enhancing the technical operations of both the Malawi Election Commission (MEC) and the National Registration Bureau (NRB) ahead of the forthcoming general election, through two parallel UNDP-led Basket funds.

The EU also focused on the protection and empowerment of vulnerable groups: The EU launched its new EUR 59 million Gender Responsive Social Protection Programme, aimed at empowering Malawi's poorest and most vulnerable women and girls. The EU is funding a EUR 3.5 million project aimed specifically at increasing meaningful participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities in decision-making positions. Under the NDICI human rights and democracy thematic support, the EU awarded a grant worth EUR 200,000 to the Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC) focusing on the rights of refugees.

5. Multilateral context: Throughout 2024, the EU and Malawi further strengthened their excellent coordination and cooperation on matters related to human rights. In particular, the EU and Malawi consistently aligned to support resolutions condemning the Russian aggression in Ukraine, as well as on other human rights topics such as upholding the moratorium on the death penalty. Malawi's seat on the UNHRC provided renewed opportunities to foster cooperation on human rights-related matters.

Republic of Mali

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The social and political context in 2024 remained marked by serious human-rights violations on account of numerous cases of abuse, murder and serious violence perpetrated against civilians - by terrorists groups but also by Malian Armed Forces assisted by mercenaries and Russian substitutes. As a matter of fact, several NGOs, including Human Rights Watch and ACLED (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project), denounced during the year atrocities and abuses targeting civilian populations, such as summary executions and villages burned, especially in the north, centre and east of the country. Children and women are the first victims of this violence.

As regards infringements of the fundamental freedoms of opinion, expression and assembly, the year 2024 recorded a very strong degradation, resulting in a deep shrinkage of civic and political space. The measures adopted by the transitional authorities are at the origin of an authoritarian inflection that had already begun to take shape in an obvious way from the end of 2023.

Many political opponents, journalists and bloggers were arrested, disappeared or abducted by persons linked to the security forces after bringing to public attention collective problems or popular discontent with the authorities or issuing calls to protest. Repression affected all categories of the population, including artists, political activists, journalists and bloggers, intellectuals, community or religious leaders. One of the most coercive means used to restrict freedom of expression was the Freedom of Expression Act, notably through its articles sanctioning 'threats' and 'insults'–concepts to which the text does not associate a precise definition. In this context, many political actors and media, facing the high risk of arbitrary arrest, opted for self-censorship or silence. These restrictions on the freedoms of opinion and expression and association contributed significantly to the weakening of the political opposition, until it's quasi-dismantling.

The matter of human rights violations remained largely absent from the political debate. The Government prioritised restoring security, while democratic values were regarded as

secondary or even as a hindrance to the efforts made for the restoration of national sovereignty.

Since the UN reports on the events in Moura in March 2022, independent publications of HRDs are regarded by the State as hostile acts. Anything that goes against the authorities is presented as manipulation or initiated by an external enemy.

Furthermore, Mali adopted on 31 October 31 2024 a law criminalizing homosexuality and 'unnatural acts'. According to the Minister of Justice, now 'anyone who engages in this practice, by promoting or apologizing for it, will be prosecuted'.

2. EU action – key focus areas: The EU's democracy and human rights strategy in Mali sets three thematic priorities:

First, the preservation of the rule of law and the fight against impunity. The EU's objective is to strengthen respect for the rule of law. This must go through a strengthening the fight against impunity, notably through the mobilisation of the CSDP mission EUCAP Sahel Mali, in order to increase the relationship of trust with the people. In particular, the EU intends to support the promotion and defence of human rights, in partnership with the National Commission for Human Rights (*Commission Nationale des Droits de l'Homme* - CNDH). This was reflected in 2024 in interventions in support of juvenile justice, the preservation of civic space, and the safety of journalists.

Second, Women's Rights. The objective is on the one hand to encourage the socio-economic development of women and on the other hand to strengthen respect for women's rights by judicial institutions. The attainment of those objectives requires continued dialogue with Malian institutions on inequalities such as gender-based and other discrimination and EU involvement in the revision of the Family Code. This will include the implementation of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) III (2021-2025) of the EU. This was reflected in 2024 in interventions for the promotion of human rights.

The third priority are children's rights. The aim is to put an end to child labour, especially in artisanal mines while eradicating behaviour in clear violation of Mali's international commitments on human rights, such as FGM, child pregnancies and early marriages. Solving the situation of street children will be another objective. In terms of activities, the EU will support actions with the State as well as with society to combat the exploitation and abuse of children. This has resulted in 2024 in interventions in support of juvenile justice and children and young people living in street situations and displaced persons.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Public communication on human rights continues to be a key element of EU diplomatic activity in Mali: EU engagement with different groups in society, through digital diplomacy, is a key way to promote both EU values and the work done by civil society actors, including through social media, in particular the Delegation's Twitter account and Facebook page. In this way, the EU contributes to raising public awareness of its activities and positions on the promotion of human rights. The EU, the Member States and likeminded meet at the monthly meetings of the informal group of friends of human rights to discuss current events and their respective programmes. The EU continues its regular talks with the National Human Rights Commission to exchange on developments in the human rights situation in Mali, including on-going reforms.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU currently EUR 5.5 million in human rights project in Mali. The EU provided support amongst other things to promoting and addressing sexual and reproductive health and combating gender-based violence. Support was also given to protect children, particularly migrant populations, through school and economic reintegration.

5. Multilateral context: The departure of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and its observers has resulted in the virtual disappearance of independent sources of information. It has become very difficult to obtain documented information about human rights violations. The Malian army can now act without external scrutiny. The NGO denunciations and testimonies of Malian refugees in Mauritania indicate a strong deterioration of the situation, with indiscriminate use of force, in particular during joint operations with Russian elements. Abuses against local populations, especially Fulani, now appear systematic. The absence of the UN raises concerns about the increased risks of violence against civilian populations in the central and northern regions, where the MINUSMA played a major role in the protection of civilians.

Islamic Republic of Mauritania

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: During President Ghazouani's first term, the political and social appeasement he promoted fostered concrete progress in the field of human rights in recent years. In his second term, he continues to prioritise the consolidation of social cohesion, access to basic services and the fight against all forms of discrimination. However, significant limitations on women's rights and freedom of expression remain and cases of human rights violations are numerous. The new draft law against violence against women and girls has still not been presented to the National Assembly. Conservative circles, in particular Islamists, remain strongly opposed to it. Public perception of this draft law as a 'Western' product favours political instrumentalisation.

The situation of HRDs, the still difficult detention conditions ~~in prisons~~, corruption, freedom of sexual orientation and religion, and the persistence of slavery-related practices remain important points of attention. Mauritania is endeavouring to implement recommendations resulting from the UPR, the latest of which was held in 2021, while the next is foreseen for 2026. However, the authorities consider the recommendation on the death penalty and the recommendation on LGBTI rights inadmissible because supposedly incompatible with the Sharia-based national law.

In 2024, economic and financial governance remained weak. Mauritania is ranked 130 out of 180 in Transparency International 2023 as regards corruption. While the high-profile trial of former President Aziz appears to indicate the authorities' willingness to display anti-corruption efforts, these efforts remain rather superficial.

With regard to the death penalty, Mauritania has observed a moratorium on executions since 1987. Nevertheless, magistrates, obliged to follow the Criminal Code, continue to issue death sentences with little transparency on their number–to date, the number of death row inmates in prison is estimated at 162 according to the Ministry of Justice. In December 2024, Mauritania, in alliance with several Arab countries, voted against an UNGA resolution that

called for a universal moratorium on the death penalty, considering such a moratorium to be contrary to Sharia law. This raises concerns about Mauritania's willingness to maintain its moratorium.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In their 2021-2024 strategy for human rights and democracy in Mauritania, the EU and the EU MS identified eight priority areas, which guided activities in 2024, including promotion and protection of women's rights; promotion of non-discrimination and equality; improving migration governance; promotion of citizen participation; support for the rule of law and the sound administration of justice; and strengthening economic and social rights. With regard to improving non-discriminatory access to affordable and high-quality social services, since 2017 the European Union has been financing the 'Health Sector Support Programme' (PASS), which aims to improve the provision of quality care, improve national pharmaceutical policy based on international best practices and gradually establish universal health coverage in Mauritania with the effective establishment of the *Caisse Nationale de Solidarité en Santé* (CNASS). Five health centres have been built/rehabilitated and equipped. The programme also made it possible to set up a training plan for all health personnel and to start the digitalisation policy of the sector. Support to civil society and national human rights institutions was another key focus area. In the context of the June 2024 presidential elections, the EU supported the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) to promote respect for human rights during elections. This action enabled the CNDH to inform, train and raise awareness among the various actors concerned, namely institutions in charge of elections and the citizen political party, and to actively observe the electoral process. Finally, the EU focused on promotion of media independence and pluralism and the fight against disinformation.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2024, the EU and its Member States continued to support and promote human rights through public diplomacy and a qualitative increase in its strategic communication. The political dialogue meeting held in February with the Mauritanian authorities provided an opportunity to take stock of the human rights situation in Mauritania, to communicate again at the highest level on the priorities of the EU and its MS in the field of human rights and to recall the readiness of the European side to support the efforts undertaken by the authorities in this field. On numerous occasions, the EU Delegation and the Member States have been able to engage bilaterally on issues relating to respect for human rights with sectoral ministers and institutions.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU currently EUR 7.5 million in human rights project in Mauritania supporting press freedom, the media, the fight against disinformation, as well as some projects for the protection of women's rights, such as various campaigns to combat SGBV. Additionally, activities were also undertaken to support the past Electoral process (*CENI + authority Haute Autorité de la presse et de l'audiovisuel*).

5. Multilateral context: In 2024, the report of the UN expert group on discrimination against women and girls that visited Mauritania in September 2023 was published. The report highlights that essential progress has been made in empowering women and girls–including the prohibition of early marriage, the electoral code, and a more favourable institutional framework–although significant challenges remain. Such challenges are patriarchal pressures on women, ethnic and geographical impact on the status of women and a still poor understanding by many actors in society of gender-based discrimination, which reveals a form

of denial of violence against women. The experts called for the swift adoption of a law protecting women's rights and full participation in all aspects of their lives.

The Government cooperates with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration, and other humanitarian organisations to provide protection and assistance to displaced persons, refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, vulnerable migrants and other persons in situations of concern. However, the resources provided by the Government are not sufficient to meet the assistance needs of these groups, while Malian refugees are increasing sharply as are Mauritanian returnees from Mali.

After Mauritania was elected in 2023 as a member of the Board of Directors of the International Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), in 2024, the EITI Board concluded that the country achieved a moderate score (81 points) on the implementation of the EITI. The Board considers that significant progress has been made in improving the timeliness and relevance of its reporting, but that more efforts are needed to explain the impact of the increased government involvement in the Great Ahmeyim Turtle (GTA) gas field for future revenues, and to strengthen licensing procedures. Several requests for support for EU and MS positions on human rights in international fora were made in 2024. Mauritania is rather open to requests for support and, where it considers that it cannot openly support European positions, generally adopts a position of abstention. In its positions, Mauritania consults mainly with the countries of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Africa Group. As mentioned above, for the first time since 2007, Mauritania did not abstain but voted against a UNGA resolution calling for a universal moratorium on the death penalty, ostensibly within the framework of a common position of the OIC countries.

Republic of Mauritius

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Mauritius maintains a strong standing in overall governance in Africa, having generally upheld human rights, the rule of law and the rights of individuals, although think tanks and renowned institutions have reported a gradual degradation. The 2024 general elections in Mauritius of 10 November led to a peaceful and swift transfer of power. International observers found the process well conducted. Women's representation remained low, with only 18% female candidates; a disappointing trend also reflected in the new cabinet, listing only two women as Ministers. In the run up to the general elections, the Government's decision on 1 November to block social media temporarily, against the backdrop of a wiretapping scandal, was seen as a serious attack not only on freedom of expression, but also on freedom of access to information. The ban was swiftly reversed one day later, following pressure from the public.

GBV is a significant challenge in Mauritius with reported cases increasing at alarming rate. Factors such as patriarchy and social stigmatisation discourage victims from reporting cases. In 2024, Mauritius ranked 107th in the Global Gender Gap Report. It lags behind in several areas including unequal divorce rights, higher unemployment rate among women and greater prevalence of part-time employment for women.

The Ombudsperson for Children investigated 320 cases in the period 2023-2024. The Government of Mauritius has maintained the Universal Child Benefit (CSG Allowance) with a 25% increase in the monthly benefit, thus highlighting efforts to strengthen children's rights to the social security system. However, violence and sexual assaults perpetrated on minors remain widespread and underreported. In its 2023-2024 report, the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children also recommended the implementation of an Adoption Bill in order to enable children awaiting adoption to find permanent homes more quickly.

In spite of the overall increase in numbers in key areas (tourism, retail, textile), migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and precarious working conditions. In July 2024, the Parliament amended the Private Recruitment Agencies Act to include 'labour contractors', allowing the latter to employ migrant workers on behalf of businesses. This amendment further exposed migrant workers to exploitation. In 2024, the US added garments from Mauritius, largely produced by migrant workers from Bangladesh, India and Nepal, to its List of Goods Produced by Child Labour or Forced Labour. The private sector, along with the International Office for Migration (IOM) and support by the EU, developed a Code of Conduct and an Ethical Sourcing Roadmap.

The Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act passed in Parliament in April. Although there is growing acceptance towards the LGBTI community in Mauritius in recent years, they continue to be marginalised in the Mauritian society. Same-sex marriage is unrecognised. LGBTI individuals are nonetheless not specifically excluded from adoption.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU is Mauritius' main partner in the area of human rights and the promotion of democracy. Among the many activities in 2024, the following examples can be given:

Under the Democracy and Human-Rights programme, two new projects with civil society (SOS Children Villages Mauritius and Mauritius Welfare and Family Planning) are focussing on children's rights, notably to enhance sexual and reproductive rights, protect children against sexual exploitation including online, train sector institutions involved in child protection and advocate for policy review in these fields. The empowerment of women continues to be a part of the EU's activities in Mauritius. To promote gender equality, the EU mobilised an expert to assist the Ministry for Gender Equality and Family Welfare in implementing the National Gender Policy (2022–2030). Likewise, in support of women's economic empowerment, the EU conducted entrepreneurship training for the National Women Entrepreneur Council in February, contributing to the development of its roadmap to become a leading organisation for women's entrepreneurship in Mauritius. The EU has collaborated closely with Transparency Mauritius to promote democratic values and transparency. In November 2024, the EU hosted the event Youth and Democracy: Rights, Responsibilities and Participation to engage young people in understanding and embracing their role in democratic processes, in view of general elections.

The EU was active in the field of labour rights: The EU reinforced its commitment to labour rights by participating in a workshop organised by the IOM in April. The workshop aimed to raise awareness about the IRIS standard and its role in facilitating cross-border ethical recruitment, and focused on building the capacity of government officials regarding ethical recruitment practices.

The EU is also committed to advancing human rights by addressing emerging challenges in the digital age, particularly in the field of cybercrime. In March/April 2024, the EU, through the Council of Europe, organised comprehensive training sessions on cybercrime and electronic evidence for magistrates and prosecutors in Mauritius, as part of the GLACY-e and Octopus projects.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In February 2024, the EU organised the Sixth EU-Mauritius High-Level Policy Dialogue on Gender, co-chaired by the Ambassador and the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare. The discussions included combating GBV, promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights, empowering women and girls economically and socially, encouraging leadership and participation and addressing challenges related to the green transition and digital transformation.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU Multiannual Indicative Programme for Mauritius for 2021-2027 period has a budget of EUR 8 million and supports good governance and the green transition. Human rights and democracy are not directly targeted. However, several relevant projects, mentioned above, are financed under additional budget lines such as the Democracy and Human Rights programme.

5. Multilateral context: Mauritius generally aligns with EU positions in multilateral fora. Mauritius is a key ally to support an international rules-based order with the UN as its core. Mauritius is a likeminded country on many international issues. EU-Mauritius regularly exchange on regional and international matters of common interest, including related to the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the African Union.

Republic of Mozambique

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Whilst the security situation in Cabo Delgado had improved in 2023, in 2024 violence rose again, particularly in the period in which the SAMIM forces from the SADC departed the country in July 2024. Armed groups continued to perpetrate severe human rights violations and abuses, including bombings, violent attacks, the recruitment of children, kidnappings, beheadings, and sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls. Mozambican and international journalists were severely restricted in their work, in particular in Cabo Delgado.

In the course of 2024, the overall human rights and democracy situation in Mozambique deteriorated further. This deterioration was largely caused by a security and humanitarian crisis in the North, and by a wave of post-electoral violence that hit the country following the elections of 9 October 2024.

The presidential, parliamentary and local elections all took place on 9 October 2024 and were marred by widespread irregularities. They were followed by unprecedented civil unrest. Security forces engaged in indiscriminate violence, protesters in acts of looting and vandalism. The assassination of two senior political opposition figures and the announcement of provisional results on 24 October further angered the population. At end of December 2024 around 300 persons had been killed, including victims in the police forces, with thousands injured or arrested.

More than 700,000 people remain internally displaced as of end December 2024–both as a result of the ongoing conflict in northern provinces and natural disasters such as cyclones and floods in central provinces. Activists and HRDs, working in a very complex environment, were often victims of intimidation, kidnapping and assassinations–crimes that remain to be investigated. Both the ongoing conflict in the north and the climate-induced crises continue to aggravate risks to the most fragile segments of the population, namely women, children, and internally displaced persons.

Abuses against journalists and de facto restrictions on media freedom and the shutdown of mobile internet connectivity on the afternoon of 25 October, have significantly prevented access to information at a time of heightened social tensions when credible and reliable information was needed.

In September 2024, press articles appeared on massacres of the local population perpetrated by the Mozambican Security Forces at the TotalEnergies site in Afungi in 2021. Following an EU request for clarification, the Mozambican authorities have announced a specific investigation.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2024, the EU continued to closely monitor human rights developments in Mozambique, with a heightened focus on the conflict-affected areas, in particular the northern province of Cabo Delgado. The EU integrated approach, encompassing humanitarian aid, development cooperation, peace-building and security, supported 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. The EU military training mission to Mozambique (EUTM) came to an end in June 2024, having accomplished its goal of training 11 Quick Reaction Forces of the Mozambican army (FADM), as per its mandate. In addition to military and tactical training, a substantive part of the EUTM training programme continued to focus on human rights and IHL, including the protection of civilians, particularly women and children affected by armed conflict. In addition, the EU has continued to integrate human rights into its partnership/cooperation programmes, promoting inclusive development, with a particular focus on the rights of women, children, and persons with disabilities. This support translated i.a. into financial assistance, capacity-building programmes, and protection measures for activists facing risks. The EU visibly strengthened its commitment to defending human rights and democracy by vocally advocating for the protection of freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly. The EU continued to focus on key areas such as peace building and good governance. There was also a particular focus on fighting GBV.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged with the Government of Mozambique in a Partnership Dialogue in May 2024. The agenda 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.

Ahead of the elections of 9 October 2024, and upon invitation of the Mozambican authorities, the EU deployed an Election Observation Mission that performed an evaluation of all stages of the electoral process. It signalled that, despite a relatively calm and peaceful campaign and Election Day, there were shortcomings and irregularities in several phases of the process (registration, counting, and tabulation) which influenced negatively the integrity of the election and its results. Against the backdrop of the eruption of social unrest in the wake of

the elections, the EU also publicly expressed its stance. The HR/VP issued a statement condemning the killing of two Opposition figures on 19 October. Furthermore, the EEAS issued a statement calling for a stop to the excessive use of force and violent repression of manifestations, and urging the Government to respect the right to peaceful protest and a tweet by the HR/VP stressing the need for accountability, respect of rule of law, transparency in the election process. Quiet diplomacy was also used in various occasions to advocate for restraint and dialogue.

The EU Delegation engaged in several public and private events with CSOs promoting human rights and democratic institutions. These engagements were an opportunity to recall key audiences and the wider public that human rights and democracy are at the centre of the EU's action in Mozambique.

In terms of public outreach and awareness campaigns, EUDEL continued to resort to social media messaging on key dates such as International Democracy Day, Press Freedom Day, World Humanitarian Day, the 16-Days Campaign Against GBV, and Human Rights Day. Through messages tailored to the local audience, the EU highlights the work it undertakes both in Mozambique and globally, thus seeking to raise awareness about human rights issues and EU policies underpinning its response to both domestic challenges in the country and broader global trends, thus ensuring its public outreach remains relevant, targeted and effective.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU remained committed to protecting hundreds of thousands of people affected by armed violence, including IDPs and their host communities. The EU contributed over EUR 22 million in humanitarian assistance to the Cabo Delgado crisis, with a focus on addressing the most pressing needs of vulnerable populations. Key areas of support include critical access to food, water and sanitation, shelter, health and nutrition, and protection services. Youth is at the centre of the EU's partnership with Mozambique over the 2021-2027 period, notably through the e-Youth Team Europe Initiative which focuses on education, empowerment and employment. In the framework of its contribution to the Education Support Fund, FASE (EUR 50 million), the EU focused its policy dialogue on education quality and equity issues, including gender equality and inclusion of children living in vulnerable situations. Gender continued to be a cross-cutting priority of EUDEL action, including in policy dialogue and development cooperation programmes. This included actions in support of fight against GBV.

The EU has also continued to emphasise the importance of environmental sustainability through specific projects and programmes (e.g. PROMOVE Biodiversity programme, WCS illegal trade in wildlife, GUARD wildlife, NaturAfrica Southern Africa). It also contributed to expanding civil-society engagement on environmental and climate action, while cooperating with the Mozambican Government to improve its legal framework, ensuring alignment with international environmental standards and global commitments. After the end of the disarmament and demobilisation process achieved in 2023, the EU provided further support to the implementation of the Maputo Peace and Reconciliation Agreement both politically and operationally via the UNOPS managed Basket Fund. The EU has been active in offering reintegration opportunities through development projects. Following intense advocacy and consultations supported by the EU, a new law on the rights of persons with disabilities was adopted in April 2024.

5. Multilateral context: Mozambique was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the period of 2023-24 and held the presidency during March 2023 and May 2024. Respect for human rights and the rule of law is listed as pivotal for peace and security in Mozambique's campaign manifesto. Stressing that 'the widespread and systematic violation of human rights can be a source of conflict', Mozambique committed in its campaign pledges to 'work to raise human rights standards at national and global level'. In May 2024, under Mozambique's rotating presidency, the UNSC adopted a resolution, which calls on States to respect and protect UN and humanitarian personnel in accordance with their obligations under international law.

Republic of Namibia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: As Namibia's democracy is developing and maturing, the country's good track record on human rights and democracy was generally maintained in 2024. The calm and orderly reorganisation of presidency and government following the sudden death of President Geingob was remarkable, while the November 2024 presidential and national assembly elections led to the election of the country's first female president. Although the elections were overall peaceful and calm, the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) faced a number of logistical issues. Its decision to reopen the voting for two extra days in selected polling stations was controversial as it lacked a clear legal basis, which led the main opposition parties to appeal the election results.

Namibia setting an example of press freedom, ranked second in Africa, and 34th out of 180 countries globally in the World Press Freedom Index. This said, the indicators showed some decline compared to previous years. According to the OECD criteria, Namibia is one of the wealthiest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and an upper-middle income economy. However, following the latest census, which showed a higher population than expected, it may actually be closer to lower-middle income status.

Namibia is the second most unequal country globally (after South Africa) with a Gini Index of 59.1 for 2024. Over 17.2% of households are categorised as poor or severely poor. Moreover, women and girls in the country are still in a vulnerable situation and face violence and discrimination. In terms of social and economic rights, rampant unemployment, poverty and social inequality continue to be key challenges for the country. This was worsened by the severe drought related to *El Niño* in 2024, but the Government engaged in efforts to limit its adverse effects on food security. Namibia's high inequality rate takes a toll on the Namibian children. According to a UNICEF study, on average, 51.3% of the children are living in multidimensional poverty, compared to 37.4 percent for adults (18+ years) and the national average of 43.3%. The government has continued its efforts to enhance family and child protection laws, which, if implemented, could lead to significant improvement.

In a ruling in June 2024, Namibia's High Court invalidated colonial-era laws criminalising consensual same-sex relations, a decision under appeal by the Government. Additionally, the Marriage Act was signed into law in October. It defines marriage strictly as a union between a man and a woman, explicitly prohibiting same-sex marriages, including those solemnised abroad. It thus overrules a 2023 Supreme Court ruling that had recognised foreign same-sex marriages.

According to the recommendations issued during Namibia's third UPR in 2021, despite overall progress, several areas require targeted action, including sexual and gender-based violence, gender equality, access to education, unemployment, children's rights, Indigenous People's rights, discrimination of LGBTI persons, prison conditions, human trafficking, access to education, adequate housing, and access to safe drinking water. The next UPR for Nambia is scheduled for 2026.

The topic of corruption continues to be prominent. The judicial investigations into the Fishrot corruption scandal have triggered a drop of Namibia by seven positions (from 52nd to 59th out of 180 countries) in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index between 2018 and 2023.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to support human rights and democracy in Namibia through cooperation programmes in the following strategic priority areas: promotion of good governance and accountability, directly relevant to the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights; promotion of women's rights, including combatting GBV; promotion of children's rights; promotion of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, with special attention to Indigenous and marginalised people; and strengthening of the democratic political system, in particular civil society's role and capacities. The EU and EU MS in Namibia carried out a number of public diplomacy activities with the aim of promoting specific human rights issues.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: As in previous years, through regular meetings with the Minister of Justice, Minister of Gender, and the Ombudsman, the EU Delegation aimed to track the overall progress of the implementation of UPR recommendations.

4. EU financial engagement: EUDEL and EU Member States supported projects and initiatives towards the achievement of human rights priorities in Namibia. In 2024, new projects aimed at improving the human rights situation and strengthening democracy were launched. Examples include the 'Good Governance/Anti-Corruption' project with UNDP (EU contribution of EUR 1 million), which intends to avail targeted capacity-building opportunities to the Anti-Corruption Commission, but also other implementing offices, ministries, and agencies. It also supports relevant CSOs with grants. Other supported initiatives were the 'Building stronger natural resource based CSOs to improve community rights and benefits', which aims to enhance civil society's role in advocating for sustainable, equitable, and inclusive natural resource management, with transparent and accountable governance; and 'Strengthening the capacity of CBOs in Namibia to engage in EIA processes', which aims to empower Namibia's Community Based Organisations to play an active role in Environmental Impact Assessment processes and environmental advocacy.

Other projects are continuing, such as 'Empowering the San: Legal Capacity Building for Human Rights Access', a project that is implemented by the Legal Assistance Centre and aims at empowering the San people by enabling them to exercise their rights independently, fostering accountability, and enhancing community structures for advocacy; 'Promoting Gender Equality and Combating GBV', a project to which the EU contributes EUR 1.4 million, that is implemented by UNFPA and aims at reducing GBV in targeted regions in Namibia; and the 'Enhancing Participatory Democracy Programme' (EUR 5.6 million) that aims to strengthen the capacity of CSOs to contribute to the implementation and monitoring of public policies.

5. Multilateral context: Namibia actively supports the multilateral system, sponsoring several thematic resolutions such as those concerning the fight against racism. Namibia co-facilitated the 2024 UN Summit of the Future, where the Pact for the Future and its Annexes were adopted after nine months of negotiations. Namibia successfully balanced its role as co-facilitator and negotiator while addressing G77 demands and promoting multilateralism. A supporter of the Paris Agreement, Namibia aims to decarbonise by 2030.

Republic of Niger

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Since the *coup d'état* of 26 July 2023, the human rights situation in Niger has worsened and has become a source of increased concern. Many of the constitutional institutions such as the National Commission for Human Rights (*Commission Nationale des Droits Humains*, CNDH) remained suspended. In 2024, civil society organisations and media outlets remained under pressure and close surveillance, with a considerable shrinking of the civic space. Activities of political parties were suspended. The tightening of the cyber-criminality law–decided on 7 June 2024–foresees imprisonment in case of 'defamation', 'insults', and 'diffusion of information troubling public order, or impacting human dignity'. On 12 November 2024, licences to operate in Niger were withdrawn from three humanitarian organisations (ACTED, *Action Pour le Bien-Être* and NGO Safety Organisation / INSO). On 3 December 2024, Moussa Tchangari, Secretary-General of the association 'Alternative Espaces Citoyens', was arrested by Niger's intelligence service for 'apology of terrorism, hurting the safety of the State', among others.

Media has also been limited, with the pressure on journalists taking different forms. On 29 January 2024, the House of the Press - the federative framework of the medias - was suspended based on dubious grounds. At least three journalists–Samira Sabou, Soumana Idrissa Maiga and Ousmane Toudou–have been imprisoned. Mr. Toudou has still not been released. The military authorities suspended RFI and France24 after the *coup d'état*. On 12 December 2024, the government suspended BBC for three months, and charged RFI with 'incitation for genocide and intercommunal massacre' in Niger. Authorities convoked two journalists invited to attend an EU training in Brussels in November 2024 to the Prime Minister's office.

Political freedoms were severely constrained. New authorities arbitrarily detained former officials. Since his ousting in July 2023, President Bazoum and his wife remained in detention in the Presidential Palace. On 8 January 2024, their son, Salem, was released. On 12 July 2024, the High Court (*Cour d'État*) removed the immunity of President Bazoum. He was charged with 'conspiracy against the security and authority of the State', 'high-treason', 'apology of terrorism' and 'financing terrorism'. Other political leaders associated with the deposed President remained in custody, including Mahamane Sani Mahamadou (ex-Minister of Petroleum, and son of ex-President Issoufou), Fourmakoye Gado (Chair of the PNDS executive committee), Hamadou Amadou Souley (ex-Minister of the Interior and Decentralisation), Kalla Moutari (ex-Minister of Defence), Ibrahim Yacouba (ex-Minister of Energy) and Ahmat Jidoud (ex-Minister of Finance), among others. The CNSP has also issued arrest warrants against many other senior officials of the Bazoum government. On 27 August 2024, the CNSP put in place a database of individuals and groups allegedly involved in terrorist acts or other infractions against the nation's strategic or fundamental interests, or troubling in any way public security

and calm. Consequences for those put on this list include losing the Nigerien nationality, freezing financial assets and travel bans. In October and in November, 15 people, including ex-Ministers close to Bazoum, lost their Nigerien nationality.

The independence of magistrates remained under pressure, as the organ responsible for nominating magistrates has not assembled. CNSP has appointed magistrates by decree. Rights related to prisons have also been curtailed. The law guaranteeing an autonomous status to the penitentiary system was suspended on 11 March 2024. On 29 May, the Justice and Human Rights Minister announced the suspension of visits of groups such as NGOs, associations and partner organisations working on human rights to prisons 'until further notice', in violation of Niger's human rights obligations.

2. EU action – key focus areas: As a long-standing commitment, EU MS in Niger agreed on seven strategic priorities for 2021-2024: promote gender equality and rights of women and girls; strengthen the right for security and fight against impunity; strengthen access to basic services, and contribute to sustainable and inclusive development; protect migrants and internally displaced persons as well as the fight against human smuggling; support rule of law and justice ; promote democratic governance and fight against corruption; and strengthen capacities of civil society and media.

Within these key focus areas, the EU conducted a number of activities, despite a very challenging context: The EU sought to support young women leaders to engage in promotion of gender equality and rights of women and girls. However, due to the political situation, concrete activities could not take place. The EU provided support for the coalition against death penalty, which organised a national forum in Dosso. This forum focused on the revision of the penal code, which is being adopted. A thematic EU 'civil society' programme enabled to support two basic services initiatives, including of the Himma project related to enhancing the capacity of handicapped persons. Furthermore, the EU has continued its support for UNHCR to support the protection of refugees. The EU Delegation has put in place a mechanism to follow arbitrary or extra-judiciary arrests. The EU also supported the Confederation of Nigerien Employers to conduct outreach actions for the elimination of child labour, in particular in cooperation with the private sector. A thematic EU programme on 'human rights, democracy and gender equality' supported the international consortium Institute for Development and Human Rights / the Youth Movement for Development and Civic Education for the promotion of inclusive local governance and human rights within the security forces.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The *coup d'état* and events thereafter seriously hampered EU bilateral political engagement. Having said that, human rights have been regularly on the Heads of Mission meeting agendas, and raised in meetings with counterparts.

4. EU financial engagement: Most of the EU programmes in Niger were conducted through budget support or in assistance to state institutions, most of which is now suspended. This has left the EU with only few engagements in support of human rights and CSOs.

5. Multilateral context: The United Nations presence in Niger has been deeply marked by the ousting of the Resident Coordinator shortly after the coup in October 2023. A new Resident Coordinator arrived in September 2024. Her stated focus is on fostering development cooperation with the Niger authorities, and not in politics. She has delegated issues related to human rights to the representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. OHCHR

has regular meetings with Niger authorities, and conveys messages through quiet diplomacy. According to the representative, he has raised sensitive human rights issues with senior government officials. OHCHR has kept the EU Delegation informed on their activities. The EUDEL has accompanied the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Niger in its activities, including raising awareness on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On 11 December 2024, OHCHR organised a ceremony to mark the 76th anniversary of the Declaration, in close cooperation with the authorities and key stakeholders, such as the National Youth Council. EUDEL's support enabled OHCHR to underscore the importance of human rights and Niger's engagement in honouring its commitments. OHCHR sustained presence in Niger faces challenges, as it was mostly focused on implementing an EU-financed project, which has now ended. The end of this financing has put, according to OHCHR, the very presence of the Office at risk. EU Delegation and OHCHR are in discussions to prepare a new project to support civic space in Niger.

Federal Republic of Nigeria

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Nigeria continues to face an unprecedented wave of overlapping crises, ranging from a volatile security situation, and continued cost-of-living crisis with record-high inflation to worrisome humanitarian developments. Banditry, crime and kidnapping, extremist insurgencies, secessionist agitations, terrorism and farmer/herder conflicts are some of the challenges to Nigerians' safety and security. These challenges are exacerbated by the rapidly rising living costs, especially for fuel and food, and by man-made or natural disasters– from insurgencies and conflicts to climate change risks. Millions of Nigerians continued to be affected by exceptional events, such as record floods, but also protracted crises that exacerbated food insecurity, displacement, child malnutrition and lack of access to basic health, education and sanitation services. Overall, more than 133 million Nigerians feel the impact of multidimensional poverty–the highest number in any one country in the world.

The UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture visited Nigeria for the second time in September, finding that the situation in most detention centres was abysmal and that Nigeria had not yet established a National Preventive Mechanism, as per its obligations under the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture, ratified by Nigeria in 2009. It urged Nigeria to 'urgently take measures to prevent torture and ill-treatment, and to improve conditions of detention, especially in police stations and other similar facilities', and to implement legal safeguards and end the impunity of perpetrators for acts of torture.

Nigeria retains the death penalty for a number of crimes, include those that do not meet the threshold of 'most serious crimes' under international law. While no executions have taken place since 2016, death sentences continue to be imposed throughout the country.

Gender equality remains a key challenge with widespread sexual and gender-based violence, gender inequality, child marriage and the prevalence of FGM. Same-sex relationships are criminalised since 2014. LGBTI persons often face hate speech and discrimination, and sometimes deadly violence, as was the case around a virulent disinformation campaign in June linked to supposed provisions of the EU-ACP Samoa agreement.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Gender equality and women's empowerment is mainstreamed in all EU programmes, including gender sector analysis on EU-funded programmes. The EU actively promoted activism against GBV during the 16 dedicated days in October. The EU Ambassador met with women leaders, service providers and first responders from civil society and government, with the objective of learning more about the successes and challenges recorded in the fight against sexual and gender-based violence, and how Team Europe can further support this cause. The EU also focused on the rights of the child. In 2024, the EU continued its support to the Nigerian government to advance children's rights across the country, often in partnership with the UN and civil society organisations. The EU launched a significant programme in Nigeria's North-West aimed at bringing out-of-school children back into the education system and accelerating basic education and livelihood opportunities for children and youth there. In December, the EU contracted a new project aiming to strengthen childcare and protection systems with a focus on three states, Edo, Borno and Plateau. Furthermore, in 2024, the EU continued to engage actively with the LGBTI community and CSOs for consultations and events in Nigeria, not least to reflect on effective strategies to mitigate the fall-out on the LGBTI community of disinformation around the signature of the EU-ACP Samoa Agreement. The EU marked IDAHOBIT with an event involving the LGBTI and international community in Abuja. With regard to freedom of religion and belief, the EU has continued to engage with faith actors and communities across the key priority areas of its cooperation in Nigeria. It rallied representatives from community-based and civil society organizations, the media, traditional leaders, religious figures, religious umbrella groups and traditional worshippers, to engage on inter-faith dialogue and non-violent conflict management. In December, the EU and the National Peace Committee rallied stakeholders, including custodians of religious and traditional institutions, to a 'High-level Discourse on Religion and Democracy in Nigeria' to promote inclusiveness and cooperation at the intersection between religion and democracy.

As part of the key priorities in 2024, the EU continued to support the efforts of Nigeria's government to promote peace, security, and stability in the North-East and the wider Lake Chad Basin. The EU's approach remained comprehensive, combining support to the Multi-National Joint Task Force, to reconciliation and re-integration processes, peace-building and dialogue initiatives, as well as initiatives aiming to prevent and counter violent extremism and radicalization. The EU continued to work on mitigating conflict over natural resources between farmer and herder communities through a multi-dimensional approach combining different levels of intervention and peacebuilding activities. As regards democratic consolidation and support for elections, in its second phase, the EU's flagship democracy programme supporting democratic governance in Nigeria–EU-SDGN–channels sustained support to democratic process by targeting strong, effective, and legitimate democratic institutions, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission, the National Assembly, the judiciary, political parties, and the media. It also aims to increase political participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities and civil society. The EU has continued to support the work of the National Peace Committee in preventing election-related violence.

The EU is a long-standing partner to Nigeria on digital rights, having supported the passing of Nigeria's Digital Rights Bill in 2023. In 2024, the EU continued to support relevant policies and initiatives, such as the Digital Rights Reform Policy Guide (DRRPG), developed as a model for strengthening of digital rights legal frameworks in the country.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Delegation and the National Human Rights Commission jointly launched a Human Rights Defenders network on 13 November, after conducting a broad civil-society consultation on the most pressing human-rights issues in Nigeria and presenting recommendations. NHRC Executive Secretary Tony Ojukwu commended 'the EU's unwavering commitment to promoting human rights and supporting civil society efforts across the globe' on this occasion.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU has financial engagements in each of the areas of EU action (see above). In December, the EU has contracted two new projects geared towards protecting childrens' rights and the rights of the disabled through the EIDHR-related Call for Proposals (for a combined amount of EUR 1.73 million).

5. Multilateral context: Nigeria underwent the UPR in 2023-2024, with most recommendations pertaining to the abolition of the death penalty, justice and accountability for human rights violations by security forces and other actors, also alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, curtailing communal violence, strengthening women's rights and increasing women's political participation, abolishing child, early and forced marriage, transposing effective strategies to ensure equal access of all to health and education and continuing to implement measures against trafficking in persons.

Republic of Rwanda

1. Overall human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy situation in Rwanda remained challenging. Thanks to increased spending over the past years, Rwanda continued to perform well on social and economic indicators, in particular on health, education, access to water and electricity. Rwanda has good scores on international indices measuring the rule of law and the fight against corruption. Rwanda's performance in the fight against corruption is above the global average. In the Transparency International Index, Rwanda scores 53/100, 49th in the world and second in Africa. At the same time, Rwanda is ranked low on international indices measuring political rights and freedom of speech and overall democratic governance. However, Rwanda has good scores in rankings measuring the effectiveness of governance. According to World Justice Project's rule of law index, Rwanda is the 41st country out of 142 worldwide, and the first country in the subcategory of 'Sub-Saharan African Countries' and 'Low Income Countries'. Finally, in the Mo Ibrahim ranking of African countries' governance, Rwanda ranks in the top quintile at the 14th place. Its index results are considered stable. President Kagame has been in control of the country since 2000 and was re-elected for a fourth term in July 2024, securing 99.18% of the vote. The country's political landscape remained dominated by President Kagame's Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), which received 68,83% of the votes in last year's legislative election.

National unity, in the face of the genocide's memory, is prioritised over political plurality and freedom of expression. The Government continued to face allegations of serious human rights violations, including arbitrary detentions and the use of inhuman or degrading treatments in detention facilities. A revised NGO law tightened Government control over NGOs, and has the potential to limit their independence and political activism. Rwanda's media landscape remained constrained, with limited press freedom and concerns over the safety of journalists. The closure of nearly 8,000 churches and religious organisations, citing safety and financial

concerns, sparked public discontent in a deeply religious society. While the legal framework addressing women's rights in Rwanda is generally positive, and Rwanda remains the country with highest female representation in Parliament, (63.75% of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies), the weak implementation of certain laws and policies coupled with discriminatory social norms remained a challenge, especially in rural areas. 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. Rwanda hosts around 135,000 refugees from DRC and Burundi, who enjoy the right to work, move and settle freely. It continues 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 focused on six areas, namely non-discrimination and protection of marginalised groups; women's rights and the elimination of violence against women; access to food and the fight against child malnutrition; freedom of expression, regulation and capacity-building in the media sector; freedom of association and promoting an enabling environment for civil society and citizen participation; 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 the Rwandan government on human rights, criminal justice and political issues within the framework of regular political exchanges, including the partnership dialogue in the framework of the Samoa Agreement, sectoral dialogues (annual dialogue with the Ministry of Justice) and public diplomacy. The EU and Rwanda addressed various topics such as the NGO law, torture in prisons, media policy, criminal justice policy, and the implementation of UPR recommendations. The EU and Member States also monitored specific cases of politically motivated detentions. The EU carried out formal démarches on human rights and democracy issues to request support for its initiatives in UN fora. The EU also engaged with CSOs through programming, political dialogue, and direct support for civic space initiatives.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU launched a EUR 19.5 million programme focused on Justice and Accountability, aiming at improving the access to and delivery of timely justice, the reduction of the backlog of cases, and the modernization of the justice system. The Justice programme supports as well the National Commission for Human Rights for the promotion and protection of human rights, in particular in its capacity as National Preventive Mechanism. The Justice programme has also a component dedicated to reconciliation, voice and accountability working with civil society organizations.

In 2024, the EU continued implementing projects (signed in 2023) with CSOs, worth EUR 5 million, focused on promoting the rights of persons with disabilities; budget transparency and accountability; labour rights and media. This included the promotion of responsible freedom of expression, improving digital media literacy, and providing legal assistance to media practitioners. Two EIDHR-funded projects totalling EUR 1.2 million were launched to promote equal opportunities, support local organisations defending rights of marginalized groups, and facilitate legal assistance for victims of discrimination. Fifteen new projects worth EUR 11 million were signed under the 'Kungahara' programme, implemented by CSOs and local authorities in Burera and Rulindo, to address food security and nutrition challenges.

5. Multilateral context: Rwanda is party to all key 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 was overall aligned with the EU's priorities on human rights in UN fora. Rwanda cooperated and followed up closely genocide cases in foreign jurisdictions, as well as the last pending cases before the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, including the Kayishema and Kabuga cases.

Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy situation in São Tomé and Príncipe remains overall good. The incidents surrounding the November 2022 coup attempt that had resulted in the unlawful detainment, torture and death of four individuals contrast with São Tomé and Príncipe's image as a model of democracy in Central Africa for a peaceful alternation of power. No progress has been made since then in the trials of the soldiers involved in the events by the military tribunal established in November 2023. Of the 22 recommendations made by the 2022 EU Election Observation Mission, only one, on gender representation, has been fully transposed into law. A number of issues continued to face significant challenges, including women and children's rights, corruption, access to justice and independence of the judiciary, prison conditions, access to health services and safe water.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2024, the EU focused on the following priorities: strengthening the human rights 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; and environmental rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights and democracy, including the follow-up of the recommendations of the 2022 EU Election Observation Mission, were discussed as part of the regular EU-São Tomé and Príncipe Partnership Dialogue with its latest session in May 2024. The EU deployed an Election Follow-up Mission in June. The EU carried out formal démarches on human rights and democracy issues to request support for its initiatives at the UNHRC and UNGA Third Committee.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU's engagement for new actions to strengthen the capacities of justice actors, improve access to justice and to support electoral reform amounted to EUR 1.7 million. Projects to support gender equality and strengthen the role of CSOs were implemented with an EU contribution of EUR 3.3 million.

5. Multilateral context: São Tomé and Príncipe is party to most of the key human rights treaties. It has not yet signed the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. It abolished the death penalty in 1990. São Tomé and Príncipe overall converged with the EU on human rights issues in UN fora.

Republic of Senegal

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In Senegal, the overall human rights situation remains generally satisfactory. The country has ratified major conventions on human rights, and authorities are generally open to discuss and engage in improving the rights of women and children, though the political scope for manoeuvre on these and other issues–sexual and gender minorities in particular–is hampered by social, cultural or religious factors. Senegal held two major elections in 2024 and reinforced its status of democratic inspiration in the region. After tense pre-electoral campaigns marked by political tensions and violence, both elections finally took place in a peaceful and credible manner on e-day and results were acknowledged by all political forces and losing candidates (with blessing of international observers). Tensions on separation of powers between executive and legislative, as well as between executive and judicial powers put the Senegalese democratic system under high pressure in the pre-electoral period. The Senegalese democracy proved to be resilient in particular with a positive role played by the Constitutional Court all along the pre-electoral political crisis. Senegal reforms its Senegalese Human Rights Committee. After the Committee lost its A Status in 2012 due to lack of independence, resources and funding, the reform was announced in January 2024 at its UPR. In September 2024, the National Assembly voted to replace the Committee with a National Human Rights Commission in an attempt to better meet international standards and regain A status according to the Paris agreement. The rights of women remained a concern over the period, particularly in rural areas, where women's access to protection, health and education services but also to employment, land, credit and justice is limited. Despite the adoption of the law criminalizing rape and paedophilia in 2020, violence against women, including sexual and gender based violence, persists. Although the representation of women in the National Assembly slightly decreased in the 2024 legislative elections, it remains among the highest in the region (42.5% with 68 seats). The situation of children's rights continues to remain worrisome in 2024. Senegal has still not adopted the Children's code, mainly due to socio-cultural obstacles opposing certain provisions deemed particularly sensitive, such as raising the age of marriage from 16 to 18 for girls, questions of inheritance, and begging. The adoption of the law on modernisation of 'daaras' (Koranic schools) and the strengthening of the protection of 'talibé' children, has not yet been submitted for examination to the National Assembly. On the rights of sexual and gender minorities in 2024, there has been no progress with the situation remaining particularly fragile. Senegal presents a relatively independent media environment. However, restrictive laws and intimidation have continued to constrain press freedom. Publishing 'fake news' likely to 'discredit public institutions' or 'prejudice public decency' can be prosecuted which could be used against against journalists and activists. While in 2019, Senegal was in 49th place out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom ranking, it is in 2024 in 94th place. Reform of the Justice system with the aim to put an end to its political instrumentalisation was launched in May 2024 by the new authorities. This reform is underway.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Women and girls' as well as children's rights; strengthening the action capacities of civil society and non-state actors and guarantees in terms of freedom of expression, association and demonstration; strengthening the judicial system, and in particular the mechanisms for combating money laundering and preventing corruption; fighting against human trafficking; non-discrimination, particularly related to sexual orientation and gender identity (LGBTI).

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU actively engaged with the Senegalese authorities on the human rights situation at the occasion of its regular Partnership Dialogues. In parallel, since 2023 the EU has engaged locally in a structured and regular EU-civil society dialogue to allow for a platform in which civil society can voice their concerns and proposals, in order to be able to integrate these into policy reflections and EU programming.

4. EU financial engagement: In the area of children's and women's rights, the EU implemented concrete projects and programmes to promote the priorities of the country level implementation plan (CLIP) of the third EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III). The EU has actively promoted the adoption of the Children's Code and the law on the modernization of 'daaras'. The EU supported various initiatives of civil society organizations in Senegal for the promotion and respect children's rights and in support of the law criminalizing rape and paedophilia.

The EU has been particularly engaged in strengthening Senegalese civil society, notably through the '*Programme d'appui à la société civile* (PASC)'. In the context of the EU Election Observation Mission's, the EU made recommendations to the authorities and civil society for addressing key issues of human rights, fundamental freedoms and electoral reform. The EU supported several Senegalese NGOs for monitoring and analysing risks of electoral violence, as well as for creating favourable conditions for political stability and social cohesion in Senegal.

The EU continued to support the strengthening of the rule of law, through contribution to the fight against corruption and money laundering. To this end, for example, the EU is supporting the capacitation and modernisation of the GIABA, an institution of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) responsible for facilitating the adoption and implementation of AML and CFT in West Africa. Progress was registered in 2024 in terms of anti-money laundering/counter-terrorist financing (AML/CTF), with Senegal de-listed in October from the FATF grey list, with a delisting from the EU's list to follow shortly.

The EU contributed to the fight against human trafficking and smuggling of migrants in Senegal by financing the '*Partenariat opérationnel conjoint* (POC)' implemented by CIVIPOL and FIIAPP. The EU also co-financed the OCWAR-T project aimed at strengthening national and regional capacities and frameworks to tackle transnational organized crime and trafficking. In addition, the EU mobilised EUR 30 million aid package from the EU's 'flexible mechanism' to support Senegal to prevent irregular migration under a Team Europe approach.

Concerning non-discrimination, particularly related to sexual orientation and gender identity (LGBTI), a constructive exchange is ongoing with the authorities in the framework of our regular partnership dialogues.

5. Multilateral context: In the framework of the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly's Third Committee on Human Rights and Democracy, Senegal has positioned itself as a middle-ground player, regularly abstaining in UN fora. A constructive dialogue is nurtured with the Senegalese authorities, and has proven useful to deepen the mutual understanding of respective positions and priorities. Senegal's UPR took place on 22 January 2024 in the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Republic of Seychelles

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Seychelles continues to lead in Africa in terms of good governance, rule of law, and the promotion of human rights. Seychelles' performance in good governance is commended by international think tanks and renowned institutions. In 2024, Seychelles was considered the least corrupt country in Africa, ranking 20th out of 180 in the International Corruption Index, ahead of many developed countries. Similarly, it ranked first in overall governance in the Mo Ibrahim Index, with significant improvement noted during the last ten years with ten points gained in the score compared to 2014. The V-dem Report also characterised Seychelles as the only 'liberal democracy' in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Electoral Commission is preparing for the 2025 elections, which will take place on 25 September 2025. Whilst preparations are well underway, there are important challenges as regards the recruitment and training of approximately 2000 persons that will be involved in the electoral process. The Government also plans to organise an awareness campaign focusing on the following areas: civic responsibility, voter responsibility and electoral reform.

An important milestone was achieved in 2024 as key independent state institutions including Anti-Corruption Commission of Seychelles, the Ombudsman, the Constitutional Appointment Authority, the Electoral Commission, the Information Commission, the Media Commission and the Human Rights Commissions joined forces to establish a 'coalition of integrity', as outlined in the Open Government Partnership Action Plan for 2024-2026. This coalition will serve to strengthen and reinforce the integrity of democracy in the country.

Nonetheless, in 2024, Seychelles lost three places in the World Press Freedom Index compared to 2023, going from 34th to 37th place, where the situation for journalists has been characterised as 'satisfactory'. Whilst freedom of expression and freedom of the press are respected, some journalists reported cases of harassment, intimidation and criticism mainly by political party activists. On a positive note, Seychelles is one of the few African countries in which most journalists are women.

The implementation of the 2024-2025 National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security demonstrates Seychelles' commitment in enhancing the role and status of women at the workplace and in society. The Government has committed to dedicate at least 15% of its development budget to advancing gender equality. However, there is room for improvement as regards to gender equality. Notably, women hold only 21% of seats in Parliament and there is a significant lack of representation in corporate and political leadership. Women occasionally face discrimination in the workplace and are victims of human trafficking. The situation regarding GBV in Seychelles is alarming. GBV remains underreported due to stigmatisation and lengthy court procedures. Women are generally more vulnerable to GBV, especially to sexual harassment. The World Bank has recommended enacting legislation protecting women from sexual harassment in employment. The domestic violence shelter is still a pivotal point for the full implementation of the 2020 Domestic Violence act. Following the cease of operation of the EU-funded shelter in 2023, the Seychelles Government is still to determine the right model of operation for such a shelter.

Children's rights are respected in Seychelles. According to Afrobarometer, the majority of the population believes the Government is performing well in protecting and promoting the well-

being of vulnerable children. During the period 2018-2024, there have been a number of convictions of trafficking in human beings in Seychelles, thus signalling a functioning process. Efforts from the Government to identify and investigate cases of trafficking in human beings were noted, including assistance to identified victims, renovation of a shelter, and increased funding. The National Action Plan on Human Trafficking is yet to be approved and implemented.

In January 2024, Seychelles ratified the ILO Convention 189, which is a significant step in ensuring domestic workers enjoy effective protection against all forms of abuse, harassment and violence at the workplace.

The Government maintains a constructive dialogue with the LGBTI community and in September 2024, the National Assembly passed Penal Code (Amendment) Act 2024, allowing hate crimes to be recognised within the criminal justice system and prosecuted accordingly. Thus ensuring that the hate 'element' is considered when a crime is motivated by the victim's sexual orientation, gender, disability; which by extension, further protects them from targeted discrimination. This was a milestone achievement for Seychelles, which became the second country in Africa to pass legislation to protect individuals from identity-based crimes.

Efforts to promote the inclusivity of persons with disabilities were also noted. In December 2024, Cabinet approved the proposal to amend the Seychelles Pension Fund Act to address gaps in incapacity benefits and ensure a more inclusive approach by extending benefits to members with moderate functional restrictions. Likewise, the Seychelles Public Transport Corporation introduced low-floor buses to promote inclusivity of persons with reduced mobility.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU-Seychelles partnership is based on a strong commitment to promoting shared values and common interests, including democracy, rule of law, accountability and a rules-based global order with the UN at its core. Civil society is a key partner as it plays an important role in any society. The EU has a regular dialogue with NGOs and provides them with support in the area of good governance, women's rights and the fight against drug abuse.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights and democracy issues were addressed in the EU-Seychelles Partnership Dialogue on 17 October 2024, which noted Seychelles' general strong record in the field. While the ongoing drive towards gender equality was noted, unfortunately domestic violence remains a challenge. Several policy reforms in the area such as the action plan under the National Gender Policy of 2016 were discussed. The Domestic Violence shelter was acknowledged by both sides. The EU side encouraged Seychelles to move ahead with the mentioned action plan, while underlining the importance of prevention.

4. EU financial engagement: The new bilateral programme ENSEL (European Solidarity Action with Seychelles) signed in May 2024 between the EU and Seychelles, with a contribution of EUR 2 million, aims at advancing joint priorities on governance and democracy, among other issues, for the period 2024-2029.

5. Multilateral context: Seychelles and the EU are committed to promote multilateralism with the UN at its core, and agree on the need to reform the UN system. They share an interest to cooperate on human rights issues, including at global level. Seychelles is an active member of

various regional organisations, including the SADC, Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), COMESA and African Union. Similarly, Seychelles actively participates in international conferences of multilateral organisations, and entertains good relations with major international powers. Seychelles is a member of the Global Alliance for Torture Free Trade, whose objective is to end trade in goods used for capital punishment and torture.

Republic of Sierra Leone

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The political environment in Sierra Leone is marked by a polarisation between the Government and the Opposition, which was exacerbated by the elections of 2023. On 18 October 2023, a National Unity Agreement was signed between the Government and the Opposition with the objective to generate a political reform process. The post-electoral political polarization was mitigated in 2024 by the Tripartite Committee recommendations adopted in July (80 recommendations), which followed an inter-party agreement between Government and the main opposition party struck in October 2023. Proposed reforms focused on enhancing transparency in electoral processes, building trust in democratic institutions and improving inclusion in political processes.

Sierra Leone faces severe socio-economic difficulties, including high inflation, un- and underemployment, food insecurity and poverty. These conditions contribute to a very low Human Development Index, ranking 184/192. Social discontent can lead to protests: the war in Ukraine impacted food prices (Sierra Leone significantly relies on imports of staple food), acting as a threat multiplier and intensifying existing grievances especially among youth.

Sierra Leone's commitments to international human rights instruments is critical in shaping the human rights situation in the country. Sierra Leone is also using its membership of the UNSC effectively to strengthen its diplomatic footprint at regional and global level.

In the justice sector, the ECOWAS Court ruled on 7 November 2024 that Sierra Leone must amend or repeal its loitering laws. The Court rules that law discriminates against vulnerable persons and that it gives the police ‘excessive’ power to arrest and detain.

Freedom of assembly in 2024 was affected by the systematic refusal to allow public demonstrations. On 10 December two civil society activists were arrested after applying to hold a demonstration against the Electoral Commission. They were released two days later.

On 2 July 2024 president Bio signed the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act into law, marking a significant legislative milestone with respect to the rights of the child in Sierra Leone. Gender equality remains a significant concern, with women facing systemic barriers in political participation and access to resources. Despite legislative frameworks aimed at promoting gender equity, cultural norms and practices often hinder women's empowerment.

Measures to increase women political participation also feature among the recommendations of the Tripartite Agreement of July 2024. The Public Elections Act 2022 and the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act, ensured that in elective bodies at local and

national level women now account for 30% of representatives and at Cabinet level Women's representation is in excess of 30%.

2. EU action - key focus areas: gender equality and women's rights; promotion of the rights and role of children and youth; combat poverty and social exclusion, notably through agriculture and food security initiatives but also by improving access to finance; support the role of public authorities in adopting and ensuring compliance with environmental regulations aimed at securing a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment; prevention and fight against corruption; integrity of electoral processes; parliamentary strengthening; civil society oversight and accountability functions; and improving access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU held its first Partnership Dialogue with Sierra Leone under the Samoa Agreement in December 2024 during which the EU reaffirmed its support to the ongoing post 2023 elections political reform agenda, good governance reform and gender equality.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU and its MS continued strengthening coordination on gender issues, including through a Germany-initiated Team Europe gender-working group, engaging in intense political and sectoral policy dialogue, public diplomacy and outreach to advance gender equality, women political and economic empowerment and the fight against all forms of violence against women in Sierra Leone. In November 2024, EU and Sierra Leone signed a financing agreement for the EU-UN Spotlight initiative to fight all violence against women and girls in Sierra Leone, which promotes a comprehensive multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional approach. It will help the government to enhance its institutional framework, improve the response, it will contribute to prevention, and social norms change. With regard to the promotion of the rights and role of children and youth, in 2024, four NGO-led projects were launched aiming at strengthening CSOs, notably youth organisations and organisations focusing on youth economic empowerment and political participation, by increasing youth participation in governance, accountability, and promoting young people's economic empowerment and contribution towards more inclusive and sustainable growth.

In December 2024, the focal point for Erasmus Plus (Ministry of Technical and Higher Education) and members of the EUDEL staff organized informative and interactive sessions with university students on the opportunities under the Erasmus Plus Programme. In 2024, four students obtained scholarships under the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree Programme.

The EU worked on combatting poverty and social exclusion. At the high-level EU-Sierra Leone political dialogue held in December 2024, the EU expressed commitment to continue supporting Sierra Leone in the area of Green Economy, including food security and the development of the agriculture sector, one of the government's priorities.

Environmental protection, particularly combating deforestation, remained an essential element of the EU's partnership with Sierra Leone. The EU Delegation co-chaired the donor coordination group on Environment and Climate Change. Collaborative efforts with Sierra Leonean Government intensified to address environmental degradation and deforestation within and around (neighbouring) protected areas.

As regards prevention and fight against corruption, the EU continued to provide institutional capacity-building of targeted district councils in public finance management, notably on procurement and internal controls. Considerable strides were also made to enhance transparency and social accountability of local development processes, promoting private sector engagement through competitive procedures and fighting malpractices related to nepotism/political interference and stakes. Concerning the integrity of electoral processes, the EU and its MS strongly supported the process of reaching an agreed agenda of electoral reform as part of the National Unity Agreement signed in October 2023. Financial and technical assistance to the works of the Tripartite Committee was done through the multi-donors electoral basket fund managed by UNDP. Furthermore, the EU continued to provide support to the Parliament, with the aim to enhance democratic accountability, Parliament's effectiveness, democratic and budgetary oversight, through infrastructural rehabilitation and establishment of ITC backbone infrastructure for e-governance, and long-term technical assistance. In 2024, a framework to enhance Parliament-civic engagement has been established under the Parliamentary Civil Society Network (ParlCSONet), including eight thematic clusters, of which one focuses on budget accountability through informed parliamentary oversight and collaborative engagement with CSOs. From a policy dialogue perspective, the EU and its MS continued to regularly engage with CSOs and national authorities on critical issues concerning peace, development, human rights, democracy and broader aspects of democratic, economic and environmental governance.

5. Multilateral context: The HR Commission of Sierra Leone has retained its 'A' status by the UN Commission for Human Rights through the Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). It was consulted in the legislative processes that took place in 2024. In July 2024, the Parliamentary Oversight Committee on Human Rights in collaboration with the Legislative Committee met the Human Rights Commission to conduct a pre-legislative engagement on a draft 'Human Rights Commission Act'.

As Sierra Leone took its seat on the UN Security Council for 2024-2025, the country committed to following a 'nexus peace-development-human rights' approach, working on preventive diplomacy to 'thwart seeds of conflict before they sprout', and supporting sustainable resources for AU-led peace operations.

Federal Republic of Somalia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Tensions between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the Federal Member States (FMS)–notably manifested by Puntland's and Jubaland's withdrawal from the National Consultative Council (NCC)–have staggered the country's state-building process with regard to inclusive politics and democratization. Conversely, on a positive note, after more than 12 years of discussions, the constitutional review process effectively started on 31 March 2024 with the revision of the first four chapters. On the electoral agenda the FGS, demonstrating its commitment to democratization, aims to move away from the clan-based 4.5 indirect-election model towards a system of direct elections, also referred to as 'one-person, one-vote' (OPOV). The overall human rights situation remained fraught with challenges. Armed conflict with al-Shabaab and inter-clan violence continued to claim civilian lives and displace thousands. Reports of arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, and violations by security forces underscored the need

for stronger accountability mechanisms. While the FGS has taken some steps to identify and investigate individuals who may have committed human rights abuses, impunity is still prevalent.

Somalia has not yet established a national mechanism to monitor and report effectively on human rights violations.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU aims at protecting and empowering individuals. It has recently contracted a project to enhance community policing, with a special focus on gender, in order to strengthen security-related human rights as well as the rule of law. Furthermore, the EU promotes building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies: Following the FGS/FMS agreements on the main political settlement issues, the EU started providing support to the Independent Provisional Constitution Review and Implementation Commission (ICRIC) and the Provisional Constitution Review and Implementation Oversight Committee (OC) working on the necessary amendments to codify the agreements and complete the constitutional review.

In 2024, implementation started on a new project supporting the only all-women media team in the country with the objective of challenging social norms. In the first year, the media team produced 99 stories across Somalia and created the first talk show managed and hosted by women. In July 2024, the media team won the 2024 One World Media Press Freedom Award in recognition of their work and featured during the 2024 EU Lorenzo Natali Prize Award Ceremony. Support for this project is expected to continue until the end of 2026.

Regarding the EU's CSDP missions in Somalia, human rights courses are systematically provided in EUTM and EUCAP training sessions.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On democratisation, the EU has been engaging with the FGS on inclusive politics based on the Somalia-EU Joint Operational Roadmap priorities, with a focus on constitutional review, moving towards inclusive elections, and the establishment of a constitutional court.

4. EU financial engagement: The main tool to address human rights issues directly is the Human Rights and Democracy Thematic Programme, under which the EU recently contracted an initiative promoting human-rights delivery in Somalia's criminal justice and rehabilitation system.

5. Multilateral context: Somalia concluded its mandate as a member of the UN HRC in 2024. In October 2024, the HRC extended the mandate of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia for a period of one year. Somalia is not a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Republic of South Africa

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, South Africa marked 30 years of democracy with significant political developments. The country witnessed a consolidation of democracy with the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU) consisting of the African National Congress (ANC), the Democratic Alliance (DA) and other, smaller parties, following the ANC's first loss of its parliamentary majority. While South Africa

remains a mature democracy with a strong legal framework, structural challenges persist. Voter turnout has been steadily declining amid economic stagnation, high levels of unemployment, especially for the youth, entrenched inequality, corruption and poor governance. However, the formation of the GNU has brought cautiously optimistic expectations for increasing economic growth. GBV and xenophobia remain serious concerns. 2024 saw the enactment of the Prevention and Combatting of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Act. It provides a framework for the prosecution and sentencing of hate crime and hate, but has prompted concerns over limitations on freedom of expression. An act on the establishment of a National Council on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) was passed in 2024, though the actual creation of the Council remains pending.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU Delegation supported various initiatives promoting LGBTI rights, including the Soweto Pride March and screenings of LGBTI documentaries. It awarded a EUR 3 million contract to the organisation 'Gender Links' for a project on diversity and inclusion in Southern Africa. It also supported the South African government's '16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence' communication campaign. EUDEL chaired the Gender Development Partners' Group and launched, with UNWomen, a subgroup for coordinating the Women Empowerment Working Group of the G20.

The EU worked with CSOs on civic space monitoring and HRD's protection. Grants were awarded to Lawyers for Human Rights, Henry Nxumalo Foundation, and Intelwatch, focusing on journalism, digital rights, and human rights defence. The Franco-German Prize for Human Rights was awarded to Professor Melanie Judge for her work on LGBTI rights. An EU Election Expert Mission (EEM) was present in South Africa from 29 April to 11 June 2024 to assess the election of 29 May, including the legal framework and its implementation against international and regional commitments, standards and good practice for democratic elections. The EU collaborated with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) through follow-up consultations on the EEM's recommendations.

The EU continued its support to South Africa's legislatures to improve oversight and public participation through a Democracy and Civil Society Instrument (DCI) programme running until 2025. The South African parliament was selected to participate in the EU-funded project Inter Pares in 2025.

The EUDEL supported digital rights and media freedom initiatives, including the Media Freedom Festival organized by Media Monitoring Africa. Financial support was provided to The Whistleblower House.

For the fourth year, the EUDEL and EU MS Embassies joined the Soweto Pride March. EUDEL and the German Embassy provided financial support for the event. EUDEL and various EU MS were represented at the ILGA World Conference and the Global Equality Summit, both hosted in South Africa this year, with also a number of EU-supported civil society organisations participating actively. The Embassies of Germany and France co-hosted an event on Gender in Energy Transition. The Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) between South Africa and the EU/European Investment Bank, Germany, France, Denmark, and the Netherlands—along with the UK and the USA—remains a flagship initiative to support South Africa's efforts to combat inequality and transition to a low-carbon economy. The EU has pledged EUR 1 billion in support.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The eighth EU-South Africa Human Rights Dialogue was held in February 2024 in Pretoria. At the Dialogue, the EU and South Africa reiterated their commitment to the universality and indivisibility of human rights as well as to the strengthening of the multilateral human rights system. Discussions covered gender equality, anti-racism efforts, and protecting HRDs.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU's financial engagement aligned with its human rights priorities, with a focus on gender equality, just energy transition, and civic space protection. Additional funding was allocated for GBV initiatives, civil society grants, and democracy-strengthening programmes.

5. Multilateral context: South Africa continued its active role in multilateral human rights fora, including as a UNHRC member. It lead HRC resolutions on intersex rights, anti-racism education, and good governance, in cooperation with EU Member States, and remained a prominent voice in the Third Committee of the United Nations' General Assembly, including on the elimination of racism. Despite differing positions on some global issues, South Africa and the EU maintain constructive cooperation in promoting democracy and human rights at the international level.

Republic of South Sudan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Following the decision of 13 September to extend again the transitional period, which should lead the country towards democracy with the holding of elections and the passing of a permanent constitution, South Sudan's first-ever elections are now scheduled for December 2026. Important political questions remain unanswered, hampering urgently needed technical preparations for elections such as voter registration. [17]

The freedoms of expression and association continues to be under pressure and human rights activists and journalists continue to be harassed, intimidated and arbitrarily detained. The National Security Service retains its broad executive powers, including those to arrest any persons suspected of wrongdoing without arrest warrants. Access to justice and independence of the justice system remain challenging for most citizens of South Sudan. Sexual gender-based violence is one of the greatest challenges among the human rights violations and abuses occurring in South Sudan. Some of these crimes are prosecuted, yet the majority of them are not. With regard to concerning grave violations of children's rights, some improvements occurred in recent years, but 2024 showed a worrying reversal in the trend. Some faith-based organisations took up advocacy for children's rights. For example, the South Sudan Council of Churches championed the World Day against Child Marriage. The Government does little to ensure the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. It is underinvesting in providing social services and access to basic education and health services is low.

[17] President Kiir re-established, in August 2021, a two-chamber legislation with the Transitional National Legal Assembly and the Council of States. Articles 10 to 34 of the Transitional Constitution protect the enjoyment of Human Rights, but due to lack of enforcement as well as persisting violence by subnational militias, the reality is in stark contrast to these ambitions.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU focussed on judiciary reform, support to rule of law, fight against impunity including technical support for transitional justice and constitution making through exchange and analysis. The EU also supported political rights, freedom of the media and expression and helped to enable journalists to enhance professionalism, including access to accurate, quality and unbiased content in order to enable South Sudanese citizens to form their own opinions and make informed decisions. The EU promoted the political participation of women and girls.

It also focussed on GBV, including the empowerment of survivors of sexual violence to recover and reach their full potential as meaningful agents in society; promotion of women-driven advocacy and increased access to justice of victims through legal information, advice and representation; trauma management for survivors of sexual- and gender-based violence and protection of those affected by human trafficking and vulnerable migrants.

The EU was active in the field of support, monitoring and assessment of the situation of civil society and HRDs through awareness raising, research and advocacy, capacity building to support and protect HRDs and to promote and ensure accountability for human rights violations.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU is providing political and financial support to the peace process and the implementation of the peace agreement with a view to contributing to a successful transition of South Sudan from conflict area to a stable, democratic and peaceful country. In this context, the EU is supporting the Ceasefire Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM) as well as the Revitalised Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC) to monitor the cease-fire and implementation of the peace agreement. The EU is also chairing a RJMEC working group on constitutional affairs.

The EU is supporting the National Election Commission, the Political Parties Council, the National Constitutional Review Commission and civil society with an eye to fostering an environment for holding elections.

The EU is encouraging South Sudan to ratify key human rights conventions and instruments, and work towards abolition of the death penalty, starting with a moratorium and ensuring a fair trial to those detained on charges where the death penalty is a potential sentence. Four persons from South Sudan remain subject to the Global Human-Rights Sanctions regime.

4. EU financial engagement: Financial engagement of the EU and its Member States for human rights projects amounted to EUR 25 million, including EUR 13 million for projects managed directly by the Delegation of the EU.

5. Multilateral context: In 2016, the UNHRC established the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan. In 2024, the Commission reported gross human rights violations, abuses and related crimes, including political repression and economic predation by political elites. It pointed to severe violence against civilians, including extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, and appalling accounts of sexual and gender-based violence in the country. The Commission recommended that the government implements the peace agreement, addresses impunity, prioritises the protection of women and children, protects civil and political rights and addresses subnational violence. South Sudan figures on items two and ten

of the Council. Technical cooperation with the OHCHR is taking place under item ten of the Human Rights Council.

In February 2024, South Sudan ratified the two UN Covenants on civic and political rights and on economic, social and cultural rights.

Republic of the Sudan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and their affiliated militias, raged on throughout the year. Some say as many as 150,000 people have been killed. 638,000 people are facing famine and over 14 million people, approximately one-third of Sudan's population, have been displaced. The United Nations has called it the 'the world's largest displacement crisis'. The war has had a devastating impact on the civilian population and the atrocities committed underscored the need for accountability and humanitarian assistance. The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan (FFM), mandated by the UN Human Rights Council, indicated in October that both the SAF and the RSF, and their allied militias, have committed large-scale violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, many of which may amount to war crimes and/or crimes against humanity. Both the SAF and the RSF have attacked civilians and civilian infrastructure, through airstrikes and heavy artillery shelling in densely populated areas, notably in Khartoum, Al-Jazeera and Darfur. Both sides are responsible for killing and maiming children. Both have engaged in a pattern of arbitrary arrest and detention as well as torture and ill-treatment in areas under their control. These amount to war crimes. Both have imposed broad internet shutdowns and have curtailed the freedoms of information and expression through attacks on the media, journalists and human rights defenders. Both have obstructed access to humanitarian assistance. The RSF and its allied militias have committed other war crimes and crimes against humanity. These include widespread sexual and gender-based violence, rape, sexual slavery, abduction, and recruitment and the use of children in hostilities. The RSF and its allied militias have systematically engaged in pillage and looting. They have committed large-scale attacks on ethnic and gender grounds, especially against the Masaalit community in Al-Geneina (West Darfur). They are responsible for killings, torture, rape, and other forms of sexual violence, amounting to persecution. According to the FFM report, the conflict stretched pre-existing tribal tensions further and was fought mainly along ethnic lines, pitting RSF and its allied militias against SAF and Masaalit ethnic groups.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The HRDCS Sudan was conceived with the ambition of re-engaging with the new transitional government that was expected to be established upon the conclusion of the political process started by the Political Framework Agreement of December 2022. But the April 2023 war has complicated the plan. The EU has, however, continued to support CSOs and UN agencies engaged in human rights activities, taking a flexible approach wherever necessary. This approach is appreciated by both the Sudanese people and the implementing partners. Some key actions include:

The project 'Supporting democratic transformation and social cohesion by enhancing promotion and protection of human rights in Sudan', is the second phase of an EU-funded action that enabled the establishment of the OHCHR Office in Sudan during the last (aborted)

transition (2019-2021). The objective of the action is to support democratic transformation, peace building and social cohesion through advancement on human rights. The project was supported with EUR 10 million and lasted from November 2023 to October 2025.

Furthermore, the EU supported the project 'Enhance access to Justice and Rule of Law in Sudan' with EUR 5 million. The objective of this project is to improve the provision of access to legal aid services to vulnerable people in prison; these include mothers, women with disabilities, young people and children. The project is implemented in cooperation with Penal Reform International (PRI) from June 2023 to May 2026.

The EU has also provided support through the NDICI/Global Europe human rights and democracy thematic programme. Forthcoming Priorities are accountability and ending impunity; women and girls and tackling GBV; transitional justice and human rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU has consistently called for immediate ceasefire, the protection of civilians, humanitarian access and the resumption of the transition to civilian rule.

The EU adopted three packages of restrictive measures on individuals and entities involved in activities undermining the stability and political transition of Sudan, namely: Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/383, 22 January 2024, restrictive measures against six entities of the SAF and the RSF; Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1784, 26 June 2024, restrictive measures against six individuals of the SAF and the RSF; and Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/3154, 16 December 2024, restrictive measures against four individuals of the SAF and the RSF.

Those designated are subject to an asset freeze and EU persons and entities are forbidden from making funds, financial assets or economic resources available to them. In addition, they are subject to a travel ban in the EU.

4. EU financial engagement: EUDEL engaged with CSOs, human rights organisations, women organisations and HRDs throughout the year. Several consultations and networking events were organised with several key stakeholders. The NDICI Committee approved in 2024 an action document for 'Socio-economic integration of children and young people and the rights of groups at risk in displacement affected communities in Sudan'. Programme formulation will be carried out in 2025. It will provide EUR 20 million for enhancing human rights protection and the social and economic re-integration of vulnerable groups such as single household women, SGBV survivors, unaccompanied and at risk children and persons with disabilities in displacement-affected communities.

5. Multilateral context: In addition to the contract agreement with the OHCHR, the EU supports all UN mandates and positions related to investigations into human rights violations, namely: the mandate of the Designated Independent Expert in Sudan (Mr Radhouan Nouicer); the International Independent Fact-Finding Mission (composed by Mohamed Chande Othman, Joy Ezeilo and Mona Rishmawi); the personal envoy for Sudan by the UN Secretary-General (Mr. Ramtane Lamamra).

The PSC has approved an FPI programme, which will support investigations by the International Criminal Court. The EUR 5 million will help the Court's new high-tech analytical cell, which is using and Artificial Intelligence to speed up investigations.

United Republic of Tanzania

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The overall situation in relation to human rights and democracy has been deteriorating. Violations of fundamental freedoms are on the rise. In the second half of 2024, rallies have been banned, opposition party members and leaders arrested and brutalised. Political and human rights activists have disappeared, some of them even killed, leading to the publication of a Statement by the EU, its Member States and some like-minded partners in September 2024.
Overall, the HRs situation of the country still presents challenges, in particular for some categories of HRDs, for key vulnerable and marginalised populations (pastoralist communities, persons with disabilities, LGBTI persons, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees), women (especially adolescent girls) and journalists.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Protecting and empowering individuals: EUDEL and EU MS have taken gender equality and women empowerment as one of the main priority for this period. GBV and women leadership were prioritised throughout several EU and Member States' programmes and outreach activities. Moreover, the EU continued implementing projects on human rights, in particular related to marginalised and vulnerable HRDs (rural women, pastoralist, LGBTI persons).

EUDEL continued to implement projects in the area of rule of law, fighting corruption and providing legal aid, democracy and raising voices of youth and women. The EU delegation started a new phase of a previous initiative supporting civil society along the electoral cycle, which started ahead of the 2024 local elections. The EU continued to follow and promote dialogue among civil society engaged in the electoral cycle and between civil society and public authorities on recommendations from election observation and monitoring. The EU delegation coordinated some EU MS and likeminded countries in carrying out a Diplomatic Watch for the Voter registration exercises related to General Elections 2025.

The EU also continued its support to the Media sector including in the digital/on-line sphere through civil society. Support is also directed to the Personal Data Protection Commission in order to bring a human-centric approach to data investigation and enforcement.

The EU and Member States participated actively in the donor coordination mechanism under the aid effectiveness agenda, with high-level meetings, sector groups and related subgroups. In 2024, the EU chaired the Governance Working Group and the Gender Equality Working Group.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In September 2024, the EU Delegation, EU Member States and like-minded countries present in Tanzania published a statement to express concern about the recent reports of acts of violence, disappearances and deaths of political and human rights activists, events that threaten democratic values and the rights of Tanzanian citizens. The statement, which called for a thorough inquiry into these events, received widespread attention.

In December 2024, the first Partnership Dialogue under the new Samoa Agreement Framework took place. It was an important opportunity to raise issues related to the state of

democracy and human rights. Another useful platform is the Development Partners Strategic Dialogue.

The EU Delegation supported a workshop promoted by the Tanzania Law Society and other local stakeholders on enforced disappearances.

In May 2024, the EU Delegation officially launched the Youth Sounding Board, aimed at creating a space for meaningful involvement of young people in the EU's international cooperation policy. The 25 brilliant young Tanzanians advise the EU on its key priorities in the country for the next two years. The EU will craft new programs and initiatives fully integrating their perspectives.

4. EU financial engagement: Budget Support operations allowed high-level sector dialogues, in particular on Gender equality and women's rights as well as on issues related to media and communication, but also on macroeconomic, public finance management and listing of Tanzania on the FATF grey list. These exchanges provide an opportunity to engage with government on important areas of reform.

5. Multilateral context: As a follow-up to the UPR, the UN in Tanzania has been supporting the Ministry of Constitutional and Legal Affairs in defining a strategy on mid- term review and reporting 2024 and support to National Consultations. CSOs have elaborated a matrix to follow up on the implementation of UPR recommendations. The mid-term review compiled input from 228 CSO's operating in Tanzania focused on socio-economic rights, general human rights, freedom of expression, women's rights and child rights. The majority of the recommendations that were not accepted in the UPR 2022; 132 recommendations, 52%, were related to civil and political rights.

Tanzania last submitted the State Party report to the HRC in 2009. Tanzania's report on the 'List of Issues Prior to Reporting' related to the ICCPR cycle, was due in April 2022. OHCHR is supporting the preparation of the report thought a dedicated roadmap. The State Party Report was scheduled for submission at the end of 2023 but the Government has not yet produced it. Likewise, the reporting on the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and others are still due. The second National Plan of Action on Human Rights was developed by Ministry of Constitutional and Legal affairs in 2021-22 with the support of civil society, however its final approval is still pending. The report on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is being finalized but remains also pending. Conversely, the Government did deliver the report on implementation of CEDAW in 2015-2019.

In November 2024, the National Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance (CHRAGG) presented its draft National Plan of Action on Business and Human Rights (NAP-BHR) to the National Steering Committee. It is expected that the NAP-BHR will be finalised before the 2025 General Election. The EU and individual Member States collaborated with UN Women, UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF in activities and campaigns against GBV, including child marriage and FGM.

Togolese Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, Togo went through a significant constitutional change which is contested by a large part of the opposition. In April 2024, the National Assembly approved a reform of the Constitution, moving from a presidential to a parliamentary system, transferring all key executive powers to a (new) President of the Council of Ministers. The President of the Republic would have a largely ceremonial role. The timing of the proposal (voted after the end of the mandate of the Assembly) and a perceived lack of transparency and public debate on the main features of the new system triggered discontent by some members of civil society and the opposition. Under the new regime, the President of the Council will be the head of the party with a majority in the National Assembly, and will not be subject to term limits. The Opposition contests these constitutional changes and has called for demonstrations that the Government did mostly not authorize; some political opponents have been arrested as a result but were subsequently released. Meanwhile, across the country, conditions in prisons have not improved, despite efforts of the Minister of Justice in seeking improvement.

Legislative elections took place without any significant incident in April 2024, together with regional elections, and resulted in an overwhelming victory for the party currently in power. However, some important aspects of the electoral process were questioned: the restrictions in the preparation of the electoral list, the setup of constituencies criticised by some as favouring the government party, the refusal of accreditation of impartial observers and the access difficulties for local and international media.

In the last RSF 'state of the media' report, Togo has moved from 70th place in 2023 to 113th in 2024. Independent media are occasionally shut down, and there are allegations that the spyware Pegasus has been used against journalists and human rights activists. Activities of CSOs have become more tightly regulated, notably with the entry into force in April 2023 of a decree requiring NGOs to align their activities to the Government development priorities and to notify local officials of their activities. An additional decree passed in 2024 establishes complex procedures for the work of international NGOs. The terrorist threat in the Northern part of the country, with the need for increase of military presence in border areas, did lead to further limitations and restrictions.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU action in support of human rights and democracy in Togo focuses on Improving social cohesion and local democracy in the North of the country; promoting freedom of the press and expression, including through the promotion of access to quality information; supporting strengthening of the rule of law and governance; promoting freedom of association of workers, strengthening labour's rights and promoting corporate social responsibility; supporting HRDs; and promoting human rights and gender mainstreaming.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 9 October 2023, the EU and Member States held the 24th Partnership Dialogue meeting with the Togolese authorities. In general, the meeting confirmed the good relations between the EU and Togo and saw some more openness (compared to the previous year) from the Togolese counterpart to discuss human rights-related matters, though without dramatic progress in this field. Togolese authorities stated their availability to consider decriminalising opinions expressed by journalists in social networks and accessing the optional CEDAW Protocol.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, EU-financed projects in Togo worked to engage young people and women in citizens' participation and foster social cohesion in the northern Savanes region; prevent violent extremism, promote social cohesion and the resilience of communities in that region; increase the participation and representation of women in Togo's political, social and economic life; and strengthen freedom of expression and freedom of association.

Projects' implementing partners included Plan International Togo, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the PANOS Institute and the *Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement*. Funding for these projects came from the EU's European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights and its Foreign Policy Instrument. Over the period 2021 to 2027, EU funding for democracy, human rights and civil society organisations in Togo amounts to EUR 10 million. In 2024 alone, funding for human rights and civil society came to almost EUR 3 million.

In 2024, the EU invited Togolese and European NGOs to apply for funding to help promote corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Togo, especially respect for the rights of women and girls.

5. Multilateral context: In promoting human rights and democracy, the EU Delegation and Member States Embassies work together to build a conducive political dialogue with both Togolese authorities and other stakeholders in the framework of the Samoa agreement between the EU and ACP countries. The coordination of international engagement in Togo is mainly 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 EUDEL itself. In 2024, a number of discussions were held under the aegis of the UNHCR and other UN agencies to address the situation of refugees and displaced persons in the North. Last UPR on Togo was in 2022, the next one is scheduled for 2026.

Republic of Uganda

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, Uganda's human rights situation featured legislative restrictions, political repression, and limited institutional reforms. State institutions displayed initial signs of independence in human rights monitoring, while control mechanisms combined direct repression with administrative measures to maintain authority over political and civic spaces.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Related to the aspect of unlawful detentions, the EU Delegation was able to provide legal assistance to LGBTI persons and organisations, as well as strategic litigation through funding from the human rights and democracy thematic programme. Furthermore, the EU and Member States pursued strong engagement on civic and political space as the situation continues to deteriorate. In the light of the AU's Theme of The Year 'Educate and Skill Africa for the 21st Century', 2024 was a symbolic year for the EU as education is one of the largest EU investments to the country. The EU continued not only to contribute to the right to education in Uganda but also promoted respect for land and environmental rights by monitoring closely the impact of oil and gas projects.

Through the Civil Society in Uganda Support Programme, phase II (CUSP II) (co-funded by EU and Germany), 18 civil society organisations from the five regions of Uganda were trained on

digital skills. A research also explored the impact of the digitalization legal framework on inclusive development in Uganda and provided concrete recommendations for improvement. Funding was provided to Kampala Analytica, an independent policy think tank, to empower 20 CSOs and actors to effectively harness the transformative potential of artificial intelligence for sustainable development.

Under the Civil Society in Uganda Support Programme, phase II (CUSP II), funded by the EU and Germany, several activities were carried out in 2024 to create a more enabling environment for civil-society organisations and enhance the participation of women and youth in the public space. Three regional civil society conferences strengthened civil society organizations' knowledge of and compliance with the regulatory framework in Uganda, and allowed for exchanges with regulators of the sector. This was highly needed, considering the increased constraints and bureaucratic burden. Dialogues between CSOs and state institutions were organised in six cities, followed by an inaugural annual 'Talk to your Regulator' summit in May 2024 in Kampala with over 500 participants under the theme 'Cultivating trust to improve NGO sector governance'. Four activities were also dedicated to advance the role of women and youth within the public and political space.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU met the First Lady, who is also Minister of Education, to discuss the Gender for Development Uganda programme (G4DU), a Team Europe flagship initiative co-funded by EU, BE, DE and NL, and exchanged views on the situation of girls in and out of schools.

In April 2024, Commissioner Sinkevičius (Environment, Oceans and Fisheries) met Uganda's President H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and together launched the new EU Forestry programme with Uganda (EUR 40 million) to strengthen efforts to identify and implement inclusive solutions that strike a balance between different land uses, reduce deforestation, forest degradation and unsustainable conversion of natural ecosystems.

4. EU financial engagement: The Gender for Development Uganda programme (G4DU), a Team Europe flagship initiative co-funded by EU, BE, DE and NL focused on two key areas: education for adolescent girls (EUR 40 million), and elimination of GBV and promotion of sexual and reproductive health (EUR 20 million).

The Business Forum 2024 exemplified the spirit of Team Europe. The EU Delegation coordinated contributions and participation from 12 Member States, eight EU financial institutions and the Forum was attended by the Deputy Director General for International Partnerships. One session was dedicated to exploring new developments in European draft legislation on Corporate Sustainability and Due Diligence, and their impact on supply chains, including the coffee sector in Uganda. During this session the Team Europe project 'Advancing Respect for Business and Human Rights in Uganda' (EUR 5 million), co-funded by the EU and Belgium, was launched.

5. Multilateral context: Uganda's international engagement on human rights in 2024 was shaped by its leadership of two multilateral bodies: the G77+China and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). At the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Uganda articulated a more nuanced position on the relationship between national sovereignty and universal human rights principles. Uganda's engagement in Geneva-based human-rights discussions focused on eliminating racism, xenophobia, and related intolerance. These

interventions called for stronger international mechanisms to address discrimination and protect marginalized communities. In July 2024 Uganda sponsored a Human Rights Council resolution on international cooperation in human rights. At its 81st Ordinary Session in Banjul in November 2024, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights issued a resolution expressing deep concern about the treatment of environmental human-rights defenders in Uganda.

The Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) faced ongoing scrutiny regarding its independence and effectiveness in addressing domestic challenges such as freedom of expression and the protection of marginalized groups. Its 'A' status re-accreditation process from the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions is due for March 2025.

Republic of Zambia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2024 was a year marked by socio-economic hardship due to a severe drought and consequent nation-wide food and energy crisis, which has exacerbated the situation of the most vulnerable part of the population. A number of Government reforms were under review such as the Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Bills and the Non-Governmental Organisations Bill, leading to intense public debate.

During the EU Election Follow-Up Mission in January 2024, it was noted that, out of 22 recommendations, the adoption of the Access to Information Act has been fully implemented and the recommendation related to criminal defamation of the President has been partially implemented. The Electoral Commission of Zambia is expected to present a report leading to reforms in 2025, in view of the 2026 election.

Concerns around the freedom of assembly and freedom of expression were raised by the civil society and the political opposition. It is reported that the delay in reviewing the Public Order Act (POA) has allowed police to continue withholding permissions for political rallies, leading to intensified attacks on opposition parties and harassment of journalists. At the same time, it is generally recognised that freedom of the media has improved with the current Government. The Ministry of Justice is working on a Media Self-Regulation Bill, which seeks to align journalism with other regulating professions, ensuring accountability and professional standards.

Access to justice was still a concern for the majority of Zambians, mostly due to lack of awareness, financial resources and access to legal services. In October 2024, the dismissal of three Constitutional Court judges over alleged judicial misconduct led to further accusations of political interference in the judiciary and concerns with the judiciary’s independence. The conditions in detention facilities remained problematic, not conducive to preserving human rights and human dignity. A prison audit commissioned by the Government identified key challenges to be addressed, including persons kept in pre-trial detention for extended periods without charges or issues related to juvenile justice.

Rights of women and girls continued to be restricted, with a high prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence and under-age marriage. Women experienced significant challenges in participation 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. The human rights of LGBTI persons has been highly politicised and consequently highly sensitive to address. Consensual same-sex relations continue to be criminalised in the Penal Code. The rights of persons with disabilities remained restricted with regard to access to basic social services. The Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities remains insufficiently funded.

Corruption is a structural problem in Zambia, hindering good governance, business environment and citizen's access to services. This includes systemic challenges such as unresolved corruption cases, delayed reforms and transparency issues in public procurement. On a positive note, for the first time in ten years, Zambia's Corruption Perception Index improved from 33 to 37 in 2023. Additionally, the National Policy on Anti-Corruption was launched in May 2024.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU human rights and democracy policy priorities in Zambia are: 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). In addition: the advancement of women's and girls' rights, including sexual and reproductive health rights and the fight against sexual and gender-based violence; the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights, including for children and their right to good education and good health; and the promotion of an environment of non-discrimination, with a focus on the rights of marginalised groups.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2024, human rights and democracy issues continued to feature prominently in political dialogues with the Government, civil society and other key stakeholders. The Zambia-EU Partnership Dialogue took place in January 2024, covering a wide range of bilateral and multilateral issues, including governance, rule of law, human rights and gender equality. The EU has also engaged regularly with human-rights defenders, media organisations and oversight institutions. The EU Delegation joined a number of international human-rights campaigns with dedicated events, including the Press Freedom Day and 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, among others.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU and Member States regularly communicate on a variety on human rights and democracy topics and activities, through public diplomacy and through diplomatic channels with Zambian government and civil society.

In 2024, the EU signed three contracts with KfW, GIZ and UNICEF under the new Nexus Water Energy Zambia Initiative to support access to water and sanitation. In addition, it approved a new programme on Critical Raw Materials that includes support to the New Mineral Commission and business and human rights. The EnACT programme dedicated to Access to Justice, Civil Society participation and Transparency (over EUR 20 million, co-funded by Germany and EU, implemented by GIZ) supported the Ministry of Justice, civil society and other justice stakeholders.

5. Multilateral context: Zambia had an active multilateral engagement in 2024 as the Chair of the SADC Organ on Politics, Security and Defence, of COMESA, as well as the Chair of the

African Group of Negotiators at the UNFCCC. The EU reached out to the Zambian Government regarding a number of multilateral initiatives, including COP 29 in Baku.

On 19 December 2024, Zambia ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on the abolition of the death penalty with the entry into force expected for 19 March 2025 concluding the process towards abolition of the death penalty for all crimes. On 17 December 2024, Zambia voted in favour of the UNGA resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

Republic of Zimbabwe

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy landscape in Zimbabwe presents a mixed picture. Zimbabwe ranks 31st out of 54 countries on the 2024 Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance report. This report and the World Justice Project show a minor improvement in the freedom of assembly, but a decrease of civil society space, impartiality of the judicial system, and a significant decline in the area of democratic elections.

Economically, the country has long faced significant challenges, including macroeconomic instability and currency volatility, even though there have been recent improvements. 2024 was a difficult year, with economic growth slowing and poverty as well as food insecurity worsening due to the El Niño phenomenon and consequent drought.

Since the 2023 elections, no legislative reforms nor internal changes within the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) have been initiated and none of the recommendations from the EU Election Observation Mission or other missions have been considered.

A crackdown took place between June-August 2024, with multiple arrests and reported cases of torture and other ill-treatment during detentions in the run up to the SADC Summit in Harare. Civic space further contracted: the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Amendment Bill neared adoption and already resulted in pressure on and self-censorship within civil society. Towards the end of the year, thanks to the Dialogue on Arrears Clearance, the President has signalled some openness to further discuss with civil society their concerns. In September, Zimbabwe was added to the CIVICUS watchlist. Additionally, it has become increasingly difficult for CSOs to access communities due to requirements imposed by the authorities.

Consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised. LGBTI organisations operate more covertly following Vice President Chiwenga's statement condemning LGBTQ+ people as 'alien, anti-life, un-African, and un-Christian'. Local organisations have highlighted the role of foreign groups, notably US 'pro-life' organisations, contributing to fuelling anti-LGBTI sentiments both online and offline. The Government has vowed to defend national values and laws against homosexuality.

Upon the President's initiative, a reconciliation addressing the Gukurahundi genocide of the 1980s, in which tens of thousands of Ndebele and Kalanga were killed, was launched in August 2024. The EU has contributed supporting local structures—'peace committees'.

The Government has also announced further bills, including the Whistleblower Protection Bill, Witness Protection Bill, and Anti-Corruption Amendment Bill. In December 2024, the High Court issued a landmark ruling, expanding the protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) by significantly broadening access to safe and legal abortion for specifically vulnerable groups, such as teenage girls, young women and survivors of rape.

Zimbabwe abolished the death penalty on 31 December 2024. This was widely welcomed, though with the reservation that a clause has been introduced that the death penalty could be reinstated if the President declares a 'state of emergency'.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU provided support to CSOs working on promoting fundamental freedoms and strengthening civic and political space. Projects focused on monitoring and documenting human rights violations, ensuring access to legal services, and capacity building. Additionally, some organisations have worked with local peace structures to facilitate civic dialogues. The EU is engaged in supporting the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC). In November 2024, the EU launched a new project to support gender equality and women's economic empowerment. Youth inclusion is a key priority: the Youth Sounding Board, comprising youth from all the country, plays an important role in advising, monitoring and informing the EU on matters of youth inclusion, ensuring diversity of perspectives. The EU supports the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association, addressing environmental concerns and promoting transparency and accountability in the mining sector. Lastly, the EU's commitment to community engagement and inclusivity is exemplified through collaborations with the Church.

The EU has supported the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights. This includes legal services and litigation, medical and psychosocial support, rights literacy and research and advocacy. The EU is collaborating with DanChurchAid in the area of social cohesion and conflict resolution, through inclusive civic participation activities and capacity building of local peace structures. The EU also supports a project implemented by the Culture Fund of Zimbabwe Trust. This nurtures innovative ideas by arts and cultural practitioners that contribute to gender equality, freedom of expression, social cohesion and improved livelihoods.

The EU supports the Zimbabwe Institute for the 'Supporting Dialogue in Zimbabwe – Interparty Dialogue, Civil Society Strengthening and Engagement' project. The EU has launched a programme to support transparency and accountability of public service delivery and enhance justice delivery and access to justice at local level. Finally, the EU supported the International Media Support to improve the operating environment and counter disinformation, and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (Zimbabwe chapter) to strengthen access to quality information, counter disinformation and protect journalists.

The EU and Member States continued their efforts as part of the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment. This initiative aims to maximise the impact of existing investments to achieve gender equality. It includes EU projects like the Health Resilience Fund, as well as a number of EU Member States' bilateral funding. Notably, the EU, The Netherlands, Sweden, and Ireland have been involved in funding the fight against GBV and assistance to survivors. Additionally, Sweden supported actions to promote Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights. Germany focused on interventions with religious and traditional leaders to prevent child marriages and supported journalists in reporting on GBV cases.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU supported a wide range of CSOs, including those working on human rights and democracy sectors. Interaction occurred both bilaterally and jointly with individual EU Member States. The Structured Dialogue on Arrears Clearance and Debt Resolution is a Government-led initiative. Various CSOs have been included and have succeeded in discussing the PVO Bill with the authorities. The EU continued to advocate for the inclusion of electoral issues in this dialogue. Under the good governance track, co-chaired by the EU Ambassador, five technical roundtables were planned and three already took place. These roundtables provide a platform for candid discussions among a broad range of stakeholders, including Government representatives, the diplomatic community, and civil society, albeit still at a more technical level.

4. EU financial engagement: EU cooperation in Zimbabwe contributes to improving the civil and political, as well as the economic, social and cultural rights. The NDICI Multiannual Indicative Programme for the period 2021-2027 amounts to EUR 186 million and is complemented by thematic instruments.

5. Multilateral context: Zimbabwe engages participates in multilateral organisations such as SADC, the African Union and the United Nations. For the period of August 2024 to August 2025 Zimbabwe chairs SADC.

Zimbabwe regularly reports on human rights to relevant UN and AU Commissions. Nevertheless, it has not ratified several relevant international treaties, such as the CAT and ICPPED. In 2024, the National Assembly ratified the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and three protocols on the African Charter on the Rights of Older Persons, on the Rights of Citizens to Social Protection and Social Security, and on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The country has not extended a standing invitation to UN special procedures, which means that special rapporteurs and working groups must seek specific invitations to conduct a visit.

Arabian Peninsula

Kingdom of Bahrain

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy where the government is appointed by the King. Its National Assembly is bicameral, consisting of a 40-member elected Council of Representatives (Lower House) and a 40-member Consultative Council (Upper House) appointed by the King. The November 2022 parliamentary elections raised concerns about credibility due to the exclusion of major opposition parties and changes to the electoral law.

The National Institute for Human Rights, the Ombudsman in the Ministry of the Interior and the Committee for the Rights of Prisoners continued to record complaints, refer suspected cases of human rights violations to the law enforcement authorities and conduct unannounced prison visits. The country scheme of alternative sentences, extended since 2017, has been benefitting over 7489 people so far. Alternative sentences may include community service, home detention, exclusion orders, non-contact orders, electronic tagging,

rehabilitation programs or compensation. While these developments represent progress in Bahrain's human rights landscape, concerns persist. Bahrain's institutions are encouraged to strengthen their ability to investigate allegations of arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment of prisoners.

Bahrain continued implementing recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) 2022 and its National Action Plan. Bahrain has engaged in a delicate balancing act, allowing expression of dissent but drawing red lines when it comes to threats to its national unity and security. The main development this year has been several royal pardons in April, June, September and December 2024, resulting in the release of over 3400 detainees, which has been welcomed by the EU as an advancement that bolsters national cohesion and solidarity. EU encouraged Bahrain to continue along this path. However, some prominent human rights defenders and political leaders continue to be imprisoned as reported by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention[18].

The Bahraini National Action Plan (2022-2026) is setting out a roadmap with 102 priorities for the next five years in various areas like civil, economic and social rights. 64 projects identified in the strategy have been implemented to date.

Bahrain maintains the death penalty although most death sentences were commuted to life sentences and there have been no executions since 2019. There are currently 26 individuals on death row having exhausted all legal remedies.
Bahrain continued to promote interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence among religions. Freedom of expression and association remains limited in Bahrain even if freedom of assembly is more respected. Non-violent demonstrations took place in 2024 without any reported incident. Bahrain's National Human Rights Institution retains 'B status' according to the Paris principles, following the latest conclusion of the Sub-Committee on Accreditation.

In 2024, Bahrain was ranked 173 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index 2024, a drop of two places compared to the previous year. No independent media outlets operate within the country.

2. EU action - key focus areas: 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.

The EU and the Member States continue to monitor systematically human rights, justice, and rule of law in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Elections to the lower house of the National Assembly are held every four years in Bahrain. Next elections are planned for 2026.

The EU has highlighted to Bahraini authorities that freedom of expression both offline and online remains a foundation for democracy and stability, inviting to oppose any legislation, prohibiting freedom of expression, as well as condemning intimidation. The EU welcomes the decision to include 11 projects dedicated to enhancing digital rights in the National Human Rights Plan 2022-2026.

[18] https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/detention-wg/opinions/session96/A-HRC-WGAD-2023-2-Bahrain-Advance-Edited-Version.pdf

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The eighth EU-Human Rights dialogue, held on 8 December 2024[19], covered a broad range of topics such as freedom of expression and association, rule of law, the right to a fair trial, including certain individual cases and the death penalty. The two sides exchanged information on the latest developments in the EU and in Bahrain and reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining an open dialogue to address challenges and exchange best practices on human rights issues on the basis of mutual respect. The dialogue highlighted the importance of continued cooperation of the EU and Bahrain in multilateral fora. The EU commended, in particular, Bahrain for the progress achieved in advancing women's rights and youth empowerment, and recognised its significant efforts undertaken to promote social and economic rights, freedom of religion or belief and peaceful coexistence. Unlike previous years, the European Parliament did not adopt a Resolution on Bahrain in 2024.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the FPI funded 'Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach', women empowerment remains one of the priorities identified for projects. During the latest Human Rights Dialogue, the EU confirmed its readiness to provide technical assistance on implementing the country's Human Rights Strategy.

5. Multilateral context: Bahrain is a party to the core UN human rights treaties but has not ratified the Optional Protocol of 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.

Bahrain is creating synergies between recommendations made during the 41st session of the UPR in November 2022 and its National Action Plan. Bahrain seems also ready to consider recommendations, which have been 'noted' during the previous UPR exercise. In the 55th session of the Human Rights Council, the EU welcomed recent improvements of the human rights situation in Bahrain, including on women's rights, and encouraged Bahrain to continue along this path and to maintain its wider human rights obligations, especially as regards human rights defenders.

Republic of Iraq

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Iraq continues its political transition amidst the struggle for power-sharing within the Iran-allied Shia Coordination Framework's governing majority.

The national human rights oversight mechanism is currently not functional. The High Commission for Human Rights (IHCHR), dissolved in July 2021, has not yet been reappointed and the question of independence and competencies of its future members remains a source of concern. The status of the IHCHR is now at risk of being downgraded, following a recommendation of the Global Alliance of National Human rights Institutions, unless key issues are addressed.

[19] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/bahrain-8th-eu-bahrain-human-rights-dialogue-held-manama_en

Civil society organisations and activists report a shrinking civic space, as they are frequently the target of lawsuits and administrative obstacles, often based on unclear grounds, which restrict their ability to operate. The Penal Code still provides for criminal sanctions for defamation, which can be easily abused to curtail freedom of expression. Human rights defenders, journalists and activists continue to face threats both online and physical and harassment. In 2024, Iraq was ranked 169 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index 2024, a drop of two places compared to the previous year.

Gender equality remains significantly hindered across Iraq, including in the Kurdistan Region (KRI), where existing legislation is not effectively implemented. Iraq's Penal Code continues to enable impunity for male violence against women, and a long-awaited domestic violence law has been stalled in Parliament for years without progress. The Iraqi Parliament started debating an amendment to the Personal Status Law that would introduce a Shia religious code to govern personal status matters, raising concerns about the potential negative impacts on women's and the rights of the child in other areas.

The position of LGBTI persons in Iraq has severely deteriorated, with the approval in May 2024 of an amendment to the Anti-Prostitution Law that introduced severe sentences of up to 15 years in jail for consensual homosexual relations. This legislative development goes together with a widespread hostile sentiment towards sexual minorities rooted at societal level, as attested by online harassment, threats and physical attacks, reported by LGBTI persons.

Death penalty continues to be applied under the law on counterterrorism, despite serious concerns about due process and fair trial guarantees of defendants. There are no official figures, but it appears that executions, including mass executions (for example 13 people on 22 April), have significantly increased in 2024. Death sentences continue to be also increasingly applied for drug trafficking in contravention of international law. In a constructive development, Iraq has shown a willingness to embed human rights into its counterterrorism strategy, with government security bodies engaging with the European Union Advisory Mission in Iraq (EUAM Iraq) and the EU Delegation to organise training sessions and capacity building workshops on human rights and counterterrorism.

Since the end of the conflict in 2017, almost 5 million people have returned to their homes, while 1.1 million people remain internally displaced. After closing the last camp in federal Iraq in 2023, the government announced in 2024 its intention to close all remaining IDPs camps in the KRI. The lack of civic documentation for many IDPs remains problematic as it hinders the possibility to access basic services. In Sinjar, protracted insecurity and lagging reconstruction and rehabilitation of essential services remain as barriers to the dignified and voluntary return of the displaced population. On the positive side, Iraq has made and is continuing to make huge efforts to repatriate its own nationals from camps in North-East Syria.

In October 2024, long overdue parliamentary elections took place in the Kurdish region. The vote proceeded smoothly and peacefully, with no major security incidents reported. Negotiations are still ongoing for government formation.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU´s human rights policy in Iraq maintained focus on strengthening democratic institutions, fighting against corruption and supporting socioeconomic reforms, including access to quality education. It also prioritised promoting the rule of law – including fair trial, dignified detention conditions and the abolition of the death penalty – along with advancing women's

and the rights of the child, gender equality, and rights of minorities. Additionally, the EU policy supported actions to foster freedom of expression, encouraging political participation, protecting human rights defenders and empowering civil society organisations. EUAM Iraq continued to work with the Government of Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government to mainstream human rights principles within the civilian security sector and counterterrorism. The EU continued to support different fragile communities, both politically and financially, including the Yazidis. The HRVP issued a statement on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Yazidi tragedy.[20]

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU's bilateral engagement with Iraq is guided by the EU-Iraq Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which stipulates that EU-Iraq relations are based on respect for human rights and democratic principles. Dialogue on human rights has continued throughout 2024, with both the Federal Government and the Kurdish Regional Government. The Government and the Parliament have shown openness to engage meaningfully with the EU in a spirit of mutual trust to discuss relevant human rights developments and address concerns of the Iraqi civil society and the international community. Throughout the year, the EU has also engaged in regular meetings with civil society organisations active in the promotion of human rights and with human rights defenders across the country. The EU reacted publicly to reports of recent increased application of capital punishment sentences in Iraq, including cases of several executions in one single day.[21] The EU issued a statement following the adoption of legislation foreseeing imprisonment of 10 to 15 years for people engaging in consensual homosexual relations.[22]

4. EU financial engagement: Actions focused on improving detention conditions, including enhancing the treatment of juveniles deprived of their liberty as part of a rehabilitation, reintegration and PVE strategy. Projects implemented with local partners continued to provide support to human rights defenders throughout 2024. The EU also funded capacity-building projects for civil society organisations to foster an environment conducive to political participation, active citizenship and participation in political life, and to support free and fair elections in preparation of the upcoming Parliamentary election in 2025. The EU also remained fully committed to strengthen the government's capacity to guarantee economic and social rights, including the right to education, through its large cooperation portfolio of national reform programs. The EU continued to reinforce the actions mainstreaming the empowerment of women across all programming. As well as projects aimed at supporting justice initiatives that combat corruption. The EU supported the mainstreaming of human rights within the counterterrorism sector, as well as reintegration of IDPs and returnees, through projects enhancing access to civic documentation and basic services for children and national reconciliation.

5. Multilateral context: Iraq is state party to the main international human rights instruments, although it has not implemented all of them. The EU Delegation together with Member States' Missions engaged in constructive political dialogue with the Iraqi authorities on several human rights issues. It also carried out several démarches with Iraqi authorities on human rights issues in the context of the UN fora. 2024 has been marked by preparations towards the fourth

[20] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/iraq-statement-high-representative-10th-anniversary-yazidi-tragedy_en
[21] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/iraq-statement-spokesperson-executions_en
[22] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/iraq-statement-spokesperson-adoption-discriminatory-legislation_en

review under the Universal Periodic Review, which took place in January 2025. Iraq has put forward its candidacy for HRC membership for the period 2026 – 2028.

State of Kuwait

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Kuwait has had an elected Parliament since 1962 and a relatively open political system with a free parliamentary system, which was rather unique among Gulf countries. It previously operated under a semi-democratic system and a constitution supporting media pluralism and civil society. However, following a royal decree on 10 May 2024, the Emir dissolved the Parliament and suspended key elements of the 1962 Constitution for up to four years.
Kuwait still applies the death penalty. Six men were executed on 5 September 2024. Kuwaiti citizenship was revoked for thousands of individuals during the reporting period, with total numbers approaching 20,000 and the vast majority of those affected being women divorced, widowed and current foreign wives of Kuwaiti men.

With regard to civil and political rights, Kuwait has amended the penal law to strengthen the penalty for the crime of torture, in alignment with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Kuwait has achieved positive developments in the field of empowerment of women and girls. Official figures show an increase of women's participation in the government, army, police, coast guard and judicial sectors with women in leadership positions. A positive step was the Public Authority for Housing Welfare's amendment of the housing regulations to enhance Kuwaiti women's rights, ensuring their housing entitlements are protected at the time of housing/plots allocation, regardless of marital or familial changes. In a short period of time, from 2021/22 to 2023/24, Kuwait has climbed up the ranking on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) index by Georgetown Institute from the 123rd to the 61st position. According to Kuwait's report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the State has also progressed by 10 points in the global index on gender gap, ranking third in the Arab states on WPS.

However, despite Kuwait's endorsement of recommendations to eliminate gender-based discrimination during its 2020 Universal Periodic Review, Kuwaiti laws continue to restrict women's rights in marriage, divorce, child custody, and nationality under the Personal Status Law. Although a domestic violence protection law was introduced in 2020, it has significant gaps, lacking penalties for domestic violence and excluding various relationship contexts from its protection.

The sponsorship system ("Kafala") has not been abolished in Kuwait, thus continuing to raise concerns on exploitation and abuse of migrant workers, particularly in the case of domestic workers. The UN Human Rights Committee welcomed several measures to reduce the control of employers over workers, such as the requirement on employers to transfer wages to employees' bank accounts, the decision to allow workers to change jobs without the employer's consent under certain conditions, and the setting of a minimum wage. However, migrant workers still struggle to change jobs without employer consent. On the positive side, the Public Authority of Manpower lifted in December 2024 restrictions on expats aged over 60 years without a university degree, as they will no longer be required to pay a special annual fee to obtain a comprehensive health insurance policy from a private sector insurer in order

to renew their residence permits. Domestic workers are in a more vulnerable situation, with concerns focusing on the difficulties to protect employees from abuse and implement existing legal frameworks, and the criminalisation of 'absconding cases'.

Kuwait has supported recommendations to ensure non-discriminatory access to essential services for its stateless (Bidoon) population. However, it continues to deny them access to Kuwaiti nationality, resulting in their statelessness. In September 2024, Bidoon children faced difficulties while enrolling in schools, unless they had the security card provided by the Central Apparatus for the Remedy of Illegal Residents. Many Bidoons do not renew their annual security cards, in order to avoid the risk of being assigned another, non-Kuwaiti nationality on their new card, making it more difficult for them to eventually end their statelessness. Regarding access to healthcare, Bidoons with expired security cards are treated alike with visitors when it comes to medical fees at public hospitals and clinics.

Freedom of expression or opinion is subject to the control of Kuwaiti state authorities, particularly as regards social media. In 2024, Kuwait was ranked 131 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index 2024, climbing 23 places compared to the previous year. After the dissolution of the Parliament, a significant increase in the arrest and prosecution of former MPs, activists and individuals for critical remarks in public or social media was observed. The constitution guarantees the right to peaceful assembly, but it prohibits non-citizens and Bidoons from holding peaceful gatherings and protests. The negative trend concerning rights of LGBTI persons continued and according to ILGA World consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised.

2. EU action on Human Rights - key focus areas: Protecting and empowering individuals: The EU Delegation contributed financially to the winner of the 2023 Chaillot Prize Kuwaiti Society for Human Rights, with the purpose of supporting the visibility activities aiming to raise migrant workers' awareness about their rights in Kuwait.

Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies: The EU Delegation worked closely with likeminded countries and international organisations to encourage further advancement of human rights in the country, mainly in the field of women's empowerment in business and decision making positions.

Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy: As a follow up to the 4th EU-Kuwait Human Rights Dialogue, the EU, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the UN House and NATO organised the first ever Peace Day Forum in Kuwait, under the title 'Showcasing the Power and Value of Women, Peace and Security in Kuwait and Beyond'. The aim was to address the impact of war on women, while emphasizing the importance of women's role and participation in prevention, protection, relief and recovery from conflicts.

New technologies; harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges: The EU continued to promote freedom of expression in Kuwait and organised several public diplomacy events supporting in particular media freedom.

Delivering by working together: On 3 December, the EU and Kuwait conducted the fifth Human Rights Dialogue in Kuwait[23], with a large representation from the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other governmental institutions and agencies. The meeting took place in

[23] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/kuwait-5th-human-rights-dialogue-european-union-held-kuwait-city_en

a constructive and friendly atmosphere, with Kuwait showing willingness to openly engage with the EU.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 3 December 2024, the EU and Kuwait conducted the fifth Human Rights Dialogue in Kuwait[24]. The meeting touched upon a wide range of topics such as, labour rights - including domestic workers and reform of the sponsorship system - anti-discrimination and protection of persons in vulnerable situations; women's and children's rights; freedom of expression; assembly and association; illegal stateless residents and digital rights. The two parties also discussed rule of law - including the right to fair trial, prohibition and prevention of torture and ill-treatment and death penalty, where the EU reiterated its principled opposition to it.

4. EU financial engagement: The Foreign Policy Instrument sponsored facility 'EU Outreach Facility for the Gulf' is used to conduct human rights-related events and activities. The EU Delegation funded joint visibility activities with Kuwait Society for Human Rights, aiming to raise migrant workers' awareness about their legal rights in Kuwait.

5. Multilateral context: Kuwait is member of the UN Human Rights Council for 2024-2026 and it assumed the Presidency of the GCC for one year as of December 2024.

Sultanate of Oman

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Oman's political system reflects a blend of traditional governance and gradual modernisation, operating as an absolute monarchy with limited democratic practices. While political parties are banned and organised opposition is prohibited, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has introduced incremental reforms since his ascension in 2020 to modernise governance and address socio-economic challenges within a centralised framework. The absence of a pluralistic political landscape presents challenges in advancing democratic principles, such as freedom of expression and political participation, which remain restricted. Nevertheless, Oman has made strides in socio-economic development and maintaining stability, balancing conservative traditions with progress in areas like labour rights and gender equality. This equilibrium shapes the broader human rights landscape, where individual freedoms are often secondary to maintaining social harmony and national unity.

The human rights situation in Oman remained stable, with some progress. Freedom of expression continues to be limited. In 2024, Oman was ranked 137 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index 2024, climbing 18 places compared to the previous year. Political parties remain prohibited, and organised political opposition is not tolerated. Courts generally operate impartially, and socio-economic rights are respected for Omani nationals, although conservative views on women's roles persist. The death penalty is applied for severe crimes such as murder. While other lesser crimes such as drug trafficking, piracy or treason could also be punished with the death penalty, Oman did not conduct any executions since 2021. Oman also implements stringent safeguards, requiring judicial, religious and royal approval. According to ILGA World consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised.

[24] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/kuwait-5th-human-rights-dialogue-european-union-held-kuwait-city_en

2. EU action - key focus areas:*:* Throughout 2024, the EU monitored the human rights situation in the country including freedom of expression, women's rights, labour rights and the trafficking in human beings. The EU Delegation accredited to Oman was in regular contact with resident EU Heads of Mission, coordinating EU positions on human rights matters and liaising with the authorities in Muscat.

Discrimination in legislation, particularly concerning inheritance, divorce, and child custody, persists despite some progress in empowering women. Freedom of religion and belief, while constitutionally protected, faces practical limitations due to societal norms and restrictions on minority faith practices.

Adopted in July 2023, the new Labour Law came into effect in 2024 following the conclusion of the grace period in January. The law introduced several significant measures, including reducing the maximum daily working hours, providing paid paternity leave, and improving maternity leave provisions. While reports on the implementation of these reforms remain limited, nationwide information campaigns and accessible grievance mechanisms have been established to support their rollout.

The EU continues to advocate for a moratorium on the death penalty as a step towards eventual abolition.

3. **EU bilateral political engagement:** The Second EU-Oman Human Rights Dialogue[25], held on 20 November 2024, after two years since the inaugural meeting in Muscat in 2022, provided an opportunity to review recent developments in human rights within both the EU and Oman, namely on labour rights, gender equality and women empowerment, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, right to a fair trial and the death penalty.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the EU-funded Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation, and Outreach, youth empowerment has been a priority. Initiatives have focused on inclusive education programmes that promote gender balance and diversity.

5. Multilateral context: Oman's engagement in multilateral human rights fora remains cautious but constructive. Oman acceded to the Arab Charter on Human Rights, aligning national laws with regional human rights Principles. Oman has accepted over 80% of recommendations from its last UPR and plans to present a progress report in 2025. Ongoing consultations on ratifying key international conventions such as the OPCAT and ICCPR reflect Oman's growing international alignment.

State of Qatar

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Qatar is an absolute monarchy, with the Emir exercising executive authority, supported by the Council of Ministers and a Shura Council, composed of appointed and elected members, advising on legislation.

[25] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/oman-second-eu-oman-human-rights-dialogue-held-brussels_en

Qatari National Human Rights Committee, the main advisory institute to the government, has launched its third strategic plan 2024-2030 in an effort to improve the overall human rights situation in the country.

Significant challenges remain as regards youth rights, political freedoms and labour rights of migrant workers. Qatar has not yet granted full citizenship to the children of Qatari mothers and non-Qatari fathers, but several children have in the past year received non-expiring Qatari residency IDs. Reforms on labour rights continue, notably of the *Kefala* system, which include, inter alia, the abolition of exit permit requirements, a minimum wage law and steps to promote social dialogue through the obligation to create Joint Committees in companies with large numbers of employees. Moreover, ILO reports that practical challenges remain for migrant workers, such as obstacles in changing employers and retaliatory charges against workers as having absconded. According to non-governmental organisations, the Qatari authorities and FIFA have yet to provide compensation to the exploited workers whose labour made the 2022 FIFA Men's World Cup possible.

Qatar is considered to have a de facto moratorium on the imposition of the death penalty, with no reported executions since 2003, although courts have continued to sentence citizens and foreign nationals to death.

There has also been a noticeable tightening of control over social norms, which has had an impact on the safety and well-being of the LGBTI community. According to ILGA World consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised. While Qatar allows a certain level of public discourse on human rights issues in the media, including social media, this space remains selectively restricted.

On political rights, on 5 November 2024, a constitutional referendum with 86% turnout, showed 90% in favour of return to the appointment system of the Shura Council and cancelling of the election-based system. Therefore, the system shifted towards a process of political participation through informal consultation, the Islamic notion of the 'Shura'. On the positive side, the constitutional reforms also entailed that all Qataris are now officially considered as equals irrespective of their background.

In 2024, Qatar was ranked 84 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index 2024, climbing 21 places compared to the previous year.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU Delegation in Doha engages constructively with individuals of the local society and human rights authorities with hosting or participating in events reinforcing human rights through other fields, namely sports, culture and public diplomacy.

Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies: The EU Delegation and EU MS have been actively promoting a resilient, diverse and inclusive society through a series of activities at local level, working with Qatari universities (Qatar University, Hamad bin Khalifa University) through presentations, discussions and thematic events (mostly sport diplomacy) on human rights and . The EU Delegation has also partnered with Qatar Foundation and Qatar Financial Center for an event on women's role in sports in society, on the occasion of the National Sport Day 2024. In November 2024, the EU Delegation and the EU member states hosted the first EU Short Film Festival, where issues such as the role of men and women and inclusion of persons with disabilities were addressed by young film producers.

Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy: The EU Delegation and EU MS have actively and consistently engaged with Qatari authorities to promote EU priorities at relevant UN fora, especially at the Human Rights Council, where Qatar is a member. The EU Delegation also participated in an event on Business and Human Rights Dialogue for the Arab Region, co-organised by the National Human Rights Committee and UNDP, the first such dialogue in the region.

New technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges: The EU has initiated exchanges with the Public Prosecutor's Office and the National Cyber Security Agency including on protection of human rights, notably data protection and online security. During the first EU Short Film Festival, masterclasses were offered on creating short film with the use of AI and on a mobile phone, therefore enhancing the individuals' capacity to document their stories and experiences, including in fields of human rights, in an effective and inexpensive manner.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 25 September 2024, the sixth EU-Qatar Human Rights Dialogue took place in Brussels,[26] with constructive discussions on specific topics including labour rights; women's rights; persons in vulnerable situations, including LGBTI individuals; fundamental freedoms; rule of law, the death penalty; freedom of religion or belief ; digital rights; human trafficking; and refugee policy. Qatar continued to demonstrate open engagement with the EU on human rights issues, while the Qatari National Human Rights Committee also expressed interest for cooperation with the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights. In July 2024 the EU organised a Business and Human Rights regional workshop in Doha focused on addressing the topics of labour rights and in particular forced labour and corporate sustainability due diligence.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU does not have a dedicated budget for supporting local civil society and human rights organisations. The Foreign Policy Instrument sponsored facility 'EU Outreach Facility for the Gulf' and the Press and Information budget are mobilised to finance human rights related activities.

5. Multilateral context: Qatar acceded to multiple relevant human rights conventions to fulfil its international human rights obligations. Qatar was re-elected member of the Human Rights Council, for the period 2025-2027. Qatar did not ratify any of the international human rights instruments in 2024 to which the country is not yet a party. Qatari officials informed of the readiness of the country to agree on the establishment of a permanent ILO office in Doha. Currently, there is only an ILO Project Office based in Qatar. In 2024, Qatar and ILO signed an agreement to extend the Qatar – ILO Joint Work Programme for another four years. In November 2024, Qatar went through, the fourth cycle of the UPR and EU member states have submitted their recommendations.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy, with Mohammed bin Salman, the crown prince, serving as the de-facto ruler on behalf of his father, King Salman. The king holds legislative, executive, and judicial powers and

[26] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/qatar-european-union-and-qatar-hold-6th-human-rights-dialogue-brussels_en

oversees the Council of Ministers, while the Consultative Council, a body of appointed experts, advise him.

Political freedoms and freedoms of expression, assembly and association remain limited, with arrests and detentions of religious figures, journalists, academics, writers and human rights activists being reported also in 2024, including for public criticism on social media platforms. There is no independent media in Saudi Arabia, and Saudi journalists remain under strict surveillance, including when they are outside the country. In 2024, Saudi Arabia was ranked 166 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index 2024, climbing two places compared to the previous year. The death penalty continues to be applied, reaching a record high (in the last three decades) of 342 executions by December 2024, including 122 for drug-related offenses. In December 2024 the Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern that members of the Shia community, migrant workers and domestic workers, including women, are disproportionately subjected to arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment along with the absence of fair trial guarantees and coerced confessions, particularly in cases involving the death penalty. Saudi Arabia is not a party to the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 or its 1967 Protocol. However, the country has a long history of hosting refugees, including from Yemen, Syria and recently Sudan, under 'visit visas'. Several reports from NGOs indicate that the human rights violations targeting Ethiopian migrants at the Yemeni-Saudi border have continued in 2024.

In 2024, Saudi Arabia showed commitment to its objective to advance human rights in the Kingdom, building upon the positive trends of the previous years in the fields of women and workers' rights and constructively engaging in multilateral fora. The number of women in the workforce has been steadily growing, reaching 37% in 2024 which is above the 30% target set in the Saudi Vision 2030. Saudi Arabia continues work to dismantle the *Kafala* system. Notably, in April 2024, it issued new regulations revising regulations for domestic workers, as well as simplifying the process for transferring employment contributing to safeguarding the rights of workers and improving its overall labour market. However, no significant progress occurred in enacting the first ever Criminal Code, still under development by the government, with the aim to clarify the authority of the judiciary to decide on cases that are not clearly regulated under Sharia law. According to ILGA World consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Despite repeated requests, EU diplomats are still denied access to observe trials, especially at the Specialised Criminal Court. The EU raised a number of individual cases of concern, including jailed human rights defenders, bloggers and child defendants on the death row.

The EU has welcomed the adoption of new laws and ongoing work on a new Penal Code for Discretionary Sentences, as well as the election of Saudi Arabia as chair of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women for 2025, and has conveyed its readiness to provide technical assistance on specific aspects of the judicial reforms. In 2024, the Shura Council welcomed 19 new women members, building upon the 20% women quota introduced by King Abdullah in 2013.

The EU has encouraged Saudi Arabia to ratify the pending UN Human Rights main Conventions (CCPR, CESCR, OPCAT, ICCPR-OP2-DP, CED, CMW). Saudi Arabia is still not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, however, in April, the government decided to bear the government fees of displaced citizens from neighbouring countries, who were permitted to stay and rectify their status in the country, for a period of four years. The risk of extradition and / or deportation of individuals who face imminent risks in their home countries is a source of concern. The EU has raised this with local authorities.

harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges: The EU continued to promote freedom of expression, while rejecting hate speech. The EU expressed concerns about serious limitations of the freedom of expression online.
The EU encouraged Saudi Arabia to intensify cooperation with the EU and ILO and other UN agencies in pursuing further comprehensive and inclusive labour reforms in line with international standards, as the country prepares to host the Expo 2030 and 2034 FIFA World Cup.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 17 December 2024, the EU and Saudi Arabia held their fourth Human Rights Dialogue in Riyadh[27]. It was co-chaired by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and the President of Saudi Arabia's Human Rights Commission. Locally, the EU Delegation and EU Member States' Ambassadors have been regularly raising human rights issues with Saudi interlocutors. In addition, human rights issues concerns, including on individual cases, are regularly raised in contacts with Saudi high officials at all levels. The EU issued two Statements to express concern for the steep rise of executions and the application of the death penalty in Saudi Arabia, including for drugs offences.[28]

4. EU financial engagement: Under the FPI financial programme *'Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach'*, women empowerment and human rights remains one of the priorities. In line with the spirit of Team Europe initiatives, EU Member States contributed to events promoting EU human rights priorities locally.

5. Multilateral context: The EU-Saudi Arabia Human Rights Dialogue provided an opportunity to exchange views on international human rights law and cooperation on multilateral fora. Greater coordination in human rights fora would allow for convergence of positions on specific initiatives. In March, Saudi Arabia was elected for the first time chair of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women for 2025. In January 2024, the country went through the UPR and received 354 recommendations for furthering the protection of human rights in its territory. It accepted the majority of them, while maintaining reservations on those interfering with the Sharia law provisions. Saudi authorities have been cooperating with the UN Office in Riyadh, as well as UN agencies based abroad with the objective to address issues related to combatting human trafficking and allegations of human rights violation at the border with Yemen.

[27] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/saudi-arabia-4th-eu-ksa-human-rights-dialogue-held-riyadh_en
[28] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/saudi-arabia-statement-spokesperson-recent-executions_en
https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/saudi-arabia-statement-spokesperson-executions-country_en

United Arab Emirates

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The UAE is a federation of seven emirates, with Abu Dhabi's ruler as President and Dubai's ruler as Prime Minister. The Federal National Council, with 40 members, has limited legislative power. Half of its members are elected, though by a restricted electorate. The October 2023 elections saw a significant increase in female representation, with women comprising half of the newly appointed members.

The UAE continues to balance their human rights record and international reputation, focusing on socio-economic rights. Civil and political rights, as well as political pluralism continue to be restricted. Although the UAE Constitution formally guarantees free speech, fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression, remain curbed. Authorities can prosecute individuals and/or censor local or foreign media, critical of the ruling families, religion, economy or government policies. In 2024, the UAE was ranked 160 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index 2024, a drop of 15 places compared to the previous year. Cases of imprisonment of peaceful critics, political dissidents and human rights activists continue to be recorded in the UAE.[29] A new mass trial (UAE84) started in December 2023, coinciding with the world's attention to COP28 in Dubai, and concluded in July 2024. It followed up on the post-Arab-Spring mass trial 'UAE94' in 2013. Cases of torture and other inhuman treatment have also been reported by international NGOs in that context. The death penalty remains a punishment, including for drug trafficking.

Partial progress has been observed in case of individual and rights of minorities, and anti-discrimination policies. Given the country's multicultural concept of tolerance and coexistence, religious and expatriate communities can practice their belief.

The country's attention to human rights translates into the elimination of discrimination, especially in case of women and persons with disabilities. Recent legislation progressively strengthened women's rights, including protection against sexual harassment, the right to (emergency) abortion and against domestic violence; it also codified equal pay and conditions in the workplace. The UAE decriminalised consensual relationships outside of marriage and strengthened protection of children born out of wedlock. Since 2022, a new federal law regulating the personal status matters of non-Muslims allows them to opt for their home country's relevant civil legislation, and hence assures equal male/female rights in legal proceedings such as testimony, estate, marriage, divorce and joint custody. According to ILGA World consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised.

On the rights of migrant workers, the UAE had made progress regarding labour standards, especially ahead of the Expo 2020 Dubai and during the covid-19 pandemic. However, the sponsorship (*kafala*) system remains de facto in place. The Labour Law (2022) consolidated workers' rights with respect to discrimination, wages and un/limited contracts. The (involuntary) loss of employment insurance was introduced in 2023; an outcome of the ILO's comprehensive efforts in the region.

In early 2024, UAE's Permanent Committee for Human Rights replaced the National HRs Committee in a significant change beyond a mere re-branding. The UAE's NHRI, established in 2021 according to Paris Principles, did not engage in visible activities throughout 2024.

[29] For instance, on 16/09/2021, the European Parliament adopted Resolution 2021/2873(RSP) on the case of human rights defender Ahmed Mansour in the UAE.

2. **EU action - key focus areas:** The EU Delegation coordinated among MS, and in cooperation with like-minded countries formally requested, albeit unsuccessfully, to observe the final court hearing of the mass trial (*UAE84*).

EU continue to monitor systematically Human Rights, justice, and Rule of Law in the UAE. The EU and its MS have been collaborating with the UAE towards more intensive judicial cooperation, also in the context of anti-money-laundering, human trafficking and organized crime. The EU significantly contributed to the promotion of women empowerment and human rights of disabled persons by awareness raising events.

The UAE aspires to be a global leader in AI, and is interested in jointly enabling a normative international framework. Social media have been instrumental in passing *soft messages* on human rights and fundamental freedoms, or even more critical feedback from abroad. Nevertheless, building on covid-19 restrictive measures, the UAE ramps up its surveillance capacity and nearly all public and on-line spaces remain closely monitored. The UAE issued its first personal data protection law in 2021, said to be inspired by the EU's GDPR; however, deficiencies in data protection persist.

The EU's human rights work in the UAE focuses on: fundamental freedoms, discrimination and persons in vulnerable situations, women's and girls' rights and gender equality, the rule of law and administration of justice, the UAE's National HR Action Plan (awaited/due in 2022), including business and human rights, and finally digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI). The EU supported women empowerment, incl. in the context of the UAE membership in the Human Rights Council. The EU's HRs public awareness campaigns in social media have been coordinated with EU MS locally.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU and UAE held their annual informal Human Rights dialogue in January 2024[30]. Discussions focussed on labour rights, freedom of expression, digital technologies and AI, rule of law and women's rights. The EU also raises the situation of HRDs, and underlines the importance of ratifying major international HR conventions and instruments. The EU has been consulted, and shall contribute to complex ILO efforts enhancing standards for migrant labour.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the FPI funded Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach project, the EU Delegation organised events in cooperation with the UAE's 'civil society' and academia.

5. Multilateral context: UAE's Human Rights Council membership (2022-2024) created opportunities for engagement and consultation on human rights issues, despite increasing non-alignment by the UAE with the EU's positioning Building upon its previous support for the UAE's National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (WPS), the EU continued engaging in advocacy for women's participation in peacekeeping and post-conflict efforts. The EU carried out several démarches including the EU's thematic, country and regional priorities at the HRC and UNGA. The UAE did not sign any (major) international covenants in 2024, such as the ICCPR and ICESCR. No significant progress on

[30] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/uae-12th-human-rights-dialogue-held-brussels_en

implementation, nor public attention to this, were observed in 2024 relevant to recommendations from the UPR in 2018 and 2023 (4th cycle).

Republic of Yemen

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in 2024 remained extremely poor across the country and in particular in the Houthi-controlled areas. While a ceasefire has been de facto in place for two years now, internal conflicts continue to affect the Yemeni population across the country.
In 2024, the Houthis resorted to the arbitrary arrest of more than 60 local staff working for UN, iNGOs and diplomatic missions, as well as many others in the north. Some of the detainees have been referred to the prosecution of Special Security Courts that are not in line with international standards and may face the death penalty. The UN Secretary General has condemned these arbitrary detentions and demanded the release of the detainees. They also raided the OHCHR office in Sanaa. This clampdown was accompanied by an intimidation campaign aired through Houthi-controlled media. Most staff remain in detention, in an unknown location, with no access to lawyers or contact with their families.

Women continued to suffer from severe discriminatory practices, in particular in Houthi-controlled areas, where the de facto authorities are implementing the 'mahram' requirement (obligation for women to be accompanied in public by a male guardian). Moreover, there were obstacles regarding the implementation of vaccination campaigns in Houthi areas. According to ILGA World consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalised.

Civilian casualties were reported from Houthi attacks and incidents (including landmines) across Yemen. Houthi attacks on merchant vessels – such as the attack on the vessel the 'True Confidence', transiting through the Red Sea, which killed three seafarers - also led to civilian casualties

In the government controlled area, the Yemen National Commission for the Investigation of Violations of Human Rights also reported on arbitrary arrests and torture in Dhamar Governorate in its report released in September. In May, the Southern Transitional Council seized the headquarters of the 'Yemeni Women's Union'; in July, a court in Aden sentenced Ahmed Maher, a Yemeni journalist, to four years in prison; local authorities in Aden shut down the 'Yemen journalists union', and in December, they tried to prevent the holding of the 7th Feminist Summit in Aden. In 2024, Yemen was ranked 154 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index 2024, climbing 14 places compared to the previous year.

NGOs complained of restrictions and a worsening of the operational environment throughout the reporting period across the country.

3. EU action - key focus areas: The EU's bilateral engagement with Yemen is guided by the EU-Yemen Cooperation Agreement, which stipulates that EU-Yemen relations are based on respect for human rights and democratic principles. EU action on human rights in Yemen focuses on six priorities: promotion and protection of women's rights and empowerment of women; the rights of the child with a focus on Children and Armed Conflict; closing the accountability gap and fighting impunity as well as promoting compliance with International Humanitarian law; promoting an independent civil society, enabling civic space, support and

protect human rights defenders; freedom of expression and promotion of independent media; combating discrimination and exclusion in all forms.

In 2024, the EU Delegation to Yemen financed three actions oriented to support the promotion of women's rights, journalism and free media.

4. EU bilateral political engagement: There is no human rights dialogue with the Government of Yemen due to the ongoing conflict. The EU Delegation raises human rights issues and cases of concern through diplomatic visits and meetings with the Yemeni authorities. The EU Delegation continued engaging with human rights defenders through its projects. The HoD organised meetings as well with Yemeni CSOs engaged in the promotion of human rights in the country. EU Political Counsellors dedicated various discussions to the implementation of the human rights strategy in Yemen.

The EU has also echoed calls by the UN that condemned arbitrary detentions and demanded the release of the detainees, as was also done by other countries (Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the United States). A joint statement co-signed by the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, France, the Netherlands and the Government of Yemen was issued in September 2024 demanding the release of all staff, and announcing support for the UN decision to minimise the exposure of staff to risk in Houthi areas by suspending all non-life saving and non-life sustaining activities. The co-signatories called on the international community to redirect funding elsewhere in Yemen.

5. EU financial engagement: In 2024, the EU Delegation to Yemen launched a call for proposals combining the allocations from the Civil Society Thematic Programme and the Thematic Programme on Human Rights and Democracy (NDICI). EUR 3,447,608 were available for the financing of project proposals. Three actions were selected:

1) LIFT: Life-changing Interventions for Females to Thrive, implemented by Stichting ZOA and co-financed by the EUD with 1,125,000 EUR;
2) Empowering Yemeni Young Women and Adolescent Girls Through Access to Digital Economy, implemented by Stichting War Child and co-financed by the EUD with 1,000,000 EUR;
3) Resilient Media for Democratic Progress in Yemen, implemented by International Media Support and co-financed by the EUD with 947,608 EUR.

The calls for proposals launched between 2021 and 2024 took into consideration the 6 priorities and focused on their achievements. The consultations that took part with the participation of the members of the civil society prior to the elaboration of the guidelines for the calls confirmed the pertinence and timeliness of these priorities. The outputs of the actions financed under these calls for proposals are encouraging but also reflect the challenges and long road ahead. According to the interlocutors, all these priorities are still relevant and the continued support is much needed.

5. Multilateral context: The Government of Yemen submitted its fourth national report under the Universal Periodic Review mechanism in May 2024. On 13 August, the High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk issued a statement condemning the storming of the OHCHR by the Houthis and renewed the call to free the detainees in Houthi areas. During the Human Rights Council 57th session, the EU issued a statement under 'item 10' in which it reiterated its concern about reports that highlight the numerous and serious human rights violations and abuses in the country, including against women and girls. The statement condemned the

arbitrary detentions by the Houthis of UN personnel and staff working for international and national non-governmental organisations, and diplomatic missions in Yemen and renewed the call for their immediate and unconditional release. Likewise, the EU renewed its support to the National Commission of Inquiry, and urged the Council to expand the mandate of OHCHR on the ground.

Asia

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: By the end of 2024, more than three years into the Taliban rule of Afghanistan, the human rights and democracy situation in the country further deteriorated. Systemic violations of fundamental freedoms, rights of persons belonging to minorities, as well as increasing restrictions of civil and political rights of all Afghans, especially of women and girls, were further enforced. More than 100 edicts targeting the rights of women and girls issued since July 2021 were ultimately encoded in the so-called 'Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice' (PVPV Law), officialising the many discriminatory policies and severe restrictions on women's and girls' rights and freedoms. The Taliban maintained their ban on girls' education beyond grade six and by December 2024 also imposed a directive prohibiting medical training of women in private or public institutions, eliminating one of the last pathways for higher education for women, while putting at risk the lives of many women and girls. Another decree issued in December 2024 ordered all new residential constructions to be built without windows looking onto 'places usually used by women', and commanded that already existing windows as such should be blocked to prevent 'obscene acts'. Consequently, Afghanistan remained the worst ranked of 177 countries in terms of the status of women, according to the 2023/2024 Women, Peace and Security Index[31].

Freedom of media and freedom of expression were also severely reduced through 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. In 2024, 11 television stations and one radio station were closed, while the Taliban's 'Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice' started implementing a ban on broadcasting of any image depicting living beings. Additional restrictions on media content included bans on music, foreign cultural depictions, fiction, and news commentary on the Taliban's politics. In 2024, Afghanistan ranked at 178 out of 180 in the RSF World Press Freedom Index, losing 26 ranks in just one year[32]. According to the report, in 2024, 25 journalists have been arrested or detained, a quarter of them for their links with media in exile.

In 2024, Afghanistan witnessed new evidences of torture, inhumane and degrading treatment of detainees, as well as enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings. Judicial corporal punishment, including flogging as well as death penalty continued to be applied– often with the practice of retributive punishment–and carried out in public places like stadiums. Since

[31] Women Peace and Security Index, 2023/2024: https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/WPS-Index-executive-summary.pdf#page=2;
[32] Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, 2024, Afghanistan: https://rsf.org/en/country/afghanistan;

the Taliban take over on 15 August, six executions were carried out publicly, three of them in 2024.

Additionally, the Taliban *de facto* authorities continued to disregard international norms and standards, as set out in international conventions and instruments to which Afghanistan is a state party. This includes CEDAW, the CRC and the Rome Statute of the ICC.

2. EU Action – key focus areas: The regression on human rights, especially for Afghan women, girls and vulnerable groups, remained at the centre of the EU's attention, in line with the European Council Conclusions adopted in September 2021 and reconfirmed in March 2023. While the situation on the ground increasingly became challenging, the EU remained steadfast in its commitment in supporting the protection and the promotion of human rights in Afghanistan. In 2024, the EU maintained its support to the Afghan civil society and HRDs, as well as the EU's Safe Passage Task Force set up in October 2021, thanks to which hundreds of Afghans at risk and their close ones were able to leave the country.

In March and July 2023, the EU adopted restrictive measures against Taliban representatives using the EU's Global Human Rights Sanctions regime.

3. **EU bilateral political engagement:** As the situation in Afghanistan continued to deteriorate, the international community, including the EU, continued the policy of non-recognition of the legitimacy of the Taliban *de facto* authorities. The EUDEL in Kabul ensures the sole presence of the EU and its MS in Afghanistan. In line with 2021 and 2023 Council Conclusions, EUDEL not only engages with the Taliban *de facto* authorities in discussing issues of concern, but also with the business community and civil society representatives across the country. In particular, the Delegation has used its presence in Kabul to provide outreach to women. In addition, in December 2024 the EU Special Envoy for Afghanistan visited Afghanistan and continued the EU's engagement with Afghan CSOs in and outside of the country.

4. EU financial engagement: Since the Taliban take-over in 2021, the EU has provided a total of EUR 1.7 billion of humanitarian and basic needs support, through the UN, humanitarian partners and CSOs. In particular, in 2024, the EU provided critical relief assistance to the most vulnerable, funding projects worth over EUR 125.5 million. In addition, the EU has also allocated nearly EUR 161 million in humanitarian aid, focusing on emergency food assistance, healthcare, education in emergencies, and access to clean water, hygiene and sanitation facilities as well as shelter and protection services, which include de-mining activities. These projects have been delivered with a 'by-women, for-women' and a 'do-no harm' approach.

5. **Multilateral context:** The EU continued its support to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), as well as to the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett. The mandate was renewed for another year in October 2024, with additional capacity to be provided by the OHCHR on documentation and preservation of information collected, including specific capacity for analysis and reporting of serious human rights violations in Afghanistan.

The ICC authorised the Prosecution to resume the investigation into the Afghanistan situation in October 2022, which the EU continues to support as a key mechanism for increased accountability in Afghanistan.

In 2024, the EU included Afghanistan in its Council Conclusions on EU priorities in UN Human Rights fora in 2024, as well as in statements at the 55th, 56th and 57th UNHRC and in the UNGA Third Committee.

People's Republic of Bangladesh

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The first half of 2024 was marked by increasing restrictions on fundamental freedoms in the aftermath of the January parliamentary elections. Longstanding human rights challenges persisted as in previous years: members of the opposition were harassed and detained; civil society struggled with shrinking civic space; freedom of speech and press freedom were severely curtailed; and minorities, Indigenous Peoples and marginalised groups suffered from various forms of discrimination and harassment.

In the months of July and August 2024, Bangladesh experienced significant political change. Triggered by the reinstatement of a quota system for allocating civil service jobs, protests escalated and serious human rights violations were committed by security forces and members of the ruling party's student wing. The OHCHR assesses that as many as 1,400 people could have been killed during the protests. The fall of the government and the subsequent breakdown of law and order led to widespread looting and violent reprisals against persons affiliated with the former ruling party. In addition, a number of attacks and harassment against religious minorities, in particular Hindus, Indigenous Peoples, and marginalised groups took place. It should however be noted that there was widespread disinformation surrounding the scale of these attacks.

An interim government headed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus was sworn in on 8 August. The Interim Government has expressed its commitment to a peaceful and democratic transition, underpinned by good governance and human rights. Wide-ranging political and economic reforms were announced as a prerequisite for holding free and fair elections, expected by the end of 2025 or beginning of 2026. Meanwhile, the Interim Government has taken steps to ensure justice and accountability for human rights violations committed under the previous government. Bangladesh acceded to the CPED and established a commission of inquiry to investigate cases of enforced disappearance. Furthermore, Bangladesh invited an OHCHR fact-finding mission to the country, with a view to reporting on violations perpetrated during the protests, analysing root causes, and making recommendations to advance justice and accountability. In addition, the Interim Government has proposed to amend several key laws, such as the Cyber Security Act and the International Crimes Tribunal Act to bring them in line with international human rights standards.

Further progress in key areas such as media freedom, the rights of minorities and vulnerable groups and labour rights is an important aspect for the Interim Government's continuing work.

Bangladesh retains the death penalty and a high number of sentences continue to be issued on a yearly basis, including for crimes that do not meet the threshold of 'most serious crimes' under international law and often in proceedings that do not meet international standards on

due process and the right to a fair trial. Concerns also remain over the detention conditions of those on death row.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Throughout 2024, the EU played an active role in promoting and defending human rights in Bangladesh by engaging in a range of diplomatic and public initiatives. This included strengthening its networks with CSOs, HRDs, journalists, and academics, as well as conducting various seminars, roundtable discussions, and consultations on key human rights concerns.

The EU also used social media campaigns, public debates and interviews to raise awareness about critical human rights issues. The EU's engagement focused on gender equality, with funding directed toward projects aimed at preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence. The EU also supported LGBTI rights activists facing harassment through mechanisms like ProtectDefenders.eu.

In addition, the EU engaged in improving access to primary education for all children. Furthermore, the EU organised exchanges, events, and conferences on pressing issues, such as a cybersecurity event in July, and carried out two missions to the Chittagong Hill Tracts to engage with local communities.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Since Bangladesh's Interim Government was sworn in in August, the EU has pursued a policy of engagement with the country in order to maximise the opportunities for dialogue at a crucial time. The 11th Joint Commission, the sub-group on trade and economy and the sub-group on human rights and good governance were held in early November and late October. The EU also launched the negotiations of a Partnership and Cooperation agreement with an explanatory round in early November, following the Joint Commission in Dhaka.

The EU and Bangladesh reinforced their commitment to strengthen cooperation on human rights, good governance and the on-going reform process.
Under the Team Europe Initiative on decent work, the EU hosted a Civil Society Dialogue on the Labour Sector in September. The event's inputs were translated into 45 actionable recommendations for the Interim Government, aimed at expediting reforms to advance freedom of association and social dialogue, and to eliminate child and forced labour.

The EU also strengthened its bilateral engagement with Bangladesh on migration and electoral processes. In March, the second Bangladesh-EU Migration and Mobility Dialogue was convened, aiming to improve cooperation on migration-related issues. Additionally, the EU deployed an Election Expert Mission in January 2024.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU translates its human rights priorities into concrete actions through project funding in Bangladesh. In 2024, the EU committed several million euros to new initiatives aimed at preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence in public and workplace settings, one of the most widespread human rights violation in Bangladesh. Additionally, the EU allocated substantial funds to improve the primary education system, alongside providing technical assistance to strengthen educational outcomes. The EU also supported projects on civil and political rights, including those related to freedom of

expression and media. It further directed generous financial support to bolster local CSOs working on labour rights and due diligence. The EU's commitment to humanitarian efforts remained strong, as it allocated nearly EUR 43 million in support of the Rohingya refugee crisis, providing crucial assistance to both refugees and host communities in Bangladesh.

5. Multilateral context: In 2024, Bangladesh continued its three-year membership of the UNHRC, which will conclude in 2025, and remained engaged on resolutions on Myanmar, including Rohingya issues, in the UNGA and UN Human Rights Council. A notable shift in Bangladesh's approach to the death penalty occurred in December 2024, when it abstained for the first time from voting on the UNGA resolution calling for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. Additionally, in October, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk visited Bangladesh.

Kingdom of Bhutan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, Tshering Tobgay was elected as the Prime Minister of Bhutan after his People's Democratic Party won 30 out of 47 seats in the National Assembly. The remaining 17 seats were won by the opposition Bhutan Tendrel Party.

Bhutan's commitment to human rights is well reflected in its Constitution, and the country's laws are largely in line with international standards. Over the last 15 years, Bhutan has undergone an intense transformation, with marked improvements in human rights and democracy indicators. Bhutan continues to make important progress in reducing maternal and infant mortality and expanding education. It has made important steps forward in protecting the rights of women and children and promoting gender equality, as well as recognizing LGBTI rights. The decriminalisation of same-sex relations took place in 2020.

Despite Bhutan's good human rights and democracy record in recent years, some concerns remain. These include the lack of legal clarity for 'inducement' to religious conversion; the practice of minority religions; the situation of people from the Lhotshampa community stranded in camps in eastern Nepal and a small number of political prisoners serving long prison terms in Bhutan. Some reports also depict a deterioration of the country's press freedom indicators.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Within the Human Rights and Democracy Thematic Programme under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, Bhutan was allocated for the first time EUR 1 million as a direct grant to be implemented through a contribution agreement with UNDP. One focus area of this project is the enhancement of accessibility and inclusivity of justice and legal aid services through the establishment of the necessary capacities and institutional mechanisms in the justice sector and of oversight bodies. Furthermore, another objective is to strengthen CSO's engagement and capacities towards fostering fundamental rights, democratic governance and equitable justice.

In addition, in 2024 the EU Delegation supports four projects focusing on capacity building of CSOs, parliamentarians, media for rights-based governance, inclusive development, and

participation in policy making under the thematic programme for CSOs with a total of EUR 2.5 million. A project for EUR 1 million through International IDEA is focusing on capacity building of parliamentarians and another project for EUR 1 million through UNICEF supports inclusive access to digitalisation in education and skills.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The 2024 edition of the EU-Bhutan Annual Consultations took place in September 2024 in Brussels, and its extensive agenda included issues concerning human rights and democracy. The EU and Bhutan enjoy a very constructive and dynamic diplomatic relationship with regular visits of officials from both sides. In 2024, the EU Delegation to India and Bhutan carried out seven missions to Bhutan on its own. Also in 2024, the Ambassador of the EU to India and Bhutan led a mission to Bhutan comprising 17 EU MS Ambassadors or Deputies based in New Delhi. During this visit, they held meetings with high-level Bhutanese interlocutors, interacted with the local media, and attended the launch of the Bhutanese Parliament-Private Sector Collaboration Strategy, an initiative co-funded by the EU.

4. EU financial engagement: In August 2024, the EU and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's began a three-year (2024-2027) multi-country EUR 9 million joint initiative. Entitled 'Preventing and addressing Trafficking in Human Beings and Smuggling of Migrants in South Asia', this initiative sought to address critical challenges related to trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants in six partner countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

5. Multilateral context: Bhutan has ratified three of the nine international human rights conventions: CEDAW, the CRC along with two of its optional protocols, and the CRPD, the latter ratified in 2024. In 2023, Bhutan acceded to the Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons.

Bhutan's fourth UPR cycle took place in 2024, with the final report expected by February 2025. During the review session, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights made recommendations regarding Bhutan's accession and ratification of international human rights conventions and the establishment of an independent mechanism for monitoring human rights. The Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions noted many positive changes in the detention regime, including the regular observance of 24 hours for an individual to be brought before a court of law, the use of open-air prisons, and the progress with regard to juvenile justice and expeditious trials, among others. However, the Working Group also expressed concern about the detainees' access to legal representation. Other issues touched upon were the prevalence of violence against children and insufficient institutional response; the significant decrease in the female labour force; the decrease in the representation of women at the National Assembly; the criminalisation of abortion; high rates of violence against women and discriminatory practices against vulnerable groups belonging to ethnic minorities.

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 had a dual criminal law system based on Common Law and Sharia Law. Whereas the SPC foresees capital or corporal punishment for crimes such as adultery, extramarital sex or LGBTI relations, the Common Law allows for extenuating circumstances for women, men over 50, ill people and persons sentenced to death.

While both the Common Law and the SPC contain death penalty provisions, Brunei remains a country with a *de facto* moratorium on the death penalty. Based on the limited data available, no executions have been carried out since 1996. A moratorium on the use of the death penalty has been in place since May 2019, when the Sultan extended the *de facto* moratorium that already existed in the Common Law to the one under the SPC.

Freedom of religion or belief remains limited, with the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam as the official religion, and restrictions to the practice of other religions or 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 the SPC. New places of worship other than Islamic ones are not registered, and the renovation of existing ones face nearly insurmountable hurdles. Non-Muslims suffer discrimination, e.g. as regards social benefits, access to the armed forces or access to 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 can be 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 Head of State, Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, of Finance and of Defence. The country of 455,858 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 its civic space is limited. While no evidence has been found of the existence of political prisoners, 'administrative detention' without trial or charge does occur.

Brunei is ranked 117th out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index 2024, up from 142 in 2023. National legislation restricts press freedom and silences criticism of the Sultan, the Government and the country's official religion. The largest media outlets are state-run. While authorities monitor online speech, Brunei does have an active online community. There are restrictions to freedom of association, such as the possibility to suspend the activities of NGOs at any time for any reason, and freedom of assembly, including the illegality of strikes. According to the Freedom in the World Index 2024, Brunei scored 28 out of 100, repeating its 2023 score, with its status being 'not free'.

Brunei has several laws in place to fight trafficking in human beings, e.g. the Women and Girl Protection Act, the 2019 Prevention of People Smuggling Order and the 2019 Anti-Trafficking in Person 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. In 2024, the U.S. State Department's Trafficking in Persons Report downgraded Brunei from Tier 2 to Tier 3, out of 3.

The National Action Plan (NAP) for Women announced by the Government back in March 2023 has not yet been published and several challenges remain. Brunei's Islamic Law tends to disadvantage women in areas such as divorce and child custody. The SPC criminalises 'indecent behaviour' and makes abortion a capital offence. Bruneian legislation denies women

the right to confer their nationality to their children. Citizenship is derived from descent and the father's prerogative only. There are an estimated 20,000 stateless persons, categorised into stateless permanent residents and stateless persons without legal status, with varying degrees of rights and benefits. However, the number of citizenships granted has increased over the last years with 2,748 people granted citizenship in 2023 and nearly 1,000 in April 2024.

2. EU action - 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 of France and Germany, and during the visits of the non-resident EU Head of Delegation to Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Bilateral relations are limited given that the negotiations for a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement remain on hold. The EUDEL located in Jakarta continues to follow developments on the ground, in close cooperation with the two EU MS who have in-country missions. In 2024, a number of public diplomacy activities in the realms of higher education and the energy transition were carried out under the EU-Brunei Darussalam Partnership Facility (2023-2025).

5. Multilateral context:
Brunei has ratified a number of key human rights conventions, including the CEDAW, CRC, and the CRPD. Even though in 2019 the Sultan had publicly committed to ratifying the Convention against Torture, Brunei had not yet done so at the end of 2024. Ahead of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Brunei submitted five pledges on human rights protection and promotion. In November 2024, Brunei underwent its UPR.

Kingdom of Cambodia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: 2024 was the first full year in power of Prime Minister Hun Manet, the son of former PM Hun Sen, who ruled Cambodia for 40 years. There are no signs that the new government is taking a different approach to governance and human rights. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, while the country has made progress on some aspects of economic, social and cultural rights, the status of civil and political rights remain a major challenge, especially the constrained civic and political space. Journalists, as well as members of the opposition and of non-governmental organisations who criticize the authorities still face harassment, and dozens of political dissidents, human rights and environmental activists continue to be detained, prosecuted or imprisoned. On 2 July 2024, ten young activists from Mother Nature, a youth-led Cambodian environmental group, were found guilty of 'plotting' and sentenced to 6-8 years in prison. As reported by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, the Cambodian authorities arbitrarily arrested at least 94 people, including environmental, human rights and other activists, between end of July and end of August, for publicly criticising the Cambodia–Laos–Vietnam Development Triangle Area.

On 25 November 2024, Thai authorities forcibly returned six Cambodian political opposition activists of the dissolved opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), who were recognised as refugees by the UNHCR. Upon their arrival in Cambodia, all were arrested and

five were charged with 'plotting'. Cambodia ranked again second to last out of 142 countries on the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, published in October 2024. The 2024 country report of the UNSR on the situation of human rights in Cambodia recommended the Government to end all forms of harassment, violence and intimidation against political opponents, land rights and labour activists, environmentalists, journalists and other HRDs, and to release, drop charges and revoke the sentences of those imprisoned.

Media freedom further deteriorated in 2024, as the last independent network of professional journalists, CamboJA, reported that criminal charges such as incitements, extortion and defamation were increasingly used against journalists, rather than the civil process outlined in the Press Law. CamboJA reported that, in the first nine months of 2024, 28 cases of harassment against 46 journalists were recorded, of which 21 were instances of legal action and intimidation. Mech Dara, an award-winning Cambodian journalist known for his reporting on human trafficking and cyber scam compounds, was arrested on 30 September and charged with 'incitement to disturb social security' in relation to allegedly misleading social media posts. After issuing an 'apology video' appealing for clemency, he was released, but remains on remand and can be formally charged at any time. In December 2024, the journalist Chhoeung Chheng, known for his reporting on illegal logging, was killed in the line of duty in Siem Reap. Cambodia sunk lower in the ranking of the World Press Freedom Index, published by Reporters without Borders, ranking 151 of 180 countries in 2024, compared to 147 in 2023, and 142 in 2022. The UNSR 2024 report recommended a reform of the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations (LANGO) to ensure freedom of association for civil society organisations, and called on the Government to create an enabling environment for freedom of the press, including by reinstating media licenses withdrawn in breach of human rights.

Instances of human trafficking and forced labour via online scams were increasingly reported in 2024. The US imposed sanctions in September 2024 on the Cambodian tycoon Ly Yong Phat, senator and treasurer of the ruling CPP party, and his conglomerate L.Y.P. Group Co., for their role in serious human rights abuses related to the treatment of workers subjected to forced labour in online scam operations.

2. **EU action - key focus areas:** In 2020, the European Commission temporarily and partially withdrew the tariff preferences granted to Cambodia under the EU's 'Everything but Arms' trade scheme due to serious and systematic violations of human rights enshrined in the ICCPR. This decision remained in place in 2024. On 28 November 2024, the EP adopted a resolution on 'the shrinking space for civil society in Cambodia, in particular the case of the labour rights organisation CENTRAL', while addressing the continuous human rights and labour rights concerns. In line with the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027, EU activities focused on the protection and empowerment of individuals, notably with regard to political and civil rights. The EU Delegation and EU Member States continued to engage with diverse civil society actors and monitored a significant number of court hearings of human rights defenders, politicians and activists.

3. **EU bilateral political engagement:** 2024 saw an increase in high-level political contacts between Cambodia and the EU. In March 2024, the European Commissioner for International Partnerships visited Cambodia and held several high-level meetings with the Cambodian government, discussing among other topics human rights and state of civil society. In April 2024, the 12th EU-Cambodia Joint Committee took place in Brussels, where a full day was

dedicated to a sub-group meeting on institution building, administrative reform, legal and judicial reform, and governance and human rights. A substantial discussion covered *inter alia* civil and political, labour and women's rights. The EU Delegation maintained contacts with a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including political parties, NGOs, CSOs, the business sector and trade unions. The EU also published several statements in 2024, notably on the verdict on the Mother Nature environmental activists and the arrest of Mech Dara.

4. EU financial engagement: 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. In 2024, the EU managed eleven grants addressing a broad range of human rights issues including freedom of expression, labour rights and decent work, protection of land ownership and the traditional rights of forest and fishing communities, and in support of farmers' organisations and networks of CSOs, and support to human rights defenders. The EU also continued to support the Office of the OHCHR. In 2024, the EU published a Call for Proposals under the Thematic Programme for Civil Society Organisations within the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe). The aim is to contribute to an inclusive participatory empowered and independent civil society and democratic space in Cambodia, as well to promote Good Governance and Democracy through enhanced transparency and accountability in the area of the Public Finance Management reform.

5. Multilateral context: In 2024, the EU continued to express its key concerns at the UNHRC including through statements and participation in the Interactive Dialogue with the UNSR on 7 October 2024. On 8 May 2024, during the 46th UPR of Cambodia by the UNHRC, Member States made a series of recommendations, calling on the Government to establish an independent national human rights institution; cease harassment, intimidation, arbitrary arrest and unjust prosecution of political opposition, human rights defenders, journalists and media workers and labour activists; and release detained HRDs. Cambodia accepted 232 out of 275 recommendations and noted 43.

People's Republic of China

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in China continued to be very serious in 2024. China's obligations under international and national law - including its own constitution - to respect, protect and fulfil human rights and fundamental freedoms for all were not respected. The EU remained concerned about political re-education camps, mass arbitrary detentions, widespread surveillance, tracking and control measures, systemic and severe restrictions on the exercise of fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion or belief, as well as the non-transparent use of the death penalty, the use of forced labour and labour transfer schemes, torture, forced abortion and sterilization, birth control and family separation policies, and sexual and gender-based violence, especially in Xinjiang. The human rights situation in Tibet too continued to be dire, as it was also demonstrated by reports about the forced relocation of rural Tibetans.[33] Investment in hydropower by the Chinese government in Tibet had a detrimental impact on Tibetan cultural assets, such as monasteries.[34] The EU closely monitored the preservation of

[33] https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/05/22/educate-masses-change-their-minds/chinas-forced-relocation-rural-tibetans
[34] https://savetibet.org/chinese-hydropower/

fundamental freedoms, cultural heritage and identity of Tibetans and called on China to ensure full bilingual education both in Tibetan and Chinese at all levels of the schooling system. Despite China's ratification of the two ILO conventions on forced labour[35] in 2022 civil society[36] and academia[37] continued to publish extensive, evidence-based reports referring to the use of forced labour in China. Civil society also protested about the Chinese government's systematic violation of freedom of religion or belief, notably about the accusation of house churches not registered under the Government of being illegal, and declaring that offerings made to these churches were fraudulent.[38]

2. EU action - key focus areas: the European Council conclusions on China (30 June 2023), confirming that the EU remains firmly committed to the promotion of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in China, remained valid.[39] In 2024, most of the EU's actions regarding the human rights situation in China remained primarily aimed at protecting and empowering individuals. The EU, also through its delegation in Beijing, continued to regularly address, bilaterally with the Chinese authorities, through public communications and within relevant UN fora individual cases involving human rights defenders and journalists. Through EEAS spokesperson statements and the EU Delegation, the EU continued to pay particular attention to relevant anniversaries, such as the 35th Anniversary of the Tiananmen Square events[40], and the sentencing of human rights defenders[41] who were merely exercising their fundamental freedoms and called for their unconditional release. EU diplomats also tried to attend human rights defenders' trials, but were not allowed in the courtroom even if they were public hearings.[42] The listing of four individuals and one entity from China under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime as part of a wider package of listings has been extended for another year on 2 December, until 8 December 2025 and is based on their involvement in serious human rights violations and abuses in Xinjiang.

The EU Delegation in China and EU MS continued to organise and support 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 Day against Homophobia and Transphobia. The EUDEL organised periodical events on gender equality, rights of LGBTI persons, media freedom, death penalty, violence against women and protection of human rights defenders. On Human Rights Day in December 2024, the EU Delegation issued a comprehensive statement reiterating all its concerns on the human rights situation in China[43] and released a video on the universality of human rights. [44]

[35] Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)
[36] https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/01/china-carmakers-implicated-uyghur-forced-labor
[37] https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5053281
[38] https://www.csw.org.uk/2024/12/05/press/6387/article.htm
[39] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/06/30/european-council-conclusions-on-china-30-june-2023/?utm_source=dsms-auto&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=European%20Council%20conclusions%20on%20China%2C%2030%20June%202023
[40] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/china-statement-spokesperson-35th-anniversary-tiananmen-square-events_en
[41] See e.g., https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/china-statement-spokesperson-sentencing-yu-wensheng-and-xu-yan_en
[42] https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3276318/eu-officials-assail-denial-access-trial-two-chinese-human-rights-advocates
[43] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/statement-eu-delegation-china-international-human-rights-day-4_en
[44] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/human-rights-day-2024-video-you-are-human-you-have-rights_en

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The 39th session of the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue was held in China (Chongqing) on 16 June 24. Organised by the relevant Chinese authorities at central and local level, a side visit to Tibet took place before the dialogue.[45]

4. EU financial engagement: The EU continued to implement several projects on human rights in China. These projects take shape with international and 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 and LGBTI persons, child sexual abuse, the situation of migrant workers, as well as enhancing access to justice for persons with disabilities and victims of domestic violence, and supporting the rule of law.

5. Multilateral context: China, along with Cameroon, Honduras, Pakistan and Türkiye, presented a UN HRC resolution on 'Promoting accessibility for the full enjoyment of all human rights by all'[46] that was adopted by consensus in October. The EU paid particular attention to elements in the draft text of this resolution that risked diluting existing international human rights law. This was the second substantial UNHRC resolution China led on which was adopted by consensus, following a resolution on the promotion and protection of all human rights, including civil and political, but also economic, social and cultural rights, and the right to development that was adopted in 2023. As it had done in the past, China led on a more technical resolution on the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, along with Denmark, France, Kenya and Mexico.[47] In the UNGA's Third Committee, 15 UN members (including 7 EU Member States) issued a cross-regional statement on the human rights situation in Xinjiang and Tibet (22 October 2024).[48]

China underwent its fourth UPR in January,[49] rejecting 30% of the recommendations it received, up from 18% in 2018 when its previous UPR was held.[50] The human rights situation in China was raised by the High Commissioner in his updates to the UNHRC,[51] addressed three times in press releases by HRC Special Procedures and three times by the OHCHR.[52] China was visited by the UNSR on unilateral coercive measures.[53] UN HRC Special Procedures sought information on potential human rights violations by China through 17 communications.[54]

The EU, through its Item 4 and Item 2 statements at the UN HRC (HRC55 and 57, as well as 56 respectively)[55] and its omnibus statement at the UNGA's Third Committee[56] 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 Uyghurs, Tibetans and persons

[45] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/china-39th-human-rights-dialogue-european-union-took-place-chongqing_en
[46] https://searchlibrary.ohchr.org/record/31675
[47] https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/57/4
[48] https://unny.mission.gov.au/unny/241022_UNGA79_Joint_statement_on_the_human_rights_situation_in_Xinjiang_and_Tibet.html
[49] https://upr-info.org/en/review/china
[50] https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/china/china-oral-statement-at-the-united-nations-human-rights-council
[51] HRC 55 (March); HRC56 (June); HRC57 (September)
[52] https://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/china
[53] https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4059973?v=pdf
[54] Can be retrieved through this site: https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments
[55] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/hrc55-item-4-general-debate-human-rights-situations-require-council%E2%80%99s-attention_en?s=62; https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/hrc57-item-4-general-debate-human-rights-situations-require-council%E2%80%99s-attention_en?s=62; https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/hrc56-interactive-dialogue-high-commissioner%E2%80%99s-annual-report-eu-statement_en?s=62
[56] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/eu-statement-%E2%80%93-un-general-assembly-3rd-committee-agenda-item-71-human-rights_en

belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities across China. Furthermore, the EU continued to promote and defend the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights. In this spirit, the EU continued to exercise 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: Since the imposition of the National Security Law (NSL) in June 2020, the political and human rights situation in Hong Kong has deteriorated drastically. More than 300 people have been arrested under the NSL. Most independent media outlets were forced to close and many civil society organisations disbanded. Extensive changes to the electoral laws have significantly curtailed the ability of pro-democracy groups to contest elections. These developments have severely undermined Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong, which were supposed to be guaranteed until at least 2047. This trend continued in 2024: New national security legislation (the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance also known as Art. 23 legislation) was adopted on 19 March. It introduces sweeping and broad definitions of state secrets (bringing Hong Kong's definition of national security in line with mainland China) and a series of new offences, including 'external interference'. As of 31 December 2024, at least 15 people have been arrested and 3 people sentenced under the new law.

The trial of 47 pro-democracy advocates (commonly known as 'Hong Kong 47') concluded in 2024. On 30 May, 14 out of 16 defendants were found guilty while two were acquitted. 31 had previously pleaded guilty. On 19 November, 45 defendants were sentenced to prison terms ranging from four to ten years. On 29 August, two former chief editors of the now-defunct independent online news outlet Stand News were found guilty of publishing 'seditious' material. The NSL trial against media entrepreneur and British citizen Jimmy Lai continued. Mr Lai faces charges of 'collusion with foreign forces'. He has been in prison continuously since December 2020. On 11 April, Joseph John, a holder of a Portuguese passport and a Hong Kong Identity Card, was sentenced to five years in prison for 'incitement to secession'. In December, Hong Kong police issued arrest warrants and bounties for six overseas-based activists accusing them of national security offences, bringing the total number of such arrest warrants to 19. There were however positive developments in the area of equal treatment of same-sex couples: the Court of Final Appeal ruled in favour of same-sex couples in relation to their inheritance rights and access to public housing.

2. **EU action - key focus areas:** Upon invitation of the Hong Kong government, the EU Office together with the EU Member States Consulates-General conveyed the EU's concerns about the draft Safeguarding National Security Ordinance in writing via diplomatic note and orally in two briefing sessions for the consular corps organised by the Hong Kong authorities.

The EU furthermore issued the following statements and social media posts in defence of human rights in Hong Kong:

- 20 March: Statement by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union on the adoption of new national security legislation in Hong Kong;

- 30 May: Statement by the Spokesperson on the conviction of defendants in the 'Hong Kong 47' case;
- 29 August: Statement by the Spokesperson on the conviction of former chief editors at Stand News;
- 19 November: Statement by the Spokesperson on the sentencing in the 'Hong Kong 47' case;
- 24 December: Spokesperson social media post on the new round of extraterritorial arrest warrants issued by Hong Kong's authorities against six pro-democracy activists in exile.

To express the EU's commitment to the principle of equality and non-discrimination and its support for the rights of LGBTI persons, the EU Office organised a film screening and a panel discussion with a focus on marriage equality, bringing together civil society, business community, the consular corps and policy makers. The EU Office again participated in the annual Hong Kong Pride event.

In 2024, the EU Office organised art events related to human rights. The annual EU Film Festival opened with a Ukrainian film, drawing attention to the plight of the Ukrainian people under Russian aggression. The EU Office also continued to co-organise the 'EU-Asia Documentary Film Festival' to shed light on social issues including the struggles of the LGBTI community. In December 2024, the EU Office organised the annual 'Colours of Humanity Arts Prize', formerly known as Hong Kong Human Rights Art Prize.

The EU Office has maintained regular contacts with civil society groups working on a range of topics.

Mandated by the 2020 Council conclusions on Hong Kong, the EU Office and the EU Member States in Hong Kong regularly observed national security trials. In June, the European Commission and the HRVP published the 26th annual report on the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, covering developments in 2023[57].

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU Office holds regular meetings with the Hong Kong authorities, including the Chief Executive, during which it conveys concerns about the evolution of democracy and human rights in Hong Kong and the implementation of the national security legislation. The EU Office is also in contact with the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China.

4. **EU financial engagement**: The EU is exploring pragmatic ways to enhance 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 its concerns about the erosion of democracy and fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong in Item 4 statements on situations that

[57] JOIN(2024) 20 final

require the UNHRC's attention[58]. During the UNGA the EU underlined it concerns about developments in Hong Kong in the Omnibus statement read at the Third Committee[59].

Macao Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Macao is a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, a status that implies a high degree of autonomy under the principle of 'one country, two systems'. However, a recent push for 'patriotism' and a focus on national security are perceived as potentially presenting threats to democracy and fundamental freedoms. The Human Rights Committee has in the past already expressed concerns about inter alia the lack of protection of the rights of migrants, the ban on peaceful assemblies, and the eligibility criteria for the Legislative Assembly. On 13 October, Sam Hou Fai was chosen as the next Macao Chief Executive. He was the sole and only candidate in the election and secured 394 votes from the 400-strong Election Committee. He was sworn in on 20 December, the anniversary of the handover of Macao to China by Portugal.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued monitoring signs of closing civic space and democratic backsliding, in close contact with the Consulate General of Portugal, based in Macao. In May, the EU Office organised a field trip for Member State Consul-General to support exchanges with political and civil society stakeholders in Macao.

3. **EU bilateral political engagement:** The EU Office is committed to maintaining regular dialogue with the Macao Government. The 2024 leadership transition added to existing challenges in reaching out to official interlocutors. The organisation of the Europe Day reception in Macao on 16 May 2024 allowed for exchanges with high-ranking government officials.

The Head of the EU Office met with the outgoing Chief Executive Ho Iat-Seng and attended the inauguration of the new Chief Executive on 20 December.

4. EU financial engagement: There is no EU financial engagement in Macao.

5. Multilateral context: Macao is a party to international treaties, such as the ICCPR but generally plays a very limited role in multilateral fora.

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. The human rights situation is one of the most advanced in Asia. In terms of LGBTI rights, Taiwan is considered a pioneer in the region, being the first in Asia to legalise same-sex marriage in 2019. Protections for civil liberties are generally robust. Elections and referenda are held in a fair and transparent manner. The most recent presidential and legislative

[58] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/hrc57-item-4-general-debate-human-rights-situations-require-council%E2%80%99s-attention_en?s=62

[59] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/eu-statement-%E2%80%93-un-general-assembly-3rd-committee-agenda-item-71-human-rights_en

elections took place on 13 January 2024. 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 poor working conditions of migrant workers – including migrant fishers, factory and women care workers.

2. EU action - key focus areas: 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.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU-Taiwan Human Rights Consultation took place on 5 March 2025, the previous were held in 2023. The European Economic and Trade Office (EETO) maintains close contact with all key human rights and democracy CSOs in Taiwan, as well as with activists and government officials. In addition to visiting CSOs, the Office has hosted consultation meetings and thematic roundtables with civil society to exchange views and ideas on the key human rights priorities and communicate on the EU's human rights priorities.

On the death penalty, Taiwan's Constitutional Court ruled on 20 September 2024 that the death penalty was constitutional when restricted to the most serious crimes and when adherence to due process was ensured. Based on the ruling, the Ministry of Justice and Judicial Yuan are expected to propose related legislative amendments in the next two years, as stipulated by the Constitutional Court. The fate of the remaining death row inmates[60] remains precarious - many could be freed by extraordinary appeals but they also risk immediate execution if the ruling were to be upheld. CSOs were very disappointed with the ruling, but noted that it was positive in the sense that it will make death penalty sentences extremely difficult in the future as there are now more clearly defined procedural safeguards. The EETO has provided support for the necessary policy reforms and stands ready to continue to do that, so that Taiwan can decisively progress towards the full abolition of the death penalty. On the poor working conditions of migrant workers – including migrant fishers, factory and women care workers, CSOs expressed concerns. Migrant offshore fishermen and domestic workers are not protected under the Labour Standard Act. Discrimination and debt bondage remain common, and CSOs continue to report cases of excessive work hours and docked payment, as well as abusing working and living conditions. Migrant offshore fishers still fall under the jurisdiction of the Fisheries Agency, despite concerns over the Agency's competence in handling labour issues and a potential conflict of interest.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, the EETO organised, promoted or supported a number of events and initiatives on the identified human rights priorities, together with some of the EU Member States. These activities resulted in increased public awareness and enhanced exchanges between the EU and Taiwan, both with NGOs and with the Taiwanese authorities. Activities on human rights and democracy are being organised. Besides marking Human Rights

[60] 37 during 2024; 36 after the execution carried out on 16 January 2025

Day, activities covered the following areas: promotion of the abolition of the death penalty; rights of migrant workers, press freedom; countering disinformation and promoting media literacy, promotion of LGBTI rights as well as gender equality.

5. Multilateral context: Although Taiwan is not a member of the UN, it has voluntarily adopted five human rights treaties by incorporating them into domestic law, including the ICCPR, the ICESCR, CEDAW, the CRC, and the CRPD. The Government regularly publishes implementation reports, followed by parallel reports prepared by civil society organisations, and invites a panel of international experts to conduct reviews and give recommendations. The third review of the implementation of ICCPR and ICESCR involving international experts and CSOs was completed in May 2022. In the same year, Taiwan also reviewed its implementation of the CEDAW, CRC and CRPD following the same procedures. Before leaving the UN in 1971, the Government had signed the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, although this convention was not actively implemented in the beginning. In 2022, the Executive Yuan released the first implementation report of the ICERD, followed by independent review reports released by the National Human Rights Commission and CSOs. The first review of the ICERD by a panel of independent experts was held in April 2024.

Republic of India

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: India held parliamentary elections between April and June 2024 **–** the largest democratic exercise in the world with 646 million citizens casting their votes. Elections were certified as free and fair by the Election Commission of India and the Opposition accepted the results. The Election Commission of India swiftly addressed allegations of hate speech by candidates and in some cases sanctioned candidates who were found to be guilty. There were only a few episodes of violence during the elections, mainly in the state of Manipur where voting had to be repeated in some polling stations. In 2024, legislative assembly elections took place in an overall calm and orderly fashion in eight States or Union Territories, including Jammu and Kashmir - the first since the abrogation of Article 370 that granted the State a special status. In Maharashtra, the Opposition has made allegations of vote irregularities and filed petitions with the Election Commission of India and the Bombay High Court. Online and offline platforms where the right to criticise the Government can be freely exercised are available in the country. Universities and student unions as well as think tanks and cultural organisations continue to be engaged in the political debate. Nevertheless, UN and independent reports have expressed concern over the shrinking civic space in the country. India ranked 159th in the World Press Freedom Index 2024, up from 161st in 2023 and it was ranked 110th in the Human Freedom Index 2024, down from 109th. In 2024, at least three journalists (of whom two EU nationals) were required to leave the country due to issues with the renewal of work permits or visas allegedly as retaliatory measure for their reporting. 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, non-government organisations and not-for-profit organisations. The relative lack of transparency or explanation on how FCRA rules are implemented is a major source of uncertainty for CSOs operating in India. In 2024, more CSOs that were working or had worked with the EU and its Member States had their FCRA licenses cancelled. According to an Internet Shutdowns Tracker, maintained by Indian not-for-profit Software Freedom Law Centre, in

2024 there were 60 internet shutdowns in India – fewer than the 96 in 2023 but still the highest number in the world. This measure is usually taken at local level and often as a preventive tool for preserving law and order.

In July 2024, during the fourth periodic review of India under the ICCPR, conducted by the Human Rights Committee for the first time after 27 years, experts voiced concern about discrimination and violence against persons belonging to minorities, including Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, as well as LGBTI persons. Civil society and media can seek government accountability and promote, protect and strengthen human rights, although their effectiveness has not been tested. The Committee was also concerned over the high number of death sentences awarded, including for offences not involving intentional killings, but takes note that no executions have been carried out since 2020. In 2024, the Supreme Court and other parts of the judiciary have continued to interpret and reinforce constitutional remedies in various landmark cases. For instance, in February 2024 the Supreme Court ruling held that the Electoral Bond Scheme was unconstitutional for violating the right to information of voters. In August 2024, it reiterated that 'bail is the rule, jail is the exception', even under anti-terror and anti-money laundering law provisions; that 'merely because the writings of a journalist are perceived as criticism of the government, criminal cases should not be slapped against the writer' in October 2024; and that 'citizens' voices cannot be throttled by a threat of destroying their properties' as well as that 'bulldozer justice is simply unacceptable under the rule of law' in November 2024.

On gender equality, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2024 noted that India ranked 129th out of 146 countries, down from 127th in 2023. Inequalities in employment and job quality, persistent gender-based violence at home and in public places, and low political empowerment are among the challenges faced. Concerning LGBTI rights, in April the central government set up a committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary to evaluate the needs of the LGBTI community, as directed by the Supreme Court in 2023. PM Modi in his Independence Day speech in August said that his government would make 'equitable decisions with high sensitivity towards [the] ostracized transgender society by bringing amendments and introducing new laws for their inclusion into the mainstream'.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EUDEL currently funds projects under the Human Rights & Democracy thematic programme and the CSO programme in line with the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: EUDEL together with EU MS has regularly engaged with government officials and institutions on human rights. The Human Rights Dialogue planned for 2024 was postponed until January 2025 and eventually proved to be substantial and constructive. Concerning individual cases of human rights defenders and journalists, the EU asked the National Human Rights Commission to look into allegations of human rights abuses. A number of senior EU officials during their visits to Delhi, had interactions with human rights activists and defenders as well as political party representatives, all reflecting the different parts of the civic and political spectrum of Indian democracy. In 2024, the EUDEL frequently organised, together with EU MS, meetings with civil society representatives covering all different spheres of human rights. The EP adopted a resolution on EU-India bilateral relations in January 2024 providing recommendations regarding the protection of human rights.

4. EU financial engagement: India is also part of a number of multi-country projects launched in 2024.

5. **Multilateral context**: In Geneva, the EU and Indian missions resumed the tradition of team-to-team meetings ahead of UNHRC sessions, which took place in June ahead of HRC56 and in August ahead of HRC57. In September, the EU Ambassador in Geneva spoke at a side event organised by the Indian mission on 'Children's Right to Development: Action Pillars in Times of Crises'.

Republic of Indonesia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Indonesia is the third largest democracy in the world, with free and fair elections, a pluralistic media landscape and a vibrant civil society. Basic human rights are guaranteed by the constitution and a strong institutional human rights framework. On 14 February 2024, Indonesia held the world's largest single-day election – including presidential, legislative-national, provincial and district elections.

Spurred by one of the highest (voluntary) voter turnouts in the world (81.78%), Prabowo Subianto secured a landslide victory with 58.6% of the popular vote, and was inaugurated as the eight President of Indonesia on 20 October 2024. On 27 November 2024, regional and local elections governors, mayors, and regents) took place – all under orderly circumstances.

Following the adoption of a new Criminal Code in December 2022, stakeholders continued to lay the regulatory groundwork for its entry into force in early 2026. A notable improvement is that the Code offers 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 exempts survivors of rape and other forms of sexual violence (such as forced prostitution, sexual exploitation and slavery), and increases the gestation period from 40 days (6 weeks) to 14 weeks. These provisions followed in the wake of the landmark adoption of the Sexual Violence Bill in 2022, which created a legal framework for the prosecution of sex crimes with a survivor-centred approach.

Another encouraging development is that the Code allows for the death sentence to be commuted to life in prison. Furthermore a life sentence can be commuted to 20 years after 15 years of imprisonment. No executions were carried out in 2024 and the *de facto* moratorium on the death penalty was upheld, with the last executions dating back to 2016. According to the most recent data available, 479 persons – including 10 EU nationals – were on death row at the end of 2024.

Some of the Code's more challenging provisions are those that criminalise extra-marital sex and cohabitation, consequently de facto outlawing LGBTI relations, and moreover provisions expanding the punishable scope of libel, slander, and insults to the (vice-) president as well as the country's blasphemy provisions.

The armed insurrection in Indonesia's Papuan provinces resulted in civilian casualties, including killings committed by independence fighters. In August 2024, a New Zealand helicopter pilot was killed after landing near Timika. In September 2024 another New Zealand pilot, held hostage by independence fighters since February 2023, was freed.

As of late 2024, Indonesia hosted around 12,135 refugees and asylum-seekers. Almost half of them came from Afghanistan; followed by Myanmar, Somalia and 49 other countries. While Indonesia is not signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, there are provisions for refugee protection embedded within domestic law, and Indonesia generally respects the right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement. In 2024, Indonesia's Rohingya refugee population reached 2,658 persons, following a dramatic surge in sea crossings.

LGBTI persons continue to constitute a particularly vulnerable group in Indonesia, having to grapple with 48 discriminatory by-laws. At a time when support for legalising same-sex marriage is on the rise across Asia, a survey from December 2023 by the US-based Pew Research Center found that 92 percent of Indonesians oppose it.

2. EU action – key focus areas: The EUDEL and EU MS' missions engaged together with the Government, Parliament and civil society on freedom of expression, freedom of religion and belief, discrimination against minorities – including LGBTI persons, human rights defenders, as well as women's empowerment and gender equality. Initiatives included the '100% Manusia' (human rights) film festival, a series of events as part of the 'Join Hands to Stop Gender-Based Violence' 16 Days of Activism campaign, the Indonesia Women's Empowerment Principles (WEP) Awards, and a drawing contest on electoral processes and democracy.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Against the backdrop of both Indonesia's general elections and the EP's election in 2024, there was scope for the EU and Member States to discuss democracy and human rights issues at all levels. In July 2024, the EU and Indonesia held their 8th Political Dialogue in Bali, and their 10th Human Rights Dialogue in Brussels. In September 2024, the 8th EU-Indonesia Security Dialogue took place in Semarang. The EU and its MS engaged with Indonesia on thematic human rights issues as well as on the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the conflict in the Middle East, women's access to education in Afghanistan, and the conflict in Myanmar.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU continued to work closely with Indonesian civil society organisations and local authorities through ten projects supported for over EUR 13.5 million. These projects covered the protection and promotion of women's rights – including the fight against sexual and gender-based violence, the protection of human rights defenders, the prevention of torture and other ill-treatment, freedom of expression, access to justice, sustainable and rights-based development, and the strengthening of civil society organisations in Indonesia. Through the regional and multi-country projects, the EU also supported projects to protect the rights of Indonesian migrant workers, particularly women and those working in fisheries, as well as projects to empower youth and media in promoting responsible businesses.

5. Multilateral context: Indonesia is a member of the UNHRC for the 2024-2026 period. On 1 November 2024, former Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi took up her role as the first-ever UN

Special Envoy on Water. In 2024, Indonesia ranked as the world's 5th largest provider of UN uniformed peacekeepers.

Islamic Republic of Iran

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Iran continued to be dire in 2024. The pace of executions dramatically increased, with reportedly at least 901 people executed in 2024. The use of capital punishment, including as a response to domestic dissent, is unacceptable. The EU strongly condemned in August 2024 the execution of a protester in connection with the 2022 uprising. Arbitrary arrests of the EU mono and dual nationals by Iran with a view to making political gains is of great concern. Fundamental rights, including the freedom of expression, assembly and association, freedom of religion or belief, continued to be severely curtailed. Women and girls, as well as individuals belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, continued to face a deterioration of their fundamental rights. The crackdown on human rights activists, journalists, lawyers, artists and other activists demanding fundamental freedoms continued in 2024 through arbitrary detention, intimidation, threats and violence. Those detained were held in degrading conditions and did not have access to adequate medical care. Iran became the world's largest refugee hosting country, with over 3.8 million refugee and refugee-like populations on its territory, for whom offered access to health and education facilities.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In line with Council Conclusions of December 2022, the EU pursued a comprehensive policy approach vis-à-vis Iran. Additionally, the EU continuously assessed Iran's actions and promptly reacted to any negative trajectory by a mix of public and private diplomacy, as well as bilateral and multilateral instruments, which included restrictive measures and support for UN accountability measures. The EU continued to address all issues of concern pertaining to the human rights situation in the country, including: the increasing use of death penalty, with a focus on the sentences against protesters, dissidents and juvenile offenders, noticing the growing number of capital punishment against women and individuals belonging to ethnic and religious minorities; the shrinking space for the civil society and the curtailing of fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression and assembly; the repression of women and girls rights, as well as the rights of individuals belonging to ethnic and religious minorities; degrading detention conditions and lack of access to adequate medical care; restrictions on communications, including internet filtering; Iran's disregard for its international human rights obligations, including the ICCPR and the UNCRC, to both of which Iran is a party.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU used its direct channels with the Iranian authorities to call on them to respect and uphold the rights of its citizens, including women and girls' rights and individuals belonging to ethnic and religious minorities' rights, to grant their fundamental freedoms and to pursue a consistent policy towards the abolition of the capital punishment. In his statement on behalf of the EU, to mark the second anniversary of the tragic death of Mahsa Amini, the HR/VP honoured the courage and determination of countless Iranians, especially women, who demanded respect for fundamental freedoms and reiterated the full support of the EU and its MS for their voices to be heard and respected. In addition, the EU expressed concern regarding the situation of the human rights defenders, political prisoners, protesters and that of EU mono and dual nationals arbitrarily detained in

Iran, urging the Iranian authorities to ensure detention condition in line with international standards and access to adequate medical care. The EU and its MS urged Iran to end the distressing practice of detaining foreign civilians and dual nationals with a view to making political gains and to allow consular access, consular protection and due process rights in line with international legislation. The bilateral political engagement complemented other EU's instruments to call on Iran to improve the human rights situation and to assist the accountability mechanisms.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, the EU has allocated more than EUR 12.5 million to the most vulnerable in Iran, refugee and refugee-like populations, the majority of whom are from Afghanistan, and to their host communities. In implementing the projects, the EU always takes into account its human rights commitments.

5. Multilateral context: The EU remained a strong advocate for the UN accountability mechanisms and continued to call on Iran to allow free and unhindered access to the country for UN mandate holders. As in previous years, the EU supported the resolution on the human rights situation in Iran tabled by Canada during the UNGA in New York, as a resolution that is fact-based and free of unverified allegations. The EU welcomed the engagement of the Iranian authorities with OHCHR as well with the UNSR on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Japan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Japan continues to play an influential role in promoting fundamental values and respecting international human rights obligations, particularly in multilateral fora such as the UNGA Third Committee.

In 2024, there were positive domestic developments in areas such as the rights of sexual minorities, child welfare, and public awareness on criminal justice reform. However, challenges remain concerning gender inequality, migrant and refugee rights, and retention of the death penalty, although no executions have been carried out since July 2022. Civil society and judicial initiatives have been instrumental in driving positive change.

2. EU Action – Key Focus Areas: The key focus areas on human rights were gender equality and women's empowerment; LGBTI; the criminal justice system, including the death penalty and prisoners' rights; rights of the child; rights of migrants and refugees; and business and human rights.

All the priority areas were in line with the five strands of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027, as they contributed to 'protecting and empowering individuals,' supported the development of 'resilient, inclusive, and democratic societies,' promoted 'a global system for human rights and democracy,' and tied into the objective of 'New technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges.'

Activities were subject to a broad stakeholder dialogue and work was implemented involving civil society organisations and EU MS in a joint approach.

3. EU Bilateral Political Engagement: The EU maintained active bilateral exchanges with Japan on human rights, including discussions in UN multilateral fora. The EUDEL, in coordination with

EU MS, engaged regularly with Japanese authorities and civil society organisations on human rights issues. In line with the EU's commitment to abolishing the death penalty, this topic was also mentioned during these exchanges.

The EUDEL and EU MS embassies collaborated with the Japanese government, Diet members, and other stakeholders to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Topics included ensuring women's equal and inclusive participation in political decision-making, for instance as part of an event organised for the International Women's Day. The EUDEL and several EU MS embassies also supported organisations and events that championed the human rights of LGBTI persons, fostering a culture of tolerance and respect. These efforts included active participation in the Tokyo Rainbow Pride Festival and the 30th anniversary of the Tokyo Rainbow Parade in April 2024, as well as the support to regional pride events.

Additionally, the EUDEL and EU MS embassies closely monitored developments in children's rights in Japan, particularly legal reforms related to the joint custody system. Exchanges with NGOs also addressed the rights of migrants and refugees. On the topic of business and human rights, the EUDEL co-organized an Open Dialogue on corporate sustainability due diligence in partnership with the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation.
The EU actively leveraged social media, conducting joint campaigns with EU MS around international human rights events. EU MS made significant contributions across all focus areas, particularly in advancing gender equality and LGBTI rights.

4. EU Financial Engagement: The EU Delegation allocated funding for the following activities: on the death penalty, criminal justice system and prisoners' rights the two-year project 'Veritas- Evidence-based advocacy on the Death Penalty – Japan' (EUR 150 000) in support to CrimeInfo, completed its second (and last) year of implementation.

Additionally, with the financial support of the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Support Facility, the following two EU funded activities were organised: A Seminar on the occasion of International Women's Day (EUR 40,000) and the EUDEL participation in the Tokyo Rainbow Pride 2024 (EUR 18,000).

5. Multilateral Context: The EU and Japan maintained strong coordination in multilateral fora, particularly in the UNHRC and the UNGA Third Committee. Japan's support for EU-led resolutions on pressing global issues demonstrated shared values. Regular EU-Japan consultations, alongside joint demarches with EU MS in Tokyo reinforced these commitments.

Republic of Korea

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: On 3 December, President Yoon Suk-yeol abruptly declared martial law – a move that set off an extraordinary six hours of political turmoil before being overturned by lawmakers. While the swift revocation of the decree highlighted the resilience of Korean democratic institutions, the failed attempt was a strong warning signal for governance and political stability.

Overall, the Republic of Korea's human rights record remains positive, although a comprehensive anti-discrimination law is yet to be passed. Several human rights concerns

persist, including on gender equality; rights of LGBTI people; the elderly; and people with disabilities. Media also documented a recent outcry over sexually explicit and illegal deep fakes in the country.

2. EU action - key focus areas: To mark the day against the death penalty, the EU Ambassador together with the EU MS were active on social media reaffirming the EU's opposition to the death penalty.

Ambassadors of the EU and EU MS marked the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. The EUDEL together with Belgium, France, Ireland and the Netherlands participated in the Seoul Queer Culture Festival by sharing a booth and participating in the parade. Germany, Finland, Sweden and Denmark also took part in this event. Several EU MS also participated in Incheon Queer Culture Festival in September, as well as the Seoul Pride exhibition in November, and supported the Pride Film Festival. At the annual EUNIC film festival, AT contributed a movie with a focus on LGBTI issues. Following the October demonstration against the legalisation of same-sex marriage and the passage of an anti-discrimination law, a joint statement was issued on 6 November, endorsed by the EU, 21 EU MS and 8 like-minded states, to reaffirm the shared position on the rights of LGBTI persons.

On 24 July, the EUDEL held talks with the Team BADA (Barrier-Free Accessibility to Digital for All) to discuss ways to promote equal access to technologies for disabled youth. Along with other CSOs, the EUDEL invited the Korean Disability Forum to a roundtable on the occasion of the visit of the EUSR for Human Rights Olof Skoog on 14 October.

The EUDEL co-hosted the fourth ASEM Forum on the Human Rights of Older Persons 2024 with the ASEM Global Aging Center on the 'Civil Society and the Human Rights of Older Persons in Southeast Asia' on 16 July.

In the framework of the EUPOP project, the EUDEL organised a conference on 7 March focusing on women in the workplace today. The EUDEL also participated in the 38th Korean Women's Day event hosted by Korea Women's Associations United together with EU MS embassies – in Seoul.

In November, a video clip and picture with Ambassadors from EU MS for the 'Orange the World' campaign for the 'International Day to end violence against women' was published online. The Austrian Embassy in Seoul organised a panel discussion in co-operation with the Seoul International Women´s Association and the UN Women Centre of Excellence for Gender.

The Delegation took part in the Gender Equal Parenting photo contest to promote the value of co-parenting together with the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, as well as the embassies of Sweden, Spain, Germany, Norway, and the Philippines.

Amid the Government's intention to abolish the Gender Ministry, the EUDEL highlighted the importance of promoting gender equality at high-level meetings.

On the occasion of the visit of the EUSR for Human Rights, a roundtable with CSOs was organised on 14 October, which included the participation of two former members of the Ministry of Justice civilian taskforce on digital sex crimes.

In November, the EUDEL co-hosted with the National Human Rights Commission the 2024 International Human Rights Conference on Climate Change and Human Rights: Ensuring Justice and Action for All.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The visit of the EUSR for Human Rights to Republic of Korea on 14-15 October was the opportunity for the Delegation to organise events on the situation of human rights in Republic of Korea and DPRK, as well as to showcase the EU action on human rights in the world.

In the framework of the Digital Partnership, the EU and the Republic of Korea's work together on digital rights and the Declaration on the Future of the Internet and intend to intensify this cooperation even further in 2025.

4. **EU financial engagement:** Between 2017 and 2023, the EUDEL has been managing three public diplomacy projects under the EU Policy and Outreach Partnership (EUPOP) in Republic of Korea funded by the Partnership instrument for cooperation with third countries managed by FPI. These projects promoted human rights at large and societal resilience by supporting EUDEL outreach and engagement activities and of EU-Republic of Korea mutual interest. The last project supported with EUR 750,000, for the time January 2022 – January 2024, addressed anti-discrimination rights of minority groups – based on ethnic origin, sexual orientation, and disabilities. In December 2024, a new EU public and cultural diplomacy project (NDICI-Global Europe), managed by FPI staff at the EU Delegation, supported with EUR 2.99 million (December 2024 – December 2028) started.

5. **Multilateral context:** As a state party to seven core international human rights conventions, including the ICCPR and ICESCR, Republic of Korea is earnestly striving to implement the provisions of the relevant conventions at the national level through collaborative partnerships with various stakeholders. Furthermore, the Republic of Korea, was re-elected to the UNHRC in October 2024 for the 2025-2027 term.
Demarches in support of multilateral action: The EU and EU MS delivered several demarches in support of EU priorities ahead of the 68th session of the UN Convention on the Status of Women and the UNGA 79 Third committee.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, the human rights and democracy situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) remained dire. 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 Government maintained power through the use of arbitrary detention and imprisonment, torture, executions, enforced disappearances, and forced labour. Fundamental liberties – such as freedom of thought, conscience, religion, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, and freedom of movement – continued to be systematically denied. Significant border restrictions originally imposed in response to Covid-19 remained in place, and a large

share of diplomats and international humanitarian staff were still not allowed to re-enter the country. The number of defectors in 2024 was comparable to 2023, though still much lower compared to pre-pandemic levels.

The government of the DPRK still refused to engage with the UNSR on the situation of human rights in the DPRK Elizabeth Salmon, and continued to limit engagement with other UN human rights bodies and mechanisms. Outside observers continued to express concern that border restrictions, the suppression of market activity and impediments to international humanitarian assistance, together with the long-term effects of poor economic policies, resulted in significant humanitarian issues including food security problems. The dire human rights situation was aggravated by the fact that the DPRK continued to divert its resources into illegal nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles programmes - and into military support for Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine - away from the welfare of its own people.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU addressed all areas of concern through resolutions at the UNHRC and the UNGA. Frequent communication took place between the EU and the OHCHR as well as like-minded international partners. The UNSR visited Brussels in November 2024 to engage with the EU institutions. In addition, the EUSR for Human Rights, Olof Skoog, travelled to Seoul in October 2024 to engage with the RoK government and civil society on DPRK human rights as well as to meet with North Korean defectors. The EUDEL in the Republic of Korea also continued to engage with the Ministry of Unification and support the work of civil society in promoting human rights in the DPRK by participating in and co-hosting local events. Using the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, the EU imposed new restrictive measures against the DPRK Minister of State Security and against a DPRK detention centre in response to serious human rights abuses related to sexual and gender-based violence. The EU also renewed earlier sanctions under the same regime against two senior DPRK officials and the DPRK Central Public Prosecutor's Office.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU maintained limited contact with the DPRK authorities through diplomatic channels in Europe.

4. EU financial engagement: It was not possible to implement development or humanitarian assistance projects in the DPRK due to the inability of international humanitarian staff to enter the country.

5. Multilateral context: For several years, the EU has initiated country-specific resolutions on the DPRK human rights situation at the UNHRC and the UNGA. Both resolutions in 2024 were adopted by consensus and helped to maintain international attention on the situation and send strong messages of concern.

UNHRC Resolution 55/21 (April 2024) stressed the need to follow up on the recommendations from the report of the Commission of Inquiry. It expressed deep concern over the systematic, widespread, and gross human rights violations and over the exacerbation of the humanitarian situation. It renewed the mandate of the UNSR. It also included a number of new elements, including by requesting a report to take stock of the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry from a landmark report published 10 years ago. It contained updated and stronger language on issues like the refoulement of DPRK refugees, sexual and gender-based violence, and the link with international peace and security. It also expressed continued support for the accountability mandate of the OHCHR.

UNGA Resolution 79/181 (December 2024) expressed deep concern regarding the grave human rights situation in the DPRK, the pervasive culture of impunity, and the lack of accountability for human rights violations and abuses. It condemned 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. It reiterated calls for cooperation with UN mechanisms. It also included important new elements on issues such as forced labour, discrimination and GBV, reunions of separated families and the return of abductees, and the right to protection of refugees and prisoners of war. It called on the DPRK to reopen its borders to facilitate access of humanitarian staff on the ground. It also requested the President of the UNGA to organize a high-level plenary meeting, featuring testimonies by civil society representatives and other experts, to address human rights abuses and violations in the DPRK.

The fourth cycle of the UPR for the DPRK was held on 7 November. The majority of UN Member States present, including 20 EU MS, expressed strong concerns about the situation of human rights in the DPRK and delivered a total of 294 recommendations.

Lao People's Democratic Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The overall situation of human rights and democracy did not change in 2024. Freedoms of expression and association remain strictly limited with arrests and detentions for public criticism online. In September, two Lao social media content creators in Bokeo province were arrested for posting a video mocking the state of roads in their town. Police made them attend a 're-education' class, forcing them to confess and apologise publicly on social media before being released. Environmental activist and human rights defender Houayheuang 'Muay' Xayabouly,imprisoned for online criticism of the Government's response to a 2018 dam disaster, was released in 2024 after serving her full five-year sentence. Laos slightly improved its rank in the World Press Freedom Index from 160th in 2023 to 153rd out of 180 countries in 2024. The death penalty remains on the statute books for certain crimes, but has not been applied since 1989. As regards Freedom of Religion or Belief although legally free to practise their religion, Christians have faced problems over monitoring of their activities.

While Laos is a generally tolerant society towards the LGBTI community, individuals can face challenges including stigma, discrimination and marginalisation. Laos supports action against GBV and child rights abuses, and has made efforts to increase its anti-trafficking capacity. Efforts continue to address trafficking and forced labour linked to organised crime in parts of the country. The Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone in Bokeo province has gained notoriety as a sanctuary for illegal activities such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, and cyber fraud. Lao authorities have worked with law enforcement from Vietnam and China, leading to the arrest and deportation of thousands of scammers. Zhao Wei, a Chinese national allegedly connected to organised crime, and whose company operates a casino in the zone, received a state honour distinction in December, marking his support for the work of the police by contributing to their funding. Dispossession of local communities due to development activities by foreign and domestic investors in agriculture, mining and electricity production continues, with limited consultation and difficulties in obtaining adequate compensation.

2. EU action on human rights and democracy - key focus areas: The EU continued to focus on interaction with the Government, cooperation in multilateral fora, and maintained its efforts towards empowerment of civil society. The EUDEL addressed human rights, good governance and democracy issues engaging with the counterparts at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It also took an active role in local human rights coordination with UN agencies, the OHCHR Bangkok, and other diplomatic missions. In line with the focus on promoting a global system for human rights, in May the Delegation supported the Department of Treaties and Law of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its preparation for International Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination reporting. In line with the focus on building resilient, inclusive societies, the EU and Team Europe organised their annual Civil Society Organisations fair, gathering over 50 local CSOs and INGOs in Vientiane. The EU and its MS also promoted women's rights along, notably marking 16 Days of Activism against GBV with the UN and other missions. Although no substantial new information has been made available on previously reported alleged cases of attacks or enforced disappearance, in line with its focus on protecting and empowering individuals, the EUDEL continued to appeal for progress, notably in the unsolved case of Sombath Somphone, a development worker who disappeared in 2012.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The 13th EU-Laos Human Rights Dialogue took place 1-2 July in Brussels. The meeting provided a platform to address issues of concern, including individual cases. 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 Rule of Law, Access to Justice, and Institutional Oversight as a member of the Governance Sector Working Group (GSWG), a policy dialogue forum between the Government and development partners. The GSWG and its two sub-sector working groups met regularly, and there were four workshops in 2024 which ensured the active participation of CSOs, leading to practical recommendations for consideration at the 2024 government/development partners "Round Table Meeting." The EU and others continued to express concerns on onerous registration and reporting requirements and procedures applied to international and local NGOs, which complicate and delay implementation of EU projects.

4. EU financial engagement: Following a 'Team Europe approach', EU financial support for governance is primarily implemented through the project 'Citizen Engagement for Good Governance, Accountability and the Rule of Law' (CEGGA), co-funded by the EU, Germany and Switzerland. Implementation started in 2018, and its second phase will run through 2025. 22 CSO projects were selected for implementation by 23 non-profit associations. In 2024, 25 CSOs were implementing EU grants including INGOs and local CSOs, besides financial support via third parties to smaller organisations who cannot access EU finding. Under human rights and democracy programmes, the focus was laid on prevention and elimination of child labour, and social and economic empowerment of women. CSOs also received funding to support under the Civil Society Organisations-Local Authorities instrument. In 2024, the EU supported informal civil society working group meetings between CSOs, the Government and development partners, and maintained engagement and dialogue with CSOs.

5. Multilateral context: Volker Türk visited the country in June, the first visit by a UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to Lao PDR. He publicly called on the Government to ensure protection for human rights in the country's budget allocations saying that failure to do so

would undermine development. He highlighted that without a vibrant civic space, corruption remains hidden, weakening policies on environmental, development and human rights issues. He also stressed the need for those who express their views on issues of public interest 'to do so without fear' and urged the Government to better protect civil society from intimidation, violence or judicial harassment. The UNSR on Cultural Rights, Alexandra Xanthaki, visited Laos in November – the first UNSR visit to the country since 2019. She commented on the lack of public funding to protect the cultural heritage of ethnic groups, calling for a more structured dialogue with these communities. The UNSR's full report will be presented to the UNHRC in March 2026. Laos is an active participant in the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights and related regional events, and assumed its chair in 2024. Laos submitted its initial state report under the CAT. State reports on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as well as the complementary report on the ICCPR, have been delayed until 2025.

Malaysia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Malaysia in 2024 presents a mixed picture. The Government continued to engage with the civil society on amendments of various laws, but has not always been able to follow-up on these recommendations. In 2024, Malaysia ranked 107 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index, compared to 73 in 2023.
After the adoption of the Abolition of Mandatory Death Penalty Act in April 2023, removing the mandatory nature of the death penalty for eleven offences, including murder and terrorism, sentences under these offences were reviewed.

The total number of persons registered with UNHCR in Malaysia stood at 192,244 at the end of 2024, with different ethnic groups from Myanmar accounting for almost 90%. Significant progress has been made in closing education gaps across the urban-rural, socio-economic class and gender divides. Social tensions around religious sensitivities visibly intensified. At the same time, social awareness over the exploitation of vulnerable groups within religious institutions also increased, as demonstrated in the Global Ikhwan Services and Business Holdings case abuse of children and women.

LGBTI and gender-diverse people face increasing criminalisation under various laws, state-sponsored conversion practices, and censorship, among other forms of state-sanctioned regulation based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex-characteristics.

Constitutional amendments now enable Malaysian mothers to confer citizenship to children born abroad, but their non-retroactive nature excludes the children of affected mothers from access to education, employment and healthcare. Extensive land development continues to adversely affect Indigenous Peoples and traditional farming communities' rights.

2. EU action - 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. EU continues to advocate for the full abolition of the death penalty. Child marriage remains a serious issue and access to education is uneven or non-existent in the case of refugee children.

3. **EU bilateral political engagement:** The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed by the EU and Malaysia in December 2022 to reinforce political dialogue on a range of issues including human rights was ratified by 15 EU MS by the end of 2024. Once entered into force, it will be a platform to discuss human rights. The ninth EU-Malaysia Senior Officials' Meeting scheduled in 2024 will take place in 2025.

The President of the European Council held a meeting with the Prime Minister in the margins of the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Summit, on 8 October 2024 in Vientiane.

The EUDEL 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, think tanks and the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) to address issues related to human rights. These include promoting institutional reforms, gender and democratic governance, quality and sustainable journalism as well as indigenous peoples' rights. The EU also supported the Prison's Department through sharing of knowledge and best practices on EU correctional matters. A new action with ILO and UNICEF aims at increasing access to education and training opportunities, and reducing the incidence of child labour on plantations in Sabah. Malaysia also participated in EU-funded regional projects: the EU-ILO 'Ship to Shore Rights South East Asia' promoted fair and sustainable employment in the fishing industries and contributed to improve the working and living conditions for migrant workers. The regional migration project PROTECT aims to create safe migration pathways, ensure decent work for women and children migrants and address trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling in the emerging migrants corridors of Cambodia, Thailand and Malaysia, and Indonesia.

5. Multilateral context: Malaysia was in the UNHRC for the term 2022-2024. This created a certain momentum for increased engagement on human rights issues and potential ratification of international conventions. Malaysia has ratified CEDAW, the CRC and the CRPD with reservations on provisions with regard to equality and non-discrimination. However, it has not despite supporting several related recommendations in its last UPR ratified the following international treaties: the CAT, the ICCPR, the CPED, the ICERD, the ICESCR, and the Convention on Migrant Workers.

Republic of Maldives

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In the parliamentary elections held on 21 April 2024, the Peoples National Congress (PNC) of President Dr Mohamed Muizzu won a landslide victory. The opposition in the 93-seat parliament was reduced to 12 members of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). There was a plurality of candidates and diversity in the campaign, as well as a well-administered election. However, the campaign finance framework needs to be better regulated and enforced, while concerns related to the instrumentalisation of state resources and vote buying should be addressed. Women's representation was reduced to only three members of the new parliament whilst the number of seats was increased from 80 to 93: robust measures are needed to enhance women's representation in national politics. The implementation of

the EOM recommendations residential elections of 2023 would help to further improve the election processes.

CSOs expressed concerns about the hasty process leading to the ratification of the Constitutional Amendments Bill in November 2024, as well as about the amendments to the Anti-Corruption Commission Act (13/2008) and the Elections Commission Act (8/2008) shifting the power to appoint the president, vice president and members of the respective commissions from the elected members of both commissions to the President of the Maldives.

The level of impunity for acts of corruption remains high due to the very low number of prosecutions.

RSF ranked the Maldives the 106th position in the Press Freedom Index of 2024, which is a drop of six positions from 2023. The Evidence Act (11/2022) criticised by local and international civil society for its restrictive effect on media freedom, as it requires journalists to reveal sources on court orders, remains unchanged. The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (HRCM) recommended amending the Act to include safeguards with regard to source disclosure. No physical assault or abduction of journalists were witnessed in the recent past. However, online and offline intimidation of journalists and human rights activists continued to be reported in 2024. The lack of access to information for journalists and the public poses a threat to freedom of expression. It is uncertain whether a public consultation will be carried out ahead of the planned amendment of the Right to Information Act.

The Maldives ratified the CPED in August 2023. The term of the Presidential Commission on Deaths and Disappearances ended on 31 May 2024. A decision by the president's office to share the commission's reports with the families of the victims is pending. The lack of publicity of the findings raises concerns, as serious human rights violations of the past remain with impunity, such as two landmark cases – the disappearance of journalist Ahmed Rilwan (2014) and the murder of blogger and HRD Yameen Rasheed (2017).

Concerns persist with regard to violence against women. The HRCM reported in June 2024 that domestic violence reporting has increased, yet many victims withdraw cases due to fear, economic dependence, delayed legal proceedings and concerns about confidentiality. The HRCM recommended criminalising domestic violence. Adult consensual same-sex relations are criminalised in the Maldives.

Foreign migrant workers comprise a considerable part of the population, and their situation remains vulnerable. There is a need to ensure the protection of workers' rights, and increase efforts to address trafficking in persons. In the area of environmental rights, striking a balance between environmental protection and infrastructure projects remains a challenge.

The death penalty remains part of the penal code of the Maldives, with a de facto moratorium on its use since 1954. However, the Government has on several occasions in 2024 indicated it might consider its reintroduction.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027, the EU action in the Maldives is focused on supporting the rule of law, the fair administration of justice, fighting impunity and supporting 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 fifth Senior Officials Meeting took place in Male in June 2024, addressing, inter alia, democracy, good governance, human rights, the rule of law and justice, security, as well as sectoral cooperation. In July 2024, the Maldives signed the 'Samoa Agreement', the EU partnership agreement with African, Caribbean and Pacific States, which provides a framework to enhance the relationship between the Maldives and the European Union, as well as regional integration.
The EU Delegation and the EU Member States carried out high-level political dialogues throughout 2024. The EU and its Member States also continued to work closely with civil society, human rights defenders, and media.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU, through its programmes, provides support to strengthening the rule of law, developing an effective, accountable and inclusive justice system with a special focus on women and girls to support fighting gender based and domestic violence; strengthening anti-corruption efforts through better legal frameworks, institutional capacity and public perception; as well as strengthening civic space and freedom of expression and security cooperation and environmental protection.

5. Multilateral context: In 2024, the Maldives continued to demonstrate its commitment to multilateralism through engagement with international and regional fora. The country is a member of the UNHRC for the term 2023-2025. The Maldives announced its candidacy for membership of the ECOSOC (2027-2029) and the UNSC (2033-2034).

In the UNGA Sixth Committee Agenda Item 81: Status of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 in November 2024, the Maldives called for the universal acceptance of the Rome Statute and for full cooperation with the ICC by all UN Member States.

Mongolia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Mongolia held parliamentary elections on 28 June 2024, in which the limited electoral reforms adopted in 2023 were applied: While the unicameral system was maintained, the number of MPs was raised from 76 to 126. 48 seats are now assigned by proportional vote, 78 by majority vote. Elections were monitored by a big number of international observers – including from the OSCE and the EP – and in general deemed to have taken place in fair conditions. The ruling Mongolian People's Party (MPP) obtained 68 seats, the Democratic Party (DP) 42, while 16 went to smaller lists. Under the previous legislature elected with the old electoral system, the MPP had held 62 out of 76 seats. The MPP, the DP and one of the smaller parties (the HUN Party) have formed a coalition government. This leaves an opposition formed by just 8 MPs. The proportion of

female MPs has risen to 25% from 17% under the previous legislature. Some of the new ministers are strong supporters of human rights, but the impact will have to be seen on the new government's course of action. The visit of President Putin (September 2024) in defiance of a valid International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant has damaged Mongolia's reputation as a paragon of the rule of law in Northeast Asia.

Despite international concerns, political interference in the judiciary continues and the latter's autonomy remains questionable. Mongolia continues to occupy a very low ranking in international corruption indexes, a situation unchanged for the last two years. While freedom of the press is generally respected, there are cases of harassment against media workers. However, the new government has submitted a draft amendment to the Criminal Code's controversial provision against 'disseminating false information'. The controversial draft 'NGO laws' discussed under the previous government have not been resubmitted.

As regards civil and political rights, cases of torture in detention centres are still reported. Pre-trial detention is often excessively long. Mongolia is making tangible progress on gender equality (access to higher education, female representation in Parliament), but gender-based violence is still a big problem. Mongolia has actively promoted children's rights, but some challenges remain (for example violation of children's rights in boarding schools).

2. **EU action - key focus areas:** As regards protecting and empowering individuals, EU activities in 2024 focused notably on gender equality and women's rights the rights of the child, on non-discrimination and rule of law and judiciary reform. Action took various forms (project work, participation in conferences, social media). The EU Delegation and EU MS embassies participated in the local campaign '16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence'.

In terms of promoting a resilient, inclusive and democratic society, the EU supported in 2024 various projects in favour of independent media, access to information and fight against disinformation. During the reporting period, implementation of the EU's budget support programme, continued providing a platform for supporting the creation of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.

The EU also supported several projects in favour of civil society (notably for activities in support of persons with disabilites, strengthening women's participation in community-level decision-making and in economic activities).

3. **EU bilateral political engagement**: Because of the Mongolian elections and the institutional transition in the EU, the official meetings of the Human Rights Dialogue and the EU-Mongolia Joint Committee did not take place in 2024 and were postponed to the first quarter of 2025. Working level engagement with Mongolian authorities and civil society on human rights issues continued throughout the year.

4. **EU financial engagement:** In 2024, the EU continued implementation of its sector budget support programme to boost employment, including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) reforms and improve transparency in public finances in Mongolia. An EU supported technical assistance project with UN Agencies (UNDP, FAO, 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. An EU-funded project on 'Strengthening National Gender Equality Expertise in Mongolia' was launched in 2024. The EU and the Mongolian Armed Forces also launched a project to equip Mongolian peacekeepers with the necessary expertise to integrate gender sensitivity into international peacekeeping missions. The opening of this project marked the celebration of the 35th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the EU and Mongolia. The EU and its MS also supported judicial reform through a variety of projects. In 2024, the EU also continued to support human rights and democracy through several other projects, carried out with EU MS or other partners, including a focus on civil society activities in favour of persons with disabilities and enabling CSOs to advocate for accountability and transparency.

5. Multilateral context: Traditionally, Mongolia is keen to demonstrate a strong commitment to multilateralism, to the UN and its human rights system. Mongolia plays a constructive role in the UN human rights fora. The country has ratified or acceded to almost all core UN human rights instruments and their optional protocols. Mongolia has extended a standing invitation to all UN human rights mechanisms. Mongolia's next UPR is scheduled for 2025.The country continues to avoid supporting country specific resolutions in the UNGA. Consequently, Mongolia has not supported any resolution related to the Russian War of Aggression against Ukraine, including those with a human rights content. Mongolia's acceptance of President Putin's visit in defiance of a valid arrest warrant is currently subject of an exchange between Mongolia and the ICC.

Myanmar/Burma

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024 Myanmar topped world rankings as the worst country with regard to fundamental rights (WJP Index), the second most violent after Palestine (ACLED Conflict Severity Index), the second least democratic after Afghanistan (EIU World Democracy Index), and the most repressive on internet freedom together with China (Freedom on the Net Index). The year was marked by a stark increase in indiscriminate violence against civilians, increased weaponisation and recruitment of civilians into military ranks, and a further regression on freedom of expression, in particular on digital rights.

2024 saw for the second consecutive year an important increase in military airstrikes against civilian targets. Almost one million additional people were forcibly displaced in 2024, with the internally displaced population now totalling over 3.5 million people. Enactment of the military conscription law in February 2024 put civilians further at the heart of the conflict. There were continued reports of vulnerable youth being forced or even sold to serve the army against their will. Several non-state armed groups equally applied compulsory conscription in areas under their control. CSOs and their beneficiaries reported a sharp increase in the effects of armed conflict on their work: the risk of landmines, forced recruitment, military checkpoints, shelling and shooting. Arrests and detention of CSO staff, travel and movement restrictions and office raids equally continued.

Arbitrary arrests because of real or perceived political activism continued. According to the Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), the total number of political prisoners still in

detention is least 21,377. Torture to death during interrogation and killings in detention significantly increased in 2024, with at least 1791 people killed after being detained, more than thrice the figures of 2023. Despite the continued pending threat of possible executions, no execution was carried out in 2024. However, death sentences continued to be handed out. 61 of 330 townships are now under martial law, where judicial processes take place under military tribunals with lack of access, transparency, legal representation and right of appeal. The number of lawyers facing dismissals and suspension of professional practices has systematically increased since the coup, most of them targeted for providing legal counselling and assistance to political dissidents.

Freedom of expression and digital rights suffered a new setback in 2024. The junta implemented widespread internet shutdowns and exerted direct control over telecommunications companies, drastically limiting citizens' ability to access information and communicate freely online. In May 2024, the military cracked down on the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), essential tools to access the open and free internet. On 1 January 2025, a contested and restrictive Cybersecurity Law came into force. Under Freedom of Association and Assembly, and in follow-up to the report of the Commission of Inquiry on Myanmar's violations of Conventions 89 on Freedom of Association and Assembly and 29 on Forced Labour, the ILO called for a draft resolution concerning measures to be taken under Article 33 of the ILO Constitution in 2025.

2. **EU action - key focus areas:** Human rights and democracy continue to be the cornerstone of the EU's work in Myanmar. The EU mainstreamed human rights across all areas of cooperation, and allocated significant dedicated funds in 2024. Of the many human rights areas that the EU supports in Myanmar, the most important in 2024 were the justice sector, direct protection of HRDs and support to human rights organizations, GBV and children's rights, support to journalists and independent media outlets, business and human rights, and respect for IHL. Programming and funding continued to take place under challenging circumstances. Activities included ensuring that thousands of people had access to legal aid, community justice mechanisms were strengthened and the EU supported evidence collection towards transitional justice and ending the cycle of structural violence and impunity. Furthermore, the EU provided protection activities to persons in need, including mental health and psychological support and GBV case management. The EU scaled up its support to independent media in 2024 given the worsening trend of freedom of expression; and as part of its business and human rights work, the EU supported local labour rights organizations and strengthened responsible business practices in the garment sector.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In 2024, the Council of the EU further extended its restrictive measures on Myanmar and imposed an additional round of sanctions in October, adding 3 individuals and 1 entity to the sanctions list. 106 individuals and 22 entities are now subject to EU sanctions. Other EU restrictive measures remain in place: the embargo on arms and equipment and export restrictions on equipment for monitoring communications that might be used for internal repression, the export ban on dual-use goods for use by the military and border guard police, and the prohibition of military training and cooperation with the military.

The EUDEL continued its active engagement with local and international human rights CSOs. The EU Special Envoy for Myanmar engaged with a wide range of stakeholders in the pro-democracy movement, with Myanmar's neighbours and the wider region and closely collaborated with other Special Envoys for Myanmar, in particular the UN and ASEAN Envoys.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU continued with its strict policy since the 2021 coup to channel all cooperation exclusively through civil society, international NGOs and UN agencies. All support to government remained suspended. Over EUR 40 million cooperation funds under implementation in 2024 directly contributed to strengthening the EU's human rights priorities in Myanmar.

5. **Multilateral context:** The EU remained an active voice on Myanmar in various UN fora. The EU led the resolution on the human rights situation in Myanmar at the UNHRC and co-sponsored the resolution on the situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar at the UNGA Third Committee. The EU also collaborated closely with the ILOin view of the Commission of Inquiry on Myanmar's violations of Convention 87 of Freedom of Association in Myanmar, and whose case remained high on the agenda in Geneva throughout 2024. The EU and its MS continued their financial and political support to the International Investigative Mechanism on Myanmar (IIMM) to bolster their investigations into allegations of international crimes and violations of international law.

Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Although Nepal has successfully conducted two elections under the federal constitution, legislative arrangements to implement federalism effectively are still awaited. Political representation of women is generally low with two ministers and one junior minister in a cabinet of 25 members. Although the constitution's quota requirements have referred to 33% women representation in parliament and 40% in local governments.

18 years after the signature of the peace agreement, the long-awaited amendment to the Bill on Transitional Justice, was adopted in August 2024. However, there are concerns that the law makes the TJ process reparations-centred and lacks important provisions that could ultimately provide justice for victims. The selection process of members of the two commissions that are crucial in the implementation process was criticised.

Civil society representatives have noted that obtaining official approval for democratic protests has become more difficult and the National Cyber Security Policy (August 2023) presents critical risks for human rights. Invoking the Electronic Transactions Act 2006, the authorities have arrested individuals who criticised political leaders online. Rights of women, Dalits, minority groups, as well as persons with disabilities and migrant workers remain a concern. Instances of GBV have increased in the aftermath of natural disasters. Nepal has taken major steps forward as regards the rights of persons belonging to the LGBTI community and is the second country in Asia to recognise same sex marriage after Taiwan.

2. **EU action - key focus area:** The EU was involved in measures aimed at improving access to justice with a focus on combating impunity, supporting HRDs, protecting people and

promoting equality – including the continuation of the EUDEL's project on storytelling and digital documentation of survivors of the armed conflict. Moreover, the EU supported the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda with the support to implement the National Action Plan (NAP) – II on the UNSC Resolutions 1325 and 1820.

Another key focus area was the promotion of socio economic rights and inclusion with a focus on gender equality and social inclusion and promotion of rights-based approaches: the EUDEL in partnership with four UN agencies – ILO, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women – is implementing a gender equality programme entitled 'Empowered Women, Prosperous Nepal'. The project focusses on combating GBV, advancing socio-economic capacity of women and strengthening their leadership capability. The EUDEL also supported a CSO project on youth. The EUDEL together with the Finish Embassy continued responding to the needs of water and sanitation in two provinces of Nepal by promoting a human rights-based approach. Sectoral support in the areas of nutrition, education, and green and resilient agricultural production have helped to foster socio-economic rights of the public. A number of projects focusing on renewable energy and energy efficiency have contributed to ensuring safe, and quality housing.

The EU also focused on strengthening public space and the rule of law – especially by promoting civic space and the effective role of CSO's, freedom of expression and independent media, encouraging access to information and transparency and supporting Nepal's adherence to fundamental human rights. The EU has continued to provide support to promote Nepal's compliance with international and national human rights commitments. An ongoing project on electoral reform has contributed to systemic changes and practices to promote equal rights to all. A partnership with the federation of Nepali and international non-governmental organizations has strengthened CSO's voices, facilitating an environment for them to work more efficiently. An ongoing federalism support programme along with general support to the federalism agenda in cooperation projects have also contributed to promoting rule of law and good governance. Two media projects funded by the EUDEL continue capacity building of journalists, contributing to create an inclusive and conducive environment for independent media. The EUDEL also organised TED Talk –inspired talks by youth activists on a variety of human rights issues, combining youth and human rights perspectives.

As part of the multi-country initiatives of the INTER PARES programme, the EU has extended collaboration with the federal parliament of Nepal to enhance effectiveness of the parliamentary processes including budgeting, law making, oversight, as well as gender and inclusion. The collaboration is foreseen to become operational in 2025.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: the EU does not have a **Human Right Dialogue** with Nepal - however issues related to human rights, good governance and democracy are addressed in the annual Joint Commission. The EU Delegation together with EU Member States follow up consistently and in coordination with like-minded partners and relevant stakeholders in Nepal to encourage the adoption of the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons and Truth and Reconciliation Commission amendment Act, instrumental to a successful conclusion of the TJ processes. The amended law represents a breakthrough in terms of the 18 years of political stalemate over the TJ processes in Nepal. Continuation of this collaboration will be important for facilitating effective implementation of the law, including the maintenance of a victim-centred approach.

4. EU financial engagement: At the close of 2024, EUDEL Nepal had a portfolio of EUR 2.5 million dedicated to human rights, including a contract with provisions for TJ support. The EUDEL's portfolio with dedicated support to CSOs amounted to EUR 3.5 million, while the gender-specific and rights-focussed project has a budget of EUR 15 million.

Moreover, EUDEL has a human rights-sensitive budget support and/or projects in education (EUR 52.5 million), nutrition (EUR 25 million), water and sanitation (EUR 10.5 million), as well as energy (EUR 7 million) and other 'green' areas, comprising climate change resilience and circular economy (EUR 28.5 million).

5. Multilateral context: The National Human Rights Commission of Nepal was able to retain its 'A' status in 2024 after providing assurances that it was addressing concerns raised by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions. In order to enable the NHRC to pursue its role more effectively and remain as a credible national institution for the protection and promotion of human rights, the EUDEL has signed a project with the NHRC in 2024. This project aims at supporting the enactment or amendment of laws and policies from a human rights perspective; and an institutional shift by enabling the NHRC to fulfil its mandates with better investigation, more effective monitoring of conventional and emerging human rights issues, and strengthened collaboration and support to TJ mechanisms and processes. The NHRC in September 2024 organised the International Conference on Gender Inclusion in National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), in collaboration with the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions.

Islamic Republic of Pakistan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Overall, human rights, the state of democracy and rule of law showed a deteriorating trend, in particular in the fields of freedom of expression, right to peaceful protest, access to information and freedom of religion or belief.

The much-delayed general elections, which ultimately took place in February 2024, only amplified the overall perception of political volatility and polarisation in the country. The EU issued a statement noting the lack of a level playing field due to the inability of some political actors to contest the elections, restrictions to freedom of assembly, freedom of expression both online and offline, restrictions of access to the internet, as well as allegations of severe interference in the electoral process, including arrests of political activists. The EU called on Pakistani authorities to ensure a timely and full investigation of all reported election irregularities[61]. A general stalemate between the winning ruling coalition and the main opposition party of the imprisoned former Prime Minister Imran Khan continued throughout the year having a negative impact on the country's stability.

Women's participation in politics slightly increased. In 2024, 12 women were elected to the National Assembly. Women participation in the economic life of the country remains low despite government's programmes to promote women's entrepreneurship. Moreover,

[61] HRVP statement on behalf of the EU issued on 9 February 2024, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/02/09/pakistan-statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union-on-the-general-elections/

discrimination and domestic violence against women continue with a persisting culture of impunity for perpetrators. Civil society space and basic civil liberties remain restricted by administrative burdens for local and international NGOs and state interference in the media sphere. As a result, media representatives and human rights activists reported an increasing climate of pressure and self-censorship, cases of arbitrary detentions and disappearances, and a perception of widespread surveillance. Internet, cellular services and social media were temporarily shut down on several occasions, such as on Election Day. Internet speed has dramatically slowed down since July 2024, when the Pakistani authorities announced new laws allowing the country's security apparatus to operate mass surveillance and control operations without judiciary oversight.

A constitutional amendment passed in October 2024, is perceived to further limit the independence of the judiciary. According to international legal experts the changes may lead to the politicisation of the judiciary, especially in nominating top judges. Civilian courts have already been weakened by an ever-growing use of military courts to sentence civilians[62] in what are believed to be politically motivated trials.

In a positive development in 2024, the National Commission for Human Rights Pakistan, an independent human rights watchdog with *suo moto* powers, received an 'A-Status' accreditation from the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, while the tenure and the mandate of the National Commission for Minorities have not been renewed.

Hate speech, discrimination and violent incidents continued against religious minorities, including accusations of blasphemy, mob violence and lynching, despite the rules and procedures in place. Discrimination against and persecution of Ahmadi Muslims, barred by the constitution to identify and practice as Muslims, continued, including in the electoral process. The destruction of Ahmadi mosques and cemeteries and physical attacks increased, in a climate of impunity for the perpetrators. Pakistan's harsh blasphemy laws remain in place and are prone to misuse and false accusations. In 2024, at least eight people were killed following accusations of blasphemy – the highest number in a single year. It is also reported that a new worrying trend appeared concerning the so called 'social media blasphemy cases'. The forced conversion of women and girls from religious minorities, in particular from vulnerable families of Hindu and Christian communities, continue, with a strong correlation between reports of forced conversions and child marriages. Disadvantaged families from religious minorities are often engaged in bonded labour and hazardous work.

Death penalty remains applicable for 31 crimes, including various non-lethal offences. Despite the *de facto* moratorium on executions, Pakistani courts still frequently awarded death sentences for offences, which in most cases, do not meet the threshold for the 'most serious crimes' under the ICCPR. Pakistan's system of mercy petitions continues to fail meeting international standards and the country has to date one of the largest number of prisoners on death row.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU addressed human rights issues through engagement with government and other key stakeholders, CSOs and human rights activists. Pakistan's compliance with its international obligations and commitments under the GSP+ scheme is

[62] Statement by the Spokesperson on the sentencing of twenty five civilians by a military court on 22 December 2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/pakistan-statement-spokesperson-sentencing-twenty-five-civilians-military-court_en

central in discussions. The EU also observed key trials relating to fundamental rights. For yet another year, the EU supported the Asma Jahangir Human Rights Conference held in April 2024 in Lahore, providing a platform to discuss human rights issues. On the International Day to End the Death Penalty, the EU co-sponsored an event raising awareness about torture, arbitrary detention, and death penalty.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU-Pakistan political dialogue March 2024 and the EU-Pakistan Joint Commission (November 2024) allowed the discussion of the whole human rights agenda, in particular in the subgroup on Democracy, Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights. Ambassador van Daele, EU's Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU, visited Pakistan in September 2024, raising the issues of minorities, blasphemy laws, education, and forced conversions. Moreover, the EU continued the monitoring process related to the implementation of the GSP+ conditionality and engaging with relevant Pakistani authorities.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU launched the project 'Human Rights in Pakistan II', implemented by UNDP, with the specific objective of improving the effectiveness of institutions and systems as well as to enhance private sector participation in the protection of human rights and gender equality. The EU has also launched the programme 'Pakistan Women Leaders' implemented by UN Women and UNDP. The project is centred on amplifying women's voices, enhancing their agency and creating a conducive environment for them to rise to leadership positions. The EU continued, under its Rule of Law programme, to support reforms aimed at improving gender parity in criminal justice institutions. The EU also supported projects to promote human rights in the areas of criminal justice systems, including abolition of death penalty; freedom of religion and belief; business and human rights; as well as freedom of expression.

5. Multilateral context: In June 2024, Pakistan was elected as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the term 2025-2026. As part of the Like-Minded Group, the Non-Aligned Movement and as president of the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation within the Geneva fora, voting patterns between EU MS and Pakistan often diverge. Pakistan was last reviewed by the Human Rights Committee that monitors the implementation of the ICCPR in October 2024 and by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in August 2024. During the ICCPR review, issues raised included among others attacks on journalists and religious minorities.

Republic of the Philippines

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The current administration has shown more commitment to uphold and advance human rights than its predecessor. Positive developments include a Supreme Court ruling on 8 May 2024 declaring red-tagging i.e. labelling individuals or organisations as communist sympathisers or terrorists without substantial evidence a threat to people's life, liberty and security. In May 2024, President Marcos created a Special Committee on Human Rights Coordination with the mandate to promote human rights. On 10 December 2024, Human Rights Day, the Philippine government officially launched the 4th National Human Rights Plan. Charges against former Senator Leila De Lima, a vocal critic of the war on drugs, were dropped, and she was released in June 2024 after six years in police custody. In October 2024, the Philippine Senate and House of Representatives began parallel investigations into the war on drugs.

While these positive developments are welcome, there are still some areas of concern. Full judicial accountability is still lacking, with few convictions for the abuses that took place under the former administration's war on drugs. Laws to protect human rights defenders and an anti-discrimination law are still lacking. Human rights violations at local level continue to occur, and red-tagging continues to be used. Environmental, land rights and indigenous communities defenders are those most often targeted. While extra-judicial killings related to the war on drugs have significantly decreased, arbitrary arrests, as well as enforced disappearances of political activists, journalists, human rights and indigenous peoples' rights defenders, and trade unionists continue to occur.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU's human rights and democracy priorities in the Philippines included: promoting accountability and the rule of law, including through the improvement of access to justice for all Filipinos; protecting human rights defenders and trade unions; strengthening the civic and democratic space; supporting 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.

The EU continued to engage with the Philippines to encourage the administration to cooperate with the ICC and to re-join the Rome Statute. To protect and empower individuals, and to build resilient, inclusive and democratic societies, the EUDEL has also publicly supported HRDs and press freedom, and initiatives to fight disinformation and restrictions on the civic space. The EUDEL and EU MS' embassies monitored trials to ensure respect for the rule of law and due process rights, and closely followed developments affecting media workers. In the case of journalist Maria Ressa, the EU raised concerns with the government calling for respect for freedom of expression and the rule of law. The EU continued to advocate against the reintroduction of the death penalty. The EU continued to engage with the Philippines on its commitments to comply with core human rights conventions through the GSP+ monitoring process.

The EUDEL continued its dialogue with civil society, and between civil society and the government. To complement the existing Civil Society Sounding Board, a Youth Sounding Board was established in December 2023 and matured throughout 2024. The EUDEL supported resilient, inclusive and democratic societies in line with the EU's Gender Action Plan III. EU programmes have made significant efforts to adequately mainstream gender, for example by having full time gender experts on their staff. EU Programmes have also contributed to increase an open government approach, involving CSOs in their activities with public authorities. Promoting the use of digital technologies as an enabler for good governance was another priority for the EU in its engagement with the Philippines. The EUDEL signed a new programme on the rule of law, which will include work on public procurement transparency and oversight, including by CSOs.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engaged with the Philippine authorities on human rights on several occasions, including in the annual meeting of the EU-Philippines Joint Committee on 3 December 2024. Prior to that, the fourth Sub-Committee Meeting on Good Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights under the EU – Philippines Partnership and Cooperation Agreement met in Manila on 30 November 2024. 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 EUDEL engaged regularly with the Philippine government to ensure follow-up on a number of concrete actions discussed during annual dialogues.

4. EU financial engagement: One of the two main areas of the EU's bilateral cooperation with the Philippines is on Justice, Governance and Peace. GOJUST, a EUR 20 million programme, supported the Philippines' justice reform and access to justice initiatives since 2021. The programme also supported the Philippines Commission on Human Rights. Moreover, the EU and some EU MS funded the UN Joint Programme on Human Rights in the Philippines. The EU is a key partner of the Philippines on the Mindanao Peace Process and action to prevent violent extremism. Through the Civil Society Thematic Programme, the EU continued to support the sexual and reproductive health rights of youth, including LGBTI people. Another area of targeted CSO intervention on women's rights included a transformative women leadership programme in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The Democracy and Human Rights Thematic Programme supported the activities of CSOs in the area of protection of human rights defenders, including on labour and environmental rights, and in the promotion of press freedom and protection of journalists, especially those working in conflict-affected areas like the BARMM. The EU supported a CSO project addressing disinformation among youth and on protection of children from online and offline violence, including elimination of worst forms of child labour. The upcoming 2025 projects will focus on the promotion of 'human rights cities' as a follow up to the initiative under the UN Joint Programme, protection of HRDs and land rights defenders, and protection of the rights of children affected by climate change (disasters).

5. Multilateral context: The government continues to engage with the international community regularly. In February 2024, Irene Khan the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression visited the Philippines, noting that the country needed fundamental and sustained reforms to address serious and deep-rooted human rights issues, and calling for the abolishment of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict The Government of the Philippines did not renew its participation in the UN Joint Programme in July 2024, raising concerns about its capacity to ensure the full implementation of measures to institutionalise human rights reforms. The EU continued to call on the Philippines to cooperate with the ICC.

Republic of Singapore

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Singapore is overall characterised by sound governance and low corruption. The government, led by Prime Minister Lawrence Wong (in office since May 2024), has made incremental progress in promoting initiatives aimed at enhancing women's rights and representation in the workforce. Recently announced policies include extended parental leave rights and a comprehensive legal framework to combat discrimination.

Nevertheless, concerns persist regarding Singapore's implementation of the death penalty and restrictions on freedom of expression and association. Nine executions were carried out in 2024, in all but one case for drug trafficking. The Post-Appeal Applications in Capital Cases Act, in effect since June 2024, tightened the rules for late-stage appeals in death penalty cases. An estimated 50 prisoners remained on death row.

On freedom of expression, Singapore ranked 126th out of 180 countries in the 2024 World Press Freedom Index published by RSF. Under the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act (FICA), fully in force since December 2023, nearly 100 social media accounts were blocked to Singapore users in July 2024 for the alleged spreading of disinformation. Under the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), any Singaporean Minister may issue 'correction directions' to online sources, including independent media, which are required to publish the notice and correction. Under the 2009 Public Order Act, any public gathering relating to political causes require a police permit. Several local activists were investigated for protesting against the Israel-Hamas conflict in defiance of the Act.

Migrant workers in Singapore, who constitute a significant portion of the workforce, particularly in construction and domestic work, continued to face numerous challenges. While there were positive steps taken to improve their working conditions and access to legal recourse, issues such as low wages, long working hours, and inadequate protection against abuse persisted. A new Workplace Fairness Bill to protect workers against discrimination through new obligations for employers of foreign nationals was introduced in Parliament in November 2024 and passed in January 2025

Singapore's LGBTI community continued to advocate for greater recognition and rights, with the annual 'Pink Dot' rally gathering several thousand participants in June 2024.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to focus its attention and activities on fostering freedom of expression, assembly, association and political participation; advocacy against the use of the death penalty; promoting the protection of migrant and LGBTI rights and the ratification of international human rights and ILO conventions; and monitoring the impact of new technologies on human rights. Across all priorities, efforts were made to encourage greater transparency on human rights issues. Gender equality issues were also mainstreamed throughout the implementation of various activities.

Continuing its longstanding advocacy, the EU and its MS, together with Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, issued joint statements before or after an execution. Representatives of the EU and its MS observed a public Court of Appeal hearing of the cases of several death row inmates.

Team Europe continued to engage with local LGBTI groups through regular exchanges and their invitation to events. On the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT, 17 May), the rainbow flag was flown at the EU Residence and by some EU MS. The European Film Festival, which took place in Singapore for the 33rd time in 2024, was again an annual opportunity to screen socially relevant films, including on LGBTI themes.

Between 25 November and 10 December 2024, EUDEL together with EU MS, participated in the annual global campaign '16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence', producing a video in which youth voices shared their perspectives on gender equality issues.

The impact of digital technologies on mental health was the subject of a panel discussion at the EUDEL's annual Human Rights Day Seminar on 'Human Rights and Mental Health' on 10 December 2024. The Singapore-Europe Dialogue on Digital Trust and Safe AI took place in November 2024 and provided a stage for expert discussions on the EU's human-centric approach to AI governance. An Administrative Arrangement between the EU AI Office and the AI Safety Institute of Singapore was signed on 20 November in order to enhance cooperation

in joint research, technological innovation, as well as developing responsible use of safe, trustworthy, and human-centric AI.

3. **EU bilateral political engagement:** EUDEL together with EU MS carried out a number of démarches and political outreaches on human rights-related topics to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, presenting – among others – the EU's priorities for the UNGA Third Committee, and in support of the universalisation of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. The EUDEL and EU MS also engaged with government stakeholders on human rights-related topics on numerous occasions. The issue of the death penalty was raised during the EU-Singapore Senior Officials Meeting in June 2024.

4. EU financial engagement: Financing of CSOs by foreign entities remains prohibited in Singapore. The EUDEL's activities consisted of monitoring and reporting, coordinating closely with EU MS 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 remains like-minded in supporting the rules-based international order and multilateralism. In the regional context, Singapore remained an active contributor to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights.

On 14 November 2024, Singapore voted for the UNGA Resolution put forward by France and the Netherlands on the elimination of violence against women and girls in the digital environment.

At the UNGA Third Committee, Singapore continued to lead the retentionist camp on the use of the death penalty. In November 2024, it voted against the biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, which received 131 votes in favour. Prior to the vote, Singapore had once again introduced an amendment in defence of the 'sovereign right of states' to apply capital punishment, which gathered 105 'yes' votes.

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the candidate of the left-wing National People's Power (NPP) coalition, won the presidential election in September 2024 with 42.3% of the votes. The NPP, campaigning on a system change and anti-corruption platform, won a landslide victory in the parliamentary elections in November. The NPP enjoyed broad support including from minorities winning in 21 out of 22 districts. These were the most peaceful elections in the history of the country. The election showed Sri Lanka's commitment to democracy, while the need for further reforms – on inclusion, transparency in political finance and the improvement of women's participation – remains.

The EU deployed an EOM, which assessed the presidential election as competitive and offering genuine political alternatives. An Election Expert Mission (EEM) was also deployed for the general elections, which similarly concluded with a positive assessment, including the competent organisation by the Electoral Commission of Sri Lanka. Recommendations were formulated to further strengthen the electoral process.

There were no women among the three presidential candidates, but a record 22 women were elected to parliament, a significant increase compared to only 12 in the previous, but still far from the 25% target action plan for 2023-2027 on Women, Peace and Security. The Women's Empowerment Act was passed with amendments in June but a dedicated commission for its implementation has yet to be established.

Local and provincial elections remain long overdue with several years' postponement, and the government has pledged to have them held in 2025. Under its former administration, Sri Lanka became the first country in Asia to have an IMF Governance Diagnostic Assessment (GDA). The GDA provides recommendations to address structural problems related to the rule of law, public finance management, corruption, fiscal governance and money laundering. In 2024, initiatives were taken by the new Government to combat corruption.

In 2024, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka was reaccredited with an 'A' status, marking its full compliance with the Paris Principles. Lack of public consultation during the drafting of legislations remains a concern. In 2024, the controversial Online Safety Act (OSA) was passed by the previous Parliament without including all recommendations issued by the Supreme Court. The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) with its wide-ranging powers has long been one of the key concerns. There is a strong demand from voters and civil society on the NPP Government to repeal the PTA and amend or repeal the OSA, delivering on electoral promises. Since the new Government came to power, arrests were made using the PTA in November around the terrorist threats in Arugam Bay.

The Private Members Bill was tabled in Parliament in 2024 to de-criminalise same sex relationships, but lapsed with the close of the ninth Parliament.

Progress on reconciliation has been slow. On 1 January 2024, the former Government published a proposal for a Commission for Truth, Unity and Reconciliation, which was met with scepticism by civil society , as recommendations of prior commissions with a similar mandate have not been implemented. Tensions with the Tamil community have surfaced with the erection of Buddhist temples on Tamil religious sites. Memorialisation of Tamil war victims has often been suppressed by security forces. The new Government ordered the police to only intervene if Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) symbols were displayed and most memorialisation events were held peacefully and without interference since then. In 2024, exhumations from the mass grave near Mullaitivu were completed. The NPP Government has taken some initiatives well received by civil society and public opinion, including the closure of a military camp in the North, the reopening of investigations into the 2019 Easter bombing and on a number of emblematic cases.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU action in Sri Lanka focused on support to democracy, the rule of law, and access to justice; promoting space for civil society, human rights defenders and media; supporting the rights of minorities for an inclusive and peaceful society; promoting gender equality and women's rights, as well as labour rights and environmental rights in business.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EUDEL and EU MS engaged throughout the year with the authorities on issues affecting long-term peace, democracy, human rights, political

stability, rule of law and economic recovery. The 26th EU-Sri Lanka Joint Commission took place on 22 February, as well as the Working Group on Rule of Law, Governance, and Human Rights. The visit of the Chief Observer of the EOM, MEP Nacho Sánchez Amor, was an opportunity to address election related priorities but also the PTA, OSA, and the ICCPR Act as well as women's rights with a wide range of interlocutors. The EU monitors compliance of Sri Lanka with its GSP+ commitments to ensure continued access to the European market for its export industries.

4. EU financial engagement: The flagship Justice Sector Reform programme with EUR 16.2 million is ongoing, focusing on improved access to justice, transparency in the sector and the more efficient justice services delivery, with a strong focus on vulnerable groups. The project Strengthening Social Cohesion and Peace in Sri Lanka, EUR 11 million, co-financed by the German Federal Foreign Office, supports communities and authorities on reconciliation efforts. The EU and its MS are also engaged through a number of projects in supporting democratic processes and promoting space for civil society, human rights defenders and media, the rights of minorities, women's rights and gender equality, and promote environmental rights.

5. Multilateral context: At the 57th UNHRC session, the EU supported the adoption of the resolution that extended the 51/1 UNHRC resolution on Sri Lanka. The EU highlighted its concern about the lack of progress on accountability and truth seeking, stressed the need to preserve the civic space, and addressed the risk to fundamental freedoms posed by restrictive laws (PTA, OSA) and legislative initiatives (Anti-Terrorism Bill). Sri Lanka's new government maintained the position of rejecting the resolution and its external evidence mechanism, re-iterating the commitment to domestic processes for truth finding and accountability.

Kingdom of Thailand

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In August 2024 the Constitutional Court dissolved the Move Forward Party main opposition for its proposed amendment of the lèse-majesté law and banned its party executives from politics for 10 years. The Court removed Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin from office on allegations of serious ethical breaches. Paetongtarn Shinawatra, leader of the ruling Pheu Thai Party, became Prime Minister. Thailand was elected a member of the UNHRC for the term 2025-2027. Thailand's progress towards the OECD membership will be assessed against OECD's standards and values. In January 2025 Thailand became the first country in Southeast Asia to recognise same-sex marriage. CSOs reported that the courts continued convicting with harsh sentences an increasing number of activists and politicians under *lèse-majesté*. Strategic lawsuits against public participation, intimidation and surveillance by the authorities reportedly continued targeting HRDs. CSOs regretted the expiration of the 20-year statute of limitations of the Tak Bai case in relation to the death of 85 Malay Muslims in the southernmost provinces. The Cabinet rejected a proposal by the National Human Rights Commission to revoke the death penalty and Thailand maintained the death penalty for 60 offences. While Thailand became a State Party to the CPED, CSOs denounced the deportation of foreign political activists and transnational repression. Overcrowding and precarious conditions in prisons and Immigration Detention Centres reportedly persisted. Displaced persons from Myanmar reportedly sought refuge in Thailand, with CSOs documenting a continued trend of refoulement. Thailand

withdrew its reservation to Article 22 of the CRC. The Cabinet approved the revised criteria to expedite the process of granting permanent residency and Thai citizenship to long-term immigrants. CSOs were concerned that the House-approved Draft Act for the Amendment to the Royal Ordinance on Fisheries would conflict with Thailand's obligations to the ILO Fishing Convention C188.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued efforts to strengthen the protection of civil and political rights, promote the business and human rights agenda, and ensure protecting HRDs and the forcibly displaced and marginalised groups or individuals in vulnerable situations. The EU ensured a human rights-based approach to development in implementation of EU-funded projects and programmes, which included capacity building to government officials, civil society and HRDs. The EU continued regular dialogue with interlocutors in the government, civil society, HRDs, the business sector as well as collaboration with UN agencies. The EU conducted or attended démarches, public diplomacy campaigns, and diplomatic briefings related to human rights. The EUDEL, EU MS and like-minded embassies conducted diplomatic trial observations. The EUDEL launched an English essay competition on the death penalty for undergraduate students to raise awareness. The EU remained committed to supporting resilient, inclusive and democratic societies by providing capacity building for and assistance to non-Thais, marginalised groups and individuals in vulnerable situations, as well as promoting gender equality and engagement with youth. The EU worked with the UNHCR and civil society on providing humanitarian assistance and advocacy for Myanmar and other asylum seekers in Thailand. The EU launched an action to promote girls and youth's digital rights in safe online spaces to harness opportunities and addressing challenges arising from new technologies.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EUDEL and EU MS' embassies continued to regularly engage with the relevant authorities to discuss the protection and the promotion of human rights. The EU Ambassador notably met with the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Social Development and Human Security. EUDEL engaged with relevant ministries at the working level to enhance cooperation on human rights, especially on business and human rights, gender equality, women's empowerment and the rights of persons with disability. The EU and Member States' Ambassadors met with leadership of political parties and exchanged on political and human rights issues.

4. **EU financial engagement:** The EUDEL continued cooperation with the OHCHR to train government officials on international human rights standards, and provide technical assistance to government and civil society actors for effective implementation of the Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearances Act. An EU-funded project supported Thailand's implementation of the second National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, while another activity was launched to assist Thailand to develop human rights due diligence measures in business operations. Two EU-funded projects focused on the convergence of labour standards, and the engagement with youth and media to promote responsible business conduct. Two new projects promoted migrant workers' rights through strengthening CSOs capacity and networks. A regional project was implemented by the IOM on promoting corporate responsibility and migrant workers' rights, and another was implemented by ILO, UNWOMEN, UNICEF and UNODC to ensure protecting the rights of women migrant workers and children. Six projects – one with UNHCR and five with NGOs, totalling EUR 12 million – continued

supporting the nine refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border. A gender-targeted action started implementation to enhance CSOs' participation and representativeness of women's, youths' and children's voice in local and national policy dialogue. Two projects were implemented on the rights of persons with disability. In the Southernmost provinces, the EU funded a grant aimed at protecting the rights of marginalised communities and another project on improving the situation of children and youth, including those with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity.

5. **Multilateral context:** The EUDEL worked with EU MS and other embassies and organisations including the UN agencies and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) to raise human rights and democracy issues with government counterparts. EUDEL together with EU MS conducted démarches and outreaches with the Thai authorities on the rules-based international order and UNGA resolutions, including those for the UNGA Third Committee on freedom of religion or belief, the human rights situation in Myanmar, in the DPRK and biennial resolution on a Moratorium on the use of the death penalty. The EUDEL led a multilateral action to mark two years of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2024.

Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Timor-Leste stands out in the Indo-Pacific for its strong human rights and democratic record, ranking highest in ASEAN for human rights in 2023 according to the V-Dem Institute. It has ratified key UN human rights treaties and developed independent institutions, including an Ombudsman for Human Rights and an Anti-Corruption Commission.

The country's history of struggle against foreign occupation has shaped its commitment to democracy, resilience, and human rights. While Timor-Leste upholds media freedom, occasional restrictions exist. Socio-economic inequalities, corruption, and limited resources hinder full implementation of legal and political commitments. Violence against women and children remains a critical human rights concern, along with discrimination against marginalized groups, such as people with disabilities and the LGBTI community.

2. **EU action - key focus areas**:
Key progress areas in Timor-Leste include several important developments. The Human Rights Centre at the National University of Timor-Leste continues to play a vital role in educating students on human rights, legal protections, and governance, with support from European Union projects. In the area of gender equality and women's empowerment, Timor-Leste has made significant strides in combatting GBV by offering support to survivors and strengthening policies aimed at eliminating domestic violence, which remains a widespread issue. Regarding children's rights, EU-backed programs are addressing critical challenges such as malnutrition, child protection, and healthcare, with a 2024 grant contract focusing specifically on the promotion of child rights.

Efforts to support vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities and the LGBTI community, are focused on providing vocational training, education, and employment opportunities, while also working to raise public awareness about their rights. In terms of

democratic foundations, there have been notable improvements in electoral reforms, governance, and decentralization, which have enhanced local government accountability. One such initiative, the 'One-Stop-Shop' (Loja Sidadaun), has been introduced to streamline public services. Lastly, the Regional Trade Programme (AAP 2022) has been crucial in promoting labour rights and trade reforms that align with international labour standards, contributing to the broader goals of decent work and economic reform.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Timor-Leste and the EU held the first Partnership Dialogue under Article 3 of the Samoa Agreement signed on 15 February 2024. The Partnership Dialogue attested to shared values including democracy, the rule of law and human rights, and the defence of the multilateral system with the UN at its core and a rules-based international order. They took stock of the progress made in implementing the recommendations made by the EOM. Additionally, a structured dialogue with Civil Society Organisations was held in 2023, including peer review and learning sessions.

4. **EU financial engagement:** To accelerate the follow-up to some of the recommendations of the EOM for the 2022 presidential elections, the Delegation had a grant contract for electoral reform with a consortium of seven CSOs known for their positive engagement in the electoral process. This ended in late 2024. With the help of EU budget support and other instruments in the areas of decentralisation and public finance management, the country could also take action to further strengthen its governance institutions and processes.

5. Multilateral context: Timor-Leste has supported EU positions at the UN, including condemning Russia's war in Ukraine. It is positioning itself as a strong voice for democracy in ASEAN and hopes to gain full membership soon. UNSG António Guterres has praised the country's progress in democracy and human rights.

Socialist Republic of Vietnam

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Vietnam's one party socialist republic system led by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CVP) is characterised by a centralised bureaucracy and limited political pluralism, with the CVP holding a monopoly on political power.

While the country saw several changes at the helm of the leadership with the arrival of a new General Secretary of the CVP, a new President and a new Chairman of the National Assembly, the human rights and democracy situation in 2024 followed the trend of previous years.

Thanks to impressive economic growth rates, the enjoyment of economic rights continued on a positive path. A new Land Law came into force on participation in land policy processes signalling a positive shift towards inclusive and equitable land governance in Vietnam.

At the same time, political and civil rights remained restricted, especially fundamental freedoms of expression and association. Journalists, bloggers and activists continued to be arrested and convicted on national security or tax evasion charges. A new decree 126 came into effect on the organisation, operation and management of associations, introducing new restrictions and compounding the challenges for NGOs and independent entities created by a new Politburo Directive ('Directive 24'), which has the aim to ensure national security and prevent foreign interference in policy-making by controlling and limiting foreign interaction

and funding of NGOs. In terms of press freedom, Vietnam moved up four levels from the 178th position in 2023 to the 174th out of 180 countries in the RSF 2024 World Press Freedom Index. However, the government continued to control all print, broadcast and electronic media and issued a new decree 147 further regulating the use and provision of internet services and online information.

The death penalty continued to be applied to 18 crimes, including rape, murder, drug related crimes and corruption. No official data on the number of executions in 2024 was available since Vietnam considers executions a state secret.

2. **EU action - key focus areas**: The EU continued to focus its attention and activities on HRD's freedom of expression, access to information and freedom of religion or belief, civil society and participative democracy, equal rights and diversity (gender, people with disabilities, LGBTI), rights of the youth and child, the Rule of Law and the fair administration of justice, abolition of the death penalty and compliance with international human rights law and effective implementation of human rights mechanisms.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue took place in July in Brussels, followed by the EU-Vietnam Sub-Committee on Good Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights in October in Hanoi, and the Joint Committee also in October in Hanoi where all key human rights focus areas were discussed. A Joint EU-Vietnam Statement was issued after the Human Rights Dialogue and the Joint Committee. Human rights were mainstreamed in bilateral discussions at all levels with the Government of Vietnam.

Throughout the year, the EUDEL, in close coordination with EU MS and like-minded countries, maintained regular exchanges on human rights with Vietnamese stakeholders and reiterated requests for the release of all persons detained for exercising their freedom of expression both online and offline. The EUDEL also actively engaged in actions aimed at supporting human rights activists, consistently requested the possibility to observe trials of human rights defenders and insisted on access to legal aid, medical support and family visits for prisoners.

Furthermore, the EUDEL together with EU MS carried out a number of démarches and political outreaches on human rights-related topics to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, presenting – among others – the EU's priorities for the 57th session of the UNHRC and for UNGA 79.

4. **EU financial engagement:** The EU provided technical assistance for the revision of the Vietnamese labour code and the ratification of all core ILO Conventions and their implementation.

With the EU's thematic programme for Human Rights and Democracy and other instruments, CSO's actions were supported through grants in various domains such as gender equality and prevention of GBV; 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; fight against discrimination and stigma of LGBTI persons, rights of people with disabilities and cultural rights.

The partnership built between the EUDEL, EU MS and the Ministry of Justice as well as the Supreme Court in the context of the EU-Vietnam Justice and Legal Empowerment Programme (EU JULE), allowed to support the implementation of ICCPR and other human rights treaties (i.e. CAT, CRC, CRPD). EU JULE also included a component supporting non state-actor

initiatives to increase access to justice. JULE II, a follow-up programme on rule of law and human rights was signed with Vietnam at the end of 2024.

5. Multilateral context: In 2024, Vietnam underwent the fourth cycle of the UPR accepting 271 of 320 recommendations proposed by other countries, including 253 fully approved and 18 partially approved recommendations. During the UPR consultations, the EU raised concerns about the increased number of imprisoned journalists and the absence of a free media, and called for more substantive progress towards the abolition of the death penalty, the implementation of the CAT and freedom of expression.

Oceania

Commonwealth of Australia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Australia demonstrated a strong overall commitment to human rights in 2024 despite continuing to have areas of concern. Efforts to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and achieve life expectancy equal to non-Indigenous Australians continued.
While progress was made in some areas, gaps in adult and children incarceration rates, educational achievement, health and life expectancy remained. The progress of reconciliation stalled following the failure in 2023 to create a consultative body to Parliament.

Amidst concern at a rise in incidents of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hate speech, arson and vandalism, the Government implemented legislation, security measures and appointed special envoys to ensure the exercise of freedom of religion and belief. Australia's policies on offshore detention of asylum seekers arriving by boat and legislation to facilitate the removal to third countries of persons with no right of stay has been criticised by several human rights organisations. While several Australian states took action to raise the age of criminal responsibility from ten years' old, concerns about juvenile crime in other states prevented reform. Meanwhile, the reform of the Modern Slavery Act tightened oversight of global supply chains to prevent use of forced labour.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU focus was on cooperation with Australia in multilateral human rights fora, exchanges on migration policy, addressing discrimination and the international dimension of promoting the rights of Indigenous Peoples. In Australia, the EU Delegation was a significant partner of the Australian Human Rights Commission, supporting the annual Kep Enderby Memorial Lecture, an event aimed at addressing systematic racism by presenting perspectives from First Nations' People.

EU Delegation also sponsored the Pride in Sports Awards, including the LGBTI Role Model of the Year, and the impact of disinformation on democracy and human rights was addressed via the Delegation's support for the Disinfo Pacific Conference. Team Europe actions included a local statement on the IDAHOBIT; a joint event between Heads of Mission and the Foreign Minister, as well as the Attorney-General and Federal Police Commissioner to oppose the death penalty; and events to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, as well as a film festival to promote gender equality.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Exchanges on social cohesion were included in the EU-Australia inter-parliamentary meeting in December 2024. The EU-Australia Human Rights Consultations in May 2024 included an in-depth exchange on all focus areas. The EEAS Managing Director for Global Affairs met the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission in Sydney and engaged with senior officials, including the Ambassador for First Nations People in Canberra in December 2024. The EU Ambassador and EU Heads of Mission also engaged with First Nations elders as part of a visit to Western Australia.

4. EU Financial engagement: The EU Delegation supported the events related to the focus areas.

5. Multilateral context: Australia was aligned with the EU in UN human rights fora on most issues and took an active role in promoting several common objectives. EU and Australian officials maintained regular contact in promoting cross cutting human rights priorities during negotiations for the Pact for the Future.

Frequent exchanges took place in addressing the gender equality pushback seen in various multilateral bodies.

At the Third Committee, Australia took an active role on gender equality and resolutions related to the DPRK, Myanmar and the Joint Statement on Women and Girls in Afghanistan. At the UNHRC, Australia worked with the EU on resolutions related to Afghanistan, Myanmar and the DPRK.

Republic of Fiji

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, the Coalition Government led by PM Sitiveni Rabuka continued unwinding institutional and legal structures that the former government had put in place, notably the Media Industry Development Act, while provisions in the Public Order Act and the Crimes Act still need to be amended for freedoms to be fully reinstated. Access to political rights and civil liberties in Fiji is assessed as partly free by the Freedom House. Returning of municipal elections in 13 city and town councils is expected to take place in 2025, which will signal improvement in participatory democracy.

In December 2024, the bill establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was adopted. While recognising that its mission will be a challenging and sensitive task, the process has a strong potential to contribute to the advancement of individual rights, the fight against human rights violations in the country, and to help Fiji overcome the 'coup culture' – that has prevailed for several decades – in favour of democracy. The EU supports Fiji in fostering national reconciliation by financing the Chair of the TRC and providing capacity-building support to the TRC and its secretariat.

Fiji has abolished the death penalty and ratified all core human rights instruments. Despite improvements, and alongside Fiji's active multilateral engagement on human rights, a number of human rights challenges persist in the country, including on effective prevention and response to GBV, discrimination and human rights compliance by law enforcement personnel. Issues that further impact women's development include the low representation of women in

formal sector employment, women's health and women's equal representation at all levels of government and civil society. As of February 2025, only 10.9% of seats in Parliament are held by women, less than in the previous Parliament.

On the positive side, Fiji continued the implementation of its National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls 2023-2028, the first one in the Pacific, as well as adopted the National Action Plan for Women's Economic Empowerment 2024-2029. Fiji has made continuous progress in terms of corruption control since 2010, ranking 50th out of 180 countries in the 2024 Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. The Fiji Independent Commission against Corruption regularly updates on its website the number of complaints received, cases investigated, individuals charged and individuals convicted.

The Constitution provides for freedom of expression, freedom of press, as well as the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association. However, these freedoms may be restricted by legislation on a wide range of grounds. Some provisions of the Public Order Amendment Act remain of particular concern, as it allows the government to refuse applications for permits for any meetings or demonstrations deemed to harm peace, public safety and good order or to undermine the economy. The Public Order (Amendment) Act continued to be used to restrict the right to peaceful assembly and association.

2. **EU action – key focus areas:** EU action continued to promote access to justice and human rights including fostering gender equality, and supported CSOs in various areas of activity.

Through a EUR 20 million budget support programme on rural livelihoods, the EU supported actions aimed at strengthening human rights, democracy and the rule of law but also progress towards achieving the SDGs; and encouraged an accountable and effective public administration. This support also contributed to mitigating climate adaptation. The previous budget support programme was fully completed in May 2024, providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways.

Fiji also benefits from several initiatives promoting human rights, gender equality and addressing GBV, supporting economic rights, climate change adaptation and mitigation and improving the management of natural resources.

3. **EU bilateral political engagement**: The EU follows up on the issues raised in the first Partnership Dialogue under the Samoa Agreement (held in April 2024) and continues promoting access to justice and respect for human rights, encouraging the government to progress towards making Fiji's legislation fully compliant with international human rights standards. In 2024, the EU Delegation to the Pacific continued to carry out a number of démarches and outreach activities, inviting Fiji to support EU human rights initiatives and priorities at the UN level. With climate change and human rights inextricably linked in the Pacific region, the EU Delegation actively promotes climate resilience and action in its interactions with Fiji, including at multilateral level.

4. EU financial engagement: The EUDEL supports the Government in implementing the Climate Change Act through a new budget support programme of EUR 12.8 million. The EUDEL recently concluded the UNDP-led multi-country Pacific Digital Democracy Initiative: this action

worth EUR 1.4 million contributed to progress participatory digitalisation processes in four target countries – Fiji, FSM, Solomon Islands and Tonga – in order to harness Information and Communication Technologies for more inclusive, rights-based democracy and development.

The EU recently launched the project 'A Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Approach to Combatting Impunity for Sexual Offences', led by Medical Services Pacific, which aims at ending impunity for sexual offenses through increased awareness and accountability for human rights violations through a strengthened, functional and supported reporting system.

In the framework of the CSO Thematic programme, the EUDEL awarded EUR 1.08 million at the end of 2023 for the benefit of CSOs working on building resilience to climate change and promoting good governance and accountability. Fiji also benefits from the regional programme 'Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls – Phase II' (PPVAWG) for which the EU allocated EUR 8 million and which started in January 2024. Furthermore, five actions comprising more than EUR 2.8 million contributed to increasing the participation of CSOs in addressing climate change.

5. **Multilateral context:** Fiji completed its fourth UPR in January 2025. Fiji noted that it had implemented the majority of the recommendations from its last UPR. Fiji received over 209 recommendations during the review, which are currently being considered. Fiji has been a key ally in international fora in condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Fiji supported the majority of UNGA resolutions to condemn Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, having abstained from the Russia-led resolution on the glorification of Nazism. Fiji's President attended the Summit on Peace in Ukraine in June 2024 and signed the Joint Statement.

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. Kiribati is a constitutional parliamentary democracy with a multi-party political system in place. Elections have been regular, free, peaceful and well-administered and the courts can review disputed results. Political parties generally do not follow fixed ideologies or formal platforms and political affiliations are influenced by geography, tribal ties, and personal loyalties.

The country held its last parliamentary and presidential elections in August and October 2024 respectively. 27 MPs retained their seats, while 14 sitting MPs lost their seats, including three who were cabinet ministers. Five women were elected, compared to four women in 2020. In the presidential elections, incumbent President Taneti Maamau was re-elected for a third four-year term. The elections were reportedly conducted in an orderly manner, but foreign insights were few as there is no foreign media represented in Kiribati and the government had banned all diplomatic visits during the election period from August to December 2024.

The judiciary has been considered generally independent and free from government influence.

Overall, the human rights situation in Kiribati seemed to have remained stable in 2024, but little data is available and information from the ground is scarce. There are no foreign media

represented in Kiribati. Only four countries have resident missions: Australia, New Zealand, Japan and China.

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.

The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of race or origin. However, the law does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or social status. Consensual sex between males is criminalised, but there were no reports of prosecutions. Women's participation in political life remains low.

The government of Kiribati has not yet established a National Human Rights' Institution in compliance with the Paris Principles.

Kiribati is not covered by the Transparency International Annual Corruption Perception Index. However, Kiribati was covered in the organisation's Global Corruption Barometer for the Pacific in 2021, in which a majority of respondents, including in Kiribati, responded that corruption was a problem in both the public and the private sectors, despite government efforts to control it.

2. EU action – key focus areas: Regional programmes implemented in Kiribati focus 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 2024, the EUDEL to the Pacific reached out numerous times to the Kiribati government via démarches, in order to support the EU's human rights priorities and initiatives at the UN and other international fora.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, Kiribati benefited from one EU-funded regional initiative promoting gender equality and the fight against GBV – the PPVAWG Phase II that started in January 2024. The two previous programmes promoting gender equality, PPVAWG Phase I and the 'Spotlight Initiative'ended in December 2023.

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.

5. Multilateral context: Kiribati's third UPR took place in January 2020. Of the 129 recommendations received, Kiribati accepted 88 and noted 41. The next UPR will take place in 2025.

Kiribati has been a key ally in international fora in condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Kiribati co-sponsored the vetoed UNSC resolution of 25 February 2022 and has voted in support of most Ukraine-related UNGA resolutions since then. Kiribati abstained from the Russia-led resolution on Glorification of Nazism in December 2024.

Kiribati is also a key ally, together with other Pacific Islands Countries, in the fight against climate change.

Republic of the 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). The Marshall Islands voted in a general election 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. Four women were elected, up from three in the previous election. Dr Hilda C. Heine was elected by the Parliament as the President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, for the second time, after her first term as President from 2016 to 2020.

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 nuclear justice. Both issues are RMI's priorities as a member of the UNHRC 2025-2027.

Current human rights and democracy concerns in RMI 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.

2. EU action – key focus areas: EU actions focus *inter alia* on elimination and prevention of violence against women and girls, supporting CSO's engagement with the government on policy dialogue and governance as well as providing access to clean and safe water on all the outer islands of the Marshall Islands.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: During 2024, the EU continued working closely with RMI in promoting and upholding human rights. The EUDEL carried out démarches and outreach activities with RMI to support EU human rights initiatives and priorities at the UN level. With climate change and human rights inextricably linked in the Pacific region, the EDEL to the Pacific will continue to actively promote climate resilience and action in its interactions with RMI, including at multilateral level.

4. EU financial engagement: Through different financial instruments, the EU supported efforts to strengthen human rights, gender equality and increased participation of women in decision making. The Marshall Islands benefits from an EU-funded regional initiative promoting gender equality and the fight against GBV, the PPVAWG Phase II.

The Pacific Partnership Social Citizenship Education (SCE) component is implemented by the Pacific Community (SPC), in partnership with the National Public School System, and piloted across 12 schools in Majuro, Wotje and Jaluit. It emphasises social rights and obligations necessary to be part of, and to enjoy equal opportunities, benefits, and status in a community. It refers to active, informed and responsible citizens who know their human rights and

responsibilities, practice gender-equality, non-discrimination and inclusion, prevent violence, are concerned about the welfare of others, and are willing to contribute to the development of the country.

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: The Marshall Islands is one of the most active countries among the Pacific islands in terms of participation in core international human rights treaties, having ratified eight of the nine core international human rights instruments, as well as one Optional Protocol. They have not acceded to the 2000 UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol.

The Marshall Islands also remain a strong defender of international rule of law, condemning Russia's illegal, unjustified and unprovoked war in Ukraine, and having supported all – and co-sponsored most – Ukraine-related resolutions in the UNGA and UNHRC. Marshall Islands was a signatory of the Joint Communiqué on a Peace Framework, at the Summit on Peace in Ukraine in Switzerland in June 2024.

The Marshall Islands is a particularly active and vocal participant in climate change negotiations, being a strong partner for the EU in climate action in international fora, in particular the UN and the IMO. RMI was elected to the UNHRC 2025-2027 for the second time to serve as the only current Pacific member, with climate change and nuclear justice as its top priorities. RMI aspires to pursue a balanced agenda focused on strengthening accountability and elevating the voices of small states as essential bridge-builders in international dialogue.

In recent years, the Marshall Islands have raised the issue of the consequences of the US nuclear legacy. The Marshall Islands say that the US nuclear testing has left their citizens with some of the highest rates of cancer globally. Research conducted by the OHCHR revealed that 67 nuclear tests performed between 1946 and 1958 – by the United States in RMI – left communities displaced and contributed to radioactive land and sea pollution. The report was presented to the UNHRC in October 2024; its recommendations include establishing truth and non-repetition mechanisms, as well as adopting and supporting a transitional justice-driven approach.

The Marshall Islands underwent their third UPR in November 2020. RMI 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, GBV and women's rights, as well as human trafficking. RMI's next UPR is scheduled for October 2025.

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's latest election on 7 March 2023

to elect all 14 members of the unicameral national Congress saw a smooth and peaceful transition of power to the Simina administration. At the election, citizens also voted in 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 this, socio-economic discrimination and violence against women continue to be the most prevalent human rights problems the country faces, 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.

FSM is not covered by the Transparency International Annual Corruption perception index. However, FSM was covered in TPI's Global Corruption Barometer for the Pacific in 2021, in which a majority of respondents, including in FSM, responded that corruption was a problem in both the public and the private sectors, despite government efforts to control it.

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 respect, the protection and fulfilment of human rights, gender equality and the increased participation of women in decision making. The EU remains committed to supporting and raising awareness of civil society and non-state actors in FSM as an essential element of implementing 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. Implementation, enforcement, and integration of these principles into domestic laws and policies are equally important. Raising better public awareness about human rights and providing education on rights and responsibilities can contribute to a culture of respect for human rights in FSM.

In 2024, the EUDEL to the Pacific carried out démarches 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: An EUR 14.2 million EU-funded 'Sustainable Energy and Accompanying Measures' (SEAM) programme combines different components with the overall objective to enable FSM citizens to utilize affordable, reliable and environmentally sound energy. The NGO component provides a EUR 1 million grant to support increasing the participation of women and CSOs in the energy sector to enhance participation of non-state actors in policy dialogue, monitoring national programmes, economic reforms and public finance management with a particular emphasis on climate change, sustainable energy and environmental conservation. Specific focus will also be given to increase the empowerment and capacity of women in the island communities of Chuuk through solar engineer training and livelihood skills. This will lead to increased participation of these women in community decision-making, in particular on gender issues.

FSM ratified the CRPD and completed consultations and reporting for the CRC with support received through EU-funded projects. FSM is currently working on its new Disability Policy after the previous policy expired in 2018.

A new action 'Strengthening Water and Sanitation Governance in in the Federated States of Micronesia ' aims to support the Government in developing and implementing a cohesive package of policy, institutional, regulatory and financial reform, aimed at driving measurable progress towards the SDG6 targets of universal access to safe and resilient drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.

5. Multilateral context: The Federated States of Micronesia underwent their 3rd UPR in January 2021. FSM received 154 recommendations, of which it supported 141 and noted 13, most relating to ratification of international instruments and LGBTI rights. Recommendations pointed to challenges such as human trafficking, addressing gender discrimination, GBV and women's rights, establishing a NHRI, as well as the rights of children, including their access to health and education. FSM's next UPR is scheduled in January 2026.

FSM has been a key ally in international fora in condemning Russia's war in Ukraine, having supported all and co-sponsored most Ukraine-related resolutions in the UNGA, UNHRC and UNSC. FSM was a signatory of the Joint Communiqué on a Peace Framework at the Summit on Peace in Ukraine in Switzerland in June 2024.

FSM is a party to only three of the nine core international human rights instruments, as well as two optional protocols. FSM is not a party to the Rome Statute of the ICC, but is party to the 2000 UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol.

Republic of Nauru

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Nauru, the world's smallest republic with a population of about 12,500 people, 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. Nauru held general elections in September 2022 to elect 19 members of Nauru's unicameral Parliament for a new three-year term. A broad range of international actors were accredited as international observers for this election. MP Russ Kun was elected President, however ousted in a vote of no confidence in October 2023, when David Adeang was elected new President. The next parliamentary elections are expected to be held by September 2025.

On 15 January 2024, Nauru announced it was switching diplomatic allegiance to China, from having been one of Taiwan's four remaining Pacific allies. 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 NHRI in line with the Paris Principles. Nauru has been hosting the Nauru Regional Processing Centre, an Australian offshore immigration facility, which was scaled down and then reportedly resumed the reception of new refugees in 2023 and 2024.

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. 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 (NSDS) 2005-2025' and provides direction for all levels of society regarding Nauru's gender priorities. The government has a Directorate of Women's Affairs (DWA) within the Department of Home Affairs that is responsible for monitoring and improving the status of women and the quality of their lives. An updated Nauru National Women's Policy 2024-2034 was drafted in 2024. The Nauru Action Plan for National Gender Equality Policies 2025-2030 is a joint Action Plan that defines actions and activities to be undertaken to support three key national gender equality policies. These policies include the Nauru National Women's Policy 2024-2034, Nauru National Gender Mainstreaming Policy and the Gender Responsive and Inclusive Climate Change, Disaster Risk and Pandemic Response Policy.

As regards freedom of press and media, the criminalisation of criticism towards the government remains an important concern. In accordance with the 'Crimes Act 2016', criminal charges can be evoked 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 experience reduced access to water, food and other basic services.

2. EU action – key focus areas: Presently, there is are no key focus areas in Nauru as the EU is not providing any bilateral support to Nauru under the new programming.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: During 2024, the EUDEL for the Pacific reached out numerous times to the Nauru government via démarches 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 (PFM), Oversight and Accountability programme, Pacific – European Union Waste Management Programme (PacWaste Plus), Biodiversity and Protected Area Management (BIOPAMA II), SWITCH-Asia, Pacific EU Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme, BSRP II – Building Safety and Resilience in the Pacific, Climate Services and Related Applications Programme (ClimSA) and activities of the Regional Pacific NDC (Nationally Determined Contribution) Hub.

5. Multilateral context: Nauru completed its third UPR in February 2021. The next review is to be held in January 2026. Nauru is one of the few nations worldwide who recognise the two breakaway regions South Ossetia and Abkhazia of Georgia.

Nauru has voted in favour of most resolutions at the UN fora on Russia's aggression against Ukraine. However, Nauru did not vote on the UN Resolutions on the Situation of human rights in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, neither in 2023 nor in 2024. Nauru did not vote on the Russia-led Resolution on Glorification of Nazism in December 2024.

Nauru is also a key ally, together with other Pacific Islands Countries, in the fight against climate change.

New Zealand

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, New Zealand maintained its high rankings in international assessments on human rights and democracy.

In 2024, public discourse in New Zealand has gained significant momentum around the Treaty of Waitangi, driven by the introduction of the Treaty Principles Bill by ACT leader David Seymour. The Bill proposes redefining the principles of the Treaty through Parliament, bypassing traditional mechanisms. This has sparked intense debate, with critics asserting that the Bill undermines Māori rights. The introduction of the Bill has also prompted a massive public response, mainly from the Māori community. The bill was subsequently rejected in the Parliament on 10 April, 2025 by a large majority.

Certain domestic challenges persist regarding rights of the child. Pasifika children continue to experience the highest rates of poverty in the country. At the same time, efforts to strengthen child protection frameworks gained momentum with new legislation being adopted.

Gender-based and domestic violence continued to disproportionately affect women and girls in New Zealand, particularly Māori and Pasifika communities. In this context, in 2024 the lawmakers have unanimously voted to allow victims of domestic violence to file for divorce without the previously mandatory two-year separation period.

In 2024, New Zealand's Government significantly increased its commitment to disability support services.

Following the findings of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care, which revealed that approximately 200,000 children and vulnerable adults suffered abuse between 1950 and 2019, PM Christopher Luxon issued a formal apology to survivors of abuse in state and faith-based care, acknowledging the Government's failure and expressing deep regret.

Māori continued to be significantly overrepresented in New Zealand's prison system, comprising approximately 52% of the incarcerated population, despite representing only about 17% of the national population.

In September, New Zealand launched the Human Rights Monitor, an online tool designed to track recommendations from UN human rights mechanisms and the Government's progress in implementing them.

2. **EU action -key focus areas**: EU efforts focused on sharing best practices, raising awareness, and fostering meaningful policy dialogue. EUDEL engaged in several démarches, mostly in the context of the UNGA's Third Committee. EU and New Zealand continued to display great synergy in the UN system.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 5 July 2024, the EU and New Zealand held bilateral human rights consultations. The discussions reaffirmed shared commitments to human rights, including updates on New Zealand's forthcoming International Human Rights Action Plan. Both sides aligned on topics such as disabilities, gender equality, countering disinformation, and supporting Indigenous Peoples' participation in UN fora. Agreements included enhancing expert-level coordination on key issues, particularly the death penalty and environmental and Indigenous Peoples' rights.

EUDEL continued to promote EU policies and positions through social media and participated to various events dedicated to equality and inclusion.

4. EU financial engagement: There is no EU programming in New Zealand.

5. Multilateral context: In March, during the 68th session of the CSW, New Zealand reaffirmed its commitment to international efforts to combat violence against women and girls and support the LGBTI community.

In 2024, New Zealand underwent its fourth UPR. The Government accepted the majority of recommendations, supporting 168 out of 259 recommendations and partially supporting 12, demonstrating a commitment to enhancing human rights protections. Key recommendations included addressing systemic inequalities faced by Māori and Pacific peoples, strengthening protections for women and children against violence, addressing child and youth well-being, child poverty, and ensuring an adequate standard of living.

Republic of 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. Palau was ranked the highest in the inaugural Pacific Media Freedom Index (with data from 2023) launched in September

2024. The general election on 5 November 2024 was reportedly conducted in an orderly manner. President Surangel Whipps Jr. was returned for a second term.

There are, however, human rights concerns that still demand attention, such as addressing GBV, 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 and child exploitation offences. The government is demonstrating increased efforts to combat human trafficking, including amending the anti-trafficking law to increase penalties for trafficking crimes and improve protections for trafficking victims, investigating more trafficking crimes, identifying more trafficking victims, conducting public awareness campaigns, and providing protection services to victims.

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implements the law effectively.

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.

According to the Civicus Monitor[63], on a five-point scale – ranging from open, narrowed, obstructed to repressed and closed – the civic space in Palau is considered to be open and therefore favourable to the activity of civil society.

2. EU action – key focus areas: Persisting human rights and democracy concerns in Palau include gender inequality and GBV. 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 CSOs' engagement with the Government on policy dialogue and governance.

[63] https://monitor.civicus.org/country/palau/

3. EU bilateral political engagement: During 2024, the EUDEL to the Pacific carried out 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.

With climate change and human rights inextricably linked in the Pacific region, the EUDEL to the Pacific will continue to actively promote climate resilience and action in its interactions with Palau, including at multilateral level.

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 a EUR 0.2 million financial allocation was set aside to support civil society organisations in Palau.

Palau also benefits from the EU's regional flagship programme on oceans (the Pacific EU Marine Partnership – PEUMP). Streamlining activities with a gender, social inclusion and a human rights-based approach is a key aspect of the programme. Activities include for example, targeted gender trainings and workshops for fisheries professionals. Gender assessments of the tuna fisheries sector are being conducted to inform policy while also highlighting women's roles in food security along the food supply chains.

5. Multilateral context: Palau underwent its third UPR 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, GBV and women's rights, establishing a NHRI, the human rights implications of climate change as well as the rights of children, including their access to health and education. Palau's next UPR is scheduled in April 2026.

Palau has only acceded to two of the nine core human rights instruments, despite having signed – but not ratified – all seven others in 2011. Palau is Party to the 2000 UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol.

Palau has been a strong and consistent voice in condemning Russia's war in Ukraine at international fora. Palau established diplomatic relations with Ukraine in 2024. Palau's President attended the Summit on Peace in Ukraine in Switzerland in June 2024 and Palau was a signatory of the Joint Communiqué on a Peace Framework at the Summit on Peace in Ukraine at this Summit.

Palau is not a party to the Rome Statute of the ICC.

Independent State of Papua New Guinea

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Papua New Guinea, with a population of approximately 11 million, faces several human rights challenges. Papua New

Guinea ranks 169 out of 170 in the UNDP Gender Inequality Index (2022), with over 1.5 million women and girls experiencing GBV annually, often tied to conflict and domestic abuse.

Weak law enforcement and corruption hinder the implementation of human rights laws and policies, while deforestation and extractive projects affect biodiversity and human rights. Despite these challenges, Papua New Guinea has made strides in addressing human rights issues and positive developments were recorded, including: The establishment of a Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence in 2020; the abolition of the death penalty in 2022; the reinforcement of anticorruption institutional structures with the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in 2023; reinforcement of the anti-GBV capacities across the country; and progress in environmental protection and sustainable development initiatives.

2. EU action - key focus areas: One key area of EU engagement with Papua New Guinea on human rights issues was Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination, including the integration of gender equality in EU-supported programs, and the implementation of the 'Soim Wokabaut: EU Gender-Based Violence Referral Pathways Programme' signed in 2024 to combat GBV in Papua New Guinea. Another key area were HRDs. The EU allocated EUR 3.2 million for HRDs protection and capacity building and support through the NDICI CSO Programme to defend women and girls' rights. With regard to Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication, IDAHOT was marked with a social media campaign respecting local cultural and religious sensitivities. Various human rights days were observed through newspaper and social media campaigns, including International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, EU Green Diplomacy Week and the International Day against Death Penalty. On December 10, International Human Rights Day, EUDEL marked EU- Papua New Guinea human rights and governance achievements, and pushed for the Human Rights Commission. Ruth Kissam, a GBV activist, visited Brussels in October 2024 under the EU visitors program, gaining social media attention.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Political dialogue continues with the sixth Papua New Guinea-EU high-level meeting planned for 2025. In 2024, the EU carried out political démarches on Papua New Guinea's positions in multilateral organisations. The EU also supported the establishment of the Papua New Guinea Human Rights Commission in 2024 to help with human rights ratification and implementation. Progress was limited but recent efforts are encouraging.

The EU monitored Papua New Guinea's 2022 elections, providing 15 recommendations for electoral process improvements. Preparations for 2027 elections are underway with possible upcoming request for EU support.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU programming is focusing on environmental protection, including through the EUR 54 million Forestry, Climate Change and Biodiversity programme to support sustainable development and green jobs. Rule of law and anti-corruption is another priority with a budget of EUR 26 million for the EU-Papua New Guinea 'Partnership for Good Governance' to strengthen legal frameworks and fight corruption. Support for the Bougainville Peace Process and socio-economic development was also provided.

5. Multilateral context: Papua New Guinea voted in favour of a resolution on human rights in Ukraine, including Crimea and Sevastopol, and on human rights in Iran. Papua New Guinea abstained from a Russia-led resolution against the glorification of Nazism and voted against a moratorium on the death penalty.

Independent State of 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 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 that need to be addressed.

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 above, still only chiefs of villages (*matai*) may contest the elections. The number of women holding *matai* title is still low, but rising. Ms Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa was elected as Samoa's first female Prime Minister on 9 April 2021 and, in addition to her, six other women hold a seat in the Samoan parliament since the election in 2022. There is a quota for 10% of women in the parliament.

Physical and sexual violence against women and girls, discrimination, and gender inequalities 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. All forms of access and human rights of people living with disabilities are still not fully safeguarded in Samoa. Consenting relationship between adults of the same sex is still criminalised in Samoa, although there are no reports of the law being enforced. Social attitudes differ in respect of transgender community. Violence against children, generally tolerated as a form of discipline, is another human rights concern.

Samoa is the only Pacific Island State having an 'A Status' NHRI (Office of the Ombudsman) under the Paris Principles.

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.

Despite being the highest ranked Pacific Island Country in terms of press freedom in the index of RSF for 2024 and the only one with an A-rated NHRI, the Samoan Government unexpectedly announced media restrictions during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in October 2024, allowing only state media as official broadcasters and photographers.

Challenges with Samoa to implement its human rights obligations include lack of resources, limited data and statistics, insufficient capacity and technical assistance in progressing the work required especially when conducting legislative compliance reviews, proper

coordination of efforts, facilitating legislative reforms, implementation or enforcement of human rights obligations.

2. EU Action – key focus areas: Through dialogue with the Government and non-state actors, such as CSOs, in conjunction with various financial instruments, the EU has been promoting and advocating human rights, gender equality and prevention of violence against women and girls, as well as strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations.

Samoa benefits from several initiatives promoting gender equality and addressing GB, supporting economic rights, climate change adaptation and mitigation and improving the management of natural resources.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The new Samoa Agreement was signed in Samoa in November 2023, which further strengthened the excellent relations between the EU and Samoa.

Issues related to human rights and democracy were addressed during the Partnership Dialogue between the EU and Samoa held in Brussels in January 2024, where the EU and Samoa discussed, inter alia, priorities and developments in the area of human rights, and policies related to addressing gender equality and gender-based violence, and accession to international human rights instruments.

With climate change and human rights inextricably linked in the Pacific region, the EUDEL to the Pacific will continue to actively promote climate resilience and action in its interactions with Samoa, including at multilateral level.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the EU's funding instrument for 2021-2027, the Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), Samoa's priority sector for support is Water Resilience and Climate Change Adaptation. This initiative is implemented through a sector budget support, with an allocation of EUR 13.5 million to improve access to sustainable, safe, and affordable water, along with enhanced sanitation and hygiene services.

The EU has been supporting an enabling environment for an independent and vibrant civil society and has created spaces and opportunities for engagement, dialogue and strengthening capacity in strategic planning, implementation, and oversight between the Civil Society and the Government of Samoa. Several projects aimed at supporting capacity building and development of civil society. Samoa also includes projects for water resource management and hygiene.

The PPVAWG (Phase II – EUR 8 million) through the NDICI-Global Europe platform is financing a four-year programme to reduce rates and acceptance of violence against women and girls at country and regional levels.

5. Multilateral context: Samoa is a party to six of the nine core international human rights instruments and has accepted the individual complaints procedure under the CRC Committee, and has acceded to the two Optional Protocols to the CRC on children in armed conflict and

sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Samoa has extended a standing invitation to the special procedures of the UNHRC and has an outstanding visit request by the UNSR on the right to development. Samoa received a visit of the UNSR on toxics and human rights in 2024.

Samoa has been a key ally in international fora in condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, having supported all Ukraine-related resolutions. Samoa abstained from the Russia-led resolution on glorification of Nazism in December 2024.

Samoa underwent its third UPR in November 2021. Samoa was commended on progress made to improve the rights of persons of disabilities, the rights of women, children, fa'afafine and fa'atama (fluid gender roles), and Indigenous Peoples' cultural, political and economic rights. Samoa's attention was drawn to strengthening efforts in the elimination of gender-based violence, protection and safety of children, upholding media freedom and ratifying the three remaining core human rights conventions. The next UPR for Samoa is scheduled for May 2026.

Solomon Islands

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Solomon Islands is a constitutional monarchy with King Charles III as Head of State and a unicameral Parliament. Since the end of the ethnic and tribal violence of the period 1999-2003, recent elections in Solomon Islands have been regular, free, peaceful and well-administered, allowing the participation of international observers, with transparent and credible voting and counting.

General elections were held on 17 April 2024, having been postponed from 2023. It was the first time parliamentary, provincial and city (Honiara) council elections were held simultaneously. The elections were conducted in a peaceful and orderly manner, with important external support. The EU sent an Election Expert Mission, whose results and recommendations have been shared with the Government and the Electoral Office.

The overall human rights situation in Solomon Islands is stable and there are no systematic abuses. Enforcement mechanisms for international human rights instruments are often missing and implementation is therefore hampered – especially at outer lying islands. The limited technical, human and economic capacity within public institutions also contributes to this.

Corruption is a serious concern. In the Transparency International Annual Corruption Perception Index for 2024, Solomon Islands fell in the ranking from 70th to 76th out of 180 countries compared to 2023. While the law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, it is implemented inconsistently. 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.

Climate change has become an important human rights issue: as the climate crisis in the Pacific further escalates, Solomon Islands may soon start experiencing reduced access to water, sanitation, food, health and other basic services. As a result, this may lead to serious pressure.

Physical and sexual violence against women and girls, discrimination, and gender inequality remain the most significant human rights challenges in Solomon Islands. Although no laws limit participation of women and 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.

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 first Partnership Dialogue under the Samoa Agreement was held on 4 February 2025 in Brussels, focusing on issues of mutual interest for the EU and SI, such as human rights, rule of law, fight against climate change and biodiversity loss and protection of the seas.

During 2024, the EUDEL to the Pacific outreached numerous times to the SI government in order to support the EU's human rights priorities and initiatives at the UN and other international fora, notably on Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

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 to the Pacific manages an on-going Budget Support programme involving vigilant monitoring of government spending, in particular the Constituency Development Funds (CDFs).

4. EU financial engagement: Solomon Islands benefits from the second phase of the regional programme 'Pacific Partnership to End Violence against Women and Girls' for which the EU allocated EUR 8 million. The action has been strengthening the capacity of NSAs to advocate for gender equality as well as their ability to engage in monitoring gender equality and EVAWG commitments.

The two-year (2023-2025) 'Strengthening the Electoral Cycle in the Solomon Islands (SECSIP) Phase III' project (EU contribution: EUR 5.5 million) focuses on enhancing inclusive, informed and transparent electoral processes, including through accountable and effective electoral institutions.

The EU's current interventions targeting the civic space are in accordance with the Roadmap for Civil Society Engagement in the Pacific, which constitutes the policy framework for EU's support to civil society in the region. CSOs are also important implementing partners in various regional programmes dealing with gender equality or climate change resilience (Pacific-EU Marine Partnership programme, the Kiwa Initiative).

In 2024 a number of projects were launched in support of CSOs in the Pacific Island Countries. The global objective was to enhance civil society's engagement as actor of governance and development by building a dialogue with public authorities, advancing human rights issues, influencing policy and decision making processes and holding the Government accountable

for its performance towards citizens and society at large. A number of actions are currently under implementation that address inter alia 'Youth Economic And Climate Action', 'Building Voices For Accountability', 'Protecting and Promoting of Civil, Social, Economic and Human Rights for People with Disabilities' as well as an action on 'Strengthening the Capacity of Civil Society Organizations in Solomon Islands to Prevent Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and to Protect Survivors'.

The EU supports the multi-country Pacific Digital Democracy Initiative: this action – now worth EUR 1.4 million – contributed to progress participatory digitalisation processes in four target countries – Fiji, FSM, **S**olomon Islands and Tonga – in order to harness Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for more inclusive, rights-based democracy and development.

Under the same thematic programme, the EU recently launched the project 'A Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Approach to Combatting Impunity for Sexual Offences', led by Medical Services Pacific (MSP), which aims at ending impunity for sexual offenses through increased awareness and accountability for human rights violations through a strengthened, functional and supported reporting system.

5. Multilateral context: Solomon Islands completed its third UPR in May 2021. Following up on the recommendations of the UN Country Team, Solomon Islands 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) as well as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (22 June 2023). Solomon Islands's fourth UPR is scheduled to take place in May 2026.

Solomon Islands supported a number of UNGA resolutions to condemn Russia's war on Ukraine, while being absent from the 7 April 2022 UNGA resolution to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council and abstaining from the Resolutions of human rights in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (in 2023 and in 2024). Solomon Islands voted in favour of the Russia-led Resolution on the Glorification of Nazism.

Kingdom of 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. The Privy Council facilitates a continuing political role for the monarch. Tonga is a young democracy (the youngest in the Pacific) with democratic elections only since 2010.

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, traditional systems and cultural factors limit the participation of women in political processes and local government. In November 2021, Tonga elected an all-male Parliament, which is still

in power, though there was a change in the position of Prime Minister and a Cabinet reshuffle in December 2024. While the education level of women in Tonga is very high, this is not translated into the workforce and the way families view the roles of women.

Corruption and abuse of office are serious problems in Tonga despite government efforts to control it. Public officials and leaders of state-owned companies are sometimes held to account for bribery and other malfeasance, anticorruption mechanisms are generally weak and lacking in resources. In 2024, Tonga's first anti-corruption commissioner was sworn into office.

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 legal framework for preventing domestic violence. In 2022, Tonga adopted a changed definition for rape allowing for a more comprehensive definition to include marital rape, rape between partners. This will go a long way in ensuring women and girls can be protected by the law from intimate partner violence.

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. In May 2020, the Government passed a number of regulations with vague restrictions on publishing 'sensitive information'.

The legal status of same-sex relationships is not recognised in Tonga and consenting same-sex relationships between adults remain criminalised, 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: The EU continues assisting Tonga 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

In the area of human rights, 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.

With climate change and human rights inextricably linked in the Pacific region, the EUDEL to the Pacific will also continue to actively promote climate resilience and action in its interactions with Tonga, including at multilateral level.

4. EU financial engagement: Through the 'Support to the energy sector in Tonga' programme, the EU contributes to the Tonga's sustainable and inclusive low carbon development. Tonga benefits from many regional programmes, including on plastic waste, which is expected to generate improved economic, social, health and environmental benefits to the people of Tonga.

The Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls – Phase II tackles root causes of gender inequality and violence against women in the Pacific. In Tonga this programme, inter alia, provides support to the 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.

Thematic programmes such as the Pacific Digital Democracy project, established a strong commitment to digital rights by enhancing and strengthening the government and civil society participation to safety online, battle disinformation and hate speech and promote e-government. Under the CSO programme, a new project started in 2024 in Tonga, the Climate and WASH resilience community project aiming to build governance and resilience at community level and mitigate negative impacts of climate change on human rights.

5. Multilateral context: Overall level of ratification of key human rights conventions remains very low. Tonga is only a party to the CERD and the CRC. Tonga's report to the CERD Committee is due since 2001. In 2018, Tonga submitted its first report to the Committee of the CRC, the second one is due since 2023.

Tonga signed the CRPD in 2007, but has not yet ratified it. In February 2020, Tonga acceded to the 'UN Convention against Corruption'. In August 2020, Tonga ratified the ILO 'Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour'.

Tonga's last UPR was completed in May 2023. The Tongan government received a total of 173 recommendations. Tonga accepted 110 as a whole. The majority of these recommendations pertained to the ratification and accession to international human rights instruments, cooperation with human rights mechanisms, and requests for technical assistance. Despite the challenges in implementing human rights commitments given the limited capacity and resources, Tonga committed to continue its efforts to enhance the human rights situation both at national and community levels.

Tonga is not a party to the Rome Statute of the ICC.

Tuvalu

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Tuvalu is a constitutional monarchy. King Charles III is the Head of State. The country held its last four-yearly election to Parliament on 26 January 2024. Tuvalu has approximately 6,000 eligible voters and does not face serious governance issues; however, a frequent use of parliamentary vote of no confidence is a cause of instability.

There have been no reports of systematic violation of human rights in Tuvalu in 2024. Human rights are respected, 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.

However, a few areas of concern remain, in particular high level of GBV. Although Tuvalu's legislation does prohibit discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation, consensual same-sex relations remain criminalised under the Penal Code–although there are no reports of law enforcement.

GBV is rooted in traditional behavioural norms of a patriarchal society and often remains unreported due to a '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 level of gender-based, sexual and domestic violence remain elevated. 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. Women's rights and gender equality continue to be areas that need further improvement, including, inter alia, employment discrimination, land inheritance aspects or local governance arrangements. In the January 2024 elections, no woman was elected to the Parliament.

In Tuvalu, 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.

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 right to life, development, food, health, housing, water and sanitation. As one of the countries in the Pacific at risk of disappearing due to sea level rise, Tuvalu actively promotes discussions about statehood. In September 2023, Tuvalu enshrined a new definition of statehood in its constitution. A world-first, the constitution asserts the State of Tuvalu will continue to exist, even if its landmass disappears under rising sea levels.

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: During 2024, the EU carried out démarches and outreach activities inviting Tuvalu to support human rights initiatives, Ukraine and other EU priorities at the UN level.

With climate change and human rights inextricably linked in the Pacific region, the EUDEL to the Pacific will continue to actively promote climate resilience and action in its interactions with Tuvalu, including at multilateral level.

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 past focal areas for EU assistance to Tuvalu was environmental protection, more specifically waste management. The civil society support component of the programme included measures to support CSOs to actively engage in the programme and promote its sustainability.

The current EU cooperation is focused on the Tuvalu Coconut Sector Rehabilitation Programme. This assistance has a budget of EUR 4.5 million, supporting 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 rural communities.

Tuvalu became a focus country under the regional programme 'Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls', launched in November 2018 and which ended in December 2023. The programme brought 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. This support continued in 2024 with the launch of the second phase of the PPVAWG.

5. Multilateral context: There is limited administrative capacity due to the low population of approximately 11,000 citizens, which creates particular constraints with regard to reporting requirements under UN instruments. Tuvalu's report to the CEDAW Committee, due since March 2019, was submitted in January 2025.

Tuvalu is a party to four core international human rights instruments, regarding discrimination against women, the rights of the child, rights of persons with disabilities and torture.

Tuvalu underwent its fourth UPR in November 2023. Recommendations focused largely on increasing the accession to core human rights treaties, a prohibition against discrimination based on gender, disability and sexual orientation, implementing policies aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change, taking into consideration a focus on human rights, decriminalisation of homosexuality and improving access to health care. Tuvalu's government received a total of 167 recommendations and accepted 84 of them, stating that noted recommendations do not align to the sensitivities and accessibility of Tuvalu's context.

Tuvalu is not a party to the Rome Statute of the ICC.

Republic of 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. In a national referendum on 29 May 2024, a majority voted in favour of two constitutional amendments, which would bring more stability by restricting 'party hopping'.

Following the dissolution of the Parliament on 18 November 2024, a snap election took place on 16 January 2025. It was postponed by two days because of the devastating 7.3 earthquake that hit Port Vila on 17 December. On 11 February, the Parliament elected Jotham Napat, a former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs as Prime Minister.

No women were elected between 2008 and 2022, which made Vanuatu one of few countries in the world without a single female Member of Parliament until Julia King was elected in 2022. While King lost her seat in the January 2025 elections, another woman, Marie Louis Milne, secured a seat, maintaining the gender representation at one out of 52 MPs.

Otherwise, societal discrimination and violence against women remained the most significant human rights concern in Vanuatu. Although no laws limit participation of women and 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.

While consensual same-sex activity is legal in Vanuatu, LGBTI persons face legal challenges and discrimination. In 2024, a National Policy to ban advocacy and promotion for LGBTI issues was drafted and an amendment to the Marriage Act to ban same-sex marriage was adopted.

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. The independent judiciary constitutes a balancing element.

Corruption remains an endemic problem, given the close ties between politicians and the business community. In the ranking of Transparency International's Annual Corruption Perception Index, Vanuatu slightly improved its score in 2024 by two points, since 2023, reaching 50 out 100, ranking 57th out of 180 countries.

2. EU action – key focus areas: Through the bilateral Budget Support and Technical Assistance programme on value chains, the EU supports efforts to advance human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, progress towards Sustainable Development Goals and encourages an accountable and effective public administration. In addition, the support to CSOs is expected to have a positive impact on food security and gender equality.

EU actions in Vanuatu focused on preventing GBV, promoting climate actions and better management of natural resources.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: With regard to the EU, Vanuatu is an important partner in the Pacific – particularly on climate change, disaster risk reduction and ocean governance – and the third largest aid recipient in the region.

In April 2024, the first EU-Vanuatu Partnership Dialogue under the Samoa Agreement was held in Port Vila. It included discussions on the rule of law, democracy, and human rights. Vanuatu presented the latest progress it made in the fields of good governance, the fight against corruption, promotion of gender equality, tackling GBV and human trafficking. Vanuatu also informed about the ongoing ratification of international human rights instruments, and the prospect of establishing a fully-fledged NHRI.

Furthermore, the EUDEL to the Pacific outreached numerous times over the past year to the Vanuatu government, via démarches, to foster support for the EU's human rights priorities and initiatives at the UN and other international fora.

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 (CSOTCF) Programme', which allocates EUR 4.5 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. Projects with World Vision, Live and Learn, and Care have been implementing the initiative in 2024.

In 2024, Vanuatu has also benefited from a regional initiative promoting gender equality and the fight against GBV, the PPEVAWG Phase II, with the EU contribution of EUR 8 million, implemented by UN Women in collaboration with the Pacific Community.

5. Multilateral context: Climate change has become a serious human rights issue in Vanuatu. In December 2024, hearings were held at the ICJ on the case initiated by Vanuatu on states' legal obligation for climate action. Vanuatu, together with over 100 other nations and international organisations, including the EU and its MS, gave testimony in The Hague.

The country successfully completed its fourth UPR in May 2024. Out of 209 recommendations received, Vanuatu supported 169, including on the establishment of a NHRI compliant with the Paris Principles and the prevention of discrimination and violence against women and girls. Vanuatu noted 40 recommendations, of which three related to protecting freedom of expression and nine to rights of LGBTI persons.

Since Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine started on 24 February 2022, Vanuatu has mostly voted in favour of the UNGA resolutions to condemn Russia's war of aggression except for the one on the suspension of the rights of membership of Russia in the UNHRC, where it abstained. In 2024, Vanuatu voted in favour of the resolution on the situation of human rights in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, adopted on 20 November at the Third Committee session of UNGA 79. At the same time, Vanuatu voted in favour of the Russia-led resolution on glorification of Nazism.

The Americas

Antigua and Barbuda

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The twin-island of Antigua and Barbuda is a multiparty parliamentary democracy upholding civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. It operates under the rule of law with strong democratic institutions. Incidents of GBV and domestic violence, mostly affecting women and girls, as well as between same-sex partners and violence against LGBTI persons, remain a concern in Antigua and Barbuda. The significant underreporting can be attributed to social stigma and community pressure, victim blaming, lack of confidentiality and fear of reprisal. Child abuse remains a challenge in the forms of sexual abuse, neglect and abandonment, verbal abuse, and physical punishment. Corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool in schools remains legal in Antigua and Barbuda, although not commonly enforced. Societal norms continue to drive the LGBTI community underground, obstruct access to health services, contribute to discrimination and foster stigmatisation of LGBTI persons in Antigua and Barbuda. Since July 2022, in a significant development, there was successful challenge of the country's 'anti-buggery' law that used to criminalise same-sex relations. Crime rates have increased in the last year. The country's only prison suffers from substantial overcrowding, and does not meet UN standards. Prevalent across the Eastern Caribbean, the administration of justice in Antigua and Barbuda and in particular the backlog of cases remains a concern. Antigua and Barbuda retains death penalty, although no executions have been carried out since 1991. There has not been any political initiative or national discussion towards abolishing the death penalty in 2024.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU priorities continued to focus on the following areas: democratic governance and the rule of law; domestic and gender-based violence; the death penalty; discrimination and violence against LGBTI people; and child abuse.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights matters are regularly discussed in meetings with national authorities and CSOs in Antigua and Barbuda.

4. EU financial engagement: To combat discrimination against the LGBTI community the EUDEL is financing the project 'Caribbean LGBTIQ+ 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.

The EUDEL is funding eight beneficiary countries under the Partnership of the Caribbean and the European Union on Justice (PACE Justice) Regional Programme, aiming at assisting efforts towards reducing the worryingly high number of criminal case backlogs. The project is implemented by UNDP.

5. Multilateral context: EUDEL carried out formal démarches on Human Rights issues over the course of 2024. EU MS are involved in the démarches when and where possible.

Argentine Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Argentina remains among the 35 most democratic countries globally. In 2024, the human rights situation in Argentina faced additional challenges compared to the year before, notably in terms of women's rights, gender equality and LGBTI rights. The Ministry of Women, Gender, and Diversity, as well as INADI – the Argentinian anti-discrimination agency – were closed. Femicides in Argentina continued to rise, surpassing the record levels of the year before. The civic space has experienced restrictions with increasing repression of protests. Argentina has fallen 26 positions in the RSF World Press Freedom Index. The Government revoked the Indigenous Territorial Emergency Law, and voted against a UN resolution promoting Indigenous People's rights. HRDs have also been raising concerns about the revisionist views on human rights related topics, such as the memory of the military dictatorship. Poverty rates increased in 2024 up to 56%, taking however a slight turn downwards towards the end of the year.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU priorities continued to focus on the following areas: democratic governance and institutional strengthening; gender issues: the fight against violence and for equality; children's rights and protection; building a more equal society free of any type of discrimination against minorities or vulnerable groups; environmental rights and the right to live in a healthy and sustainable environment; and new technologies and digitalization, including media freedom.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued its broad political contacts, meetings and initiatives with both state and non-state actors engaged with human rights issues. The eighth EU-Argentina local Human Rights Dialogue was held on 28 May 2024, covering the human rights situation in Argentina as well as in the EU.

4. EU financial engagement: In total, the EUDEL´s portfolio of ongoing projects amounts to EUR 19.9 million. The EUDEL continued in 2024 to oversee the implementation of numerous human rights projects including challenges relating to digitalisation, which play a central role in the EU Human Rights agenda in Argentina. A project aiming to reduce gender gap in technology by promoting systemic change in educational systems to support girls to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics started in January 2024. In September, capacity building of trade union leaders and members started, as well as advocacy activities to bring about regulatory reform to improve work conditions.

EUDEL continued to co-finance and monitor the second year of implementation of 'Sociedad Civil en Red II', which aims to increase the participation of civil society in public decision-making, through dialogue between authorities and civil society organisations, as well as 'Alianza Universitaria Argentina Europea para la Transformacion digital'. The latter is carried out by a network of five Argentinian and four European universities to exchange best practices on promoting digitalisation between the public and private sector and academia as well as enhance digitalisation in university courses.

The project 'Tecnologías e Innovación para la Inclusión' will construct an interdisciplinary laboratory of biomechanics adapted for people with motor disabilities to acquire technical training. 'RED CREER - Modelo de Impacto Colectivo para la Inclusión Socio-económica de Personas Privadas de la Libertad, Liberados y Liberadas', has helped creating a national network of 161 CSOs, enterprises and public organizations which work closely to promote social and economic inclusion of imprisoned and recently released people. 'Bien Restituido -

para el desmantelamiento patrimonial del crimen organizado y el fortalecimiento de la sociedad civil', aims to enable reusing assets recovered from criminal activities to strengthen civil society and support victims of crimes. The draft law to enable this was presented at the National Chamber of Argentinian Deputies in May 2024. The project 'Sociedad civil y los recursos naturales: modelos innovadores para el desarrollo sustentable' was aimed at strengthening the capacity of communities to engage in constructive and informed dialogues with authorities and companies when it comes e.g. to mining and fossil fuels and was completed in October 2024. The project 'TRAMA' created a successful model for inclusion and 'Tape Pora' supported economic activities, provision of health services and bilingual education of the Mbya-Guaraní community both completed in 2024. Two more projects completed in 2024 addressed the issues of the poorest and indigenous communities. In Team Europe spirit, numerous additional activities have been financed through EU Members States.

5. Multilateral context: Argentina has taken an at times negative stance in multilateral human rights fora, expressing doubts on the merits of multilateralism. At the UNGA Third Committee, Argentina voted against resolutions supporting Indigenous peoples rights and the fight against violence against women in the digital domain. In the subsequent UNGA plenary vote, Argentina made a turn around and voted in favour of the latter. Argentine played an active role in addressing human rights violations in Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba.

Argentina has been a member of the UNHRC since 2019, with two terms: 2019-2021 and 2022-2024.

Commonwealth of the Bahamas

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The Bahamas is a stable democracy where political rights and civil liberties are generally respected. However, several human rights concerns persist. Crime continues to be a major issue in the country. Statistics from InSight Crime's website states that the country has recorded 110 murders for 2023 while data from the Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index ranked the Bahamas as 30 out of 180 countries with a score of 64 out of 100 for 2023. The Bahamas remains with a Tier 1 ranking in the US Trafficking in Persons Report 2024, which signifies that the country continues to meet minimum standards for eliminating trafficking and that the Government demonstrates serious and sustained efforts toward this. A 2024-2028 country strategy report by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) indicated that LGBTI individuals and migrants, particularly those without legal documentation, are at significant risk of facing discrimination and violence in The Bahamas. There is a lack of comprehensive date on the LGBTI population in the Bahamas. The migrants, particularly those lacking legal status, are reluctant to engage with governmental institutions due to fears of deportation or mistreatment. Additionally, individuals with disabilities encounter barriers in education, employment, and accessing essential services, including inadequate infrastructure and information.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 – 2027, the EU closely monitors human rights issues, with a focus on undocumented migrants, women's rights and gender equality.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The Bahamas and the EU held their Partnership Dialogue in November 2024. Delegates focused on the political partnership, economic cooperation and trade, human rights, good governance, environmental sustainability, and peace and security.

4. EU financial engagement: The Bahamas continues to receive benefit of various regional programmes, some of which focus on human rights issues, such as improving access to healthcare and energy following Hurricane Dorian in 2019.

5. Multilateral context: The most recent UPR for the Bahamas took place in October 2023. The Bahamas received 233 recommendations, 164 of which it supported and 69 were noted. Supported recommendations were related to the rights of women and girls, domestic violence and violence against women, the rights of the child, the right to education, climate change and the environment, the national human rights institution/ombudsman, and trafficking in persons.

Another significant development was the establishment of an OHCHR Regional Office in the Caribbean in the Bahamas. A resolution was tabled in 2023 in the UNHRC under the lead of the permanent mission of the Bahamas. It called for the establishment of the regional office and was endorsed by the CARICOM ministers of foreign affairs and supported by the CARICOM Secretariat. The resolution was adopted without a vote with a number of co-sponsors.

Barbados

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Barbados is a multiparty parliamentary democracy upholding civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. It operates under the rule of law with strong democratic institutions. Prevalent across the Eastern Caribbean, the administration of justice in Barbados and in particular the backlog of cases remains a concern. Incidences of gender-based and domestic violence – including male victims and violence between same-sex partners, often overlooked due to social stigma – remain a recurrent phenomenon in Barbados. Cases are not always reported due community pressure, shame and fear of reprisal. Child abuse remains a challenge in the forms of sexual abuse, neglect and abandonment, verbal abuse, physical punishment and family dysfunction. Corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool in schools remains legal in Barbados, although not commonly enforced. The latest Child Protection Bill, passed into law in 2024, seeks to amplify the rights of children, and allows for an early intervention in cases of abuse. While the Barbados' High Court adopted a significant ruling on the unconstitutionality of the 'anti-buggery laws' in 2022, LGBTI persons still face discrimination and stigma in various areas, including the workplace and educational institutions. Crime rates have seen a spike in the last year mainly due to small arms trafficking to the region, with the number of homicides reaching 50. The spike in the murder rates, particularly, comes amid growing concern over the increasing involvement of underage offenders in serious violent crimes. While the last execution took place in Barbados in 1984, there has not been any political initiative or national discussion towards abolishing the death penalty in 2024.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU priorities continued to focus on the following areas: democratic governance and the rule of law; domestic and gender-based violence; the death penalty; discrimination and violence against LGBTI people; and child abuse.

The EU additionally engaged in public diplomacy. Europe Day on 9 May was marked by outreach activities in primary schools across Barbados: Delegation staff helped refurbishing several playgrounds and engaged with pupils about the EU, including on human rights with the help of wristbands containing several articles of the UDHR.

EUDEL participated in the international 16 Days of Activism campaign against GBV through a campaign on all social media platforms used by the Delegation that entailed messages against violence. The EUDEL also displayed large light message against GBV on the exterior of the Delegation building in the evening and initiated the Red Shoes Project art exhibit in Barbados, raising awareness of the public and prompting its active engagement in the fight against violence against women and girls. 13 local and international partners joined in the project, including the Government of Barbados. The project displayed donated, used shoes painted in red, representing a group of women whose lives were taken or who are affected by GBV. The EUDEL participated in the Pride Parade in Barbados, displaying messages of support to the LGBTI community in the region across social media platforms.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human Rights matters are regularly discussed in meetings with national authorities and civil society organisations in Barbados.

4. EU financial engagement: To combat discrimination against the LGBTI community the EUDEL is financing the project 'Caribbean LGBTIQ+ 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.

The EUDEL is funding eight beneficiary countries under the Partnership of the Caribbean and the European Union on Justice (PACE Justice) Regional Programme, aiming at assisting efforts towards reducing the worryingly high number of criminal case backlogs. The project is implemented by UNDP.

5. Multilateral context: The EUDEL carried out formal démarches on human rights issues over the course of 2024. EU MS are involved in the démarches when and where possible.

Belize

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Belize remains a strong democracy, with regular, peaceful transition of power through competitive general elections. Belize continues to make strides in addressing human rights concerns, with ongoing efforts in constitutional reform, Indigenous rights recognition, and international cooperation. However, challenges remain, particularly in respect of the long-standing disputes with Guatemala and Honduras and the implementation of policies to ensure prior consultation with Indigenous communities and addressing recommendations from international human rights bodies. The Government has made progress in recognizing and protecting the rights arising from the Maya customary land tenure system, in compliance with the Caribbean Court of Justice's Consent Order of 2015 and is developing a Maya Land Tenure policy. However, no specific customary land tenure policy or legislation requiring prior consultation with Indigenous peoples on matters affecting them has been enacted. Crime remains a pressing issue for Belize. The Government has periodically introduced States of Emergency particularly in the Southside Belize City, following sharp increases in shootings. Human rights advocates have raised

concerns that these measures may lead to abuses as they grant police and other agencies the authority to incarcerate suspected gang members for 30 days without formal charges. At the same time, alleged unlawful abuse of force and killings by security officers remain of concern. Belize has not signed nor ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR on the abolition of the death penalty. However, there have been no executions in Belize since 1985 and there is currently no one on death row. On 3 December 2024, Belize demonstrated its commitment to promoting the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities by signing into law the Belize Disability Act. Further, on 16 December 2024, Belize acceded to the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons, further demonstrating its commitment to protecting the rights of the elderly.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, the EU provided support to government and civil society actors in Belize throughout the year. The Delegation focused on protecting and empowering individuals, building a resilient, inclusive and stable democratic society and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms. The annual EU-Belize Political Dialogue, as well as financial assistance are the main routes of engagement.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 27 May 2024, Belize and the EU held their first partnership Dialogue, under Article 3 of the Samoa Agreement, the new Partnership Agreement between the EU and members of the OACPS. Good governance, human rights, the deterioration of the security situation in Haiti, the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the war in Gaza, EU support for confidence building measures in the Adjacency Zone between Belize and Guatemala ahead of the ICJ ruling were among the main issues discussed.

The EUDEL maintains regular dialogue with local stakeholders on human rights related issues. EU MS also raise human rights issues with their high-level government partners during bilateral meetings. The Delegation also carried out démarches to seek support for EU priorities.

4. EU Financial Engagement: Several EU-funded projects for human rights were implemented in 2024, promoting economic, social, cultural and environmental rights particularly for vulnerable groups, including the poor, Indigenous people, women and girls. Key initiatives included a new three-year project signed in May 2024 between the EU and the Organization of American States (OAS) to continue their joint efforts in the Adjacency Zone between Belize and Guatemala until 2027. Furthermore, the EU provided support to the Sarstoon Temash Institute for Indigenous Management (SATIIM) for the promotion and protection of economic, social, and cultural rights of Maya women in Belize; as well as ongoing assistance to the Belize Network of NGOs (BNN) to strengthen local civil society organizations' capacities in advocating for and monitoring good governance, public accountability, transparency, and national constitutional reforms. The regional programme support focused on enhancing good governance frameworks.

5. Multilateral Context: Belize and the EU are likeminded in their support for democracy, multilateralism and the rules based order. The government of Belize is among several countries participating in international peacekeeping efforts in neighbouring Haiti. Belize also

plays an active role in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) advocating for regional integration and collective action on issues such as trade, security and climate change. The Human Rights record of Belize was examined by the UPR Working Group on 29 January 2024. Belize supported 127 of the 166 recommendations received. During the last UPR in 2024, Belize announced its intention to establish a Human Rights Institute, which would collaborate with the Office of the Ombudsman on human rights monitoring and advocacy. The EU remains committed to supporting Belize's efforts in these areas while advocating for abolition of the death penalty.

Plurinational State of Bolivia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In a political context characterised by persistent levels of polarisation, the limited independence of the judicial institutions is of concern. The yearlong delay in holding judicial elections reflects political gridlock, as well as an institutional conflict between the electoral authorities and the Constitutional Tribunal. There are question marks regarding the legitimacy and independence of the judiciary as courts decide on matters with considerable political ramifications, such as limits on presidential re-election and the leadership of the ruling party, as well as prison sentences for opposition politicians. Additional challenges concern the narrowing space available for independent media outlets, including cases of journalists facing harassment. Violence against women and the LGBTI community remain significant concerns, despite an existing legal framework to address them. The excessive use of pre-trial detention and prison overcrowding also remains an issue.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027, in 2024, the EU focussed on promoting the rule of law, access to justice, support and protection of HRDs, the rights of Indigenous peoples and LGBTI groups as well as the elimination of GBV.

In 2024, the EUDEL organised 77 meetings with CSOs, including 14 within the 'EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society'. These addressed topics such as elections, the Global Gateway initiative, GBV, LGBTI rights, environmental issues, media freedom, the UPR, rights of Indigenous peoples, and civic space.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights and democracy issues were addressed through regular dialogue with the Bolivian authorities and civil society, as well as through public diplomacy. In addition, in the framework of the EU's GSP+ monitoring, the EU was in constant exchange with Bolivian authorities regarding human rights and democracy issues. The Joint Staff Working Document, published in November 2023, was received by the Government in a constructive manner. In October 2024, Bolivian authorities provided detailed written information on the implementation of GSP+ -related international conventions on human rights.

The EUDEL leads the International Coordination Group on Justice, gathering all donors in the sector. This group has two levels of dialogue: technical and political, the latter with the Minister and senior authorities. The discussions have addressed projects to support the digitalization of judicial processes to improve transparency and fight corruption.

Ahead of Bolivia's UPR in January 2025, the EUDEL organised consultations with CSOs. Such activities have focused on reviews of the past UPR processes, follow-up on the recommendations and new ones for the current process.

4. EU financial engagement: EU support to judicial reforms is composed of initiatives implemented by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), supported with EUR 1.77 million, and UNODC, supported with EUR 1.23 million. The programme supports several sector institutions such as the judiciary, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of Justice, schools of judges and prosecutors, as well as public defence institutions, through financial and technical assistance. The EU also works with civil society to support monitoring and advocacy of justice policies, including a EUR 1 million initiative to promote justice reform with the local foundation Construir.

In 2024, EUDEL has supported three new projects under the NDICI Human Rights thematic line: a project on informed voting and electoral observation with a focus on vulnerable populations, strengthening the rights of LGBTI populations by building synergies among LGBTI organisations and other CSOs, and to combat social polarisation, by engaging Indigenous, rural, youth, and women's organisations in grassroots dialogues. The total EU contribution comes to EUR 3.2 million.

Since 2023, the Delegation, in partnership with UN Women, has been implementing an innovative, multisector programme to combat GBV across 94 rural or peripheral municipalities. This ambitious project encompasses both prevention and support for victims, using innovative solutions such as pooling budgets and resources from multiple municipalities to form inter-municipal associations. The total EU contribution is EUR 3.44 million.

Since 2021, a regional EIDHR project has been implemented in Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador (EUR 1.5 million) on human rights and environmental protection in the mining sector. In collaboration with Spain, the Delegation has supported initiatives to strengthen Indigenous communities in vulnerable situations since 2023. This includes community life plans that integrate intergenerational and gender-focused approaches. This project also seeks to promote advocacy and dialogue between Indigenous peoples and the rest of the country. In 2024, the total EU contribution in Bolivia amounted to EUR 350.000.

5. Multilateral context: The Delegation engages actively with the Foreign Ministry, notably ahead of votes on the UNGA Third Committee and the UNHRC. Following Bolivia's recent election to the UNHRC 2025-2027, the Ministry has expressed interest in defining joint priorities with the EU, notably on gender issues. Bolivia is in the process of developing a feminist foreign policy, and during 2024, the Delegation and EU MS have participated in meetings with the diplomatic academy to provide inputs for this new policy direction. Bolivia joined the EU-LAC Digital Alliance underscored by a joint commitment to promoting a human rights based approach to the digital transformation and and to bridging the digital divide.

Federative Republic of Brazil

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, Brazil's government continued implementing positive initiatives in the area of human rights. It reinstated the Special Commission on Political Deaths and Disappearances, which investigates killings and enforced disappearances during Brazil's dictatorship; apologised for abuses committed

against Indigenous peoples during the dictatorship, as well as for the country's role in slavery. The state launched the 'JurisRacial' platform, which compiles and provides legal documents on racial issues, relaying information on how to fight racism through legal means. President Lula declared the homologation of further Indigenous territories, bringing the total number of official demarcations to 13 since January 2023. The 2024 Global Freedom of Expression Report registered that Brazil jumped from 87th in 2023 to the 35th position in 2024, reaching the highest possible 'open' classification. Brazil's Supreme Federal Court (STF) shut down the social media platform 'X' for 40 days, for refusing to block a number of users accused of spreading disinformation related to the 8 January 2023 attacks against government buildings in Brasilia. Data released in 2024 showed that in 2023, severe food insecurity fell by 85%, to 2.5 million people, and malnutrition fell by a third, to 6 million people. However, a number of human rights and democracy indicators remained of concern. Data issued in 2024 showed that in 2023, Brazil remained one of the countries with the highest levels of homicides – over 46,000. A December 2024 study by the Brazilian Forum for Public Security registered that violent deaths in the Legal Amazon (spanning nine Brazilian states) were 40% higher than the national average, due to the increased activities of criminal groups. Femicides and rape of women and girls remained high. Police violence is still frequent, with over 6000 people killed, mainly young black men. Violence against HRDs and Indigenous peoples, including killings, continued, particularly in the context of land rights disputes and the ongoing debate over the 'Marco Temporal' legislation. Indigenous territories continued to face significant challenges due to deforestation and illegal mining.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2024, democracy and human rights remained a political priority for the EU and its MS in Brazil. Based on the 2007 Strategic Partnership, the EU and Brazil have continued regular exchanges on human rights, both at bilateral and multilateral levels, including with an EU-Brazil Human Rights High Level Dialogue in July 2024 in Brazil, co-chaired by the EUSR for Human Rights, Olof Skoog[64]. The visit by the EUSR was also an opportunity to raise human rights issues, including the rights of Indigenous peoples, with the various governmental interlocutors, civil society organisations and Indigenous representatives and deepen the bilateral and multilateral cooperation for the protection and promotion of human rights.
Following the adoption of the 2020 EU Gender Action Plan III, the EU prepared a Brazil-level action plan, whose implementation started 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. The EU remained in constant contact with Brazilian civil society actors, HRDs, independent journalists, representatives of Indigenous peoples and of minority groups, drawing on their knowledge and expertise to build an informed opinion about the human rights situation in the country. This work with civil society has shown to be essential to preserve their space.

[64] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/brazil-high-level-dialogue-human-rights-between-brazil-and-european-union-%E2%80%93-joint-statement_und_en.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: After a one-year gap, the High-level EU-Brazil Human Rights Dialogue resumed, co-chaired on the EU side by the EUSR for Human Rights. The Dialogue covered the complete array of human rights issues and was preceded by a civil society consultation.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU implemented projects benefitting HRDs including Indigenous representatives and environmental activists. The projects aimed at building capacity of Indigenous organisations, supporting individual human rights defenders at risk and reinforcing institutional human rights guarantee mechanisms such as the Escazú Agreement. The EU funded projects on gender equality, fostering the economic inclusion of women, promoting the participation of Indigenous women in decision-making processes and strengthening a network of women's organisations. The EU funded projects fostering good governance via CSOs in the areas of urban development and mobility, socio-economic development, basic sanitation, transparency, public governance, social participation and climate justice. In partnership with local partners, EU support contributed to strengthen Brazil's information environment at a crucial time, when the advancement of AI and the proliferation of social networks raise ethical and regulatory issues that need to be addressed responsibly and effectively.

Under the EU's regional programmes, El PAcCTO 2.0 started activities with Brazilian justice and security institutions in order to strengthen the EU-Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) Dialogue on justice and security, and started a new work strand on the protection of indigenous communities. Through EUROFRONT, Brazilian authorities have strengthened their cooperation with neighbouring countries and Europe against the traffic of human beings and the illicit trafficking of migrants. COPOLAD fostered development-oriented drug policies.

5. Multilateral context: On January 2024, Brazil started its sixth mandate at the UNHRC 2024-2026, where it is a member of nine core groups. The last UPR of Brazil dates from 2022, where Brazil received 306 recommendations. Brazil has issued a standing invitation to UN special procedures since 2001. The most recent visits were by the UNSR on Racism in August 2024 and the UNSR on Human Rights Defenders in April 2024. Brazil has ratified all the core human rights instruments, with the exception of the 'International Convention on the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Family'.

Canada

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Canada continues to enjoy a good human rights situation domestically and a strong global reputation as a defender of human rights. It also advocates for a firm stance against discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, race, religion, age, or ethnicity. Some challenges persist concerning Indigenous rights, the rights of migrant workers as well as corporate accountability in the extractive industries. These are in spite of several priorities that Canada has highlighted, including the promotion of reconciliation and the advancement of Indigenous Peoples' rights, gender equality, and empowering women and girls through its feminist foreign and international assistance policies. While the provision of essential services and infrastructure for Indigenous communities has improved, there is a substantial funding gap remaining. In April 2024, the UNSR on the right to water and sanitation urged the Government to address discrimination against, and marginalization of, Indigenous communities by

addressing water advisories (indicating drinking water is unsafe), toxic contamination, and the criminalisation of water defenders. The Government is fighting a number of legal battles, including continued discussions on the finalisation of the settlement of compensation for First Nations children having been removed or denied essential services. In June 2024, the Report of the National Inquiry into 'Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' was released by the Assembly of First Nations, which found that only two of the Inquiry's 231 recommendations had been fully implemented – with limited or no progress. During the review of Canada by the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in October 2024, a lack of involvement in the development of gender equality policies, significant barriers to participation in public life and persistent stereotypes and practices against Indigenous women were reported. This committee reported an increase in the number of cases of GBV affecting Indigenous women. On migrant workers' rights, Canada's Temporary Foreign Workers Programme (TFWP) remains problematic as far as it ties migrant workers' temporary visas to a single employer, controlling both their migrant status and labour conditions. In July 2024, the UNSR on contemporary forms of slavery concluded that Canada's temporary foreign worker programme is rife with abuses and is a breeding ground for contemporary forms of slavery. On corporate accountability, the Trudeau government has taken steps to address impunity for abuses by Canadian companies overseas but has yet to pass mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence legislation. Attacks on LGBTI persons keep rising in Canada, particularly targeting the transgender community both online and offline.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In line with the Strategy and the main pillars of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027, a number of activities were organised by EUDEL and EU MS in Canada. Given the good human rights situation in Canada, these activities have aimed to continue promoting meaningful collaboration and exchanges of best practices between the EU and Canada on human rights issues around the world. In addition events were organised by the EUDEL in Canada under four strands: Protecting and empowering individuals (including engagement with Indigenous Peoples; raising awareness on various issues of the LGBTI communities and supporting Women's role in trade under CETA; building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies; promoting a global system for human rights and democracy (including engagements on the 'Summit on Peace in Ukraine' in June 2024; and delivering by working together.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The Human Rights Dialogue foreseen under the Strategic Partnership Agreement took place in June 2024. Discussions focused on human rights development in EU and Canada, cooperation on multilateral human rights fora, geographic and thematic priorities for further work, including rights of Indigenous peoples and human rights in the digital context. The EUDEL also launched its first Human Rights Platform in Canada in 2024.

4. EU Financial engagement: No EU financial engagement exists.

5. Multilateral context: On the international stage, Canada has continued to stand up for human rights and democracy and has announced it will be seeking a seat on the UNHRC for the 2028-2030 term. EUDEL, together with EU MS, delivered a démarche in support of EU priorities at the UNGA Third Committee to Global Affairs Canada. The exchange confirmed the strongly likeminded approach by Canada and the EU on the agenda of the Third Committee.

During the Human Rights Dialogue, two major themes covered the EU-Canadian cooperation on multilateral human rights fora, as well as geographic and thematic priorities. This exchange identified fields of engagement, notably the recently launched Global Initiative Against Impunity that the EU and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples co-funded.

Republic of Chile

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Promotion and protection of human rights remained high in Chile's agenda. Chile is classified as 'free' under the Global Freedom Index (94 out of 100 in 2023, Freedom House). It ranks 'very high' on the Human Development Index and income inequality has been declining. The death penalty remains in the Code of Military Justice, but capital punishment has not been used since the restoration of democracy. Rights groups have criticised the lack of accountability and the lack of an effective reparations policy for victims of human rights violations. Chile has adopted a far-reaching Framework Law to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence Against Women, and has the best Gender Inequality Index score in the LAC region. Security and migration have become major public concerns in Chile leading to growing support for harsher border management policies, with rights groups warning of the need to protect migrants and refugees. New labour laws passed in 2024 included the 'Ley Karin' establishing new standards for reporting, investigation and sanctioning workplace harassment and violence at work. Violence in the south of Chile linked to conflicts with the Indigenous Mapuche peoples have dropped significantly, but the Government has yet to lift the state of exception while it works to replace the military presence in the area with appropriately trained police.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU in Chile had five priorities in 2024: Strengthening the institutional framework of human rights, rule of law and accountability; supporting the rights of groups in vulnerable situations, including: women and girls, children and adolescents, Indigenous peoples, LGBTI, migrants, and HRDs; economic, social, cultural rights; business and human rights; and strengthening access to information and fight against disinformation and corruption.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to engage with all relevant Chilean stakeholders, including the Government, human rights institutions and civil society organisations. The XIII EU-Chile Annual Human Rights Dialogue was held on 2 December 2024, with opening remarks by the EUSR for Human Rights, focusing on three priority areas: business and human rights, gender equality, as well as Indigenous women and migrants in vulnerable situations. Chile and the EU shared multilateral priorities on human rights. The next-generation EU-Chile Advanced Framework Agreement, ratified in 2024, foresees further deepening political dialogues between the sides, including on human rights, and it was ratified by Chile in 2024. The EUDEL has been working with several Chilean and international NGOs and CSOs on issues related to the Human Rights Dialogue's agenda, and continues to support the Commission for Peace and Understanding.

4. EU financial engagement: During 2024, the EU and its EU MS continued to support the priorities mentioned above:

With the aim to strengthen the institutional framework of human rights, rule of law and accountability, the EU launched four new projects with CSOs in 2024 under the Human Rights

and Democracy line, including an initiative to make Chile's legislative process more transparent, inclusive, accessible, and accountable; a project to strengthen democracy by enhancing the capacity of CSOs in the areas of integrity, transparency, and participation; and a project aimed at promoting the transparency and accountability of Global Gateway Initiatives through consultative platforms and sounding boards.

The EU was also supporting initiatives protecting the rights of groups in vulnerable situations. The EU's 'EUROsociAL Fase Puente' project focussed on combatting violence against women, including by establishing a unified data base on cases of violence. A project to strengthen protection for vulnerable children supported the creation of a new Observatory for Children, as well as a network of organisations working for children's rights. The EU partnered with Observatorio Ciudadano to enhance the participation of Indigenous peoples in Chile's Commission for Peace and Understanding, aimed at documenting, mapping, and systematizing cases of historic land dispossession of Mapuche territories. In April 2024, Chile joined the Eurofront regional programme of assistance in border management, including the integration of gender-based approaches to border management. The EU supported CSO projects aimed at strengthening mechanisms to protect the rights of migrants and refugees and strengthening their right to quality education, including the rights of migrants in the fruit-agricultural sector. EU-supported projects promoted the development of public policies and regulations that incorporate environmental justice, human rights and climate change, as well as improving equitable access to justice for human rights victims including human rights activists, defenders, lawyers, and students.

In the field of economic, social, cultural rights, EU projects focused on strengthening social and trade union alliances to foster a just transition, encourage sustainable territorial development to protect native forests, and promote environmental justice including the rights of rural communities to water and a healthy environment.

Another priority was the issue of business and human rights. The EU launched the second edition of the 'Responsible Business Conduct in LAC', together with implementing partners ILO, OHCHR and OECD. The EU also funded a project aimed at strengthening CSOs in Chile to advocate for human and environmental rights within the business sector.

With regard to strengthening access to information and fight against disinformation and corruption, the EU supported the fight against disinformation under a regional FPI project aimed at raising resilience among key stakeholders against foreign and domestic information manipulation, as well as strengthening democratic mechanisms through greater media literacy and fact-checking initiatives.

5. Multilateral context: Chile is a like-minded partner of the EU and a key ally in the defense and promotion of the universality of human rights, the rules-based international order, and respect for international law and IHL. The country is a particularly staunch ally on gender equality, non-discrimination and LGBTI rights. Chile plays an active role at the UN on the promotion of human rights in Latin America (e.g. Venezuela, Nicaragua). It has been vocal in its support of the UNSG and the ICC. Chile regularly coordinates with the EU on human rights issues in multilateral contexts, such as the UNHRC, the UNGA Third Committee, the CSW, and environment fora including COP meetings. Chile is a member of the UNHRC for the period 2023-2025, and is seeking re-election for 2026-2028. In 2024, Chile underwent its fourth cycle of the UPR and the eighth periodic report at the CSW, accepting most of the recommendations.

Republic of Colombia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, Colombia has implemented significant initiatives to improve the human rights situation, including through the appointment of renowned HRDs and activists to key institutions, fostering a more effective dialogue with human rights platforms and organisations, as well as a better understanding of their needs. However, violence remains a challenge in some regions of the country and solutions do not reach the most vulnerable territories. 'Total Peace', which is President Petro's flagship proposal to end the Colombian conflict, has resulted in some progress, but faces significant challenges. Despite several ceasefires and ongoing peace dialogues, major human rights concerns persisted, particularly extrajudicial killings, civilian massacres and forced displacement. The Government has shown a willingness to improve the protection for social leaders and HRDs, but responses to rapid alerts by the Ombudsman´s Office still need to be ensured. In spite of an increase in its budget, the restructuring of the National Protection Unit has fallen short. In 2024, the National Process of Guarantees was revived, after some years of inactivity. According to the Colombian NGO INDEPAZ, 162 HRDs had been killed in the country, a slight decrease compared to the previous year. The new Attorney General introduced a strategic action plan to enhance the effectiveness of criminal investigations and address high-impact social cases, such as the murders of community leaders and HRDs. Over the past two years, the Government has also made historic progress in recognising the State's responsibility in cases of severe human rights violations. Public acts of apology led by President Petro and his participation in land restitution ceremonies for victims of the conflict, Indigenous communities, and 'campesinos' reflect this commitment. At the end of 2024, the Government adopted Colombia's first Plan of Action on 'Women, Peace and Security' under UN Resolution 1325, recognising the leadership of women as peacebuilders.

2. EU action – key focus areas: EU action focused on seven priority areas: prevention of violence against social leaders, environmental leaders, HRDs and unionists; gender equality, namely the participation and empowerment of women; guaranteeing the rights of the LGBTI community; guaranteeing the rights of Indigenous and afro-descendant people and other vulnerable populations; guaranteeing the rights of the migrant population; human rights in the context of peacebuilding and conflict prevention; democratic and human rights empowerment for sustainable development.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The 15th edition of the EU-Colombia Human Rights Dialogue took place in Bogotá on 2 July 2024 co-chaired by Vice-Foreign Minister Elisabeth Taylor Jay and EUSR for Human Rights Olof Skoog[65]. A high-level meeting in the context of the EU-Colombia Political Dialogue where human rights were discussed took place in Bogotá on 12 November 2024 co-chaired by Colombia's Vice-Foreign Minister Jorge Rojas and EEAS DSG Enrique Mora. The human rights situation in Colombia was also addressed in numerous meetings of the EUDEL and the EU Heads of Mission with the participation of Government figures and HRDs. EU Special Envoy for the Peace Process in Colombia, Adrianus Koetsenruijter, visited Colombia twice in 2024, making EU support to the peace process and to human rights more visible. Both he and the EUDEL carried out various missions to

[65] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/colombia-joint-press-statement-14th-eu-colombia-human-rights-dialogue_en#:~:text=The%20EU%20and%20Colombia%20agreed,the%20first%20semester%20of%202024

accompany three peace processes currently underway. The EU and its MS diplomats carried out field visits of to remote areas (e.g. Buenaventura) and supported HRDs, democracy and peace through the campaign ´DefendamosLaVida´.

4. EU financial engagement: The bilateral Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2021-2027 focuses on peace and on the environment. The peace projects, totalling EUR 38 million, aimed to address the root causes of armed violence and poverty in Colombia, focusing on reintegration of former combatants, socio-economic integration of migrants, combating GBV and continuing support to the Special Jurisdictions for Peace. In addition, two projects were launched in 2024 to support victims' engagement in the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, as well as the work of the Office of the Commissioner for Peace. EU continued providing vital support to the promotion and protection of human rights in particular of social leaders and persons qualified as HRDs, including Indigenous and Afro-descendants, as well as migrants. The EU has continued strengthening institutional support to the Ombudsman's Office, particularly its ability to follow up on its early warnings. Through EU emergency grants and national mechanisms, the EUDEL and EU MS have ensured the provision of individual and collective emergency support to several HRDs and organisations facing imminent threats. The EU and its MS provided support for women's access to transitional justice mechanisms, participation in the Women Peace and Security Agenda, the economic empowerment of women, the reincorporation of female ex-combatants, as well as to address GBV against women, girls and the LGBTI population. The EU contributed to actions aimed at guaranteeing the rights of migrants, as well as the integration of migrants in Colombia, particularly Venezuelans. The EU has provided support to consolidating protective environments at community and school level to prevent recruitment of children by armed groups. The EUDEL continued to support the strengthening of business and human rights standards of both government authorities and private companies.

5. Multilateral context: The EU works very closely with the UN in Colombia, in particular with the OHCHR, for the promotion and protection of human rights. The EU also has a lot of interaction with the Mission to Support the Peace Process of the Organisation of American States (MAPP/OEA), given its central role in the peace process, particularly in the negotiations with FARC-dissident group EMBF. Colombia's voting patterns in multilateral fora generally align with the EU, particularly in the area of human rights. To support and consolidate this trend, the EUDEL, together with EU MS, carried out various démarches and interventions in 2024. On 9 October 2024, Colombia was for the first time ever elected to the UNHRC, for the period from 2025 to 2027.

Republic of Costa Rica

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Costa Rica is a country renowned for its longstanding commitment to democracy and human rights. The country's robust legislative and institutional framework remains a cornerstone of its human rights approach. In 2024, the country made notable socio-economic strides, with the poverty rate dropping to 18.0%, the lowest since 2010. Extreme poverty also saw a significant decrease, falling to 4.8% from 6.3%. However, regional disparities persisted. Regarding education, despite a decade-low budget allocation of just 5.2% of GDP, a national conversation arose about the sustainability of Costa Rica's educational progress. With a literacy rate of around 98% since

2021, Costa Rica remains one of the top performers in Latin America in terms of literacy and educational attainment. However, press freedom and hate speech, rising levels of violence, migration, GBV, as well as sexual and reproductive rights were the main challenges in 2024. Costa Rica experienced a decline in the RSF World Press Freedom Index, with a score of 76, marking its lowest rating in 14 years (26th globally), reflecting concerns over press freedom and the rise of hate speech, including through increased legal and verbal attacks, as well as online harassment on journalists and media outlets. Costa Rica continues experiencing a troubling rise in violence, with the homicide rate reaching alarmingly high levels, ranking 2024 as the second most violent year in its history. Only 30% of homicide cases were solved in recent years. Women and youth are disproportionately affected. Costa Rica's National Institute of Women (INAMU) reported that one in every three women has experienced some form of violence, underscoring the gendered nature of crime. As a host and transit country for migrants and refugees, Costa Rica saw a total of over 269,000 transits between January and September of 2024. Despite having progressive migratory policies, the rising numbers highlighted the strain on resources and the complexity of integrating such populations into society. The Government implemented measures to improve refugee documentation and integration. A report by the UN Population Fund revealed alarming statistics regarding adolescent pregnancies in Costa Rica highlighting the urgent need for continued efforts to promote sexual and reproductive rights and gender equality.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU action in Costa Rica continues to focus on the protection of the international human rights system and the empowerment of vulnerable groups (such as Indigenous people and afro-communities, HRDs, migrants and refugees). New key focus areas have also emerged such as protecting citizens against disinformation and hate speech or, from a gender perspective, strengthening restorative justice mechanisms and alternative sentences as the country reinforces its security efforts.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In regards to labour rights, the Delegation supported the First Symposium on Business and Human Rights that took place in San José. This event represented a platform for reflection, education, and discussion to promote the effective integration of human rights into business practices and the role companies must have in fostering democracy. EUDEL in Costa Rica hosted the sixth edition of the Gender Equality Award on 6 December 2024. This year's edition placed a special focus on the rights of Indigenous and afro-descendent communities and the award was discerned to Thalia Jimenez, an Indigenous Ngäbe Leader, dedicated to social inclusion. The EU supported the organisation and participated at the Ambassador level in the march against violence against women, marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women which gathered 150 people in Limón, one of the most violent parts of the country. The EU continued its engagement with youth in Costa Rica and gathered with local leaders and members of the Youth Sounding Board (YSB) – Cabildo 36 for a capacity building session on communication, politics and future planning of joint work and collaboration for 2025. In order to address the current challenges faced by journalism, both in Costa Rica and internationally, in December the EUDEL organized a roundtable discussion with journalists from prominent media outlets and experts. It was an opportunity to discuss the challenges to modern journalism, access to public information and how technological advancements have fuelled disinformation and manipulation, weakening democracies.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, the EU continued to implement several cooperation projects with a strong human rights component, focusing strongly on Protecting and Empowering Individuals, the first strand of the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027. The EUDEL continued the actions of five contracts signed at the end of 2023 which aim to protect and empower populations in Costa Rica that have historically seen their rights violated, with a special focus on Indigenous peoples and Afro communities; contribute to the social and economic integration of the forcibly displaced people and to simultaneously promote business and human rights, and finally to counter the abuse and misuse of digital technologies. The projects themes range from advocacy for Afro-descendants, Indigenous and labor rights to fighting disinformation. Projects, such as Shelter City Costa Rica, aim at comprehensive protection and international relocation for HRDs at risk, along with Casa de la Alegría which seeks to expand and disseminate an approach to improve living conditions and dignified employment in agriculture for migrant families through cooperatives. The CSAEM project, focusing on health coverage and employability for migrant and refugee populations, has also made significant contributions.

5. Multilateral context: In 2024, Costa Rica underwent its fourth UPR by the UNHRC. Out of the 299 recommendations the country received, Costa Rica already accepted 161. While some recommendations of the UPR, such as legalizing abortion, were not accepted, Costa Rica is willing to engage on all the different issues: authorities committed to structuring a follow-up action plan for the forth cycle of the UPR with the involvement of civil society on the basis of the results of the consultation process leading to the Report. Additionally, Costa Rica also presented its Third Voluntary National Review on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the UN High-Level Political Forum in July 2024. Within ECOSOC, Costa Rica continued to serve as co-chair of the Commission for Social Development, and as a member of the Human Rights Council (2023–2025), it continued to promote human rights globally. Costa Rica also stood out by hosting the Immersed in Change high-level ocean action event that took place the 7th and 8th of June 2024, a precursor to the 2025 UN Ocean Conference in Nice, which Costa Rica will co-host with France.

Republic of Cuba

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The situation of human rights in Cuba remained a matter of serious concern in 2024 given the persisting limitations on the effective exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms, in particular, the full enjoyment of political and civil rights. The Government has shown no will for political liberalisation, and severe economic and natural crises have undermined Cubans' enjoyment of various economic and social rights, leading to the island's largest outflow of migrants since the 1960s. Restrictions on the activities of local HRDs, journalists, academics, artists, performers, and critical voices, have limited pluralism. Persisting imprisonment of peaceful protesters and pro-democracy activists, notably those arrested during the July 2021 demonstrations, conditions in some detention centres, reports of alleged harassment, arbitrary arrests, travel restrictions on individuals dedicated to defending fundamental rights, remain issues to be addressed. The US embargo and Cuba's designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism (SST) continued having adverse effects on the living standards of the population, and contributed to deepen the economic crisis in the country. The current Cuban Constitution, adopted in 2019, maintains

the socialist one-party political system, and organised political opposition is not legal. It introduced provisions to strengthen human rights protections, but many crucial norms still await secondary legislation or proper implementation. While the Criminal Code, updated in 2022, included some positive measures, i.e. against domestic and gender-based violence, CSOs claim that certain of its provisions are being used, together with the new Social Communication Law, to prevent citizens from expressing their dissent and to criminalise international funding, in particular funding from the US to a number of organisations. Even though it has not been applied since 2003, the Cuban Criminal Code retains the death penalty.

2. EU action on Human Rights and Democracy - key focus areas: The EU remained engaged throughout 2024, monitoring the situation and maintaining a constructive but critical dialogue on Human Rights with authorities, under the umbrella of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA). Human Rights have been discussed as appropriate at every pertinent occasion, including during, or in the margins of, political and sectoral dialogues under the Agreement. Three events with civil society took place in October 2024 in Havana. The EUDEL in Cuba and the Cuban authorities, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, were engaged in advancing the specific human rights actions agreed during the Human Rights Dialogue in November 2023. The EU has been working as Team Europe with EU MS, as well as with international organisations, European cooperation agencies and financial institutions and CSOs, inside and outside Cuba, and has continued joint efforts and work on projects and programs benefiting the Cuban people. The EU remained engaged with a wide range of additional independent activists, analysts, journalists and entrepreneurs. Exchanges were held with families of detained protesters, as well as with HRDs, in particular women activists. This engagement has nurtured the dialogues with the authorities under the PDCA. EUDEL organised a wide-range of public diplomacy activities and events focused on human and fundamental rights, such as a gender equality artistic workshop for students or an event promoting creative entrepreneurship with participation of women and young entrepreneurs. In December 2024, an EU financed project addressing gender violence against women in Cuba called 'No more' was launched. A special focus was also given to good governance, administration digitalisation and modernisation, and decentralisation of decision-making, contributing to resilience and inclusiveness and promoting the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. A key objective for the EU was to promote the participation of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MIPYMES) and new economic actors, especially from the private sector, in the process of modernisation of Cuban economy. This supported the promotion of economic and social rights.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human Rights and Democracy remained an integral part of the EU's policy towards Cuba under the PDCA. The EU continued to monitor the situation and gather information from a wide range of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, operating inside and outside the country. Specific concerns and reported violations were discussed with authorities. The European Parliament adopted on 29 February and on 19 September two resolutions voicing concerns on Human Rights issues. A project 'Strengthening 'Defensorías' for the full protection of vulnerable groups, including the rights of minors, women and the elderly' started its implementation in September. In the framework of COPOLAD, the Cooperation Programme on Drug Policy, the EU collaborated actively on supporting the creation of a National Drug Observatory in Cuba, scheduled for 2025.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), the EU's engagement with Cuba focuses on two main priorities: economic modernisation and ecological transition. Specifically, in 2024, the EU and Cuba signed a

EUR 14 million package to support MIPYMES and new economic actors, and continued projects on efficiency and decentralisation of the public administration, renewable energy and support to the biotechnology industry. In addition, targeted interventions focus on food security, gender, youth, disabilities, civil society, and cultural heritage.

5. Multilateral context: Cuba is a member of the UNHRC for the term of 2024-2026. Cuba accepted 81% of 361 recommendations the country received during its last UPR in November 2023. In March 2024, the UNHRC adopted the outcome of this UPR. In October 2024 Cuba was reviewed by the CEDAW Committee, which published findings containing both positive aspects and main concerns and recommendations. The EU engaged with the authorities on different multilateral issues, in particular ahead of UNHRC sessions, ahead of the UNGA sessions and in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. On 30 October, UNGA adopted a resolution on the 'Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba' by a vote of 187 in favour, 2 against (US, Israel) and one abstention (Republic of Moldova), and with the unanimous support of the EU and all its MS.

Commonwealth of Dominica

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Dominica is a multiparty parliamentary democracy upholding civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. It operates under the rule of law with strong democratic institutions. The most significant advancement in 2024 was the decriminalization of same-sex conduct. Although legislation was not strictly enforced, even when it was constitutional, its impact has been significant as it continued to fuel episodes of hate speech and crosscutting discrimination against people who engage in consensual same-sex intimacy. Incidences of gender-based and domestic violence – including male victims and violence between same-sex partners – remain a recurrent phenomenon in Dominica. Cases are not always reported due to various reasons, including community pressure and shame and fear of reprisal. Child abuse remains a challenge in the forms of sexual abuse, neglect and abandonment, verbal abuse, physical punishment and family dysfunction. Corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool in schools remains legal in Dominica, although not commonly enforced. Dominica is home to the only Indigenous population in the Eastern Caribbean, the Kalinago. In September 2024, Annette Sanford made history as the first female Kalinago Chief. This election follows the September 2023 election of Sylvanie Burton as President of Dominica, after the Government's nomination. Prevalent across the Eastern Caribbean, the administration of justice in Dominica and in particular the backlog of cases remains a concern. Crime rates across the Caribbean have generally increased in 2024. While Dominica observed a decrease in homicides in 2024, there has been a notable increase in the seizure of illicit drugs, particularly cocaine. While the last execution took place in Dominica in 1986, there has not been any political initiative or national discussion towards abolishing the death penalty in 2024.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU priorities continued to focus on the following areas: democratic governance and the rule of law; domestic and gender-based violence; the death penalty; discrimination and violence against LGBTI people; and child abuse.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights matters are regularly discussed in meetings with national authorities and civil society organisations in Dominica.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU supports the Government of Dominica through budget support of approximately 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.

To combat discrimination against the LGBTI community the EUDEL is financing a project, the Caribbean LGBTIQ+ Initiative for Promoting Solidarity Outcomes – CALIPSO, of the LGBTI sub-regional umbrella ECADE, aimed at building a stronger LGBTI civil society in all seven countries.

The EUDEL is funding eight beneficiary countries under the PACE Justice Regional Programme, aiming at assisting efforts towards reducing the worryingly high number of criminal case backlogs. The project is implemented by UNDP.

5. Multilateral context: EUDEL carried out formal démarches on human rights issues over the course of 2024. EU MS are involved in the démarches when and where possible.

Dominican Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The Dominican Republic is a stable democracy and a pole of stability in the region. The 2024 general elections took place in a calm and peaceful environment. The Junta Central Electoral (Central Electoral Board) was widely praised for the professional and solid organization of the elections throughout the entire process. Tackling corruption remains a key policy priority of President Abinader. This has also been reflected in the sustained improvements in the corruption perception index, where the Dominican Republic ranks among the countries with the most important progress, even if still below the regional average. Several ongoing high-level corruption investigations will be a key test if the effort is sustained. The Government continued the implementation of a wide-ranging police reform, focusing among others on better training and regular evaluation of police staff. Efforts are also undertaken to improve prison conditions, which suffer from overcrowded facilities, high numbers of preventive prisoners, non-separation of men and women, and limited access to healthcare. Curbing GBV has been another priority alongside female economic and political empowerment. Yet, significant challenges remain, as shown e.g. by the number of femicides, which remained constant between 2023 and 2024, maintaining the DR with the second highest rates in the region (CEPAL). The Dominican Republic is highly affected by the multidimensional crisis in neighboring Haiti. Rising levels of violence in Haiti, amidst the slower-than-anticipated deployment of the Kenya-led mission, have prompted the authorities to step-up border controls and to increase deportations of irregular migrants. NGOs continue to report arbitrary arrests, mistreatment of migrants in detention and the deportation of vulnerable people. As reported by HRW, from January through mid-December 2024, the DR returned over 190 000 people to Haiti which made the UNHCR call for refugee protection to Haitians under the 1984 Cartagena Declaration. In response to these claims, the DR has strengthened capacities of the police and immigration authorities, including in the field of human rights, has set-up a protocol for the protection of unaccompanied children in migration centres, and has strengthened legislation in trafficking of human beings. Business representatives in sectors dependent on Haitian labour, are also pleading for devising legal pathways for migration through work permits, among others by using biometric data –in a context where many Haitian citizens do not receive IDs by their country of origin.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In the area of human rights, the EU focuses mainly on the rights of persons in vulnerable situations. The EU focuses on women´s and girls' rights, including the elimination of child marriage and GBV. Furthermore, the EU contributes to the elimination of all forms of discrimination, including against LGTBI and persons with disabilities. Other actions focus on the rights of migrants, which include safeguarding rights of deportees. Actions also target the rights of detainees and their re-insertion into society. In the area of democracy, the EU supported national observers during the 2024 elections through Citizens' Participation. EU diplomatic staff actively participated in the DiploWatch, organised by the Dominican Electoral Board.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to monitor, promote and support human rights through dialogue and public diplomacy events. This includes the 2024 European Human Rights prize, which was awarded to CONAMUCA, a Dominican NGO that promotes economic empowerment and political representation of women in rural areas. The EU also sought to leverage the Economic Partnership Agreement to promote gender equality and decent working conditions. The annual EPA awards include, among others, two specific categories respectively for women entrepreneurs and fair trade.

4. EU financial engagement: Ongoing projects under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and the budget line for Civil Society Organisations include capacity building of CSOs and HRDs, the promotion of women rights, fighting GBV, and improving youth rights, labour rights and environmental rights. The EU supports national policies to reduce gender-based violence, in alliance with the Ministry of Women. Actions include the preparation of a regional GBV monitoring system, support to the National School for Equality, a virtual learning platform, and support to draft legislation on GBV. The EU contributed to the implementation of a national campaign to raise awareness on assistance for survivors of gender-based violence. One of the highlights was the door-to-door campaign, with informational visits to households and small enterprises, reaching 1.076 million persons in 2024. The EU Head of Delegation participated together with the Minister of Women. DG ECHO also provides humanitarian assistance to asylum seekers and refugees, as well as vulnerable people from Haitian origin. These programmes are implemented by UNHCR and UNICEF.

5. Multilateral Context: The EU and the Dominican Republic are like-minded partners in the area of human rights and democracy. Regular coordination is ensured in multilateral fora, including in the context of the DR's membership of the UNHRC 2024-2026. The DR underwent its fourth UPR in May 2024. Recommendations addressed areas such as GBV, LGBTI rights and migrants' rights.

Republic of Ecuador

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Ecuador has faced significant challenges in human rights and democracy, with rising violence, political tensions, and restrictions on civil liberties. Organized crime, particularly drug-related violence, has driven high homicide rates (38 per 100,000 in 2024), with a concerning increase in violence affecting minors (surge by 81.4% in 2024), HRDs and communities in vulnerable situations. In response to the escape of a major drug lord from prison on 9 January 2024 and escalating insecurity, the Government declared a state of emergency and expanded military powers, restricting

fundamental rights and leading to allegations of human rights abuses, including arbitrary detentions and discrimination. However, efforts to address the root causes of violence, such as poverty, inequality or unemployment, have been insufficient. Sexual and gender-based violence remains an issue of major concern prompting the Government to set up 45 protection sites throughout the country to assists victims of violence and enacting a new law in May 2024, which provides for reparations for the relatives of victims of femicide. Tensions persist with Indigenous groups that continue to be adversely affected by mining projects, including illegal mining linked to organised crime. While elections are regularly held and electoral institutions have shown growing independence, political instability persists, with controversies surrounding a presidential candidate disqualification and tensions within the executive branch. Between 2023 and 2024, Ecuador dropped from 80th to 110th position in the RSF World Press Freedom Index. The government failed to reach agreement on funding for the 'Mechanism for the Prevention and Protection of Journalistic Work', established in 2023 in the face of violence and political pressure faced by members of the media.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU in Ecuador had six priorities in 2024: supporting HRDs; gender equality and women's rights; promoting non-discrimination on any grounds; supporting independent media, access to information and the fight against disinformation; business and human rights; integrity of electoral processes; civil society in oversight and accountability.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Throughout 2024, the EU continued to engage with all relevant stakeholders, including the government, human rights institutions and CSOs. The fourth Human Rights Dialogue with Ecuador took place on 15 May 2024. It addressed a wide range of topics, including the protection of HRDs, the human rights situation in prisons, the eradication of violence against women, and promotion of dialogue with Indigenous communities. The EU continued to offer support for the dialogue between Indigenous groups and the government. The EU supported a proposal by the UN to establish a permanent representation of the OHCHR in Quito.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU allocated EUR 2 million under the rapid response pillar to strengthen penitentiary security, with an additional contribution of EUR 800.000 from Italy. The project supports the government's efforts to restructure the national penitentiary system, offers specialised capacity building including on rehabilitation and reinsertion activities, and support the development of joint strategies for military and civilian security actors. The EU funded a number of initiatives aimed at protecting HRDs. These included support to those working on protection of natural resources, preventing conflict, and defending human rights in the context of mining activities. The EU also provided support to vulnerable Indigenous communities, and to strengthening the capacity of Indigenous organizations to better defend their rights through dialogue and negotiations. The EU continued to support the UN Women/UNDP/UNFPA Spotlight Initiative 2.0, which focuses on the rights of women and children who are victims of violence. The EU funded projects to protect isolated Indigenous populations, improve access to health in very remote areas, and to strengthen human mobility through improvement of infrastructure and equipment of shelters, care protocols, capacity building, quality improvement and access to basic services, technical assistance for local governments, urban development, child protection with a focus on the Venezuelan migration crisis, access to education, economic development, as well as additional response to COVID-19. EU funded projects promoting access to independent justice, including a focus on ensuring access to justice for victims of GBV. The EU supported the participation by two journalists from

Ecuador in the 2024 'Connecting Media Communities' forum in Pristina (Kosovo) to strengthen their capacity to detect and respond to FIMI. The EU also organised workshops about disinformation in the context of the Venezuelan migration crisis. The EU supported the drafting of Ecuador's National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, under the regional project Responsible Business Conduct in Latin America and the Caribbean (RBCLAC). The EU continued to fund a project to help Ecuador's electoral institutions prepare the 2025 presidential and general election, as well as a project aimed at strengthening the role of civil society organizations in monitoring the electoral process. The EU supported a range of projects aimed at strengthening the capacity of CSOs in contributing to public policy development, including in the areas of natural resource conservation, education, disability inclusion, youth, and rural development.

5. Multilateral context: In multilateral fora, Ecuador is a firm supporter of multilateralism and regional integration, the rules-based international order and respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. During membership at the UNSC from 2023 to 2024, Ecuador has been clear in its condemnation of Russia's war against Ukraine and has supported or co-sponsored resolutions in the UNGA, UNHRC and UNSC. In the UN Human Rights Council, in its capacity as observer state, Ecuador expressed concern about human rights violations in the region, i.e. in Venezuela or Nicaragua, as well as Ukraine and Afghanistan, showing like-mindedness and siding with EU positions in this regard. Ecuador completed its fourth UPR at the UNHRC in November 2024. Positive achievements included improvements in women's working conditions, through the approval of the organic law for equal pay between woman and men. However, the review identified large-scale violations of human rights in the context of the State of Emergency, including arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial executions, acts of torture and ill-treatment. It emphasized that such measures derogated fundamental rights such as freedom of movement, of association and assembly, disproportionally affecting vulnerable groups. The Committee urged the Government to limit the use of the State of Emergency, ensure strict respect for human rights and reduce overcrowding on prisons. The Committee also raised concerns over reports of corruption affecting the judiciary.

Republic of El Salvador

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: While important achievements have been made as regards citizen security, the continuation of the State of Exception, mass detentions and lack of due process restricted the rule of law and human rights. 2024 closed with a record low homicide rate of 1.9 per 100,000 inhabitants. At the same time, the detention of over 80,000 persons during the State of Exception, the toughening of criminal legislation including for juveniles and mass trials have impacted on the protection of fundamental freedoms and human rights. El Salvador continues to face structural challenges as regards social and economic as well as gender inequity. Despite recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the World Bank poverty increased from 26.8% in 2019 to 30.3% in 2023 and around 10% of the population is estimated to be living in extreme poverty compared to just over 5% in 2019. Significant gaps remain as regards economic opportunities and inclusion, in particular for women. GBV, including femicides, are of particular concern. According to the UNFPA, between 2019 and 2022, an average of 23,398 cases of GBV were reported a year. There were 565 convictions for violent murders of women, with 319 cases determined to be femicide. El Salvador criminalises all forms of abortion, even in the case of

rape or medical emergencies. While some have been released or granted alternative measures, cases of women in detention following obstetric emergencies remain of concern. In particular LGBTI people also remain targets of discrimination, stigmatisation and homophobic and transphobic violence. Human rights organisations witness a climate of intimidation and of restriction of civic space supported by discourses of stigmatisation dismissing the promotion of human rights, in particular in the context of the State of Exception. Independent media and journalists also report a hostile environment, intimidation and restrictions, which raises concern over freedom of the press and access to information.[66]

2. EU action - key focus areas: Key areas of EU focus included: protecting and empowering individuals; building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies; promoting a global system for human rights and democracy; new technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges; and delivering by working together.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU engages with relevant authorities on human rights and democracy via public and diplomatic engagement, in particular to underline the importance of due process and rule of law to ensure the sustainability of security for all. The EU maintains an effective political dialogue with the international donor community and organised civil society, as part of its efforts to contribute to democracy and strengthen the rule of law and respect for human rights including protection of women, young people and the LGBTI community.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU provided the support in protecting and empowering individuals through the Human Rights and Democracy Programme, where the EU engages with the justice and security sectors on the promotion of human rights. This enabled the EUDEL to contribute to addressing humanitarian issues in juvenile detention centres (in coordination with Conapina, EUR 600.000 in 2024, working on vocational trainings and psychological assistance). Furthermore, the EU supports violence prevention (EUR 17.7 million) together with the Ministry of Education. The Project Agustine aims to improve and diversify the education system, improve access to education taking into account psychological needs, improve and diversify the offer available to students in order to strengthen their productive skills and support educational establishments to implement the policy of equity and equality through the Equality and Prevention of Sexual Violence Plans. The EU also works on several projects and communication and visibility actions on the rights of women and girls (EUR 21 million): The Spotlight Initiative, which entails training of teachers and school staff on sexual education and sexual violence prevention; support to women's organisations and CSO projects aimed at women's empowerment through various funding programmes (CSO-LA, EIDHR); women´s economic empowerment – implemented through AECID, with EU funding of EUR 10 million, to increase equal opportunities in districts of high socio-economic vulnerabilities; revising and updating the national legal framework of women´s human rights (EUR 4 million), and reducing early pregnancies and promoting a life free of violence in the oriental districts (EUR 4 million). In addition, the EU is active in the field of building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies, by launching awareness and information campaigns. A series of consultations were organised with CSOs as part of the EU roadmap for engagement with civil society. The EU promotes a global system for human rights and democracy through the

[66] Reporters Without Borders – El Salvador, https://rsf.org/en/country/el-salvador; Human Rights Watch World Report 2025 – El Salvador, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/el-salvador.

support of human rights defenders by providing them with means to work, reinforcing their capacities and granting them protection when needed. Projects focused on environmental defenders rights, psychosocial support to youth in detention centers and support to journalists (EUR 3.7 million). Concerning new technologies, the approach was to harness opportunities and address challenges: The EU promoted social and digital connectivity as well as training on digital skills for youth. The Social Digital Connectivity programme is focused on schools and health Centres in rural areas (EUR 17.5 million). The MERIAN programme (EUR 5 million) builds capacity and boosts digitalisation of the National Agricultural School and National research center. The EU also supports digital skills training with its LAMARR programme (EUR 9 million, also supported by EU MS). 'Delivering by working together' was implemented through initiatives that strengthen human rights in El Salvador where the EU promotes transparency in public budgets, environmental awareness through arts and public diplomacy (*Cartografías Líquidas* initiative), and food security with PotenciandoLaSAN. The EU empowers Indigenous and rural youth with *Defensores Ambientales*, support women's rights with *Vivas y empoderadas*, and fosters freedom of expression through *Foro Voces Libres*, addressing data, AI, and journalism.

5. Multilateral context: El Salvador acceded to the Hague Convention of 19 October 1996 for the Protection of Children. The European Commission presented, on 28 January, to the Council, its findings on the suitability of the country's application.

Grenada

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Grenada is a multiparty parliamentary democracy upholding civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. It operates under the rule of law with strong democratic institutions. Grenada was severely impacted by the passage of Hurricane Beryl with ensuing challenges for the affected population. Incidences of gender-based and domestic violence remain a recurrent phenomenon in Grenada. Cases are not always reported due to various reasons, including community pressure, shame and fear of reprisal. Child abuse remains a challenge in the forms of sexual abuse, neglect and 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. Grenada has outlawed corporal punishment on a child for any offence. Consensual same-sex is illegal in Grenada with punishment ranging from five years to ten years in prison under the outdated so-called 'buggery' and 'indecency' laws. The existence of such laws, even if not enforced, creates an environment conducive to discrimination. Prevalent across the Eastern Caribbean, the administration of justice in Grenada and in particular the backlog of cases remains a concern. Crime rate has spiked in the last years, particularly gun violence. Grenada retains the death penalty. While the last execution took place in 1978, there has not been any political initiative or national discussion towards abolishing the death penalty in 2024.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU priorities continued to focus on the following areas: democratic governance and the rule of law; domestic and gender-based violence; the death penalty; discrimination and violence against LGBTI people; and child abuse.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human Rights matters are regularly discussed in meetings with national authorities and civil society organisations in Grenada.

4. EU financial engagement: To combat discrimination against the LGBTI community the EUDEL is financing a project ('Caribbean LGBTIQ+ Initiative for Promoting Solidarity Outcomes – CALIPSO') of the LGBTI sub-regional umbrella ECADE, aimed at building a stronger LGBTI civil society in all seven countries.

Following the destructive passage of Hurricane Beryl, particularly in Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the EU mobilized swiftly to provide assistance in the form of financial aid, dispatch of environmental experts from EU MS, and satellite imagery by COPERNICUS to facilitate targeted on-the-ground response to the affected countries.

5. Multilateral context: The EUDEL carried out formal démarches on human rights issues over the course of 2024. EU MS are involved in the démarches when and where possible.

Republic of Guatemala

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Guatemala´s government is dedicated to democratic governance, a positive human rights agenda and inclusion. However, the country is facing serious and structural challenges as regards human rights, the rule of law and systemic social and economic inequality. The persistent instrumentalisation of the justice system for the persecution or intimidation of public officials, democratically elected authorities, civil society, media and judicial operators is a source of deep concern. The situation for HRDs, and in particular those defending land and the environment, remains highly dangerous and there is a lack of accountability for attacks against them. The government has made welcomed efforts to advance the adoption of a National Policy for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. Simultaneously, the protection of human rights is the responsibility of all powers of the State, and fighting impunity requires a transparent and impartial justice system that generates trust.

2. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued its dialogue with various state institutions, particularly with the government, about human rights.

During his attendance of the presidential inauguration ceremony in January 2024, HR/VP Borrell, together with other members of the international community, called for the respect of the election results and reiterated the support to Guatemala's democracy. On 12 January, the EU adopted a framework for restrictive measures in Guatemala. Five individuals were sanctioned for undermining democracy and the rule of law, by attempting to prevent the peaceful transition of power. In February, the EU and Guatemala signed a Memorandum of Understanding on bilateral consultations. In May, the first round of political dialogue took place, during which i.a. the respect for democracy and the importance of the rule of law and human rights were discussed. The Guatemalan government thanked the EU, in particular for its role in defending the election results of 2023. During the year, the EU held various events and meetings with state authorities of the different branches of power, as well as civil society organisations, to address human rights concerns. In coordination with the EU MS, the EU observed various trial hearings related to criminalised personalities and transitional justice cases. The EU also visited journalist José Rubén Zamora and ex-anti-graft prosecutor Stuardo Campo in prison. The EU, its MS and likeminded countries analysed various cases related to the situation of HRDs.

3. EU action - key focus area: The EU, in its engagement with Guatemala, focused on fostering a comprehensive agenda to promote inclusive economic, social and cultural rights; supporting the rule of law, access to justice, inclusive and effective administration of justice; enhancing the protection mechanisms for HRDs; strengthening the implementation of legal frameworks to prevent and sanction all forms of violence against women and gender based violence; strengthening the mechanisms of child protection against all forms of violence; and promoting full implementation of international conventions and ratification of pending conventions to reinforce the equity and development of vulnerable groups.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU's overarching goal of the Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2021-2027 (EUR 141 million) is to reduce inequalities by improving living standards of the rural population, with a focus on youth, women and Indigenous peoples. The MIP addresses the main problems affecting rural areas: lack of economic opportunities, environmental degradation and exploitation of natural resources, low access to basic public services and regional disparities. In 2024, the EUDEL launched a call for proposals aimed at CSOs (EUR 4.5 million). The main objective of the call is to improve the capacities of CSOs to perform social audit and promote multi-actor dialogues.

5. Multilateral context: In the multilateral context, Guatemala is a like-minded partner when it comes to the defence of democracy and human rights. The EU maintained its open dialogue with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss human rights issues relevant to multilateral fora. Moreover, the EU welcomed Guatemala´s decision to receive 135 Nicaraguan political prisoners for safe transit.

The EU participated and supported various missions of international actors at the invitation of the government, such as the one of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

Cooperative Republic of Guyana

1. Overview of the human rights and democratic situation: Guyana's overall human rights record is broadly positive, but not unproblematic. Human rights challenges for Guyana in 2024 continued to include women's rights, gender-based and domestic violence, including femicide, child abuse and corporal punishment, homophobia, socio-economic marginalisation, and trafficking in persons. Despite positive developments, a large proportion of the public remains opposed to (formal) rights of LGBTI persons, given the influence of conservative religious lobbies. Social rights are improving as a result of the phenomenal economic growth of the country, but are challenged by pockets of poverty, inequality and insecurity. During 2024, Guyana demonstrated a strong commitment to advancing children's rights through legislative reforms and collaborative initiatives including through the International Measures for the Protection of Children (Hague Convention) Bill introduced in the National Assembly in November 2024, several laws to protect children's rights, reaffirmed dedication to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, support for migrant and hinterland children, and restructuring of Ministry of Human Services and Social Security operations to better protect children's rights, expanding access to training and employment opportunities, and aligning with international goals to eliminate child labour by 2025. While the death penalty remains in the penal code, there is a de facto moratorium since 1997. The courts however have continued to hand down death sentences over the years. Guyana is a pioneer in Indigenous Peoples'

rights, as they were among the first to have an arrangement for land rights. However, there are still instances where legal gaps place Indigenous Peoples at a disadvantage when it comes to land rights and mining encumbrances. The government has allocated 15% of the carbon credit revenue for the Indigenous communities. This is a significant increase of their resources and should contribute to a real boost in the implementation of village development plans.

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 stopping domestic violence; the fight against homophobia; good governance; electoral reform; the livelihood of people living in and off the forest; abolition of the death penalty; and the strengthening of the role of the civil society.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU continued to engage in human rights and democracy discussions with Guyana in various settings and many important initiatives took place in 2024. The issue of the death penalty was brought up during the Partnership Dialogue with the Guyanese authorities. In March 2024, the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance indicated that the matter would be addressed during the constitutional reform process, allowing citizens to express their views on whether to retain or abolish capital punishment. The EU Delegation's Human Rights Award, presented annually since 2017, underscores the EU's commitment to supporting human rights defenders and civil society organizations in Guyana. This provides for an excellent opportunity for the Delegation to speak about Human Rights issues. For 2024 the award was given to Ms Maureen Hope recognizing her over two decades dedication to social work and community empowerment. The event had a strong media presence and coverage.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, Guyana benefited from a EUR 4.5 million envelope for a three-year period, with a focus on stopping violence against women and girls.

5. Multilateral context: Guyana is a like-minded country that shares with the EU a strong belief in upholding the multilateral system and voting for UN resolutions that are important for the EU. Guyana began its two-year term as a non-permanent member of the UNSC in January 2024, focusing on issues such as climate change, food security, and international peace. Monthly meetings take place with Guyana's Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Ambassadors of the US, UK, Canada, EU, and the Chargé d'Affaires of France, to discuss ongoing items on the UNSC agenda. In line with the UN's Global Pact for the Future, Guyana made significant progress in empowering youth and promoting sustainable development. In December 2024, Guyana joined 17 other Latin American and Caribbean countries in launching the Alliance for Security, Justice, and Development. Promoted by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), this alliance unites governments, multilateral organizations, and civil society to address organized crime in the region.

On 20 March 2024, the UN Human Rights Committee concluded its observations on the third Periodic Report of Guyana, on how it implements the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Committee Experts commended measures promoting gender equity, combating of trafficking in persons, but also recommended that the State party should strengthen its efforts, including through the constitutional review process, to ensure the compatibility of its statutory and customary law with the Covenant.

Republic of Haiti

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Despite joint efforts by the Haitian National Police, supported by a UNSC-authorised and Kenyan-led Multinational Security Support Mission, the territory controlled by the gangs increased from 80% to 85% of the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area. The coalition of several armed groups has reduced inter-gang fighting, but enhanced coordinated attacks on neighbourhoods still controlled by the State. The civil population is heavily impacted, including as victims of random gunfire, through GBV, armed robberies, burglaries, kidnappings, assassinations, and displacement. The UN reports that 5,600 people were killed in 2024 as a direct result of acts of violence. The state of emergency has become the norm, increasing the perception of a legal vacuum. Haiti's health system has been at the brink of collapse and nearly half of the population is facing acute food insecurity. Children are particularly affected. In addition, gangs continue to recruit children and youth from disadvantaged communities, with children and youth making up almost half of gang membership. Similarly, women continue to be subject to human rights abuses. Forcibly returned migrants and IDPs are equally prone to human rights abuses. The number of IDPs within Haiti has reached almost 800,000 persons. Local self-defence groups have continued to respond to gang attacks, sometimes together with the national police, leading to self-justice with lynching of alleged gang members. There is a growing reliance of the national police on these self-defence groups, possibly increasing the acceptance of arbitrary law, and further weaponising Haitian society. Prompted by the escalating violence that blocked then Prime Minister Henry to return to Haiti from an overseas trip, Haitian stakeholders reached an agreement on 3 April on a transitional governance arrangement. The so-called Transitional Presidential Council was established, and a new Interim Prime Minister–Garry Conille–was subsequently appointed. However, it only took five months until a new Prime Minister was appointed. Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council, tasked with organising the long-delayed elections, was eventually established in December 2024.

2. EU action – key focus areas: One of the EU key focus areas was the field of rule of law and democratisation. The Mobile Institute for Democratic Education's project Improvement of Justice and Detention in Haiti has significantly reduced prolonged pre-trial detention and supported reintegration for released individuals since 2023. The OHCHR project, Support for Judicial Hubs, Non-Formal Judicial Mechanisms, and Incubation and Support for Human Rights Defenders, launched in 2024, has bolstered judicial processes by establishing specialised units for mass and financial crimes, exploring non-judicial conflict resolution, and enhancing institutional frameworks. The EU also focused on transparent, democratic and participatory governance: efforts promoting transparent, democratic, and participatory governance include two election-focused projects focusing on forming a non-partisan societal alliance in view of elections and exploring innovative technical solutions to enhance credibility and inclusivity of electoral challenges. While general elections are planned for late 2025, the Delegation continues to engage with stakeholders to strengthen democratic processes despite ongoing insecurity. The EU also supported a more equitable, pluralistic and inclusive society: the project Young Agents of Change in the Haut Nord-Ouest concluded in 2024, empowering youth to advocate for inclusive governance. The PAIR project, implemented by GRET, has supported economic opportunities through youth training and entrepreneurship. Additionally, the recently signed project Ann Kampe Ansanm will promote urban development and income-generating activities in marginalised communities.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The deteriorating security situation and political instability in 2024 did not allow for a political dialogue with the Haitian government, including on human rights. Nonetheless in October 2024, building on a similar event in December 2023, the EUDEL hosted a frank and open discussion with Haitian civil society on human rights, women's rights, and children's rights in Haiti.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU financed a EUR 4 million project aimed at Youth Integration and Community Violence Reduction in Port-au-Prince. The EU also contributed EUR 3 million to the AKA – Ann Kanpe Ansanm project, implemented by *Groupe de recherche et d'échange technologique*. This initiative builds upon the youth integration and violence reduction. The EU financed the OHCHR project Support to Judicial Hubs, Non-Formal Judicial Mechanisms, and Incubation and Support for HRDs with EUR 3 million. In 2024, this project received an additional EUR 770,000. The EU signed a new project under the Civil Society Organisations thematic line, with EUR 3.4 million allocated to further support civil society's role in governance and human rights. Additionally, EUR 15 million was mobilised for a Rapid Response Action aimed at strengthening resilience and enhancing the nexus between humanitarian, development, and peace efforts, underscoring the EU's commitment to long-term stability in Haiti. Projects signed in 2023 continued, among them the Basket Fund for the National Police with EUR 3 million, implemented by the UNDP and UNODC. Moreover, two projects to support CSOs in Haiti's electoral process were supported: Project of Civil Society Organisations in Haiti to Support Elections (Pwojè OSC Ayiti pou Kore Eleksyon), implemented by *Volontariat pour le développement d'Haïti*, and the Programme to Support Transparency, Efficiency, and Credibility of Electoral Processes in Haiti (Konbit pou bon jan Demokrasi), implemented by Medialternatif. The Mobile Institute for Democratic Education (IMED) project was supported with EUR 400,000, focusing on the release of individuals detained in prolonged pre-trial detention, alongside efforts to support their social reintegration. Lastly, the Young Agents of Change in the Haut Nord-Ouest project received a contribution of EUR 600,000.

5. Multilateral context: In October 2023, the UNSC authorised the deployment of a Multinational Security Support Mission to Haiti. The mission was re-authorised for another 12 months in September 2024. The first contingent of 200 Kenyan police officers of the Multinational Security Support Mission was deployed on 25 June 2024. However, despite reinforcements in the second half of 2024 including from other nations, the mission has not yet reached the necessary level of personnel and equipment to contain the gang violence. Pursuant to UNHRC Resolution 55/24, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has regularly provided updates on the situation of human rights in Haiti.

Republic of Honduras

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Honduras continues to struggle with a number of deeply rooted and structural issues including weak governance, institutional incapacities, widespread corruption, high levels of violence, poverty inequality and lack of economic opportunities. The situation of vulnerable groups including women and girls, LGBTI persons, Indigenous peoples, journalists, and HRDs remains of serious concern. Honduras remains one of the poorest and most unequal countries in the region, with over half of the population living in poverty. The traditional conflict between defenders of Indigenous land and biodiverse territory, on one side, and the agro-industrial business, on the other, continues

to cause displacement, intimidations, violence and killings. The government has yet to launch an effective process that could offer any hope of resolution. The murder of Juan Antonio López, coordinator of the Committee for Common and Public Goods of Tocoa, in September 2024, sadly illustrates this challenge. Despite a decrease in 2024 from 34.4 to 25.3 per 100,000 inhabitants[67], the homicide rate in the country remains one of the highest in Latin America. The OHCHR registered 286 attacks against HRDs. Between January and October 2024, 199 violent deaths of women were recorded against 411 in 2023[68]. According to the Observatory of Violence against LGBTI People in Honduras, as of October 2024, 38 murders of LGBTI people have been recorded in the country[69]. The mechanism Honduras created in 2015 to protect journalists, HRDs, and justice officials lacks financial resources, capacity and trust. A lack of tolerance to criticism and shrinking space for civil society or dissenting voices is also witnessed. Any positive impact of the declared State of Emergency, adopted in response to gang violence and regularly re-enacted since December 2022, has yet to be asserted. The establishment of the International Commission against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (CICIH), one of the flagship electoral promises in the Government Plan to refund Honduras, remains pending.

2. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU has taken a prominent role in advocating for reforms, including electoral reforms, aimed to address corruption. EU priorities include strengthening civil society, enhancing rule of law and fight against impunity and corruption, protecting of HRDs, LGBTI persons and other vulnerable groups, and promoting gender equality. The EU and its MS present in the country, namely France, Germany and Spain, continue efforts to support HRDs by maintaining open channels of communication with civil society, in a structured manner, and in close collaboration with the United Nations and the OHCHR in particular. The EUDEL and EU MS regularly address the human rights situation and cases of particular concern. At the occasion of the International Day of Human Rights, the European Union and its Member States awarded the 'EUROPA Award for Human Rights 2024' to the Municipal Committee for the Defense of Common and Public Goods (CMDBCP) for its extraordinary efforts in protecting natural resources and the rights of the communities of Tocoa.

3. EU action - key focus areas: The key areas of EU focus include: strengthening institutional capacity and national human rights system; support to, protection and inclusion of vulnerable groups including women and girls, Indigenous peoples and human rights defenders; strengthening of electoral institutions; access to justice; as well as sustainable social and economic development and inclusion.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU's programme ProDerechos, continues to support the consolidation of a human rights system. In May 2024, the EU launched the EUROELECT-Honduras project (EUR 10 million) to strengthen Honduras's electoral process by enhancing the capabilities of electoral institutions, promoting inclusive citizen participation with a focus on women and marginalised groups. Fourteen additional projects with civil society and human rights organisations (totaling EUR 16.45 million), in support of local needs and priorities, fostering human rights and sustainable development, in collaboration with a wide range of active implementing partners, are ongoing. Through partnerships with international and national organisations, the EU has contributed to the fight against, and prevention of, the

[67] https://www.sepol.hn/sepol-estadisticas-honduras.php?id=138
[68] https://iudpas.unah.edu.hn/dmsdocument/17843-infografia-muerte-violenta-mujeres-ene-oct-2024-ed17
[69] https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KyLsbUeoHbEoYoZZWHq5mnyEfZmHrZ94/view

most degrading, cruel, and inhuman forms of torture and ill-treatment, particularly affecting populations deprived of liberty, women, youth, and LGBTI individuals in Honduras, including some bi-national actions with El Salvador and Bolivia. This support concluded in 2024, alongside other initiatives aimed at strengthening national human rights systems and promoting the rights of children, youth, and women in the Western Regions of Honduras. Meanwhile, interventions focused on land and territorial rights, as well as the protection of Indigenous human rights, are ongoing, including efforts in La Moskitia—the most remote region of Honduras. Efforts to promote inclusivity and gender equality have also been active in rural communities in the Dry Corridor. Additionally, five new projects were selected in December 2024. These projects focus on the social, environmental and human rights aspects of the foreseen Global Gateway initiatives in Lago de Yojóa and Tablón. With over EUR 4 million in financing, the EU will support local dialogues to foster collaboration among public institutions, CSOs, and the private sector in areas affected by the El Tablón multipurpose dam.

5 Multilateral context: Honduras' term as one of the 47 members of the UNHRC, concluded on December 31, 2024. In 2024, Honduras and the EU occasionally diverged in their voting patterns within the UNHRC. Notably when Honduras abstained from voting on a resolution to extend the mandate of a UN investigative group on Nicaragua and a resolution to extend the mandate of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela. Honduras and the UN remain officially in negotiation regarding the setting up of the International Commission against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras - CICIH. The Escazú agreement, designed to protect biodiversity and environmental defenders in Latin America and the Caribbean, has yet to be ratified despite of the political commitment expressed by the Government.

Jamaica

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Jamaica remains a stable democracy with constitutional protection of fundamental rights. However, high levels of violence, including gang related crime, significantly hinder the enjoyment of human rights. The murder rate declined by 18% in 2024 with 1,141 murders recorded against 1,393 in 2023. In August 2024, the government declared a State of Emergency in response to a shooting incident, in which eight persons were killed and nine injured in a rural community. The IACHR expressed concern over Jamaica's continued use of States of Public Emergency and called on the government to ensure that measures used to prevent and combat crime are implemented in accordance with international human rights standards. During an State of Emergency, the government temporarily grants security forces additional powers, including warrantless searches, arrests and detention. GBV remains prevalent despite legislative measures such as the Domestic Violence Act, Offences against the Person Act, Sexual Offences Act, Trafficking in Persons Act and most recently, the Sexual Harassment (Protection and Prevention) Act. An estimated 39% of Jamaican women experience some form of intimate partner violence, according to the World Bank. In 2024, Jamaica ranks 37th out of 146 on the Global Gender Gap[70], a decline from 24th in 2023. Despite this drop, women hold 62.1% of top roles (legislative, senior officers and manager roles) but are under-represented in politics. Currently, women comprise 38% of Jamaica's senate and 29% of the House of

[70] https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2024.pdf

Representatives. The twin challenges of stigma and discrimination continue to pose significant barriers for LGBT individuals in Jamaica particularly within the faith based community. According to Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perception Index (CPI), Jamaica ranks 69th out of 180 countries.

While the Jamaican Government's last execution occurred in February 1988, the death penalty by hanging remains as an available penalty for the following offenses: murder of security forces or judicial officers, jurors, or civil servants; murder for hire; double murders or repeat murders; or murder in the furtherance of a serious crime. The death penalty is however not mandatory and judges can take mitigating circumstances into account.

2. EU action – key focus areas: Support was provided to government and CSOs and in line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights, several activities were undertaken during the year. EUDEL 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: Bilateral discussions continued throughout the year with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, along with other key ministers. The strong bilateral partnership was evident in the high-level participation at the annual Europe Day celebration, which included the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Finance, Justice, Technology and Information, Labour and Social Security, as well as the Leader of the Opposition and members of his shadow cabinet, including the spokespersons on Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Youth.

In addition, EUDEL is in constant dialogue with local stakeholders on human rights related issues. Likewise, EU MS consistently raise human rights issues with their high-level government partners during their meetings. The Delegation also carried out démarches with EU MS on a wide range of issues in support of EU priorities.

4. EU Financial Engagement: Several EU funded projects were implemented in 2024 promoting economic, social, cultural and environmental rights with emphasis on citizen security, enhancing connectivity and modernizing critical infrastructure. Additionally, support was given to protecting the rights of vulnerable groups, including members of the LGBTI community, youth, people in violence prone communities and rural populations with emphasis on environmental protection and building resilience to climate change. Support was also provided to the government's health system strengthening programme, with several new and upgraded health facilities opened during the year.

5. Multilateral Context: Jamaica demonstrates its commitment to multilateralism and human rights through partnerships with the EU and active membership in the UN and CARICOM. Jamaica and the EU are likeminded in their support for democracy, multilateralism and the rules based international order. The government of Jamaica is among several countries participating in international peacekeeping efforts in neighbouring Haiti. Jamaica also plays an active role in CARICOM, advocating for regional integration and collective action on issues such as trade, security and climate change. The EU also provides support to Jamaica to strengthen governance structures and rule of law.

Although Jamaica retains the death penalty, it has had a long-standing de facto moratorium on its application. The EU continues to dialogue with the Government for abolition of the

death penalty and to seek opportunities to advocate for its abolition, including through opinion pieces published in the print media and in relevant public discussions.

United Mexican States

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Mexico is a consolidated democracy with a Presidential system that holds elections every six years. On 2 June 2024, Mexico held general elections, in which over 20,000 political posts were elected including the President and the Federal Congress. While the elections were fair and credible, violence spread throughout the campaign, mostly at local level, making the 2024 election campaign the deadliest in the country in recent years. At least 30 candidates representing different parties were killed by organised crime organisations, numerous cases of attacks, threats and harassment of candidates were recorded, and hundreds of pre-candidates dropped out from the race. The constitutional judicial reform adopted in 2024 that introduced the election of judges by popular vote, and the reform that led to the elimination of several autonomous bodies have raised concerns regarding their impact on the rule of law and checks and balances. Mexico faces serious challenges in the protection of human rights, particularly due to the power of organised crime organisations and high levels of impunity, estimated at about 95%. In the last few years, the Mexican Government has established and strengthened the existing institutions for the defence of human rights. The Ministry of Interior is active in the promotion of human rights and the development of protection policies. In particular, several commissions and mechanisms of truth and protection of human rights, as well as the registry of enforced disappearances, play a key role in addressing the human rights crisis in the country. Mexico's civil society space remains vibrant although organisations sometimes face hostility for their criticism of the government. However, civil society and human rights stakeholders have expressed concerns about the politicisation of the National Commission on Human Rights, the Mexican Ombudsman, which played a key role in defending human rights in the past. The registered number of victims of enforced disappearances exceeded 110,000 in 2023, although in 2024 the Government changed the methodology and the figure fell to below 100,000, which still represents a big challenge. At least four journalists were assassinated in 2024, according to UN figures. HRDs and environmental activists suffer regular attacks and threats. Migration and internal displacement of persons remain key challenges, influenced by US migration policy and persisting root causes in Central America.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU has worked along Mexican authorities and civil society organisations to help improve the human rights situation in the country. Furthermore, an EU Electoral Expert Mission was deployed for the June general election and met with relevant Mexican stakeholders. The Mission's work was facilitated by the National Electoral Institute. EUDEL maintained support to human rights defenders along with EU MS Embassies (plus Norway and Switzerland) through the initiative *#ProtejamosSusVoces* ('Let us protect their voices'). In November 2024, the EUDEL organised an event with the beneficiaries of this initiative consisting of workshops providing them with useful tools for their daily activities. The EU engaged with Mexican authorities, CSOs and international actors, particularly the OHCHR and UNHCR. The EUDEL discussed human rights with authorities during visits to several states. Visitors from the EU institutions to Mexico regularly met with CSO representatives. The EU supported Mexico on the search of enforced disappeared people, by financing technical assistance to the National Search Commission and the National Center for

Human Identification. The EU also remained committed to the protection of HRDs and journalists and supported them through emergency grants. The EU supported the OHCHR in Mexico to enhance its capabilities, strengthen the prevention and protection policy and promote the access to justice as a preventive measure against attacks on HRDs and journalists in Mexico. The EUDEL also funded a labour integration project for migrants in Mexico, implemented by UNHCR, ILO and IOM in partnership with Mexican private and public stakeholders, which has assisted tens of thousands people and sought to meet Mexico's job vacancy needs in various regions of the country while regularising the status of irregular migrants. Additionally, the EUDEL supports ten ongoing projects implemented by Mexican CSOs on freedom of expression and access to information on the internet, search of disappeared people, preventing minors' trafficking and forced recruitment by organised crime, arbitrary detention and torture, and support to human rights defenders and journalists.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 13 December 2024, the XII EU-Mexico High Level Human Rights Dialogue took place in Brussels, co-chaired by Mr Olof Skoog, EUSR for Human Rights, and Mr Enrique Ochoa, Vice-Minister for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights of Mexico. The parties agreed to further strengthen the bilateral and multilateral cooperation for the promotion of human rights, including in the areas of gender equality, protection of human rights defenders and control of illicit arms. The day before, EU and Mexican Civil Society Organisations held the X Civil Society Seminar on Human Rights, in which representatives from the EU and the Mexican government participated. European Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli visited Mexico to participate in the III Feminist Foreign Policy ministerial meeting on 1-3 July. She also held meetings with CSOs working on gender equality, LGBTI and disabled people's rights. She also visited an EU-funded project that provides shelter to GBV survivors.

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 GBV and migration, with a focus on HRDs and journalists and enforced disappearances in partnership with CSOs and Mexican institutions. 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 formalisation 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) and strengthening the Mexico's regulatory system of medicines and vaccines.

5. Multilateral context: Mexico is a key like-minded partner in multilateral human rights institutions, a strong and proactive advocate for human rights, and a defender of the rules-based multilateral order and of the core principles of the UN Charter. Mexico has extended a standing invitation to all UN special procedures since March 2001. In January 2024, Mexico underwent its UPR at the Human Rights Council. At the UNGA Third Committee, Mexico co-sponsored the resolution on the death penalty moratorium and a resolution with France on women's rights. In October 2024, Mexico was elected to the UNHRC for the 2025-2027 term.

Republic of Nicaragua

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights situation in Nicaragua remained very concerning. Repression continued unabated, as did crackdowns against dissenting voices, with persecution, intimidation and reprisals against civil society, political opponents, indigenous communities, media outlets, clergy and independent universities, amongst others. In January, two bishops, including Monseñor Álvarez, and other 17 members of the clergy were freed, but the campaign against religious institutions has continued, including both catholic and evangelical groups. In September, 135 prisoners were released and expelled to Guatemala. However, as in previous occasions, this move was immediately followed by deprivation of their nationality and confiscation of their assets, in a blatant violation of fundamental rights and a breach of international law. Despite releases and expulsions, around 50 political prisoners are estimated to remain in custody. The practices of denying the return to the country of Nicaraguan citizens abroad have continued, as well as restrictions on the renewal of passports and other documents as means of pressure and control on citizens. Cancellation of non-governmental/non-profit organisations' legal status has continued, reaching a figure of over 5,500, thus further restricting civic space and affecting freedom of association. Almost 40 private university institutions have also seen their assets confiscated, weakening academic availability and freedom. Freedom of expression has continued to suffer from intimidation and pressure, resulting in the departure of further journalists from the country – over 250 in exile. Many of the journalists who remain in the country opt for self-censorship. In September, the Criminal Code was amended to allow the prosecution in absentia of Nicaraguans abroad, as well as the seizure of their assets. A worrying process of constitutional reform has been carried out. These reforms further concentrate presidential powers and undermine fundamental rights, including freedom of press, protection against torture, and the rights of minorities and indigenous people. The elections held in March in the Caribbean autonomous regions were negatively affected by the cancellation of Yatama's legal status and imprisonment of its leaders, which prevented any indigenous opposition leaders from participating in the ballot. Attacks by colons against Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast remain causes for concern. On gender issues, statistically, Nicaragua has the lowest gender gap in the region, thanks in part to a supportive equal rights legislation and to awareness-raising campaigns. At the same time, several women's rights organisations - promoting gender equality, sexual and reproductive rights, and prevention of violence - were closed as part of the general trend of shrinking civic space.

2. EU action – key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027, EU efforts focused on the following areas: protecting and empowering individuals, human rights defenders; protecting girls and women against violence and promoting gender equality; promoting rights of Indigenous peoples and the environment; supporting social and economic rights of the population's most vulnerable groups; building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies; and resisting the rollback of freedom of expression and information.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Notwithstanding the absence of a structured political dialogue and as an attempt to engage on human rights, the EUDEL has continued to resolutely promote public and cultural diplomacy initiatives focused on human rights. Events have been organized in multiple fields, such as theatre ('I have a dream' acting competition to promote

human rights, inspired by Martin Luther King's historical speech), sport ('*Brilla por la Vida'* campaign and launch of the 'Movete por la Vida' race), and cinema (film exhibitions addressing gender topics and targeting school students).

4. EU financial engagement: The EU has continued to pursue an integrated approach to face the current challenges in the country, complementing diplomatic initiatives with targeted support programmes financed through available budget lines. In 2024, in the framework of the relevant thematic programmes, six new projects were contracted in areas such as LGBTI rights, HRDs, child labour, women empowerment and fight against GBV. Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities have continued to be monitored and supported. Environmental actions have been further developed. The EUDEL has maintained its close coordination with EU MS, co-financed thematic projects, striving to identify new partners in its renewed effort to support civil society in Nicaragua, which, despite current challenges, remains committed and active.

5. Multilateral context: The UPR underwent by Nicaragua in November 2024 illustrates the deepening dichotomy of the country's self-perception and the very real deficiencies regarding the protection of human rights, with Nicaragua allegedly focused on the promotion of socio-economic rights but totally disregarding civil and political rights. EUDEL has continued to voice its concerns, to engage with a view to advocating for rule-based multilateralism and to provide inputs for the relevant UN human rights bodies. The human rights situation in Nicaragua has been closely followed by the UNHRC and the Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua. The OHCHR has undertaken regular reviews to update on developments. Thus far, the Nicaraguan government has declined requests to cooperate with UN human rights mechanisms, denying access to the country to international and regional Human Rights organisations as well as to independent verification bodies – in fact, Nicaragua has started a process of disengaging from UN human rights bodies.

Republic of Panama

1. Overview of the Human Rights and democracy situation: Panama is committed to the defence of human rights and democracy; however, several internal challenges are slowing down the pace of advancement of the country's human rights agenda. The full and coherent implementation of the existing legislation to combat corruption, reach transparency and avoid impunity would require reinforced Panamanian democratic institutions. The perception that the population has about the fight against corruption is getting worse. The Corruption Perception Index 2024[71] reveals that the country only obtained 33 of 100, falling two points compared to 2023. Concerning democracy and the rule of law, Panama ranked 72nd globally across 142 countries monitored by WJP, thus ascending two positions in the Overall Rule of Law Score[72] with respect to 2023. General Elections (Presidential, National Assembly, and local authorities) took place on 5 May. An EU Electoral Experts Mission–the first in the country's history–did not detect major incidents, but issued thirteen recommendations, including higher certainty and transparency, process simplifications, information verification, and participation

[71] https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024/index/pan
[72] World Justice Project – Rule of Law Index – Panama 2024 https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/Panama

of women and people with disabilities[73]. The situation of irregular migrants crossing the Darién Gap on their way to reach the United States remained a challenge for the Government and the humanitarian agencies. The situation of women and girls was particularly dire, with UNICEF having given support to more than 500 survivors' of cases of sexual violence[74]. Despite the signature in 2024 by the National Assembly of the Chapultepec and Salta II Declarations, highlighting the principles of a free press, Panama still needs to repeal the criminal defamation laws and replace them with civil legislation. Judicial harassment against journalists and media outlets is recurrent in the country, with some criminal cases strategically aimed at intimidating journalists and the media not aligned with the political and business establishments of the country. This practice affects freedom of expression and the work of journalists in Panama. Other areas of attention are the rights of Indigenous and Afro-descent people, prisoners and persons deprived of their liberty, and access to basic services such as health care, water and energy.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EUDEL and EU MS updated and extended their strategic priorities adding the Darién Gap migration crisis and developments in the area of gender and LGTBI. The EU and its MS regularly carried out communications campaigns to raise awareness of human rights on the International Women's Day, the International Day against the Violence of Women, the International Day of the World's Indigenous People and the 16 Days of Activism. The EU also supported some activities of the Equal Rights Coalition. The EU deepened its fruitful collaboration with the Ukrainian diaspora in Panama in ensuring awareness among the Panamanian population about the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its devastating consequences. In February, the exhibition 'Ivan Yasny documents the war 2014-2024' was displayed in the Museum of Freedom and Human Rights. For the Anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian flag was hoisted in front of the World Trade Centre in Panama. The installation 'Fractured but Unbroken' displaying Ukraine before and after the invasion was a highlight at ESPACIO EUROPA, the event to celebrate the 9th of May. '20 Days in Mariupol', the Oscar and Bafta-winning documentary was screened on several occasions. In August, the EU supported the stand of the Ukrainian diaspora at the International Book Fair and collaborated with Poland to exhibit 'Posters for Ukraine' in the National Library.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU in Panama has been actively communicating, raising awareness and promoting human rights and democracy not only through its engagements with Panamanian authorities but also via public diplomacy events and public communications, such as social media actions and public interventions. The EU has maintained a good working relationship and active collaboration with the Office of the Ombudsman of Panama to increase awareness of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Furthermore, the EU in Panama regularly exchanged with UN agencies, CSOs and activists working on democracy and human rights.

4. EU financial engagement: The 2021-2024 envelope for thematic programmes for Human Rights and Democracy (NDICI-HRD) allocates a total maximum of EUR 1,1 million to Panama. Under the NDICI Rapid Response Foreign Policy Needs, EUR 2 million were allocated and

[73] Election Expert Mission Panama 2024 Final Report https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/panama/election-expert-mission-panama-2024-final-report_en?s=249
[74] Panama Humanitarian situation, report 4, 2024
https://www.unicef.org/panama/media/10521/file/Situation%20Report%20Nov%202024%20ENG.pdf.pdf

contracted in 2024 for the project Support the Alliance for Development in Democracy (ADD) in the promotion of independent and pluralistic media, access to information and the fight against disinformation. DG ECHO funding in Panama in 2024 totalled EUR 4.210,393 and included financing UN agencies and humanitarian NGO's operations to mitigate the suffering of migrants crossing the Darién Gap. In October, the Director General of ECHO visited a migrant reception centre in the Darién. In January, Fundación Justicia y Género (Justice and Gender Foundation) launched the project 'Strengthening open justice for good governance through citizen auditing by CSOs working on access to justice for women in Panama' with EU funding. Under NDICI Rapid Response Foreign Policy Needs, a project to Support the Alliance for Development in Democracy (ADD) in the promotion of independent and pluralistic media, access to information and the fight against disinformation was launched in July 2024, with Panama as headquarters of the of the project office. The EU in Panama allocated more than EUR 22 000 to cultural and public diplomacy in support of gender equality, human rights and democracy.

5. Multilateral context: Panama aligned with the EU on UNGA Third Committee resolutions such as those dealing with: Ukraine, the Moratorium on the use of the death penalty, Syria, Iran, extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and violence against women and girls in the digital environment. Moreover, Panama has positioned itself among the regional leaders in defence of democracy following the elections in Venezuela, by denouncing the electoral fraud and recognising Edmundo González Urrutia as the legitimate winner, including in the frameworks of OAS and UN.

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 lacks implementation. Violence against women and girls continued to be a widespread issue, and a draft anti-femicide law remained stalled in Congress. Teenage and child pregnancy rates are among the highest in the region. Law enforcement operations continued to confirm links between some politicians, judges, the police and organised crime, including the trafficking of illicit drugs and of arms. Other challenges include pressure on independent journalism, as well as lack of protection of vulnerable groups, such as children, landless workers, persons with disabilities, and LGBTI persons. The weakness of the justice system, including overcrowding and violence in prisons, and the excessive use of pre-trial detention continue to be of concern. In both politics and the media, a fundamentalist and anti-rights discourse, with strong support from 'pro-life' and 'pro-family' groups, remains rife, 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 December 2024, a controversial law that restricts NGOs was approved by the Government. The law, which is ambiguously worded and wide open to interpretation, imposes substantial restrictions on the financing of non-profit organisations, as well as additional registration requirements and heavy compliance penalties. Several NGOs questioned its constitutionality and relevant international authorities and organisations have issued critical statements against it. Indigenous peoples in Paraguay continue to face significant vulnerability and violations of their fundamental rights. Key concerns include access to clean water and sanitation, particularly in the Chaco region, as well as land rights, natural resources,

and access to healthcare, education, and justice. Regarding land rights, institutional weaknesses hinder efforts to protect them legally, leading to delays and unmet promises.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027, the EU focussed its efforts in Paraguay on: consolidating democracy, including through improving electoral processes; transparency and fight against corruption; promoting and protecting vulnerable groups (children, Indigenous peoples 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 2024, 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, democracy and space for civil society. There were several high level visits to Paraguay in 2024 and they all met with social society organisations. The EU continued to call for the implementation of the 2023 EU EOM recommendation including on issues such as voter education, assisted voting, national election observation, and the political participation of women. The EU also called for actions on the rights of indigenous peoples, women's rights, discrimination and violence.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU and its MS continued to devote financial and non-financial means to support the EU human rights and democracy priorities: The aim of consolidating democracy, including through improved electoral processes was supported within the framework of the EIDHR–the project 'Right to Identity through access to official documentation of indigenous people in Paraguay' contributed at increasing the political participation and access to public policies of the Indigenous population, as a contribution to the validity of human rights, through the recognition of their legal personality and their equality before the law in Paraguay. This involved access to their official identity documentation and information on civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. With regard to transparency and fight against corruption, activities related to this priority in Paraguay were channelled at regional level through the 'EL PAcCTO' programme. The second phase of EL PAcCTO restarted its activities in November 2023, providing technical assistance, training and sharing of best practices and mobilising expertise from EU countries for a more effective fight against transnational organized crime. The focus is on cross-border cooperation, penitentiary intelligence, asset recovery, alternatives to detention, cybercrime, money laundering, police and customs cooperation, and fight against corruption. Promotion and protection of vulnerable groups, gender equality and prevention of discrimination was conducted through the EIDHR project 'Access to justice and human rights of detainees', started activities in 2023, in a context of overcrowded prisons due to the high percentage of pre-trial detainees. The project provided technical assistance for the reform of the prison management model, by the implementation of a model for the application of alternative measures to prison, with a focus on human rights and the involvement of civil society.

Under the thematic lines of Human Rights and Support for Civil Society, six new projects started in 2024: The Global Infancia, Paraguay - Comprehensive approach to *criadazgo*; Diakonia, Sweden - Action against misinformation and digital violence in Paraguay; *Coordinadora de derechos humanos*, Paraguay - Strengthening organisations for a better

democracy; Decidamos - Campaign for citizen expression, Paraguay - Participation of youth in the expansion of the civic space and impact on public policies; Amnesty International, Paraguay - Youth mobilising for access to healthcare, a clean environment and equality; Centre of documentation and studies, Paraguay - Education, dialogue and mobilisation of women and young people for the full exercise of gender equality in Paraguay.

Finally, as a part of the Team Europe Gender action plan 2021-2025**,** a bilateral programme on GBV (EUR 4 million) started its implementation in 2024.

5. Multilateral context: Paraguay has ratified all core international and regional human rights conventions and was an active member of the UNHRC 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 continued to vote consistently in favour of resolutions condemning Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its impact on the human rights situation in Ukraine.

Republic of Peru

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Human rights and democracy in Peru continued facing a number of challenges. In June, the Congress presented a draft law increasing the government's control on national and international NGOs including by imposing additional reporting obligations affecting their possibility to receive foreign funding and shrinking space for civil society's work. By the end of 2024, the law had not yet been adopted. Throughout 2024, Peru introduced changes to its political and electoral framework ahead of the elections in 2026, for instance the reintroduction of a parliament with two chambers or by reintroducing the possibility for parliamentarians to run for re-election. Several laws adopted in 2024 raise concerns in terms of fight against corruption. In August, the Peruvian Congress passed a law which restricts investigations into and the prosecution of acts that may constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes committed before 2002. The law came into force despite concerned statements made by the IACHR[75] and the UN Special Procedures[76]. So far, the judiciary has not applied these limitations, and after the adoption of the law, former members of the army were sentenced for human rights violations committed in 1984 and in 1992. Violence against women remains a major problem. Between January and October, 5,518 disappearances of women were registered, of which 68% were under 18 years of age. At country level, 67% of women report having experienced GBV.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU action is focused on five priority areas: democratic stability; human rights defenders (particularly environmental defenders); prevent GBV and discrimination against women, girls and LGBTI persons; economic and social rights–particularly Indigenous peoples and migrants–; and media freedom and new technologies.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In January/February 2024, an EU Election Follow-up Mission (EFM) visited Peru to assess the implementation of recommendations made by the 2020 EU Election Observation Mission and the 2021 EU Election Expert Mission. Peru's good

[75]https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media_center/preleases/2024/206.asp&utm_content=country-per&utm_term=class-

[76]https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/06/peru-draft-bill-establishing-statute-limitations-atrocity-crimes-contravenes

performance in implementing recommendations of EU's electoral observation missions is largely due to the EU's ongoing dialogue with electoral institutions.

The EUDEL is in regular contact with the National Authorities from the executive and judicial branches of government dealing with democracy and human rights issues. Exchanges with civil society representatives (NGOs, HRDs, private sector, trade unions, media, academia, etc.) were regularly organised to discuss political and social developments in the country. The EUDEL participated together with EU MS and likeminded countries as observers in a trial of a case of the assassination of a human rights defender that took place ten years ago. The EU organised training seminars and spaces for dialogue in Lima and other provinces that served as platforms to convey messages on the need to strengthen the democratic institutions. Through contacts with government authorities, the EU engaged with the authorities to ensure the rights of migrants in Peru, especially Venezuelan citizens are respected. The threats against Amazonian Indigenous peoples were discussed with relevant ministries and public authorities. EU member states also took numerous initiatives to foster human rights defenders protection.

4. EU financial engagement: Strengthening democracy and human rights remains a key priority for the EU's financial engagement in Peru. The EU supports HRDs through a grant to the OHCHR office in Peru. The EU also works with prosecutors and judges to improve their investigation capacities against criminal organisations and illegal activities that threaten Indigenous communities.

As regards gender equality and violence against women, the three-year programme on eradication of GBV continued its activities during 2024 in cooperation with ministries, CSOs, academia and the private sector. As part of the 2024 programming, a new phase of the intervention on elimination of GBV and discrimination was approved with an estimated budget EUR 2 million. The issue of gender equality, environmental protection, and overall respect for human rights is also addressed via the support of interventions on social corporate responsibility. Two new projects managed by CSOs aimed at improving the state's and society's response in cases of disappearances and human trafficking of women and girls were signed in November.

In 2024, the EU launched Peru Social, a EUR 15 million bilateral project to support Peru in its efforts in enhancing social protection systems, in line with OECD's recommendations to Peru in the context of its accession process. The project will be complemented by a new EU initiative aiming at formalizing labour, meaning employment and workers at large. The EUDEL supports the recognition of diplomas and competences of migrants in Peru as well as the modernization of the health system, mainly with studies and recommendations addressing OECD recommendations in this sector. EU MS also made important financial contributions to the implementation of the EU Human Rights Strategy for Peru.

5. Multilateral context: Peru continued to support the initiatives condemning the illegal invasion of Russia against Ukraine. The EU made the annual démarche on the EU's priorities for the UNGA session in 2024, including on the resolution regarding the death penalty. As regards the investigating into the allegations of excessive use of force during the anti-Government protests of late 2022 and early 2023, the OHCHR has highlighted the commitment, transparency and will of collaboration shown by the prosecutors in charge. There has been no concrete outcome of the investigations. In August, the IACHR

Commissioner visited Lima to follow up on the recommendations issued by the Commission in its report on the 2022-2023 protests. The conclusions of this report were not made public.

Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The twin-island of St. Kitts and Nevis is a multiparty parliamentary democracy upholding civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. It operates under the rule of law with strong democratic institutions. Incidences of gender-based and domestic violence – including male victims and violence between same-sex partners– remain a recurrent phenomenon. Cases are not always reported due to various reasons, including community pressure, shame and fear of reprisal. Child abuse remains a challenge in the forms of sexual abuse, neglect and 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.

In 2022, the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (ECSC) in St. Kitts and Nevis ruled the criminalisation of consensual anal sex and serious indecency as unconstitutional. However, stigma and discrimination by the society against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons persists to this day, driving the LGBTI community underground and obstructing access to health services. Additionally, the national penal code does not address discrimination or harassment on the account of sexual orientation or gender identity, nor does the law recognize same sex unions in any form, whether it be marriage or partnerships.

Following the general trend in the region, St. Kitts and Nevis has seen a rise in crime rates in 2024. Prevalent across the Eastern Caribbean, the administration of justice and in particular the backlog of cases remain a concern. St. Kitts and Nevis retains the death penalty. While the last execution took place in 2008, there has not been any political initiative or national discussion towards abolishing the death penalty in 2024.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU priorities continued to focus on the following areas: democratic governance and the rule of law; domestic and gender-based violence; the death penalty; discrimination and violence against LGBTI people; and child abuse.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights matters are regularly discussed in meetings with national authorities and CSOs in St. Kitts and Nevis.

4. EU financial engagement: To combat discrimination against the LGBTI community the EUDEL is financing a project (‘Caribbean LGBTIQ+ Initiative for Promoting Solidarity Outcomes – CALIPSO’) of the LGBTI sub-regional umbrella ECADE, aimed at building a stronger LGBTI civil society in all seven countries.

EUDEL is funding eight beneficiary countries under the PACE Justice Regional Programme, aiming at assisting efforts towards reducing the worryingly high number of criminal case backlogs. The project is implemented by UNDP.

5. Multilateral context: The EU Delegation carried out formal démarches on human rights issues over the course of 2024. Member States are involved in the démarches when and where possible.

Saint Lucia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: St. Lucia is a multiparty parliamentary democracy upholding civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. It operates under the rule of law with strong democratic institutions. The most significant concern for St. Lucia has been the increasing crime rates, particularly gun violence. Related to this is the increase in drug smuggling in the past year. Sexual offences increased by nineteen percent (19%) during 2024. Prevalent across the Eastern Caribbean, the administration of justice and in particular the backlog of cases remains a concern. The death penalty remains in place. While the last execution took place in 1995, there has not been any political initiative or national discussion towards abolishing the death penalty in 2024. Incidences of gender-based and domestic violence – including male victims and violence between same-sex partners– remain a recurrent phenomenon in St. Lucia. Cases are not always reported due to various reasons, including community pressure, shame and fear of reprisal. Child abuse remains a challenge in the forms of sexual abuse, neglect and 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. Consensual same-sex is illegal in St. Lucia with punishment ranging from 5 years to 10 years in prison 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 ECADE launched litigation against the so-called 'buggery' and 'indecency' laws in St. Lucia. To date, no judgment has been rendered.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU priorities continued to focus on the following areas: democratic governance and the rule of law; domestic and gender-based violence; the death penalty; discrimination and violence against LGBTI people; and child abuse.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights matters are regularly discussed in meetings with national authorities and civil society organisations in St. Lucia.

4. EU financial engagement: To combat discrimination against the LGBTI community the EU Delegation is financing a project ('Caribbean LGBTIQ+ Initiative for Promoting Solidarity Outcomes – CALIPSO') of the LGBTI sub-regional umbrella ECADE, aimed at building a stronger LGBTI civil society in all seven countries.
The EU Delegation is funding eight beneficiary countries under the PACE Justice Regional Programme, aiming at assisting efforts towards reducing the worryingly high number of criminal case backlogs. The project is implemented by UNDP.
5. Multilateral context: EUDEL carried out formal démarches on human rights issues over the course of 2024. EU MS are involved in the démarches when and where possible.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The multi-island state of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a multiparty parliamentary democracy upholding civil liberties and fundamental freedoms. It operates under the rule of law with strong democratic

institutions. St Vincent and the Grenadines was severely impacted by the passage of Hurricane Beryl with ensuing challenges for the affected population. Over the past year, the country has struggled with an increase in gun violence and gang-related crime. Statistics indicate that the number of homicides for 2024–54–positions the island nation as second in the western hemisphere for homicides per 100,000 individuals. Prevalent across the Eastern Caribbean, the administration of justice and in particular the backlog of cases remains a concern. The death penalty remains in place. While the last execution took place in 1995, there has not been any political initiative or national discussion towards abolishing the death penalty in 2024. Consensual same-sex relations are illegal in St. Vincent and the Grenadines with punishment ranging from five years to ten years in prison under the outdated so-called 'buggery' and 'indecency' laws. In a setback for LGBTI rights in the region, in February 2024, the High Court dismissed an ongoing case, breaking from the series of similar cases around the region that ruled on the unconstitutionality of such laws. The existence of such laws exacerbates the widespread, crosscutting discrimination against LGBTI persons in the country. Incidences of gender-based and domestic violence – including male victims and violence between same-sex partners, both categories often overlooked due to social stigma – remain a recurrent phenomenon. Child abuse remains a challenge in the forms of sexual abuse, neglect and 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-centred.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU priorities continued to focus on the following areas: democratic governance and the rule of law; domestic and GBV; the death penalty; discrimination and violence against LGBTI people; and child abuse.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Human rights matters are regularly discussed in meetings with national authorities and CSOs in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

4. EU financial engagement: To combat discrimination against the LGBTI community the EU Delegation is financing a project ('Caribbean LGBTIQ+ Initiative for Promoting Solidarity Outcomes – CALIPSO') of the LGBTI sub-regional umbrella ECADE, aimed at building a stronger LGBTI civil society in all seven countries.

Following the destructive passage of Hurricane Beryl, particularly in Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the EU mobilized swiftly to provide assistance in the form of financial aid, dispatch of environmental experts from EU MS, and satellite imagery by COPERNICUS to facilitate targeted on-the-ground response to the affected countries.

5. Multilateral context: EUDEL carried out formal démarches on human rights issues over the course of 2024. EU MS are involved in the démarches when and where possible.

Republic of Suriname

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Suriname has a relatively favourable human rights situation where fundamental human rights are generally respected. The current Government has committed to review its human rights policy and improve the overall human rights situation in the country. To this effect, certain progress has been made. The last general elections were held in 2020. The CARICOM election observation mission

concluded that Suriname's electoral system is fundamentally sound. The next elections will be held on 25 May 2025 on the basis of national proportionality, instead of a district-based system, which means that each political party will be presenting only one list of candidates nationally. With the new system, small political parties will have a greater chance of entering the National Assembly. The EU has accepted the government of Suriname's invitation and it will deploy an Electoral Expert Mission for the May 2025 elections. Mr Desi Bouterse, Suriname's former military leader, a convicted drugs dealer and two-term President, passed away in December 2024, at the age of 79. At the time of his death, Bouterse was in hiding for almost a year, evading a 20-year prison sentence for his role in the 1982 December murders, where 15 political opponents were executed. The court case against Bouterse, entirely conducted in Suriname, is in itself a testimony to the independence of the judiciary. Suriname abolished the death penalty and it is an example for the region when it comes to LGBTI rights. However, it remains the only South American country that has not legally recognized the collective land rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. Human rights issues of concern include GBV, children's rights, human and drugs trafficking, prison conditions, and corruption. The government of Suriname fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking. Following these key achievements, Suriname was upgraded to Tier 1.

2. EU action – key focus areas: The EU prioritises its action in Suriname in the following areas: women's rights and the rights of the child, including domestic violence; social and economic rights of Indigenous communities; good governance; and 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 progress in human rights and democracy issues. The EU has been highlighting in particular the issue of GBV, the situation of children, excessive police violence, non-discrimination of LGBTI persons, and equal treatment of tribal and Maroon people. Communication on human rights and democracy priorities was an integral part of the EUDELS's overall communication and public diplomacy agenda. The EUDEL brought up issues of human rights and democracy related concerns in its regular meetings with government authorities, including its Partnership Dialogue in December 2024. The EU human rights and democracy priorities were communicated in social media in the context of International Human Rights days: World Press freedom Day, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, etc. The Human Rights Prize is awarded annually by the EUDEL to persons in Suriname who make an exceptional contribution to the promotion of human rights. This provides also for an excellent opportunity for the Delegation to discuss in detail Human Rights issues with civil society. The 2024 prize was awarded to Sheila Ketwaru-Nurmohamed for her work in providing assistance to victims of domestic violence and training counsellors and police officers.

4. EU financial engagement: To attenuate the negative factors influencing the LGBTI community, the EU launched the project "The Stand with Us", implemented by Projekta (EUR 402,000). The project establishes broad support for the rights of LGBTI persons in Suriname, by creating and strengthening the building blocks for an inclusive society. In order to empower indigenous and tribal communities, the EU started the project 'Local Actors for Change in the Hinterland' (LACH), implemented by Conservation International (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.

5. Multilateral context: Suriname is a like-minded country sharing with the EU a strong belief in upholding a multilateral system and voting for UN Resolutions that are important for the EU. Suriname is a party to most UN and OAS human rights treaties, without any significant reservations. In June 2024, Suriname and the United Nations signed a cooperation plan to strengthen their partnership. This plan focuses on economic transformation, social equality, climate change, natural resource management, and the rule of law, aligning with Suriname's National Development Agenda. In February 2024, the UN in Suriname collaborated with private sector leaders to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. This initiative aimed to address challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate change through collaborative strategies involving businesses, NGOs, and government institutions.

Suriname submitted its fourth Periodic Report to the UN Human Rights Committee, detailing the implementation of the ICCPR. The Committee reviewed this report during its 141st session in July 2024, commending Suriname for its commitment to judicial independence and inquiring about the establishment of a National Human Rights Institute and the rights of tribal and Indigenous peoples. In September 2024, President Santokhi addressed the UNGA, emphasizing Suriname's status as a carbon-negative country and highlighting the nation's vulnerability to rising sea levels. He called for increased support for countries maintaining carbon-negative and carbon-neutral statuses and advocated for global solidarity in addressing climate change.

Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Trinidad and Tobago has been an example of electoral democracy, convening elections as provided for in its Constitution with the will of the people being fully respected. However, improving accountability and transparency, public sector efficiency and the administration of justice remain issues of national concern. The country’s human rights record is considered good in most respects, although shortcomings can be identified with regard to death penalty, LGBTI and prisoner rights. The country retains the death penalty, but it has not been applied for some years. Although there is hostility towards LGBTI people in society, in particular from religious groups of all denominations, their rights are slowly gaining broader acceptance, especially with the younger population. Gang-related violence, high levels of GBV and trafficking are exceedingly high. As a result, the Government is implementing initiatives to strengthen prevention through programmes to support at-risk youth and change gender stereotypes, while also improving the criminal justice system and services for survivors of violence against women. In 2024 a new record was set as T&T recorded its’ highest-ever murder toll at 624 and with the public demanding that the authorities adopt more effective measures to fight crime. The Government responded by announcing a State of Emergency on December 30. The State’s management of prosecutions for corruption and human rights abuses suffers from overburdened bureaucratic procedures, inefficiencies and backlogs that riddle the justice system. A number of CSOs cover a wide range of human rights and democracy issues. They hold power to account and are able to operate without restriction or fear for their safety. Some of the main issues for CSOs, however, include the lack of financial resources to sustain some of their successful initiatives, and lack of legally established mechanisms to engage in

formal dialogues with the Government. The Government fails to follow up with the ratifications of several international treaties and conventions, e.g., regarding migrants and refugees and persons with disabilities.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EUDEL 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: The 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 79th UNGA Third Committee.

Seven strategic political and operational priorities from the Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy 2021-2024' were addressed through public diplomacy activities and information campaigns on the Delegation's communication platforms.

The European Union pays special attention to the position of women and the problem of violence against women in society. Trinidad and Tobago was one of six Caribbean countries where the 'Spotlight Initiative' was implemented until the end of 2023. Certainly, the biggest result is the approval of the 'National Strategic Action Plan on Gender Based and Sexual Violence 2023-2027'. Independently of this EU-funded project (implemented by the UN), the EU uses other fora to warn about this cross-cutting social problem and it is active in organizing every year public events in the framework of the '16 Days of Activism'.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, two civil society organisations were awarded grant contracts, totalling EUR 500,000 as a result of a successful call for proposal. Both projects are intending to address two of the priority areas: migrants and refugees, and LGBTI rights. Over the next three years of implementation, one of the projects will ensure that the main gaps experienced by migrants in the areas of health and education are filled through advocacy, provision of services and training. The other action specifically centres the economic, social and cultural rights of the LGBTI community, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalised - through a focus on improving access to housing and food, as well as opportunities to engage in dignified work and protection from violence. Further, this Action will contribute to advocacy work, on advancing the protection of the LGBTI community's civil and political rights, by providing further evidence for policy recommendations and offer best practices for service providers across civil society and Government ministries on how to best support vulnerable and marginalised communities towards ending discrimination. A number of the priority issues identified for T&T are also supported through regional initiatives including EU-funded PACE Justice and the EL PAcCTO - Europe Latin America Programme of Assistance against Transnational Organized Crime programmes.

5. Multilateral context: During the UNGA 79th Third Committee, Trinidad and Tobago voted in favour of resolutions on: 'Combating glorification of Nazism', neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; and 'The right to development'. It abstained on country-specific resolutions: Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; Situation of

human rights in the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

Eastern Republic of Uruguay

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Uruguay has a solid democracy as demonstrated by the peaceful and orderly legislative and Presidential elections held in the second half of 2024. Uruguay is politically stable with strong democratic institutions and values. Human rights defenders enjoy good legal and political environment conducive for their work. The country upholds political rights and civil liberties and works toward enhanced social inclusion. However, domestic violence against women and girls remains a concern. Despite the existing laws aimed at prevention, support, and reparation, challenges persist in fully implementing GBV legislation, largely due to resource constraints. Another pressing issue for Uruguayan democracy is the underrepresentation of women in politics. While women's parliamentary representation across Latin America has risen to 38.5%, it remains stagnant in Uruguay at 25.3%. 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 established 8% annual quota for the participation afro-descendants in education and work, but only 6% apply and 1% reach the final stage. The conditions in some detention centres are a cause for concern. Uruguay has the highest incarceration rate in South America, at 449 per 100,000 inhabitants, with a recidivism rate of approximately 65% and a disproportionately high percentage of Afro-descendant inmates. Although Uruguay has the lowest poverty rates in LAC, children remain the most vulnerable to poverty.

2. EU action – key focus areas: The EU priorities focused on: combatting all forms of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, promoting gender equality, combatting discrimination and increasing political participation of women; promoting the protection of children from all forms of violence, abuse and neglect; raising awareness about the poor living conditions of people deprived of liberty, to encourage their economic and social reinsertion and to strengthen CSOs on the matter; promoting the protection, access and use of natural resources, supporting communities affected by environment and climate change and monitoring by NGOs, and to promote citizen's participation and access to environmental justice.

The seventh edition of EU Human Rights Award recognised the work of the Civil Association 'Familias Presentes', an Uruguayan organisation protecting the rights of incarcerated individuals and their families. The Award highlights the EU's human rights initiatives globally, promotes collaboration with EU member states and the UN in selecting the winner, and enhances the visibility of civil society's work in Uruguay while commemorating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 2024, it focused on the situation of incarcerated individuals in Uruguay.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: As part of its efforts to promote the participation of CSOs in preparing for Uruguay's fourth UPR, the EU funded a project aimed at strengthening the capacities of CSOs and enhancing the monitoring of recommendations. The National Association of NGOs (ANONG), with the support from the United Nations, coordinated the project.

There was no 2024 local level Human Rights Dialogue due to the elections. The next dialogue is planned with the incoming government in 2025.

4. EU financial engagement: The total value of the EUDEL´s on-going (2020-2024) support to civil society organisations amounts to EUR 5.618,963 of which EUR 2.631,051 (47%), specifically addresses women's rights and fight against GBV. Some EU MS' embassies also provide financing for human rights projects.

Four ongoing EU-funded projects under the EIDHR aims at strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations to influence public policies on GBV; to generate knowledge about gender-based violence as a risk factor in the suicides of women, children and adolescents; women's rights and to empower female victims of domestic violence through their reintegration in the labour market and to develop their effective access to justice. The activities also include support to the National Women Institute through UN Women, to enhance services for GBV survivors, work at municipalities´ level, and a communication campaign aimed at fostering behavioural change.

CSO Thematic Programme funds three projects on agro ecology and biodiversity (EUR 1.6 million) concerning the right to access sustainable natural resources and a sound environment, implemented with civil society organisations.

5. Multilateral context: Uruguay is, being a UN founding member, deeply committed to multilateralism. It is also one of the world's largest per capita contributors to UN peacekeeping missions. The EUDEL and EU MS Embassies have conducted joint démarches on the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and other issues of multilateral relevance. These efforts, including those related to the UNGA Third Committee, have shown that Uruguay's positions generally align with that of the EU.

Uruguay's dedication to human rights was prominently demonstrated during its fourth Universal Periodic Review in 2024. Significant progress was highlighted in combating discrimination, safeguarding the rights of vulnerable groups and migrants, addressing GBV, and promoting environmental policies. Nonetheless, recommendations were made to further strengthen policies in key areas, including prison conditions, gender-based violence, women's participation, and racial discrimination.

United States of America

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, the Biden Administration maintained the moratorium on the federal death penalty and President Biden commuted the sentences of 37 people on federal death row to life imprisonment on 23 December. At the state level, 25 people were executed in nine states, a slight increase on the 24 executions carried out in 2023, but most notably an increase in terms of states applying the death sentence. 27 states still maintain capital punishment as no new states passed repeal legislation and Congress did not pass proposed legislation to abolish the federal death penalty. The trend following the US Supreme Court's repeal of the constitutional right to an abortion through its *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision continued. Currently 12 states have imposed strict near-total abortion bans and another seven severely restricting abortion access (including some enforcing six-week bans). By the end of 2024, the incoming Trump presidency that partially ran on an anti-LGBTI agenda, particularly in terms of curtailing

trans-rights, had already signalled that a certain number of Executive Orders to this effect would be taken. In 2024, 665 bills curtailing transgender rights were introduced in 43 states. Although the large majority of these bills failed, 16 state legislatures passed 45 bills that include bans on public funds used for gender-affirming healthcare, prohibitions on using different names for students than the ones on their birth certificates, bans on discussions of gender and sexuality in classrooms, and restrictions on transgender women's participation on women's sport teams, among others. Congress introduced 81 bills impacting transgender rights but none were passed. The Guantánamo Bay detention facility remained open. However, during the last days of the Biden Administration, 11 Guantanamo Bay detainees of Yemeni origin were transferred to Oman, diminishing the number of prisoners to 15 including three that have been cleared for transfer. Migration and asylum rights continued to face significant pressures in 2024. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reported over 700,000 removals in fiscal year 2024 (1 October - 30 September), the highest amount since 2010. President Biden also announced that Cubans, Haitians, Venezuelans, and Nicaraguans' humanitarian parole status would not be extended, putting 530,000 migrants at risk of deportation. The United States did resettle 100,034 refugees in fiscal year 2024. Although the Administration did not reach its cap of 125,000 refugees, this was the highest number of refugee resettlements in the U.S. in 30 years.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU and its MS organised a full programme of activities to advance human rights goals, in line with the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2027). The EU remains one of the most engaged international actors (alongside like-minded states such as Switzerland) on advancing abolition of the death penalty in the United States, with the active support of Member State embassies and consulates across the country. On 9 October, the HR/VP delivered a joint statement with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on the World Day against the Death Penalty, calling out the United States amongst other countries still carrying out the death penalty, in particular the use of nitrogen hypoxia as a method for execution. In 2024, the EU submitted written interventions in four individual cases and sent a letter with 26 Member States to the Governor of North Carolina to request that he commute the state's death row sentences and to President Biden asking him to commute federal death row sentences.

The EUDEL to the United States organised several briefings for EU MS with civil society groups and Administration officials on capital punishment, voting rights, immigration developments, antisemitism, and global democracy developments. The EU Delegation also met with numerous HRDs. In addition, EUDEL and EU MS worked together on human rights through a variety of events including on the abolition of the death penalty, accountability for Russian crimes in Ukraine, and LGBTI rights, among others.

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. This included, amongst others, coordinating closely on, the death penalty, migrant and asylum seekers' rights, further accountability for human rights violations in Ukraine and the promotion of human rights in multilateral fora. In June, the EUSR for Human Rights visited Washington to co-chair the EU and United States annual consultation on human rights in Washington. In these consultations domestic developments, common multilateral concerns and opportunities for EU-US collaboration in particularly on third countries where discussed, while also conveying EU

concerns on some aspects of US policy such as the continued use of the death penalty. The EUSR maintained a close exchange with US Special Envoys on Freedom of Religion or Belief as well as on LGBTI rights throughout the year.

4. EU financial engagement: The EUDEL to the US promoted the EU's human rights values by financially supporting a Europe and World Day Against the Death Penalty event in conjunction with the Swiss Embassy, New York University, and several civil society organisations. The EU Delegation also funded a public discussion on LGBTI rights to young professionals that featured the Delegation's Human Rights Counsellor and a local journalist from the *Washington Blade,* an LGBTI media outlet. Additionally, EUDEL participated in the Washington DC Pride Parade.

5. **Multilateral context:** The EU and the US further strengthened coordination on UN affairs, particularly in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The EU and US worked closely together at the UNHRC. The US continued to promote democracy and human rights abroad, especially regarding accountability for Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The U.S. participated in the third Summit for Democracy, held by the Republic of Korea and continued to play an active role in the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group on Ukraine.

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy in Venezuela continued to be severely hindered throughout 2024. The shrinking of the political and civic space coupled with a severe crackdown on dissenting voices ahead and after the 28 July presidential election with more than 2000 arbitrary detentions, including minors, is of major concern. Civil and political rights, including freedoms of association and assembly faced significant restrictions. The exercise of the freedom of expression and information continues suffering serious limitations in the country. State-led actions limiting these rights often include the harassment and persecution of media workers, internet blockage imposed upon independent media, the shutdown of radio stations or disinformation campaigns. The adoption of restrictive regulatory framework, including the bill on the control, regularisation, performance and financing of NGOs, potentially constraining the operating environment for civil society is also of particular concern. Following the elections of 28 July, domestic and international monitors voiced serious concerns about the electoral results announced by the authorities claiming the victory of Nicolás Maduro without fully disclosing voting records for independent scrutiny. The copies of the voting records published by the opposition showed that Edmundo González received the majority of votes. The EU has repeatedly asked for the full publication of official records stressing that in their absence, Nicolás Maduro lacks the legitimacy of a democratically elected president. The climate of violence in border and mining areas continued throughout 2024, often controlled by illegal armed groups, local gangs or military groups. Human Rights Defenders continue denouncing episodes of disappearances, attacks and harassment. The enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights was seriously impacted by the dire economic situation. The difficulties in the access to food, essential public services, transport, education and health persisted in 2024. International humanitarian sources indicated that millions of people are still in need of humanitarian assistance.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU was active in the area of protecting and empowering individuals. The EU has supported initiatives to prevent violence against women, promote human rights education for youth, and continuously monitor the human rights situation, responding to cases where human rights defenders are at risk. The EU has backed programs aimed at educating children to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls, as well as providing support to victims. The EU also focused on building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies: In 2024, the EU continued supporting projects focusing on capacity building for civil society and community leaders. The EU promoted a global system for human rights and democracy, e.g. by strongly supporting the OHCHR and actively advocating for the respect of its full mandate in Venezuela. In 2024, the Venezuelan authorities allowed the return of the OHCHR to Caracas after expelling them in February. Concerning the topic of new technologies, the EU focussed on harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges: The EU supports CSO-funded projects on media freedom and the fight against disinformation with the aim to guarantee the right to access precise, transparent and objective information. In addition, the EU pursued a 'Delivering by working together' approach. The EU coordinates locally with the EU MS present on the ground to strengthen collective efforts in implementing the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy. France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Spain have financially supported activities on a wide range of areas such as gender equality, women's rights and inclusivity issues, notably LGBTI, as well as access to information.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU has engaged with the Venezuelan authorities in support of Venezuela's return to the democratic path in accordance with the Barbados Agreement of 2023. The EU considered deploying an EU Electoral Observation Mission. However, the National Electoral Council of Venezuela decided unilaterally in May 2024 to withdraw its invitation. The EU and its Member States have been actively calling on the Venezuelan authorities to publish full voting records, to stop the repression and intimidation of opposition figures and civil society, and to release unconditionally all political prisoners. The EU has issued several statements: two HRVP Statements on the elections (29 July) and on developments after it (30 July) were followed by two EU27 Statements (04/08 and 24/08)[77]. The European Council in its conclusions of October and December confirmed the EU will mobilise all the instruments at its disposal to support democracy in Venezuela. On 10 January 2025, the EU announced restrictive measures on 15 Venezuelan officials responsible for the undermining of democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the country[78]. The EU sanctions are targeted and do not harm the Venezuelan population since they are a means to foster dialogue and a democratic way out to the crisis. The EU will pursue targeted engagement with the institutions and with political and civil society actors to address concerns and facilitate meaningful dialogue on human rights and the transition to democracy.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, the EU has allocated around EUR1.32 million to support the work of civil society and contribute to their enabling environment. The EU has also allocated resources to the protection of human rights defenders and human rights mainstreaming in local media. The EU has continued being the biggest financial contributor to the OHCHR Office in Caracas.

[77] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/venezuela/
[78] https://europa.eu/!3wbCRV

5. Multilateral context: In 2024, the EU actively addressed the human rights situation in Venezuela through its participation in the UNHRC including in Interactive Dialogues with the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela and in the oral update by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on Venezuela. The EU supported the UN HRC resolution on Venezuela extending the mandate of the OHCHR and the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela. The EU strongly supports the work of the International Criminal Court and its ongoing investigations into Venezuela. The EU is committed to full co-operation on the prevention of serious crimes falling under the jurisdiction of the Court including through regular exchange of information. The ILO's participation in the government-led Social Dialogue Forum stalled again. In the ILO's 352th session, the EU expressed that it was deeply concerned about the labour rights situation in Venezuela, particularly regarding Freedom of Association and the Right to Organise. Many trade unionists remain imprisoned for union-related activities.