

# Human rights and democracy in the world, 2021

During the January I plenary session, the European Parliament is due to formulate recommendations for future EU action in favour of human rights and democracy in the world. The latest EU annual report on the topic highlights the EU's commitment to promoting human rights and democracy globally in 2021, against a grim backdrop of backsliding in many countries. In its motion for a resolution, Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs and Subcommittee on Human Rights highlight the impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

## Background

Within the framework of the [EU action plan on human rights and democracy 2020-2024](#), in April 2022 the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy published the [2021 annual report on human rights and democracy in the world](#). The report finds that three quarters of the world's population live in a country where the human rights situation deteriorated in 2021. It also highlights the EU's efforts to promote human rights, international humanitarian law and international criminal justice in 2021, epitomised by the actions of the [EU Special Representative for Human Rights](#) (EUSR HR) and supported, notably, through the €1.5 billion [Global Europe Human Rights and Democracy 2021-2027](#) programme and the [Team Europe Democracy Initiative](#). This report focuses on the situation in 2021 and [does not examine](#) in depth the impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which broke out in February 2022.

## European Parliament position

Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) drafted a report for the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), with an opinion from the Committee on Gender Equality (FEMM), in view of the plenary debate in response to the EU annual report. The [report that the AFET committee adopted](#) on 30 November 2022 highlights the consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on democracy, human rights and humanitarian law. The AFET/DROI report calls for strong support from the EU and Member States for all mechanisms that will hold war criminals and human rights violators accountable for their actions relating to the war in Ukraine, and provide remedies to their victims.

The report welcomes EU action to forestall all human rights abuses, especially against women, [children](#), older persons, [persons with disabilities](#), [LGBTIQ](#) people, and national, ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities. It expresses concern about the threats to freedom of expression in many countries and the clampdown against [defenders](#) of this freedom. It also condemns the instrumentalisation of religion as a tool to weaken the enjoyment of fundamental freedoms.

The report hails the Commission's proposals to integrate human rights in value chains ([due diligence](#), [prohibition of products made with forced labour](#)). Stronger human rights clauses with clearer criteria should allow for effective suspension of EU agreements with third countries; similarly, EU budget support should be suspended in the event of human rights violations. In addition, the report proposes to devise EU and international mechanisms to fight corruption worldwide.

The report calls for the [EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime](#) (GHRSR) to be consistently applied by all EU Member States; sanctions under the GHRSR should take into account Parliament's recommendations and be decided by qualified majority voting in the Council. It also calls for a strengthening of relations on human rights issues between Parliament and the European External Action Service (EEAS), and for the EUSR HR to be accountable to Parliament.

Own-initiative report: [2022/2049\(INI\)](#); Committee responsible: AFET/DROI; Rapporteur: Isabel Wiseler-Lima (EPP, Luxembourg).

## EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service

Author: Eric Pichon, Members' Research Service  
PE 739.287 – January 2023



This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy. © European Union, 2023

[eprs@ep.europa.eu](mailto:eprs@ep.europa.eu) (contact) <http://www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu> (intranet) <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank> (internet) <http://eprthinktank.eu> (blog)