

Human rights and democracy in the world

During the January 2021 plenary session, the European Parliament is due to debate the annual EU report on human rights and democracy in the world. The latest annual report, adopted by the Council in June 2020, highlights the EU's leading role in promoting human rights and democracy in 2019, against the backdrop of negative trends globally. The report of Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs takes into account more recent developments, such as the impact of coronavirus. It points out that the response to the pandemic has caused a decline in the respect of democratic and human rights standards in some countries. Based on this report, Parliament is expected to formulate recommendations for future EU action in favour of human rights and democracy.

Background

On 15 June 2020, the Council of the EU approved the [EU annual report on human rights and democracy in the world 2019](#). The report [acknowledges](#) that human rights and democracy were increasingly challenged in 2019 in several countries, and at multilateral level. This report is the last in the framework of the [2015-2019 EU action plan](#) on human rights and democracy. The Council adopted the [2020-2024 EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024](#) on 19 November 2020, and a [global human rights sanctions regime](#) on 7 December 2020.

European Parliament position

Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) drafted a report for the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) to prepare the plenary debate in response to the EU annual report. While the annual report focuses on the situation in 2019, the AFET/DROI [report](#), adopted on 3 December 2020, also highlights the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. The report warns that measures for economic recovery might lower requirements on social rights and protection of the environment. It stresses that lockdown and other restrictive measures have been used by some governments as an excuse to delay [elections](#), [restrict fundamental freedoms](#), and target human rights defenders or opponents; it expresses concern about the use of data-based digital tools in this context. The pandemic has also resulted in an increase in hate speech, discrimination and violence against ethnic or religious minorities, women, children, and LGBTI people.

The report highlights that climate change and destruction of the environment, such as deforestation in the [Amazon](#), are a threat to human rights, as they trigger a rise in global hunger, conflict over water and other resources, and displacement. [Environmental defenders](#) are also increasingly under attack. While the number of international migrants and refugees in 2019 made up 3.5 % of the world's population, the report stresses the disproportionate impact of coronavirus on them, and denounces measures detrimental to the [human rights of refugees, migrants](#) and of [those who assist them](#). The report hails the aspirations of citizens, especially youth, towards human rights, and welcomes the EU's involvement at international level, in particular for the 30th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the [Rights of the Child](#). It calls for strengthening of the protection of refugees and human rights defenders, and urges the EU to condemn any backlash – in particular on women's and LGBTI rights, as also highlighted by the opinion of the [Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality](#). It calls for the EU to streamline and monitor human rights and democratic standards in all its policies, and notably in international agreements.

As concerns the implementation of the 2020-2024 action plan on human rights and democracy, the report insists that the European External Action Service, the Commission and Parliament engage in a structured dialogue on the follow-up. This would allow for improved parliamentary diplomacy and scrutiny.

Own-initiative report: [2020/2208\(INI\)](#); Committee responsible: AFET; Rapporteur: Isabel Santos (S&D, Portugal).

