










Procedure file

Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2021/2204(INI)	Procedure completed
The EU Guidelines of Human Rights Defenders		
Subject 6.10.09 Human rights situation in the world		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	 Foreign Affairs		26/05/2021
		 NEUMANN Hannah	
		Shadow rapporteur	
		 OCHOJSKA Janina	
		 GLUCKSMANN Raphaël	
		 CSEH Katalin	
		 KANKO Assita	
		 URBÁN CRESPO Miguel	

Key events			
25/11/2021	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
09/02/2023	Vote in committee		
17/02/2023	Committee report tabled for plenary	A9-0034/2023	Summary
15/03/2023	Debate in Parliament		
16/03/2023	Results of vote in Parliament		
16/03/2023	Decision by Parliament	T9-0086/2023	Summary
16/03/2023	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2021/2204(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Implementation
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 54
Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 159
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	AFET/9/07479

Documentation gateway					
Committee draft report		PE736.464	24/10/2022	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE738.617	21/11/2022	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A9-0034/2023	17/02/2023	EP	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T9-0086/2023	16/03/2023	EP	Summary

The EU Guidelines of Human Rights Defenders

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Hannah NEUMANN (Greens/EFA, DE) on EU guidelines on human rights defenders.

Members recall that human rights defenders are key allies in the EU's efforts to protect and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law and to prevent conflicts worldwide. It is therefore in the essential interest of the EU and its Member States to support and protect their activities.

Overall assessment of the EU's strategic framework

Members welcome the EU policy framework for human rights defenders, which has developed over the last 20 years around the guidelines adopted in June 2004 and revised in 2008. However, they consider that the overall implementation of the Guidelines by the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Commission and the Member States has been uneven, focusing mainly on reactive measures, lacking consistency in the overall implementation of the strategy and characterised by insufficient visibility of EU action and channels of support for human rights defenders.

The EU is called upon to strengthen its policy framework for human rights development through continuous, concrete and effective action in third countries, in particular in its relations with authoritarian regimes and in places with which the EU and its Member States have concluded association, trade, investment or cooperation agreements, or have important commercial, energy, security, migratory and other interests.

Team Europe - Working together for maximum impact

The report calls on the EU to implement a genuine Team Europe approach to human rights defenders, encouraging Member States that are not yet active on human rights development issues to develop a specific strategy and framework for action. It calls for greater consistency and a strategic overall approach in this regard and for a firm commitment by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) and his office on ensuring the consistent implementation of the Guidelines across all delegations.

Greater focus on prevention and funding needs

Members welcome the EU's substantial and steadily increasing financial contribution to supporting human rights defenders worldwide. They call for a qualitative shift towards a more comprehensive, long-term approach to ensuring the integral security of entire communities mobilised to defend their rights. They call on EU delegations to facilitate the establishment and funding of local and regional networks and movements of human rights defenders.

The report stresses the importance of placing the protection of human rights defenders at the heart of the EU's political commitment and diplomatic action vis-à-vis third countries. The Commission and Member States should give priority to: (i) systematically identifying key allies in third country authorities and institutions; (ii) providing more financial support for the establishment and strengthening of national human rights institutions; and (iii) strengthening national legislation and policies on human rights defenders.

Members reiterate their call on the Commission to refrain strictly from providing budgetary support to third country governments responsible for widespread human rights violations and repression of human rights defenders.

New challenges

The report calls, inter alia, for (i) implementing the Guidelines with a gender perspective; (ii) addressing climate protection as a separate issue in its policy on human rights defenders; (iii) integrating violence against human rights defenders into its crisis management policy, (iv) prioritising the fight against the misuse of surveillance technologies in the field of human rights defenders; and (v) addressing the issue of

human rights defenders in the context of the UN Human Rights Council, (iii) integrate violence against human rights defenders into its crisis management policy; (iv) prioritising the fight against the misuse of surveillance technologies to undermine the work of human rights defenders; (v) integrating the protection of the rights of human rights defenders, in particular trade union representatives and defenders of land, indigenous peoples' rights and the environment, into its corporate sustainability due diligence directive and its trade agreements and instruments.

The report stresses that visas are an essential protection tool and that, in order to effectively assist human rights defenders at risk, the Commission should take a proactive role in the establishment of a European multiple-entry visa system for these defenders.

European Parliament oversight and practical support

The report stresses that Parliament, as a full member of Team Europe, should be fully integrated into the EU's policy on human rights defenders.

Parliament should decide to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights defenders, including through: (i) the adoption of a new European Parliament strategic framework on support for human rights defenders, (ii) a more systematic dialogue with human rights defenders in all its relevant bodies, and (iii) the organisation of an annual meeting with human rights defenders by each interparliamentary delegation and the external affairs committees.

Necessary institutional and policy changes

The report calls for, inter alia:

- the designation by each interparliamentary delegation of a human rights focal point among its bureau members;
- a comprehensive assessment of the Union's action in favour of human rights defenders in the framework of the mid-term review of the implementation of the 2020-2024 Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy, scheduled for June 2023;
- updating the Guidelines in the light of the evolving challenges and risks faced by human rights defenders, in particular the digital transformation and online threats;
- improving communication and transparency on the implementation of the Guidelines;
- the possibility of strengthening the EU's presence in all countries of serious human rights concerns.

The report calls on the EEAS and the Commission to systematically consult civil society representatives and human rights defenders prior to any human rights dialogue.

The EU Guidelines of Human Rights Defenders

The European Parliament adopted by 400 votes to 43, with 86 abstentions, a resolution on EU guidelines on human rights defenders.

Parliament recalled that human rights defenders are key allies in the EU's efforts to protect and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law and to prevent conflicts worldwide. It is therefore in the essential interest of the EU and its Member States to support and protect their activities.

Overall assessment of the EU's strategic framework

Members welcome the EU policy framework for human rights defenders, which has developed over the last 20 years around the guidelines adopted in June 2004 and revised in 2008. However, they consider that the overall implementation of the Guidelines by the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Commission and the Member States has been uneven, focusing mainly on reactive measures, lacking consistency in the overall implementation of the strategy and characterised by insufficient visibility of EU action and channels of support for human rights defenders.

Stressing that the human rights defenders dimension has yet to be mainstreamed throughout the Union's external action in a systematic and consistent manner, Parliament called on the EU to strengthen its policy framework for human rights development through continuous, concrete and effective action in third countries, in particular in its relations with authoritarian regimes and in places with which the EU and its Member States have concluded association, trade, investment or cooperation agreements, or have important commercial, energy, security, migratory and other interests.

Team Europe - Working together for maximum impact

The resolution called on the EU to implement a genuine Team Europe approach to human rights defenders, encouraging Member States that are not yet active on human rights development issues to develop a specific strategy and framework for action. Such an approach, through which all EU institutions and actors, including the EU Special Representative on Human Rights, as well as the Member States, would work together on implementing the Guidelines, would prove effective in helping to counter the global backsliding of human rights and democracy.

The EU is invited to increase its institutional capacity, both in Brussels and in its delegations, in order to be able to adequately respond to the worsening environment faced by human rights defenders.

Greater focus on prevention and funding needs

Parliament underlined the importance of putting the protection of human rights defenders at the heart of the EU's political engagement with and diplomatic agenda for third countries. The Commission and the Member States should prioritise:

- the systematic identification of key allies within third-country authorities and institutions,
- increased financial support for the establishment and strengthening of national human rights institutions;
- the strengthening of domestic legislation and policies on human rights defenders, in line with the UN framework on human rights defenders;
- the promotion of national campaigns, networks and structures to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of human rights defenders;

- efforts to encourage governments to dedicate sufficient funding to the protection of human rights defenders;
- assistance to develop independent mechanisms to address the climate of impunity for violations committed against human rights defenders;
- the provision of training for human rights defenders on issues such as reporting human rights violations and attacks against them.

Members reiterated their call on the Commission to strictly refrain from providing budgetary support to third-country governments responsible for widespread human rights violations and repression of human rights defenders.

New challenges

The resolution called, inter alia, for (i) implementing the Guidelines with a gender perspective; (ii) addressing climate protection as a separate issue in its policy on human rights defenders; (iii) integrating violence against human rights defenders into its crisis management policy, (iv) prioritising the fight against the misuse of surveillance technologies in the field of human rights defenders; and (v) addressing the issue of human rights defenders in the context of the UN Human Rights Council, (iii) integrate violence against human rights defenders into its crisis management policy; (iv) prioritising the fight against the misuse of surveillance technologies to undermine the work of human rights defenders; (v) integrating the protection of the rights of human rights defenders, in particular trade union representatives and defenders of land, indigenous peoples' rights and the environment, into its corporate sustainability due diligence directive and its trade agreements and instruments.

The resolution stressed that visas are an essential protection tool and that, to effectively assist human rights defenders at risk, the Commission should take a proactive role in the establishment of a European multiple-entry visa system for these defenders.

European Parliament oversight and practical support

Parliament reiterated its commitment to playing a leading role in shaping and enhancing the EUs action in support of human rights defenders, notably through its plenary urgency resolutions and debates, the work of its Subcommittee on Human Rights, specifically reports and hearings, its missions to third countries and international and regional organisations and its annual Sakharov Prize.

Parliament decided to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights defenders, including through: (i) the adoption of a new European Parliament strategic framework on support for human rights defenders, (ii) a more systematic dialogue with human rights defenders in all its relevant bodies, and (ii) the organisation of an annual meeting with human rights defenders by each interparliamentary delegation and the external affairs committees.

Necessary institutional and policy changes

Parliament called for, inter alia:

- a comprehensive assessment of the Union's action in favour of human rights defenders in the framework of the mid-term review of the implementation of the 2020-2024 Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy, scheduled for June 2023;
- updating the Guidelines in the light of the evolving challenges and risks faced by human rights defenders, in particular the digital transformation and online threats;
- improving communication and transparency on the implementation of the Guidelines;
- the possibility of strengthening the EU's presence in all countries of serious human rights concerns.

Parliament called on the EEAS and the Commission to systematically consult civil society representatives and human rights defenders prior to any human rights dialogue.

Transparency				
NEUMANN Hannah	Rapporteur	AFET	05/07/2023	COHOM Delegates
NEUMANN Hannah	Rapporteur	AFET	11/10/2022	Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize laureate
NEUMANN Hannah	Rapporteur	AFET	20/09/2022	Division for Human Rights, European External Action Service
NEUMANN Hannah	Rapporteur	AFET	31/05/2022	Front Line Defenders
NEUMANN Hannah	Rapporteur	AFET	30/05/2022	Head of Unit Gender, Human Rights and Democratic Governance, European Commission
NEUMANN Hannah	Rapporteur	AFET	12/05/2022	Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI)
NEUMANN Hannah	Rapporteur	AFET	24/04/2022	Former UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders
NEUMANN Hannah	Rapporteur	AFET	07/04/2022	Front Line Defenders Several Human Rights Defenders cooperating with Front Line Defenders

NEUMANN Hannah	Rapporteur	AFET	07/04/2022	International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
NEUMANN Hannah	Rapporteur	AFET	22/03/2022	EU Ambassador to Afghanistan