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EU-NGO FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS



**YOUTH AS ACTORS OF CHANGE
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

The 25th EU-NGO Forum on Human Rights was co-organized by the European Commission, the European External Action Service and the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN).

This document should not be considered as representative of the European Commission, EEAS, nor HRDN official position.



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ACRONYMS

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DG INTPA	Directorate General for International Partnerships – European Commission
EC	European Commission
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
EUDELs	European Union Delegations
HRD	Human Rights Defender
HRDN	Human Rights and Democracy Network
LAC	Latin America and Caribbean
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
HR/VP	High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission
OHCHR	United Nations – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human rights
UDHR75	75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
WYDE	EU’s Women and Youth in Democracy Initiative
YAP	Youth Action Plan in External Action

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the context of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR75), the 25th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the adoption of the Youth Action Plan in External Action and the 2022 European Year of Youth – the 25th EU-NGO Forum on Human Rights took place on 4th and 5th December 2023, in Brussels, Belgium under the theme “Youth as actors of change for human rights”. It focused on the role of young human rights defenders (HRDs), the global threats and challenges they face, and explored meaningful ways for them to actively contribute to shaping their future and the future of human rights.

The two-day event brought together 300 in-person participants from over 100 countries, including 140 HRDs and activists and representatives from the European Union institutions, the United Nations, civil society organisations, and EU Member States.

This year’s Forum prioritised interactivity and featured breakout sessions allowing participants to share experiences and engage in constructive intergenerational exchanges. The full agenda, concept note, resources shared and after movie of the event are available for participants on the Forum’s online platform.

Recommendations and the way forward

The outcomes of the discussion contributed to the UN Human Rights 75 Youth Declaration, that was presented at the High Level event held in Geneva on 12 December 2023, to commemorate the UDHR75 by a number of youth representatives, including young delegates from the Forum.

Some key takeaways included:

- **Meaningful participation:** The EU and the international community must ensure meaningful youth participation in decision-making, ensuring their voices are not only heard but also incorporated into policies shaping the present and future of human rights. This should include creating spaces for young people’s voices and dialogues with international and European institutions.
- **End age-based discrimination:** Youth actors struggle regularly against perceptions of inexperience and a lack of seriousness. Measures to eliminate age-based discrimination and to take youth perspectives more seriously are needed.
- **Building communities:** Concrete support to build global and regional networks is needed, by establishing or strengthening platforms that connect different activists, defenders, and organizations, embracing inter-cultural exchanges, facilitating information sharing, pooling resources and funding.
- **Access to funding:** It is essential to support local and global CSOs through core, accessible funding and capacity-building, with simplified administrative processes. Prioritise flexible funding mechanisms, including emergency funds for at-risk activists, trust and support youth-led organizations, and recognise their limited capacity for managing large funds, piloting smaller and more easily manageable allocations.

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- **Building capacity:** training and capacity building for young activists and defenders should be enhanced. For example, participants called for greater awareness-raising and better access for young people to the EU HRD Protection Mechanism Protect Defenders.eu and the EU youth sounding board initiative, globally.
- **Protection policies:** The EU and the international community need to ensure the adoption and implementation of comprehensive HRD protection policies covering mental health, cyber-attacks and other online threats, conflict resolution, and specific legal support to young activists. More safe spaces where human rights defenders can exercise their activities need to be created, particularly in conflict situations and in authoritarian countries. Moreover, mechanisms to systematically monitor and address violations against HRDs globally need to be strengthened. Protection measures should also include increased investment in preventive measures.
- **Combat disinformation and online threats:** Strengthened support to address state-driven disinformation campaigns and misuse of social media is needed. In this respect, young people's trust in the institutions needs to be rebuilt and supported. Urgent measures, including effective actions to counter digital surveillance, censorship and hate speech are essential. Both public and private sectors should also regulate the online sphere in line with international human rights law. Moreover, participants called for guidance from the EU and the UN on freedom of expression and social media usage for youth, in particular in terms of mental health and digital security.
- **Address structural inequalities:** Stronger measures to fight structural inequalities, gender-based discriminations, and the shrinking of global civic space.
- **Support education:** Civic, human rights and general education need to be guaranteed in all countries as they are a powerful tool to promote and protect human rights and democracy. Strategies to empower activists in effectively communicating human rights effectively to diverse audiences should be strengthened.
- **Visa accessibility:** Visa issues frequently arise, impeding HRDs to travel to events at the EU or the UN, such as for the EU-NGO Forum itself. Participants called to facilitate the visa procedures and promote meaningful participation of HRDs and activists in international fora.

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape, youth plays a pivotal role in protecting and promoting human rights, ranging from climate change to digital rights, the ongoing struggle for democracy while combating corruption, and the fight against discrimination. They act as essential watchdogs and implementers of the UDHR, embodying its principles and core values.

As independent activists, or as members of organizations, young HRDs have shown that their determination and resilience remain vibrant as they strive to challenge existing power structures and construct a better future. In all these actions, young people have consistently called for empowerment, for a platform to express their views and be heard, to be taken seriously and to be free from age discrimination.

This is why the EU-NGO Forum was set up this year with a deliberate emphasis on serving as an interactive space for HRDs of different ages and representatives of the EU, NGOs, and UN, to explore together ways to empower youth around the world. Youth advisors to the European Commission ([EU Youth sounding boards](#)), including from the Women and Youth in Democracy initiative (WYDE), and youth advisors to the [OHCHR \(Human Rights 75 Youth Advisory Group\)](#) were also present. Moderators, facilitators, speakers and rapporteurs, were also chosen among the participants, in order to promote a collaborative and inclusive approach to the event.

This report aims to offer an insight into the Forum discussions and to outline the key highlights presented by participants.

The [agenda](#) (annex 1) of the Forum comprised two full days featuring plenary panels with high-level speeches, and thematic and regional breakout sessions around the themes of protection and participation, where each participant had the opportunity to play a prominent role in sharing experiences, networking, and offering recommendations. Furthermore, the Forum included foresight methodology exercises, in which participants had the opportunity not only to discuss current issues but also to reflect with a more positive perspective on ways to build a better future for human rights in the decades to come.

Regional sessions between EU diplomats and HRDs enabled country-specific discussions on human rights issues. In addition, training sessions were organised which allowed for participants to deepen their knowledge about access to EU funding or protection tools, or their skills in terms of advocacy, civic engagement or addressing disinformation and online threats.

Finally, a cultural and networking event hosted an exposition from the HRD and cartoonist Aseem Trivedi, founder member of the Free Speech Foundation, who is known for his campaigns as [Cartoons Against Corruption](#), [Cartoons for Human Rights](#) and [Save Your Voice](#). The exhibition permitted a visually impactful exploration of key human rights issues, offering a unique perspective through the lens of satire and illustration. More information on the artist can be found [here](#).

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• The opening speeches of the Forum

The Forum opened with a plenary session comprising four high-level opening speeches by representatives from the EU, the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and HRDN.

Věra Jourová, *European Commission Vice-President for Values and Transparency* emphasized the need to “commemorate” the UDHR75 amid global challenges, “as the state of the world today is not a cause for celebration”. Highlighting that human rights can never be taken for granted, she underlined the Forum’s role in bringing together young activists to share ideas for a more promising future. In this sense, the EU’s commitment to give young people a formal voice in EU policy decisions abroad was renewed through the first ever [Youth Action Plan in External Action](#), and the [Women and Youth in Democracy Initiative](#) (WYDI) which helps youth-led organisations and movements around the world to push for democratic reforms.

The *EU Special Representative for Human Rights* **Eamon Gilmore**¹, underscored that the future belongs to young people and stressed the importance of a forward-looking approach, especially in conflict zones where youth participation is often not sufficiently taken into account. Mr. Gilmore recalled the EU’s commitment to systematically consult youth in policy-making including through the establishment of the [EU youth sounding boards](#). He noted EU initiatives to enhance the visibility of young activists, notably with the campaign [#OurVoiceOurFuture](#).

“Somehow societies are never quite so fast to involve young people in building the future, to treat young people as truly equal citizens, and above all, to share power with the young. These two days are effort to somewhat correct that a little bit. To draw young people and especially young human rights defenders into the decision-making process.”

*Eamon Gilmore
EU Special Representative for Human Rights*

Hadja Lahbib, *Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Affairs, Foreign Trade and the Federal Cultural Institutions*, highlighted the crucial role of youth in constructing fair and inclusive societies, affirming that young people “are not just the future — they’re change-makers today”. As attacks and violence against activists and defenders are rising, she urgently called to empower youth in decision-making processes. In this perspective, Belgian embassies are taking steps to provide safe spaces, particularly for women and youth.

Gina Wharton, *EU Civic Space Policy Advisor at Oxfam International, on behalf of the Human Rights and Democracy Network*, pointed out how the EU-NGO Forum is an expression of the cooperation between the EU and CSOs that needs to be strengthened. With a specific emphasis on young HRDs and activists facing life-threatening challenges to be heard, the Forum needs to move beyond rhetoric and the “talk shop”. She called for a collective search for solutions, strengthened protection and meaningful inclusion of young people in decision-making processes.

“HRDs face numerous threats, challenges and risks, but yet they continue to rise and fight for the fundamental rights and freedoms of each individual, of our children, and of future generations. We must continue to stand by them and work together to promote justice and equality, while addressing civic space and human rights violations.”

*Gina Wharton,
EU Civic Space Policy Advisor at Oxfam International*

¹ Eamon Gilmore full speech available here: <https://www.gilmore.ie/25th-eu-ngo-human-rights-forum-2023-youth-as-actors-of-change-for-human-rights-remarks/>

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● The Interactive opening panel “Youth as Actors for Change”

The first interactive opening panel featured the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human rights **Nada Al-Nashif**, three young HRDs from Uganda, Ukraine and Palestine as well as the EU Special Representative for Human Rights **Eamon Gilmore**. Speakers underlined the need to recognize and empower youth as drivers of change for human rights.

Reflecting around the UDHR75 and the 25th anniversary of the UN Declaration on HRDs, **Nada Al-Nashif**, *UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights*, stressed that excluding youth from decision making is unacceptable, and that it is imperative to ensure that discussions are rooted in a commitment to inclusion and equality. Calling for transformative action, she advocated against the criminalization and targeting of peaceful protesters and any form of discrimination. She finally called for sustained and more robust efforts to strengthen and celebrate the work of HRDs worldwide.

“This 75th anniversary is an opportunity to rejuvenate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, demonstrate how it can meet the needs of our time and advance its promise of freedom, equality and justice for all.”

*Nada Al-Nashif
UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights,*

The three HRDs were asked to present country specific scenarios, including examples of the youth’s role as actors for changes.

In light of the context in Uganda, **Nana Millers**, *Executive Director at the Trans Youth Initiative*, stressed the need for a holistic and intersectional approach to address social justice and gender equality, with youth as key change-makers. She addressed the challenges faced by the transgender community and LGBTQI+ rights defenders in Uganda, especially since the introduction of the anti-homosexuality act. In this context, she called for young people to speak for their own rights, including body autonomy, and stressed the importance of creating safe spaces, enhanced medical access, and increased resources to expand support.

In her intervention **Mariia Sulialina**, *Head of the Center of Civic Education “Almenda” from Ukraine*, explained how since the Euromaidan protests of 2013 – in which she participated in as a student – the youth in Ukraine have embraced a responsibility for driving change. Despite challenges linked to human rights violations and war crimes, reforms persist, underscoring the importance of unity in Ukraine. Stressing youth’s frontline role in fighting corruption and protecting children’s rights, she called on both the EU and the UN to provide stronger tools to youth for greater effectiveness in their action.

Asala Mansour, *International Advocacy Associate at The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel (ADALAH)*, expressed strong concern for the shrinking freedom of assembly and expression in the country, especially in relation to Israel’s counterterrorism law and the undue curbs on expressing solidarity with the Palestinian population. She pointed out how youth in Palestine are the major victims but also the ones documenting the major human rights violations with determination, this is why they should be placed at the forefront of decision-making. Finally, she urged the EU and the UN to call for an immediate ceasefire and guarantee the protection of Palestinians HRDs and defend their right to be heard.

Finally, **Eamon Gilmore** underscored the disproportionate impact of societal changes on youth and called for a collective responsibility to address it. The urgency surrounding climate concerns was also highlighted, with an emphasis on the innovative potential residing in young individuals, warranting their rightful seat at decision-making tables. He drew attention to the fact that young people are often the main targets of attacks. He also emphasised the importance of youth participation in the upcoming European Parliament elections of 2024.

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● Keynote speech by Josep Borrell

● **Josep Borrell**, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) delivered a keynote speech².

"The essential is that we need a rule-based order. We need rules, because without rules, the ones who suffer [the most] are the [most vulnerable] people. When there is no law, when there is no freedom, when there is no protection of the most vulnerable, then it is the worst possible situation. This is why we have to stand everywhere, every time, in front of everybody for international law and United Nations Declaration for Human Rights – be it in Ukraine, in Israel, in Gaza, in Ethiopia, in Sudan, in the Sahel, in Belarus, Syria or Myanmar."

*Josep Borrell,
High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
and Vice-President of the Commission*

In his keynote speech, the HR/VP recalled the importance of the UDHR, the UN Declaration on HRDs and of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. He emphasised the need to respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and recalled that the protection of HRDs is one of the key objectives of the European Union. He noted how crises are multiplying and recalled key human rights situations that risk of being overlooked such as Afghanistan, Tigray, Sudan, Darfur, the Sahel, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, or Syria. Moreover, he called upon all concerned to combat antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred, in Europe and around the world

The keynote speech was followed by a Q&A session in which young human rights defenders raised and discussed concerns and reflections with the HR/VP. Several participants urged the EU to call for an immediate ceasefire and to "stop the genocide in Gaza".

² Text: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/human-rights-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-25th-eu-ngo-forum-human-rights_en
Video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-250138>

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● Building the right future – Foresight sessions

In a landscape where negative feelings about the degradation of human rights prevail, this year's EU-NGO Forum aimed through the 'Foresight Methodology' at including an optimistic perspective, encouraging participants to collectively focus on practical solutions and avenues for improvement in the pursuit of better futures.

What is Foresight?

With this aim, Foresight is a methodology that creates a space to explore, anticipate and shape the future. It is a tool for young people to think freely, outside of institutional norms, offering alternatives to current decision-making paradigms.

A specific preparatory and learning Journal was shared with participants ahead of the sessions, and is available for participants in the Forum's online platform, under the resource center.

Paying close attention to the core values and rights contained in the UDHR, the foresight session started by **identifying current trends**, challenges and potential turns that human rights could take in the next two decades. Participants could choose among eleven trends to structure the discussion, encompassing pressing global issues spanning from social justice movements, economic innovations, environmental sustainability, technological advancements, and shifts in global power, financial and trade dynamics, reflecting the multifaceted challenges and opportunities shaping our contemporary world.

The two most selected trends were:

- *Younger generations rising for a just, sustainable and inclusive future* – which describes youth efforts to actively drive change, seek innovation and strive to be heard in decision-making despite difficulties; and
- *Polarisation*, the call for the extremes – which deals with the decline of trust in political, governmental, media, and international institutions, also exacerbated by digital technologies, algorithms and subsequent disinformation.

Other trends selected by the participants related to mental health at risk, gender and multiple identities, and humanity entering the artificial intelligence era.

After this phase, participants used the 'Three Horizons' tool to reflect on their **preferred future**, considering both positive and negative prospects of identified issues. Anchored in the very essence of human existence, human rights were seen as intrinsic to individuals and collectives rather than imposed structures. The visions explored emphasized flexible funding mechanisms, urging donors to trust and support youth-led organizations and local leadership. A call for solidarity echoed through the rediscovery of international unity and the protection of all minority groups. Envisioning a less polarized world, the discussions emphasized collective care, healing justice for activists, and a concerted effort towards a society actively engaged in demanding their rights. A harmonized approach to human rights

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- education, a regulated tech landscape preserving positive potential, and an empowered populace participating in politics featured prominently. The future envisioned a world where economic, social, and digital rights are ensured, supported by strong global systems, strategic alliances, and a global culture celebrating diversity, dialogue, and inclusive citizenship. Ultimately, the participants delineated a path where HRDs and activists networked across disciplines, transcending economic and geopolitical interests to forge a future underpinned by dignity, well-being, and an unwavering commitment to human rights.



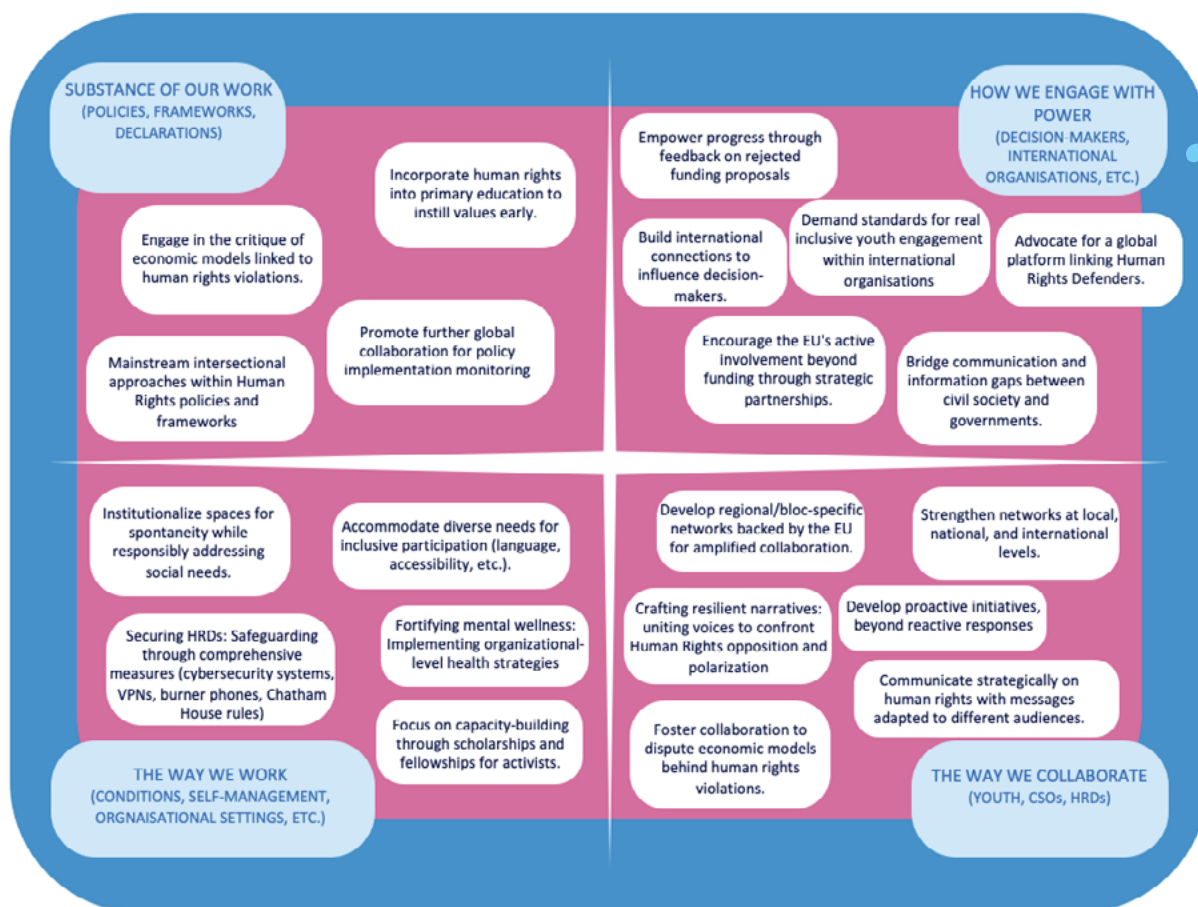
On day two, participants discussed how system changes could be unlocked. Through an Action Board, participants identified **options for active interventions** in terms of substance, communication, collaboration, and work practices as HRDs and activists.

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The table below illustrates the main outcomes of these discussions:



Recommendations and the way forward :

Recommendations and outcomes stemming from the exercise included the following:

- Empowerment of young people should be actively promoted
- Inclusivity, access, and financial equity need to be promoted by fostering technological literacy for an inclusive digital space, addressing language barriers, and ensuring accessibility in decision-making fora.
- Recognising and bridging financial disparities between different regions, particularly North and South, is crucial for equitable and effective human rights initiatives.
- Networks should be strengthened at all levels by establishing platforms connecting different activists, defenders, and organizations, embracing interculturality, facilitating information, pooling resources and ensuring better access to funding.
- Civic and human rights education need to be integrated into primary schooling. Strategies to empower activists in effectively communicating human rights to diverse audiences should be improved.
- Security and advocacy space for HRDs should be ensured by improving risk management and strategic analysis or the establishment of regional networks.
- The EU should actively participate in human rights initiatives, fostering solidarity through empathetic narratives, utilising social media, and intensifying efforts to promote human rights in foreign investments.



Protecting and strengthening the environment for human rights work – focus on human rights defenders

In light of the many threats that HRDs face – which include shrinking civic space, repression of peaceful protests, prosecution and incarceration, physical violence, the rise of restrictive legislation targeting CSOs, surveillance technologies and growing authoritarianism – human rights defenders and activists need increased and new forms of protection. For this reason, a main thread for discussion centred around exploring ways for young activists to safely engage, and the potential roles and tools that EU institutions and partners can develop.

In the first part of the session, participants were divided into five thematic breakout groups. Each group was guided by the same leading questions exploring the thematic and age-specific threats that young HRDs face, existing measures to mitigate these risks, and the type of protection and support needed from the EU, the UN and/or other actors.

Democracy and rule of law

During this breakout discussion, representatives from the EU underlined the role of the [EU's Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for 2020-2024](#) as well as the support given to accountability, access to justice, legal empowerment, and the fight against corruption, through bilateral programs with CSOs – also accessible to youth – or through support to multilateral institutions such as the International Criminal Court.

In some countries, government's tendency to strategically manipulate laws to restrict civic and democratic spaces, by criminalizing rights such as freedom of expression, association and demonstration, disproportionately affect vulnerable groups. To address threats, a participant recommended proactive measures before demonstrations, such as educating activists on potential risks and rights. Furthermore, the recommendation included the establishment of a nearby human rights defender centre equipped with expertise to intervene and document proceedings in the event of law enforcement involvement.

HRDs also explained how children and young people face more limited civic spaces than adults. Participants emphasized that the level of protection for young people varies by subject matter, with limited civic space for example for discussing climate and environmental issues when not prioritized by politicians.

HRDs also stressed the importance of education as a main tool to reach democracy and human rights. This is indeed limited in some countries, such as Afghanistan, as an educated population can be "dangerous for the regime".

Moreover, deep concern was raised about the recurrence of coups in West Africa targeting democratically elected governments. In this respect, it was recommended to both the EU and the UN to incorporate region and country-specific strategies. Additionally, attention was drawn to the negative impact of corruption on the work of HRDs.

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● Environment and climate justice

● During this session participants analysed how highly marginalized communities who are lacking robust support from CSOs, including indigenous people protecting their lands, are facing increased risks of persecution by their governments. In some countries, the media paint a problematic picture of HRDs, for example categorising them as opposition/political activists, which can impact their relationships with communities, creating a reluctance to engage or to be associated with them.

Criminalization of activists, drug trafficking, environmental violations by companies and regulatory complexities were highlighted as further challenges.

To face these challenges, HRDs indicated that they employ diverse strategies, including collective partnerships for protection, temporary digital disengagement, and advocacy for protective legislation. Participants mentioned the Escazú Agreement (Regional agreement in Latin America and the Caribbean), which addresses the right to access information related to the environment, public participation in environmental decision-making processes, environmental justice, and the need to protect environmental defenders.

Other practical measures mentioned by participants include the creation of emergency funds, 'buddy check-ins' when working in the field (i.e. regularly checking in with the other), the creation of alliances, and community consultations.

Participants also suggested having more international experts to provide guidance and help coordinate the work of young organizations and activists.

Gender and LGBTQI+ rights

Different types of violence threaten the safety of activists for gender and LGBTQI+ rights.

The first is physical violence. Women face gender-specific risks, such as sexual violence, including rape, which significantly threatens their well-being and safety. Violence can also include police brutality against HRDs, violent arrests, or severe penalties. A participant explained how in Uganda for example, the 2023 Anti-homosexuality act poses a significant threat to the LGBTQI+ community, stipulating the death penalty for „serial offenders“ or individuals engaged in same-sex relations. This act's influence is unfortunately being felt beyond Uganda's borders.

The second type of violence is psychological violence. It can take the form of stigmatisation by governments, or religious entities which impacts the ability of activists to express themselves freely and safely.

Participants called for increased prevention measures, as well as larger EU investments in human rights education and education on sexual and reproductive health, including in rural areas.

The ability of HRDs to occupy civic spaces is also increasingly challenged. LGBTQI+ organisations struggle to register themselves legally while existing organisations can be deregistered or harassed. With state protection decreasing, enabling more acts of violence against the LGBTQI+ community, it is becoming all the more urgent to provide protection mechanisms. The psychological toll for activists of feeling under constant threats should not be underestimated and makes it extremely challenging for any kind of activism on these issues to thrive.

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Freedom of expression, Media and Digital

Participants expressed concern about the rise of political movements that do not abide by democratic principles, and increasing government repression, often facilitated by the use of digital tools, accessing individuals' data, and imprisonment of those who express dissent in online spaces. In many countries, the work of HRDs is discredited on social media and through communication applications such as WhatsApp. There are many loopholes in the policies and regulations on the digital space.

In many parts of the world, people are imprisoned for speaking up about human rights, and access to information from outside the country is restricted. In this sense, the creation of spaces such as the EU-NGO Forum for information access and sharing is very important.

Moreover, the repression of peaceful demonstrations, fake news and disinformation on social media, targeting journalists and truth-seeking activists, have further exacerbated the difficulties faced by young activists. Targeted mechanisms to safeguard HRDs operating in oppressive conditions and within repressive regimes need to be established in many countries. Even where protective laws exist, implementation is often lacking, in particular with regard to peaceful assembly and freedom of speech.

In response to these threats, participants suggested pressuring governments to adopt sound laws, policies and measures to protect freedom of expression, including in the digital space. There is a need for new tools to address the challenges HRDs face today, and common human rights standards in the digital space, which the EU could promote globally. Establishing a working committee of HRDs for ongoing consultation with international organizations was another tool suggested by participants. It was also highlighted that activists need to "be proactive rather than just reactive" when liaising and advocating towards public institutions and international organisations.

Conflict and Peace

During this session participants called for urgent and immediate consideration by the EU and the international community of the current conflicts that are compromising long-term development gains, exacerbating vulnerabilities and having serious repercussions on human rights. Young peace builders face social media attacks, pressure and government repression, jeopardizing their safety and rights.

The participants stressed the importance of implementing early intervention strategies to prevent conflicts. This means countering government measures that restrict human rights under the pretext of national security, "terrorism" and the fight against organised crime. In addition, participants stressed the need to establish and support protection mechanisms, supporting local initiatives that operate discreetly for the safety of human rights defenders and focusing on building safe communities and spaces. To ensure the effectiveness of these measures, participants called for sustainable and predictable funding with flexible modalities, particularly for young people, to ensure accessibility and support for their initiatives. Moreover, some participants asked that sanctions for governments targeting HRDs should be intensified. Other participants called for increased solidarity networks and partnerships to collectively address challenges.

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• The plenary discussion

Following the breakout sessions, the participants reconvened in the plenary room where rapporteurs presented the main outcomes of their sessions and panelists expressed their views.

Hannah Neumann, *Member of the European Parliament and vice Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights*, emphasized the potential of young people to lead governments and civil society, urging a move away from conventional expectations. She stressed the central role of HRDs as key allies of the EU and called for greater collaboration. In particular, she mentioned that the EU Parliament is increasing its work on prevention and reaction, and looking at ways to ensure that governments understand the definition and importance of human rights defenders.

Belén Martínez Carbonell, *Managing Director of the Global Directorate at the European External Action Service*, presented the EU's strong commitment to defend and support HRDs, as well as its approach to regulating the digital sphere. She encouraged young defenders to reach out to the network of 140 EU Delegations around the world, and highlighted that EU diplomats around the world must open the door and listen to young activists.

Orsolya Toth, *Political Advisor to UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor* highlighted the UN's awareness of ground-level situations, acknowledging HRDs as crucial contributors. She emphasized the need for a shift in the narrative surrounding HRDs, celebrating their achievements, and encouraging active participation. OHCHR takes up issues when necessary in formal letters to governments. Awareness of the protection needs of young human rights defenders is quite widespread but more attention should be paid to the needs of child HRDs.

The Forum also brought to the table a child HRD from Kosovo, **Erisa Dervishaj**, *Secretary of Respect our Rights*, who spoke about the overlooked role of children in decision-making, emphasizing their right to influence critical matters. She advocated for a more inclusive environment and better communication. In support of her speech, **Petra Strader**, *Programme Quality Support Director at Save the Children Sweden*, called for strengthened partnerships with children in the defense of human rights, stressing the significance of access to information and the right to be heard. She cautioned against adult gatekeeping in matters concerning children's rights.

Finally, **Braulio José Abarca Aguilar**, *Coordinator of the Education and Historical Memory Program of the Human Rights Collective "Nicaragua Never Again"*, painted a picture of human rights threats in Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly in Nicaragua. He highlighted how in Nicaragua, HRDs are held as political prisoners, suffering torture and degrading treatment, while others are in exile. He emphasized the shrinking civic and democratic spaces, and the need to address religious and gender-based persecution and defamation.

Chiara Adamo, *Head of Unit of the Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance at the EC DG INTPA*, affirmed that young people should not be perceived as a "vulnerable group" but as "change-makers" who are at the forefront of the fight for human rights. She further outlined the importance of intergenerational solidarity, and the EC's initiatives addressing mental health, disinformation, digital space, and civic space. She cited the Defend Democracy initiative, which provides more space to youth voices to defend democracy, in particular against cyber threats. She also mentioned that the EU has launched initiatives such as the EU System for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society (EU SEE) to prevent further deterioration and foster a sustainable, accessible environment for civil society.

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● Recommendations and the way forward:

● The main recommendations on the way forward made by the different rapporteurs of each break out thematic session, included:

- Ending age-based discrimination and taking youth perspectives seriously.
- Supporting education programmes to foster a more human rights active population, including for women.
- Creating capacity-sharing initiatives for young HRDs and activists on protection issues, such as digital security trainings, workshops on legal protection and assistance, sharing best practices for on-the-ground work.
- Addressing the lack of resources of young HRDs and activists, by allocating sustained and easily manageable funding with flexible modalities
- Creating spaces for young people to have a voice in international institutions and organisations.
- Adopting a comprehensive set of protection policies and measures to ensure the safety and well-being of young activists. Such policies and measures must include mental health but also protection against cyber-attacks, conflict resolution measures, funds for the protection of young activists and the provision of psychological and legal support.
- Ensuring better collaboration and increased support from international institutions, which should include mobilising international experts to provide guidance and support on protection and security issues.
- Addressing disinformation campaigns and the rise of fake news, especially when it is state-driven. All efforts to limit the ability for social media to be misused should be pursued.
- Implementing and maintaining mechanisms at EU and international levels to systematically monitor and address the increasing violations and repression against HRDs worldwide.
- Using a collective approach to protection by encouraging HRDs to build solidarity networks and partnerships to collectively address challenges and learn from each other.

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• Youth Participation and Promotion of Human Rights

• This session began with a plenary focusing on the crucial role of youth in decision-making and the challenges faced by human rights defenders.

Erica Gerretsen, Director at the EC DG INTPA Directorate G "Human Development, Migration, Governance and Peace", stated that "Youth are the power of today and tomorrow". She emphasized the youth's crucial role in COP28 and the achievement of SDGs, advocating for climate justice and their involvement in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. She then highlighted the three main pillars "engagement, empowerment, and connection" of the EU Youth Action Plan, promoting youth voices in politics and in decision-making. Among these pillars, the main EC programmes mentioned were the WYDE, empowering youth and women in the promotion of democracy; the Youth Empowerment Fund, supporting youth-led projects to achieve the SDGs; the Erasmus + Programme and the new Africa-Europe Youth Academy that the EU will launch soon.

"In current challenging times, with the Youth Action Plan we want to position youth at the heart of EU external relations and ensure young people have the resources, tools and spaces they need to voice their concern, implement their ideas and advance towards more inclusive and peaceful societies."

Erica Gerretsen

Stella Ronner-Grubačić, EU Ambassador for Gender and Diversity and Deputy Managing Director for Global Affairs, European External Action Service, added that despite the fact that over 50% of the global population is under 30, youth lack effective tools to influence decisions that impact them. She referred to structural inequalities, gender-based discrimination and insufficient representation in politics, as well as the shrinking global civic space as obstacles to the promotion of human rights. She recalled the EU's commitment to promoting freedom of expression and safeguarding civic space. She emphasised that education for girls and boys is an important instrument to promote gender equality at an early stage. She ended by noting that the EU is proud to have two Youth delegates to the UN for the second time.

Natalia Gómez Solano, Special Adviser on Youth to the European Commission on International Partnerships, stressed the need for guidance from the EU and the UN on social media usage for youth, in particular in terms of mental health and security considerations. She also mentioned the challenges of navigating the shrinking civic space, advocating for policies supporting youth participation and partnerships to empower activists. In terms of transnational work, she highlighted the role of digital communication tools, the importance of networks for training and cultural understanding, and the need for global collaboration to ensure accountability and protect HRDs from threats. Summing up, she also stressed the importance of providing resources to grassroots initiatives.

"Strengthening transnational relations is imperative, providing security, support, and a life guarantee for environmental and human rights defenders, while preventing the persistent threat of danger and death. International communities must unite not only to impose appropriate sanctions, ensure accountability, and avert potential threats but also to prevent war crimes, fostering a collective commitment to global peace and security."

Natalia Gómez Solano

Special Advisor on Youth to the European Commission

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After this plenary introduction, the participants were divided into five interactive thematic sessions, guided by key questions, exploring how young people can effectively use media in activism, navigate closing civic spaces, address accessibility challenges through various forms of partnership, and identify opportunities for transnational human rights activism.

Democracy and rule of Law

Participants stressed the importance of providing access to media platforms for effective human rights advocacy, particularly in countries where adequate facilities are lacking. Moreover, attention was brought to the need to establish clear guidelines to navigate the sometimes fine line between expressing opinions and engaging in harmful or discriminatory speech.

A range of concerns were raised about the erosion of press freedom, suggesting the need for disclaimers when authorities utilise media for propaganda. One participant also stressed the key role of tailoring messages based on audience and platform, while another proposed using platforms like TikTok to create awareness-raising videos on the rights of HRDs.

Participants discussed how the dangers of speaking out against authoritarian regimes, the problems of credibility in the media, the difficulties of subsistence and the discouragement of the family all contribute to the self-imposed closure of civic space and hamper activism. Recommendations from participants during this session included leveraging social media strategically, developing programmes on the responsible use of civic space, addressing targeted propaganda by authoritarian regimes, and considering the audience when choosing media platforms for impactful messaging.

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Environment and climate justice

During this session, HRDs emphasised the importance of tailoring social media content to attract young people, involving them in the creation of messages, and showcasing international partnerships.

A participant shared the obstacles their organisation faced in sharing information about and worker's rights violations in social media, due to conflicts with transnational companies who were at the origin of it. Limited internet access and the need for training in reaching decision-makers through social media is also an issue in different countries.

Addressing the shrinking civic space, HRDs from African and Asian countries detailed challenges ranging from rights violations to legal persecution and the difficulty in obtaining funding. Effective partnership modalities were discussed, including providing long-term solutions for natural disasters, providing post-trauma support to victims, better resource distribution, and building the capacity of informal groups. Participants emphasised assessing organisational needs, promoting digital skills, climate justice, consultative collaborations, legal support, responsibility in global consumption, and decolonizing relations.

HRDs from the MENA region called for stronger policies and brought attention to the negative impacts that conflicts have on the natural environment. They also flagged the importance of rethinking the narrative around green development and sustainability, as well as to ensure coherence between European policies and actions outside Europe.

Gender and LGBTQI+ rights

In this session, participants stressed the importance of having youth-friendly information and creating safe spaces on social media for HRDs. The EU was urged to bridge the knowledge gap between grassroots organizations and policymakers. Concerns were also raised about security issues, anti-gender and anti-rights speech, gender-unfriendly platforms, which exclude many users.

The use of TikTok, podcasts, and Instagram to engage with UN and EU spaces and to advocate for human rights was cited as an effective strategy. In this sense, participants underlined the importance of moving forward from traditional and over-institutionalised advocacy tools and methodologies, from which youth can be sometimes excluded.

A participant from South Asia stressed the need to ensure the participation of women HRDs in the EU and UN programme, events and fellowships to address caste and gender issues with an intersectional approach, and reach discriminated minorities who are excluded from decision-making.

Among the positive developments noticed, some participants highlighted how the backsliding in democracy and shrinking civic space are increasingly causing younger generations to take part in protests and demonstrations, having a positive impact on young people's commitment to protect their rights.

Freedom of expression, Media and Digital

Participants noted how in many countries, repression of media freedom and freedom of expression, including control of the internet and mobile phone are extremely worrying. Individuals can be tortured or imprisoned for what they write on social media. This illustrates the challenge of actively engaging in the safeguarding of human rights when the basic platforms for such participation are severely constrained. They identified how in some countries, in particular in conflict and high-risk human rights situations, youth can still be unfamiliar with social media and need to be empowered to ensure their participation.

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- However, alternative communication channels are being explored, such as working with local community radio stations to disseminate accurate information, combat disinformation and counterbalance the limited internet access in some regions.

- Among the recommendations, participants suggested that the EU should invest more in preventive actions, strengthening the emergency support provided. Investments should also be enhanced in digital security and safety. Combined efforts should be made to counter the censorship of social media, through enhanced networking and strengthened local media capacities.

Conflict and Peace

Youth activists and human rights defenders face significant barriers owing to oppressive political environments and financial constraints.

Restricted access to resources and the difficulty in registering organisations limit their ability to organise campaigns.

To address these issues, the EU and the international community should actively involve youth in policy development, establish global support networks, offer media skills and digital security education, facilitate dialogue with social media companies, and lobby for human rights-compliant regulation. Additionally, support for marginalised groups, simplified bureaucratic processes, increased funding, and emergency funds for at-risk activists are crucial steps forward.

Recommendations and the way forward :

The EU can take several key recommendations from the extensive discussions on youth participation, human rights, and the challenges faced by activists:

- Keep supporting and raising awareness about the [Youth Action Plan](#) in EU external action and promoting engagement, empowerment, and connection for young voices in political decision-making.
- Address structural inequalities, gender-based discriminations, and the shrinking of global civic space, recognising youth as a non-homogeneous group, and potential shrinking space within specific (age/ gender/other) groups
- Take into account the limitations of online outreach/participation mechanisms (in terms of access, literacy, and spread of disinformation/hate speech), and support the participation of youths, HRDs and vulnerable populations in public and 'formal' spaces.
- Train HRDs on freedom of expression and digital security, for example developing and sharing practical guidelines on social media usage, with a focus on mental health and security considerations, with examples of how to tailor messages, make strategic use of social media, and address propaganda.
- Ensure nuanced and context-specific approaches in supporting youth activists globally, including efforts to bridge the knowledge gaps, ensure digital security, and facilitate partnerships (for example with social media platforms and the media).
- Invest in preventive protection and increase funding, simplify processes, such as youth-friendly funding practices, establish flexible emergency funds to safeguard activists at risk.
- Support networking, collaborative efforts against hate speech, making social media platforms resistant to censorship and strengthening local and independent media, including in local languages.

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Regional dynamics and trends – discussion between Human Rights Defenders and EU representatives

Depending on the region, the policy frameworks and regional mechanisms available to human rights defenders may differ. For this reason, the participants in this session were divided into geographical regions – The Americas, Asia Pacific, Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Europe – where they explored strategies to increase participation in policy shaping, discuss support from authorities and regional human rights mechanisms, and explore the EU's role in their region.

Senior EEAS officials responsible for the respective regions participated in each geographical session, presenting EU human rights priorities and listening to first-hand policy recommendations from HRDs. This session was also the opportunity for participants to strengthen regional networks with other HRDs.

Workshops and information sessions

Finally, participants also engaged in five parallel information sessions:

- EU Human Rights Defenders protection policies and mechanisms, which provided practical information on the Protect Defenders.eu mechanism for HRDs at risk.
- EU funding cycles, rules and trends, which offered an overview of the EU funding modalities available for CSOs.
- Advocacy towards the EU, which focused on the different advocacy possibilities at the EU delegation level, sharing best practices and participants' experiences.
- Celebrating Tomorrow: Youth Civic Engagement Explored – Stories, Insights, and Inspiration, which explored examples of initiatives and projects that have enabled young people to meaningfully participate and make a positive impact in democracy support
- Facing digital threats and disinformation, which proposed realistic scenarios of cyber/disinformation-attack and defamation campaigns to help participants recognize and respond effectively in real-life situations

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CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions featured the speeches and main recommendations formulated by three HRDs who acted as rapporteurs from the Foresight, the Protection and the Participation session.

Venus Aves, Member of the UN Human Rights 75 Youth Advisory Group, acted as rapporteur of the Foresight session.

"I think what this exercise highlighted is that in order to get to where we want to be, we need to take time to imagine, to dream, to put ourselves in a different world or worlds, to think outside the box, to hopefully reshape the box [...] We might not always be able to translate or package the future we want into the language of our decision-makers. What it does, however, is set a clear vision of where we're heading, fight despair and pessimism in our movements, and keep our passion for a better future alive and burning, while dealing better with our aspirations and frustrations, ours, as individuals, but also, and especially as multiple collectives" [...] "this is just the beginning of the next decade of human rights and our Foresight journey. Together, we can build the right future."

Venus Aves

Member of the UN Human Rights 75 Youth Advisory Group

In her speech, she also recommended participants to utilize the exercise carried out during the two-day Forum as a valuable example for integrating foresight practices into organizational structures and decision-making processes. By the time of the publication of this report, some participant already replicated the methodology within their organizations.



A participant implementing Foresight workshops in his organisation in Nepal following the Forum examples

Khaleem Ali, youth activist from Trinidad and Tobago, acted as rapporteur for the protection session and stressed the importance of protecting young HRDs from attacks, including through emergency funding, and legal assistance. He called for implementation of local resources, restrictions on arms trade, and inclusive spaces. A collaborative international approach for environmental justice, investments in psychosocial and mental health support were stressed, along with the importance of monitoring systems, legal literacy, and good governance. He also underlined the essential role of young people as key implementers of the UDHR in the next decades.

Camila Leite Contri, lawyer and specialist in Telecommunications and Digital Rights at the Brazilian Institute for Consumer Protection, stressed the importance of meaningful participation of activists and empowerment of diverse voices in decision-making spaces, taking into account factors such as

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local contexts, gender, race, LGBTI+ people and people with disabilities. Recommendations included ensuring internet connectivity for all, preserving freedom of expression, and strengthening networks connecting human rights defenders. She noted that social networks can also be a fruitful space for building solidarity and shaping political awareness, provided there is a balanced approach to platform moderation and freedom of expression. The overarching message called for a more inclusive and impactful approach to address these critical issues.

Emma Achilli, *EU Adviser International Dalit Solidarity Network*, on behalf of HRDN, emphasized the Forum's significance, especially in these times where the potential risk of shrinking civic space is present even in Europe. She advocated for HRDs to have a seat at the table in decision making, and together to foster collaboration on protection, resource access, and maintaining open civic spaces. She recommended continuing the dialogue beyond the Forum, and encouraged participants to connect with the European Union Delegations in their home countries with this aim in mind.

Chiara Adamo, *Head of Unit of the Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance at EC DG INTPA*, highlighted the importance of the Forum as a secure space for co-creation with meaningful participation. She indicated that the European Commission is about to launch the Youth dialogue platform, to which participants can take part. Moreover, she introduced initiatives such as the Youth Democracy Cohort and recalled the EU's will to create Youth Sounding Boards in the EU Delegations of most EU partner countries, encouraging participants to take part in it. Finally, she indicated that the EU institutions are raising awareness amongst EU Member States about the specific visas and travel needs of human rights defenders.

Finally, **Ellis Mathews**, *Head of the Human Rights Division at the EEAS*, reflected on the event's youth-centric nature, assuring participants they are not alone in their struggles and connecting them with EU-based CSOs and human rights actors. He acknowledged the participants' desire for real involvement rather than symbolic gestures and encouraged communication with civil society beyond the policy world, emphasizing the importance of using clear and direct language. He expressed hope for ongoing connections among participants and with EU actors, encouraging the HRDs to contact the EU Delegations in their respective countries to foster exchange and cooperation.

The main conclusions of the Forum were also brought to Geneva through the [High-level Event on 11 and 12 December to mark the UDHR75](#). A number of key messages from the Forum were integrated in the [Human Rights 75 Youth Declaration](#) to reaffirm the importance of driving positive change in the pursuit of a more inclusive, just, and sustainable global future.



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4-5 DECEMBER 2023

Egmont Palace, 8bis Place du Petit Sablon
1000 - Brussels



Monday 4 December 2023

8:00 – 8:45 Registration and Welcome Coffee

9:00 – 9:30 Opening Speeches by

- › Věra Jourová, European Commission Vice-President for Values and Transparency
- › Eamon Gilmore, EU Special Representative for Human Rights
- › Hadja Lahbib, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Affairs, Foreign Trade and the Federal Cultural Institutions
- › Gina Wharton, EU Civic Space Policy Advisor, Oxfam International, on behalf of the Human Rights and Democracy Network

9:30 – 10:30 Interactive opening Panel: “Youth as Actors of Change”

- › Nada Al Nashif, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights
- › Nana Millers, Executive Director, Trans Youth Initiative – Uganda
- › Mariia Sulialina, Head of the Center of Civic Education “Almenda”, Ukraine
- › Asala Mansour, International Advocacy Associate – ADALAH, The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel
- › Eamon Gilmore, EU Special Representative for Human Rights

Moderators: Samantha Chaitkin (*Human Rights Officer, European Commission – INTPA G1*) and Venus Aves (*Member of the UN Human Rights 75 Youth Advisory Group*)

Location: Arenberg room – EN, FR, ES

10:30 – 11:00 BREAK

11:00 – 12:30 Building the right future – Foresight Session – Part I

The key aim of these two sessions is to envision the next two decades of human rights efforts, bringing divergent and convergent ideas together using strategic foresight tools. Each of the two sessions will be organized in breakout groups.

The first session will focus on identifying current trends, challenges and potential turns that human rights topics are taking. The second session (on Day 2) aims at discussing the results of the first session, extracting the relevant information, in order to draw concrete ways to envision a future around human rights.

The specific outcome of these sessions will be recommendations and actions that can be taken by CSOs, the EU or the UN.

- Location:**
- ▶ Group 1 to 2 – Blue room
 - ▶ Group 3 – Salon Voltaire
 - ▶ Group 4 to 7 – Orange room
 - ▶ Group 8 to 13 – Sax room

12:30 – 13:00 Group picture

13:00 – 14:00 LUNCH

14:00 – 15:30 Parallel sessions: Protecting and strengthening the environment for human rights work: focus on Human Rights Defenders

- Group 1: Democracy and Rule of Law – Arenberg room (EN, FR, ES)
- Group 2: Environment and Climate Justice – Salon Voltaire (EN)
- Group 3: Gender and LGBTIQ+ – Sax Room (EN)
- Group 4: Freedom of Expression, Media and Digital – Orange room (EN, FR, ES)
- Group 5: Conflict and Peace – Blue Room (EN, FR, ES)

Participants will focus on the specific barriers and threats that young human rights defenders face and their subsequent protection needs. We will zoom in on what young activists can do to support each other in staying safe, and what partners can do to support young activists. This will be done while looking at intersectionality of vulnerabilities and particular thematic issues. The participants will identify how current national and regional protection policies and frameworks can fill the current safety gaps.

15:30 – 16:00 Keynote speech by **Josep Borrell**, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Commission Vice-President

Location: Arenberg room (EN, FR, ES)

16:00 – 17:30 Plenary session: “Protecting and strengthening the environment for human rights work – focus on human rights defenders”

- › **Belen Martinez Carbonell**, Managing Director of the Global Directorate at the European External Action Service
- › **Hannah Neumann**, Member of the European Parliament and vice Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights
- › **Chiara Adamo**, Head of Unit of the Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance at DG INTPA at the European Commission
- › **Orsolya Toth**, Political Advisor to UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor
- › **Erisa Dervishaj**, Secretary of Respect our Rights, Kosovo
- › **Petra Strader**, Programme Quality Support Director at Save the Children Sweden
- › **Braulio José Abarca Aguilar**, Coordinator of the Education and Historical Memory Program of the Human Rights Collective “Nicaragua Never Again”

Moderator: Mae Ocampo (*Executive Director, Protection International*)

Location: Arenberg room (EN, FR, ES)

Through a conversation with UN and EU representatives, young human rights defenders and activists will identify how the EU can adapt some of its tools to enhance the protection of children and youth defending human rights.

17:30 Closing of day 1

18:00 – 20.30 Cultural event and Networking Cocktail

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4-5 DECEMBER 2023

Egmont Palace, 8bis Place du Petit Sablon
1000 - Brussels



Tuesday 5 December 2023

8:00 Welcome Coffee

9:00 – 9:30 Opening: Youth Participation and Promotion of Human Rights

- › Erica Gerretsen, Director for Human Development, Migration, Governance & Peace, DG INTPA, European Commission
- › Stella Ronner-Grubačić, EU ambassador for Gender and Diversity and Deputy Managing Director for Global Affairs, European External Action Service
- › Natalia Gomez, Special Advisor on Youth to the European Commission

The opening will introduce the participants to the session's concepts of participation and human rights promotion as well as related EU policies.

Location: Arenberg room (EN, FR, ES)

9:30 – 11:00 Parallel sessions: Youth participation and promotion of human rights

- Group 1: Democracy and Rule of Law – Arenberg room (EN, FR, ES)
- Group 2: Environment and Climate Justice – Blue room (EN, FR, ES)
- Group 3: Gender and LGBTIQ+ – Sax Room (EN)
- Group 4: Freedom of Expression, Media and Digital – Orange room (EN, FR, ES)
- Group 5: Conflict and Peace – Salon Voltaire (EN)

Participants will gather in five thematic groups and focus on the specific instruments they use to promote human rights and what support they need to increase participation in their human rights work. The guiding questions will cover navigating restricted civic space, youth-friendly partnership modalities, the use of new and traditional media tools, and transnational collaboration. Each thematic working group will identify what can be done better across these aspects.

11:00 – 11:30 BREAK

11:30 – 13:00 Parallel sessions: Regional dynamics and trends – discussion between Human Rights Defenders and EU representatives

- Sub-Saharan – Arenberg room (EN,FR)
- Asia Pacific – Sax room (EN)
- The Americas – Orange room (EN, ES)
- Middle East and North Africa – Blue room (EN,FR)
- Eastern Europe Africa and Central Asia – Salon Voltaire (EN)

The participants in this session will be divided into different geographical regions, where they will analyze how they can increase their participation in shaping public policies and how public authorities and regional human rights mechanisms can support their work. They will also discuss how they perceive the EU's role in the specific region. The participants will first have a chance to exchange among themselves and then to discuss their findings with EU representatives. EU representatives will present the EU human rights priorities in each region and will listen to first-hand policy recommendations from human rights defenders.

13:00 – 14:00 LUNCH

14:00 – 15:15 Building the right future – Foresight Session – Part II

- Location:**
- ▶ Group 1 to 2 – Blue room
 - ▶ Group 3 – Salon Voltaire
 - ▶ Group 4 to 7 – Orange room
 - ▶ Group 8 to 13 – Sax room

15:15 – 15:30 BREAK

15:30 – 17:00 Workshops and information sessions

- Session 1: EU Human Rights Defenders protection policies and mechanisms – Blue room (EN, FR, ES)
- Session 2: EU funding cycles, rules and trends – Arenberg room (EN, FR, ES)
- Session 3: Advocacy towards the EU – Salon Voltaire (EN)
- Session 4: Celebrating Tomorrow: Youth Civic Engagement Explored – Stories, Insights, and Inspiration – Orange room (EN, FR, ES)
- Session 5: Facing digital threats and disinformation – Sax Room (EN)

17:00 – 18:00 Closing Session

- › **Ellis Mathews**, Head of the Human Rights Division at the European External Action Service
- › **Chiara Adamo**, Head of Unit of the Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance at DG INTPA at the European Commission
- › **Emma Achilli**, EU Adviser, International Dalit Solidarity Network, on behalf of the Human Rights and Democracy Network

Moderator: Samantha Chaitkin (*Human Rights Officer, European Commission – INTPA G1*)

Location: Arenberg room (EN, FR, ES)

Rapporteurs from the different sessions will share and discuss recommendations with the Human Rights and Democracy Network and EU policy makers.

Side Event

18:30 – 21.00 Cine-ONU event to mark the international day of Human Rights

(optional event organised by OHCHR [at Flagey](#) – Place Sainte-Croix 1, 1050 Brussels transfer available for registered participants).



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