capital punishment and over the continuing absence of an overall anti-discrimination law, which is blocked due to disagreement over the issue of sexual orientation. Gender inequality with regard to a gender pay gap and the proportion of women in political and economic decision-making positions remains an issue. The government and civil society are working to address violence against women, including online gender-based violence.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU action in the Republic of Korea in 2019 focused on the following priorities:

- Freedom of association, especially in regard to ILO Fundamental Conventions;
- Gender equality and addressing violence against women;
- Anti-discrimination and tackling hate speech;
- De jure abolition of the death penalty.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU delegation in Seoul maintained its role as a centre for facilitating contact between government and civil society organisations working on human rights issues and the wider diplomatic community. The EU insisted that the Republic of Korea make progress in ratifying the four ILO Fundamental Conventions to which it is not yet a party. A Panel was requested under the EU- Republic of Korea Free Trade Agreement Chapter on Trade and Sustainable Development. The Republic of Korea government submitted the ratification documents for three of the conventions for parliamentary approval. The EU engaged with organisations promoting the rights of LGBTI persons and Member State embassies expanded their participation to provincial as well as the Seoul Pride Festival in a move that significantly strengthened the provincial events. The EU also continues to engage on the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities. The EU encouraged the authorities to legislate for a general anti-discrimination law and exchanged experiences in addressing online hate speech. Exchanges continued to take place on a diverse range of topics regarding gender equality and tackling violence against women and minors. EU public diplomacy kept the spotlight on the need to maintain the moratorium on executions and abolish capital punishment.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the Partnership Instrument Public Diplomacy Project, the EU delegation launched a civil society platform designed to build cooperation between EU and Republic of Korea civil society organisations (CSOs), and facilitated the participation of Korean CSOs in the civic forum organised by the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels.

5. Multilateral context: The Republic of Korea participated for the second time in the EU-led 'Good Human Rights Stories Initiative' at the UNGA.

The voting record of the Republic of Korea in the UN human rights fora remained very similar to that of the EU, demonstrating like-minded values in most areas. The Republic of Korea decided not to co-sponsor resolutions on the human rights situation in the DPRK.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The grave human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) remained unchanged in 2019. Reportedly, the government continued to maintained strong control over its population. According to reports, the government carried out enforced relocations, used forced labour, made arbitrary arrests and maintained political prison camps. Basic civil and political liberties for citizens, including the absence of access to a fair trial, freedom of expression, religion, association and assembly remained practically non-existing.

Independent media and civil society organisations and organised political opposition remained prohibited. Children were used for unpaid labour and were subject to physical violence and punishment. Women faced sexual harassment and abuse, including in detention. Women and girls who left the DPRK faced the risk of becoming victims of trafficking, sexual abuse and forced marriage. Persons, who are repatriated to the DPRK, in contravention of the principle of non-refoulement, were often severely punished.

In addition to grave human rights violations, the general living conditions remained very difficult, including chronic food insecurity, widespread malnutrition and lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Access to verifiable information continued to be a challenge given the limited access to the DPRK. The UN's Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, Tomás Ojea Quintana, continues to await to be granted access to the country.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU maintains a policy of Critical Engagement towards the DPRK, which combines pressure through sanctions and other measures while keeping communication and dialogue channels open. The EU remains committed to achieving the goal of the complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement by North Korea of its nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction and its ballistic missile programmes of all ranges, the upholding of the global non-proliferation regime, and the improvement of human rights and humanitarian situation in the DPRK.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: The EU has no delegation in the DPRK. EU Member States with diplomatic presence in the country take turn every 6 months to represent the EU locally. Due to unfavourable political circumstances, the EU last held its political dialogue with the DPRK in 2015.

The EU regularly interacted with the UN's Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the DPRK.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2019, the EU provided assistance to the DPRK mainly in the area of food security. Some projects also addressed social inclusion of people with disabilities and the elderly, while others tackle disaster preparedness in rural communities. All these activities were of direct benefit to those among the most vulnerable people in the DPRK.

5. Multilateral context: In 2019, the EU tabled resolutions on the situation of human rights in DPRK at the 74th session of UNGA and the 40th session of UN HRC respectively. The EU Member States also actively participated in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the DPRK in May 2019 and provided a number of recommendations.