

The EU and Member States delivered several démarches in support of EU priorities ahead of the sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), HRC, and UN General Assembly (UNGA), including the UNGA resolution on the return of Ukrainian children.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The human rights and democracy situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) remained dire in 2025. There were no indications that the government engaged in constructive action to address the findings of the International Commission of Inquiry's conclusions in 2014 that 'systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations have been and are being committed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, its institutions and officials. In many instances, the violations of human rights found by the commission constitute crimes against humanity'. An OHCHR report published in September 2025, assessing DPRK human rights developments over the past 10 years, reflected that the situation has further degraded and that the population continues to suffer brutal repression, fear and deprivation.

The government continued to maintain power through arbitrary detention and imprisonment, torture, executions, enforced disappearances, and forced labour. DPRK retains the death penalty and is believed to continue to carry out executions extensively, although access to information is restricted. Basic liberties – such as freedom of thought, conscience, religion, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, and freedom of movement – continued to be systematically denied. According to Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index 2025, the DPRK ranked 179th out of 180 countries, reflecting the near-total absence of independent media and severe restrictions on access to information. Significant border restrictions originally imposed in response to Covid-19 remained in place. The number of defectors in 2025 fell slightly compared to 2024, remaining still much lower relative to pre-pandemic levels.

The government of the DPRK refused to engage with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK and continued to limit engagement with other UN human rights bodies and mechanisms. Meanwhile, the country gradually increased its diplomatic engagement with a limited number of partners on a selective basis. Outside observers expressed concern that border restrictions, the suppression of market activity and impediments to international humanitarian assistance, together with the long-term effects of poor economic policies, resulted in significant humanitarian issues. The dire human rights situation was aggravated by the fact that the DPRK continued to divert its resources into illegal nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles programmes – and into military support for Russia's illegal war against Ukraine – rather than towards the welfare of its own people.

EU action - key focus areas: The EU addressed the above areas of concern through resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and the UN General Assembly (UNGA). The EU was closely involved in the organisation of the UNGA high-level plenary meeting on 20 May 2025. Frequent exchanges took place between the EU and the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as well as like-minded international partners. The European Parliament held two dedicated hearings on DPRK human rights issues in 2025 with the participation of the UN special rapporteur, human rights activists and the EEAS. The EU Delegation in the Republic of Korea also continued to engage with local authorities and support the work of civil societies in promoting human rights in the DPRK by participating in and co-hosting local events (e.g. Briefing on 'Made in China' report with NKHR in April

2025; organised with the support of OHCHR for the Human Rights Day conference with North Korean defectors). Under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, the EU renewed restrictive measures against three DPRK officials and two DPRK entities responsible for serious human rights violations.

EU bilateral political engagement: The EU maintained limited contact with the DPRK authorities through diplomatic channels.

EU financial engagement: It was not possible to implement development or humanitarian assistance projects in the DPRK as international humanitarian staff is barred from entering the country.

Multilateral context: As per previous years, the EU initiated country-specific resolutions on the DPRK human rights situation at the HRC and the UNGA. Despite increasing polarisation in general at multilateral level, both resolutions in 2025 were successfully adopted by consensus, helping to maintain international attention on the situation.

HRC Resolution 58/17 (April 2025) stressed the need to follow up on recommendations from the report of the Commission of Inquiry. It expressed deep concern over the systematic, widespread, and gross human rights violations and over the exacerbation of the humanitarian situation. It renewed the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on DPRK human rights and requested the High Commissioner to continue strengthening, institutionalising and further advancing work on accountability. It also contained updated and stronger language on issues such as border restrictions, enforced or involuntary disappearances and arbitrary detention, forced labour, and the rights of children.

UNGA Resolution A/RES/80/220 (November 2025) expressed deep concern regarding the grave human rights situation in the DPRK, the pervasive culture of impunity, and the lack of accountability for human rights violations and abuses. It condemned the long-standing and ongoing systematic, widespread and gross violations of human rights and expressed its very serious concern about numerous human rights violations of both political and civil and social, economic, and cultural rights. It reiterated calls for cooperation with UN mechanisms. It also streamlined certain sections of the text while retaining all core elements and introducing new or strengthened references on issues such as the September 2025 OHCHR report, freedom of movement, corruption, the death penalty, and forced labour. It called on the DPRK to reopen its borders to facilitate access of humanitarian staff on the ground.

The EU was also closely involved in the organisation of the UNGA high-level plenary meeting on DPRK human rights on 20 May 2025 (which was a deliverable resulting from the December 2024 UNGA resolution on DPRK human rights). This high-level plenary meeting involved high-level speakers from the UN and UN Member States and featured testimonies by civil society representatives and other experts, to address the human rights abuses and violations being committed in the DPRK, and to maintain the spotlight on the issue.

Lao People's Democratic Republic

Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The overall situation of human rights and democracy in Laos remained largely unchanged. Although Laos slightly improved its rank in the World Press Freedom Index from 153rd in 2024 to 150th out of 180 countries in 2025, freedoms of expression and association remained limited. A government reorganisation saw the transfer of responsibility for media issues and oversight of civil society organisations to different organs of the Lao People's