



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
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# GUIDELINES ON HUMAN RIGHTS 2026–29





# Foreword

Human rights remain central to Switzerland's foreign policy. Indeed, they serve as one of its core guiding principles. In a rapidly changing world – marked by far-reaching social, technological and geopolitical developments – upholding human rights requires more than just adopting a defiant stance or adding to lists of norms. It requires discernment, clear priorities and the ability to adapt.

These new guidelines for 2026–29 are based on one simple conviction: to stay effective and credible, human rights action must focus on the essential. Protecting individuals and their fundamental freedoms remains the absolute priority, and a litmus test for measuring a country's commitment to the rule of law. Switzerland continues to place a particular focus on minorities and vulnerable groups, not in order to extend the perimeter but because their situation is a stark reminder of the shortcomings that still exist when it comes to protecting people's fundamental rights.

Amid financial constraints and heightened expectations in terms of results, these guidelines set out a series of choices. Priority is given to making an impact rather than spreading resources too thinly, effective implementation in place of expansion of norms, and targeted action instead of symbolic commitments. The aim is not to address every issue, but to provide better protection where rights are most at risk.

Switzerland is committed to rights-based diplomacy based on dialogue, consistency and discretion, in close coordination with its peace diplomacy work. It will focus on context-specific bilateral and multilateral approaches geared towards concrete and measurable improvements, without engaging in public recriminations that often serve only to weaken trust rather than improving protection for individuals.



These guidelines ultimately reflect a commitment to accountability and learning. Their implementation will be closely monitored and evaluated to make sure Switzerland's actions are aligned with global developments and remain credible. Human rights are not upheld by resisting the tide of history, but by responding to it with clarity, a strong sense of what is important and the determination to make a difference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cassis', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ignazio Cassis  
Federal Councillor  
Head of the Federal Department  
of Foreign Affairs FDFA

# Contents

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<b>1</b>	<b>Framework</b>	<b>5</b>
<hr/>		
<b>2</b>	<b>Review of the Guidelines on Human Rights 2021–24</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1	Current situation through a historical lens	7
2.2	Principles	9
<hr/>		
<b>3</b>	<b>Priorities</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1	Freedom of expression	11
3.2	Death penalty	11
3.3	Torture	13
3.4	Minorities	13
3.5	Women’s rights	14
3.6	Economy and sustainability	16
<hr/>		
<b>4</b>	<b>Implementation and instruments</b>	<b>18</b>
4.1	Bilateral instruments	18
4.2	Multilateral instruments	18
4.3	Instruments of implementation	18
<hr/>		
<b>Appendices</b>		<b>20</b>
Overview of the main international human rights conventions ratified by Switzerland		20
List of abbreviations		21
Glossary		21

# 1 Framework

The promotion of human rights and democracy worldwide is enshrined in the Swiss Federal Constitution<sup>1</sup> (Art. 54, para. 2, Cst.). The Federal Act on Measures pertaining to Civil Peace Support and the Promotion of Human Rights<sup>2</sup> fleshes out this objective and lists the available instruments at federal level.

In Switzerland, human rights are protected both under domestic law and in accordance with the international conventions it has ratified – such as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and United Nations (UN) human rights conventions<sup>3</sup>. These guarantee the freedom and dignity of individuals against arbitrary state power and are applicable to everyone, regardless of origin, status or personal beliefs.

This document is part of the foreign policy cascading strategy. The Foreign Policy Strategy 2024–27<sup>4</sup> (FPS 2024–27) does indeed cascade into various geographical and thematic strategies that reflect its main focal points, in particular the International Cooperation Strategy 2025–28<sup>5</sup> and the Guidelines on Democracy 2025–28<sup>6</sup>.

The new Guidelines on Human Rights 2026–29 succeeds the previous 2021–24 version<sup>7</sup> (extended to 2025), which replaced all earlier human rights frameworks and documents.



Figure 1: How the FPS 2024–27 flows down into other strategies in a cascade

1 <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/1999/404/en>  
 2 <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2004/253/en>  
 3 Overview in appendix

4 <https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/fdfa/publikationen.html/content/publikationen/en/eda/schweizer-aussenpolitik/Aussenpolitische-Strategie-2024-2027>  
 5 <https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/fr/dfae/politique-exterieure/mise-oeuvre-politique-exterieure/thematique-strategien/strategie-internationale-zusammenarbeit.html>  
 6 [https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/fdfa/publikationen.html/content/publikationen/fr/eda/schweizer-aussenpolitik/Leitlinien\\_Demokratie\\_2025-2028](https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/fdfa/publikationen.html/content/publikationen/fr/eda/schweizer-aussenpolitik/Leitlinien_Demokratie_2025-2028)  
 7 [https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/fdfa/publikationen.html/content/publikationen/fr/eda/menschenrechte-humanitaeres-migration/Leitlinien\\_Menschenrechte\\_2021\\_2024](https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/fdfa/publikationen.html/content/publikationen/fr/eda/menschenrechte-humanitaeres-migration/Leitlinien_Menschenrechte_2021_2024)

# 2 Review of the Guidelines on Human Rights 2021–24

The implementation of the Guidelines on Human Rights 2021–24 took place amid multiple crises on the world stage, including the polarisation and fragmentation of the international system, the COVID-19 pandemic and a proliferation of armed conflicts such as in Ukraine, Sudan and the Middle East. At the same time, confidence in democracy as a form of government was also tested – as demonstrated by the ‘super election year’ of 2024, which saw voters express widespread mistrust towards incumbent leaders. Democratic values like citizen participation and the rule of law came under mounting pressure from both internal dynamics and external influences.

Against this backdrop, the following overview aims to understand which of the objectives set out in the previous guidelines were achieved, which were not, and what lessons can be learnt.

## Freedom of expression and assembly

Between 2021 and 2024, Switzerland supported more than 6,000 journalists via the Global Media Defence Fund and co-presented two resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) on peaceful demonstrations, which were adopted and co-sponsored by 65 states. It also helped strengthen protections for journalists by funding a handbook for law enforcement as well as providing political support for the Council of Europe’s (CoE) safety of journalists platform. These actions are underpinned by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

## Death penalty

Between 2021 and 2024, capital punishment was abolished in part or in full by seven states, and the UN death penalty moratorium now has the support of 130 countries, up from 123. Switzerland contributed to this progress through targeted initiatives and awareness-raising projects, particularly in Zimbabwe and Morocco. A Swiss action plan on abolishing the death penalty was also introduced in 2024. Through such efforts, Switzerland is working to advance the global push for universal abolition at the normative level.

## Torture

With regard to preventing and combating torture, Switzerland and its partners provided support for the collection of evidence and forensic expertise, helping to make states more accountable and ensure justice for the victims. Over the past three years, evidence was provided in 87 cases in more than 15 countries, including Algeria, Belarus, Iran, Azerbaijan, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Nigeria, Peru and Venezuela. Switzerland also contributed to torture prevention efforts through police training. At regulatory level, Switzerland helped to establish the absolute prohibition of torture as a *jus cogens* norm within the HRC. It also bolstered the implementation of global standards through the election of a Swiss expert to the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT).

## Protection of minorities and vulnerable groups

In 2021, Switzerland submitted its fifth report on national minorities to the Council of Europe. The resulting recommendations issued in 2023 now form the basis for constructive dialogue between the Swiss authorities and communities concerned. From a regulatory perspective, this demonstrates Switzerland’s compliance with the relevant European conventions. In addition, targeted interventions and specific projects are helping to improve protections for linguistic, ethnic and religious minorities in sensitive contexts.

## Business and human rights

More than 80% of Switzerland’s National Action Plan (NAP) on Business and Human Rights 2020–23 was implemented,<sup>8</sup> affecting more than 1,200 economic actors. Switzerland also promoted the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and supported the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers’ Association (ICoCA), whose membership has been growing by 20% each year. These standards strengthen due diligence in global value chains. Companies are better able to identify risks, prevent abuses and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while boosting their competitiveness.

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<sup>8</sup> See FDFA press release ‘Swiss Confederation assesses its approach to business and human rights’: <https://www.news.admin.ch/en/hsb?id=98713>

## Human rights dialogues

Between 2021 and 2024, the FDFA conducted annual human rights dialogues with Brazil, China, the EU, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia (suspended since 2022) and South Africa. These dialogues help strengthen cooperation and embed international human rights standards firmly in national and foreign policy. This is only possible thanks to Switzerland's credible, low-key approach, based on direct exchanges with governments and often combined with specific human rights-related projects.

## Multilateral action

In 2024, Switzerland was elected to the HRC for the 2025–27 period, with a result that reflected the support of the international community. It also held the presidency of the HRC in 2025. In 2024, Switzerland co-organised the commemoration in Geneva of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which resulted in more than 800 commitments and 16 new ratifications of international treaties. During its term on the Security Council (2023–24), Switzerland worked to better integrate human rights into peace and security debates, helping to increase recognition of human rights as an essential element of prevention.

**This review of the 2021–24 guidelines highlights the following adjustments that need to be made going forward:**

- Acknowledging that the universality principle of human rights is facing increasing pushback, whilst reaffirming Switzerland's commitment to the idea that every human being is entitled to fundamental rights by virtue of their humanity.
- Including women's rights and equality between women and men among the priorities, given their close link to political stability, development and sustainable peace.
- Capitalising on Switzerland's heightened profile in promoting democracy and peace thanks to synergies between peace, democracy, governance and human rights diplomacy.
- Better integration of the digital dimension across all priorities, given its direct impact on human rights and wide-ranging implications.

## 2.1 Current situation through a historical lens

It is now common to refer to four generations of rights: civil and political rights; economic, social and cultural rights; solidarity/collective rights; and, more recently, rights related to digital and environmental issues.

This interpretation reflects the gradual broadening of global concerns, while highlighting the proliferation of conceptual frameworks that has not always been followed by effective implementation.

The international human rights system is undergoing a period of profound transformation. Fundamental freedoms are being challenged by new tensions, civic space is being redefined in many contexts, and multilateral mechanisms are adapting to a more polarised geopolitical environment. This dynamic is part of a wider trend in democratic systems worldwide. In this context, the central challenge has shifted from norm-setting to the ability to effectively implement, adapt and enforce existing frameworks.

These circumstances underscore the need for actors who are capable of taking long-term action based on consistent and predictable commitments. Switzerland's position remains consistent with this approach, building on milestones such as the 1975 Helsinki Final Act,<sup>9</sup> which established a lasting link between security, cooperation and respect for human rights, and the Federal Council's 1982 report on Switzerland's human rights policy,<sup>10</sup> which already at that time had identified the protection and promotion of human rights as a core objective of foreign affairs.

In a context marked by fragmentation and growing scepticism of the multilateral system, the main priority is to consolidate common ground and step up the implementation of existing commitments. These observations underpin the principles detailed in the next section.

9 [https://www.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/5/c/39501\\_1.pdf](https://www.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/5/c/39501_1.pdf)

10 <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/fga/1982/2753/fr>

### Number of countries that improved

Countries with aggregate score declines in *Freedom in the World* have outnumbered those with gains every year for the past 18 years. The scope and scale of deterioration affected a fifth of the world's population in 2023.



### Numbers of countries that declined

Note: Countries whose scores were unchanged are not included in this comparison.

Figure 2: 18 years of decline in freedom globally. Source: Freedom House

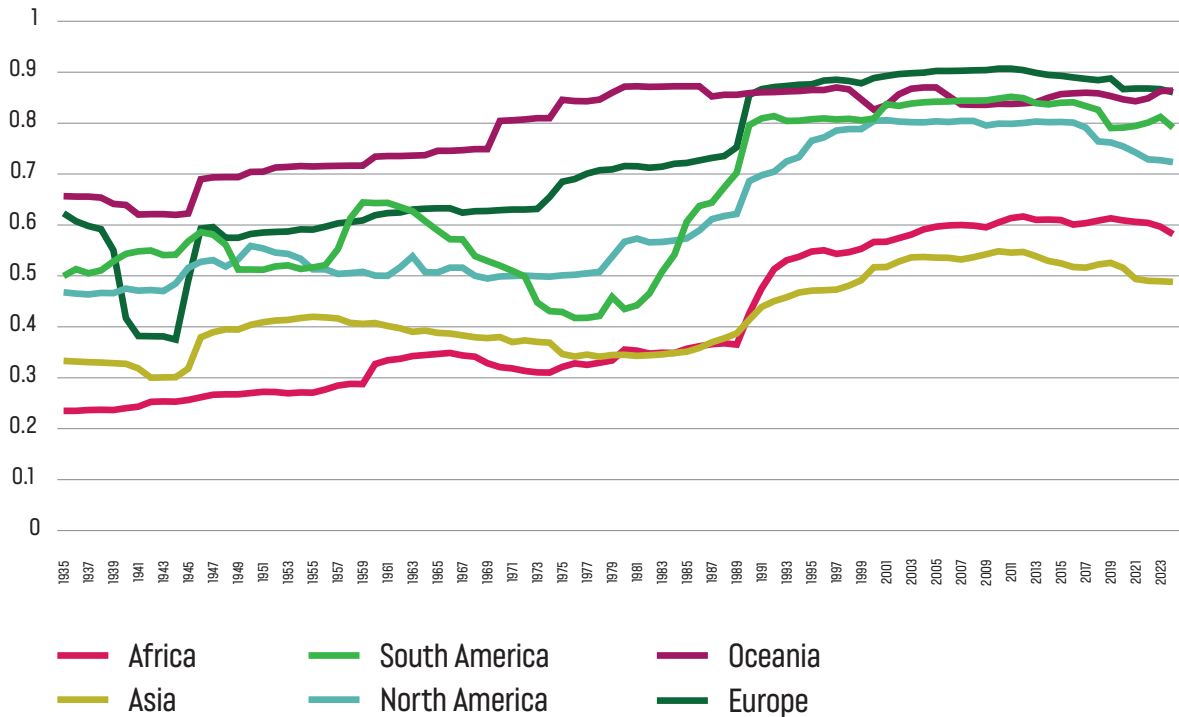


Figure 3: Estimation of the extent to which people are free from government torture, political killings, and forced labor, they have property rights, and enjoy the freedoms of movement, religion, expression, and association. Index ranges from 0 to 1 (maximum level of rights protection). Source: V-Dem (2024), OurWorldInData.org/human-rights | CC BY

## 2.2 Principles

Swiss human rights diplomacy gains in heft when it is based on the following principles.

### Defending the universality, interdependence and indivisibility of human rights

Universality is the cornerstone of the international human rights system: all individuals enjoy the same rights, without distinction. Interdependence and indivisibility mean that no right can be fully exercised in isolation. In a global context marked by multidimensional crises and far-reaching societal changes, Switzerland reaffirms that human rights are not a reflection of regional or cultural perspectives, but rather universal obligations freely ratified by almost all states. To this end, Switzerland maintains the following positions:

- upholding the universality of human rights and opposing cultural relativism.
- focusing diplomatic efforts on civil and political rights, while recognising that all rights must be respected equally.
- engaging in dialogue to foster the full implementation of economic, social and cultural rights.

### Applying the existing legal and institutional framework

International human rights law is one of the pillars of a rules-based world order. Yet in many countries, violations occur with impunity, and at the multilateral level, there is growing opposition to well-established norms. In response to these tensions, Switzerland is focusing its efforts on increasing compliance with obligations and on consolidating and protecting the existing legal and institutional framework.

To this end, Switzerland maintains the following positions:

- promoting the universal ratification of international conventions and supporting their full implementation.
- opposing reservations that are incompatible with the object or purpose of a convention or that seek to relativise the universality of human rights.
- commitment to international justice, particularly to the international criminal tribunals and accountability mechanisms, including UN treaty bodies and monitoring mechanisms established by the HRC.
- advocating compliance with human rights in armed conflicts.

### Aligning human rights, democratic resilience and the rule of law

Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are three distinct but interdependent dimensions. When they work together, they strengthen the resilience and inclusiveness of societies: fundamental freedoms are the lifeblood of democracies, while democratic institutions offer the most effective guarantees for the safeguarding of rights.

At a time of democratic regression and shrinking civic space, Switzerland champions this synergy and backs non-state actors in their role to bolster institutions as well as citizen participation<sup>11</sup>. While the primary aim of promoting democracy is to consolidate democratic institutions and processes, human rights action focuses on the universal protection of fundamental rights and human dignity, regardless of the political system in place.

In this context, non-state actors working to promote human rights help build democratic resilience. Their involvement plays a key role in citizen participation, democratic debate and tracking progress on human rights.

To this end, Switzerland maintains the following positions:

- strengthening synergies between human rights, democracy and the rule of law at bilateral and multilateral level.
- advocating an open and pluralistic civic space guaranteeing freedom of expression, assembly and association.
- reiterating the importance of all human rights as a basis for political participation, social inclusion and equitable decision-making processes.

### Anticipating tomorrow's challenges, particularly in relation to new technologies

Technological advances driven by digitalisation have a direct impact on the implementation of human rights. While they open up new possibilities in terms of access to information, education and political participation, they also come with increased risks, particularly in relation to surveillance, disinformation, discrimination and breaches of privacy. Switzerland advocates an integrated approach aimed at ensuring that human rights are also upheld in the digital sphere.

To this end, Switzerland maintains the following positions:

- integrating digital and technology issues into its thematic priorities.
- promoting the application and observance of human rights in the digital space at bilateral and multilateral level.

<sup>11</sup> See Guidelines on Democracy 2025–28: [https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/fdfa/publikationen.html/content/publikationen/fr/eda/schweizer-aussenpolitik/Leitlinien\\_Demokratie\\_2025-2028](https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/fdfa/publikationen.html/content/publikationen/fr/eda/schweizer-aussenpolitik/Leitlinien_Demokratie_2025-2028)

## Enhancing credibility by aligning with peace diplomacy

Swiss human rights diplomacy is particularly effective when it is aligned with its peace diplomacy, which is also employed for crisis prevention, de-escalation and human protection. This approach is exemplified by Switzerland's good offices, its role as a facilitator, and its efforts to foster dialogue and mediation. Policy coherence also bolsters both Switzerland's credibility and its capacity to act.

To this end, Switzerland maintains the following positions:

- ensuring policy coherence between peace diplomacy and human rights diplomacy.
- prioritising approaches that build trust, reduce vulnerability and focus on sustainable solutions.
- embedding its actions within a long-term perspective.

# 3 Priorities

This section sets out the thematic priorities underpinning the implementation of these guidelines.

## 3.1 Freedom of expression

Switzerland promotes the right to freedom of expression, which is a must for free, democratic and pluralistic societies. Freedom of expression includes the right to form and express an opinion, and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas. However, the right to freedom of expression is not absolute and may be subject to certain restrictions under the law, provided that such restrictions pursue legitimate objectives and do not violate the principle of proportionality.

An independent and diverse media landscape and the ability of media professionals to carry out their work without hindrances are key to enabling the public to form their own opinions and to holding authorities to account.

Switzerland also supports the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, which allows for public debate and social participation.

### **Digitalisation and freedom of expression**

*Digitalisation is fundamentally reshaping the way we communicate and opening up new possibilities for expression and access to information. However, it also comes with increased risks, particularly in terms of disinformation, hate speech, surveillance and breaches of privacy. It is therefore crucial to safeguard freedom of expression in the digital space, including in the context of digital governance.*

#### **Key areas of action are as follows:**

- Switzerland supports media freedom, pluralism and independence, with a particular focus on protection for journalists, taking into account the specific risks faced by female journalists.
- Switzerland works to ensure that human rights are respected during peaceful protests.
- Switzerland promotes freedom of expression online and opposing internet shutdowns, while combating hate speech and digital violence.

## 3.2 Death penalty

Switzerland is committed to the universal abolition of the death penalty. Capital punishment violates the fundamental right to life and the prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. The death penalty is fundamentally incompatible with respect for human rights, as it deprives individuals of all other rights. Switzerland is opposed to the death penalty under all circumstances.

#### **Key areas of action are as follows:**

- Switzerland implements the 2024–27 action plan on the universal abolition of the death penalty<sup>12</sup> (led by the FDFA).
- Switzerland supports initiatives launched within the UN framework to abolish, suspend or restrict capital punishment.
- Switzerland supports organisations and actors working to abolish the death penalty.
- Switzerland raises the issue of capital punishment in Switzerland's bilateral exchanges and promoting concrete measures towards its abolition, with a particular focus on reducing the number of death sentences and executions.
- Switzerland systematically engages with states where the death penalty is applied in violation of the minimum guarantees under international law<sup>13</sup>.
- Switzerland incorporates the digital dimension into Switzerland's anti-death penalty efforts by advocating transparency and the online documentation of cases.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.news.admin.ch/en/nsb?id=101861>

<sup>13</sup> This includes the execution of individuals who were minors at the time of the offence, pregnant women, and people suffering from mental illness.

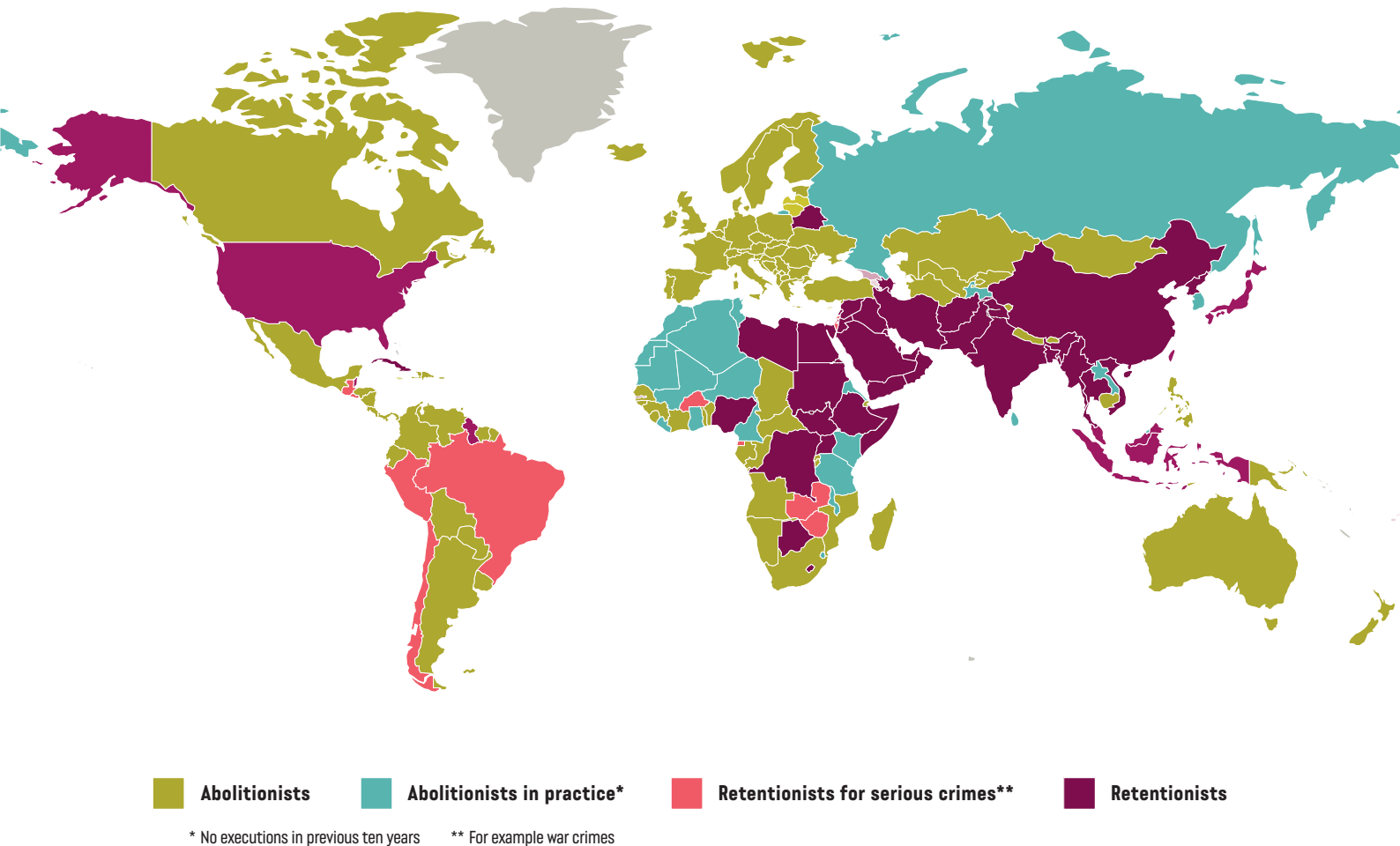


Figure 4: Global map of where the death penalty exists (2024). Source: Amnesty International



Figure 5: Global executions hit highest since 2025. Executions recorded by Amnesty International worldwide (excluding data for China, Vietnam and North Korea because the exact figures are not known). Source: Amnesty International

### 3.3 Torture

Switzerland works to uphold the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment. Under international law, practicing them is prohibited in all circumstances and, in certain cases, constitutes a crime against humanity. Yet torture remains widespread in many countries, both in times of peace and during armed conflict, resulting in severe and lasting consequences for victims and societies. Some progress has been made, however. More and more countries are ratifying the UN Convention against Torture and its optional protocol. These instruments provide for preventive measures, punishment and redress, as well as independent monitoring in places of detention. Given that most cases of torture occur during police custody, interrogation or detention, particular vigilance is essential in these contexts.

Switzerland supports preventive measures against torture. Together with its partners, it focuses on monitoring places of detention, applying the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners<sup>14</sup> and training judicial personnel and the police in line with the Méndez Principles<sup>15</sup>.

#### **Digitalisation and the prohibition of torture**

*Digitalisation makes it easier to collect and share information, improves independent monitoring in places of detention and increases global awareness. Tools such as the Global Torture Index of the World Organisation Against Torture, which is partly funded by Switzerland, help create reliable indicators. However, victims may face increased risks through data manipulation, restricted access to information or the use of technology for surveillance.*

#### **Key areas of action are as follows:**

- Switzerland supports the efforts of the UN, Council of Europe and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to combat torture, as well as the work of civil society to promote compliance with this prohibition.
- Switzerland encourages countries to ratify the UN Convention against Torture and its optional protocol and working actively to strengthen their treaty bodies.

- Switzerland backs torture prevention measures at bilateral and multilateral level.
- Switzerland supports efforts to document and prosecute cases of torture, as well as innovative digital approaches aimed at making prevention and monitoring mechanisms more transparent and effective.

### 3.4 Minorities

Switzerland, whose identity is rooted in pluralism and the coexistence of different linguistic and cultural communities, is committed to protecting national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. Protecting minorities is a key human rights issue and crucial for social stability and peace. It ensures that individuals belonging to minority communities can preserve their identity and fully participate in public life without facing discrimination.

Despite growing recognition of these rights, minorities<sup>16</sup> continue to face systematic violations and structural discrimination. Social tensions, increasing hate speech, especially on social media, and politically motivated attempts to exploit differences all undermine protections for minorities. Switzerland supports inclusion, inter-community dialogue and international mechanisms that promote full respect for minority rights<sup>17</sup>. It is also committed to protecting vulnerable groups, in line with the non-discrimination principle enshrined in international treaties.

#### **Digitalisation and minority rights**

*Digitalisation is opening up new avenues for minorities in terms of preserving their identity and getting their voices heard, thanks to online spaces where they can express themselves and rally support. It is also making it easier to access education, culture and information in minority languages. At the same time, digitalisation increases the risk of discrimination, targeted surveillance and the spread of hate speech. Protecting vulnerable communities in the digital space and promoting equal access to technology are therefore vital to safeguard their rights.*

14 See in full UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules): [https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson\\_Mandela\\_Rules-E-ebook.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson_Mandela_Rules-E-ebook.pdf)

15 See Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering (Mendez Principles): [https://www.apt.ch/sites/default/files/publications/apt\\_PoEI\\_EN\\_11.pdf](https://www.apt.ch/sites/default/files/publications/apt_PoEI_EN_11.pdf)

16 See Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-rights-persons-belonging-national-or-ethnic>

17 At regional level, the protection of minorities is enshrined in the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and its European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

### Key areas of action are as follows:

- Switzerland works to protect national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities at bilateral and multilateral level.
- Switzerland raises awareness of the fate of minorities and vulnerable groups at particular risk, and putting forward solutions to secure their protection.
- Switzerland protects individuals who are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations, for example because of a disability, forced displacement, gender or sexual orientation.

## 3.5 Women's rights

Switzerland works to ensure that the rights of women and girls are protected, a key factor for inclusive economic growth, sustainable development, and stable and peaceful societies. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>18</sup> is the benchmark legal framework for protecting women's civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, and has been ratified by almost every country in the world<sup>19</sup>.

Gender inequality persists in a number of countries and across a range of sectors. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence and underrepresented in the workforce, public life and decision-making. They are also more likely to suffer from poverty and be affected by conflicts.

### **Digitalisation and women's rights**

*Digitalisation also influences Switzerland's priorities in terms of women's rights. Digitalisation has the potential to broaden women's participation in political and decision-making processes, help prevent gender-based violence – including awareness-raising and improving access to support services – and increase access to information and services relating to sexual and reproductive health (SRH). At the same time, it also exposes women to more online violence and harassment, making stronger safeguards essential.*

### Key areas of action are as follows:

- Switzerland ensures compliance with global standards and bolstering institutions dealing with gender equality and women's rights.
- Switzerland raises the issue of women's rights at bilateral level where the context so requires and putting forward concrete measures to strengthen respect for these rights.
- Switzerland raises awareness among men and boys of the importance of achieving gender equality and women's and girls' rights.
- Switzerland implements its new National Action Plan (NAP 1325) on Women, Peace and Security concerning the impact of armed conflict on women and girls<sup>20</sup>.
- Switzerland focuses its efforts on the following five areas:
  - 1 / strengthening women's participation in public and political life, particularly in decision-making and peace processes.
  - 2 / protecting women from online violence and harassment and advocating the adoption of global standards to reduce such threats.
  - 3 / combating all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, including online, particularly in armed conflicts and in connection with terrorism.
  - 4 / promoting SRH rights, in particular through better access to information and high-quality services.
  - 5 / increasing women's economic empowerment.

<sup>18</sup> See Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 18 December 1979 and ratified by 189 states to date: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/cedaw.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Other regional instruments relating to women's rights have helped bolster the normative framework, including the [Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women

<sup>20</sup> Security Council Resolution 1325 (adopted in 2000) addresses the impact of armed conflict on women and girls and recognises the role of women in peace and security and the importance of their participation in peace processes. Resolution 1325 and nine subsequent resolutions constitute the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. National WPS action plans (NAP 1325) serve as vehicles for UN member states to translate these multilateral commitments into national policies and measures. With its 2007 NAP, Switzerland was one of the first countries to adopt such an action plan.

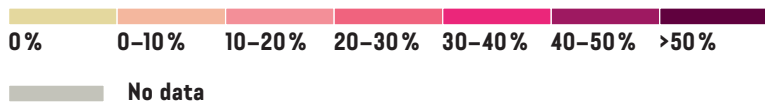
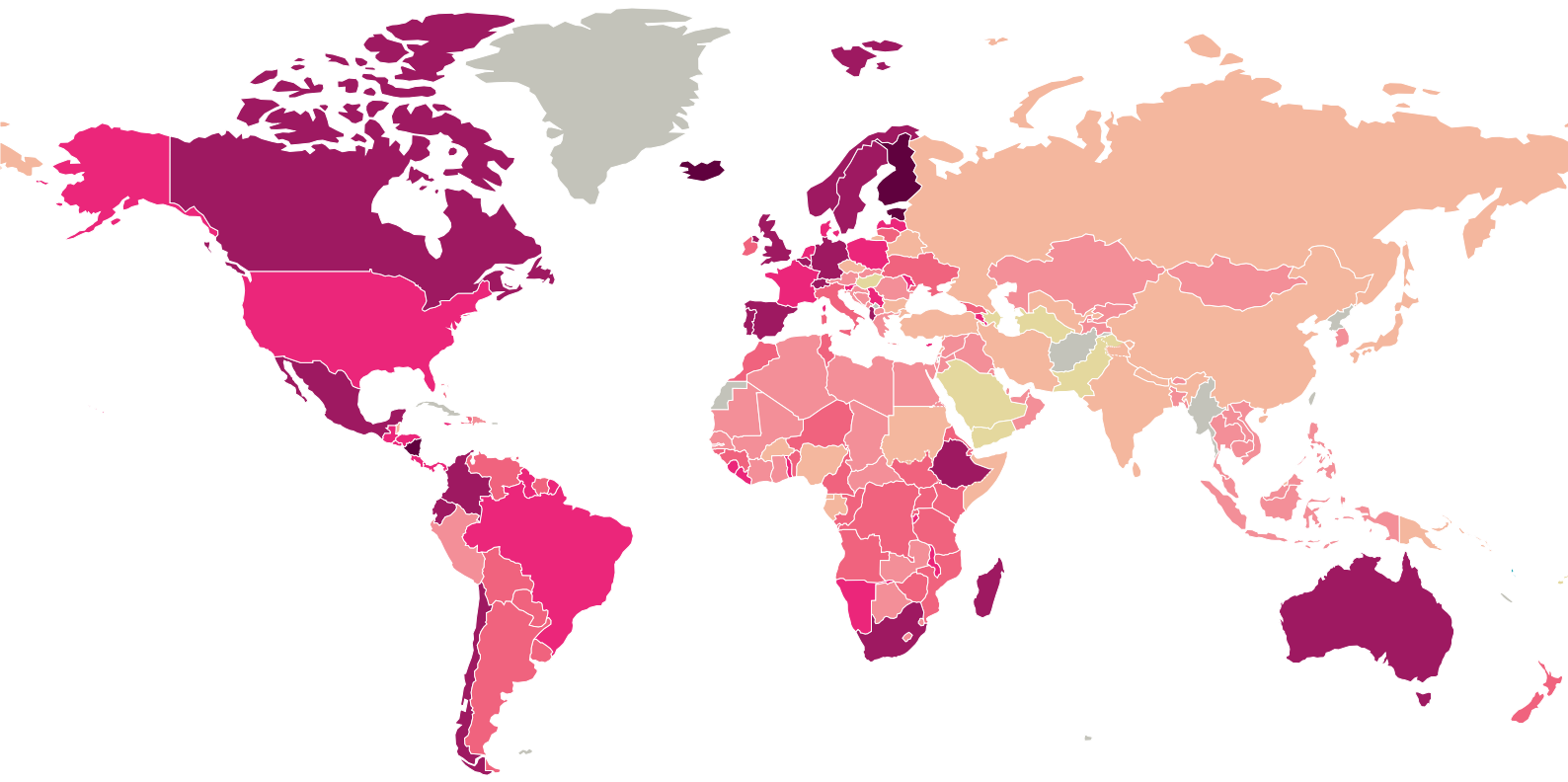
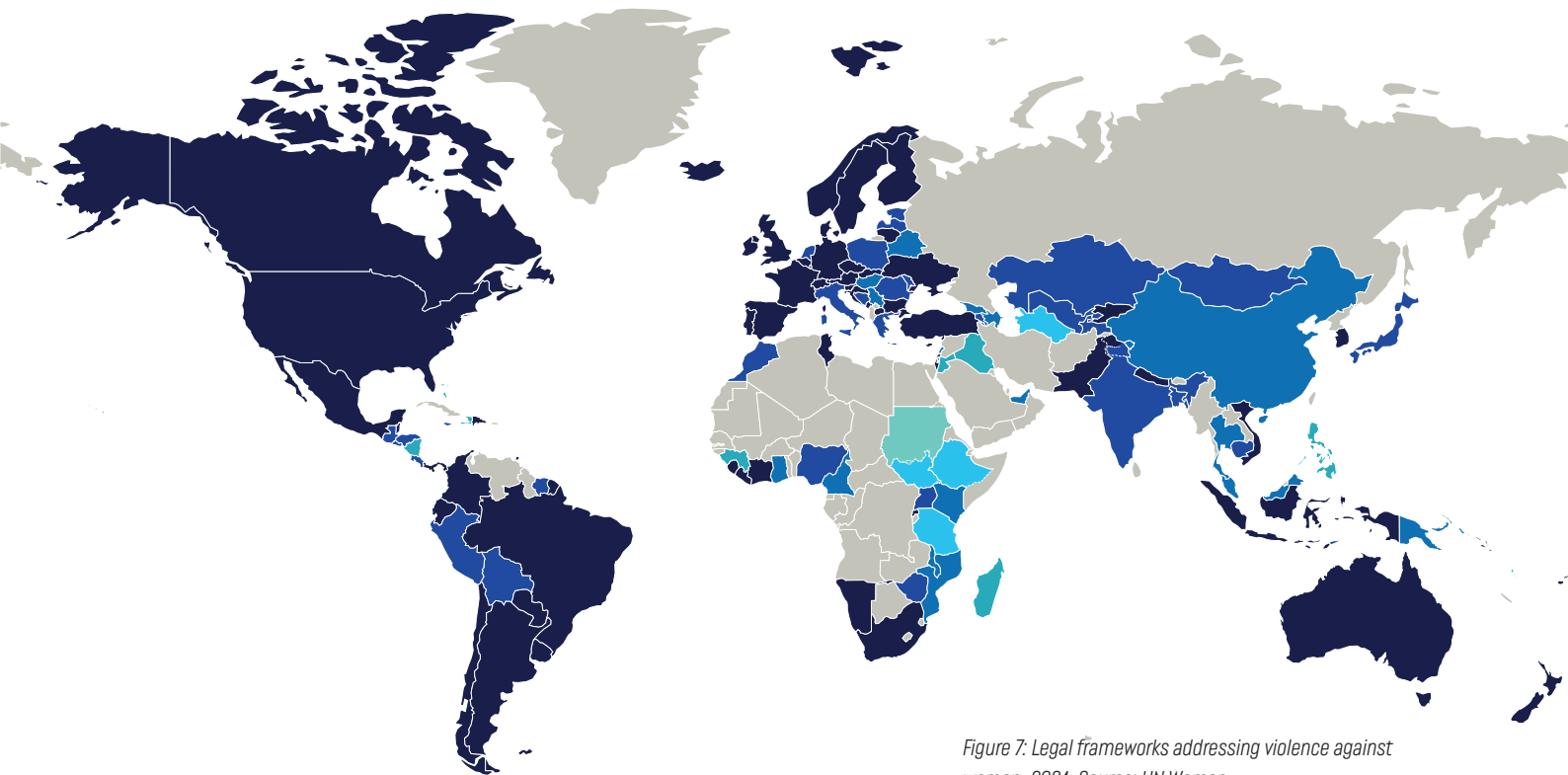


Figure 6: World map showing the percentage of women in ministerial positions, 2024. Deputy prime ministers and prime ministers or heads of government who hold ministerial portfolios are included; deputy presidents and heads of government or public agencies are excluded. Data source: IPU via the World Bank; UN Women via the World Bank



A higher percentage indicates stronger legislation

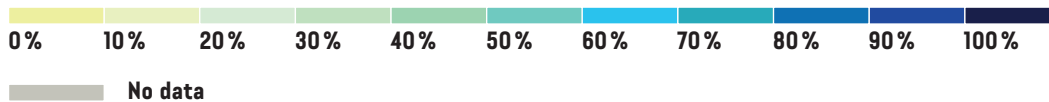


Figure 7: Legal frameworks addressing violence against women, 2024. Source: UN Women

## 3.6 Economy and sustainability

Switzerland is committed to promoting compliance with human rights in the business sector, in close connection with the SDGs. It acknowledges the crucial role played by businesses in risk prevention and compliance with global standards, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights<sup>21</sup> adopted in 2011, whose implementation in Switzerland is set out in the National Action Plan 2024–27<sup>22</sup>. Responsible conduct also helps reduce reputational risks for companies, while Switzerland works to promote conditions for fair competition at the international level, based on a pragmatic approach founded on dialogue.

As a global centre for commodities trading, Switzerland pays close attention to sector-specific risks, particularly in sensitive contexts and when private security providers are involved. It supports initiatives aimed at preventing human rights violations and helping companies to implement international standards.

Switzerland recognises the interdependence between human rights and sustainability, which includes links to environmental law, without losing sight of how these areas are also distinct. In terms of economic, social and cultural rights, Switzerland prioritises access to water, health and food security.

Furthermore, as a host country for numerous international sporting federations, Switzerland promotes respect for human rights in sport and engages in dialogue with nations hosting major sporting events.

### **Digitalisation and the economy**

*Digital technologies, cybertechnologies and neurotechnologies are rapidly transforming the global economy. While they unlock new horizons for innovation, productivity and sustainability, they also pose challenges for human rights. Mass data collection, as well as automation and the use of AI can lead to discrimination, undermine privacy protection and create new forms of economic dependence. Switzerland is closely monitoring these developments and is committed to promoting a global framework that strikes a balance between economic innovation and compliance with human rights, for example by submitting a resolution to the HRC on neurotechnologies and human rights and through the Council of Europe's convention on AI.*

Key areas of action are as follows:

- Switzerland implements the UN Guiding Principles together with the private sector and other stakeholders, focusing on the commodities sector and the digital sphere, in line with the guidelines set out in the National Action Plan 2024–27.
- Switzerland promotes human rights due diligence by companies.
- Switzerland supports initiatives that promote compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law in private security services<sup>23</sup>.
- Switzerland continues efforts to promote respect for human rights in sport.
- Switzerland fosters a coherent approach to the environment and human rights, taking into account how they are distinct.
- Switzerland addresses threats and challenges posed by the rapid development of new technologies, in particular digital technologies, cybertechnologies and neurotechnologies.
- Switzerland pays particular attention to the implementation of the rights to health, food and water.

21 [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciples-BusinessHR\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciples-BusinessHR_EN.pdf)

22 [https://www.nap-bhr.admin.ch/napbhr/en/home/nap/nationaler\\_aktionsplan.html](https://www.nap-bhr.admin.ch/napbhr/en/home/nap/nationaler_aktionsplan.html)

23 In particular, the [International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers \(ICoC\)](#), the [Montreux Document](#) and the [Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights](#).

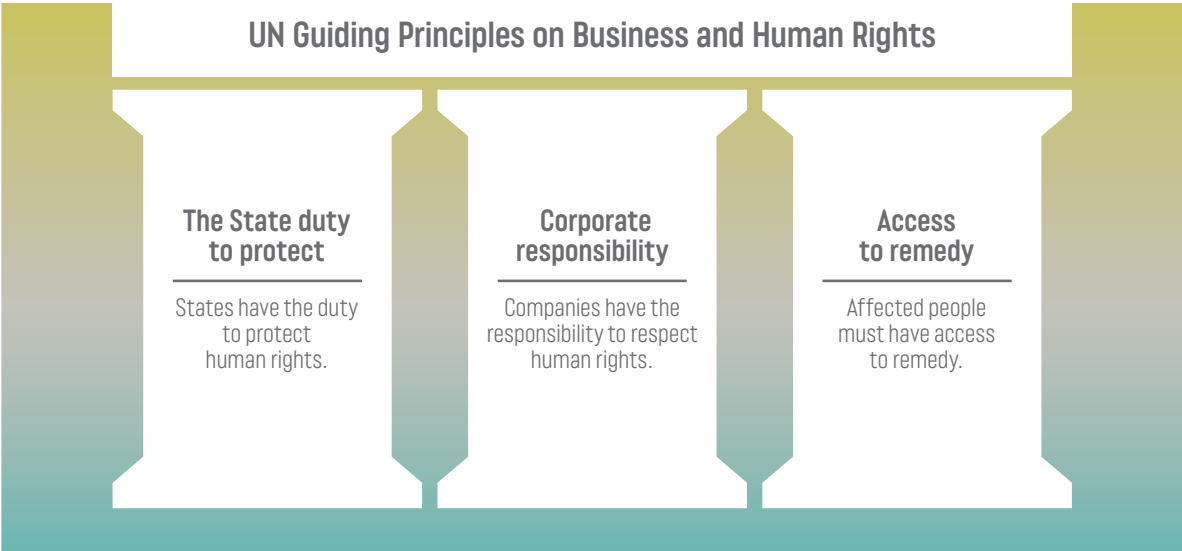


Figure 8: UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

# 4 Implementation and instruments

These guidelines are implemented through a complementary mix of bilateral and multilateral instruments designed to deliver concrete results. The guidelines aim to strengthen the coherence and effectiveness of Swiss human rights diplomacy by providing a framework for guidance aimed at increasing Switzerland's influence and the impact of its actions, particularly through its role within International Geneva.

## 4.1 Bilateral instruments

Switzerland incorporates human rights into all its bilateral relations. Depending on the context, Switzerland may pursue targeted approaches, engage in regular dialogue or take ad hoc measures in the event of major breaches. The external network plays a key role in analysing local situations, engaging in dialogue with the authorities and civil society, and issuing observations or statements where necessary. This work is complemented by financial support for projects implemented abroad, in order to boost the practical impact of Switzerland's engagement on the ground.

Human rights dialogues are a key instrument of bilateral policy. They are drawn up on the basis of Swiss interests and the willingness of partner countries to engage in regular and in-depth exchanges. In order to maximise their relevance, these dialogues are supplemented by projects that translate political discussions into measurable improvements, for example in legislation, law enforcement practices or journalist protection. Regular evaluations are carried out to assess the usefulness and effectiveness of these dialogues, with a view to adapting approaches and ensuring long-term impact.

## 4.2 Multilateral instruments

Switzerland is actively involved in key multilateral forums, in particular the HRC and the UN General Assembly, as well as in regional organisations such as the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the International Organisation of La Francophonie. Its aim is to make these mechanisms more effective, build thematic coalitions and foster approaches geared towards concrete results. Mandates and presidencies held by Switzerland, such as its seat on the HRC for the 2025–27 period and the OSCE chairpersonship in 2026, present opportunities to extend its influence and consolidate its profile as a credible partner.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) plays a key role in terms of prevention, monitoring and advising states. It also acts as the secretariat for international treaty bodies and the HRC. Swiss financial and political

support for the OHCHR is a reflection of Switzerland's commitment to strengthening Geneva's central role as a global hub for human rights.

### **Synergy between bilateral and multilateral level**

*To boost their impact, Switzerland seeks to ensure that its bilateral efforts – human rights dialogues, projects and interventions – are aligned with and complement its multilateral positions and initiatives, particularly under the Universal Periodic Review. It carefully calculates the most suitable level and means for addressing an issue, giving priority to the approach most likely to produce concrete results, or using a combination of both the bilateral and multilateral levels where necessary. This approach ensures that action is coherent and effective.*

## 4.3 Instruments of implementation

### **Bilateral and multilateral diplomatic activity**

Diplomatic activity is the primary instrument for implementing these guidelines. Switzerland uses both bilateral and multilateral channels to promote respect for human rights, bring about tangible results and maintain spaces for dialogue. Choosing the right level and instruments for taking action rests on a careful assessment of the context, objectives and expected outcomes.

### **Effective, low-key communication**

Communication is also a valuable tool in human rights diplomacy, aimed at advancing understanding of Swiss positions, supporting protection-related objectives, and maintaining the credibility of Switzerland's activities abroad.

Switzerland prioritises factual, measured and dialogue-oriented communication, avoiding 'megaphone diplomacy' based on public outrage.

Based on the context, diplomatic activity may involve open or discreet approaches, or a combination of the two, depending on the intended impact, political dynamics and protection for the people concerned. These choices are guided by factors such as impact and are not to be confused with communication itself, which is informed by the principles of coherence, accuracy and accountability.

## Institutional coordination

Clear coordination ensures that Switzerland's actions are coherent. Through its Peace and Human Rights Division, the State Secretariat plays a leading role within the FDFA (including the external network), together with the Directorate of International Law, which is responsible for ensuring compliance with international obligations. Interdepartmental and inter-cantonal cooperation are based on well-established mechanisms, such as the group for 'international policy on human rights'.

## Evaluation and impact

These guidelines are being implemented within the framework of an ongoing assessment process. A final evaluation will be conducted to gauge their relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. Based as far as possible on scientifically sound approaches and applying the criteria set by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), this evaluation will contribute to a more robust analysis on the impact of international cooperation, as requested by Parliament,<sup>24</sup> and will aim to draw operational lessons for the period beyond 2029.

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<sup>24</sup> See press release 'International cooperation: improving impact measurement': <https://www.parlament.ch/press-releases/Pages/mm-gpk-s-2023-11-20.aspx?lang=1033> (fr, de, it)

# Appendices

## Overview of the main international human rights conventions ratified by Switzerland

### 1. The UN system

In the UN system, the **International Bill of Human Rights**, which consists of three fundamental instruments – the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** and the **two UN Covenants (ICCPR and ICESCR)** – has been supplemented by other international human rights conventions and their additional protocols.

This includes the following main conventions:

**International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination**  
(CERD, 21 December 1965)

**Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**  
(CEDAW, 18 December 1979)

**Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**  
(UNCAT, 10 December 1984)

**Convention on the Rights of the Child**  
(CRC, 20 November 1989)

**Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**  
(CRPD, 13 December 2006)

**International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance**  
(ICPPED, 20 December 2006)

### 2. The European regional system

The first regional system for the protection of human rights was set up in **1950 by the Council of Europe**. The main human rights conventions **ratified by Switzerland** within this framework are as follows:

**Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms**

(European Convention on Human Rights, ECHR), as well as its numerous additional protocols

**European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**  
(CPT, 26 November 1987)

**European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages**  
(5 November 1992)

**Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities**  
(1 February 1995)

**Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings**  
(16 May 2005)

**Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse**  
(Lanzarote Convention, 25 October 2007)

**Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence**  
(Istanbul Convention, 11 May 2011)

## List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CoE	Council of Europe
Cst.	Federal Constitution of 18 April 1999 of the Swiss Confederation (SR 101)
ECHR	Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, also known as the European Convention on Human Rights (SR 0.108)
FDFA	Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
FPS 24–27	Foreign Policy Strategy 2024–27
HRC	UN Human Rights Council
ICoCA	International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers' Association
NAP	National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights 2024–27
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SPT	UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
UN	United Nations

## Glossary

A regularly updated [glossary](#) of foreign policy terminology is available on the FDFA's website. Strategy glossaries provide a common set of definitions for key terms.







## Imprint

Editor:

Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA  
3003 Bern  
[www.fdfa.admin.ch](http://www.fdfa.admin.ch)

Publication date:

23.02.2026

Design:

Projects Section, FDFA Communication

Cover photograph:

Unexploded cluster bomb submunition on the side of a path.  
Bashquoi village, northern Aleppo, Syria.

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Maps:

The boundaries and names shown, as well as the designations used on the maps, do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by Switzerland.

This publication is also available in German, French and Italian. It can be downloaded from the website [www.fdfa.admin.ch/strategy](http://www.fdfa.admin.ch/strategy).

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