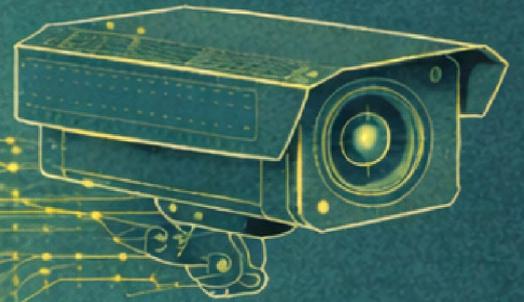


# How EU Funding and Exports of High-risk AI Systems Exacerbate Severe Human Rights Violations in Palestine and the Broader Region



حملة - المركز العربي  
لتطوير الإعلام الاجتماعي  
7amleh - The Arab Center for  
the Advancement of Social Media



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March 2026

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## Key Terms and Definitions

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CSDDD	Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive
EC	EU Commission
EDF	European Defence Fund
EIF	European Investment Fund
EIB	European Investment Bank
MEP	Member of European Parliament
Dual-use items	A range of products including technologies and software that can have both civilian and military purposes.
High-risk AI	High-risk AI: These systems pose serious risks to health, safety or fundamental rights. Under the EU AI Act, they include systems used for remote biometric identification, emotion recognition and biometric categorisation, AI use-cases in law enforcement, migration, asylum and border control management. <sup>1</sup>
IAI	Israel Aerospace Industries
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument. This is the EU's main funding instrument for all third countries, particularly its neighboring countries.
Palestine	"Palestine" refers to the territory recognized under international law as comprising the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, as occupied by Israel since 1967, in accordance with United Nations resolutions and the prevailing position of the international community.»
Border externalization strategy	This is "a core tenet" <sup>2</sup> in the EU's migration policies and practices aimed at controlling migration flows. Through this strategy, the EU externalizes and outsources parts of border control control responsibilities to neighbouring countries.
UAVs	Unmanned aerial vehicles or drones

<sup>1</sup> European Commission. 'AI Act'. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/regulatory-framework-ai>

<sup>2</sup> Napolitano, A. "Artificial Intelligence: The New Frontier of the EU's Border Externalisation Strategy." EuroMed Rights. July 2023. [https://euomedrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Euomed\\_AI-Migration-Report\\_EN.1-pdf](https://euomedrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Euomed_AI-Migration-Report_EN.1-pdf)

# Introduction

In 2024, the European Union (EU) adopted the world's first most comprehensive legislation regulating Artificial Intelligence (AI), the EU AI Act. The Act bans AI systems that pose "unacceptable risk" such as those that deploy "subliminal" or "purposefully manipulative or deceptive" techniques, social scoring, and those that exploit "any of the vulnerabilities of a natural person or a specific group of persons."<sup>3</sup> Further, it imposes a number of requirements including risk management, transparency, and human oversight for developers and deployers of high-risk AI systems such as those used in migration, border control, law enforcement, and the provision of public services.

However, as the EU moves to regulate high-risk AI systems to prevent harm to fundamental rights within its borders, beyond its borders, and specifically in the Arab region, EU-origin and EU-funded high-risk AI systems particularly those used in migration control, predictive policing, biometric identification, and warfare are exacerbating surveillance and rights violations, hindering democratic participation, and reinforcing discrimination.

This research maps the key instruments through which the EU enables the transfer and deployment of high-risk AI systems in countries of the Arab region, with a specific focus on Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Palestine, and Tunisia. The paper further maps the human rights risks and impacts of EU funding and exports of high-risk AI systems. It specifically looks at how EU funding and AI technologies are exacerbating severe human rights violations in Palestine<sup>4</sup>. It further identifies key shortcomings in existing EU legislation and internal procedures that fail to protect human rights in funding and transfer of high-risk AI systems.

## The key questions guiding this research are:

- » What are the key instruments under which the EU enables the deployment of high-risk AI tools in Arab countries?
- » What types of EU-origin and EU-funded high-risk AI systems are deployed in select neighbouring Arab countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Tunisia)?
- » How do these tools impact fundamental rights and freedoms? Who is likely to be affected the most by the deployment of such systems?
- » In what ways do relevant EU legislation and institutions address or fail to address the cross-border implications of AI tools used in non-EU countries?

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<sup>3</sup> European Commission. 'AI Act.' <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/regulatory-framework-ai>

<sup>4</sup> Palestine refers to the territory recognized under international law as comprising the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, as occupied by Israel since 1967, in accordance with United Nations resolutions and the prevailing position of the international community.

To answer these questions, a comprehensive desk research was conducted to map the different mechanisms, specifically funding programs and agreements with third countries and regulations that enable EU funding and transfer of high-risk AI systems to Arab countries. Additionally, the different types of technologies in question and companies involved in exporting them were mapped in addition to human rights concerns raised and impacts documented by human rights groups, journalists, researchers, and academics. In addition, two interviews were conducted with two experts specializing in analysing and scrutinizing EU policies, their shortcomings, and human rights impacts.

# 1. How EU funds and exports high risk AI systems and other invasive technologies in MENA

The desk research identified three main avenues through which EU-funded and EU-origin high-risk AI systems make their way to Arab countries that are the focus of this study. First, in the area of migration control, the EU provides funding to support the deployment by governments in the region of invasive technologies, including those that deploy AI, such as biometric identification systems, traveler screening systems, and smart gates. Second, there is funding, through EU scientific research and innovation grants and investments, to Israeli weapons and technology companies whose systems are deployed to control and target Palestinians. Finally, EU technology companies also export their high-risk AI systems such as facial recognition, fingerprint recognition, and smart city tech to countries in the region.

## Funding and transfer of technologies and methodologies in context of migration control

While the EU's collaboration with MENA countries, particularly North African countries, in migration control, is not new, for over a decade, the Union has zealously been expanding its border externalization strategy in response to a record of asylum seeker arrivals to Member States in 2015.<sup>5</sup> Migration control is one of EU's "strategic priorities" in the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), its instrument for funding programmes with third countries, particularly neighboring countries.<sup>6</sup> The NDICI Regulation states that "indicatively 10 % of the financial envelope for the Instrument should be dedicated particularly to actions supporting management and governance of migration and forced displacement."

To pursue this strategic interest, the EU provides funding for equipment and technologies to third countries of origin and transit, including those in MENA, to control migration. In 2023 and 2024, the EU expanded its border externalization strategy by signing controversial agreements with the governments of Egypt,<sup>7</sup> Lebanon,<sup>8</sup> Morocco,<sup>9</sup> and Tunisia.<sup>10</sup> While the EU promotes these agreements as "partnership" programmes or "financial assistance" support, since aid provided to Mediterranean countries in MENA

5 Tawat, M. & Lamptey, E. 'The 2015 EU-Africa joint Valletta action plan on immigration: A parable of complex interdependence'. Wiley Online Library. 21 December 2021. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/imig12953>.

6 Eur-Lex. 'Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, amending and repealing Decision No 466/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation (EU) 2017/1601 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 480/2009 (Text with EEA relevance)'. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX3%A32021R0947&qid1694611521351=>

7 European Commission. 'Joint Declaration on the Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership between The Arab Republic Of Egypt and the European Union'. 17 March 2024. [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/joint-declaration-strategic-and-comprehensive-partnership-between-arab-republic-egypt-and-european\\_2024-03-17-en](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/joint-declaration-strategic-and-comprehensive-partnership-between-arab-republic-egypt-and-european_2024-03-17-en)

8 European Commission. 'President von der Leyen reaffirms EU's strong support for Lebanon and its people and announces a €1 billion package of EU funding'. 2 May 2025.

<https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/president-von-der-leyen-reaffirms-eus-strong-support-lebanon-and-its-people-and-announces-eu1-2024-05-02-en>

9 European Commission. 'EU launches new cooperation programmes with Morocco worth €624 million green transition, migration and reforms'. 2 March 2023.

[https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-launches-new-cooperation-programmes-morocco-worth-eu624-million-green-transition-migration-and\\_2023-03-02-en](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-launches-new-cooperation-programmes-morocco-worth-eu624-million-green-transition-migration-and_2023-03-02-en)

10 European Commission. 'Memorandum of Understanding on a strategic and global partnership between the European Union and Tunisia'. 16 July 2023. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip3887\\_23](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip3887_23).

is being conditioned upon their control of irregular migration, a prominent priority in these agreements, they are often referred to by critics as «migration deals».<sup>11</sup>

EU-funded border externalization programmes are implemented by EU governments in partnership with national governments of third-party countries, inter-government organizations like the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD),<sup>12</sup> and companies in the private sector.<sup>13</sup> The ICMPD is a key partner of the EU in this area, implementing an Integrated Border Management (IBM) programme and carrying out different projects with surveillance elements, and potentially deploying AI, including in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon.

There is a lack of transparency from the EU and Member States about the types of systems, including technical capabilities, they are funding for use in migration control by counterparts on the southern Mediterranean, particularly in North Africa. However, it is likely that some of these systems deploy AI for three reasons.

First, the methodologies and systems being funded are likely to reflect the EU's own practices and own push for the use of high-risk AI systems to control migration. At and within its own borders, the EU deploys invasive surveillance systems (including those equipped with AI) such as AI-powered drones and vehicles that can identify and track people, automated systems that analyse camera footage,<sup>14</sup> algorithms to analyse and predict people's behaviors, "smart" gates, for instance deployed at migrant detention facilities in Greece<sup>15</sup>, and facial and license plate recognition systems. As part of its border externalization strategy, it is very likely that EU funds are funding similar practices and technologies in MENA.

Second, according to information that is already publicly available, some of the projects and programs for migration control funded by the EU in MENA point to the involvement of high-risk AI. Some of the systems currently or previously funded by the EU for use by governments in the region include biometric systems,<sup>16</sup> border control equipment such as systems for traveler screening and risk analysis,<sup>17</sup> and control and command centers,<sup>18</sup> smart gates (these systems deploy facial recognition),<sup>19</sup> and integrated maritime surveillance systems.<sup>20</sup>

Third, there is the lack of robust regulation governing the deployment of high-risk AI systems in migration.

11 Stachelhaus, S. 'EU-Lebanon deal: Turning a blind eye to reality'. The Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. 16 July 2024. <https://eu.boell.org/en/2024/07/16/eu-lebanon-deal-turning-blind-eye-reality>

12 ICMPD. 'About ICMPD'. <https://www.icmpd.org/about-us/about-icmpd>

13 PorCausa. 'The Migration Control Industry 2: Who takes the money?'. 2020. <https://porcausa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Migration-Control-Industry-2-Who-takes-the-money.pdf>

14 Christides, G., Fallon, K., Mrkaja, D., Meyer, M., Schmitz, F. & Arbid Aza, H. 'Invisible Walls: How AI Tech at Europe's Borders Threatens People Seeking Refuge'. Solomon. 16 January 2025.

<https://wearesolomon.com/mag/focus-area/migration/invisible-walls-how-ai-tech-at-europes-borders-threatens-people-seeking-refuge/>

15 Ibid.

16 Fuentes Lara, C. & Fanjul, G. 'Externalisation (\*): (\*) Chaos, corruption and migration control under the guise of European cooperation'. PorCausa. April 2024.

[https://porcausa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/InformeExternaliz\\_ENG-COMPL.pdf](https://porcausa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/InformeExternaliz_ENG-COMPL.pdf)

17 Privacy International. 'The Future of the EU Trust Fund for Africa'. September 2019. <https://privacyinternational.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/EUTF20%Policy20%Briefing.pdf>

18 'EU Council MOCADDEM Action File'. Statewatch. 15 December 2023. <https://www.statewatch.org/media/4205/eu-council-mocadem-action-file.16821-23-pdf>

19 Dumbava, C. 'Artificial Intelligence at EU borders: Overview of applications and key issues'. European Parliament. July .2021 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2021/690706/EPRS\\_IDA\\_690706\(2021\)EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2021/690706/EPRS_IDA_690706(2021)EN.pdf)

20 Echoes Team. 'From Libya To Tunisia: How The EU is Extending the Push-Back Regime By Proxy In The Central Mediterranean'. Civil MRCC. 21 January 2024.

<https://civilmrcc.eu/from-libya-to-tunisia-how-the-eu-is-extending-the-push-back-regime-by-proxy-in-the-central-mediterranean/>

The EU AI Act,<sup>21</sup> together with the Pact on Migration and Asylum,<sup>22</sup> allow for the use of invasive technologies and practices such as “automated profiling and risk assessments for security and vulnerability checks in order to allegedly facilitate decisions related to asylum procedures, security assessments, detention, and deportation of migrants,” emotion recognition and dialect recognition systems and remote biometric identification systems (i.e. facial recognition).<sup>23</sup> In MENA, there is a legal void that characterizes the governance of AI, in particular high-risk systems, in addition to weak data protection regulations.<sup>24</sup> This means that funding for invasive systems and practices can easily be transferred from the EU to countries in the region with little to no regulatory obstacles.

## Funding of Israeli tech and weapons companies

In addition to funding deployment of technologies in MENA for migration control, the EU is also funding and investing in the Israeli high-tech and weapons industry. Funded technologies include AI-powered drones and spyware.

Horizon Europe, the EU’s key funding programme for research and innovation, has faced scrutiny for funding Israeli startups and companies that provided the Israeli military with AI-equipped drones or AI algorithms for drones and autonomous vehicles deployed against Palestinians, including in the ongoing genocidal war in Gaza.<sup>25</sup>

The state-owned Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), that is involved in the supply of weapons that were used directly in the commission of war crimes, including the genocide currently under investigation before the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice, is also benefiting from millions in EU defence funds.<sup>26</sup> IAI is notorious for its attack and surveillance drones which the Israeli military have been deploying in Gaza. According to a 2025 investigation by Investigate Europe,<sup>27</sup> at least €15 million has been awarded to Greece’s Intracom Defense since IAI acquired it in May 2023. The funding came from the European Defence Fund (EDF), which supports defence technologies and equipment by EU companies. However, Intracom is closely linked to IAI, and as a result Israeli government and military. As such, allocated EU defense funds have contributed to sustaining military capabilities associated with serious violations of international humanitarian law. According to Investigate Europe:

“Intracom Defense is currently involved in 15 EDF projects, the investigation found. Seven of them, including one co-funded directly by European governments, were awarded after its sale to IAI and the start of the conflict in Gaza in October 2023, where IAI surveillance drones have been used in Israeli military operations in the territory.

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21 PICUM. ‘A dangerous precedent: how the EU AI Act fails migrants and people on the move’. 4 April 2024. <https://picum.org/blog/a-dangerous-precedent-how-the-eu-ai-act-fails-migrants-and-people-on-the-move/>

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Fatafta, M. & Samaro, D. ‘Exposed and exploited: Data protection in the Middle East and North Africa’. AccessNow. 28 January 2021.

<https://www.accessnow.org/publication/exposed-and-exploited-data-protection-mena/>

25 Vaudano, M. ‘EU-Israel scientific collaborations face criticism over potential military use’. Le Monde. 31 May 2025. [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2025/05/31/eu-israel-scientific-collaborations-face-criticism-over-potential-military-use.8\\_6741868.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2025/05/31/eu-israel-scientific-collaborations-face-criticism-over-potential-military-use.8_6741868.html)

26 Maltepioti, K., Maggiore, M. & Miñano, L. ‘European Defence Fund millions benefiting Israeli state-owned drone manufacturer’. Investigate Europe.

11 June 2025. <https://www.investigate-europe.eu/posts/european-defence-fund-millions-benefiting-israeli-state-owned-drone-manufacturer>

27 Ibid.

While Intracom Defense is registered and based in Greece and has a Greek presence on its board, its financial records for 2024 show that 94.5 per cent of shares are owned by IAI, and according to the Israeli firm's latest records it holds 100 per cent of voting rights in Intracom Defense.”

Another EU fund, the European Investment Fund (EIF), part of the European Investment Bank (EIB), which is the EU's lending arm, financed Israeli spyware company Paragon Solutions through an Israeli venture capital fund, a 2025 report by Belgian investigative platform Apache revealed. Paragon was founded in 2019 by former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and a former head of an Israeli military intelligence unit.<sup>28</sup> According to an EIB spokesperson, “in January 2020, the EIF signed a commitment of €21.2 million with Aurora Europe SCSp, a fund-of-funds with a total size of €85 million and a focus on life sciences and technology.” The fund invested this amount in 21 funds, including Red Dot Capital Partners II LP, which in turn invested in 10 companies, including in Paragon Solutions in October 2020, the spokesperson explained. It is unclear how much of the money went to Paragon Solutions, which was acquired for \$900 million by the American investment company AE Industrial Partners in December 2024.<sup>29</sup> The company also received EU funding under the InnovFin Equity Facility for Early Stage (IFE), a financing instrument launched as part of Horizon 2020, the predecessor to the Horizon Europe innovation programme.<sup>30</sup>

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28 Walrave, J. 'European Investment Fund financed Israeli spyware company Paragon'. 1 October 2025. apache.<https://apache.be/2025/10/01/european-investment-fund-eif-financed-israeli-spyware-company-paragon>

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

## Exports of high-risk systems

In addition to EU funding of technologies and equipment that could fall under high-risk AI, exports of AI systems by EU companies to MENA also pose risks to human rights.

In Palestine, EU-origin surveillance cameras, including those equipped with facial recognition, were previously found to be in use by Israel as part of an extensive network of surveillance cameras that keep a constant tab on Palestinians and facilitate arbitrary restrictions on their fundamental rights and freedoms. Thales, a French arms group, sold electronic components and communication systems for Israeli drones between 2018 and 2023.<sup>31</sup> According to a 2025 Disclose investigation, the company, in which the French state is a majority shareholder, sold the systems to IAI and Elbit systems, another Israeli company complicit in human rights violations in Palestine, for use in their surveillance and attack drones.<sup>32</sup> One week after a ceasefire agreement was signed between Israel and Hamas in October 2025, Disclose uncovered a shipment of parts destined for Elbit Systems' drones from another French company, Sermat.<sup>33</sup>

Elsewhere in the region, systems that deploy or likely deploy AI are also being exported by EU companies. In 2017, Spanish company SACTI installed an IP CCTV security system of 349 cameras at Egypt's South Valley University, which has its main campus in Qena, a city located 600 km from Cairo.<sup>34</sup> Scati's cameras are equipped with AI capabilities enabling "a proactive CCTV system that automatically alerts security operators when certain events are detected", the company stated when it announced the project.<sup>35</sup>

In 2025, Thales signed an agreement with the Lebanese government «to modernize and upgrade the integrated passenger control systems" at the Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport with "advanced technologies such as electronic document readers, biometric fingerprint recognition, and cutting-edge camera systems."<sup>36</sup> Another French company, IDEMIA, was contracted by Morocco to supply the country's new digital identity national system.<sup>37</sup> In Egypt, in 2020, IDEMIA signed an agreement with the Arab Organization for Industrialization, a military-owned company, to manufacture biometric recognition devices such as fingerprint, facial, and iris recognition "for use in civil and security fields."<sup>38</sup>

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31 Lavrilleux, A. 'Arms Sales To Israel: France's Thales Supplying Equipment For Armed Drones Since 2018'. Disclose. 13 March 2025. <https://disclose.ngo/en/article/arms-sales-to-israel-frances-thales-supplying-equipment-for-armed-drones-since2018->

32 Ibid.

33 Hasday, A. 'Arms Sales: Delivery Of French Equipment In Israel Imminent'. Disclose. 17 October 2025. <https://disclose.ngo/en/article/arms-sales-delivery-of-french-equipment-in-israel-imminent>

34 Scati'. 'Prestigiosa Universidad egipcia protegida gracias a los sistemas de CCTV de SCATI 24'. May .2017 <https://www.scati.com/ΓΕ·Ο/Γ·ΙV/prestigiosa-universidad-egipcia-prottegida-gracias-a-los-sistemas-de-cctv-de-scati/>

35 Ibid.

36 MEA Tech Watch. 'Thales Partners with Lebanon to Modernize Border Control Systems at Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport'. 2025. <https://meatechwatch.com/2025/02/03/thales-partners-with-lebanon-to-modernize-border-control-systems-at-beirut-rafic-hariri-international-airport/>

37 IDEMIA. 'IDEMIA to Supply Morocco's Latest National Electronic ID Cards'. 12 February 2019. [https://www.idemia.com/pdf-export.php?post\\_id1715=](https://www.idemia.com/pdf-export.php?post_id1715=)

38 Enterprise. 'Arab Organization for Industrialization to produce ID tech alongside Idemia'. 10 November 2020. <https://enterprise.news/egypt/en/news/story/dbEd-cA-9ebaE-f-9Vb-eA-Aca-VΛΓVIVΛc/arab-organization-for-industrialization-to-produce-id-tech-alongside-idemia>

## 2. Overview of human rights impacts of EU transfer and funding of AI technologies

EU funding and exports of high-risk AI systems pose severe risks to human rights, particularly to the fundamental rights of people on the move, Palestinians living under Israeli prolonged military occupation, and civic space actors such as dissidents, activists, journalists, and protesters.

The use of high-risk AI systems such as facial recognition, predictive policing systems, and emotion recognition systems exacerbate the precarious condition of asylum seekers and migrants and violations they are subjected to as they attempt to reach Europe. Previous investigations found that security authorities of countries funded by the EU in North Africa were involved in serious human rights violations against migrants, including beatings, sexual assaults, rape, torture, and forced displacement and transfer of people<sup>39</sup>

AI surveillance systems can facilitate the tracking and monitoring of people on the move, preventing them from moving freely and escaping violence and unsafe situations. As a result, migrants can get stranded in countries of transit, where they are at risk of violations at the hands of the local authorities, or they may be forced to go back to their countries of origin, where they may face conflict or persecution. In other cases, they may explore other (less safe) routes on the way to Europe. For instance, in 2018, Moroccan authorities expelled migrants living in Tangiers and Nador to the south with “burning of migrant camps and expulsion from the flats where they lived,” in a strategy aimed at “reducing tension on the European border.”<sup>40</sup> According to Spanish organization PorCausa, the dismantling of the camps was one of the reasons a high number of migrants attempted to cross the border to Spain on June 24, 2022, resulting in a violent response from the Moroccan police, which killed dozens of migrants and injured hundreds.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to their weaponization against people on the move, repressive regimes that obtain high risk AI systems with the support of EU funds will not hesitate to use them to surveil and target those they consider to be a threat to their rule, such as journalists, Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), and political opponents. In fact, public space surveillance and digital space monitoring is widely practiced by the MENA governments, with little to no safeguards for protection of privacy and personal information from the prying eyes of security agencies. Dissidents, journalists, HRDs, protesters, and activists are a frequent target of state surveillance. Increasingly, States are deploying more invasive technologies, including those that deploy AI such as facial recognition cameras, license plate recognition cameras, and spyware.<sup>42</sup> The continuous provision of EU funds and technologies, with little due diligence and safeguards, only further the surveillance capabilities of authoritarian governments, and thus exacerbate interference with fundamental rights and freedoms, particularly the right to privacy, freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom

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39 Townsend, M. 'Europe overhauls funding to Tunisia after Guardian exposes migrant abuse'. The Guardian. 24 January 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/jan/24/eu-human-rights-tunisia-migrant-security-forces-migration>

40 Fuentes Lara, C. & Fanjul, G. 'Externalisation(\*)': (\*) Chaos, corruption and migration control under the guise of European cooperation'. PorCausa. April 2024. [https://porcausa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/InformeExternaliz\\_ENG-COMPL.pdf](https://porcausa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/InformeExternaliz_ENG-COMPL.pdf)

41 <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/migrants-at-the-mercy-of-moroccos-iron-fist>

42 Abrougui, A. (2025). Phishing, spyware, and smart city tech: Surveillance in Sisi's Egypt. In T. Roberts & A. Mare (Ed.). Digital Surveillance in Africa: Power, Agency, and Rights (pp. 57–84). London.: Zed Books. Retrieved December 16, 2025, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350422117.ch-3>

of association, press freedom, and freedom of expression and information.

EU funding and exports of AI and surveillance technologies pose particularly severe risks to Palestinians, who live under Israel's illegal military occupation and apartheid system, characterized by "land confiscation, illegal settlement and dispossession, coupled with rampant institutionalized discrimination".<sup>43</sup> Technology, including AI systems, are an integral part of the Israeli occupation apparatus and apartheid system. As Ameera Kawash wrote in a 2024 research report for 7amleh<sup>44</sup>:

"Israel's technological, militaristic, and economic supremacy has determined how AI-related technologies are integrated into Palestinian life, posing critical threats to Palestinian human rights.

Israel, a global military and tech leader, is rapidly integrating AI technologies into its weaponry, cybersecurity, and surveillance systems. Palestinians in the occupied territory (OPT) and Israel, face myriad risks and dangers from AI-enhanced systems which undermine their basic human rights, including AI-based facial recognition technologies, automated weapons, social media monitoring, and military targeting."

By continuing to export high-risk AI systems to Israel and to provide funding to Israeli companies that develop such systems, the EU, Member States, and private actors contribute to sustaining an industry that enables and benefits from an illegal occupation that is associated with serious human rights risks. In light of documented uses of these technologies, such practices may give rise to concerns regarding potential legal complicity in violations of fundamental rights, including the rights to life, freedom of movement, privacy, and non-discrimination.

The next section will focus on how technological funds and exports are impacting the rights of Palestinians and contributing to violation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in Palestine.

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<sup>43</sup> 'Israel's Occupation of Palestinian Territory.' Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/projects/israels-occupation-of-palestinian-territory/>

<sup>44</sup> Kawash, A. 'Impacts of AI Technologies on Palestinian Lives and Narratives.' 7amleh. February 2024. <https://amleh.on-forge.com/storage/AI20%&20%Racism7/amleh-20%AI20%english1-1.pdf>

### 3. How EU funding and technologies enable apartheid, occupation and genocide in Palestine

Rights groups maintain that Israel is committing apartheid in Palestine, a finding that is supported by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in its advisory opinion of 19 July 2024.<sup>45</sup>

According to Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, Israel is “advancing and perpetuating the supremacy of one group – Jews – over another – Palestinians.”<sup>46</sup> The organization explains that “the key tool Israel uses to implement the principle of Jewish supremacy is engineering space geographically, demographically and politically.”

This engineering is enabled through unequal policies that continuously dispossess Palestinians of land, self-determination, citizenship, and political participation. The deployment of technologies of control and oppression are a central element of Israel’s apartheid and occupation.

In the West Bank, a vast surveillance network equipped with facial recognition keeps a constant tab on Palestinians, monitoring their behaviors and activities and controlling and deciding their movements and whether they can pass through checkpoints, this affecting all aspects of their life, including their ability to work, visit relatives, seek medical treatment, exercise religious freedom, and even go home.<sup>47</sup> The (automated) surveillance also infringes on Palestinians’ rights to privacy and nondiscrimination, their freedoms to move, organize, protest and assembly, while Israeli settlers can move freely and with no restrictions.

EU companies’ technologies were previously found to be in use by Israel against Palestinians, including cameras supplied by the Netherlands-based TKH Group in occupied East Jerusalem. The cameras are “likely to be part of the Mabat 2000 networked facial recognition system” which “has given Israeli authorities unprecedented powers of control and surveillance over the everyday lives of Palestinians in East Jerusalem, facilitating arbitrary restrictions on their rights to freedom of movement and freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly”, according to Amnesty International’s 2023 report, Automated Apartheid.<sup>48</sup> In response to the report’s findings, one of the investors in TKH Group, ASN Impact Investors, said in July 2024 that it demanded that the company adopt “proper due diligence policies to avoid such deals from taking place in the future” within a year or “otherwise the investment will be terminated.”<sup>49</sup> It is unclear what TKH Group’s response was and if its technologies continue to be exported to the Israeli government for use in Palestine.

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45 Baldwin, C. ‘World Court Findings on Israeli Apartheid a Wake-Up Call’. Human Rights Watch. 19 September 2024. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/19/world-court-findings-israeli-apartheid-wake-call>

46 B’Tselem. ‘A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea :THIS IS APARTHEID 21’. January.2021 <https://www.btselem.org/apartheid>

47 Amnesty International. ‘Automated Apartheid: How facial recognition fragments, segregates and controls Palestinians in the OPT’. 2 May 2023. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/6701/2023/en/>

48 Amnesty International. ‘Israel/OPT: Dutch Investor pushes for human rights safeguards to stop use of surveillance technology against Palestinians’. 2 July 2024. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/07/israel-opt-dutch-investor-pushes-for-human-rights-safeguards-to-stop-use-of-surveillance-technology-against-palestinians/>

49 Ibid.

Previously, the existence of surveillance cameras manufactured by Italy-based company Vidoetec was also documented in 2018 in the occupied old city of Jerusalem,<sup>50</sup> in East Jerusalem, where Amnesty documented the existence of the Mabat 2000 networked facial recognition system. The company was acquired by U.S. company Motorola Solutions in 2022.<sup>51</sup>

Through funding, investment, and procurement practices involving Israeli companies whose technologies are documented as being used in the context of the occupation, the EU and its Member States may be complicit in serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law against Palestinians.

Under the HORIZON Europe programme, in 2020, €50.000 in funding was provided to XTEND to optimize its Skylord drone system.<sup>52</sup> On its website, the Israeli company describes its “value proposition” by emphasizing scenarios that recall those the Israeli military encounters in Gaza, “from urban warfare to subterranean (Sub-T) operations.”<sup>53</sup> The company previously advertised the SKYLORD by emphasizing its use by Israel.<sup>54</sup> It has also profited from the war against Gaza, which included a palusible genocide, as the company was contracted in August 2025 to deliver “thousands” of assault drones “worth millions of dollars” to the Israeli military.<sup>55</sup>

Another company that received EU funding under HORIZON Europe is Sightec, which provides a platform that uses «algorithms which can provide vision-based orientation and navigation, Real-time Detection & Tracking, Visual Positioning and Autonomous Inspection» for drones.<sup>56</sup> It received funding of almost €2.5 million from the EU between April 2022 and December 2023 as part of the AUTOFLY project under the HORIZON program for “delivery drones with situational awareness capabilities” “by developing a unique platform designed by Sightec that enables drones to perform complex tasks autonomously.”<sup>57</sup>

While “the project comes across as extremely civilian” a 2024 report by Statewatch and Informationsstelle Militarisation (IMI) noted, “the project aimed to use artificial intelligence to achieve the highest possible degree of autonomy, enabling the drones to move independently of GPS and even without radio communication. This is a visible effort to conceal military requirements in a civilian setting....”<sup>58</sup>

Apartheid and settler-colonial occupation have made Israel one of the world’s largest producers and sellers of arms and technologies of repression, which include “border security and surveillance systems,

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50 Who Profits. ‘Videotec’. <https://www.whoprofits.org/companies/company6171-2?6171/>

51 Motorola Solutions. ‘Motorola Solutions Acquires Ruggedized Video Security Solutions Provider, Videotec’. 12 May 2022. <https://www.motorolasolutions.com/newsroom/press-releases/motorola-solutions-acquires-videotec.html>

52 Statewatch. ‘European money for the war in Gaza: how EU research funding supports the Israeli arms industry’. 22 March 2024. <https://www.statewatch.org/analyses/2024/european-money-for-the-war-in-gaza-how-eu-research-funding-supports-the-israeli-arms-industry/>

53 XTEND. ‘Who is XTEND’. <https://www.xtend.me/resources/xtend-and-height-technologies-partners-to-deliver-skylord>

54 Statewatch. ‘European money for the war in Gaza: how EU research funding supports the Israeli arms industry’. 22 March 2024. [https://www.statewatch.org/analyses/2024/european-money-for-the-war-in-gaza-how-eu-research-funding-supports-the-israeli-arms-industry\\_#/ftn23](https://www.statewatch.org/analyses/2024/european-money-for-the-war-in-gaza-how-eu-research-funding-supports-the-israeli-arms-industry_#/ftn23)

55 Israeli Ministry of Defence on LinkedIn. ‘Israel MOD to Procure Thousands of Drones from XTEND Worth Millions of Dollars’. 20 August 2025. [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/israelimod\\_israel-mod-to-procure-thousands-of-drones-activity7363873945898430464-7-IPf?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_desktop&rcm=ACoAAACQo3QBIISM6Qg8BOSIAqoMBhUUu00033Y](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/israelimod_israel-mod-to-procure-thousands-of-drones-activity7363873945898430464-7-IPf?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAACQo3QBIISM6Qg8BOSIAqoMBhUUu00033Y)

56 ‘AUTOFLY’. EIC Data Hub. <https://eic-datahub.eisma.eu/?p190185259=>

57 Statewatch. ‘European money for the war in Gaza: how EU research funding supports the Israeli arms industry’. 22 March 2024. [https://www.statewatch.org/analyses/2024/european-money-for-the-war-in-gaza-how-eu-research-funding-supports-the-israeli-arms-industry\\_#/ftn23](https://www.statewatch.org/analyses/2024/european-money-for-the-war-in-gaza-how-eu-research-funding-supports-the-israeli-arms-industry_#/ftn23)

58 Ibid.

phone-hacking spyware, tracking and targeting technologies.”<sup>59</sup> Despite repeated calls by United Nations human rights experts for the suspension of arms transfers,<sup>60</sup> Israel’s weapons exports reached a record high in 2024, with Europe accounting for 45 percent of the total purchases, nearly a 20 percent increase from 2023, coinciding with the escalation of Israel’s military operations in Gaza.<sup>61</sup>

These Israeli systems, marketed as “battle-tested” on Palestinians, are attractive for “fortress Europe» as it externalizes and militarizes border control to keep migrants and asylum seekers out.<sup>62</sup> “Cashing in on the IDF brand has successfully led to Israeli security companies being some of the most successful in the world. The Palestine laboratory is a signature Israeli selling point”, writes Antony Loewenstein in his book, *The Palestine Laboratory*.<sup>63</sup> He described Palestine as “Israel’s workshop, where an occupied nation on its doorstep provides millions of subjugated people as a laboratory for the most precise and successful methods of domination.”<sup>64</sup>

In 2020, the EU’s border agency Frontex awarded contracts worth €100 million to companies in the aircraft and defence and aerospace industry including two Israeli companies, IAI and Elbit Systems Ltd, “for providing and operating unmanned drones to monitor refugees and migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean.”<sup>65</sup> IAI was one of the recipients—the other is Airbus— of €50 million to operate its Heron drone.<sup>66</sup> Elbit Systems was awarded another €50 million to operate its Hermes 900 drone. Both drones, equipped with AI, have been used in Gaza, during the ongoing campaign that UN experts and proceedings before the International Court of Justice have identified as involving acts plausibly amounting to genocide. These drones are part of a broader EU apparatus that is endangering the lives of migrants at sea, and by purchasing them, the EU is also helping sustain the Israeli military-industrial complex, which is directly involved in apartheid and the genocidal war.<sup>67</sup>

IAI’s Heron TP and Elbit System’s Hermes 900, are actively deployed by the Israeli military in Gaza for surveillance, target detection, and target generation and elimination.<sup>68</sup> The Israeli military also deploys

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59 Foster, K. ‘The Harvard of anti-terrorism: how Israel’s military-industrial complex feeds the global arms trade’. *The Conversation*. 31 May 2023. [https://theconversation.com/the-harvard-of-anti-terrorism-how-israels-military-industrial-complex-feeds-the-global-arms-trade204758-](https://theconversation.com/the-harvard-of-anti-terrorism-how-israels-military-industrial-complex-feeds-the-global-arms-trade204758)

60 “Arms exports to Israel must stop immediately: UN experts.” OHCHR. 23 February 2024. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/arms-exports-israel-must-stop-immediately-un-experts>

61 Rapaport, N. ‘Arab states received 12 percent of Israeli arms exports in 2024 amid surge in arms sales’. *Middle East Eye*. 5 June 2025. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israeli-arms-exports-reached-record-high2024->

62 Gannon, C. ‘The European Union Is Embracing Militarization’. *Jacobin*. 25 March .2025 <https://jacobin.com/2024/03/european-union-militarization-austerity-defense>

63 Loewenstein, A. *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel exports the technology of occupation around the world*. Verso Books, 2023

64 Ibid.

65 Business and Human Rights Resource Center. ‘Frontex’s contracted companies reportedly operating surveillance equipment to monitor migrants & refugees crossing the Mediterranean; utilized by the Israeli military in its assaults on Gaza; incl. co. responses’. 1 March 2022. <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/frontexs-contracted-companies-reportedly-operating-surveillance-equipment-to-monitor-migrants-refugees-crossing-the-mediterranean-utilized-by-the-israeli-military-in-its-assaults-on-gaza-incl-co-responses/>

66 Hearst, K. ‘No rescue from above: Europe’s surveillance in the Mediterranean leaves migrants to their fate’. *Middle East Eye*. 30 January 2022. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/libya-europe-migration-frontex-surveillance-deadly-fate>

67 OHCHR. ‘A/HRC/59/23: From economy of occupation to economy of genocide - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967’. 2 July 2025.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5923-economy-occupation-economy-genocide-report-special-rapporteur>

68 Düz, S. & Koçakoğlu, M.S. ‘Deadly Algorithms: Destructive Role of Artificial Intelligence in Gaza War’. *Foundation For Political, Economic And Social Research*. February 2020.

<https://media.setav.org/en/file/2025/02/deadly-algorithms-destructive-role-of-artificial-intelligence-in-gaza-war.pdf>

IAI's unmanned ground vehicles (UGV) such as the Jaguar UGV, which deploys AI to perform "target surveillance and aiming" and armoured combat vehicles that "can autonomously perform target detection and attack missions." IAI further developed the Oron Surveillance and Reconnaissance Aircraft with systems that "combine data supplied by AI-supported sensors and generate AI-based analysis."<sup>69</sup> IAI and Elbit Systems' involvement in the war on Gaza and genocide are well documented and the company has strong links and collaboration with the Israeli military and Israeli Defence Ministry.<sup>70</sup>

Israel's deployment of AI systems for detection, generation and killing of targets, and the destruction of entire family homes<sup>71</sup> violate key principles of law of war, or the International Humanitarian Law (IHL), in particular military necessity, proportionality, distinction between combatants and civilians, and precaution. Yet, Israel deploys these systems with minimal human oversight and a little regard for civilian life and civilian infrastructure. These systems are also embedded with inaccuracies, and accelerates detection of targets,<sup>72</sup> further minimizing precautions needed to spare loss of civilian life. Over two years of genocidal violence, assisted by AI, has killed and injured 10% of the population, with a high ratio of the reported deaths (nearly 67,000) to be among civilians.<sup>73</sup> Experts believe these numbers are an undercount.<sup>74</sup> First, this toll does not include indirect deaths as a result of lack of food, water, and medical care due to the weaponization of starvation and deliberate targeting of medics and medical facilities. Second, Israel systematically destroyed civilian infrastructure, including the public health infrastructure needed for reliably reporting the number of deaths and injuries, and for recovering the bodies of those killed in bombardments and not found yet. Through the systematic targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, Israel has destroyed conditions necessary for life in Gaza.<sup>75</sup> This is most evidently manifested in the halving of life expectancy within the first year of the genocidal war.<sup>76</sup>

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69 Ibid

70 Ibid

71 OHCHR. 'Gaza: UN experts deplore use of purported AI to commit 'domicide' in Gaza, call for reparative approach to rebuilding'. 15 April 2024. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/gaza-un-experts-deplore-use-purported-ai-commit-domicide-gaza-call>

72 Düz, S. & Koçakoğlu, M.S. 'Deadly Algorithms: Destructive Role of Artificial Intelligence in Gaza War'. Foundation For Political, Economic And Social Research. February 2020.

<https://media.setav.org/en/file/2025/02/deadly-algorithms-destructive-role-of-artificial-intelligence-in-gaza-war.pdf>

73 Crawford, N.C. 'The Human Toll of the Gaza War:

Direct and Indirect Death from 7 October 2023 to 3 October 2025'. Brown University's Watson School of International and Public Affairs. 7 October 2025. [https://costsofwar.watson.brown.edu/sites/default/files/2025-10/Human-Toll-in-Gaza\\_Costs-of-War\\_Crawford-7\\_October.2025-pdf](https://costsofwar.watson.brown.edu/sites/default/files/2025-10/Human-Toll-in-Gaza_Costs-of-War_Crawford-7_October.2025-pdf)

74 Ibid.

75 MSF. 'Gaza genocide'. 10 October .2025 <https://msf.org.uk/issues/gaza-genocide>

76 Guillot, M. Draidi, M. Cetorelli, V. Monteiro Da Silva, J. H C. & Lubbad, I. 'Life expectancy losses in the Gaza Strip during the period October, 2023, to September, 2024'. The Lancet. 23 January 2025.

DOI/[10.1016 :S0140-6736\(24\)02810-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(24)02810-1)

## 4. EU's weak safeguards for funding and transfer of AI systems of oppression

Opacity and a severe lack of due diligence and independent oversight characterize the EU's transfer and funding of AI systems deployed in the region, whether through exports by technology companies, funding of governments in North Africa under migration deals, or financing of Israeli companies implicated in apartheid and genocidal acts.

### Increased scrutiny of funding to Israeli companies, but inaction persists

In the past few years, and specifically in the context of the war on Gaza, some Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have attempted to scrutinize EU funding to Israeli companies, but to no avail.

MEPs from the Left group has repeatedly raised questions about EDF funding allocated to the state-owned Israeli IAI through its Greek subsidiary Intracom such as guarantees in place “to ensure that a non-EU parent company cannot access sensitive information and that project results remain within the EU entity,” and the frequency and methods with which the Commission audits Intracom Defense.<sup>77</sup> The Commission answered with vague details about three “guarantees” in place, in the form of control over the company, security measures to prevent sensitive information being accessed by the non-EU parent company (ie. IAI) and Intracom Defense’s intellectual property ownership of results which cannot be exported without prior authorisation. The Commission’s answer did not address how often it audits the company and which methods it deploys except that it “holds the right to audit projects (until five years after the final payment).”<sup>78</sup> In an answer to an earlier parliamentary question submitted by an MEP from the Left group,<sup>79</sup> the Commission stated that transfer of ownership of the result of EDF funded projects “requires prior notification to the Commission and may trigger recovery of funds if it conflicts with the security and defence interests of the EU, its Member States or the EDF objectives.”<sup>80</sup> It stated that “ethical screening is conducted for all projects under the EDF Regulation” and that “compliance with international law is also evaluated at project-level.”

Funding under Horizon, including for IAI<sup>81</sup> has also faced scrutiny from MEPs, with the Commission repeatedly maintaining that funding under Horizon is “for purely civil applications.”<sup>82</sup> Yet, as shown above, Israeli military and technology companies funded by the EU are directly and actively involved in enabling

77 Parliamentary question - E-003822/2025. European Parliament. 1 October

2025 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-003822-EN.html>

78 Parliamentary question - E-003822/2025(ASW). European Parliament. 15 December

2025 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-003822-ASW\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-003822-ASW_EN.html)

79 Parliamentary question - E-003011/2025. European Parliament. 18 July 202

5 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-003011-EN.html>

80 Parliamentary question - E-003011/2025(ASW). European Parliament. 9 September 202

5 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-003011-ASW\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-003011-ASW_EN.html)

81 Parliamentary question - E-002908/2024. European Parliament. 12 December 202

4 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2024-002908-EN.html>

82 Parliamentary question - E-003467/2025(ASW). European Parliament, 27 October 202

5 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-003467-ASW\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-003467-ASW_EN.html)

the occupation, apartheid, war crimes and crimes against humanity against Palestinians, and even when funded activities are for “civilian” purposes on paper, the dual-use nature of the systems such as drones and spyware, make it easy to redirect their use for military and repression purposes. In fact, in an answer to a different question,<sup>83</sup> submitted on September 8, 2025, the Commission acknowledged that “Horizon Europe projects’ results may be developed into technologies with a dual-use potential, even if they were originally intended and funded for purely civil applications”<sup>84</sup> and that it “has come to the conclusion that Israel is violating human rights and humanitarian law” in the context of the Gaza genocide.

EU funding through HORIZON Europe, and its predecessor Horizon 2020,<sup>85</sup> has also been previously awarded to projects involving Israeli government entities implicated in oppressing and killing Palestinians including the Ministry of Security<sup>86</sup> and the Ministry of Defence.<sup>87</sup> In her report titled “From economy of occupation to economy of genocide”, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, wrote that HORIZON “actively facilitates collaboration with Israeli institutions, including those complicit in apartheid and genocide” and that “it is impossible to disentangle the expertise that Israeli partners contribute to these partnerships from that gained and used in violations to which they are connected.”<sup>88</sup>

Despite clear links between Israeli entities funded by HORIZON Europe and severe human rights violations, Israel has still not been suspended from the programme to date. In July 2025, the Commission proposed the partial suspension of Israel from HORIZON to target “start-ups and small businesses with disruptive innovations and emerging technologies that have potential dual-use applications, such as in cybersecurity, drones, and artificial intelligence.” Yet, to this date, this proposal is yet to be implemented as it needs approval through “a qualified majority” of the Council of the European Union,<sup>89</sup> which represents Member States’ governments. For a qualified majority to be reached, two conditions must be met: 1) 55% of member states (15 out of 27) vote in favour of the suspension and 2) the proposal is supported by member states representing at least 65% of the total EU population. That majority is yet to be reached as some EU governments continue to stall its adoption for political reasons.

This illustrates how EU systems of governance and internal procedures coupled with insufficient independent oversight is hampering respect of human rights in funding of high-risk AI systems and other dangerous technologies.

The Commission mandates an “Ethics Self-Assessment” in proposals seeking funding under HORIZON and all proposals are required to undergo an “Ethics Screening” by a group of “independent ethics experts.” For projects deemed “flagged as serious or complex,” an “Ethics Assessment” is conducted by external

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83 Boylan, L. ‘Awarding of European public funds to the Israeli military industry under Horizon Europe’. European Parliament. 8 September 2025. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E\\_10-2025-003467-EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E_10-2025-003467-EN.html)

84 Parliamentary question - E-003467/2025(ASW). European Parliament. 27 October 2025. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-003467ASW\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-003467ASW_EN.html)

85 Le Hyaric, P. et al. ‘Israel’s involvement in projects financed under Horizon 2020’. European Parliament. 6 February 2018. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/G\\_8-2018-000001-EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/G_8-2018-000001-EN.html)

86 Ibid.

87 OHCHR. ‘A/HRC/59/23: From economy of occupation to economy of genocide - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967’. 2 July 2025.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5923-economy-occupation-economy-genocide-report-special-rapporteur>

88 Ibid.

89 European Commission. ‘Commission proposes partial suspension of Israel’s association to Horizon Europe’. 28 July 2025. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip1921\\_25\\_](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip1921_25_)

experts. Finally, during the implementation phase, internal and external “Ethics Checks” are conducted, and in case of an ethical breach, the Commission can carry out an “Ethics Audit.”<sup>90</sup>

However, decisions on which projects and companies to fund are influenced by politics, said Chris Jones, executive director at Statewatch.

“It’s all politics in the end, isn’t it? Any company can just hire a philosophy PhD graduate to make their project sound ethical...The EU should not be giving anyone’s money to Elbit Systems, but somehow it continually does. If politically they are not recognized as being in the wrong, if they are not sanctioned, then it is totally lawful for the EU to keep giving them money. All these things go to ethical review, all the project proposals go through an ethical review, ethical committee...It is a political problem.” He further argued that procedural ethics mechanisms alone are insufficient, and that meaningful change ultimately depends on political decisions taken by governments, which require sustained public and parliamentary engagement.

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<sup>90</sup> HORIZON Europe (HE) Programme Guide. European Commission. 15 September 2025. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/programme-guide\\_horizon\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/programme-guide_horizon_en.pdf)

## Migration deals: lack of democratic oversight, transparency, and accountability

Similarly, in the area of migration control, there is little due diligence and oversight of the Commission and Member States' funding of controversial programmes and technologies. For instance, when it signed an MoU with Tunisia in 2023, the Commission failed to conduct "a formal human rights impact assessment of the deal," which "would have been preferable" instead of an internal assessment that "verified the human rights situation" in the country, the EU Ombudsman found in an inquiry.<sup>91</sup> The Ombudsman also criticised the Commission for not publishing any information about the assessment exercise it conducted before signing the deal<sup>92</sup> and its call for a summary of the results to be published was met with rejection by the Commission stating that its "content and conclusions" were «confidential.»<sup>93</sup>

"There is no way to really force them [the Commission] to do anything," Andreina de Leo, who researches the role of EU funding in the external dimension of EU asylum and migration policies at Maastricht University in the Netherlands said in an interview with 7amleh. She explained that the Commission is legally required to answer the Ombudsman "to say how they intend or not to implement the recommendations, but they are not obliged to change the conduct as such."

She is part of a collective that is working on submitting a complaint to the Ombudsman to suspend EU funding to Libya for migration control:

"Usually the problem is that the Ombudsman says we have identified a failure, [that] there is no proper mechanism in place to ensure that there are no violations during the implementation of the project, there is no clear threshold that would then explain why you suspend [funding] or not. So, then the Commission says simply, 'yes, we will do these things a bit better...We know that in case of violations, we have to suspend if the violations are systematic', but then they never explain what they mean with systematic..."

What further complicates oversight is the way funding is provided as the EU Commission does not provide funding directly to projects and countries in the Arab region, but rather gives funding to Member States which then distributes the funding. According to de Leo, this is by design:

"Under the financial regulation, which is the act of secondary law that regulates EU funding given to both Member States and or third-party countries, there is an argument to be made that when it is clear that final beneficiaries use the equipment in violation of fundamental rights, one could consider this an irregularity under the new financial regulation, and so the Commission should be obliged to retrieve the funding. The problem is that the system works in quite a complex way. I think it's not a coincidence, it's

<sup>91</sup> European Ombudsman'. Ombudsman criticises Commission failure to inform public how it assessed human rights risks in EU-Tunisia agreement 23. October.2024

<https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/news-document/en194322/>

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> European Ombudsman'. Reply by the European Commission to the own-initiative inquiry on how the European Commission intends to guarantee respect for human rights in the context of the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding 29. April. 2025 <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/doc/correspondence/en204049/>

made this way to make accountability more difficult.” She further explained:

“The Commission never gives funding directly to third countries, but they use an indirect management mode of use of funding. It entails that the implementing partners, those that receive the money directly from the Commission, are Member States...If you read it formally in the financial regulation, it does state that the ultimate responsibility is on the Commission because it is the Commission that has the task of making sure that funding is not used in violation of the applicable rules. But due to the fact that there are so many actors involved, they say that it’s never clear who failed to ensure compliance.”

Additionally, these non-binding migration deals reflect a “trend of de-constitutionalization and informalization of EU cooperation with third countries” that expanded following the 2015 refugee crisis.<sup>94</sup> They thus do not require the approval of the parliament, which undermines “democratic oversight, transparency, and legal certainty.”<sup>95</sup> This approach goes against an opinion by the European Parliament Legal Service from December 2023, obtained and released by Statewatch in March 2024,<sup>96</sup> which argued that these agreements need “to be subject to democratic scrutiny to ensure the coherence and consistency of the Union’s external action as a whole, particularly where that agreement relates to sensitive policy decisions.”<sup>97</sup>

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94 De Leo, A. ‘The EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding: A Blueprint for Cooperation on Migration?’ Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy. 19 October 2023.

<https://timep.org/2023/10/19/the-eu-tunisia-memorandum-of-understanding-a-blueprint-for-cooperation-on-migration/>

95 Ibid.

96 Statewatch. ‘Parliamentary lawyers: democratic oversight needed for EU-Tunisia migration agreement.’ 15 March 2024. <https://www.statewatch.org/news/2024/march/parliamentary-lawyers-democratic-oversight-needed-for-eu-tunisia-migration-agreement/>

97 Legal Service of the European Parliament. ‘Legal status of the Memorandum of Understanding signed in Tunis on 16 July 2023’. 19 December 2023. <https://www.statewatch.org/media/4203/eu-ep-legal-service-opinion-tunisia-mou.19-12-23-pdf>

## Exports of EU-origin tech without adequate due diligence

Finally, existing EU legislation does not ensure adequate human rights safeguards and due diligence in exports of high-risk AI systems by EU companies to the region. The EU AI Act, does not regulate the export of dangerous systems as it only applies to those providing and deploying AI systems in the Union, including importers and distributors, providers, and deployers of AI systems, regardless of where they are based. According to a 2024 position paper by 7amleh analysing the Act's extraterritorial impacts on Palestinians:

"...companies that are based in the EU but export their systems outside the Union, including to Israel, are not bound by the Act's safeguards, even when the systems they export are banned or considered high-risk under EU law. As a result, dangerous systems such as facial recognition, predictive policing, emotion recognition and those used in the automation of warfare can be sold by EU companies to the Israeli government or Israeli companies without adequate safeguards and scrutiny to prevent violations against Palestinians."<sup>98</sup>

The Act itself did not prohibit the deployment of invasive high-risk AI systems that are incompatible with human rights such as remote biometric surveillance and emotion recognition systems in the area of migration. As such, the EU is not only able to use these technologies within its own borders but is also not going to hesitate in promoting and funding their use abroad as part of its border externalization strategy. Jones described this as "security ideology transfer." He explained:

"If the EU's security model is based on allegedly advanced technologies, they are going to try and disseminate that sort of security ideology to other states. Then, they may not have to provide them with the actual equipment. They can just say, 'look, we're doing this with these kinds of systems, you should do the same.' And then maybe that state is going to go and buy them [the technologies] themselves. So, it may not be direct technology transfer, it's more like ideology transfer, which then requires a bunch of different technologies to make it work."

The exports of surveillance technologies that deploy AI can also fall under the 2021 EU Regulation for the exports and transfer of dual-use items, a range of products including technologies and software that can have both civilian and military purposes.

The regulation requires a prior authorisation for the export of 'cyber-surveillance items,' "likely to be used for internal repression or serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law."<sup>99</sup> Cyber-surveillance items are defined in the Regulation as "dual-use items specially designed to enable the covert surveillance of natural persons by monitoring, extracting, collecting or analysing data from information and telecommunication systems."<sup>100</sup>

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98 Abrougui, A. 'Position Paper on the European Union's AI Act and its Implications for Palestinian Digital Rights'. 7amleh. July 2023.

<https://7amleh.org/storage/Position%20Paper%20on%20the%20European%20Union%E2%80%99s%20AI%20Act%20and%20its%20Implications%20for%20Palestinian%20Digital%20Rights%20.pdf>

99 Regulation (EU) 2021/821 setting up an EU regime for the control of exports, brokering, technical assistance, transit and transfer of dual-use items: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/821/oj/eng>

100 Ibid.

However, the implementation of the Regulation, described as “fragile”<sup>101</sup> and a “missed opportunity” by human rights groups following its adoption back in 2021,<sup>102</sup> depends on the interpretation and political will of Member States. For instance, an export authorisation may be required for cybersecurity items «if the exporter has been informed by the competent authority that the items in question are or may be intended, in their entirety or in part, for use in connection with internal repression and/or the commission of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.” However, the Regulation does not provide clear guidance on what constitutes a “serious” human rights violation, once again leaving this open to the sole interpretation of governments.<sup>103</sup> In addition, to subject new cybersurveillance technologies to export restrictions, unanimity of Member States is needed. Further, the Regulation did not require exporters to conduct “human rights due diligence” in accordance with international human rights standards, requiring exporters to develop and implement “‘internal compliance programme’ or ‘ICP, defined as “ongoing effective, appropriate and proportionate policies and procedures...to facilitate compliance with the provisions and objectives of this Regulation...including, inter alia, due diligence measures assessing risks related to the export of the items to end-users and end-uses.”

Four years after its adoption, the Center for Democracy and Technology Europe released a research report analysing the Regulation’s enforcement, revealing a lack of transparency on licensing decisions from national authorities, fragmented and insufficiently detailed due diligence guidance, a lack of clarity exporters face on what constitutes an adequate human rights risk assessment, and absence of systematic monitoring of the actual deployment of exports once they leave EU borders.<sup>104</sup>

While human rights due diligence is required under the 2024 EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), this directive was significantly weakened under a deregulation agenda targeting EU digital and sustainability laws. When adopted in 2024, the law was staged to apply to large EU companies with more than 1000 employees on average and a net worldwide turnover of more than €450 million or companies in a third country with a net turnover of more than €450 million in the EU. On November 13, 2025, the EU Parliament approved plans to weaken the scope of the CSDDD, a change made possible by the center-right European People’s Party (EPP), the largest group, aligning itself with far-right groups.<sup>105</sup> Under these changes, human rights due diligence would now only be required for very large companies with more than 5000 employees and a net annual turnover of over €1.5 billion.<sup>106</sup> This means that the directive, once implemented, would now only apply to a very small fraction of all companies, including those in the technology sector. As a result large companies, medium and small companies and startups can continue exporting high-risk AI systems without a legal requirement for robust human rights diligence

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101 Human Rights Watch. ‘EU: Robustly Carry Out New Surveillance Tech Rules’. 25 March 2021. [https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/25/eu-robustly-carry-out-new-surveillance-tech-rules?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/25/eu-robustly-carry-out-new-surveillance-tech-rules?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

102 Amnesty International. ‘New EU Dual Use Regulation agreement ‘a missed opportunity’ to stop exports of surveillance tools to repressive regimes’. 25 March 2021. [https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/03/new-eu-dual-use-regulation-agreement-a-missed-opportunity-to-stop-exports-of-surveillance-tools-to-repressive-regimes/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/03/new-eu-dual-use-regulation-agreement-a-missed-opportunity-to-stop-exports-of-surveillance-tools-to-repressive-regimes/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

103 Ibid.

104 CDT Europe. “From Export Control to Unknown Exports: How the EU’s Dual-Use regime falls short on tackling spyware”. December 2025. <https://cdt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/CDT-Europe-Report-on-the-Dual-Use-Regulation.pdf>

105 Mittal, S. ‘Disappointment as European Parliament moves to significantly weaken scope of CSDDD’. Edie. 13 November 2025. <https://www.edie.net/disappointment-as-european-parliament-moves-to-significantly-weaken-scope-of-csddd/>

106 European Parliament. ‘Sustainability reporting and due diligence: MEPs back simplification changes’. 13 November 2025. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20251106/IPR31296/sustainability-reporting-and-due-diligence-meps-back-simplification-changes>

## Conclusion

EU funding and exports of invasive AI technologies such as facial and fingerprint recognition, smart city tech, smart border crossing gates, systems for screening of travelers and risk analysis, and drones pose severe risks to human rights in MENA. This is taking place with little due diligence and independent oversight, and despite evidence of funds and exports being used in human rights violations.

The Commission and Member States continue to sideline human rights in their migration control deals and partnerships with Arab States. Funding is allocated for the purchase and installation of equipment and technologies, including high-risk AI systems, that facilitate the tracking, control and abuse of people on the move. In a region where public space surveillance and digital space monitoring is conducted by authorities with little to no safeguards for privacy and human rights, EU funding of such technologies will only further the surveillance capabilities of repressive regimes.

Action is yet to be taken to ensure EU funds, including those allocated under the Horizon programme and the EDF, do not go to companies who remain complicit in the prolonged occupation of the Palestinian Territory and in the commission of war crimes in Gaza. At the time of publishing, an EU Commission proposal to partially suspend Israeli companies from Horizon has still not been approved. Additionally, the EU continues to be one of the biggest clients of Israel's weapons industry, helping sustain the Israeli military-industrial complex, and as such Israel's military violence, which in the words of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories, "remains the engine of its settler-colonial project."

Further, EU companies can still export high-risk AI systems and even systems that are prohibited under the AI Act to MENA countries despite severe risks of their use in human rights abuses. Some of the technologies being exported include facial recognition cameras, biometric fingerprint recognition, digital identity systems, electronic components and communications systems for drones that deploy AI, and smart city systems. While exports of these systems can fall under different EU legislation, specifically the 2021 EU Regulation for the exports and transfer of dual-use items and the 2024 EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), there are loopholes that allow for EU-origin high-risk AI systems to be abused by authoritarian regimes in the region. Open language and lack of guidance in EU Regulation for the exports and transfer of dual-use items make its robust implementation dependent on the interpretation and political will of Member States. While the CSDDD, which mandates human rights due diligence for businesses, would not apply to most companies in the European tech industry.

In the meantime, a year after the entry of the force of the EU AI Act, European human rights groups are alarmed at a proposal by the Commission to weaken its implementation. In particular, the proposal, if approved, would delay enforcement of transparency requirements for high-risk systems and exempt small mid-cap companies from the requirement to prepare detailed technical documentation of their high-risk AI systems before they are introduced to the market or put into service.<sup>107</sup> The proposal to weaken the Act is part of a broader digital and sustainability "deregulation" agenda pursued by the Commission, supported by some Member States, and pushed for by the tech industry lobby and the Donald Trump

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<sup>107</sup> EDRI. 'The EU must uphold hard-won protections for digital human rights'. 13 November 2025. <https://edri.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/The-EU-must-uphold-hard-won-protections-for-digital-human-rights.pdf>

administration in the U.S.<sup>108</sup> “Unless the European Commission changes course, this would be the biggest rollback of digital fundamental rights in EU history. It is being done under the radar, using rushed and opaque processes designed to avoid democratic oversight,” a group of 133 civil society organizations, trade unions and defenders of the public interest said in a statement.

It is still unclear how the deregulation agenda would further exacerbate abuses enabled by EU-origin technologies and funding of high-risk AI systems. However, the ways with which Europeans’ hard-won digital rights gains are being rolled back—with opacity, no democratic oversight, and a prioritization of political and economic interests over fundamental rights— bears the same hallmarks of the Commission and EU Member States’ own practices in Palestine and the broader region as they fund the deployment of invasive technologies to control migration, invest and import in Israeli weapons and systems that sustain genocide and apartheid, and refuse to adequately regulate exports. Resisting these strategies can thus benefit from cross-regional and collective actions that document, raise awareness, campaign and organize for a broader political shift in the EU in the medium to long term.

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<sup>108</sup> Besliu, R. ‘What’s Driving the EU’s AI Act Shake-Up?’ Tech Policy Press. 13 November 2025. <https://www.techpolicy.press/whats-driving-the-eus-ai-act-shakeup/>.

# Recommendations

## Civil Society

- » Civil society and human rights groups should work, through documentation and advocacy, to address EU funding and exports of high-risk AI systems that pose risks to fundamental rights and freedoms in the region, by identifying the parties allocating the funds, who is receiving the funds, and how taxpayers' money is spent, violations enabled, and lack of accountability and oversight.
- » Civil society and journalists need to investigate the role of international organizations such as the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which receive significant EU funding to implement migration programmes and projects, including through the deployment of technology, in MENA.
- » On the medium term, digital rights and human rights groups can engage with a broader alliance of political and civic space actors to raise awareness among voters in national elections and the 2029 European Parliament Election to help set in motion a political shift that can eventually lead to more robust human rights due diligence and safeguards in EU transfer and funding of AI systems.

## EU Commission / Parliament / Member States

- » The EU Commission and Member States should refrain from weakening existing legislation and work on strengthening them and extending protection of human rights in exports of high-risk AI systems in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Union's obligations under Article 21 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU), which states that its "action on the international scene shall be guided by...democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law."
- » The European Parliament should exercise enhanced scrutiny over EU funding and export practices related to high-risk AI systems, including through hearings, own-initiative reports, and requests for Commission reporting on human rights due diligence in EU-funded programmes. It should also oppose legislative proposals to weaken EU laws on digital rights and sustainability.
- » Robust human rights due diligence in accordance with international human rights standards should be mandated for EU technology companies exporting any invasive technologies and dual use systems, including AI systems, that can be deployed to interfere with human rights. Due diligence should be mandated regardless of company size and turnover. Member States should also strengthen their enforcement of EU Regulation for the exports and transfer of dual-use items, including by reinforcing independent and parliamentary oversight of licensing decisions, harmonizing transparency standards for the licensing of spyware exports, and ensuring that due diligence applies to the full life cycle of the technology being exported, not only before the license is granted.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> CDT Europe. "From Export Control to Unknown Exports: How the EU's Dual-Use regime falls short on tackling spyware". December 2025. <https://cdt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/CDT-Europe-Report-on-the-Dual-Use-Regulation.pdf>

» The EU Commission should review its internal procedures for allocating funding under different programs and funds, in particular under NDICI, HORIZON, EU Defense Fund, and the EU Investment Fund, and implement robust due diligence in funding allocation to ensure taxpayers' money does not finance the development and deployment of dangerous AI systems in ways that undermine fundamental rights and freedoms.

» The EU Commission and Member States should be transparent about the types of technologies, including AI systems, they are funding in countries in the region for purposes of migration control. They should also conduct robust human rights due diligence before entering migration agreements as recommended by the Ombudsman. In line with article 21 of the TEU, these assessments should explicitly examine potential human rights impacts of high-risk AI systems and other invasive technologies funded under these agreements.

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