

# Safeguarding Palestinian Digital Rights in the EU Policy Framework

Since the start of the war on Gaza, the digital rights of Palestinians have faced an unprecedented crackdown, with escalating restrictions on online expression, increased surveillance, and heightened compliance by social media platforms with Israeli censorship demands. The Israeli government has expanded its legal and extralegal measures to suppress Palestinian voices, criminalizing digital content and targeting individuals for their online activities; such as the [Facebook Law](#)<sup>1</sup>, approved in December 2021. This has resulted in [widespread self-censorship](#)<sup>2</sup>, arbitrary detentions, and the systematic erasure of Palestinian narratives from online platforms.

Compounding this digital rights repression is the severe threat to media freedom and the safety of journalists on the ground. According to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), at least 164 Palestinian journalists and workers from the media sector have been killed. The Federation, which has [compiled](#)<sup>3</sup>, all the names and circumstances of each death, also reports that several have been injured and others are missing during the war in Gaza. Foreign media have been largely banned by Israel from independently covering the war, creating an information vacuum and highlighting the indispensable role of local Palestinian journalists. Yet, this also potentialized disinformation to spread in global information ecosystems, an environment that underscores an urgent need to protect the agency of Palestinians through digital rights, but also journalistic resilience, information integrity, and media viability.

These challenges are further complicated by the implementation of the European Union's Digital Services Act (DSA), a landmark regulation designed to protect fundamental rights and ensure accountability and transparency in online content moderation. While the DSA aims to create a safer and more transparent digital space, its enforcement has produced mixed results for Palestinian digital rights. The DSA obliges very large online platforms (VLOPs) to act swiftly against illegal content and disinformation, but civil society organisations have documented that

<sup>1</sup> [Digital Warfare: Israeli Censorship of Palestinian Content](#), Palestine Studies, written by Nadim Nashif. (2023, June 15).

<sup>2</sup> [Digital Security Among Palestinian Youth Citizen of Israel](#), Tamleh, 2024

<sup>3</sup> [Palestine: At least 164 journalists and media workers killed in Gaza](#), International Federation of Journalists, May 2025

<sup>4</sup> [Palestinian Digital Rights and the Extraterritorial Impact of the European Union's Digital Services Act](#), Tamleh, 2024

this pressure often **leads to the over-removal of legitimate Palestinian content**<sup>4</sup>, especially when platforms respond to takedown requests from Israeli authorities or EU member states. The lack of nuanced, context-sensitive moderation and the reliance on automated tools have resulted in the disproportionate censorship of Palestinian voices, both inside and outside the EU.



By addressing these pressing concerns, this paper seeks to mobilize EU policymakers, civil society organizations, and digital rights advocates **to take concrete steps in protecting Palestinian digital rights and combating online repression.**

This position paper aims to highlight the legal and policy frameworks used to restrict Palestinian digital rights and information integrity, examine the complicity of tech platforms in silencing Palestinian voices, and present key recommendations for the European Union (EU) to uphold its commitment to human rights in the digital space. As a global leader in digital regulation, the EU has a critical role in ensuring that its policies and diplomatic engagements align with international human rights standards, pushing for accountability and transparency in content moderation practices affecting Palestinians.

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## Legal Restrictions on Freedom of Expression

In November 2023, Israel enacted the Ninth Amendment to its “Anti-Terrorism” Law, introducing severe restrictions on digital freedoms. This amendment criminalizes the **mere consumption of content that Israeli authorities**<sup>5</sup>, classify as “inciting terrorism,” imposing harsh penalties, including imprisonment. The law grants broad powers to Israeli security agencies, enabling them to surveil and prosecute Palestinians based on perceived intent rather than concrete actions, raising serious concerns about privacy, due process, and freedom of expression. Online activities such as following, sharing, or reacting to content labeled as “terrorism” are now punishable offenses, creating a chilling effect on digital discourse.

<sup>5</sup> [New Law Prohibiting the Consumption of Terrorist Publications](#), Tamleh, November 2023

## Impact on Palestinian Citizens of Israel [link](#)

Since October 7, 2023, there has been a sharp escalation in arbitrary measures against Palestinian citizens of Israel for expressing solidarity with Gaza. Reports indicate that individuals have faced detentions, dismissals, and expulsions simply for their online activities. A recent survey found that 70% of Palestinians aware of the “Counter-Terrorism Law” have curtailed their online engagement out of fear of repercussions. This crackdown has disproportionately silenced Arab communities, while incitement from Israeli Jewish users remains largely unaddressed, highlighting a systemic double standard in digital governance.

## Social Media Compliance with Israeli Requests

Between October 7 and November 14, 2023, [Israeli authorities submitted approximately 9,500 takedown requests to social media platforms](#)<sup>6</sup>. Meta alone received 60% of these requests, complying with an alarming 94% of them. This level of compliance suggests a significant lack of scrutiny and raises concerns about the complicity of major tech platforms in facilitating digital repression. The widespread removal of Palestinian content further exacerbates censorship and erodes the fundamental right to freedom of expression. Leaked internal data later revealed that Meta removed over 90,000 posts in compliance with Israeli requests, maintaining the same 94% compliance rate well beyond the initial period.

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The opacity of these algorithms makes it exceedingly difficult to determine the full extent of this issue, and impedes information integrity by effectively shaping public discourse in a non-transparent manner.

<sup>6</sup> [Palestinian Digital Rights in the Context of Genocide and Big Tech Accountability One Year After the War on Gaza](#), Tamleh, 2024

<sup>7</sup> [Gaza Strip: Risk of Famine as 495,000 people face catastrophic acute food insecurity](#), IPC, 2024

## ALGORITHMIC BIAS AND CONTENT SUPPRESSION

Beyond direct takedown requests, concern persists regarding algorithmic biases that may inherently suppress Palestinian voices or amplify content that promotes harm. The opacity of these algorithms makes it exceedingly difficult to determine the full extent of this issue, and impedes information integrity by effectively shaping public discourse in a non-transparent manner. The Digital Service Act (DSA), particularly its provisions for Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs), offers a crucial framework to address this issue. The DSA mandates that VLOPs identify, assess, and mitigate systemic risks stemming from their services, including negative effects on fundamental rights, civic discourse, and electoral processes. This explicitly covers risks associated with content moderation, algorithmic design, and the amplification of content. However, for the DSA to be effectively applied in contexts like the war on Gaza, it is imperative that independent researchers and accredited journalists are granted meaningful access to data and algorithmic parameters. Without this access, external scrutiny of platform compliance with their DSA obligations, particularly concerning algorithmic bias and content suppression, remains severely limited.

## WEAPONIZATION OF DISINFORMATION

Beyond direct censorship and algorithmic bias, the war has been characterized by a pervasive and coordinated spread of disinformation campaigns, actively weaponized to manipulate public opinion and delegitimize Palestinian narratives. These campaigns often originate from state-aligned actors, well-resourced networks, or hyper-partisan groups, leveraging social media platforms to disseminate false or misleading information, discredit legitimate journalism, and incite hatred. The impacts are also much broader than polarization or hate. According to [The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification \(IPC\)](#), disinformation disrupts humanitarian aid distribution efforts during a time when the whole Gaza Strip faces Famine. The widespread nature of disinformation amplifies the suppression of authentic voices and narratives, distorting the reality of events and impeding informed public discourse. The news outlet Haaretz has been [documenting](#) <sup>8</sup> Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) taking place since the start of the war.



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<sup>8</sup> [Israel Secretly Targeted American Lawmakers With Gaza War Influence Campaign](#), Haaretz, 2024

## EU Relevance and Recommendations

### UPHOLDING INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

The European Union must call on Israel to align its digital policies with international human rights obligations. Ensuring freedom of expression and access to information should be a core demand in EU-Israel relations. The EU must also address the disproportionate impact of Israeli laws on Palestinian citizens and residents, advocating for policies that safeguard digital rights and prevent systemic discrimination.

### REGULATING AND MONITORING TECH PLATFORMS

Social media platforms operating within the EU must be held accountable for their content moderation policies.

#### The EU should:

- **Require platforms to transparently report** state-issued content moderation requests.
- **Ensure adherence to EU standards on freedom of expression and privacy** when responding to government takedown demands.
- **Strengthen oversight mechanisms** to prevent undue compliance with politically motivated censorship efforts.
- **Ensure that Article 40 of the Digital Services Act is implemented** in a timely manner and grants access to relevant data, including that pertaining to content moderation in war zones and its impact on specific communities.

### COMBATING DOUBLE STANDARDS AND CENSORSHIP

The EU must take proactive steps to challenge digital discrimination.

#### This includes:

- **Investigating the compliance of platforms**, such as very large online platforms (VLOPs) or very large online search engines (VLOSEs) like Meta, with disproportionate takedown requests targeting Palestinian content.
- **Advocating for unbiased content moderation policies** to prevent the silencing of marginalized voices.
- **Establishing independent oversight mechanisms** to ensure accountability in digital governance.

## Call to Action

The European Union has a vital responsibility in safeguarding digital rights as part of its broader commitment to international human rights, freedom of expression, and equality. In light of the accelerating digital repression targeting Palestinians (manifested through content takedowns, algorithmic discrimination, surveillance, and criminalization of online expression) it is imperative that the EU move beyond statements of concern and adopt concrete measures.

**To meaningfully protect Palestinian digital rights, the EU must:**



**1.**

Require platforms to transparently report state-issued content moderation requests.



**2.**

Ensure adherence to EU standards on freedom of expression and privacy when responding to government takedown demands.



**3.**

Strengthen oversight mechanisms to prevent undue compliance with politically motivated censorship efforts.



**4.**

Ensure that Article 40 of the Digital Services Act is implemented in a timely manner and grants access to relevant data, including that pertaining to content moderation in war zones and its impact on specific communities.

The digital space must remain a forum for free expression, activism, and information-sharing. If the EU is serious about defending universal human rights and digital democracy, it must ensure that Palestinian voices are not erased from the digital public sphere. A rights-based internet is not a luxury, it is a necessity. The EU must act now.

7amleh – The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media is a leading Palestinian digital rights organization dedicated to defending freedom of expression, privacy, and digital access for Palestinians. Through research, advocacy, and capacity-building initiatives, 7amleh works to challenge digital discrimination, counter online censorship, and promote a safe and open internet.

RNW Media is an international media development organisation based in Haarlem, the Netherlands, dedicated to harnessing the power of independent digital media to promote human rights and the public good. With roots dating back to 1947 as Radio Nederland Wereldomroep, it has advocated for free and open information for over 75 years. Guided by the pillars of Media Viability and Information Integrity, it equips media makers with tools and strategies to sustain impactful, independent journalism and foster more informed, open, and democratic societies.

Together, 7amleh and RNW Media advocate for human rights in digital ecosystems, combat online suppression, and push for policies that ensure inclusive and equitable digital spaces.

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لتطوير الإعلام الاجتماعي  
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