

Civic space and human rights defenders in the Netherlands

NHRI Academy on HRDs

First report specifically on shrinking civic space in the Netherlands

- Comes out in September
- Survey based on the work of FIRM:
 - Majority of CSOs still rate the protection of civic space in the Netherlands as 'good', but **86%** of CSOs think the situation in general has worsened over the last two years, ~ **50%** for their own organisation
 - Surprisingly, no differences between type of CSO, but we think may be because a lagged effect on some areas: migration, climate activists
 - Their main concerns: political climate and (access to) funding



In addition to the survey, our analysis of 2024-2025 (1/2)

- Freedom of assembly
 - Protesters visited at home
 - ECHR settlement: climate activists should not have been banned from area
 - 'Exploration' by government for update of national law on demonstrations to add a blanket ban on face covering
 - Increased surveillance by police, new policies with unclear legal basis to collect data on protesters



In addition to the survey, our analysis of 2024-2025 (2/2)

- Stigmatization:
 - Minister tried to prevent volunteers working on the rights of refugees receiving a royal award
 - Protesters are called 'rioters' by politicians
 - Venice Commission: also in name of legislation. 'Law on transparency *and undermining* by civil society organisations'
- Law giving minister direct power to prohibit an organisation: 'Law on prohibition *undermining organisations*' denied by the senate!
- Reduced or no consultation on new asylum/migration legislation



Now writing our recommendations to the government, questions/requests for help

- We have a suspicion that organisations representing Muslim minorities in the Netherlands are treated unequally in the participation process, but can't prove it, another research institute tried to but also couldn't. Any ideas?
- Learned this week: add a paragraph on SLAPP directive implementation to include domestic cases!
- Almost made mistake to recommend 'monitoring' the space for civil society. We can't assume our recommendations are read in good faith anymore.
- Elections coming up in October, how to do follow-up of our report without an active government. Experience doing this in election time?
- **Generally, what to do now we see first warning signs**

