



The space for human right defenders to operate freely around the world is shrinking. To promote the universally agreed human rights is being criminalised. Governments and non-state actors use existing or new laws to harass and imprison activists. For women human rights defenders, this means that the space to work for gender equality and women's rights is threatened.

SUFFOCATING THE MOVEMENT

– SHRINKING SPACE FOR
WOMEN'S RIGHTS



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The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation strengthens and promotes women's organisations in several regions around the world. We support women human rights defenders who live and work in conflict affected countries, so that they can continue fighting for women's rights.

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation supports women's organisations in conflict-affected countries. We have done so for almost 25 years.

During this time, we have listened to members of the feminist grassroots movements to identify their priorities and provide safe spaces for women human rights defenders to meet and exchange ideas. We have persistently provided long-term financial support, something that is quite unique in the development cooperation community, as it tends to be sensitive to new trends and topics.

During the 1990s, the world experienced a wave of optimism. After the fall of the Berlin wall, we witnessed the construction of democratic societies in central and eastern Europe, as well as positive examples of progress in several African countries. With the new millennium, however, the direction changed with the 9/11 attacks. In the aftermath of the war against terror, it soon became clear that human rights, a vibrant civil society and democratic values were not priorities.

At Kvinna till Kvinna, we noticed signs of change early on. It became difficult to channel funding to women's organisations in several countries, and the women's rights defenders, our partners, suffered a harsher climate, with constant threats to their work, their lives and sometimes even their families.

Increasing fundamentalism, conservatism and traditional values started suffocating the women's movement. Wo-

men were physically prevented from moving freely and women's organisations were threatened and harassed. The shrinking space for civil society organisations has a negative impact on all organisations, but it hits women's organisations particularly hard. In patriarchal societies, women are excluded from decision-making arenas, so their fight for influence and to secure women's rights takes place within the civil society.

Research shows that a feminist movement is the single most important factor to fight violence against women. What happens when civil society is no longer able to organise itself or receive foreign funding? Or if women activists are labelled "whores" or "spies", and the safe spaces for women to meet are shut down? What happens to women's rights, the fight against sexual harassment and gender equality?

Kvinna till Kvinna will not give up, and neither will the women rights defenders with whom we work. We will carry on finding flexible and innovative ways to support women activists in conflict-affected countries, and they will find ways to continue their struggle for women's rights. In this report, we have reached out and received input from 123 prominent women human rights defenders from many countries and organisations.

We work together to raise awareness of the urgent need to stop the war against civil society. We need to reverse this development now, or risk losing gains for women's rights that have taken generations to achieve. As one of the women human rights defenders interviewed in this report said: "It is killing our movement."

Petra Tötterman Andorff
Acting Secretary General, Kvinna till Kvinna

An activist wearing a mask with the words "No Voice" to demonstrate the lack of space for civil society during a silent protest in Singapore at a venue of the IMF-World Bank annual meetings.

Photo AP/Wong Maye-E



INTRODUCTION

The wish to stop civil society from fighting for change and organising by restricting civic space is nothing new. For this report, the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation conducted an online survey asking women human rights defenders in 32 countries, how they are affected.

The tendency of shrinking space became noticeable several years ago, partly due to the war on terror and partly because governments have come to fear the power of its country's citizens.

It has now become evident that the shrinking civic space is not a passing trend, but a new norm – it is a reality of our time. And the situation is urgent. In 2017, the Civicus World Alliance for Citizen Participation, showed that 44 percent of the world's population live in countries that can be considered "closed" or "repressed" for civil society.¹ The organisation calls the situation "a global emergency".²



Participants at the AWID (Association for Women's Rights) Forum in Istanbul, April 2012, holding placards saying "For the freedom of the woman".

In the survey carried out for this report, Kvinna till Kvinnas asked women human rights defenders in 32 countries whether the situation has changed during the past years, and if so, how. **More than 60 percent say their space to act as an activist has shrunk.** The main reasons for this development are believed to be governments' fears for political change, increasing nationalism including hostility towards foreign funding, and conservative ideals.

The perceived differences in how women human rights defenders are affected by the shrinking civic space, compared to male human rights defenders, are striking. 85 percent believe that women human rights defenders are affected differently especially through decreasing possibilities for women's organisations to receive funding and an increasing emphasis on women's traditional role as caretakers rather than political actors. Another important aspect is the failure to recognise women's role as actors for change and their exclusion from political participation. A surprising and saddening result is the extent to which the civic space is shrinking, something that is also affecting countries in Europe. We can conclude that the challenges presented, and the implications it has on gender issues, are indeed global.

Meanwhile, the international community is busy organising discussions, papers and meetings on the subject. The gender aspects of the shrinking space for civil society have mostly been absent, however, which means that the response from the international community is failing to provide adequate support, and is late in adapting its strategies. With this report, the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation aims to deepen the

knowledge and understanding of how the shrinking civic space affects women human rights defenders, and what the implications are on women's human rights. This adds to the findings of two previous reports published in 2017: "Tightening the Purse Strings: What Countering Terrorism Financing Costs Gender Equality and Security" and "Standing Firm – Women and Trans-Led Organisations Respond to Closing Space for Civil Society".³

With its long experience of working with women's organisations under threat in conflict-affected countries, Kvinna till Kvinna has a unique ability to discuss the gender aspects of shrinking space. For many years, the organisation has been dealing with the practical implications of shrinking space, including increasing difficulties to support partner organisations. These difficulties include security concerns related to public advocacy, as well as the possibilities to fund women's organisations and enable partners to attend regional and international meetings.

For this report, we began by focusing on countries that are, or have been, affected by violent conflict. However, our survey shows that this trend is not limited to countries with weak institutions, it is also a concern within European countries.

We would like to send a special thanks to the 123 women human rights defenders who took the time to complete the survey, give interviews and provide input to this report, and to the European Women's Lobby for helping us to reach women's organisations in EU countries.

HOW WE KNOW

The report has been put together using three main sources: a desk study of recent reports and papers about shrinking space; interviews with eight women human rights defenders; and an online survey.

Other reports published by Kvinna till Kvinna have been useful, in particular the two *Femdefenders* publications (2015) and *Patriotism and Patriarchy – The impact of nationalism on gender equality* (2014).

The interviewees have been chosen to represent most of the geographical areas covered by the survey and come from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Azerbaijan, Egypt, the United Kingdom, Lebanon, Poland, Serbia and Sweden.

In order to get an overall picture of how the shrinking civic space affects women activists, an online survey was sent to prominent women human rights defenders in conflict-affected countries, as well as countries within the European Union. We sent the survey to 290 women human rights defenders and received 123 responses from 32 countries.⁴

The survey consisted of seven questions, some of which were multiple-choice. The results are therefore presented in diagrams sometimes adding up to more than 100 percent.

The sample of organisations and women human rights defenders is partly random. The organisations based in EU countries are members of the European Women's Lobby.

Since the respondents from the EU are significantly fewer, the results have been analysed separately. Due to the severe restrictions on civil society in a number of countries, we were not able to send the survey to certain activists most affected by shrinking space. However, the responses from 123 women human rights activists in the Middle East, the Balkans, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Caucasus and the European Union, feeds into the analyses of the main gendered aspects of the global phenomena of shrinking space.

All un-named quotes in this report are from survey respondents.

Abbreviations:





WHAT IS SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE?

To answer this question, let's first start by looking at the rights of civil society. They can be summarised as the freedom to exercise three interdependent rights: freedom of assembly and association, and freedom of expression.⁵

Shrinking space is characterised by state-sponsored or non-state actors' restrictions on these fundamental rights.

Shrinking (civic) space is the most frequently used term to capture the process of increasing restrictions on civil society, and it is also the term used in this report. Sometimes the context makes it relevant to use the term closing/closed space.

Shrinking space describes a situation of increasing criminalisation and bureaucratisation of human rights work, aiming to make life difficult for activists and civil society organisations, and preventing them from carrying out their work. Sometimes freedom of association and assembly are directly restricted,

but authorities can also use alternative legislation to harass human rights defenders. Countries copy legislation and practices from each other. Human rights defenders find themselves forced to use human and financial resources to counter harassment rather than to carry on with their work. Public defamation campaigns and prosecutions aimed at discrediting activists and organisations cause long-lasting damage to the public image of human rights defenders. It also leads to self-censorship – activists become cautious about what they say and do. "People are careful about what they say, even in private, as they suspect everyone. It is a state of paranoia", as a woman activist from Azerbaijan puts it.⁶

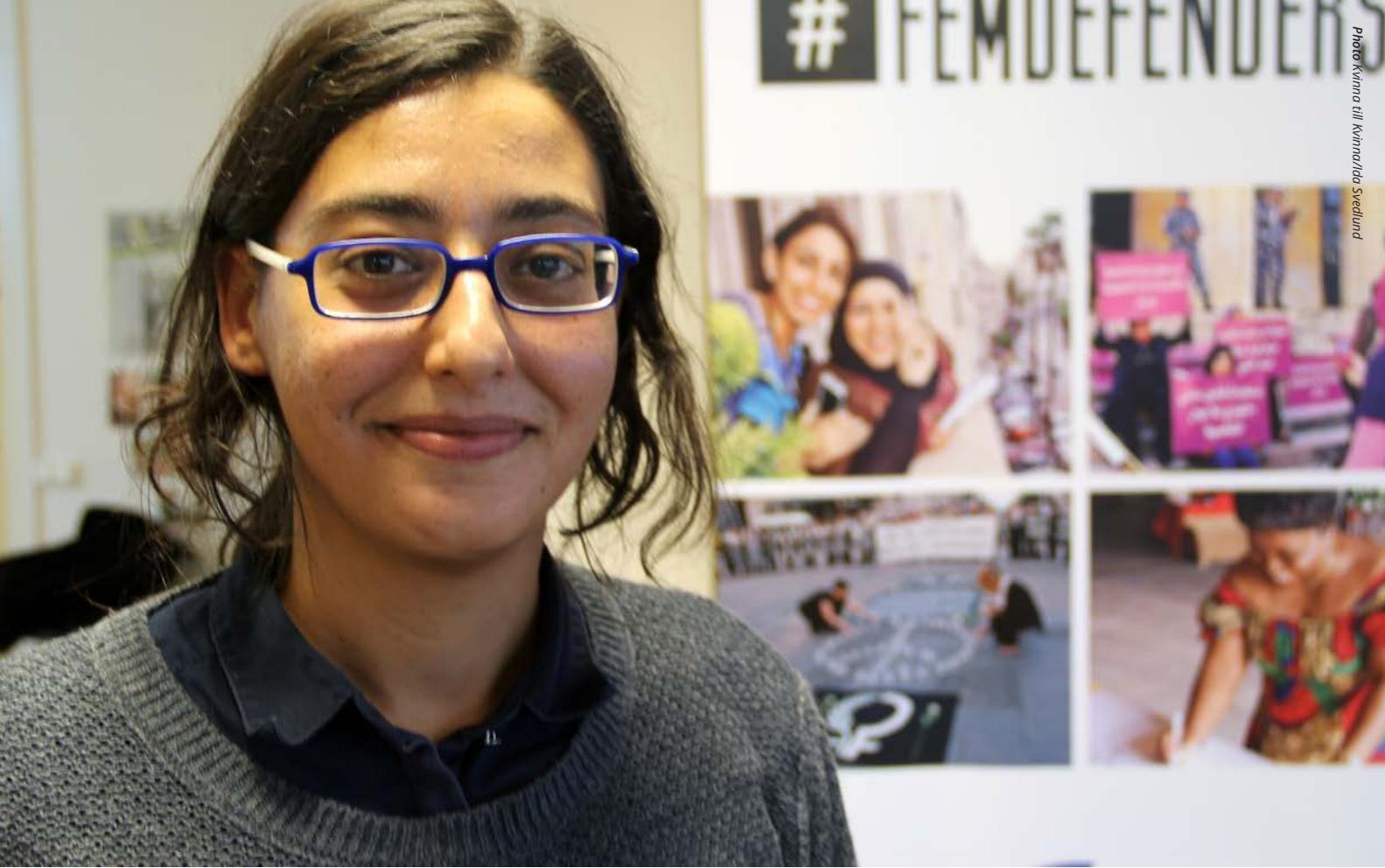
Most countries with severe restrictions on civil society are societies that are witnessing high levels of militarization, greater focus on political and nationalistic security, as well as growing social conservatism. Parallel to the shrinking space development, international agreements such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Climate Accord, depend on a strong civil society to act as watchdog, advocator and implementer. Furthermore, international donor meetings to finance the 2030 Agenda have emphasised the important role of civil society to reach the goals.⁷

A crowd attacks a minibus carrying gay rights activists during an International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) rally in Tbilisi, May 2013.

“

What's begun to emerge is that we really think there is a global emergency around civil space, that for a variety of reasons governments and sometimes non-state actors are going out of their way to shut down the ability of citizens to collectively organize and mobilize.”

DANNY SRISKANDARAJAH, CIVICUS ⁸



INTERVIEW

Middle East and North Africa: “It is killing our movement”

SARA ABOU GHAZAL is the regional coordinator for Women Human Rights Defenders, Middle East and North Africa Coalition (WHRD MENA Coalition). The coalition focuses on three main themes; documentation of violations against women human rights defenders, the security situation and advocacy.

Sara Abou Ghazal sees examples of shrinking space in her work every day, with both state and non-state actors behind the restrictions. She mentions Islamic State in Iraq, and political parties that try to scare women from saying what they think in Jordan and Palestine.

But the region also offers more positive examples. Tunis is one, where Sara Abou Ghazal thinks a good model for state interaction with women human rights defenders exists. Egypt, on the other hand, is an example of the opposite.

– What is currently happening in Egypt is the peak of shrinking space. It's completely closed. They cannot do anything, says Sara Abou Ghazal.

She talks about “Case 173”, which since 2013 has effectively been preventing civil society organisations from receiving foreign funding. Moreover, members of the coalition are currently experiencing asset freezing and travel bans. A new law that regulates civil society work in Egypt was recently adopted, which makes it so difficult to receive official approval to implement a project that few even attempt to do so.

– In Egypt, the reason behind these repressions is patriarchy, and the idea that the state doesn't trust any component that is not part of it. It is problematic with a state that is paranoid all the time, says Sara Abou Ghazal.

She mentions Bahrain as an example that is similar to Egypt. Several women human rights defenders are currently living in exile due to threats against them in Bahrain. One reason for Bahrain's attack on civil society activists is that they want to preserve a certain image abroad, and they arrest people who could say otherwise.

– What we don't talk enough about is the silencing, says Sara Abou Ghazal.

She sees the consequences of these repressions not only for the activists and their organisations, but also in the way it is stopping other women from getting involved.

– We know we live in a structure that is patriarchal. When women are targeted, people tend to think they must have done something wrong. Usually they lose their reputation, which means losing sympathy. Other women become less inclined to do that kind of work. We lose a lot of our continuity because of this. It means it kills our movement.

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE

It is not always easy to define what shrinking space is, it includes a variety of means and methods and the concept can seem very broad. Below are some of the most frequently occurring methods used to restrict civil society actions.⁹

Limiting the ability of civil society organisations to receive international funding.

Several countries have introduced laws forbidding or making heavy restrictions on civil society organisations to accept foreign funding. These laws also undermine the public's trust in them by implying that they are acting as "foreign agents". Between 2014 and 2016, more than sixty countries used legislation to restrict civil society's ability to access funding.¹⁰ Ethiopia introduced such a law back in 2009, stating that any non-governmental organisation receiving more than ten percent of its funding from abroad should be considered "foreign". Such groups were prohibited from doing any kind of activities related to human rights issues. The law also banned human rights groups based outside the country from doing any such work in Ethiopia.¹¹

Domestic laws regulating the activities of civil society organisations, such as imposing extra registration, and regulating licensing, reporting, and accounting.

The introduction of new laws demanding complicated procedures for registering, obtaining permission

to implement projects or something as simple as registering an address change, has proven an effective way of shutting down civil society organisations. The amount of administrative work, and occasional high fees, hits smaller civil society organisations particularly hard. Adapting to these new laws takes time from the core work of the organisations. Financial inspections by state authorities are another common way to exert power, and to harass and make work difficult for civil society organisations. Such inspections may of course be legitimate at times, but too often they are a means of intimidation, trying to show who is in control.

Policies imposing restrictions on rights to freedom of assembly and association.

New legislation is also limiting the right to assembly, as for example the "gag-law" in Spain that is severely restricting the right to public demonstrations. There are even laws targeting specific issues, such as the infamous "gay propaganda law" in Russia, which criminalises providing information about homosexuality to minors.

Intimidation and violent attacks against civil society by religious conservatives or the far right.

In conservative countries where religious communities exert strong influence on societies, attacks on the LGBTQI population and women activists defending the right to abortion are all too frequent. In a post-war context, far right groups often target activists who discuss atrocities committed by their own nation or those who meet activists from the other side of a conflict. Attacks by non-state actors often go unpunished by the state. By choosing not to react to such attacks, the state in fact legitimises them.



Decreasing space for online activism, due to repression and intimidation through blackmail, slander, harassment, stalking – by both state and non-state actors.

In the *Femdefenders* report (2015), Kvinna till Kvinna asked women human rights defenders about attacks and harassment by means of an online survey. More than half (55%) of the respondents said that they had faced threats on the internet.

A woman activist from Serbia describes how she helped organise a march against fascism in Belgrade, which motivated members of the Association of Fathers to publish an online campaign calling for violence against the organisations' members, and publishing their photos. The women activists were called "cancer of the society".

Civic spaces normally reserved for civil society organisations are being invaded by private interest groups, lobbyists and government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) to discredit civil society organisations.

The appearance of GONGOs is a sophisticated way to close the space for civil society. With GONGOs, governments have found a way to make it look like they support civil society, while at the same time ignoring and silencing the genuine, and critical ones. As GONGOs advocate for issues in line with government policies and against critical voices, they also contribute to creating an image of conflicts within the civil society. Their appearance leads to the fragmentation of civil society and distrust among citizens.

Limited possibilities to attend international meetings.

Some years ago, it was quite easy for human rights defenders to travel abroad, today authoritarian regimes are increasingly trying to protect their reputation by preventing outspoken human rights activists from attending international meetings. These limited possibilities can manifest themselves as travel bans, or in more subtle ways when passports are claimed to be stolen or visas are claimed to be false. Several well-known human rights defenders have been targeted by slander campaigns upon their return, or been arrested. Even the mere threat of being confronted with a complete travel ban, when trying to attend an international meeting, makes many activists think twice before travelling.

Self-censorship.

Since organisations that are challenging the government are the ones most likely to be targeted by repression, they often use self-censorship as a strategy to enable them to work under the radar. Activists testify that they tone down their criticism or use different wordings to be able to continue to do their work. There are also examples of women human rights defenders choosing not to talk at all about their work as means of protecting themselves. One such example comes from a survey respondent from Iraq: "[I] received indirect threats from an Imam near my house. Since that time, I can't say whom I am working with, I can't introduce myself as a woman activist."

“

The government wants to demonstrate how it cooperates with civil society by misusing organisations for their political goals.”

WHRD, SERBIA

“

If we talk about [certain] issues, we know we will be targeted.”

WHRD, ISRAEL

“

[We have experienced] restricted communication with other feminist activists under imposed travel bans, and open threats by representatives of the National Commission for Lebanese Women [government structure] 'not to talk bad about our country to foreigners, or else...”

WHRD, LEBANON

A UN report warns that a growing number of human rights defenders around the world are facing reprisals for cooperating with the UN on human rights.¹² Travel bans, asset freezing, detention and torture are reported as means to be used against activists cooperating with the UN. The report names 29 countries where cases of reprisals and intimidation have been documented during the past year – significantly greater than the previous highest number of 20. The report mentions the case of the Bahraini human rights defender, Ebtesam Abdullhusain Ali Alsaegh, who, after returning from a UN meeting in Geneva, “was interrogated at length at Bahrain Airport, had her passport confiscated and a few weeks later was beaten and sexually assaulted.” The report says governments that have been challenged about the cases either failed to address the concerns in the responses they provided or did not reply at all. The tendency to punish human rights defenders is not limited to contacts with the UN, but also includes other large international or regional organisations, such as the EU.

ISRAEL

In March 2017, the Coalition of Women for Peace received threats before their planned conference in Jaffa, “Women Beyond the Siege”, about the situation facing women in Gaza. The conference was held at the Al-Saraya theatre. Right-wing activists, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture in Israel, tried to cancel the event. A week before the conference, the news site NRG published an article challenging the legitimacy of the event quoting a Ministry of Culture official saying that they would look into the state funding of the theatre at which the event was due to take place. In a statement, the Coalition of Women for Peace says: “In recent years, the state of Israel has been passing legislation, advocating and acting publicly in various ways against the civil society and against any criticism of the government and its policy, creating an atmosphere of intimidation, deterrence for resistance and limiting activists, organisations, and groups opposing the occupation and acting against human rights violations. [...] Indeed, it seems that Israeli officials are interested in keeping the voices of women in Gaza unheard.” (*Right wing attempts to silence the voices of Women from Gaza. March 28th, 2017.* www.coalitionofwomen.org)



In September 2012, Lyudmila Alexeyeva, Russian human rights activist, gave a statement regarding the new Kremlin law obliging those that receive funding from abroad to register as "foreign agents". In response, Lyudmila Alexeyeva said that Russian rights activists have "survived the Soviet power and will survive this".

RUSSIA'S "FOREIGN AGENT LAW"

Russia implemented its "foreign agent" CSO law (in 2012), which determined that any civil society organisation receiving its funding from an outside country was to be labelled a "foreign agent". This is detrimental to these civil society organisations because

in Russia, the term "foreign agent" has been deemed to mean "traitor" or "spy". Thus far, 158 groups have been considered foreign agents, and thirty organisations have closed as this labelling has damaged their credibility with the public.¹³ Other countries have followed suit over the past five years.

KENYA

In the aftermath of the elections in Kenya 2017, the government closed down and froze the assets of two prominent non-governmental organisations; the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and the Africa Centre for Open Governance (AfriCOG). The government also called for the arrest of their directors. In October 2017, the Kenyan government shut down the International Development Law Organization (IDLO), an NGO that had been funding key judiciary projects in Kenya. The assets of the organisation were frozen. The authorities claimed that the organisation had been involved in criminal activities, but the government did not specify what these alleged criminal activities were.¹⁴

TANZANIA

On 17 October 2017, the Tanzanian Police raided a meeting that had been arranged by two non-governmental organisations in Dar es Salaam. The purpose of the meeting was to prepare for a legal case relating to the government's decision to limit the provision of preventive HIV/AIDS health services. Thirteen people attending the consultation were arrested but granted bail. However, they were re-arrested and detained three days later and held without charge for a week. The foreigners among them were immediately deported without the authorities giving any reasons for their deportation.¹⁵



Francine Kasimba is fighting for women's human rights in the DR Congo. She is a part of the women's rights organisation CEDEJ.

DEFENDING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN DIFFICULT TIMES

In the context of a shrinking space, beyond the implication this has for all human rights defenders, women human rights defenders are subject to attacks simply because they are women.

Threats against women express themselves rather differently than threats against men. The former UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, Margaret Sekagya, pointed out that women are at greater risk than men when it comes to specific forms of violence and abuse.¹⁶ These violations are linked to

traditions, norms and perceptions about how women should behave in a society.

Each arrest or forced disappearance, each public gathering or demonstration, result in a risk of being raped or sexually harassed. Even suspected sexual violence could deprive a woman of her reputation. Smear campaigns are common, using as starting point the conservative norms of how women should behave. Threats against women human rights defenders' families and children are often used as a way to silence activists. Misinformation and false accusations about the work of women human rights defenders cause former allies, their community and even close family members to lose trust and turn their backs on them. They become isolated.

SHRINKING SPACE HITS UNEVENLY

Women human rights defenders are crucial actors for change in their societies. They challenge deeply rooted patriarchal norms on a daily basis simply by being professional, outspoken women, as well as through the nature of their work.

Groups that have historically been excluded or experienced social discrimination are the ones most affected by the restrictions. They are often targeted by both state and non-state actors.¹⁷ In the State of Civil Society Report 2016, Civicus argues that those who are excluded already have the smallest voice in society, and therefore can least afford to experience any further restrictions.¹⁸

For civil society to be effective in advocating for democracy and human rights, it has to be diverse and inclusive, so that voices of marginalised groups can be heard. This precondition faces serious risks as the shrinking space phenomena hits unevenly.

Kvinna till Kvinna mapped the obstacles for women's participation in peace processes in *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* (2012) and in the *Femdefender* publications (2015).¹⁹ The obstacles include gender-based violence (politically motivated violence targeting women human rights defenders to silence them, often disguised as "common" domestic violence), threats and slander (including calling women names such as



If women human rights defenders are under attack, then you know if you are a Roma woman activist you are multiple times more likely to be attacked, lose your job, be underrepresented."

JOANNA MAYCOCK, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY



In Kuwait, as a woman you shouldn't be an activist at all, and when you are, you are accused of neglecting your home and just focusing on yourself."

WHRD KUWAIT

"prostitute" or "bad mother"). Obstacles also include small yet crucial matters such as "forgetting" to inform women of important meetings or scheduling gatherings at night-time to make it difficult for women to attend. This is done in a systematic way to stop women human rights defenders from gaining political influence. The space is shrinking for civil society, and this process adds on to a situation all too well-known among women human rights defenders, who have always faced extensive obstacles and difficulties in their work.

It is important to note that the multiple obstacles that women activists need to deal with – defending why they work in public at all, working in a hostile environment with constant fear of repression and slander, struggling to survive financially – leads to exhaustion among women activists. The well-being and health of women activists is also at risk and needs to be addressed.



Photo: Pixabay

INTERVIEW

Egypt:

"If we become more political, we are targeted more"

ACTIVIST NOUR works for a Cairo-based organisation that promotes women's rights. Nour (changed name for security reasons) notices that the space is shrinking due to restrictive legislation, travel bans, organisations not getting work permits and through attacks on women activists' reputations. But she says her organisation is better off than others.

– You don't know, it can change from one month to another. It depends on their mood. We don't know

exactly why someone is targeted. It is difficult to predict, says Nour.

Still, the new laws regulating civil society affect her organisation. Projects have been denied permission by the ministry. One of their events was cancelled recently, without any warning. It was an award ceremony for journalists reporting on women's rights issues. The organisers were called to the national security office for interrogation and were asked about why they do these kinds of activities with journalists.

Nour describes the situation as constantly being forced to "tiptoe" so as not to attract attention.

– If we become more political, we are targeted more. We choose our language, and we choose to work with development issues – not political issues.

With virtually no possibilities of obtaining foreign funding, and an NGO law that severely restricts the freedoms of civil society, Nour worries about the effects on the women's movement.

– Everything changed. There is no money and no freedom. We know they will target our work, they don't want anyone to focus on human rights, because they know it means more than just a few more rights for women.



Photo Kvinnor till Kvinnor/Milica Soba

SOPHISTICATED WAYS OF EXTINCTION

After several years of work and research within the field, the Kvinnor till Kvinnor Foundation has been able to identify some of the main aspects of shrinking civic space that particularly affect women human rights defenders.

NON-RECOGNITION AND POLITICAL MARGINALISATION

When asked in the survey carried out as part of this report how women activists are hindered in their work, the most common answer is non-recognition, closely followed by systematic exclusion from political participation. Women's rights groups experience political marginalisation through legislation that restricts political activity, exclusion from dialogue and decision-making processes, or through being denied access to mainstream media. It is also, as seen by the survey results, a matter of not being recognised as an important actor for change, sometimes not even within the human rights community. This needs to be regarded in a historical context, where women start off with a lesser voice and access to decision-making arenas compared to men.

In many places, state and non-state actors try to delegitimise women's rights or feminist organisations by creating GONGOs. These appear to be civil society organisations, but advocate for policies that support the government or the religious community's agenda.



The pressure is expressed through [...]: Exclusion from negotiations, especially with regards to EU integration process; and governmental institutions "have limited time" to participate in different efforts initiated by civil society organisations, especially women's organisations such as ours. This sends the message that organisations are irrelevant. We also see a non-willingness to respond to our calls for cooperation with local policy makers."

WHRD, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

This has proven an effective way of creating distrust among the public, since it seems that "the women's movement" itself is divided. It is also a practical way for a government to claim they cooperate and financially support civil society, without having to deal with those who are critical to their work. As one survey respondent from Croatia explains, the appearance of "family NGOs" who have the support of the Catholic Church, means a "complete takeover" of areas where feminist groups are working, in this case prostitution, surrogacy, sexual and reproductive rights. The respondent says there is no need for detention of activists or raids on women's groups "because sophisticated ways of extinction of feminist groups still function."

THE DANGER OF NOT ADAPTING TO THE NORM

Respondents to the survey stated that the second most important difference in how shrinking space affects

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WHRDs are crushing traditional roles and it very much p*s off all the conservatives and fascists. And then, the attacks start – attacks on sexuality are the most common way to attack women who organise themselves – they call us whores, sluts, dirty lesbians, creatures no one wants to f***. Yes, I know, it is very contradictory.”**

MIRJANA MIROSAVLJEVIĆ BOBIĆ, SERBIA

“

As a woman activist, you have to do double the work from the beginning, explaining why you are not satisfied with your traditional role. It's a continuous negotiation for women, why to work in public at all.”

SARA ABOU GHAZAL, LEBANON

women human rights activists is an increased focus on the traditional role of women as mothers and caretakers as opposed to political actors. Shrinking civic space is often accompanied by a fundamentalist discourse on national identity and traditional patriarchal values. It is especially dangerous to be a women human rights defender in such a setting, since these societies are

eager to restrict women's rights to free movement, to their bodies, to their sexuality and reproductive decisions. To fight for women's political participation can also be dangerous, since it challenges the power structure and the status quo of society.

In patriarchal societies, outspoken women who are present in the public sphere are often considered to be "lesser women". In DRC they are called "difficult", considered to be too loud, and very few of the women activists manage to combine family life with activism. The women's rights activist Géhé Katana Bukuru tells how being a divorced woman, without biological children, is used as a way to discredit her work, as she is not considered to be a "real" woman. In Serbia, prominent women activists are described as witches or lesbians (a derogative term in this context). Women human rights defenders are attacked for being politically vocal women, hence breaking the norms of what a woman "should" do. But they are also attacked because the nature of their work is breaking social norms and consensus.

When the feminist anti-war movement Women in Black challenges the national consensus on Serbia's role in the Balkan wars in the 1990s, there are unannounced visits from the tax authorities, and stories are planted in government-controlled media outlets that they are in fact running a brothel in their office. They are portrayed as "swimming in dollars", "grant eaters" and so on. It is popular to publish "research" or "official documents" that show grossly exaggerated grant sums or salaries for the women's organisations. One organisation in Macedonia provides an example of how flyers were distributed stating a falsely exaggerated income of their director.

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The accusations have become more widespread in Hungary. Women's rights activists are accused of trying to spread "gender ideology" and the "free choice of sex/gender" or the reversal of "innate roles of women and men" – when in fact they promote gender equality and the women's human rights agenda. Women human rights activists are seen as if they were opposing traditional family values and have been called "human rights extremists" by pro-government media sources."

WHRD, HUNGARY

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The organisation in which I work is located next to the office of the umbrella organisation of the Croatian War Veterans who are openly ultra-nationalists. They have left us written threats, attacked us in our working space, etc. The police advised us to leave, [something that] we did not do. Just after informing the competent ministry, the institutional means for our legal counselling were terminated, which for the past 17 years [provided] free legal aid to women victims of all forms of male violence.”

WHRD, CROATIA

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If there are fewer opportunities for paid work in civil society, men will assume them. And since men are already grossly over-represented in political life, it's an absolutely vicious circle, which starts and ends with women being less likely to be heard.”

JOANNA MAYCOCK, EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY

SHAMING

Attacking a woman's reputation is an effective tool in a patriarchal world. A woman's honour reflects on the whole family, and although many women human rights defenders have the support of their families and relatives, close ties and dependence on the family can also be troublesome. In societies where traditional values are strong, the risk of bringing shame on the family can lead to women activists withdrawing from public work. In some cases, the family itself might pose a threat to women human rights defenders, such as the case where a female activist in Egypt had to bribe her mother each month in order for her mother not to tell the brother about her activism.

State and non-state actors sometimes claim to possess compromising material of a sexual nature in order to silence women activists. Online slander cam-

CASES

SUDAN

A woman activist was arrested when she was at her office, with other colleagues present. They were not told the reason for her arrest, just that the prosecutor claimed to have evidence of her being a bad mother and a bad woman. The evidence was a photo of her not wearing a veil, but as it was never shown in public, people assumed it was a photo of her naked. The media reported on it as though it was pornographic material. This negative attention forced her into hiding – her safety was endangered and her family was harassed. She was acquitted, but they confiscated the organisation's money and documents. She finally had to flee Sudan.

MONTENEGRO

A woman spokesperson for a Montenegro-based organisation has exposed corruption among senior politicians in the country. In 2014, the *Informer* newspaper printed an article with pornographic content showing a naked woman and a dog. The paper claimed that it could be the activist on the picture. The story was spread all over the country through social and traditional media, and made life and work very difficult for the activist.

AZERBAIJAN

Khadija Ismayilova, an investigative journalist, was just about to release a critical investigation on the president's family, when she received information that there was video material of her engaging in sexual activity. She was told that the video would not be released if she refrained from publishing her work. When she didn't comply, the video, filmed in her own apartment with a hidden camera, was posted on various media platforms. At a later occasion, she was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years in prison for tax evasion and illegal business activity, but was released after strong pressure from international organisations. She is now on probation and with a five-year travel ban.²⁰

EGYPT

At a rock concert in Cairo in September 2017, some members of the audience waved a rainbow flag in support of the band's singer, who is openly gay. This provoked a crackdown on LGBTQI people. More than 50 people were arrested. Among them is a woman accused of "promoting sympathy" for the LGBTQI community. She has told her lawyer that she is subject to sexual harassment and sexual violence in the prison, but there has been no reaction from the state regarding her situation. While public homosexual acts are illegal in Egypt, homosexuality itself is not.

paigns targeting women human rights defenders are common. Openly discrediting women's organisations creates a sense of legitimacy and public acceptance when authorities later crack down on them.

THREATS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The threat of violence, in many cases sexualized violence, to silence feminist activism is a powerful strategy. For women human rights defenders, the risk of being arrested and put in detention or prison, involves a deep fear of sexual violence. As does taking part in public protests. Regardless of whether a woman detainee was subject to sexual violence or not, just the suspicion of what might have happened could destroy a woman's reputation. She will be stigmatised no matter what. While male activists are often portrayed as heroes after imprisonment, women activists are more likely to be suffering from the social stigma of a possible rape inside prison walls. More

than half of the activists in our survey have been exposed to violence or threats of violence. This number is even higher (72 percent) in conflict-affected countries. Threats and slander are more common than direct violence.

LESS ACCESS TO FUNDS

When asked whether there are any differences in how shrinking space is affecting women and male human rights defenders, access to funds was perceived as the most noticeable difference. The vast majority (73 percent) of all respondents from EU countries stated that women's organisations have less access to funds. This is also perceived to be one of the most significant differences in conflict-affected countries (51 percent). More than 40 percent of all respondents have experienced an increase in the bureaucratic burden, which also affects their ability to access funds. Increased bureaucratisation with respect to receiving, monitoring



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One of the dirtiest and strongest tools is to threaten the activist by saying they have compromising material about her. Calls may be tapped, apartments bugged; this is how the authorities manage to silence the activists. This is how the space to operate shrinks. And there is no way to resist it; it's like closing the oxygen. You cannot resist, and you cannot fight back.”

WHRD FROM AZERBAIJAN



A White Cover

and reporting on financial support, means that the time they have to actually perform their core activities is limited.

Resources to advance women’s rights is a political issue. Women and girls receive attention, but women’s rights organisations continue to be underfunded. The international feminist organisation AWID has engaged in extensive research on the issue. They conclude that there is “very limited funding available for the transformative, long-term, and political work of women’s rights organisations.”²¹

This is confirmed in an OECD study from 2016, showing that only 0.5 percent of the funds to support gender equality in poorer countries went to women’s rights organisations in 2014. This is a worrying development as that figure was 1.2 percent in 2011.²² In other words, the money to finance gender equality is being taken from women’s rights organisations and given to other organisa-

tions. Part of this trend is the fact that major donors are increasingly choosing to channel funds via large international organisations or UN bodies, rather than funding local organisations based on their priorities. That means even less money for women’s organisations as they will only get fragments of the funds. If they are invited to be part of one of these international organisations’ projects, it is often in the capacity of service providers, rather than being the drivers for change.

As women’s organisations have less access to funds compared to other civil society organisations from the outset, restrictions on access to funding for civil society will always affect women’s organisations severely. With the fragmentation of civil society, which seems to be both a strategy by repressive states (by creating GONGOs, for example) and a consequence of increased competition for funding, established male-led organisations are more likely to get a piece of the pie instead of the marginalised women’s rights organisations.



Photo Hassan Annar

In March 2017, an activist working for gender equality, was protesting against article 522 in the Lebanese penal code that shields rapists from prosecution on the condition that they marry their victim. The activist is standing in a golden cage, dressed as a bride and wearing bandages. Following the massive protests, the article 522 was abolished a few months later.

[Shrinking space] really pushes women to go back, not even finding ways to protest it. It deletes them, it takes them out of the public space. With that we lose a lot of achievements that we have accomplished in recent years."

SARA ABOU GHAZAL, LEBANON

NO ONE LEFT

It is primarily within the arena of civil society that women find the space to act and demand their rights, since formal power structures are often closed or inaccessible to women.

If civil society is closed, women human rights defenders have few arenas if any to fight for political influence and women's rights. This will have consequences for women's human rights. Research has shown that a

strong women's movement is the single most important factor for strong legislation on violence against women and measurable change on the ground.²³

Maina Kiai, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, has highlighted the serious repercussions of this. If groups that are normally politically excluded are not allowed the space to state their grievances, this will result in more violations and abuse. Therefore, an all-inclusive environment for citizens to express their views and freely associate without fear of being killed, sexually assaulted or imprisoned, is essential to global security and peace. Disadvantaged groups need that space the most, especially when there is nowhere else for them to work.²⁴

In short: There will be no one left to fight for women's rights if the women's movement is silenced.



Géhé Katana Bukuru, leader of SOFAD in her office in Uvira: "I have my own system among the papers! This is one of my security strategies. If someone comes to search my office for documents, he will meet this."

INTERVIEW

DR Congo:

"They call us traitors"

DESPITE THE 2003 PEACE AGREEMENT, the Democratic Republic of Congo of today is a country marked by conflict and political crisis. In the district of Uvira, activist Géhé Katana Bukuru is working for peace and a better situation for women. As a result of her activities, she receives death threats and has been forced into exile. She also had to make some tough decisions in her private life.

– I am aware of the threats. But today, compared to when I started, I see that we are more people, that gives me courage. One has to continue to the end. Going backwards is not an option. There are so many people behind me, she says.

She talks about death threats, imprisonment, of constantly being watched and having to witness when people close to her are being tortured. The harassments come from both the authorities and warlords.

Her organisation, SOFAD (Solidarity Movement of Women's Rights Activists), is organising women in villages into peace clubs and they also work against sexual and gender based violence.

They encourage mothers not to send their sons to war, which is considered to be provocative.

– They call us traitors. They say that we are selling out the country, that we are collaborating with the

enemy. Each armed group accuses us of being allied with the other group, says Géhé Katana Bukuru.

SOFAD wants more women to be included in decision-making in a country where the formal representation of women is less than ten percent. One condition for women's political participation is that they need their own, independent economy. That is seldom the case in DRC. Women need to ask their husbands or fathers for money to be able to stand for a political position. And the men tend to say no.

Géhé Katana Bukuru is divorced, and she says few women activists are married.

– You have to make a choice: to stay with a man or to continue working for human rights. I was 30 when I divorced. I realised that with the kind of life I am living, with threats, arrests, I could not stay married and have children. In Congo, men think that a woman's role is to give birth all the time. I chose work, she says.

Civicus defines Congo as a closed space for civil society and Freedom House places the country at the bottom of the scale when it comes to citizens' freedom and political rights. Géhé says the space for women who are working to defend women's rights is small.

– What helps, in my experience, is to act in more than one place at the same time, even outside the country. Then it is safer, she says.

House searches are a method used by the authorities to intimidate Géhé Katana Bukuru and her organisation, and they take place both in the offices and at home. She describes how she made it a strategy to keep her place as untidy as possible.

– It's a complete mess! In that way, it takes the police or military at least two days to find what they are looking for, and that is enough time for me to warn people who might be at risk.

On one occasion, a man presenting himself over the



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Those who fight for human rights don't have any protection. This is particularly true for women human rights defenders. It is more difficult for women activists, since society doesn't approve of women being active politically. They are perceived as difficult, even rude for not respecting the traditions.”

GÉGÉ KATANA BUKURU, DRC

phone as a colonel said she had to come and meet with him, in an hour. The place he demanded her to come to was not a public one. "You better come, or else we will come for you", he said. That time, Géhé went to the police. But they said they had no control over the armed groups, and instead told her that she needed to be more careful.

– If you fight for human rights you don't have any protection. This is particularly true for women human rights defenders. It is more difficult for women activists, since society doesn't approve of women being politically active. They are perceived as difficult, even rude for not respecting the traditions, she says.



INTERVIEW

Azerbaijan:

"Shutting off the oxygen"

In Azerbaijan, several restrictive legislative acts have been introduced over the past years, to curb the activities of civil society organisations and to give the regime a tighter grip over civil society. In 2014, the government introduced legislation that restricted and then gradually banned all kinds of foreign funding for civil society. Dozens of government critics, human rights defenders, and media professionals have been arrested and convicted in a sweeping crackdown in the past few years. Among them are two youth activists serving ten years in prison for spraying graffiti on a statue of the former president, and refusing to apologise on camera.

We spoke with woman human rights activist Sabina from Azerbaijan (changed name for security reasons).

- They always argue that they are protecting national interests, to prevent foreign agents from entering Azerbaijan and infiltrating the country, Sabina explains.

Another argument put forward is that Azerbaijan is a rich country, and the government has enough resources to support civil society. Indeed, it did allocate money in the budget to support civil society, but the approval procedure requires adaptations to projects so as to comply with government policies.

- One effect has been the appearance of GONGOs,

which used to be quite prominent and independent organisations, but then adapted to the government's criteria to get support. They changed their discourse. They did it in order to survive, but it meant they lost their reputation. The organisations that refused to compromise their principles, had to close down, says Sabina.

Approximately 300 organisations had to shut down or close their offices since the new law was introduced.

Women's organisations are able to continue to work as long as they do not express criticism of the regime. Outspoken and internationally active women activists are punished.

- I think there are a lot of common features in how female and male activists are affected. But what stands out, because Azerbaijan is a patriarchal society, is that women's voices are not heard as much. They are more vulnerable when it comes to speaking out. They largely threaten women activists by saying that they will publicise material of a sexual nature. It is easier to bring down a woman than a man in Azerbaijan, Sabina says.

- Calls may be tapped, apartments bugged – this is how the authorities manage to silence activists. This is how their space to operate shrinks. It's like shutting off the oxygen supply. You cannot resist, and you cannot fight back.

Sabina believes the closing of civic space is a way for the government to stay in power. She says people know how corrupt the rulers are. The regime fears a revolution.

- There is currently no opposition in Azerbaijan. There are no demonstrations anymore. Everyone is aware they might be tapped, bugged and that they can lose their job. People are careful about what they say, even in private, as they suspect everyone. It is a state of paranoia.

WORKING IN A STATE OF PARANOIA

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We are being slandered and threatened, because many state actors are perpetrators and fear that our activism will make them lose power and be disgraced if caught.”

WHRD, LIBERIA

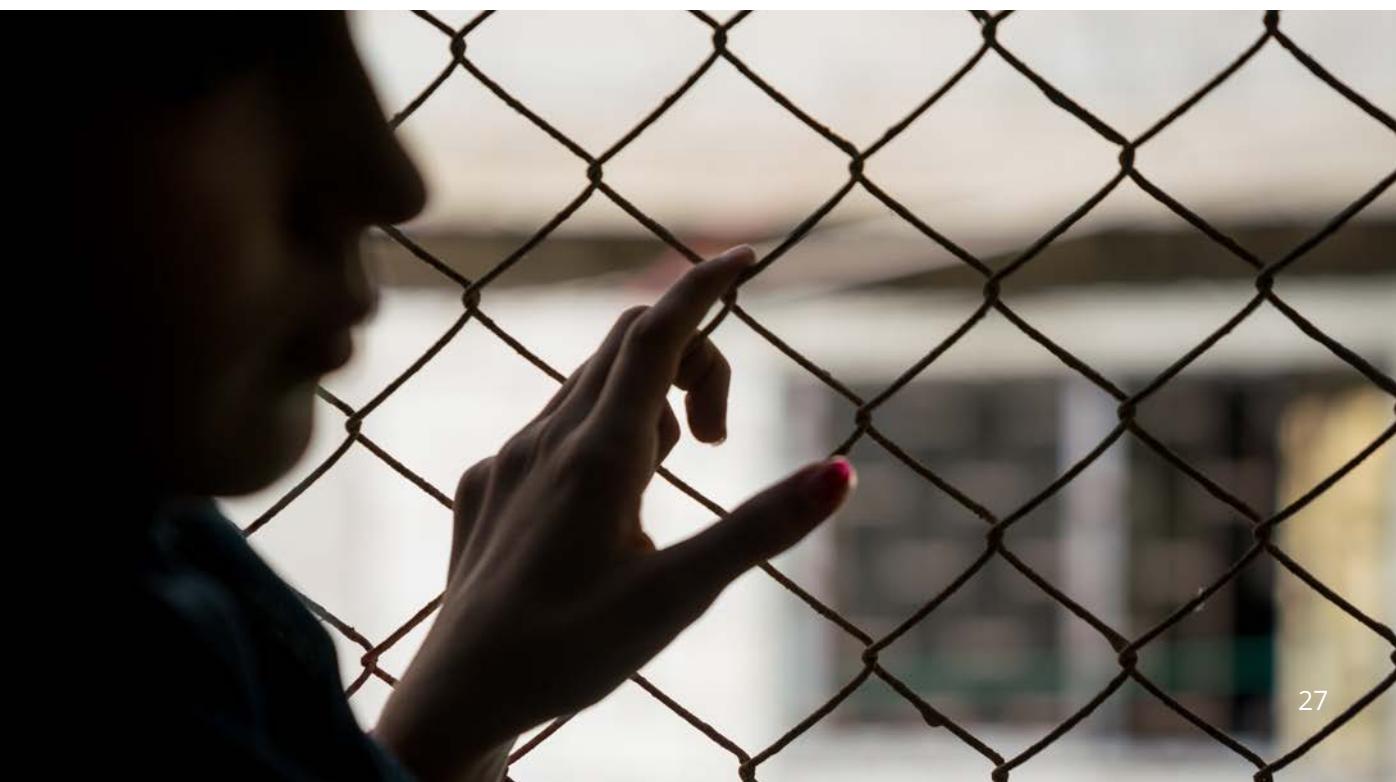
Three main factors contribute to the shrinking civic space: the war against terrorism, an intensified discourse on family and traditional values, and governments' fear of another Arab Spring or Orange Revolution.

FEAR OF POLITICAL CHANGE

A massive 79 percent of respondents in conflict-affected countries and 58 percent in EU countries believe that governments' fears of political change and the power of civil society are the reason behind restrictions on civil society space. When people organise

outside the political party systems to change the society, civil society becomes a threat to regimes that fear criticism. Those regimes hit back by accusing civil society of being controlled by foreign agents and working against the interests of the nation.²⁵

Both Azerbaijan and Egypt are good examples of what kind of measures, and to what extent, the leadership is ready to take in order to silence any opposition. Our interviewees from these countries describe them as paranoid, not trusting anyone who is not part of the state. As a result, citizens are being surveyed, bugged and followed. Civil society organisations are left with the option of cooperating with the regime or drowning in administrative requirements with no possibilities to finance their activities. Vocal critics get arrested, have their assets frozen or are prevented from leaving the country.



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On different internet platforms there is anti-NGO propaganda going on. Some of my colleagues from other civil society organisations were interrogated by government security forces after false online publications on their operations. This contributes to jeopardizing the working sphere.”

WHRD, BREAKAWAY REGION OF ABKHAZIA, GEORGIA

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There are fears that civil society will influence the building of partnerships that would empower women or communities to decide to reject government policies.”

WHRD, JORDAN

CASE

EGYPT

"2011, things were going well in the change process for Egypt. People were engaged in drafting the new constitution, talking publicly about the sexual violence that occurred. But after the change of rule in 2013, the state introduced a court case against local organisations that accept foreign funding, "Case 173", that affected 200-300 organisations. As a result, two of our members are currently subject to asset freezing (both the organisation's account and the directors' private bank accounts), a clinic has been shut down, and staff and directors have been issued with a travel ban. Local media has been bashing these organisations, delegitimising them, and support from the local community has decreased. It's quite difficult for people to show their support, since it means they could also be targeted. The persons targeted are very prominent leaders who had helped the national council to draft a strategy to combat violence against women.

When you issue them with a travel ban, when you freeze their assets, you also say to the whole country that these women are not good. This influences other women not to do that kind of work."

Told by Sara Abou Ghazal, WHRD MENA Coalition

“Case 173”

Case No 173 is commonly referred to as the “case on foreign funding of civil society.” In July 2011, the Egyptian cabinet ordered the Minister of Justice to set up a fact-finding committee to look into foreign funding received by civil society groups. The document includes a report from the National Security Agency and another from the Egyptian General Intelligence Agency that lists almost every independent human rights organisation in Egypt, as well as the international NGOs who were subsequently prosecuted and sentenced. In June 2013, 43 foreign and Egyptian civil society organisations' staff members were sentenced to prison terms of between one and five years, and a number of international NGOs were shut down, including Freedom House and the International Center for Journalists.



Photo Nacho Doce

Protests against Judith Butler, an American philosopher and gender theorist, during her speech in Brazil November 2017.

TRADITIONAL VALUES AND NATIONALISM

The intensified rhetoric of so-called traditional or family values further contributes to the shrinking space for women in general, and for women human rights defenders and LGBTQI activists in particular.

The essential idea of pushing for traditional values is to preserve the heteronormative patriarchal family, and to limit women's and LGBTQI people's rights.

The connection between restrictive civic space and the promotion of conservative, patriarchal and traditional values was one of the conclusions in the Kvinna till Kvinna report, *Patriotism and Patriarchy – The impact of nationalism on gender equality*.²⁶ Stereotyped gender roles are part of nationalist rhetoric, as is claiming the right over women's bodies and their reproductive rights. Feminism, the fight for women's rights and for LGBTQI persons' rights are often said to concern "western values" and are described as something not part of the national and cultural identity. It has also become increasingly difficult to raise and discuss women's sexual and reproductive rights in the UN, or indeed to talk about gender equality. The term gender has become strongly connected to the promotion of homosexuality and destruction of traditional family values.

An extreme example occurred in São Paulo, Brazil, in November 2017, when right-wing activists organised a protest against the visit of the American gender theorist Judith Butler to a democracy seminar. The protesters set fire to a doll symbolising Butler, and held signs saying "Death to gender ideology" and "Girls and boys are born different". Prior to the seminar, the right-wing group had gathered 300,000 signatures protesting against Butler's appearance in Brazil. Right-wing groups have been growing in Brazil in the past years and their political candidates have considerable support.²⁷

UN resolutions passed in the Human Rights Council in Geneva contain dangerous clashes between women's individual human rights on the one hand, and traditional and family values on the other.²⁸ What is problematic with these resolutions is that human rights are individual rights, but the resolutions want to protect the unit, the "family". In this unit, women and girls often do not have the right to make decisions. Some countries' registers of associations refuse to include organisations that monitor the human rights of LGBTQI individuals on the grounds that it contravenes public order, law and morals.²⁹

Increasing religious fundamentalism closes doors for women as actors for change, limits women human rights defenders' access to public spaces, and places res-

A poster depicting images of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei at al-Firdous Square in Baghdad.

Photo Ahmed Saad



trictions on what a woman can and cannot do. The close ties and frequent interaction between the church and the state in Croatia and Serbia, for example, means that women's reproductive rights are under constant attack. The highest representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church repeatedly make statements on how it is Serbian women's "duty to give birth",³⁰ or that Serbian women "killed more children than Hitler and Mussolini"³¹ by having abortions (even though abortions are legal in Serbia). In Iraq, many women human rights defenders highlight the increase of religious fundamentalism as a challenge to their human rights and ability to work.

Half of the respondents to the survey see that increasing fundamentalism and religious influence is the reason for restrictions on women's organisations. Even more of them (58 percent), think that increasing nationalism is one of the underlying factors behind the restrictions, especially connected to the limitations on foreign funding of CSO and fears of "western values". Almost as many see reinforcement of conservative values as a reason for targeting women's organisations.

THE WAR ON TERRORISM AND COUNTER VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The focus on preventing terrorism has created an atmosphere of fear, which has affected the fulfilment of human rights and democracy.

After 9/11, counter-terrorism legislation changed rapidly, leaving considerations for human rights behind. The UN Security Council urged member states to act, and FATF,³² the international standard-setting institution for combating money laundering and financing of terrorism, adopted recommendation 8 that pinpoints civil society organisations as particularly at risk of being used by terrorists for money laundering. This enabled governments to adopt a variety of restric-



The actors in the executive organs of the government are currently acting on religious values.

WHRD, IRAQ



Although there are no formal or legal prohibitions or restrictions on movement, there are other traditional and patriarchal patterns that prevent women from, for example, staying late in a café where their male colleagues might be discussing certain political issues, or from running pre-election campaigns in full capacity, because they have to keep an eye on their home and children."

WHRD, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA



tions to limit the space for civil society organisations. As stated in a report from the Women Peacemakers Programme: "It has led to increased financial surveillance and profiling of civil society, increasingly complicated financial processes, and even loss of financial access for some civil society organisations."³³ Even though recommendation 8 has since been revised,³⁴ the damage has already been done. Even its revised version includes problematic wording referring to "at risk NPOs" as being vulnerable to terrorist financing without any guidance as how to determine which NPO (non-profit organisations) are to be categorised as "at risk".

Nowadays, FATF engages in extensive dialogue with civil society. But it does not come without risks for women human rights defenders, as was pointed out by a participant at the Women Peacemakers Programme's consultation in the Middle East and North Africa: "How can we sit together with religious NGOs, which are against the work we do for women's rights? How can there be a safe space for us in such a collective setting?"³⁵

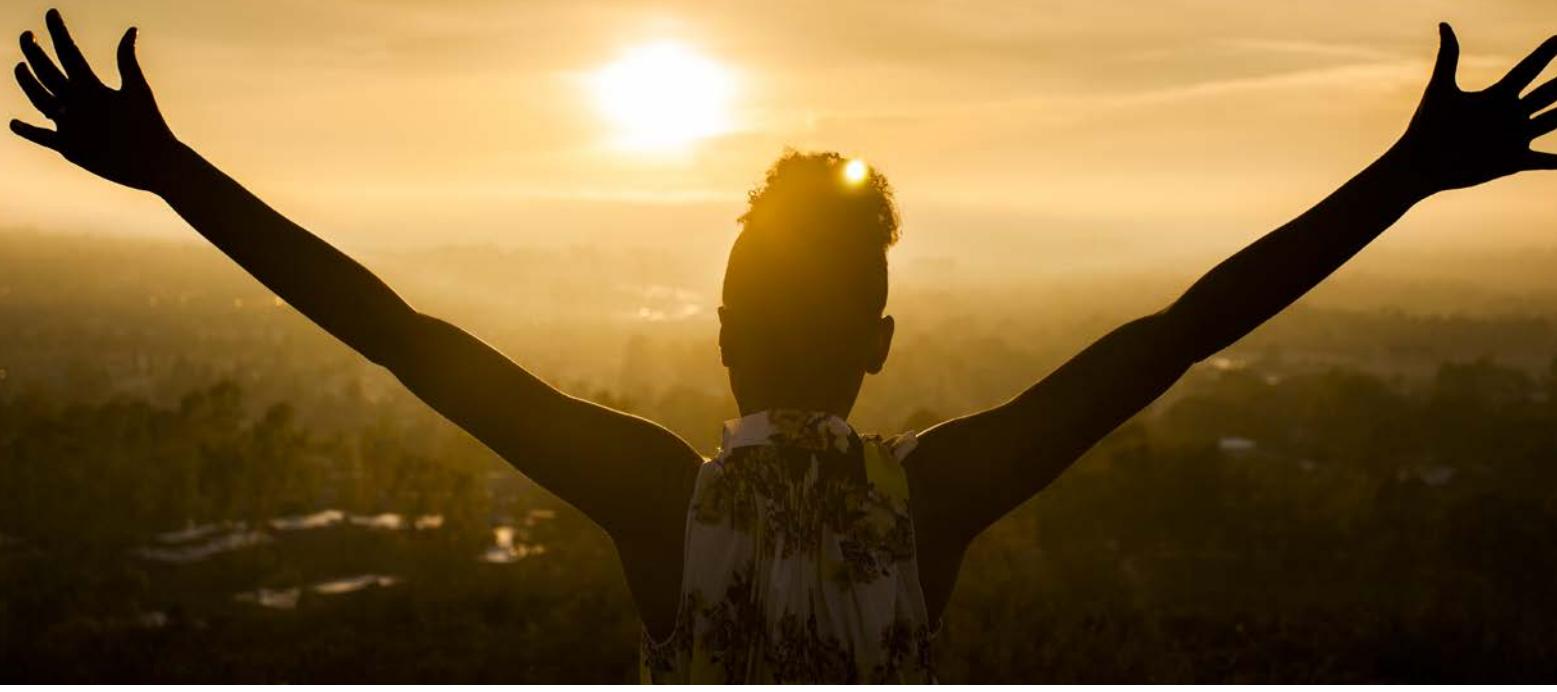
For women human rights defenders, terrorism and counter-terrorism have both limited their space. According to Saferworld, in the context of increasing repressive efforts in Egypt to "combat terrorism", security and justice institutions have clamped down on a number of activists and movements promoting women's rights and gender equality.³⁷ Activists speak of limited access and more control of funds. Many

FACTS

EGYPT'S ANTI-TERRORISM LEGISLATION

"The Sisi regime has enacted legislation that gives it extensive powers to persecute citizens for 'terror' offences. Terrorism is now defined very broadly in Egyptian law. According to the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), the new legislation (Law 8/2015): "...relies on a broad, vague definition of actions by which individuals or groups may be designated terrorists. Under this definition, human rights defenders, political parties, or development associations and their members can be easily designated as 'terrorist'."³⁶

women organisations are quite small with limited budgets, which have made it even more difficult to handle the bureaucracy concerning funding. All this combined with more paranoia and less trust, has negatively affected collaboration between different women's organisations. Sometimes donors can have a disempowering effect: "Donors are also part of this [demands on civil society] – in the name of security they are increasingly telling us what to do and trying



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Under the cover of countering terrorism, the government has opposed work on human rights and argued that for now it is more important with national security than with human rights.”

WHRD, JORDAN.

to control us", said one activist during the Women Peacemakers Programme discussion in the MENA region on shrinking civil society space due to countering terrorism financing.³⁸

The war on terrorism has basically given states a carte blanche to do almost anything in the name of national security. This includes limiting the civic space.

FACTS

JORDAN'S ANTI-TERRORISM LEGISLATION

In April 2017, the Council of Ministers decided to include non-profit organisations in the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act. Critics say it is unlikely that this resolution will help the government in meeting its goal of countering terrorist financing and money laundering. Most Jordanian non-profit organisations are small and lack the resources or capacity to implement the sophisticated requirements in the law, which have historically been applied to banks and financial institutions.

The anti-terrorism legislation allows the Ministry of Social Development to put an organisation's funding on hold in the name of national security. The law prohibits criticising for example the King or allies of the government. All websites must register with the Media Commission. Restrictions are common. The Cyber Security Law is used to manage social media – and this also falls under the Anti-Terrorism Law.



INTERVIEW

Serbia:

Dance to the tune of the regime, or don't dance at all

MIRJANA MIROSAVLJEVIĆ BOBIĆ is the director of Reconstruction Women's Fund, a Serbian organisation that supports women's organisations across the country. Serbia is in the process of applying for EU membership, but the parties currently in power have close ties to the former regime of Slobodan Milošević that ruled the country during the 1990s. The Serbian Orthodox Church has quite a lot of influence over the political agenda. Women's rights organisations are fighting both nationalist and traditional values in society. There is not a lot of space for feminist activism.

– The space has never been open during the last three decades. For GONGOs created by different political parties or those who are getting state money to promote the official politics or media – they are nothing else than sleazy PRs of the regime – maybe there is more space, but it's not open. If you need to dance to the tune of the regime, there is no autonomy, says Mirjana Miroslavljević Bobić.

She provides numerous examples of how "unfree" the space is for those advocating for values that are in opposition to the conservative regime. One year, the 8 March demonstration was banned by the Ministry of Internal Affairs with the explanation that it represented a risk to public transportation and public

health. There is a long history of banning LGBTQI gatherings such as Pride. The police also tends to permit fascist groups to have counter-meetings at the same time as human rights organisations. Another tactic involves gathering more police than necessary when so-called critical organisations hold events.

– It sends a message to the public that we are guilty or dangerous, and that the police need to protect the public from us, she says.

Mirjana Miroslavljević Bobić explains that the reason why women activists are attacked in Serbia is not only because they are women, but also because they are the most persistent critics of the regimes.

– Being that exposed, they are crushing traditional roles and it very much p****s off all the conservatives and fascists. And then, the attacks start – attacks on sexuality are the most common way to attack women who organise themselves – they call us whores, sluts, dirty lesbians, creatures no one wants to f***. Yes, I know, it is very contradictory. Then the attacks based on physical appearance start – that we're ugly, fat, have greasy hair and so on. And not to be forgotten, there are the attacks on us as the traitors of the country, because women are supposed to secure the future of the state order by being reproductive machines.

Reconstruction Women's Fund was named on various right-wing "blacklists" together with organisations accused of "endangering the constitution of Serbia". The organisation's website was hacked a couple of times, and their finances were falsely presented in the daily newspaper *Politika*. Grassroots organisations in smaller places around Serbia that are supported by Reconstruction Women's Fund also face a number of restrictions.

– There have been a lot of attacks on women activists – either physical attacks on them, bodily, or on their homes and offices. They also experience a lot of blackmailing and threats: "You'll get the budget money if you behave." They have been kicked out of their office spaces for criticising the local authorities. All these pressures and attacks drain a lot of energy and strength. And they lead to a high level of self-censorship, Mirjana Miroslavljević Bobić explains.

Female leaders of different civil society organisations in Hungary.



SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE IN THE EU

The space for civil society to organise and act is shrinking. This is a global trend, visible not only in conflict-affected countries or countries with weak democratic institutions, but also in EU member states.

Almost half of the respondents in EU countries feel their space has decreased in the past few years. Although Kvinna till Kvinna's survey did not have as many responses from EU countries as in conflict-affected countries, women human rights defenders from 15 EU countries are represented.

The three most dominant trends of shrinking space are increased exclusion from decision-making, not being recognised as actors for change, and extensive hate and smear campaigns. Respondents see growing conservatism and a focus on traditional values as the most important factors behind the restrictions. As many as 73 percent regard uneven access to funding to be the biggest difference in how women's rights organisations are affected by the shrinking space in comparison to other organisations.

According to a study published by the European Parliament, "most EU governments are still reluctant to raise the issue of the closing space in deference to commercial and geostrategic interests."³⁹ Instead of putting sanctions on EU members trying to limit civic space, which could force governments to adhere to human rights, "the EU has offered new agreements and aid to many of the governments engaged in the most brutal restrictions against civil society."⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the so-called refugee crises in 2015 led to a shift in policy priorities within the European Union, pushing economic development, migration and trade higher up the agenda, resulting in a lesser focus on human rights.⁴¹ For example, the EU has been criticised by human rights organisations for agreements made with Turkey relating to the refugee situation, which has forced the EU to look the other way concerning human rights violations. In our survey, women human rights defenders from other countries, who are based in Turkey due to the conflicts in the region, report that Turkish authorities are threatening to deport them if they cooperate with international organisations.

Similarly, double standards are obvious in EU relations with Egypt. Despite rhetorical commitments to advance human rights, EU countries continue to sell equipment to Egypt to "help Egypt's fight against terrorism", without transparency, and without human rights guarantees.⁴²

Hungary has seen a worrying development under the Orban regime, with limitations of freedoms for media, the academia and the civil society. The country's new CSO law that was passed in June 2017 has hindered civil society organisations from receiving foreign funding, but the EU has not taken any steps to sanction Hungary's actions. Even though the EU is publicly discussing the shrinking civic space in member states, the statements are disconnected from concrete measures that would solve the problem. If one member state can enact unjust laws that undermine EU guidelines, then what is to stop other nations from following suit? And what are the implications when the EU wants to act as a voice for human rights and democracy with third party countries?



Photo Miklós Péri

“

I would absolutely insist that it's not just in Poland, Hungary or the Balkan countries. Shrinking space is an overall trend in the EU.”

JOANNA MAYCOCK, SECRETARY GENERAL OF EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY

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The situation in Austria is possibly a lot better than elsewhere in Europe, but there has been a rise in conservative politics and attacks on women's rights (reproductive rights, shelters...) – if only on a discursive level at the current moment.”

WHRD, AUSTRIA

There are reasons for concern. Poland is following Hungary's example in restricting the rights of civil society. New laws limiting the freedom to peaceful assembly have been introduced, and Amnesty International reports on police harassment of protesters, and the use of various techniques to physically prevent protesters from joining the protests.⁴³ When women took to the streets calling for a liberalisation of the extremely restrictive abortion rights in the country, the authorities answered by raiding the offices of two prominent women organisations the day after. They seized equipment and data, claiming it was part of an investigation linked to suspected wrongdoings in the Ministry of Justice during a period when the ministry was financially supporting the two organisations. "We are afraid that this is just a pretext or warning signal to not engage in activities not in line with the ruling party," the Women's Rights Centre said in a statement.⁴⁴

As the Kvinna till Kvinna survey shows, it's not only Hungary and Poland that are restricting the space for civil society. The UK introduced the Lobbying Act in 2014 that restricts civil society organisations' possibilities to campaign during pre-election periods. The law was said to have the intention to prevent corporate interests and lobbyists from influencing the election results, but has had a silencing impact on human rights and charity organisations as they fear huge fines if found to be violating the law.⁴⁵ Spain has severely limited the rights to public protests by the use of administrative and criminal sanctions to penalise organisers and protesters, as well as excessive police force.⁴⁶

In the EU context, it is also important to look at the countries preparing to join the EU, the so-called accession countries. In order for them to become EU members, the union can raise demands on human rights issues. Human rights defenders say, however, that this

FACTS

The new Hungarian CSO Law requires civil society organisations receiving more than 23,000 Euros per year from a foreign entity to register and to display this on its website and all publications, as well as report on the details of each donor. This policy is very similar to Russia's "foreign agents law" that has hindered hundreds of respected organisations to carry out their work.

“

[...] speaking out requires a lot of courage. Many women members of parliament, other politicians and high-profile figures receive threatening messages, mostly in social media but also otherwise, directed at themselves or their children.”

WHRD, FINLAND

”

NGOs are also increasingly attacked in the press, questioning where their money comes from, and whom they represent. If we look at our members in Hungary, they basically work without staff and are frequently harassed.”

JOANNA MAYCOCK, EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY

possibility is not used to the extent one would expect. Rather, the EU seems to prioritise political stability, even when it is at the cost of human rights.

In Macedonia, an EU candidate, human rights organisations report that the two main factors behind the shrinking civic space are the lack of funding available to civil society organisations (part of becoming a candidate country means that many bilateral donors pull out) and the previous conservative political rule. Financial inspections were a frequent tool used by the former regime to make it more difficult for non-governmental organisations to carry out their work. Those critical to the regime have been targeted. Civil society is portrayed as a threat to national security, as a destabilising factor when the nation needs stability. One organisation states that it was publicly blacklisted and that activists' names were published, along with their grossly exaggerated salaries. The organisation was labelled as operating "against the nation". Members were labelled "mercenaries" and banned from communicating and collaborating with the government.⁴⁷

The lack of funding for women's rights organisations is a problem in both EU member states and accession countries. The countries in central and eastern Europe and the Balkans in particular, seldom have available national funds, and the possibilities for local fundraising are very limited.⁴⁸

The last election to the European Parliament in 2014 resulted in gains for nationalist and EU-sceptical parties throughout the region. Therefore, the fact that there are proposals to introduce restrictions on civil society coming from within the EU itself, should not come as a surprise. In September 2017, the parliament voted on an amendment, proposed at the last minute by the conservative European People's Party group (EPP), to reject EU funds to organisations that oppose the EU's "strategic commercial and security objectives". The EPP asked that no funding should be granted to organisations that "demonstrably disseminate untruths" and that are contrary to the "fundamental values and/or policy objectives of the EU". The members of parliament voted against it and critics compared it to the Hungarian NGO Law.⁴⁹



Activists from the AWID (Association for Women's Rights In Development) Forum taking part in demonstrations in the streets of Istanbul 2012.

“

[The Hungarian] bill has nothing to do with transparency and everything to do with obstructing and discrediting critical civil society voices.”

JOHN DALHUISEN FROM
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL⁵⁰

”

The work of civil society organisations based in Turkey on the Syrian border has been narrowed, because the Turkish government has imposed very complicated demands on civil society organisations, which has forced us to work in secret.”

WHRD, TURKEY



Kamila Ferenc holds the sign "Enough of the state's oppression".

INTERVIEW

Poland:

Law and justice against women's rights

KAMILA FERENC IS A LAWYER working for the Federation for Women and Family Planning in Warsaw, Poland.

– The space for civil society in Poland was still growing and not yet fully developed when the new Law and Justice government started to limit this space, trying to take over society as a whole. The space is now shrinking, says Kamila Ferenc.

The National Institute of Freedom, a newly created body for distributing funds to civil society in Poland, greatly concerns Kamila Ferenc.

– It is established and controlled by the Polish government, while pretending to be grassroots and neutral, she says.

She sees a great deal of state support going to civil society organisations that support the government's policies, some of which, she says, are tasked with discrediting other CSOs. She also mentions the restrictions on demonstrations that Poland recently introduced, which include fines for people using civic

disobedience during demonstrations.

Kamila Ferenc says there is legal harassment of civil society organisations that oppose the government's political agenda. Examples of this include disproportionate measures in legal proceedings, as well as financial inspections and unjustified withdrawals of state donations from progressive organisations fighting for gender education, non-discrimination and women's rights.

– Women activists are those who most often work in areas particularly targeted by the government, so they are naturally subject to attacks and discrediting strategies. Their work, struggle and determination is compared to the stereotype and model of the traditional "Polish mother", who should make the family and the home her main priority. It is entirely natural and accepted for men to pursue political or activist careers. However, when women do so, it is regarded as proof of their defects, such as cynicism or greed, Kamila Ferenc says.

The anti-choice lobby in Poland is strong. One group that campaigns for this is Ordo Iuris. It says it wants to protect the legal system and Poland's constitution. It recently attacked the Federation for Women and Family Planning by publishing a report on their finances.

– They suggested that we were receiving funds from "abroad" to start the Black Protest in Poland and that it wasn't a grassroots movement, Kamila Ferenc says.

The Black Protest gathered several tens of thousands of women all over Poland in October 2016, to protest against a proposed new law to further limit the already highly restrictive abortion rights in Poland. The proposal was voted down as a result of the mass protest.



SWEDEN AND THE GROWING NATIONALIST RHETORIC

With the reappearance of a nationalist party in the parliament, far-right Nazi groups occupying the public space and a growing industry of online fake news portals spreading hatred, sexism and racism online, the Swedish society faces challenges.

When the Nordic Resistance Movement (NMR) was permitted to hold a manifestation at the Almedalen Week 2017, Sweden's most important annual political event that is held on the island Gotland, it sparked a huge debate. Two main strategies became visible; to boycott the event as a way to protest that a Nazi organisation was given permission to be present, or to be present in order not to allow democratic voices to be silenced. Ultimately, the presence of NMR made people belonging to the groups commonly targeted by the NMR fear for their safety.

A similar debate followed the announcement that the right-wing news portal *Nya Tider* would be present with an exhibition booth at the Gothenburg Book Fair in September 2017. Tensions mounted when it was announced that the NMR was permitted to organise a demonstration passing the book fair. The demonstrators were carrying signs with photos of well-known Swedish politicians and journalists, and the word "criminal" written below their faces.

The nationalist movement and rhetoric has grown

in Sweden for several years. In 2010, the nationalist party the Sweden Democrats were voted into the Swedish parliament with a programme based on conservative family policies and promising to take a tough stand against immigration. Support for the party was 5.7 percent in 2010. By 2014, this figure had risen to almost 13 percent. The Sweden Democrats build on a nationalistic tradition, where to safeguard the nuclear family is a core value – the family is considered to be the fundamental building block of society and women are praised for their roles as mothers fostering new Swedes. The party has strongly advocated for a system where one parent can receive childcare allowance to stay at home with the children instead of the children attending preschool, the party opposes any form of quotas for gender equality and it is the only party in the parliament wanting to lower the limit for abortion to 12 weeks.⁵¹ When women's main function is considered to be in the home, her space inevitably shrinks. As the respondents to our survey showed, this is one of the most significant differences in how shrinking space affects women activists compared to men – the increasing focus on the traditional role of women as mothers and caretakers.

In addition, part of the right-wing and nationalist discourse is to question not only the term gender, but also gender research and education at universities. In Russia, one of the country's most important centers for gender research has been severely restricted, and similar tendencies can be found in Poland and Germany. In Sweden, the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research is experiencing a new wave of critique and attacks for being "unscientific" or "ideological" and a threat against the nuclear family and the nation.⁵²



Journalist Niklas Orrenius, known for his investigative journalism on nationalism and racism in Sweden, wrote a piece after the demonstration in Gothenburg about how members of the NMR called him "Miss Orrenius" and "weeper". It illustrates how anything "feminine" is considered less worthy in these circles, and instead it is stereotypical male attributes that are most valued.

Orrenius writes how this goes hand in hand with the homophobic views of far-right, nationalist groups shouting "faggots" at counter-protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, in the United States.⁵³

Many voices are currently under attack. The attacks are often organised as hate campaigns and pose a threat to freedom of expression and democracy. Women journalists are targeted online in particular. Hate speech including threats of sexualised violence, sexism and objectification have all become "part of the job".

Fojo Media Institute Special Report from 2017 discusses online hate and threats directed towards women journalists in Sweden. The report concludes that women working in the media are particularly exposed to threats of sexual violence and intimidation. And the problem is wide-spread, 30-40 percent of Swedish journalists have received direct threats. Even though not all studies show that women are more targeted than their male counterparts, it is clear that the kind of intimidation differs, and that female journalists



Looking at the pressure and the stress and the hatred and threats that follow after each public appearance, I see that the space is shrinking. Both in the way that employers show certain concern, even fear, but also certain self-censorship that I've noticed comes into force. I have heard bosses mumble that it is easier to work with journalists that don't "stir up so many emotions", which is a direct threat to democracy and strengthens the dark forces that are allowed to control the agenda."

ALEXANDRA PASCALIDOU, SWEDISH JOURNALIST

are much more likely to be subjected to sexualised threats and harassment than men.⁵⁴ A recent study shows that women politicians are also increasingly being targeted online.⁵⁵

The #metoo campaign in the fall of 2017 showed with painful clarity how men's sexist and patriarchal behaviour affects and silences women in all position and all occupations, not only those in the public space. As with the women activists in our study, self-censorship is one consequence. Women journalists think twice before writing about a subject that they know could fuel hate and harassment. And young women think twice before even entering the field of journalism or politics.⁵⁶



INTERVIEW

Sweden

Racism, sexism and a derailed public debate

THE SWEDISH JOURNALIST ALEXANDRA PASCALIDOU

has been speaking out about racism and human rights for more than 20 years. Yet she has often felt like giving up, because of the attacks against her, mainly from the far right.

Alexandra Pascalidou was one of the journalists featured on the placards carried by participants at the Nordic Resistance Movement (NMR) march in Gothenburg in 2017, with the word "criminal" written beside her portrait.

– This is the story of my life. From armed Nazis standing outside my home to daily hate attacks. My home address published on right-wing forums. Fascists surrounding me in a bar. People writing to my employers and encouraging them to fire me, she says.

As the host of various TV and radio shows, she has been a target of racist and misogynist attacks.

– Looking at the pressure and the stress, the hatred and threats that follow each public appearance,

article, TV or radio job, I see that the space is shrinking. Both in the way that employers show certain concern, even fear, but also certain self-censorship that I've noticed comes into force. I have heard bosses mumble that it is easier to work with journalists that don't "stir up so many emotions", which is a direct threat to democracy and strengthens the dark forces that are allowed to control the agenda, she says.

Threats and hatred towards women journalists in Sweden has become a serious threat to democracy. It affects the professional as well as private lives of journalists.

– I live in fear. And I fight not to surrender and let the darkness win and gain ground. I am also worried about the way the public debate has derailed, says Alexandra Pascalidou.

She describes a development where opinions resting on the declaration of human rights, or the Swedish constitution, are met with suspicion and considered biased, provocative and even controversial.

– The fact that I am a woman, an immigrant from a working-class family who grew up in the suburb, and that I stand up for equality, seem to be very provocative, she says.

Alexandra Pascalidou reports incidents to the police.

But she says the only time anyone has been held accountable, was when Nazis were standing outside the door of her apartment.

– Just a few days ago, I reported a number that had been calling and harassing me during the night. I am so tired of this. But I'm not alone. And I will never ever give up. It's my duty to keep fighting, not only for my daughter but for our sisters around the world.



Women in Black organises memorial for the victims of the genocide in Srebrenica during the Balkan wars in the 1990s. Fascists are allowed to demonstrate and disturb the manifestation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The women human rights defenders contributing to this report have painted a picture of governments so afraid of losing power that they become paranoid. Civil society is seen as the enemy.

Further, they report how growing nationalism and a focus on traditional gender roles prevents women from being politically vocal. And that civil society is being suffocated by restrictive laws, blocked funding, travel bans and arrests.

The women activists featured in this report speak of the price they must pay for going against the norm; the shaming, the sexual harassments, the attacks on their families, their sexuality, their reputation.

The obstacles that women human rights defenders encounter in the shrinking space context are severely limiting their possibilities to exercise their civic rights. Firstly, even before entering the public arena they have to fight for their right to do so, their right to step out of the societal norm. Secondly, they fight for women's rights, for her right to her own body, to move freely or to be financially independent. These are controversial issues in conservative settings. Women activists are targeted for not behaving as they "should" and for challenging what lies at the core of nationalist values; the nuclear family, the responsibility of a woman to reproduce for the nation. Women

belonging to minority groups are even more affected.

The women's movement needs networking, support, learnings and exchange to thrive. With the limitations – such as travel bans – affecting civil society and increased repression from governments, women activists are facing difficulties travelling and building coalitions, both regionally and internationally. Interaction with human rights mechanisms and international policies often poses risks. Women activists become isolated. Attacks on the reputation of prominent women leaders creates fear, and is an effective tool to prevent other women from taking on similar roles, from raising their voices, from being politically active.

The shrinking civic space means that the arena where women can voice their concerns and advocate for their rights, as well as support each other to reach political positions, is getting smaller and smaller. In some countries, it has already virtually disappeared.

We do not have a choice. We need to unite! The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation is in constant contact with women human rights defenders struggling to be able to continue their work. They need to be recognised as crucial actors for development, peace and gender equality. And they need democratic states to speak up against repressive regimes, even if it means losing out on trade deals. Diplomacy is necessary, but so are consequences and sanctions.

The simple fact is that if we fail to act now, we will see a backlash for women's rights and for democracy in the aftermath of shrinking space.

KVINNA TILL KVINNA CALLS FOR...

- Recognition! Women human rights defenders are the single most important factor for increased gender equality and women's rights. Their brave political work needs to be internationally recognised and appreciated.
- Increased diplomatic and political pressure on repressive governments, and to always include discussions on human rights in every dialogue on foreign policy, development cooperation, migration or trade.
- International and regional organisations, such as the EU and UN, to always meet with women's organisations, urban and rural, when visiting a country. This is crucial to acknowledge the importance of their voices and to get a comprehensive picture of the state of women's rights, peace and security. Bear in mind that GONGOs can put outspoken women activists at risk and may have a different agenda.
- Awareness of the gendered dimension of shrinking space among donors and policy makers. This insight will contribute to more effective responses in development cooperation programming and policies.
- Flexibility and innovation in funding women's organisations. This requires close attention to the needs of the specific organisations and how to work in the new contexts. Long-term and core funding enables organisations to operate in restricted conditions and to be more resilient. Emergency funds must also be available.
- Recognition of large donors on their own role in this development. The trend of less and less funding for women's organisations is a crucial contributor to shrinking space, as can the channelling of funds via large, regional or international organisations be, if local women's organisations' priorities are not included.
- Support to networking and movement building. It is even more important in a shrinking civic space context. Increased difficulties to access funding and to travel leads to a fragmentation of the women's movement.
- Prioritisation of counteracting shrinking civic space at EU delegation and embassy levels. Embassies and EU delegations have the potential to play an important role in promoting dialogue with local civil society, providing a safe space to meet, and arranging seminars and round tables.
- Recognition of the human consequences of the shrinking civic space. It means: increasing attacks on women activists, a higher degree of sexual harassment, threats towards family, slander that isolates, etc. This affects the activists in many ways including burnout, anxiety and depression. Donors should target support to handle the stress.

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SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

The survey was answered by 123 respondents from 32 countries.

The results are presented in two columns: one for EU country respondents and, another for conflict-affected countries.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

The space for civil society is shrinking in many parts of the world. How do you perceive your possibilities to work as an activist?

More than 60 percent of respondents in conflict-affected countries feel that their civic space has shrunk. The number is presumably even higher since there are activists and organisations that have not even been able to receive the survey for security reasons. In the countries within the EU, the number is lower (just under 50 percent) but the trend is the same throughout the survey; a significant number of women human right's activists perceive their civic space to be decreasing. Only a few are noticing an increase of their civic space.

It is worth adding that some of those who feel their civic space remains unchanged may have experienced a negative starting point. In the analyses of the survey, it became clear that some of the respondents who answered that their space has stayed the same, continued answering the survey's questions aiming to identify how and why their civic space is affected. This may refer to the fact that their space has improved in certain aspects in recent years, but this has not been the case in every aspect.

In what way have you experienced that state or non-state actors are trying to hinder your work during the past few years? (diagram 1)

Of the activists in conflict-affected countries, 64 percent claim that it is "by not gaining recognition as actors for change" that they are hindered from carrying out their work. This figure is 54 percent for the EU countries. More than 50 percent of the respondents in the EU also recognise a systematic exclusion from political participation, and extensive hate and smear

campaigns. The corresponding results for conflict-affected countries are 40 percent and 28 percent. In conflict-affected countries, 50 percent also state that they are hindered in their work by formal constraints such as restrictive regulations and legislations (38 percent in EU countries).

If you feel that the space for you and your organisation to work and act has been limited, what do you think are the reasons behind/ what are the arguments that authorities use? (diagram 2)

Nearly 80 percent of the respondents in conflict-affected countries believe that governments' fear of political change is the strongest reason behind the limitations of space, while in EU nearly 70 percent perceive the increase of conservative ideals to be the strongest reason behind shrinking space.

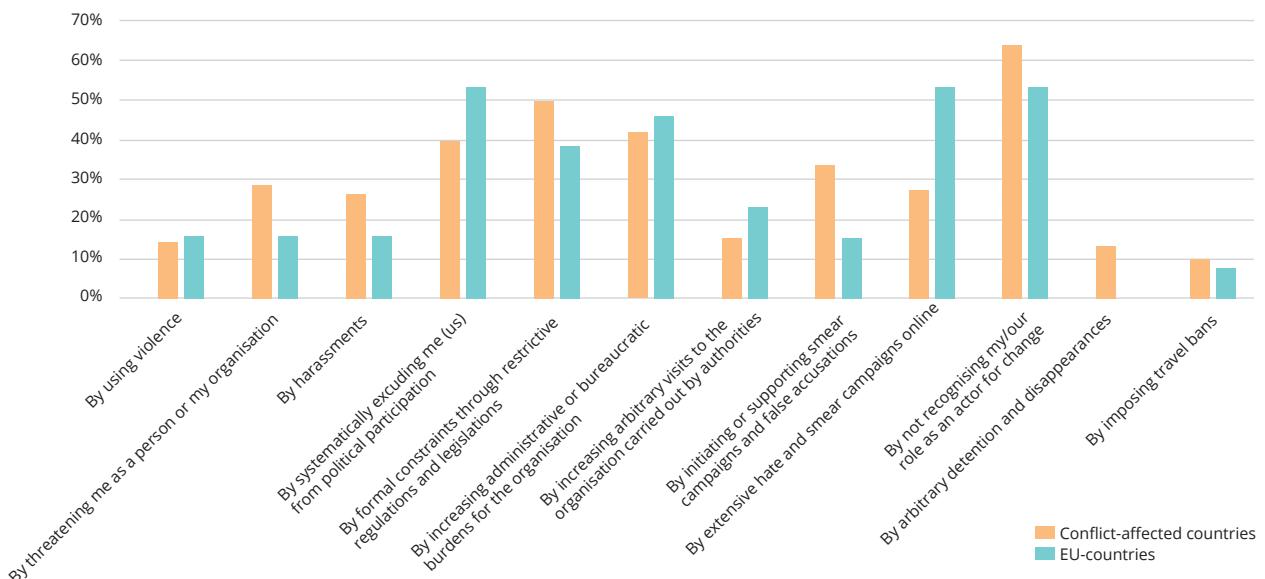
Do you find that women human rights defenders (WHRD) are affected in a different way compared to male human rights activists? (diagram 3)

85 percent of all respondents believe that there is a difference in how women and male human rights defenders are affected by shrinking civic space. In the EU countries, a significant 73 percent of respondents believe an important difference is the decrease in the possibilities of receiving funds for women's organisations, while 40 percent can also see an increased focus on women's roles as mothers and caretakers, as opposed to political actors. In conflict-affected countries the results for those two categories are 51 percent each, thus constituting the two most significant differences.

Have you or your organisation been exposed to violence or threats of violence because of your activism? (diagram 4)

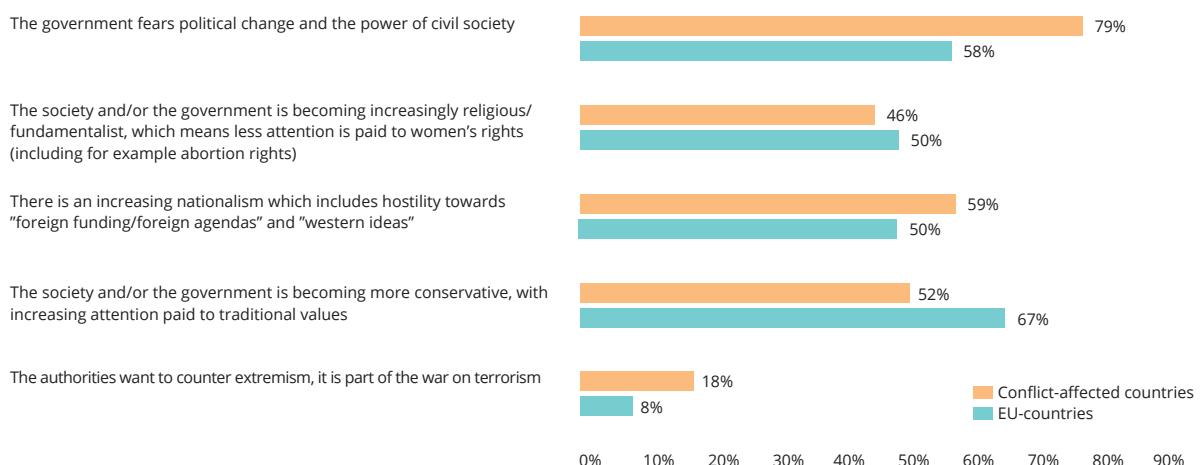
72 percent of the respondents in conflict-affected countries state that they or their organisations have been subject to violence, threats or slander. In EU countries, the same number is 53 percent. Overall, threats and slander are more prevalent than direct violence.

1. In what way have you experienced that state or non-state actors are trying to hinder your work during the past few years?



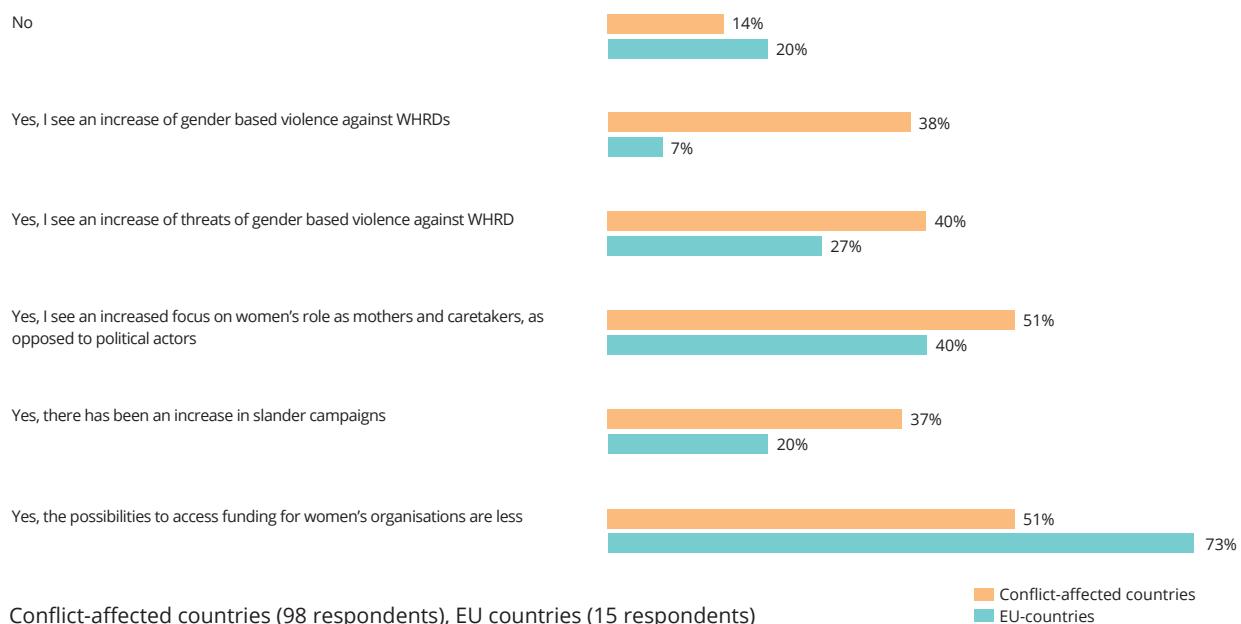
Conflict-affected countries (98 respondents), EU countries (13 respondents)

2. If you feel that the space for you and your organisation to work and act has been limited, what do you think are the reasons behind/ what are the arguments that authorities use?

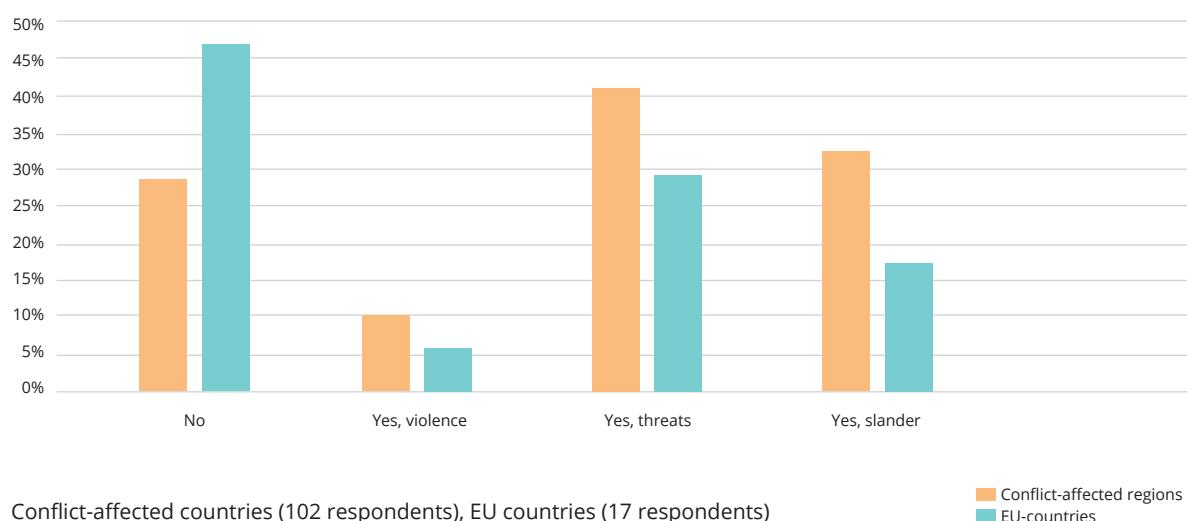


Conflict-affected countries (95 respondents), EU countries (12 respondents)

3. Do you find that women human rights defenders are affected in a different way compared to male human rights activists?



4. Have you or your organisation been exposed to violence or threats of violence because of your activism?



INTERVIEWS:

Interview notes with activist in Macedonia
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interviewed October 15, 2017

Abou Ghazal, Sara, regional coordinator for Women
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Coalition, interviewed October 10, 2017

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Women and Family Planning in Warsaw,
interviewed November 16, 2017

Interview with activist Nour (changed name),
WHRD Egypt, November 3, 2017

Interview with activist Sabina (changed name),
Azerbaijan, October 26, 2017





**RESEARCH SHOWS THAT A
STRONG AND INDEPENDENT
WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IS
THE MOST CRITICAL FACTOR
FOR IMPROVING WOMEN'S
RIGHTS.**



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