





# Minister's foreword

Earlier this month I visited *The Moscow Times* in the Netherlands and spoke to Derk Sauer, who was a pioneer 30 years ago in launching an independent newspaper in Russia. He was forced to leave the country this year, along with many other journalists. My discussions with the newspaper's editors increased my already deep concerns and yet at the same time bolstered my hopes for human rights in the world.

The nature of my concerns will be clear for, sadly, Sauer and his team are no exception. Since the invasion of Ukraine independent journalism has been all but impossible in Russia, and journalists are only allowed to disseminate information issued through Russian government channels. But freedom of the press is at risk in the rest of the world, too: in Ethiopia, where many, many journalists have been arrested since the start of the civil war; in Nicaragua, where the government has published a list of the names of 100 journalists it has labelled 'terrorists'; and in the Netherlands too, where the murder of Peter R. de Vries signified a low point in a more widespread and worrying trend of growing violence against journalists.

The increased insecurity of journalists is part of a larger worrisome trend: the erosion of human rights around the world. Eight in ten people live in a country where their freedoms are curtailed; sexual violence against women is being used ever more systematically as a weapon of war, as the war in Ukraine has shown; since the fall of Kabul human rights defenders in Afghanistan live in fear of their lives; and the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* is a blow for the many American women and men who fervently support the right to self-determination – to name just a few of the most shocking examples.

At the same time, there are developments that give me hope. When I was in the newsroom at *The Moscow Times* in the Netherlands, the journalists there spoke with passion about the importance of free journalism in Russia. They tirelessly continue their work here, still publishing independent news articles 2,800 kilometres away. And they are not alone in showing such passion. All over the world, courageous journalists and human rights defenders do their utmost to defend our freedoms, and women and the LGBTIQ+ community campaign for equal rights.

This report describes the Netherlands' efforts to protect these freedoms and rights. The results of these efforts are reflected to some extent in statistics. For example, last year the Netherlands supported 541 journalists in emergency situations, we provided €69 million in support for LGBTIQ+ communities in 28 countries (making us the biggest donor in the world), and 22 human rights defenders from 18 countries were given temporary refuge in the Netherlands under the Shelter City programme.

At the same time this report shows that words matter, as well as statistics. For example, we continue to advocate for a UN resolution abolishing the death penalty for blasphemy and apostasy, ensuring our message is loud and clear, even though there is insufficient support for the resolution in the Human Rights Council.

Nevertheless, I think that the most important result of all our efforts in support of human rights cannot be expressed in either figures or words. It is the attitude that I encountered not only during my visit to *The Moscow Times*, but also in Kyiv earlier this year, and in many other places. The people I meet are not only aware of their rights, they are prepared to defend them, in the knowledge that a more tolerant world is a better place for all. Our human rights policy is making the younger generation in particular aware of their rights, through education and information. The seeds of tolerance being planted now offer a prospect of a freer and more just world in the future.

Wopke B. Hoekstra  
**Minister of Foreign Affairs**

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# Guide for readers

The Human Rights Report 2021 focuses on the six priorities of Dutch foreign human rights policy: freedom of expression and internet freedom, freedom of religion and belief, equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people, the protection of human rights defenders and strengthening of civil society, equal rights for women and girls, and tackling impunity for the most serious crimes. Human rights are also firmly embedded in other areas of foreign policy, such as security, development cooperation and foreign trade. The results achieved in these policy areas are described in other reports, such as the report on the results of development cooperation.<sup>1</sup>

Before turning to the priorities mentioned above, this report outlines in its first chapter general trends and developments in human rights, including the growing pressure on human rights and democracy, the multilateral efforts of the UN and the EU, and the work of the Human Rights Ambassador and the Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief. The first chapter presents some examples of these efforts.

## Thematic chapters

Each thematic chapter begins by outlining the most striking results achieved, followed by a summary of expenditure on each theme in 2021. This is based on spending from the Human Rights Fund and other funds, including Shiraka, Matra, the Civic Space Fund and Public Diplomacy. Spending by the Power of Voices partnerships in 2021 has also been included in the calculation of expenditure on equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people and freedom of religion and belief. Expenditure on equal rights for women and girls includes only spending under the Human Rights Fund and other funds established by the embassies specifically for this theme. An overview of other expenditure on this theme can be found in the section on women's rights and gender equality in the report on the results of development cooperation.<sup>2</sup>

A number of examples are presented to highlight the efforts the government has made to achieve the objectives, using a broad range of instruments and channels, including project funding, bilateral diplomacy, multilateral negotiations and declarations, and coalitions. Descriptions of how parliamentary motions and the government's commitments to parliament have been fulfilled are also given.

<sup>1</sup> Home - OS Portaal 2021 | NL Ontwikkelingssamenwerking [[Dutch Development Results](#) (in English)].

<sup>2</sup> Home - OS Portaal 2021 | NL Ontwikkelingssamenwerking [[Dutch Development Results](#) (in English)].

# 1. Global and multilateral human rights efforts

## Human rights and democracy under growing pressure

Ukraine is the frontline of the battle between democracy and autocracy which is being fought before the eyes of the entire world. It illustrates just how power relations and global challenges have changed. Autocratic countries are becoming increasingly effective in their efforts to undermine and influence the standards and institutions that support and protect fundamental freedoms. These countries have a shared interest in minimising scrutiny of violations, and seem increasingly to draw inspiration from each other in devising and applying strategies and instruments to undermine such checks and balances.<sup>3</sup> This has put human rights and democracy under even greater pressure. According to Freedom House, in 2021 eight in ten people lived in a country where freedom of religion and belief, freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression are restricted.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, a growing number of democracies are displaying autocratic tendencies. There has also been a global backlash against women's rights, gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as against equal rights for the LGBTIQ+ community.

These developments are occurring at a time when the space for civil society continues to shrink around the world. Governments employ a wide range of arguments and instruments for restricting freedom of association, assembly and expression.<sup>5</sup> National security legislation, anti-terrorism laws and COVID-19 are being used as pretexts to restrict the civic space for free expression and ban protest. This has jeopardised the safety of civil society actors, including human rights defenders and journalists.

Online, too, various tools are being used to curb the activities of civil society organisations, citizens' movements and journalists. Governments shut the internet down during protests, elections, conflict and coups. This occurred on 182 occasions in 34 countries in 2021, disrupting communications and cutting off contact with the rest of the world.<sup>6</sup> In Belarus an internet shutdown led to an increase in other human rights violations, as journalists' reports and photographs were unable to reach the international community. Internet shutdowns facilitate impunity.

In addition, the development of commercial hacking software has suddenly made digital surveillance a real possibility for many countries. A study last year by Amnesty International found that Pegasus spyware developed for surveillance of terrorists has been used on a large scale against journalists, human rights defenders and lawyers.<sup>7</sup> This type of espionage can lead to threats, and worse. The family of the murdered journalist Jamal Khashoggi (Saudi Arabia) and murdered journalist Cecilio Pineda (Mexico) were for example targeted by Pegasus.

## Efforts through the UN

These trends and developments in countries all over the world have also had an impact on multilateral relations. The international rule of law and the multilateral system are under pressure because various countries are increasingly attempting to undermine the UN system.

Countries like Cuba, Iran, Venezuela, Russia and China are actively seeking to cut off needed funding for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), undermine the independence of UN mandate holders and shift the focus to collective rights.

<sup>3</sup> Freedom in the World 2022: [FIW\\_2022\\_PDF\\_Booklet\\_Digital\\_Final\\_Web.pdf \(freedomhouse.org\)](#).

<sup>4</sup> Freedom in the World 2022: [FIW\\_2022\\_PDF\\_Booklet\\_Digital\\_Final\\_Web.pdf \(freedomhouse.org\)](#).

<sup>5</sup> [Civicus Monitor 2022](#).

<sup>6</sup> Access Now/#KeepItOn report 2021: [2021-KeepItOn-Report-1.pdf \(accessnow.org\)](#).

<sup>7</sup> *Pegasus-project: spyware NSO Group gebruikt om activisten, journalisten en politieke leiders wereldwijd te volgen*, Amnesty International Netherlands, 19 July 2021.

Pegasus project: spyware leak suggests lawyers and activists at risk across globe, The Guardian, 19 July 2021.

This detracts from the monitoring and promotion of individual political and civil rights. Their methods include generous, interventionist funding for UN agencies and associated individual appointments, and seeking to become active members of UN bodies and committees that discuss these issues. The Netherlands and like-minded countries are resisting this pressure.<sup>8</sup>

For example, the European Union faced a strategically complex choice when Pakistan and other countries initiated a resolution on misinformation at the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly. Since Pakistan's objective was not aligned with EU policy, it was uncertain whether the EU should even open negotiations with Pakistan on the resolution. Eventually the EU did enter into talks and, with input from the Netherlands, the wording on protection of human rights when tackling misinformation was strengthened and inappropriate references to hate speech were removed. Although the EU would have preferred to see more concessions, a constructive approach secured the removal of the most harmful elements in the text, which had enough support to be adopted without the EU if it had come to a vote.

There are also shifts in the balance of power reflected in efforts by various countries to change global human rights standards. By making many fairly small amendments to texts, language and procedures, a process has been set in motion which if left unchecked could slowly but surely erode individual human rights and universal freedoms. Along with the EU, the Netherlands and like-minded countries actively resist this pressure by tabling the subject for discussion in various forums and by taking a firm position in negotiations. Nevertheless, a growing number of countries appear to be receptive to a narrative focused on non-intervention and the prioritisation of economic development over protection of human rights. As a result of this trend, the negotiating position of the Netherlands and like-minded countries has been weakened at bodies like the UN Human Rights Council. This became clear at the end of 2021 when the resolution to renew the mandate to investigate violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations in Yemen, which had been co-initiated by the Netherlands, did not receive sufficient votes in favour, following strong lobbying against the motion led by Saudi Arabia. As a result, the independent UN Commission of Inquiry on Yemen was immediately disbanded. Geopolitical power relations have also made it impossible for the EU to prevent the adoption of resolutions that are at odds with the universal nature of human rights.

In the current situation, collaboration and coalitions with democratic countries and traditional partners are vital. It is less and less possible to rely on such support, however. The role of non-traditional partners is therefore becoming steadily more important. In many cases this means that the EU has to be prepared to compromise, as was the case, for example, with the resolution on a mandate to investigate Belarus, initiated by the EU, to be sure of securing the votes of Latin American members of the Human Rights Council. And collaboration with Indonesia and Bangladesh is very important in talks at the Human Rights Council on EU-sponsored resolutions concerning Myanmar.

In a few cases, however, it proved possible to achieve progress thanks to the efforts of EU member states. The resolution on strengthening the role of the United Nations in the promotion of democratisation and enhancing periodic and genuine elections was for example adopted by consensus at the UN General Assembly. The resolution includes a reference to non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. This was a milestone in the work of the UN in New York, in which the Netherlands was closely involved as co-chair of the UN LGBTI Core Group. Only one other resolution adopted by the General Assembly makes specific reference to sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI): the resolution on 'extrajudicial executions', on which the support of the US was instrumental.

### **Important decisions**

Thanks in part to intensive diplomatic efforts, a series of important decisions were taken in 2021, including:

- A new mandate for a special rapporteur to monitor the human rights situation in Afghanistan, supported by extra OHCHR experts.
- Continuation of the work of the investigative mechanisms for serious human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law in Syria, Libya and South Sudan.
- The adoption by consensus of a Dutch-sponsored resolution on child, early and forced marriage, with strong new frameworks concerning bodily integrity and autonomy, choice of partner and reproductive rights.

<sup>8</sup> To keep the text as readable as possible, the term 'the Netherlands' is used here. In UN forums, however, action is taken on behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

## European Union

Unfortunately, the European Union also faces pressure on human rights, democracy and the rule of law within its own borders. This is illustrated by the fact that in 2021 the EU was unable to achieve consensus on a joint declaration at the session of the Human Rights Council that discussed the most serious human rights situations. The declaration was eventually read by the incoming EU presidency on behalf of 26 EU member states. The session discussed the human rights situations in Russia, China, Egypt, Türkiye, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Belarus, Afghanistan and a number of other countries.

In the Netherlands' view, the EU is not taking a strong enough line on the subject of gender equality and related issues such as sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Several EU member states are pursuing policies on these topics which do not include equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people and freedom of choice for women and girls.

A decline in EU efforts in UN human rights forums was only prevented thanks to active diplomatic collaboration with like-minded member states. Given the obstruction and the challenges in preserving consensus within the EU, it is encouraging to note that it proved possible to retain wording on gender equality and SRHR in the various resolutions on the position of women and girls.

The importance of gender equality and SRHR was also underlined in three widely-supported cross-regional statements made at the General Assembly and the HRC.

Given the national positions of several member states, the fact that the European Commission managed to obtain the support of 25 EU member states to implement the third Gender Action Plan is a positive development. As a result, the EU continues to lead the field internationally in support for initiatives to work towards a gender-equal world. More generally, however, it requires more and more effort to arrive at a common EU position on gender equality, effort that could usefully be devoted to garnering the support of third countries.

## Efforts of the Human Rights Ambassador and the Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief

Human Rights Ambassador Bahia Tahzib-Lie and Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief Jos Douma play a key role in advancing human rights policy. The efforts of the Special Envoy are described in the section on freedom of religion and belief.

### Human Rights Ambassador

In public statements, bilateral talks, interviews and speeches, the Human Rights Ambassador consistently raised the issue of growing authoritarianism and the increasing pressure on human rights and the rule of law.



During her trip to Saudi Arabia Human Rights Ambassador Bahia Tahzib-Lie visited a Signify LED bulb factory (Philips), the country's first all-female factory, where women can rely on transport to and from work and daycare for their children. She talked to the women about the future of all-female factories and the potential for mixed factories.

She regularly joined like-minded European Human Rights Ambassadors and the EU Special Representative for Human Rights in articulating strong alternative viewpoints. At the initiative of the Netherlands, cooperation within this network was further stepped up in 2021. This resulted, among other things, in 26 joint statements on social media commenting on internet shutdowns, attacks on human rights defenders and journalists, and other matters.

COVID-19 meant that many planned visits and discussions had to take place remotely in 2021. The Human Rights Ambassador took part in several multilateral meetings and paid 'virtual country visits' to Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Hungary, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Canada, Venezuela, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Zimbabwe and Central America. She also made physical visits to Poland, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia and Slovakia. On her fully-fledged country visits, the Human Rights Ambassador held talks with both the authorities and civil society organisations in order to promote compliance with human rights, not only conveying concerns and points of criticism, but also exploring the possibility of strengthening bilateral relations on human rights and collaboration in multilateral forums.

One important aspect of the Human Rights Ambassador's work is dialogue with society (both in the Netherlands and

abroad) to improve the visibility and effectiveness of and public support for Dutch human rights policy. In 2021 she initiated a tour of the Netherlands' Shelter Cities and visited universities in the Netherlands and abroad. Ambassador Tahzib-Lie spoke at the launch of the Municipalities and Human Rights Platform, organised by the Ministry of the Interior. She also spoke regularly with the Broad Consultation on Human Rights, a network of 17 Netherlands-based human rights organisations, concerning human rights policy and the situation in specific countries. On 10 December, International Human Rights Day, the Human Rights Ambassador gave the Max van der Stoep Lecture, calling for an annual Human Rights Week during which academics, activists, judges, lawyers, MPs, civil servants, students and anyone else with a passion for human rights would work together to raise awareness of human rights, prompt dialogue on the subject, and advance human rights all over the world.

#### *Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief*

The Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief was also unable to complete his planned programme of country visits as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. He experienced an unexpected development in his role, however, when he was asked to chair the International Religious Freedom and Belief Alliance (IRFBA),<sup>9</sup> an association of 35 countries working to promote freedom of religion and belief (FoRB).



Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief Jos Douma visited Cardinal Ayuso Guixot.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.state.gov/international-religious-freedom-or-belief-alliance/>.

Working with the steering group – Australia, Brazil, the United Kingdom and the United States – he was able to consolidate this new alliance, which issued statements on matters such as religious minorities in Afghanistan, the fate of Yazidi women and girls, and the difficulties often faced by Jehovah’s Witnesses. Jos Douma also organised an online meeting after the IRFBA Ministers Forum, on the fortieth anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. As chair, he also addressed a meeting in Washington attended mainly by American interest groups, which discussed the challenges associated with the right to freedom of religion and belief in foreign policy. Finally, he joined forces with Australia in launching an initiative to abolish the death penalty for blasphemy and apostasy. Although there is still insufficient support for a UN resolution on this matter, the Netherlands continued to lobby for the abolition of the death penalty for blasphemy and apostasy in various political forums, including the Human Rights Council, thus partially implementing the motion by MP Gert-Jan Segers (Parliamentary Paper 35 719, no. 7).

The Special Envoy organised several online meetings at which staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs talked about the role of religion in their work and at the missions.

He also took part in various forms of religious dialogue, including in connection with the Italian Presidency of the G20, Religions for Peace and the Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Diplomacy.

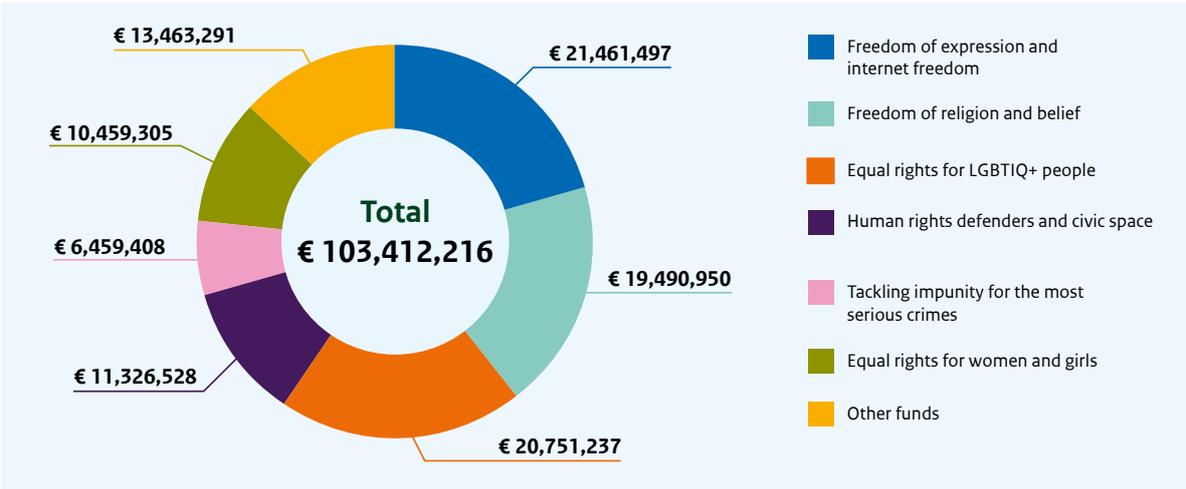
**Thematic efforts**

In its human rights policy, the Netherlands devotes special attention to six priority themes: freedom of expression and internet freedom, freedom of religion and belief, equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people, human rights defenders, tackling impunity for the most serious crimes and equal rights for women and girls. Dutch policy efforts and use of the human rights fund focus mainly on these themes. These efforts are guided from The Hague and are generally implemented by civil society organisations and Dutch embassies. The embassies closely monitor developments in their country and are therefore best equipped to shape bilateral programmes. Country visits and bilateral talks by members of the Dutch government are also used to raise human rights issues. The following chapters examine the results on individual themes.

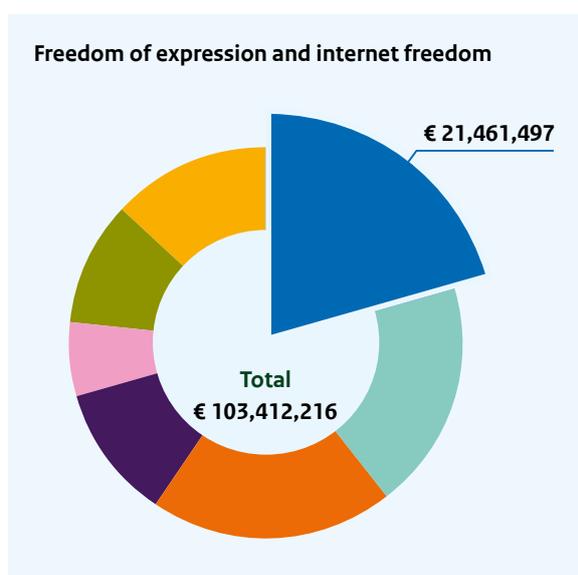
**Total amount of expenditures per human rights priority (Based on all funds)**

|   | Expenditure in Euro’s |
|---|-----------------------|
| Freedom of expression and internet freedom    | 21,461,497            |
| Freedom of religion and belief                | 19,490,950            |
| Equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people               | 20,751,237            |
| Human rights defenders and civic space        | 11,326,528            |
| Tackling impunity for the most serious crimes | 6,459,408             |
| Equal rights for women and girls              | 10,459,305            |
| Other funds                                   | 13,463,291            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                  | <b>103,412,216</b>    |

**Total amount of expenditures per human rights priority (Based on all funds)**



## 2. Freedom of expression and internet freedom



### Highlights 2021:

1. 541 journalists given assistance in acute situations using resources from emergency funds.
2. Support on digital security for more than 7,000 individuals and over 1,100 organisations.

The context in which journalists do their work has grown steadily more hazardous in recent years due to the increasing number of authoritarian regimes, as well as developments in digital technology and political polarisation. Independent media outlets are being blocked, the number of internet shutdowns is increasing, and disinformation spreads rapidly. Physical, digital and legal attacks on the media and journalists are commonplace. Female journalists face a double threat: being attacked for being journalists and for being women. Constant threats often lead to self-censorship. This is an alarming trend, as media freedom and access to independent information are vital.

Democracies cannot survive and flourish without a free, independent and pluralist media. The Netherlands therefore works consistently to promote access to information, including access via a free, open and safe internet. It also focuses on enhancing the safety of journalists all over the world, with a particular emphasis on female journalists. The Netherlands strives as well for freedom of the press and media, including a diverse, open and varied media landscape.



Journalists filming the withdrawal of the army in eastern Ukraine  
©Scott Petersen – Getty Images

### Protection of journalists and media workers

2021 was an alarming year for the safety of journalists around the world.<sup>10</sup> Besides the daily attacks journalists face simply for doing their job, the COVID-19 pandemic and numerous political crises worsened the uncertainty and exposure they face as they do their vital work. In Myanmar attacks on media professionals have increased dramatically since the coup. The country has been taken over again by an authoritarian military junta, and since then a large number of journalists have been imprisoned without trial or arrested for spreading 'fake news'. Countless journalists have been forced to leave the country.

<sup>10</sup> Freedom House – Freedom in the World 2022: [The Global Expansion of Authoritarian Rule](#). Annual report of the partners of the Council of Europe Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists.

In Ethiopia large numbers of journalists have been arrested since the start of the civil war between federal government troops and the Tigray People's Liberation Front. Strict emergency laws have been introduced, and violations of press freedom are on the increase. In Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega's government has stepped up its attacks on the media. The weekly publication *Confidencial* has been closed down and a list of 100 journalists who are regarded as 'terrorists' has been issued.

One of the most alarming situations emerged in Afghanistan. Since the Taliban took power, conditions for media workers and journalists have deteriorated dramatically. Targeted surveillance, severe threats, repression and censorship are the daily reality journalists face there, and many have fled the country. Many more journalists and their families still live in life-threatening situations.

The Netherlands worked to ensure the safety of journalists in various ways, including through support to emergency funds. Direct emergency assistance was provided for 346 journalists (and over 200 family members) who were in immediate danger, via the Reporters Respond emergency fund established by the Dutch organisation Free Press Unlimited (FPU). Due to the crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar, almost 50% of the support went to journalists in Asia. Assistance was provided mainly for temporary accommodation, support for basic needs and family support.

FPU's Legal Defense Fund supported 195 cases in 2021. In 68 cases, direct support was provided, and a further 127 journalists received support via the FPU's network of local partners. The Legal Defense Fund helps journalists who are being prosecuted for defamation, alleged connections with terrorist groups, disturbance of public order or cybercrimes (such as spreading 'fake news' or incorrect information as defined by the government). The assistance ensures these professionals have representation in court so they can avoid being charged, defend themselves against charges or, in cases where they have been detained, secure their conditional release.

The Legal Defense Fund also supported a large number of journalists who were subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or imprisonment. Finally, the Fund provided assistance in cases where journalists (and their families) were unable to pay the costs of legal proceedings or fees, or their income ceased due to legal problems. Since its establishment in 2018, the Legal Defense Fund has provided direct support in 626 cases.

We also help ensure the safety of journalists through our embassies. Last autumn the Dutch embassy in Mexico organised a seminar for investigative journalists, in close collaboration with UNESCO.

The aim was to offer female investigative journalists from all over Mexico tools to do their work safely, something they cannot take for granted given the many threats to and murders of journalists in Mexico. The seminar gave journalists from the northern border region, in particular, the opportunity to share their experiences and learn from specialists in a less formal way, using practical tips and protocols.

### Emergency funds for online safety

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the biggest donor to the Digital Defenders Partnership (DDP). DDP focuses on the online safety of human rights defenders and civil society organisations. Human rights defenders who receive online threats are also at great risk of falling victim to smear campaigns, libel, criminal charges and even physical assault. DDP therefore works closely with other civil society organisations. Together, they can provide greater safety, including legal support and physical security. In 2020 DDP and its strategic partners were able to support more than 7,000 individuals and over 1,100 organisations.

DDP not only provides material support, such as new, safe computer hardware, but also help to work safely online. The partnership develops tools that enable individuals and organisations to keep themselves safe online. DDP supports a team of 'Digital Integrity Fellows', for example, who provide intensive guidance for civil society organisations on how to implement digital safety measures. The partnership also administers the online Digital First Aid Kit, a website where human rights defenders can go for 'first aid' in the event of a digital attack. The website was translated into three more languages in 2020, and digital first aid is now available in ten languages.

### International coalitions

#### *Media Freedom Coalition (MFC)*

As a member of the MFC the Netherlands works with a diverse group of like-minded countries on the themes of press freedom and safety of journalists. The coalition is a broad partnership involving more than fifty countries in different parts of the world that work together to advocate for press freedom, greater safety for journalists and accountability for those who put journalists at risk. The MFC employs various methods, including issuing statements and diplomatic interventions in individual cases. The coalition also promotes cooperation between countries, civil society and international organisations.

In 2021 the MFC issued several declarations, both on specific themes (on World Press Freedom Day, for example), and on specific situations in countries like Russia, Belarus, China and Myanmar. As a member of the Executive Group the Netherlands played an active role in the coalition, helping to develop its strategy.

*Freedom Online Coalition (FOC)*

The FOC celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2021.

The coalition was established by the Netherlands and the United States in 2011 to promote and defend human rights online. The FOC has since campaigned for recognition of the fact that human rights apply both online and offline, and that a free, open and safe internet is vital for the achievement of human rights.

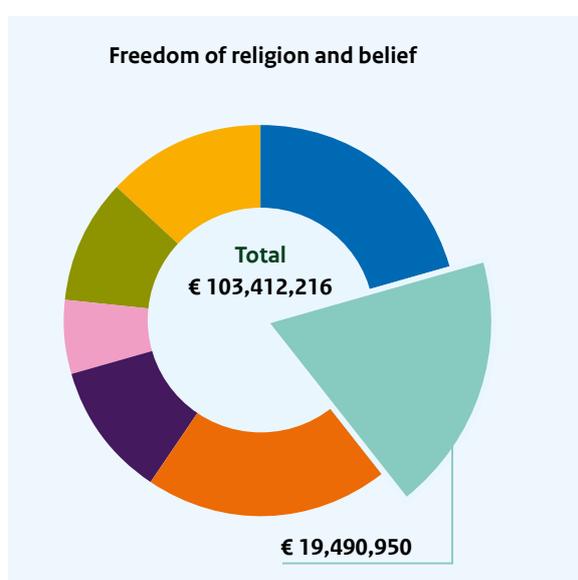
The FOC ministerial meeting in December 2021 endorsed the Helsinki Declaration - Towards a Rules-based, Democratic and Digitally Inclusive World.<sup>11</sup> The declaration underlines the importance of working together for human rights online, tackling censorship and for clear agreements concerning new technologies.

Members of the FOC underline the need to ensure that new technologies do not compromise existing human rights in their design or their functioning. It was partly for this reason that the FOC played a very active role in the negotiations on the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (AI). These talks were very important, as previous debates on the ethics of AI had always been regional or sectoral. Thanks to the UNESCO Recommendation, there is now a globally recognised framework which underlines the importance of international human rights in the development and use of AI.

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<sup>11</sup> [FOC-10th-Anniversary-Helsinki-Declaration-Towards-a-Rules-based-Democratic-and-Digitally-Inclusive-World.pdf](#) (freedomonlinecoalition.com).

# 3. Freedom of religion and belief



### Highlights 2021:

1. Religious tolerance promoted in Indonesia through diplomatic efforts and project support, including the development of a counter-narrative to conservative and extremist reporting, and facilitation of dialogue.
2. Contribution to the development of an inclusive curriculum for the teaching of Islam to young Muslims in Burundi. The human rights-based curriculum was taught to 9,885 Burundian students at 68 mosques.

The growing pressure on human rights and democracy all over the world has specifically impacted the often already desperate situation of religious minorities. It is therefore vital that we continue to focus on the right to freedom of religion and belief. The Netherlands does not distinguish among religious and non-religious groups, and works equally hard to improve the situation of Christian minorities, non-believers, the Baha’i community, Muslims and other religious groups that face discrimination and persecution, thus implementing the motion by MPs Roelof Bisschop et al. (Parliamentary Paper 35 719, no. 5).

To reduce discrimination against and persecution of religious groups around the world, the Netherlands focuses on the implementation of and compliance with international standards. It also urges a tolerant and inclusive religious climate, both in society at large and within religious communities. The Netherlands contributes to international coalitions around the world that seek to promote freedom of religion and belief.

### Freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia

Freedom of religion and belief is enshrined in Indonesia’s constitution. However, this freedom is under increasing pressure in a predominantly Muslim Indonesian society. Interreligious tolerance, of Christians for example, is on the decline. The same applies to intrareligious tolerance, which adversely affects the Ahmadiyya community, for example. Religious conservatism is growing, under the influence of the media. Although the Jokowi government works at national level to safeguard freedoms for the various ethnic and religious groups, some local legislation disadvantages minorities and exacerbates intolerance and sectarian conflict.

The Dutch embassy is in talks with the Indonesian government about strengthening human rights in general, and freedom of religion and belief in particular.

Over the past year the embassy also worked to strengthen religious tolerance through various projects, and from various perspectives. One project that took an academic approach studied the spread of extremist and conservative messages on new and old media, and worked actively with the authorities – including the Ministry of Religion – to produce a counter-narrative. Another project brought religious leaders, youth groups and national and local authorities together to build tolerance in traditionally intolerant regions of Indonesia, such as Bogor and West Sumatra. This resulted, among other things, in successful local consultative structures and regional and local action plans to promote freedom of religion and belief.

A third project focused on planting seeds of tolerance with young people by giving their teachers tolerance training, thus making education more inclusive. Besides financial support, the embassy participated where possible in

activities concerned with freedom of religion and belief. Where necessary the embassy brings authorities on board. The various projects are also important sources of information for the embassy.

### Improved implementation of international treaties at local level

The Netherlands supported a project run by Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV) in Kenya and Burundi to improve compliance at national level with international frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The project collaborated with the Africa Muslim Women Action Network (AMWAN) in Kenya to improve women's access to religious courts, both by informing women and girls about their rights and how to secure them at Kadhi courts, and by enhancing the capacity of the courts themselves, thus improving women's access to them. As a result, women are now better able to bring cases involving matters such as divorce and inheritance before a court. The project also amplified calls for the appointment of female judges at Kadhi courts in East Africa.

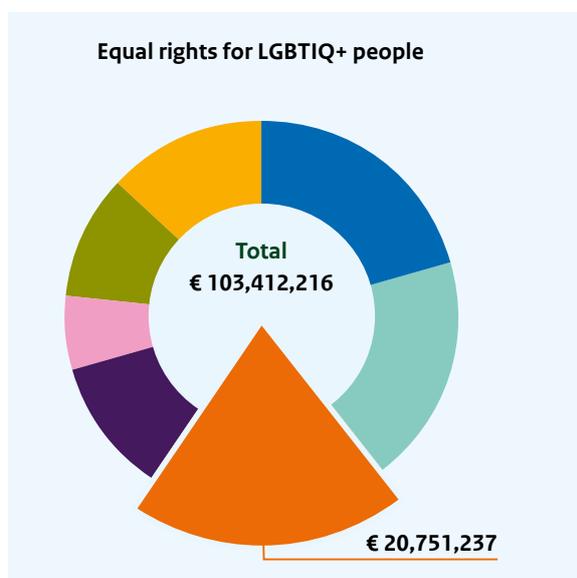
In Burundi an inclusive curriculum was drawn up for teaching Islam to young Muslims. The curriculum is human rights-based, and is designed to improve attitudes to freedom of religion and belief and equal rights for women and girls. The #IslamsForShe network taught the curriculum to 9,885 students at 68 mosques. Furthermore, 45 imams are using the inclusive curriculum at their madrasas and in their preaching. Teaching young children about religious tolerance and inclusive values is a good way of promoting more inclusive and tolerant communities at local level.



**Mama Ali denies her house girl to go to church because they don't belong to the same religion**

In Burundi an inclusive curriculum has been drawn up for teaching Islam to young Muslims. The illustration shows a page from chapter 11 of the curriculum, entitled *Freedom to Believe*.

# 4. Equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people



## Highlights 2021:

1. Launch of two strategic partnerships, 'Power of Pride' and 'Free To Be Me'. The Netherlands provided over €69 million in support to LGBTIQ+ communities in 28 countries, making the Netherlands the world's largest donor to the LGBTIQ+ cause.
2. The UN Core Group successfully garnered support for an explicit reference to non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) in a resolution on elections.

Countries and organisations that campaign for equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people achieved a number of major successes in 2021. Botswana decriminalised same-sex relationships, Canada introduced a nationwide ban on conversion therapy, and same-sex marriage was introduced in Switzerland and Chile. Germany, the United States, Italy and the United Kingdom all appointed special envoys for LGBTIQ+ equal rights.

Thanks to the efforts of brave LGBTIQ+ human rights defenders who fight every day for their rights, the work of civil society organisations, the diplomatic efforts of like-minded countries, and awareness-raising campaigns, acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people continues to grow globally. More and more companies, sports associations and cultural institutions openly condemn discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people (during the European Football Championships in Hungary, for example) and a growing number of organisations take part in Pride activities abroad. All of these actors around the world spread the same message: there is no freedom until we are all equal.

At the same time, however, violence, punishment on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, discrimination and exclusion are a daily reality for many LGBTIQ+ people. Homosexuality and certain gender identities are still criminalised in 68 countries; five countries even have the death penalty.<sup>12</sup> It is appalling that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century people can still be prosecuted for who they are and who they love. Although the number of countries where homosexuality and certain forms of gender expression are a crime is decreasing, some countries are preparing even more restrictive anti-gender, SRHR and anti-LGBTIQ+ laws and measures. This is, for example, the case in Guatemala and Ghana, and also within Europe's own borders, in countries like Poland and Hungary. This trend is at odds with established standards of the multilateral and human rights system that is so important to the Netherlands. At the same time, the global backlash against equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people highlights the importance of effective collaboration, including through multilateral and cross-regional coalitions like the UN LGBTI Core Group, the Equal Rights Coalition and the Nexus initiative for SRHR, in which the Netherlands plays an active role.

The Netherlands continues to stand firm for the protection of the rights won and gains made by LGBTIQ+ people, supporting the global LGBTIQ+ community in both words and deeds. Dutch efforts focus on abolishing prosecution on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, reducing discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ+ people, and increasing the social acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people all over the world.

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch: [Maps of anti-LGBT Laws Country by Country | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](https://www.hrw.org).

### Dutch support for LGBTIQ+ communities

The Netherlands is the world's largest donor of direct LGBTIQ+ funding. Its bilateral efforts often take the form of financial support for LGBTIQ+ organisations, but also include the work of the Human Rights Ambassador and the missions network (sometimes high-profile, sometimes behind the scenes), aimed at preventing or reversing anti-LGBTIQ+ initiatives. There is also a growing focus on working with companies to achieve more inclusive workplace policies. The Netherlands works closely on these efforts with the Workplace Pride organisation, and has developed a practical guide for companies on how to campaign internationally for more inclusive policies, in collaboration with OHCHR.

One good example of how support can lead to results comes from Kenya, where the Netherlands has been working for years to strengthen the intersex movement through government-to-government capacity building and financial support for local intersex organisations. Thanks in part to this support, the Kenyan government has established an intersex taskforce, intersex diversity is included in the Kenyan school curriculum (the only country in East Africa where this is the case), and intersex people are now a recognised population group in the national census.

Support for the international intersex community will continue through the Power of Voices strategic partnerships entitled 'Power of Pride' and 'Free To Be Me'. This implements the motion by MPs Alexander Hammelburg and Kati Piri (Parliamentary Paper 35 925 XVII, no. 29).

The Netherlands also supports capacity building for LGBTIQ+ organisations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia through COC Netherlands.<sup>13</sup> Thanks to this financial and technical support, local organisations have been able to professionalise further over the past few years. Support groups have been established for LGBTIQ+ communities in these regions, individuals are offered psychosocial support, and meetings are held in safe spaces on subjects like LGBTIQ+ parenthood, LGBTIQ+ people with autism, and LGBTIQ+ people with disabilities. Pride events and the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT) raised the profile of the LGBTIQ+ community in these regions. Training for local activists focuses in particular on involving allies from the local and international business community, the media, local authorities, political parties and medical specialists. This further enhances the social acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people.



An Outright Action International project campaigning against conversion therapy in South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria is Dutch-funded. Here: human rights defenders in talks about action against conversion therapy in South Africa.

<sup>13</sup> For the safety of activists and organisations in these countries, no information is provided at country level.

As stated in the coalition agreement, the government continues to invest in support for LGBTIQ+ movements in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, thus implementing an important component of the COC Rainbow Agreement.<sup>14</sup> The government is also implementing the motion by MP Sjoerd Sjoerdsma (Parliamentary Paper 35 925 V, no. 27) by making resources from the Human Rights Fund 2022-2027 available for LGBTIQ+ and women's rights in Europe.

### Multilateral coalitions

Last year the UN LGBTI Core Group, co-chaired by the Netherlands, welcomed two new members: South Africa and Ireland. The Netherlands also successfully used the UN Core Group to garner support for an explicit reference to non-discrimination on the grounds of SOGI in a resolution on elections, thus passing the second New York resolution with a SOGI reference.



Non-binary queer model Myles poseert in de Amsterdam Rainbow Dress in Toronto. Deze jurk is gemaakt van de vlaggen van de 71 landen waar homoseksualiteit strafbaar is. Verschillende Nederlandse ambassades werkten mee aan de internationale tour van de jurk, met als doel het debat en bewustwording over LHBTIQ+ acceptatie te bevorderen.

<sup>14</sup> COC Regenboog-Stembusakkoord 2021 (in Dutch).

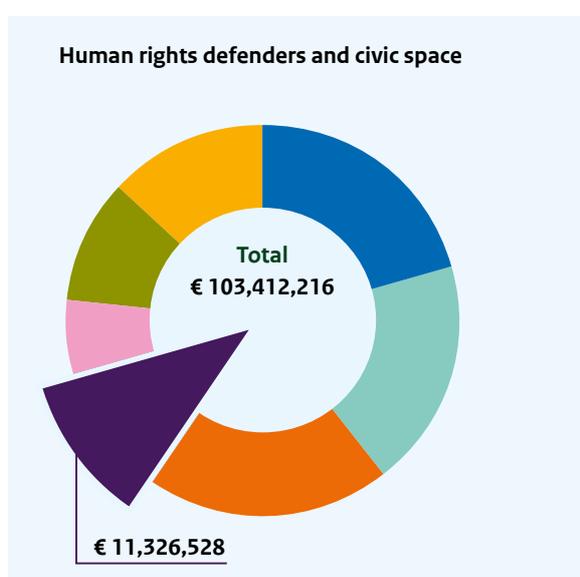
During the UN General Assembly High Level Week the Netherlands organised a flagship event on the need to decriminalise sexual orientation and gender identity in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. A goodwill ambassador of the Dutch Association for the United Nations, Nikkie de Jager, also participated in the event. The involvement of LGBTIQ+ public figures and allies remains important for achieving maximum reach, and thus promoting social acceptance.

The Netherlands also continued its active role in the Equal Rights Coalition, as co-chair of a working group on diplomacy and member of the advisory committee, and as co-chair of the UN LGBTI Core Group.

The Equal Rights Coalition launched a new five-year strategy in 2021, under which all 42 members have committed, among other things, to the joint fight to decriminalise sexual orientation and gender identity.

In Europe, too, the Netherlands remains committed to the principles of non-discrimination towards LGBTIQ+ people, as a member of the Council of Europe's Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion and of the EU High-Level Group on non-discrimination, equality and diversity's LGBTIQ subgroup.

# 5. Human rights defenders and civic space



## Highlights 2021:

1. 22 human rights defenders from 18 countries were given temporary refuge in the Netherlands as part of the Shelter City programme.
2. Dutch funding for Frontline Defenders helped provide assistance to over 2,000 human rights defenders in emergency situations in Afghanistan.

The work of human rights defenders and civil society is vital for the protection of human rights and democracy. Human rights defenders stick their neck out, often putting their own lives at risk to make a stand against injustice by documenting human rights violations or helping victims. This requires courage, and it deserves support. Protecting human rights defenders is therefore a key priority of the government's human rights policy. The Netherlands works to enhance the safety and legitimacy of human rights defenders and civil society organisations, and create a favourable climate in which they can do their work safely.

## Holistic support for human rights defenders and civil society organisations

In 2021 the pressure on human rights defenders and civil society organisations around the world increased even further. According to Freedom House, Latin America was once again one of the most dangerous regions for defenders of human rights and democracy.<sup>15</sup> While electoral shifts in some countries led to progress, growing authoritarianism in others resulted in shrinking civic space, thus reducing the scope which civil society organisations have to do their work unhindered. This shrinking space is characterised by increasing legal and administrative restrictions, intimidation, threats and violence, which hamper the work of civil society organisations and human rights defenders.

The Dutch embassy in San José ran a number of projects to protect human rights defenders in Central America and prevent restrictions and violence that make their work almost impossible. The embassy supports projects that monitor and prevent restrictive government measures, and take specific action to protect human rights defenders in emergency situations.

The embassy supported the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), an organisation that monitors restrictive legislation in the region and warns civil society organisations and the international community of the dangers of such legislation. ICNL helps local organisations, providing information and legal advice so that they have a better understanding of their legal obligations and are better able to comply. A project run by the NGO CIVICUS developed an online toolkit that provides guidance for local organisations to help them navigate the shrinking space in which they operate. The website includes information on sources of funding, guidelines and reports, workshops on safety (physical, digital and legal), effective lobbying mechanisms and instruments, and tips on participating in national and international networks. The embassy also supports projects that help human rights defenders in emergencies and provide training.

<sup>15</sup> 'Defending Latin American Human Rights and Democracy Activists': [Special\\_Report\\_LAC\\_HRDs\\_PDF\\_ENGLISH\\_Final\\_01262022.pdf](#) ([freedomhouse.org](#)).

The Shelter City project in San José provided temporary refuge for 19 human rights defenders in need. Shelter City gives human rights defenders support in terms of their physical safety and their mental health and welfare, and gives them an opportunity to rest and recuperate.

Funding of this and other projects was accompanied by diplomatic support from the embassy to improve civic space and protect human rights defenders, for example by pressurising the authorities and making public statements. Through these efforts, the embassy helped preserve the space for civil society and the safety of human rights defenders.

### **Emergency mechanisms: temporary shelter for human rights defenders in need**

The global climate of growing restrictions, intimidation, violence and even murder has meant that human rights defenders are increasingly forced to turn to emergency mechanisms. The Netherlands supports several emergency mechanisms that offer support in the form of security measures, emergency financial support for medical expenses or legal assistance, and temporary shelter in a safe place.

For example, the Netherlands helped Frontline Defenders provide acute emergency assistance to over 2,000 Afghan human rights defenders after the fall of Kabul. It also supported the Shelter City programme, which provides temporary refuge for human rights defenders in need, giving them the chance to rest and recuperate, take training courses to help improve their physical and online safety, and receive psychosocial support. So far, 400 human rights defenders in need have been received in Shelter Cities in the Netherlands and abroad. Despite the COVID-19 travel restrictions, 22 human rights defenders from 18 countries came to the Netherlands in 2021.

Temporary relocation not only saves lives, it also provides human rights defenders with the support they need to continue their important work with renewed energy. Those who benefit from the Shelter City programme underline this fact. 'After returning home, I became even more active in the LGBTIQ+ community. Helping with organising events and the like. Not only was I able to continue my work, I noticed I was also better able to cope with the stress of being an activist under our repressive regime,' said one. Another highlighted how the programme had helped make human rights defenders more visible, thus improving their safety. 'After Shelter City, I feel seen by the international community. This sense of recognition has changed how we operate as an organisation. We have now widened our reach internationally and our expertise is requested at international forums.'

As noted above, in 2021 the Human Rights Ambassador embarked on a tour of all Dutch Shelter Cities to talk to people locally about the importance of human rights and support for human rights defenders. She visited six cities, and will continue her tour in 2022.

### **Focus on the most vulnerable groups**

In 2021 human rights defenders fighting for land, environmental and indigenous rights were once again one of the most vulnerable groups. According to Frontline Defenders 358 human rights defenders were reported to have been murdered in 2021; 59% of them were campaigners for land, environmental or indigenous rights.<sup>16</sup> Dutch policy and the projects the Netherlands supports focus specifically on the most vulnerable groups of human rights defenders, including environmental activists. The Netherlands systematically drew attention in multilateral forums to the perilous situation these activists find themselves in, and called for better protection.

The Netherlands also supported several projects that improve the safety of environmental activists. Peace Brigades International, for example, gave support to 274 human rights defenders, mainly climate activists and land rights defenders. This support focused on improving the physical safety and mental wellbeing of human rights defenders. The Netherlands also worked towards this aim through the Power of Voices partnerships. One example of this is the Green Livelihoods Alliance, in which the government and civil society organisations, including representatives of indigenous people, work together as strategic partners with strengthening indigenous peoples' land and other rights as a major goal.

The Quick Response Fund for Nature was established in 2021 to help environmental activists in emergencies, with legal support or temporary relocation, for example. The various emergency funds supported by the Human Rights Funds, such as the Lifeline Consortium, were also accessible to land and environmental rights defenders, thus implementing the motion by MP Suzanne Kröger (Parliamentary Paper 31 239, no. 354).

### **Diplomatic support in individual cases**

Attention is also given to the cases of individual human rights defenders who are at risk. At the Human Rights Council, the Netherlands routinely speaks out – on behalf of all the Benelux countries – against the victimisation of human rights defenders who collaborate with the UN or have done so in the past. In 2021, for example, the Netherlands drew attention to cases from Bahrain, Belarus, China, Cuba, Iran, Laos, Nicaragua, Saudi Arabia and Turkmenistan.

<sup>16</sup> Frontline Defenders Global Analysis 2021: [2021\\_global\\_analysis\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://frontlinedefenders.org/2021_global_analysis_-_final.pdf) (frontlinedefenders.org).

The Human Rights Ambassador and her European counterparts highlighted the cases of endangered human rights defenders from Belarus, China, Iran and the Philippines.

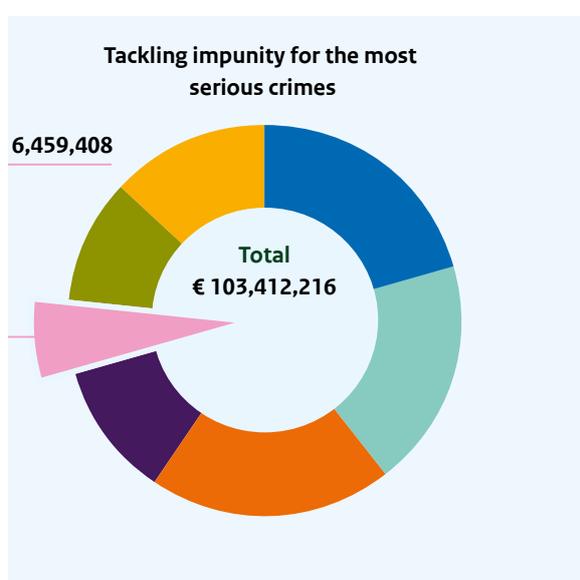
The annual award of the Human Rights Tulip also draws attention to the situation of human rights defenders, whose visibility and legitimacy it is meant to enhance.

In 2021 then foreign minister Ben Knapen awarded the Human Rights Tulip to Ugandan human rights lawyer Nicholas Opiyo. In his speech, the minister underlined the importance of human rights defenders' work.



*In 2021 the Human Rights Tulip was awarded to Nicholas Opiyo, whose achievements include a successful challenge to Uganda's anti-homosexuality law.*

## 6. Tackling impunity for the most serious crimes



### Highlights 2021:

1. Dutch financial support for UNITAD allowed psychological help for victims of ISIS in Iraq to be continued.
2. Dutch efforts enabled the Special Tribunal for Lebanon to continue its work.

'No peace without justice': over the past year the Netherlands has frequently made this motto heard in the multilateral system, incorporated it into public statements and cited it in speeches. It characterises the Netherlands' efforts in the fight against impunity for international crimes and large-scale human rights violations. This is a priority of our human rights policy. Our fight against impunity goes beyond prosecuting and trying perpetrators, and encompasses documentation, evidence gathering and redress as well. Over the past year the Netherlands championed the importance of fact-finding, justice and accountability for serious human rights violations.

In January the Netherlands held a conference on the role of innovative accountability mechanisms in tackling impunity, organised in collaboration with the International Commission of Jurists. It resulted in 20 recommendations.<sup>17</sup>

### Support for UNITAD Iraq: focus on victims

'At the heart of our strong pursuit for accountability and justice are the victims who have suffered and endured in silence.' – from the statement read by the Netherlands' Permanent Representative to the UN Yoka Brandt at the UNITAD Special Event 'The crimes of ISIL in Iraq: Delivering accountability through innovation and partnership' on 11 May 2021



Victims are at the heart of Dutch efforts to secure justice. It is very important, for example, to provide safe settings where victims can give witness statements that can later be used as evidence in legal proceedings. That is why the Netherlands focuses its support for the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) on victim support and witness protection. In 2021 Dutch support enabled the Witness Protection and Support Unit (WPSU) to continue its work, as the only part of UNITAD that offers psychological help to victims in Iraq.

<sup>17</sup> The Future of Accountability Mechanisms: Report Launch: The Future of Accountability Mechanisms – Twenty Recommendations | International Commission of Jurists (icj.org).

### Justice for the people of Syria

'For all those Syrians affected by a decade of atrocities, accountability is long overdue, but not out of sight... If we cannot be fast, we must be adamant.' – from the Netherlands' statement at the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council in September 2021.

Torture, use of chemical weapons and the bombing of hospitals and schools: more than 11 years of conflict in Syria have caused immeasurable suffering. The Netherlands is therefore engaged in a broad range of efforts to ensure the international prosecution of crimes committed in and by Syria. In 2021 the Netherlands supported many initiatives and mechanisms designed to bring justice for victims, from support for the UN's evidence database for Syria (the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, IIIM) to the extension of the mandate of the UN Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. Although nothing can be revealed about the legal strategy being used, steps were also taken in 2021 as part of a Dutch initiative to hold the Syrian state responsible under international law for gross violations of human rights, and torture in particular. Canada also announced in 2021 its intention to hold Syria responsible.



#KingdomNL thanks the Fact Finding Mission on #Libya for their findings. We support Libya's efforts to work towards #accountability & advance #HumanRights. Extension of the mandate of #FFMLibya at #HRC48 is important step to ensure full accountability.  
[bit.ly/2YvGIA](https://bit.ly/2YvGIA)

Vertaal Tweet



At the UN Human Rights Council the Netherlands advocated forcefully for the renewal of the mandate of the fact-finding mission on Libya.

### Efforts at the Human Rights Council

The number of UN mandates helping to achieve accountability increased in 2021. In light of these developments, the Netherlands continued its support for the OHCHR Investigative Support Unit, allowing it to provide thorough guidance for newly mandated UN investigation teams and to respond more proactively to emergency situations in conflict regions in Yemen, Myanmar, Libya and Belarus.

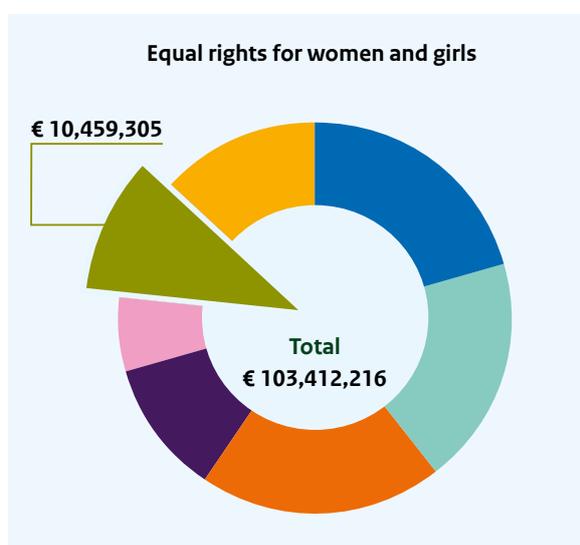
In addition, thanks in part to the efforts of the Netherlands, strong resolutions were adopted by the UN Human Rights Council, including the Dutch- and German-sponsored resolution of 13 October 2021 extending the mandate of the fact-finding mission on Libya by nine months.

The Netherlands also lobbied at the Human Rights Council for the investigation and documentation of violence, attacks and international crimes in Afghanistan. In accordance with the motion by MP Kati Piri (Parliamentary Paper 35 925 V, no. 29) the Netherlands petitioned for the establishment of an evidence database for Afghanistan. However, there was not enough support for the proposal on the Human Rights Council with its current membership. A Special Rapporteur for Afghanistan was however appointed, thanks in part to the efforts of the Netherlands and like-minded partners.

### Special Tribunal for Lebanon

Over the past year the Netherlands helped via several channels to ensure the independent and effective operation of international courts, tribunals and residual mechanisms. As host and donor, it supported the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), which was facing a major funding shortage. Thanks to the efforts of and extra financial contribution from the Netherlands and other donors, the STL was able to remain open in 2021. The Special Tribunal was thus able to focus on completing the appeal stage of the ongoing main case and prepare for a residual mechanism.

# 7. Equal rights for women and girls



## Highlights 2021:

1. Contributions to 20 investigative journalism projects on systemic factors in violence against women and girls in Romania.
2. The Netherlands helped ensure strongly worded Human Rights Council resolutions on violence against women and girls and on child, early and forced marriage.

Repressive measures and pressure on the rights of women and girls, gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) increased further in 2021. Women and girls were also disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Violence against women and girls grew, access to essential health services was restricted, and unpaid care tasks increased.

In 2021 the Netherlands remained unflagging in its efforts to defend and promote equal rights for women and girls as a central pillar of foreign human rights policy. These efforts focus on four priority themes: increasing female leadership and women's participation in political and other decision-making, economic empowerment and improvement of

women's economic position, combating violence against women and girls, strengthening the role of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and protecting them in conflict situations.

## Tackling violence against women and girls in Romania

In Romania the Netherlands supported a journalism project documenting violence against women and girls. The project focuses specifically on systemic factors that enable and exacerbate such violence. Eight journalists from six newsrooms throughout Romania conducted twenty investigations, producing both written and audiovisual reports. Three of the articles won prizes in the country's leading journalism competition. The information revealed by the project has now been incorporated into official documents on violence against women and girls which have been submitted to the Council of Europe and parliamentary groups, with a view to amending related legislation. The Netherlands also supported eight Romanian organisations that focus specifically on young women and girls, making them aware of their rights, sharing experiences in a safe setting and enhancing their self-confidence and capacity for critical thinking. The Apulum Forum Association, for example, ran workshops in seven cities for teenagers and girls at high school, teaching them about journalism and how to tell their own stories and those of others.

## Interventions in the UN Human Rights Council: resolutions on violence against women and girls and on child, early and forced marriage

The Netherlands is a lead nation on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), campaigning through both quiet and public diplomacy. Thanks to coordinated joint efforts to counteract the global setbacks for women's rights, good results were achieved in 2021 in the battle to retain international agreements on these matters. Progress was even made on some resolutions.

### Violence against women and girls

One good example is the 47th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, which in accordance with tradition focused on gender equality and women's rights.

As the EU’s negotiator, the Netherlands managed to preserve unanimity on the resolution on violence against women and girls, getting all 27 member states on board as co-sponsors.

In 2021 the resolution focused on accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, specifically violence against women and girls with disabilities. Important new elements introduced into the resolution include the expansion of the definition of violence against women and girls to include social and economic harm. Moreover, forced sterilisation, contraception and abortion were recognised as harmful practices and forced institutionalisation was classified as a form of violence.

*Child, early and forced marriage*

At the 48th session of the Human Rights Council the Netherlands presented the Resolution on Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) on behalf of a cross-regional group, in the hope of helping to prevent the 10-13 million additional child marriages that the UN predicts will occur by 2030 as a result of COVID-19.

The resolution points out that CEFM is a violation of human rights and a barrier to full, equal, effective and meaningful participation by women and girls in economic, social, political and public life. Key new elements of the resolution include expansion of the right to choose one’s own partner and the importance of sexual and reproductive health services as part of essential healthcare in crisis situations. The resolution also acknowledges that inequality and systematic discrimination against women and girls increases CEFM and must be tackled. It calls upon states to work on the underlying causes of gender inequality and CEFM; to protect the bodily integrity, autonomy and agency of women and girls; and to tackle all forms of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, intimate partner violence and marital rape. School-related violence and increased access to education and IT for women and girls are also highlighted.

**Support for women’s rights, SRHR and LGBTIQ+ people in Europe**

Using its Human Rights Fund, the Netherlands is, where possible, stepping up its support for projects for women’s rights, SRHR and equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people in Europe, thus implementing the motion by MP Sjoerd Sjoerdsma (Parliamentary Paper 35 925 V, no. 27). This support includes information on and campaigning for access to safe abortion. It should be noted that the fund cannot be used to support individuals or abortion services, only to support organisations. Primary responsibility for healthcare lies with the member states, but the Netherlands continues to champion the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights, including safe and legal abortion, in EU bodies.



NL Mission in Geneva  
@NLinGeneva

We strongly welcome the adoption of the resolution on child, early and forced marriage in times of crisis, including #COVID19, today at the Human Rights Council to #endchildmarriage! The core group  thanks all the sponsors of this #HRC48 resolution.

Vertaal Tweet



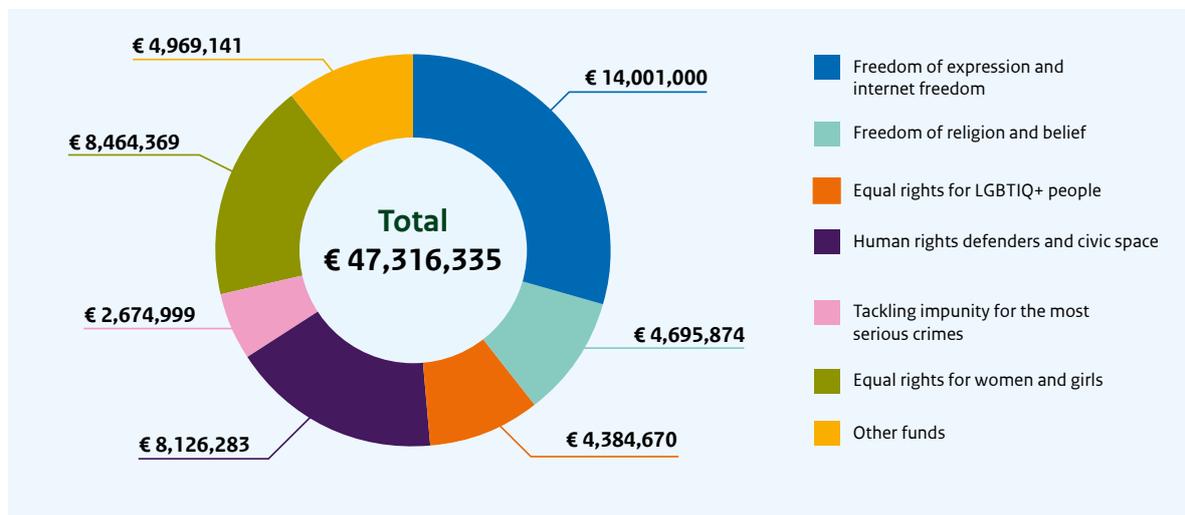
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# Financial annexes: Overview of expenditure

## Total expenditure by human rights priority (human rights fund)

|   | Expenditure in Euro's |
|---|-----------------------|
| Freedom of expression and internet freedom    | 14,001,000            |
| Freedom of religion and belief                | 4,695,874             |
| Equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people               | 4,384,670             |
| Human rights defenders and civic space        | 8,126,283             |
| Tackling impunity for the most serious crimes | 2,674,999             |
| Equal rights for women and girls              | 8,464,369             |
| Other funds                                   | 4,969,141             |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                  | <b>47,316,335</b>     |

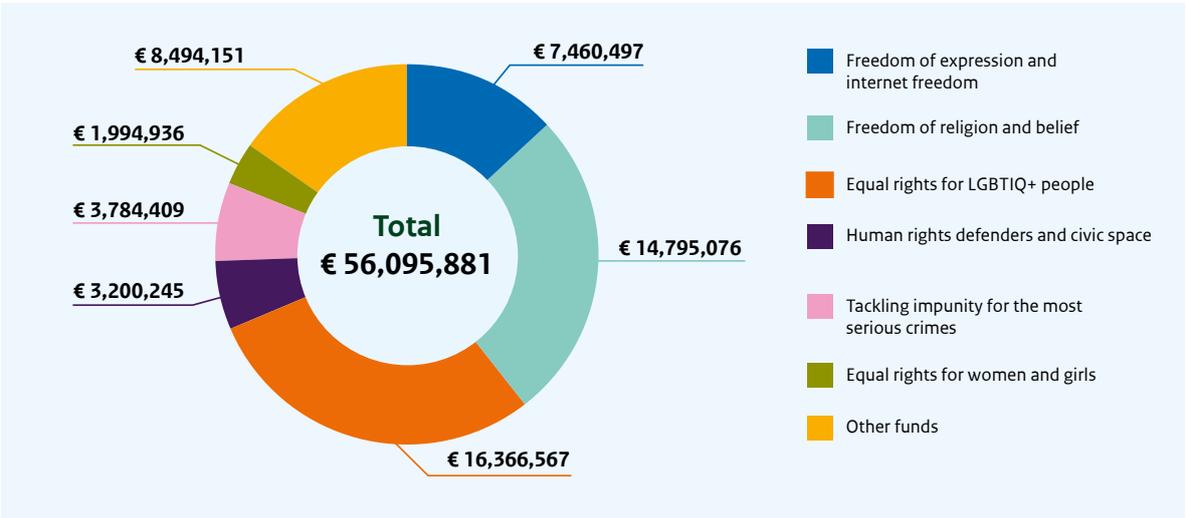
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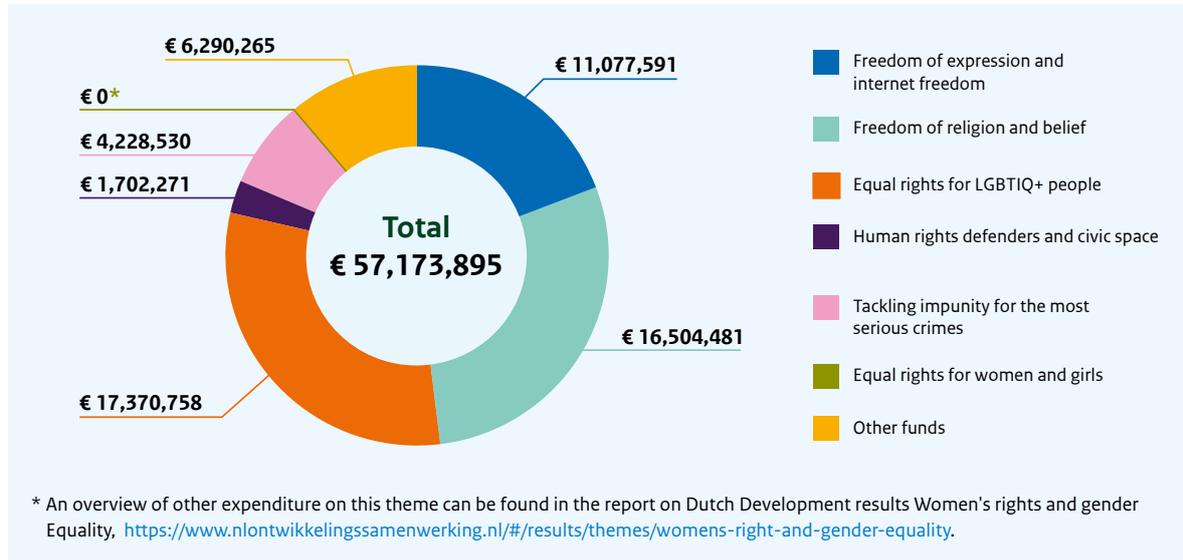
**Total expenditure by priority (other funds)**

|   | Expenditure in Euro's |
|---|-----------------------|
| Freedom of expression and internet freedom    | 7,460,497             |
| Freedom of religion and belief                | 14,795,076            |
| Equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people               | 16,366,567            |
| Human rights defenders and civic space        | 3,200,245             |
| Tackling impunity for the most serious crimes | 3,784,409             |
| Equal rights for women and girls              | 1,994,936             |
| Other funds                                   | 8,494,151             |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                  | <b>56,095,881</b>     |

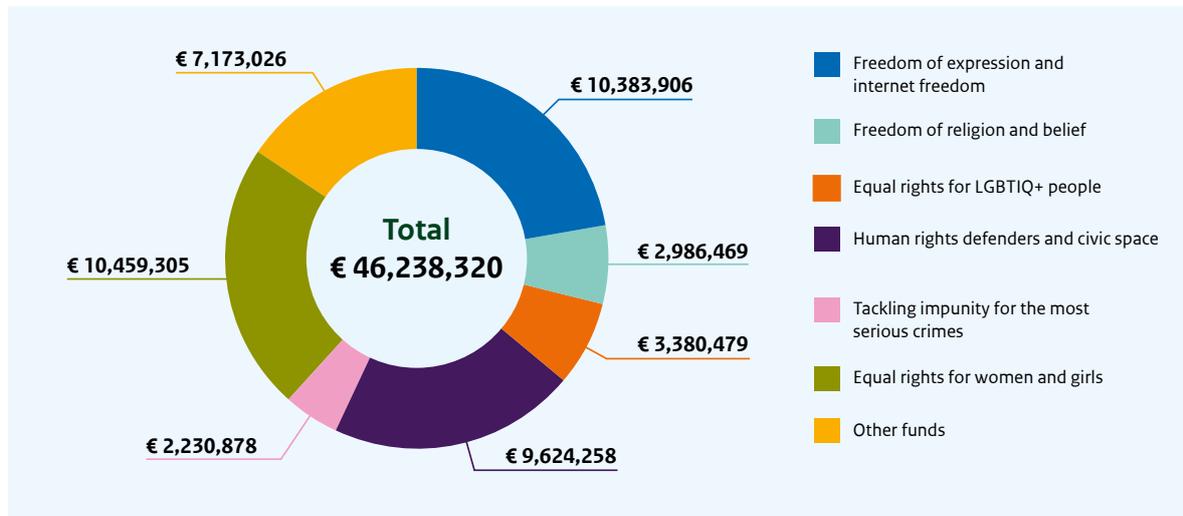
**Total expenditure by priority (other funds)**



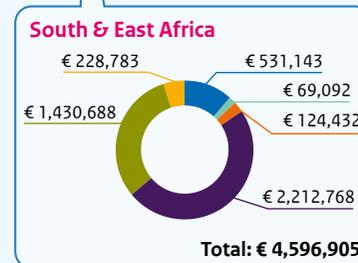
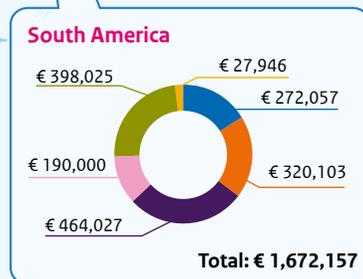
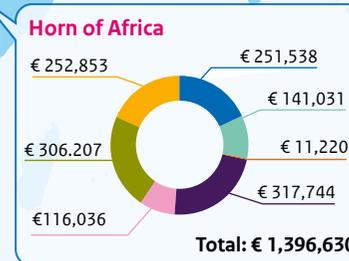
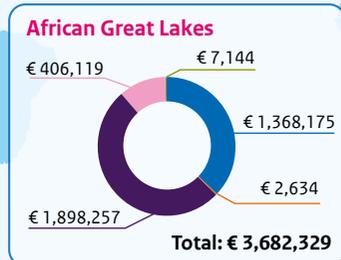
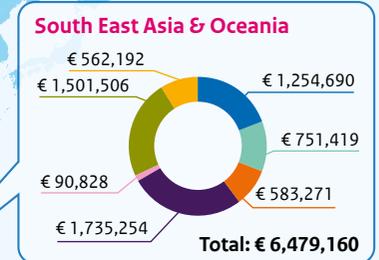
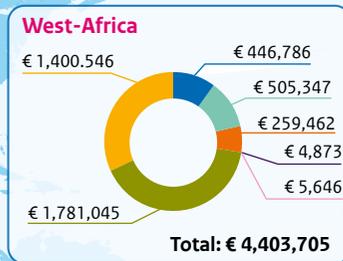
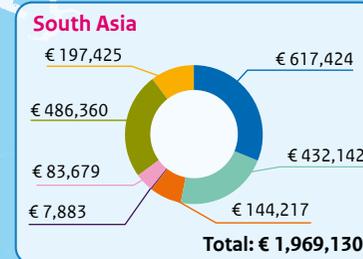
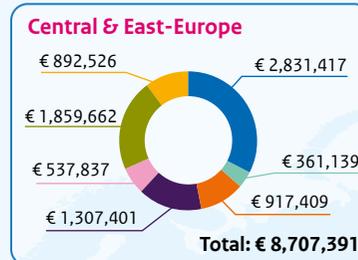
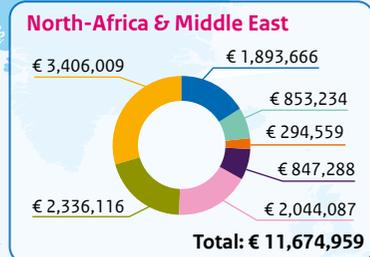
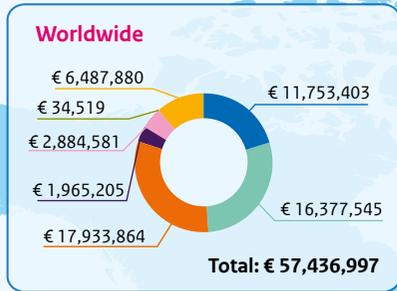
**Total expenditure by priority (centrally financed projects)**



**Total expenditure by priority (expenditure delegated to the missions)**



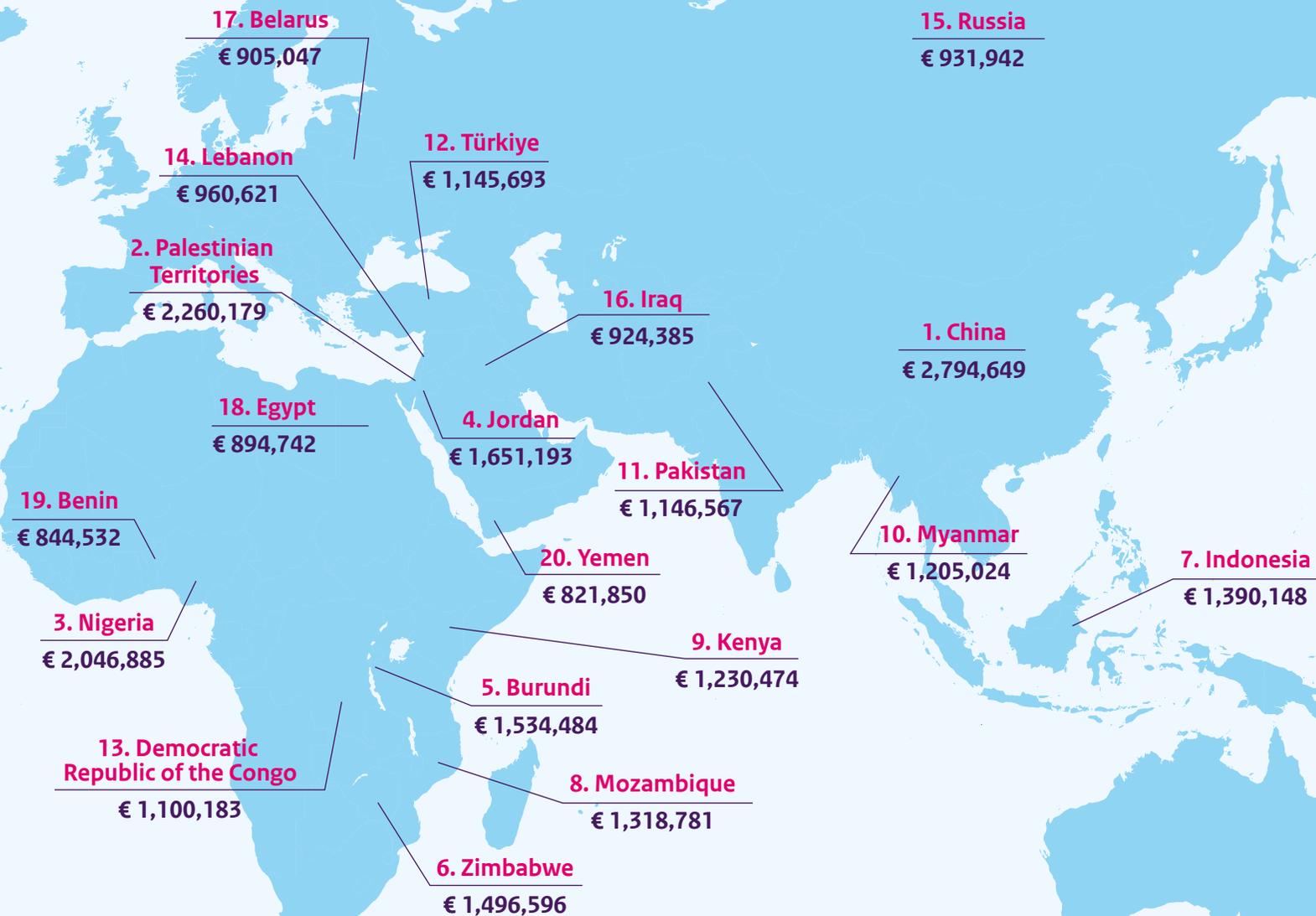
# Total expenditure by region (human rights fund and others)



- Freedom of expression and internet freedom
- Freedom of religion and belief
- Equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people
- Human rights defenders and civic space
- Tackling impunity for the most serious crimes
- Equal rights for women and girls
- Other funds

**TOTAL: € 103,412,216**

# Expenditure on human rights: top 20 countries (funding delegated to the missions)



**Expenditure on human rights: top 20 countries (funding delegated to the missions).**

|                                      | Expenditure in Euro's |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. China                             | 2,794,649             |
| 2. Palestinian Territories           | 2,260,179             |
| 3. Nigeria                           | 2,046,885             |
| 4. Jordan                            | 1,651,193             |
| 5. Burundi                           | 1,534,484             |
| 6. Zimbabwe                          | 1,496,596             |
| 7. Indonesia                         | 1,390,148             |
| 8. Mozambique                        | 1,318,781             |
| 9. Kenya                             | 1,230,474             |
| 10. Myanmar                          | 1,205,024             |
| 11. Pakistan                         | 1,146,567             |
| 12. Türkiye                          | 1,145,693             |
| 13. Democratic Republic of the Congo | 1,100,183             |
| 14. Lebanon                          | 960,621               |
| 15. Russia                           | 931,942               |
| 16. Iraq                             | 924,385               |
| 17. Belarus                          | 905,047               |
| 18. Egypt                            | 894,742               |
| 19. Benin                            | 844,532               |
| 20. Yemen                            | 821,850               |

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