



2019 DUBLIN PLATFORM

for human rights
defenders at risk

REPORT



Conference rapporteur, Jack Pope, reports on the 2019 Dublin Platform and offers summary and analysis of the key discussions, presentations and testimonies.

2019 Dublin Platform

The 2019 Dublin Platform was held from 2 to 4 October in Dublin Castle and convened 114 human rights defenders (HRDs) from 90 countries, along with a wide range of other international guests. This remarkable gathering provides HRDs with an opportunity to amplify their voices internationally, to engage with major stakeholders in the human rights field, and to learn effective strategies to help protect them in their work.

International guests included Simon Coveney TD, Tánaiste and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland; Eamon Gilmore, EU Special Representative on Human Rights; Ramanie Kunanayagam, member of the Inspection Panel of the World Bank and John Knox, former UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment. Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, each spoke at plenary sessions and participated in question and answer sessions with HRDs. Additionally, representatives of international organisations, donors and other diplomats and officials were present throughout the Platform to learn from and dialogue with the HRDs.

HRDs featured on panel discussions over the three days, focusing on protection in times of elections and political crises; gendered aspects of smear campaigns, hate speech and defamation against women HRDs; innovation in collective approaches to holistic protection; and

A series of working groups, organised by region, allowed HRDs to focus on key issues, including democratic deficits, impunity, gender discrimination, solidarity, fundraising, development, corruption, LGBTI+ issues, smear campaigns and disinformation, and physical and sexual violence, among others.

HRDs shared their experiences by presenting personal testimonies and reflections on their work, challenges, struggles and successes to a room full of fellow activists, all who are uniquely qualified to empathize and offer solidarity and support.

FLD's team of digital security experts was available to provide one-to-one support to HRDs in digital clinics, while one-to-one physical security clinics were also available to review physical and personal security strategies for the home, office, while travelling, or any other topic. A number of safe spaces and psychological wellbeing clinics were also provided.

On Thursday 3 October, following the day's session, HRDs, international guests and Front Line Defenders staff gathered for a vigil at Christchurch Cathedral's Crypt to launch the "Set Them Free" campaign, which calls for the release of HRDs facing multi-decade prison sentences. The campaign includes Bahraini HRD Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja (former Front Line Defenders Protection Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa), now serving a life sentence for his role in the peaceful pro-democracy protest movement of 2011.

The day before the start of the Platform, Front Line Defenders hosted a Donor Day for institutional donors. Participants included over 40 representatives from private trusts, foundations and governmental agencies who are working with HRDs at risk. The day provided a space for donors to share their analyses of issues impacting support to HRDs at risk, and to discuss how donors can enhance their reach, impact and collaboration.

"I have traveled through thousand miles, over mountains, over seas, and over countries to get here to this gathering of frontline human rights defenders to speak a secret violence that my people have lived through."

- Cressida Kuala (Papua New Guinea)





114 Human Rights Defenders from 90 countries participated in the 2019 Dublin Platform.



HRDs in Global Context

In recent years, support for HRDs from traditional allies has weakened, while attacks against HRDs have intensified. The pursuit of neoliberal politics, mass migration due to climate change and conflict, increasingly hostile digital spaces which generate and multiply disinformation and discrimination at warp speed, and the ever-intensifying push towards development at the expense of human rights guarantees unprecedented challenges for human rights defenders. The rise of authoritarian tendencies in countries that were traditional allies of the human rights movement- at least rhetorically - further jeopardizes the gains of the movement since the 1970s, causing HRDs to be more and more marginalized in spaces of political power.

Physical attacks, sexual violence, enforced disappearances, threats, intimidation, arbitrary arrest and detention, kidnappings, smear campaigns, attacks against organisations' offices, hacking, theft, including theft of sensitive documents, surveillance and repeated interrogations, were among the security concerns raised by HRDs at the Platform. While States are usually the prime perpetrators of these human rights violations, non-state actors such as armed groups, narcotraffickers, and mercenaries also frequently attack HRDs. This is especially prevalent in more rural areas or in conflict or post-conflict zones, such as Colombia and Iraq. In some circumstances non-state actors are used by governments as proxies to commit human rights abuses in order to escape culpability.

Michelle Bachelet noted that peace agreements in post-conflict environments must include accountability and transitional justice guarantees in order to combat self-sustaining cycles of impunity.

In addition to threats and physical attacks, HRDs are also criminalised in order to stop them from their work. The abuse of national security, corruption, cybercrime and disinformation or defamation laws against HRDs is frequently reported to FLD from every region in the world. The prosecution of HRDs can result in lengthy prison sentences and heavy fines, and also contributes to a narrative which portrays HRDs as terrorists, anti-state or anti-development. This targeting of HRDs is further compounded by judicial corruption or violations of fair trial guarantees in many countries.



Mary Lawlor, co-founder and Board Member of Front Line Defenders talks with EU Special Representative, Eamon Gilmore (l), and UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders, Michel Forst (r).

HRDs Unite! - Solidarity, Support & Networking

During the Platform, HRDs repeatedly stressed that establishing networks of solidarity and building support structures were vital for their work. HRD networks play an important role in disseminating information, providing support and solidarity, acting as early warning mechanisms, sharing protection and advocacy strategies and unifying groups of people behind common concerns. As noted by Shinta Ratri from Indonesia "I want to highlight the importance of networking...We can survive together if we stand for one another during the hard times." The importance of building community support at a grassroots level and empowering youth to become community leaders in order to carry on the struggle were also stressed as critical to the viability of the human rights movement.

Many of the participants mentioned that they had not realised that they were defenders, undertaking their valuable work solely because they thought it was right. A lack of self-identification as HRDs hinders them from accessing human rights mechanisms and resources for their work and protection, and from understanding legislation and resolutions which may apply to them. As explained by Antolín Galeano from Paraguay, HRDs feel more empowered and legitimised when someone puts a name to their work. This not only applies to self-legitimation, but also to legitimation from others.

The testimony sessions at the Platform were not only important in providing a stage for HRDs to relate their own personal experiences, concerns and successes, but also to provide motivation, hope and solidarity to all of the defenders in attendance. Most HRDs expressed that they felt inspired by the struggles of others, knowing that they were not alone, that others were fighting the same fight, and that they would go back to their work with renewed vigour.

It was, however, highlighted that in certain regions a lack of solidarity among HRDs resulted in a weakening of the human rights movement. It was noted that some defenders may view the human rights that they protect as more important than those protected by others, leading to reduced information and resource sharing and a failure to act cohesively toward common goals. An example was the invisibilisation of women's human rights issues. Additionally, certain HRDs are discriminated by some in the human rights community for the causes they support, such as LGBTI+ and sex workers' rights.

"Once we choose to raise our voice against injustice, we always have to be ready to face the government's persecution. That's why we must stay strong and never give up."

- Do Nam Trung (Vietnam)



HRDs Work For Us All - Narratives and Lawfare

Two recurrent themes during the Platform were the deployment of distorted narratives and smear campaigns to denigrate and delegitimise the work of HRDs and the use of restrictive legislation to hinder and criminalise their work. These strategies are mutually reinforcing; when HRDs are criminalised they lose legitimacy in the eyes of the public, and when they are subjected to disinformation or smear campaigns, they are more likely to be criminalised.

Narratives

HRDs are often targeted by government officials intent on stopping their work. Increasingly, officials deploy messaging that aims to marginalise HRDs from the mainstream and their communities, grouping HRDs with extremists, terrorists, secessionists or anti-development groups. In this construct, anyone who expresses dissent against the government is portrayed as an enemy of the people, and this can undercut essential community support and access to resources for HRDs.

Disinformation and smear campaigns are not only instrumentalised by authoritarian governments, but also used by non-state actors such as religious fundamentalist and right-wing nationalist groups, armed groups and even businesses. HRDs working to defend LGBTI+ and sex workers' rights are frequently portrayed as degrading traditional or cultural values, as explained by Ninia Kakabadze (Georgia) and a WHRD from Kenya; migrants' rights defenders are often accused of being smugglers or traffickers, as noted by Sophie Beau (France); and environmental defenders are portrayed as anti-development, defenders from many different regions testified. HRDs from minority and indigenous groups explained how they are often labeled as promoting inter-ethnic strife for simply standing up for the rights of their communities.

HRDs discussed these issues extensively during the regional working groups. The predominant view was that directly rejecting toxic narratives only provides them with more oxygen. Rather, what was found to be important was the introduction of new narratives, directly focusing on the beneficial results of HRDs' work in the communities they support. Participants reviewed a myriad of strategies that they used, including involving communities in human rights events, disseminating effective information on positive achievements, highlighting the sources of human rights violations (from where most disinformation campaigns originate), introducing new language surrounding HRDs' work, using new media to display unedited interviews and organising community gatherings in order to counteract negative spin.

Lawfare

HRDs discussed the challenges they face as a result of legislation regulating digital spaces, disinformation, public gatherings and non-governmental organisations. When such legislation is introduced, it is usually explained as targeting legitimate objectives such as halting the spread of hate speech and fake news, upholding public order or morals, protecting national security or stemming the financing of terrorist organisations. However, laws are often used in order to suppress dissent against governments and to silence critics. This also leads to a climate of self-censorship and legal insecurity.

Legislation regarding funding in many countries has limited access to valuable resources from international donors, inhibiting the ability of HRDs to carry out their work. In many cases, organisations that receive international funding are labelled 'foreign agents' representing the interests of other governments. Additionally, legislation limiting the registration of organisations due to their politically sensitive nature or their failure to fit into government-defined development plans (as in Laos) restricts organisations' access to funding due to the hesitance of international donors to support unregistered associations. While international human rights law protects freedom of association regardless of legal status, withholding registration from these organisations robs them of a degree of legitimacy that is crucial to access funds.





HRDs Need Justice - Accountability and Impunity

Shahidul Alam, HRD from Bangladesh, pointed out that if a climate of impunity is allowed to prosper it can create a vicious cycle whereby a lack of justice engenders further injustice. The reasons for failures in accountability which were raised by HRDs at the Platform were numerous, including weak or non-existent institutions, corruption, state acquiescence, police inaction, and media fatigue, especially in conflict and post-conflict areas.

In many countries, and as especially highlighted by HRDs in the MENA region, judiciaries are often characterised by a lack of independence from the executive and are often instrumentalised in order to achieve politically motivated results. HRDs are frequently denied fair trial guarantees, experience protracted pre-trial detention and lengthy and oft-delayed trials, and receive hefty sentences and/or fines. In other countries, notably in Latin America, compromised judicial officials receive bribes from non-state actor perpetrators, such as narcotraffickers or business enterprises, in order to ensure that these actors are protected from judicial accountability. This topic was explored in greater detail during the Platform's panel discussion on "corruption as a driver of insecurity", featuring HRDs from the Solomon Islands, Israel and Peru, and a representative of the World Bank.

HRDs, especially those from more rural areas, indigenous or ethnic-minority communities, or from the LGBTI+ community, also expressed their concerns over police complicity in human rights violations. Many HRDs who are stigmatised by their communities are hesitant or refuse to report human rights violations, threats or attacks to police out of fear of being disregarded, ridiculed or attacked. HRDs also fear that their reports may be passed on to intelligence agents.

In other cases, police may simply refuse to register a complaint, as explained by Sarada Devi Chanda (Nepal). Even in those countries with HRD protection mechanisms, many HRDs complained that they were not effectively implemented.

The panel discussion on "protection in time of elections and political crises" addressed the core issue of governmental accountability in contexts where free and fair elections are unable to take place. Shahidul Alam from Bangladesh recalled how t-shirt campaigns, protests and meticulous evidence and testimonial gathering were of great importance in registering dissent to the botched political process. Shamael Al-Noor (Sudan) stressed that momentum must be maintained in political protests, and that insufficient political compromises must be resisted.

The impunity of non-state perpetrators of human rights violations was also raised as a key concern. Religious fundamentalist groups in theocratic or semi-theocratic states often operate without accountability and maintain significant community support, while violations caused by multinational corporations, especially in the extractive sector, are often committed either with the complicity or acquiescence of governments.

During the question and answer session with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, a number of HRDs raised concerns that the international community is often reluctant to speak up about human rights violations in certain countries due to diplomatic, military or economic ties and interests. This concern was echoed by the High Commissioner, who responded that in such circumstances it is also necessary to expose these ties and incorporate them into international advocacy efforts.

HRDs, Gender & Sexual Orientation

Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) at the platform explained that they were doubly stigmatised, both in the context of their human rights work and their gender identity. During a panel discussion on the gendered aspects of smear campaigns, hate speech and defamation against WHRDs, all panelists agreed that they had experienced difficulties in gaining legitimacy for their work. LGBTI+ defenders stated that they faced similar difficulties as a result of either their gender identity or their sexual orientation.

Sexual violence and attacks targeting close family are significantly more frequently experienced by WHRDs and LGBTI+ defenders. During the discussion, female panelists also noticed a marked difference in the style of disinformation and smear campaigns which are used against them, in comparison to their male counterparts. While campaigns targeting male HRDs usually address the substantive work that they carry out, smearing of WHRDs generally focuses on the defenders themselves, questioning their morality, ethics or sex lives.

WHRDs and LGBTI+ defenders face serious difficulties when carrying out their work in more conservative cultures. Traditional gender roles place additional burdens on WHRDs, reducing their capacity to carry out their work, while the invisibilisation of the challenges that WHRDs and LGBTI+ defenders face makes it harder for them to bring their concerns to the fore, including within human rights friendly spaces.

Defenders working on womens' and LGBTI+ rights may face difficulties within the larger human rights movement, with their causes being viewed as less important, and at times even being stigmatised by larger, more mainstream organisations. This creates obstacles for them in gaining solidarity and networking effectively. Participants at the platform stressed the need to affirm the indivisibility and equality of all human rights.

Finally, these defenders noted that there was a lack of specific language in HRD legislation to address the difficulties that WHRDs and LGBTI+ defenders face. They also noted that due to cultural and, in some cases, legislative opposition to their causes, womens' and LGBTI+ rights organisations find it near impossible to access funding due to obstacles to registration in a number of countries.



HRDs Are Not Anti-Development! - Development, Business & Economic Security

HRDs highlighted their concerns over the human rights violations which result from the actions of companies, with many noting that neo-liberal policies took precedence over local development models to the detriment of local populations. Those most affected were environmental, land rights and indigenous HRDs, who advocate against pollution, deforestation, lack of access to resources and the destruction and resettlement of indigenous communities, among other violations. These types of defenders also represented over 40% of HRDs killed in 2019.

HRDs from all regions expressed, both during their testimonials and during the working groups, that companies place significant amounts of resources into discrediting their work and portraying them as anti-development or propagators of poverty. The companies also bring resources and employment to some sections of the community, which then sews divisions and mistrust.

HRDs Online - Digital Space

HRDs were enthusiastic with regard to the range of new media platforms available to express themselves, disseminate information and make their voices heard to wider audiences. However, a frequent talking point involved the threats and incendiary rhetoric that HRDs experience in online spaces. Others spoke of their experience with doxxing and the uploading of doctored photos in attempts to discredit them, and many HRDs expressed that they were unsure how to deal with these types of harassment.

Anonymity in digital spaces makes it difficult or impossible to identify where threats and harassment originate from, making accountability for such harassment a point of concern. It also makes it difficult to halt these types of violations. Moreover, the complaints mechanisms that social media platforms operate seem opaque and ineffective to HRDs. Often, threatening social media posts remain online despite objections lodged by HRDs, while, conversely, HRDs at the Platform reported having their social media profiles blocked or their posts taken down due to excessive complaints from trolling groups or through government influence on social media companies.

One HRD from Uganda noted that they were blocked from a social media site for 24 hours because of a complaint they lodged against an offensive post. A

This has the effect of alienating HRDs from the communities that they are trying to defend and diminishing the support structures on which they rely. Concern over how to address and combat these efforts dominated discussion at the Platform, with ideas ranging from providing human rights education for community members and highlighting the positive aspects of HRD work among many that were offered.

In this regard, the Special Rapporteur on HRDs noted that his mandate had increased its contact with companies who perpetrate human rights violations in order to advocate for HRD protection. He attributed this largely to fears that a reputational hit on corporations could have negative effects on finances.



key factor in combating these types of difficulties was the identification of “human rights champions” working in these organisations through effective networking – content moderators or other social media employees who understand the threats that HRDs face online and who will act quickly in order to ensure their protection.

It was highlighted that the digitisation of documents was a useful method of ensuring against physical theft and loss of information, however this presents equal dangers if the systems that HRDs use are not secured. During the Platform, digital security clinics were offered by Front Line Defenders Digital Protection Coordinators who provided guidance to HRDs on how to effectively protect themselves and their information in digital spaces.

In terms of solutions, HRDs focused on holistic and psychological responses to online harassment. During the panel discussion on gendered aspects of smear campaigns, hate speech and defamation against women human rights defenders, Irina Matvienko (Uzbekistan) noted that, when experiencing this sort of harassment, excessive amounts of time spent on online platforms can make it seem like the world is closing in on you. She highlighted the importance of online support groups that can counteract negative messages with those of support, solidarity and motivation.



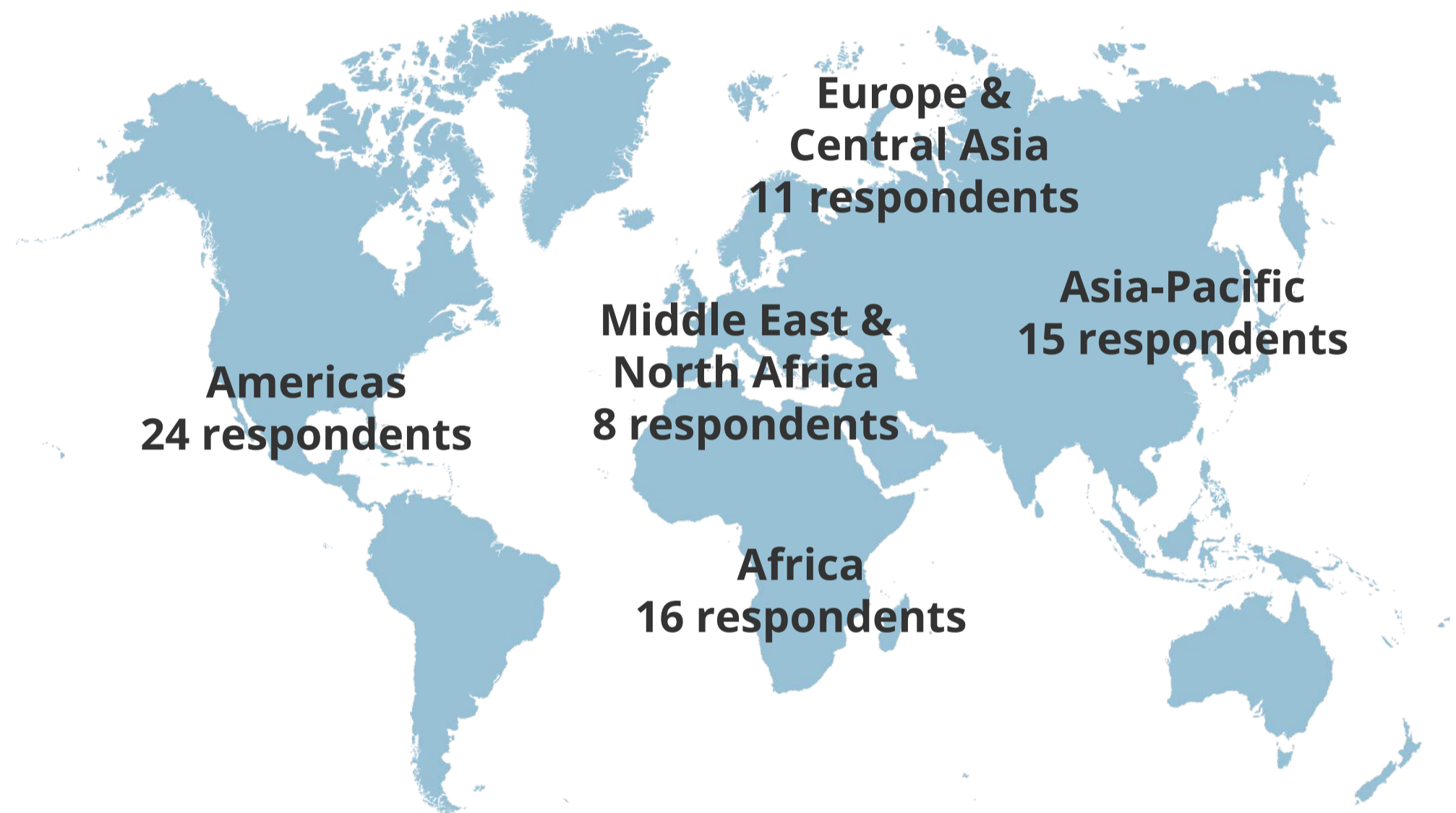
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet (above); HRDs mingling during breaks in the Platform programme (below).





Survey of Human Rights Defenders at Risk

In advance of the Dublin Platform, Front Line Defenders conducted a survey designed to analyse global risk levels for HRDs and to garner a snapshot of the issues impacting HRDs. In total, 74 HRDs completed the survey (30 male, 41 female, 1 transgender and 2 non-binary defenders). The regional breakdown was: 16 respondents from Africa, 15 from Asia, 11 from Europe and Central Asia, 24 HRDs from the Americas, and 8 from the Middle East and North Africa. While the sample group for this survey was relatively small, Front Line Defenders believes the value of the findings comes from the diversity of the participants of the Dublin Platform, the cross section of issues the HRDs are working on, and the global representation of the group.

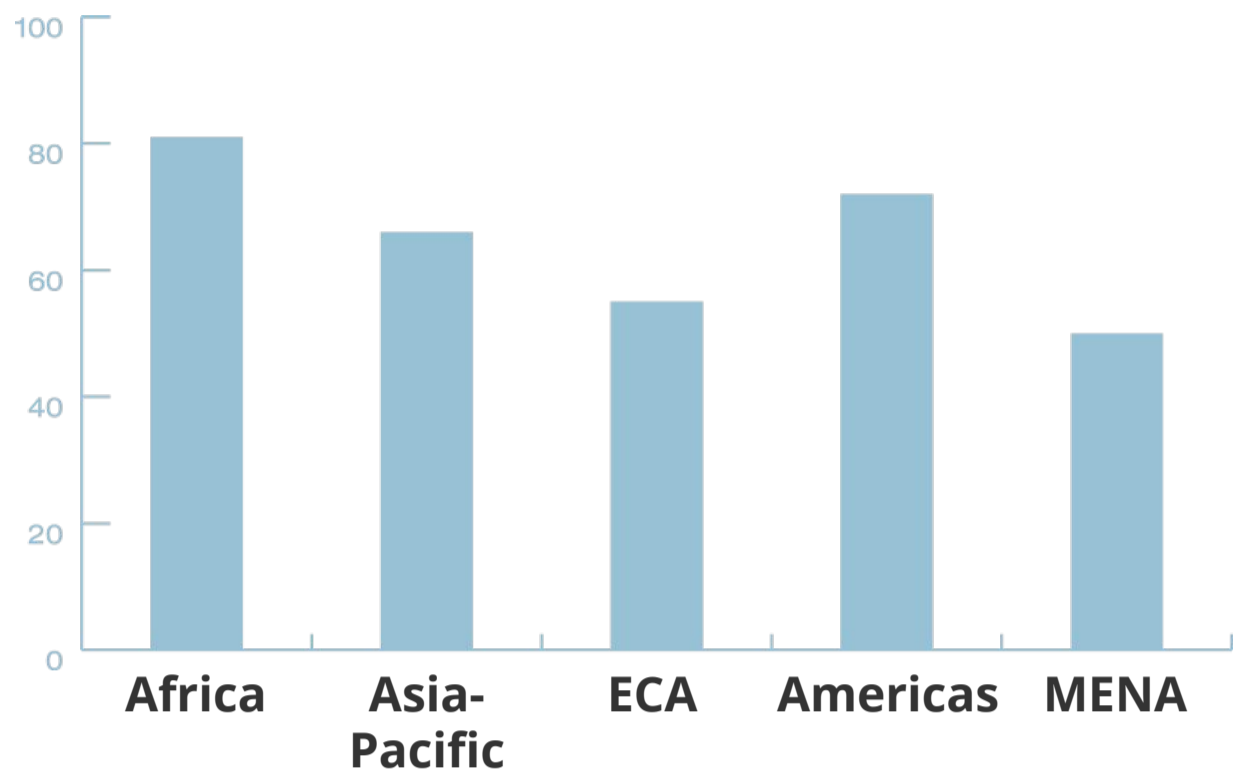




70% of HRDs felt there had been positive developments for human rights and human rights defenders in their country in the last two years

REGIONAL BREAKDOWN:

Percentage of respondents whose country has experienced success or positive developments in the last two years



Despite the dangerous and unstable contexts in which they are working, HRDs continue to drive social change and human rights victories around the world. The most frequently cited examples of successes from survey respondents either came from the introduction of new legislation favouring human rights or judicial decisions in favour of HRDs or their work. Increased public awareness of the work which HRDs carry out was also frequently noted.

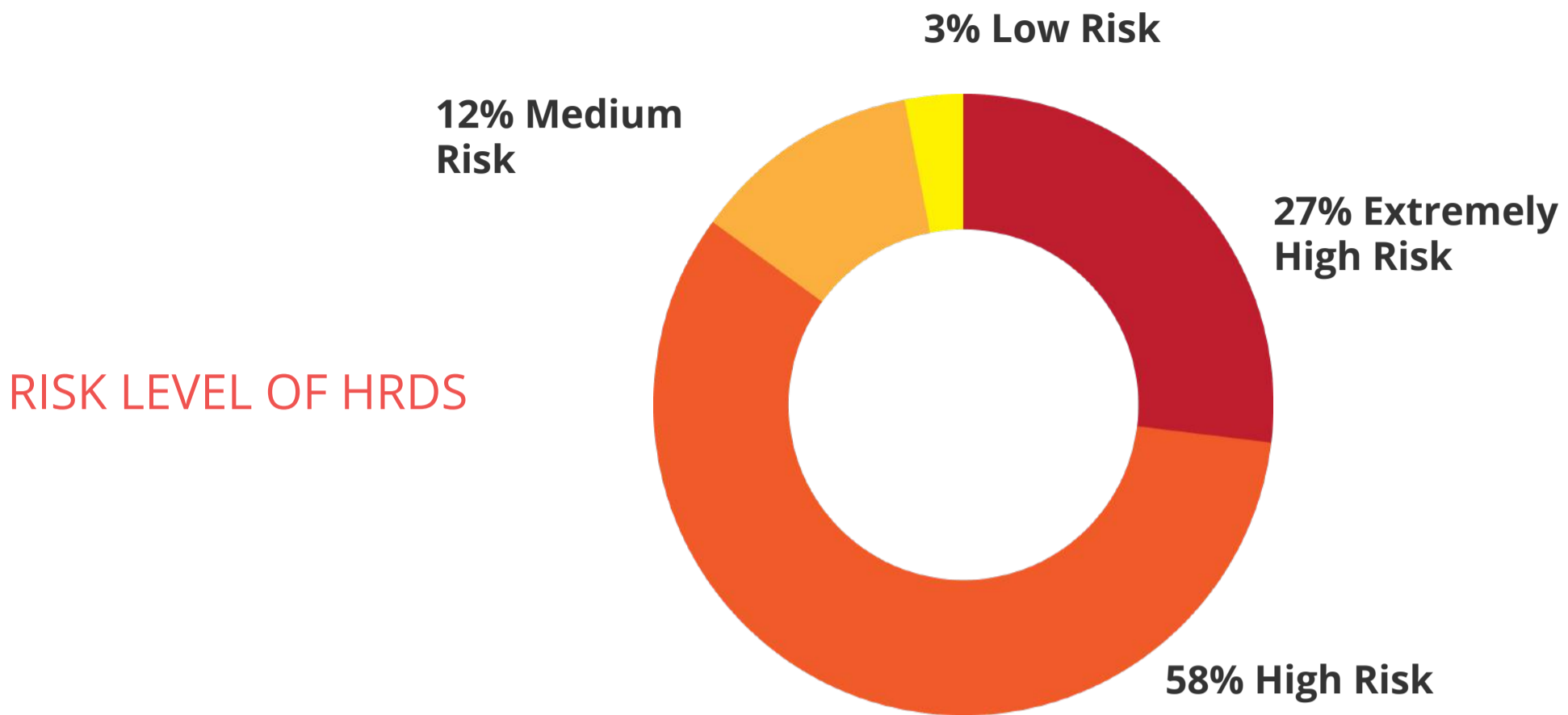
HRDs surveyed highlighted the following positive examples from their regions:

- Respondents from **Africa** noted increased sensitivity and awareness from police forces in some countries; the introduction of HRD specific legislation; increased number of meetings with high-level officials; the creation of human rights specific round tables; Increased youth mobilisation; and increased prior consultation on development projects.
- In certain countries in **Europe & Central Asia**, HRDs reported decreased levels of surveillance and judicial harassment.
- In the **Americas**, HRDs reported positive political change and progress on the introduction of HRD specific legislation. Additional improvements which were noted included increased levels of accountability and growth in institutional trust.
- Respondents in the **Asia-Pacific** region reported improvement in interaction and networking within the human rights movement.
- HRDs in the **MENA** region reported the evolution of innovative forms of social protest.

Specific examples of successes which were provided by HRDs included: the popular rejection of the commutation of the sentences of persons convicted of crimes against humanity in Argentina; the release of political prisoners from the Tlanixco indigenous community in Mexico; improvement in conditions for Carlsberg and Coca Cola employees in Cambodia; the passage of a land rights act in Liberia; the securing of government funding to fight HIV, malaria and tuberculosis in Venezuela; the introduction of specific HIV policy for men who have sex with men in Malawi; the protection of the Zoka Central Forest Reserve in Uganda; the introduction of a sexual violence bill in Somalia; and the introduction of HRD specific legislation.

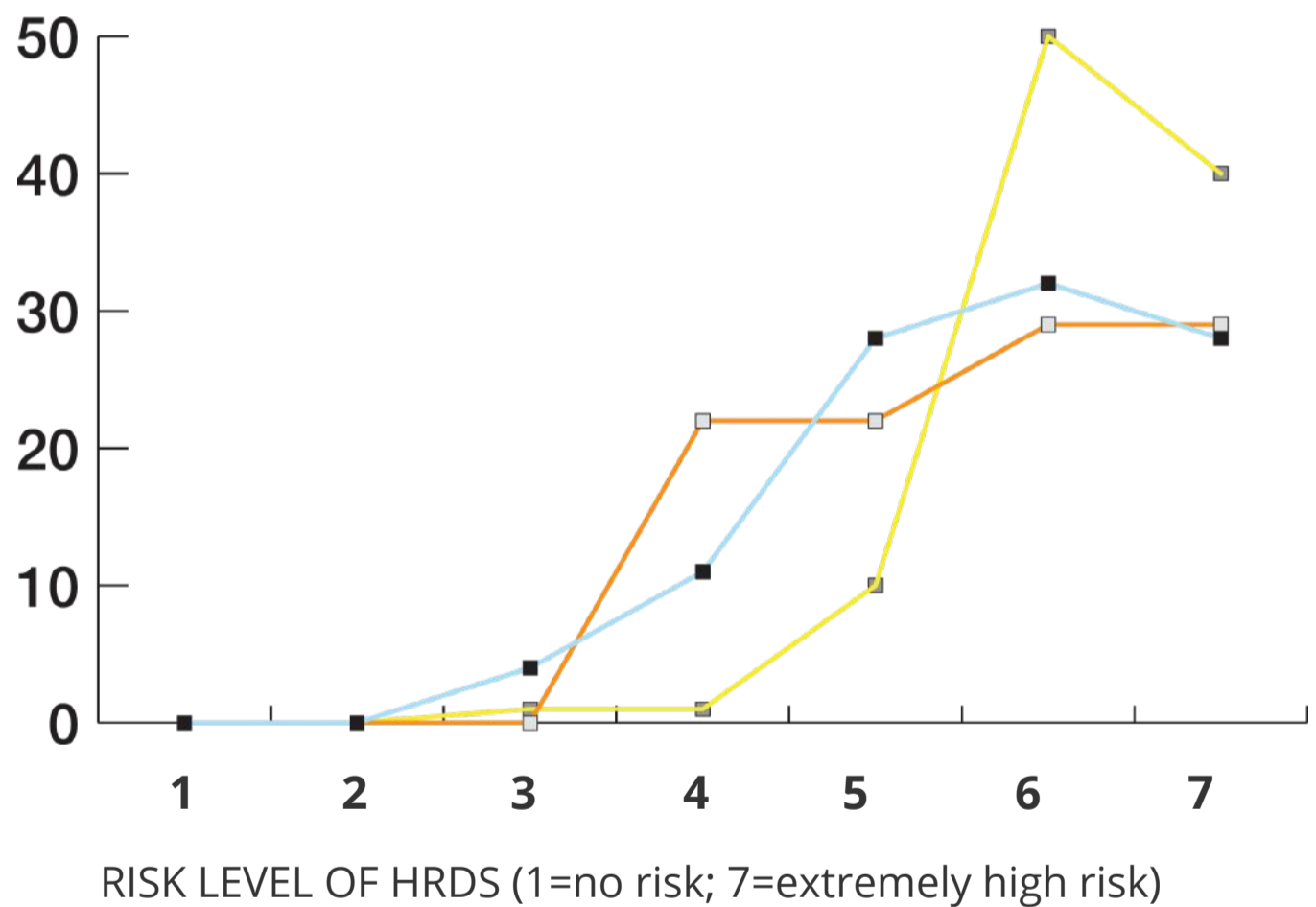


85% of the respondents felt that their risk level was high or extremely high



RISK LEVEL OF HRDS

Two groups that reported higher levels of risk were environmental rights defenders and those defending LGBTQI+ rights.



Multiple HRDs listed authoritarian governments, corruption, lack of judicial independence and impunity as drivers of risk to HRDs, especially in the Africa, Americas and Asia regions. Political unrest was similarly noted in the Africa region as a factor increasing risk. Armed conflict and the use of military courts were also cited as reasons for elevated risk levels, while threats and violence from non-state actors were highlighted in the Africa, Americas and MENA regions. In Europe, rising nationalism and stigmatic discourse from politicians and the media were considered to be an important factor in determining risk.

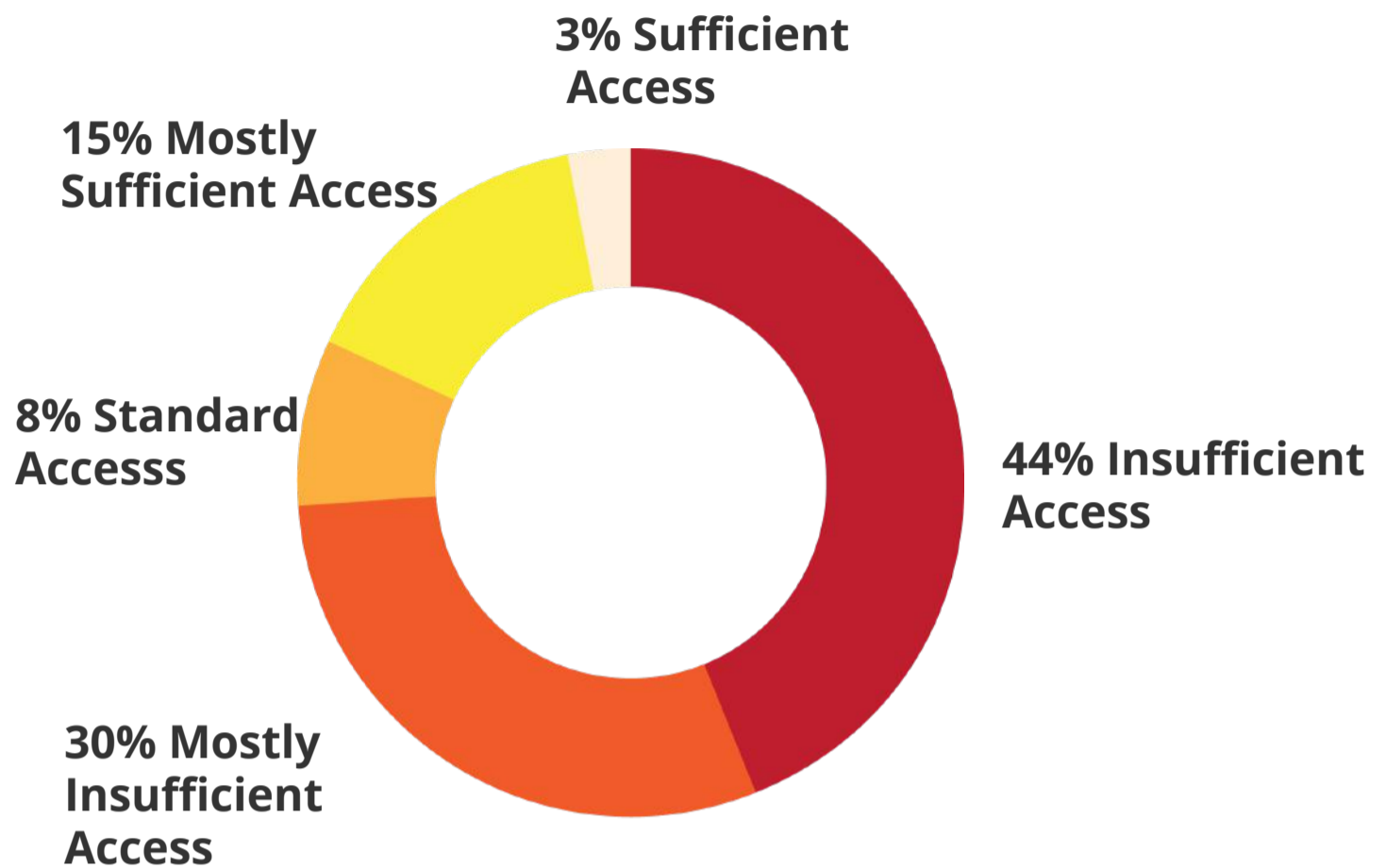
It is important to note, as highlighted above, that the HRDs attending the Dublin Platform are invited as they are known to be particularly at risk.

Two groups which reported higher levels of risk were environmental rights defenders and those working on LGBTQI+ rights.



Only 18% of HRDs stated that they felt that they had sufficient or mostly sufficient access to local protection support, thus highlighting the need for increased support for local protection mechanisms

HRDs' ACCESS TO LOCAL EMERGENCY SUPPORT



POSITIVE EXAMPLES OF SUPPORT WHICH WERE NOTED BY HRDs INCLUDED CROWDFUNDING, A HRD LAWYERS' NETWORK IN ASIA, AND NATIONAL COALITIONS FOR HRDs IN AFRICA.

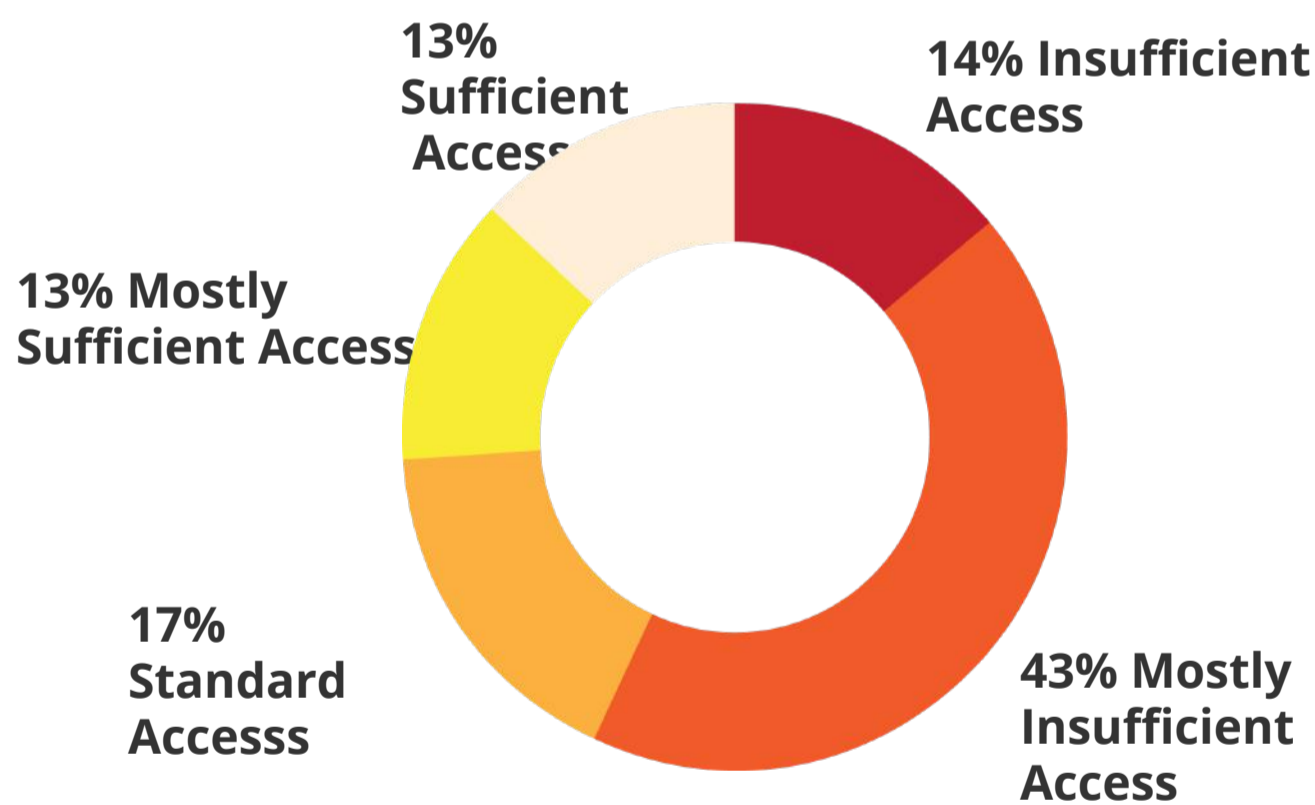
With regard to local support, HRDs in Africa, Americas and Asia reported that where support was available it was generally ineffective, inefficient, or under resourced to deal with the levels of risk and number of HRDs requiring support. A HRD from Africa specifically noted that internal conflicts in organisations providing local emergency support had a detrimental impact on the efficacy of this support. Another HRD from the same region stated that LGBTQI+ organisations have difficulty in accessing support due to laws against homosexuality. Lack of awareness of existing state protection mechanisms was noted in the Americas, and it was also mentioned that local actors are often the main perpetrators in this region. A respondent from MENA stated that there was a lack of national protection mechanisms for HRDs.





27% of respondents stated that there is sufficient or mostly sufficient access to international support

HRDS' ACCESS TO INTERNATIONAL EMERGENCY SUPPORT



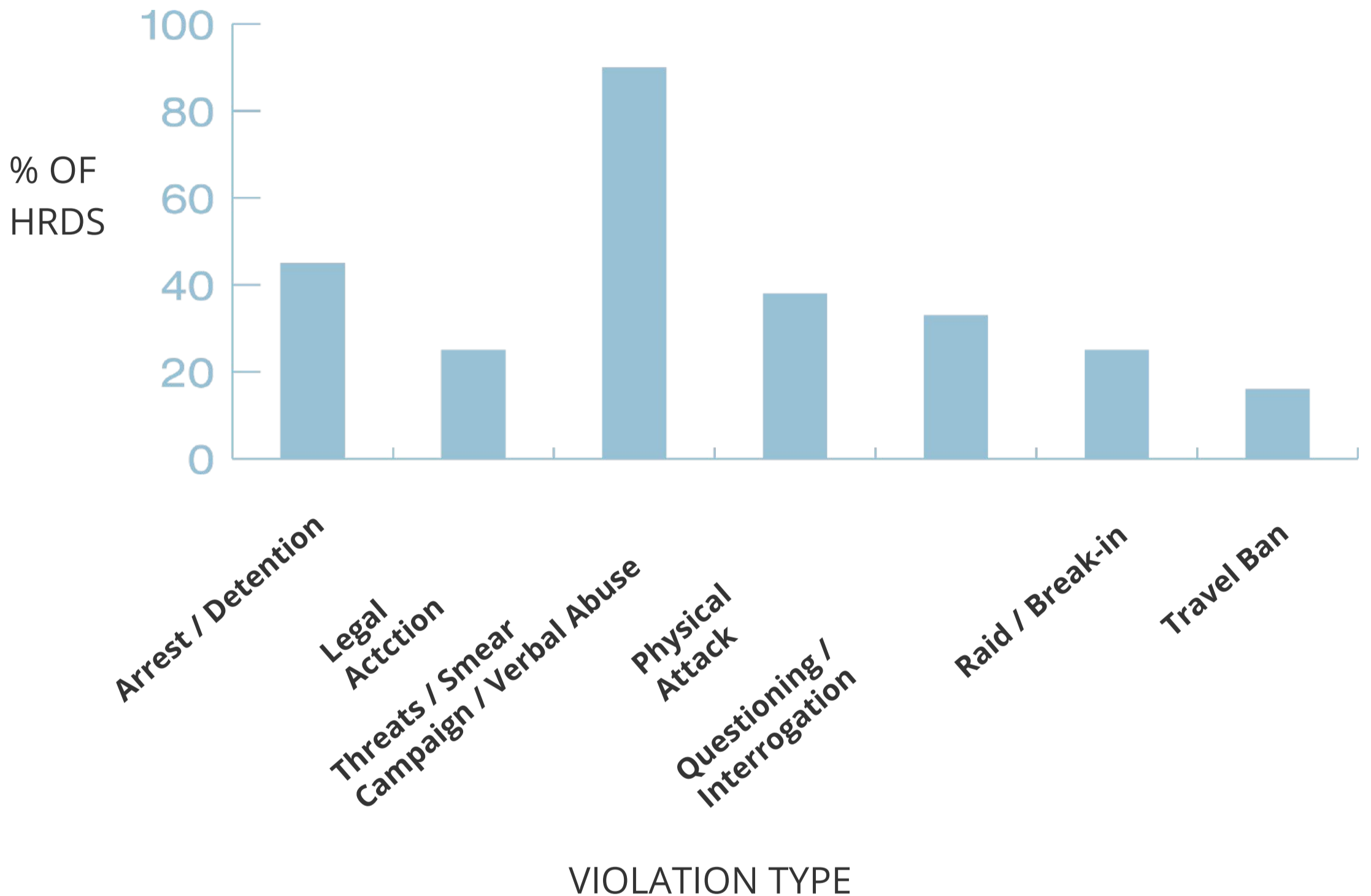
POSITIVE ELEMENTS OF INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT INCLUDED LEGITIMATION THROUGH PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND THE PRESSURE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS PUT ON GOVERNMENTS TO MEET THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS.

Difficulties identified by respondents included slow, inefficient, underfunded or overly bureaucratic support mechanisms, and lack of awareness of the available international support. Smaller NGOs and lesser known HRDs struggle in obtaining international support, either due to a lack of connections or a lack of capacity to look into available support options. Fears were noted over being associated with international actors, lest they be branded as propagating foreign interests.



90% of respondents stated that they had suffered “threats, smear campaigns and verbal abuse” within the last two years

VIOLATIONS FACED BY HRDS



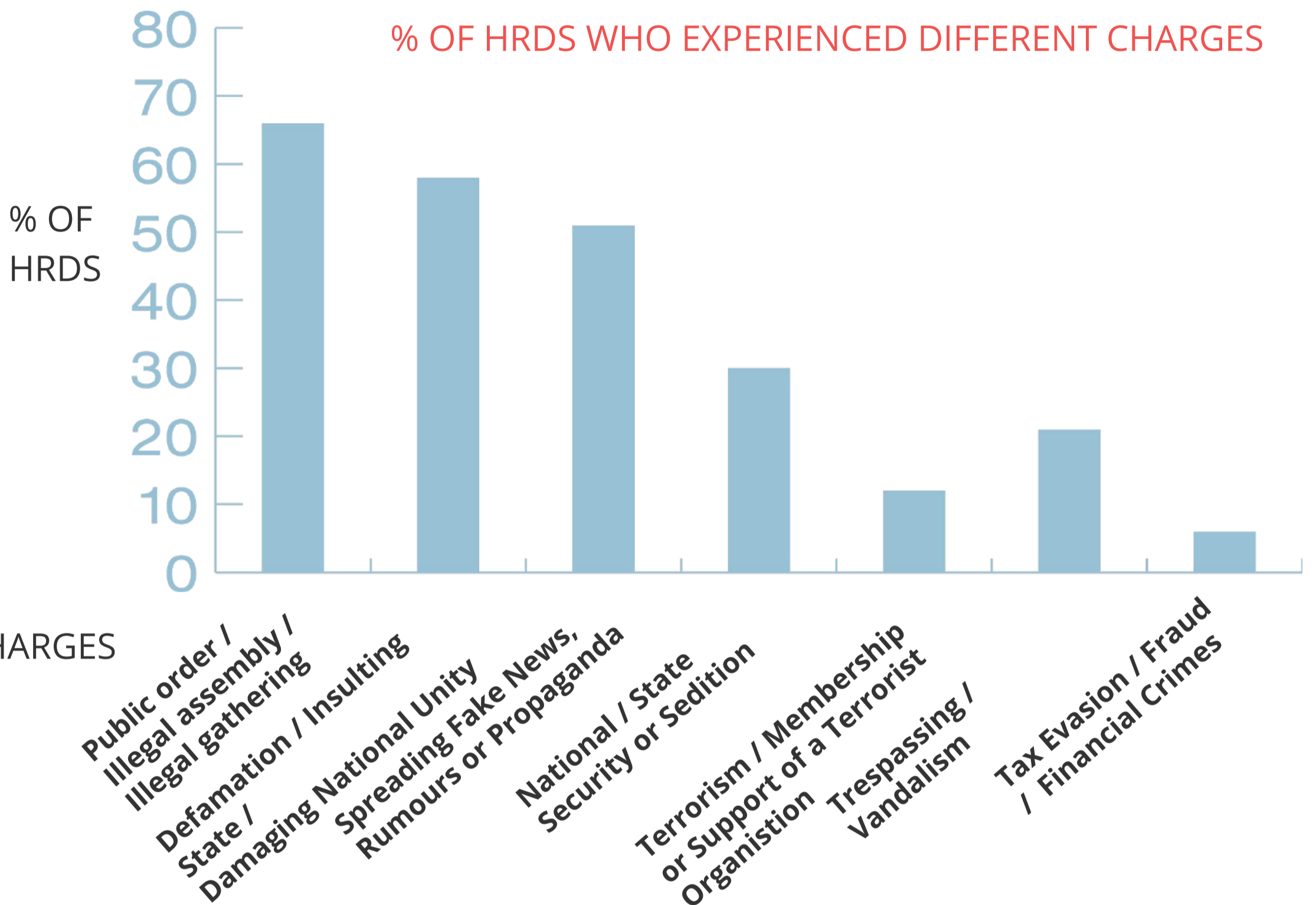
90% OF RESPONDENTS STATED THAT THEY HAD SUFFERED "THREATS, SMEAR CAMPAIGNS AND VERBAL ABUSE" WITHIN THE LAST TWO YEARS.

Aligned to FLD’s analysis from our Urgent Appeals and advocacy work, the results also highlighted that WHRDs are disproportionately impacted by defamation and smear campaigns with 97% of WHRDs stating that they suffered this threat, compared to 86% of male HRDs.

Among the other violations noted by HRDs were: attacks targeting family members; attacks on employment, possessions and livelihood; denial of NGO registration or press accreditation; attacks on privacy such as doxxing, cyber attacks; bank freezes; kidnapping, and sexual harassment or violence.



The most frequently cited legislative barrier across all regions related to laws restricting freedom of assembly.



73% OF HRDS REPORTED THAT THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS WORK WAS UNFAVOURABLE OR EXTREMELY UNFAVOURABLE.

Legislation requiring prior authorisation for protests or restricting the time, place and manner in which they can be carried out was noted by multiple respondents. This was particularly noted for organising protests or demonstrations supporting LGBTQI+ or other politically sensitive topics.

Another issue which was mentioned by respondents across all regions was restrictive legislation with regards to the establishment and functioning of NGOs. More specifically, barriers to registration were noted, either due to excessive bureaucratic processes or due to the sensitive or illegal topics which the organisations deal with, such as LGBTQI+ rights. Excessive reporting requirements were also mentioned, which placed burdens on and sap the resources of smaller NGOs, and foreign funding legislation was considered to be an obstacle to the work of NGOs in the Eurasia Region.

The use of vague or overly broad legislation, such as related to terrorism or national security laws, in order to target HRDs for their work, was noted as a critical threat. Defamation, disinformation, propaganda and cyber security laws were also noted as presenting obstacles. In countries where judicial independence is compromised, such laws pose serious risks to HRDs.

Other legal restrictions that were noted included vague smuggling laws in the context of migrant rights defenders (Europe) and the degradation of environmental and land rights legislation in favour of pro-development policies. The most commonly cited legal charges faced by respondents or their colleagues were: public order charges and defamation, including insulting the state, damaging national unity.



74% of WHRDs stated that they had experienced threats, harassment or violence because of their gender.



CONSERVATIVE CULTURES AND TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES WERE CITED AS KEY FACTORS IMPACTING WHRD SECURITY ACROSS ALL REGIONS.

In MENA, this was linked to religiously based accusations such as atheism, while in Africa, one HRD stated that WHRDs are accused of being overly westernised. Harassment such as defamation, smear campaigns, and the publication of personal information were frequently noted. Infantilisation of WHRDs or trivialisation of their work was reported in Africa, the Americas and Europe, and a WHRD from the Africa region stated that relevant interlocutors preferred to interact with males only.

Sexual violence or harassment was mentioned by respondents from the Africa and Americas regions. Online harassment was also raised by participants from the Asia, Europe and MENA regions.

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66% of WHRD respondents felt that a problem of gender-based discrimination and harassment within human rights organisations and the human rights movement was common or pervasive.



THE MOST FREQUENTLY CITED REASON FOR THE PRESENCE OF GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT WAS THE EXISTENCE OF PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES AND CULTURES WHICH PROMOTED CONSERVATIVE CONCEPTIONS OF FEMALE GENDER ROLES.

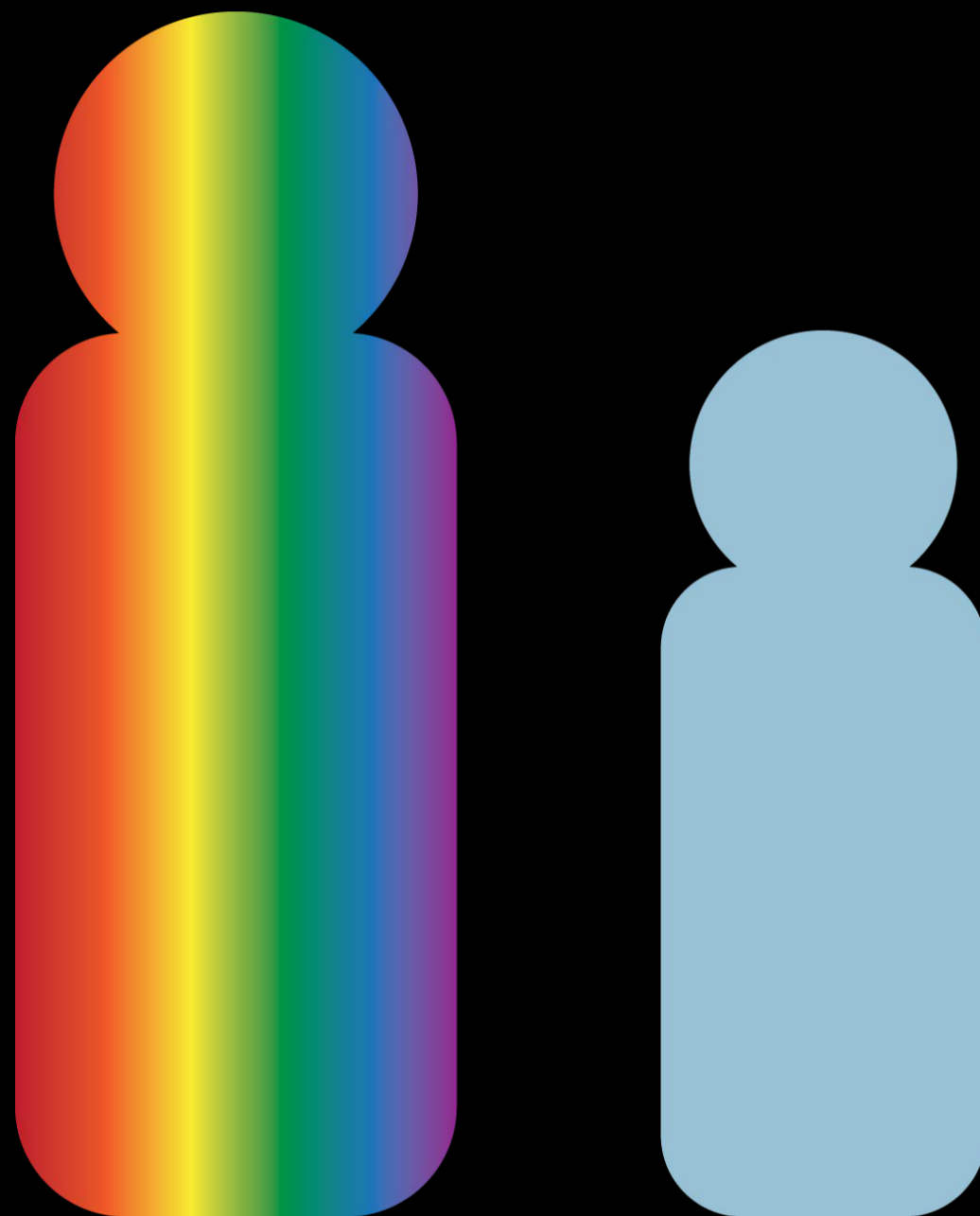
In the MENA region it was stated that, due to a conservative culture, many women do not see themselves as permitted or fit to work in human rights organisations. In the Americas, it was noted that the number of males in leadership positions was disproportionately large. Trivialisation and lack of visibility for human rights issues affecting women were cited in the Americas and Africa as obstacles to networking with other human rights organisations as WHRDs' work was taken less seriously and considered a lower priority.

In MENA and Africa, respondents noted that speaking out about sexual harassment remained taboo, and this extended speaking out about harassment and discrimination within human rights organisations. A respondent from the MENA region also noted that most human rights organisations lack internal policies on such topics and so are ill-equipped to react effectively when gender-based discrimination or harassment arise. In the Americas, it was stated that when the focus of an organisation is to resist state violence, internal violence is often covered up.

It is also interesting to note that 37% of male respondents stated that a problem of gender-based discrimination and harassment within human rights organisations and the human rights movement was common or pervasive.

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80% of HRDs working on LGBTQI+ rights think that the issue of homophobia, transphobia or other types of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity is common or pervasive within human rights organisations and the human rights movement as a whole in their countries



45% OF HRDS WHO ARE NOT WORKING ON LGBTQI+ RIGHTS THINK THAT THE ISSUE IS COMMON OR PERVASIVE, HIGHLIGHTING THE DIFFERENCE PERCEPTIONS BY NON-LGBTQI+ HRDS AND THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQI+ HRDS.

Many of the respondents outlined similar difficulties to those raised above with regards to Gender-based discrimination, including cultural stigmatisation with regards to their work, a lack of leadership positions for LGBTQI+ defenders and the trivialisation of LGBTQI+ issues, which are allegedly seen as lower priority. Religious attitudes were also frequently cited as an important element in scoring. It was noted that more conservative human rights organisations prefer not to associate with or do not accept the LGBTQI+ community, while in MENA it was stated that some organisations fear being connected with LGBTQI+ organisations or defenders, as doing so may have a detrimental effect on their ability to carry out their work or result in criminal charges.

The most frequently reported obstacle to public support for human rights work was fear of association with HRDs and human rights organisations given the sensitive topics on which they work.



30% OF RESPONDENTS SAID THAT PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THEIR WORK WAS STRONG OR VERY STRONG.

Obstacles to public support noted included:

- smear campaigns and defamation make it difficult for HRDs to garner public support;
- lack of public understanding of the work;
- difficulties from being portrayed as anti-development;
- cultural and religious stigma regarding women and LGBTQI+ defenders;
- lack of faith in the judicial system;
- inefficacy and poor governance of human rights organisations;
- low prioritisation of human rights.



Respondents identified the following needs that would allow HRDs to continue their work:

LONG TERM SUPPORT

INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY

DIGITAL SECURITY

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR WORK

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR

VISIBILITY & MEDIA

EXPOSURE

SUPPORT IN ADDRESSING GENDER-SPECIFIC

RISKS

THEMATIC HUMAN RIGHTS

TRAININGS

SUPPORT IN COMMUNITY

EDUCATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

ISSUES

INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY FOR THE

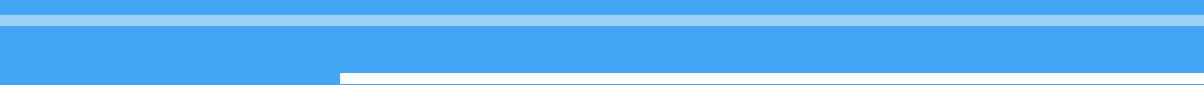
ADOPTION OF HRD SPECIFIC

LEGISLATION

SUPPORT IN ADDRESSING GENDER-SPECIFIC

RISKS

ENGLISH LESSONS



Front Line Defenders is grateful for the generous support

Al-Jazeera Media Network
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Arcus Foundation
Belgian Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs
Bread for the World
Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation
Channel Foundation
Environmental Defenders Collaborative
European Commission
Ford Foundation
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German Federal Foreign Office
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Hivos International
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Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund
Lifes2good Foundation
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Mize Family Foundation
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Overbrook Foundation
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Roddick Foundation
Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
The Swedish Postcode Lottery
Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
Taiwan Foundation for Democracy
Tikva Grassroots Empowerment Fund
Violet Jabara Charitable Trust
Wallace Global Fund
11th Hour Project

As is tradition, the Dublin Platform included a strong cultural component. Irish singer and songwriter Cathy Jordan performed at the opening plenary, while The Strawmen (pictured here) performed at the closing event. Wearing costumes that obscure their faces, 'straw boys' were groups of revellers disguised in straw costume and wearing conical straw hats over their faces, have traditionally visited weddings to dance with the bride and other women, entertained with music, songs and jokes. Their presence was believed to bring luck, wealth and health to the newlyweds.

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Onesima Riquelme Lienqueo from Chile receiving a hug after presenting her testimony detailing the discrimination and problems faced by her indigenous Mapuche community.