

Tracking civic space trends¹

WHAT IS CIVIC SPACE?

All people, no matter their gender, age or socio-economic status, have the **right to have a say, freely and safely**, regarding decisions that affect their lives and future. Civic space is the environment in which they use **formal and informal channels at different levels** to express their opinions, mobilise others and influence public debate and decision-making. **States, through laws, policies and practices they put in place, shape the space.** Assessing civic space means assessing the degree of enjoyment of public freedoms.

WHY TRACK CIVIC SPACE TRENDS?

As civic space constantly evolves, tracking trends allows different stakeholders to detect emerging challenges and opportunities. This enables authorities and other relevant actors to respond to concerns in a timely manner. A better understanding of the extent to which different people can make their voices heard and the obstacles they face when doing so, is critical to craft more effective policies, programmes, and advocacy strategies to promote human rights, sustainable development and peace.

¹ Based on the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights report \(A/HRC/57/31\) on challenges and best practices in assessing civic space trends \(July 2024\)](#)



BARRIERS TO COLLECTING AND ACCESSING UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION, INCLUDING:

- attacks and threats against those who collect data on the ground
- lack of access to official data or mechanisms to effectively access data (e.g. at local level and administrative decisions/judicial information)
- low quality data, lack of disaggregation

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES WHEN ASSESSING CIVIC SPACE?

CHALLENGES TO PROCESSING AND ANALYSING DATA:

- limited capacity and resources
- limited tools for assessing and reporting on online civic space
- inconsistency in terminology and methods

HOW IS ONLINE CIVIC SPACE BEING TRACKED?



By following the adoption of laws relating to digital space and related jurisprudence



By collecting data on online attacks, including coordinated campaigns



By monitoring the use of surveillance technology and other privacy intrusive tools



By recording internet shutdowns and incidents of blocking websites and specific content

6 AREAS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

For States:

- ✓ **MAXIMIZE ACCESS** to relevant data at all levels, including judicial and administrative decisions & strengthen regulatory frameworks with a view to increasing transparency by companies
- ✓ **CLARIFY** which state institutions are responsible for collecting and sharing civic space data & support relevant actors who collect and disaggregate data, including National Human Rights Institutions and statistics agencies
- ✓ **ENSURE THE SAFETY** of those who collect civic space data; acknowledge and remedy immediate and long-term risks
- ✓ **RECOGNIZE THE VITAL CONTRIBUTIONS** of those who collect civic space data on the ground; give visibility and resources to their work & remove barriers to funding

For those who assess civic space trends:

- ✓ **EXCHANGE & COLLABORATE** to align definitions, taxonomies and data quality standards with human rights
- ✓ **INTEGRATE** innovative tools and methodologies to monitor online civic space and collect “real-time” data, including from open sources



EXISTING PRACTICES IN TRACKING CIVIC SPACE TRENDS

