# Civil Society Space Report – Input by the Kingdom of the Netherlands

**1 Supportive regulatory framework**

The Netherlands has an extensive, professional infrastructure of rules, services, institutions and accountability procedures. Together, and in combination with good education and public information, they help to sustain an enduring human rights culture in which human rights are not merely defined on paper, but are protected and promoted in practice as well.

National human rights institutes have significant added value in the protection and strengthening of human rights at national level. The Netherlands therefore set up a national Institute for Human Rights ([www.mensenrechten.nl](http://www.mensenrechten.nl)), which came into operation on 1 October 2012. In addition, there are numerous other bodies and institutions,that both individuals and civil society actors can access, with a wide range of tasks and powers that are active in the realm of promoting fundamental rights and monitoring their observance, both nationally and internationally, and within the EU.

The judiciary is one of the three classic powers of the state, and is responsible for overseeing the observance of fundamental and human rights in specific situations. International studies have concluded that the administration of justice in the Netherlands is efficient and functions well. In addition, there are High Councils of State, such as the Council of State as the independent advisor on legislation and governance and the highest court of general administrative law in the Netherlands ([www.raadvanstate.nl](http://www.raadvanstate.nl)), as well as the States-General as co-legislator and as the body that exercises oversight over the government ([www.eerstekamer.nl](http://www.eerstekamer.nl) and [www.tweedekamer.nl](http://www.tweedekamer.nl)) and the National Ombudsman. The latter carries out investigations and issues its findings on whether or not administrative authorities have acted properly, which includes examining their observance of fundamental and human rights ([www.nationaleombudsman](http://www.nationaleombudsman).nl). The Children’s Ombudsman, which has been part of the Office of the National Ombudsman since 2011, monitors the observance of children’s rights in the Netherlands by the government and private organisations ([www.kinderombudsman.nl](http://www.kinderombudsman.nl)). The introduction of the Municipal Anti-Discrimination Services Act in 2009 made it possible for virtually anyone in the Netherlands to report discrimination to an anti-discrimination service, and if necessary to receive professional support.

More extensive information on the Dutch human rights infrastructure can be found in our National Human Rights Action Plan (available at <http://www.government.nl/government/documents-and-publications/notes/2014/03/19/national-action-plan-on-human-rights.html>).

*Support to civil society (actors) abroad*

The Netherlands also actively supports civil society organizations through its foreign and development policy. Through the Human Rights Fund the Netherlands supports national and international human rights organizations through centralized and decentralized funding (through embassies).

The Shelter City program for temporary relocation for human rights defenders provides opportunities for positive media portrayal of civil society activists within the Netherlands, taking into account their security situation. The government’s Human Rights Tulip for human rights defenders is an example of providing visibility for the work of civil society actors.

Regarding decision making on development aid, the Netherland increasingly involves civil society organisations. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are becoming increasingly important in the delivery of (development) programmes; the incorporation of civil society organisations is imperative.

The Dutch framework for renewed support to civil society organisations, entitled “Dialogue and Dissent”, supports civil society organisations to the value of some € 200 mln/year, from 2016 onward. This 5-year programme is designed to strengthen the capacity of local civil society organisations in the area of lobby and advocacy. A designated part is for direct support to local civil society organisations through embassies.

*Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation*

In the particular context of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation the Netherlands is working on the refinement of Indicator 2 (on enabling Environment) of the GPEDC. The refined indicator is almost ready for distribution to countries participating in the GPEDC’s 2nd monitoring round

**2 Right to information**

As part of the Action Plan Open Government 2014-2015 the Dutch Government is taking several actions to ensure that government organizations and civil society organizations continue to work together to improve the openness of government. This is based on the vision that in our digitized society there is a need for a more open, accessible government. For example, among the actions of the Action Plan Open Government 2014-2015 are promoting (the use and the re-use of) open data, identifying categories of government information for active disclosure and an informal approach to handling applications on the basis of the act containing regulations governing public access to government information. The Action Plan Open Government 2016-2017 will - among other things - devote attention to further active disclosure of various information categories. It will also be considered how government information can meet the needs of society.

**3 Inclusion in public decision-making processes**

The Dutch government keeps civil society organisations actively involved in the development of its policy. They provide expertise and information and criticize government plans and policies. When it comes to policy-making procedures, this involvement takes the form of round-table talks, expert meetings and written consultations. The government has introduced an online consultation procedure for legislation. In the human rights conventions reporting cycle, meetings are organised for NGOs and other relevant organisations for them to express their views and advise the government on the subjects to be included in the national report. It is also useful for the government to keep itself well informed about current developments within civil society organisations − and society at large − and vice versa.