



**WELL-BEING IN**

**HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM**

PROTECT THE PROTEST

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IN COLLABORATION WITH  
THE ROOTS PROJECT (BY GREENPEACE)



**Roots partners with climate justice movements and youth in the Global South to build local power and leadership that is cultivated in communities and shaped by shared experiences. A global Greenpeace initiative, our program is centered on capacity development, campaign resourcing, and community building. We believe that when we meet people where they are and understand the interconnecting issues that bring us together, we can spark collective and hopeful action that transforms our places, protects our civic spaces, and drives long lasting political and social change. When we build community, we build power.**

**Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and individual donations. We believe that acting in solidarity and compassion with people everywhere can change our societies for the better.**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Well-being is... “Ne pas s'oublier avant de sauver le monde” / “To not forget yourself before saving the world”

LGBTI rights activist from France

Amnesty International and the Roots Project (by Greenpeace) have been collaborating to prioritize well-being and resilience in activism. In 2022, Amnesty launched its global campaign [Protect the Protest](#) to address the growing attacks on the right to protest around the world. The campaign aims to challenge the attacks on protest, act in solidarity with those targeted, and works alongside social movements pushing for human rights change.

A range of issues, including the environmental crisis, growing inequality and threats to livelihoods, systemic racism, and gender-based violence, have made the need for protest increasingly necessary. In recent years, we have seen some of the biggest protest mobilizations for decades. Black Lives Matter, climate change movements, and protest movements in Iran and Sri Lanka, amongst others, have inspired millions all over the world to take to the streets and online to demand racial and climate justice, equity and livelihoods, and an end to gender violence and discrimination. Almost without exception, this wave of mass protests has been met with obstructive, repressive, and often violent responses by state authorities. Instead of facilitating the right to protest, governments are going to ever greater lengths to quash it.

Protesters across the globe are facing a mix of pushbacks, with a growing number of laws and other measures restricting the right to protest, the misuse of force, the expansion of unlawful mass and targeted surveillance, internet shutdowns and online censorship, and abuse and stigmatization. Protesters are often branded as “troublemakers”, “rioters”, or even “terrorists”. Meanwhile, individuals and groups that are marginalized and discriminated against face further barriers. For example, women, LGBTI and gender-nonconforming people are subjected to different types of gender-based violence and marginalization.

This situation concerns a huge number of activists at the forefront of human rights change and justice movements. As a result of this, and from our own organizations’ experience of working with activists of all ages from all over the world, we know that working for the world to be a better place can have an impact on our well-being. In the well-being [Fanzine](#) and [workbook](#) published in 2020 and 2021, respectively, Amnesty youth activists across the globe identified tools for self and collective care with a common message and vision: happiness and activism can co-exist. Since this publication, Amnesty and Roots have been collaborating to support well-being and resilience in activism through a number of training and workshops, and now wish to work together to further explore the well-being needs of activists and to help build much-needed capacity, resources and support.

Through this work, we hope to contribute positively to activists being more resilient, in the face of the threats around them and more effective in demanding their human rights. In 2023, we began to embed well-being in our work with activists more systematically.

To inform this work, we need to hear from activists themselves about their experiences to increase our understanding of how activists stay safe and healthy (physically and emotionally) despite all the challenges they face. This includes examining how systemic and structural violence affects specific groups and communities, such as women, LGBTI activists, and racialized groups, and understanding the impact of structural violence on their overall well-being. But also, it is essential to explore how people in different parts of the world experience disparate impacts due to inequalities in social structures and institutions. These inequalities may prevent individuals from fulfilling their basic needs and rights.

We aim to gather insights to understand how activists' well-being may be better supported – whether by organizations like Amnesty International and Roots, by other organizations and colleagues they work with, or by others interested in boosting the resilience and effectiveness of movements for positive change.

This report is based on a survey that was open between November 2022 and February 2023 and was distributed among Amnesty International's and Roots' networks. The survey was filled in by 553 activists from 88 countries (more details of which are [below](#)). It also encompasses case studies based on interviews with individual activists from seven countries.

## METHODOLOGY

The survey was put together by Amnesty International and Roots based on questions that they wanted to explore to inform their ongoing work and support for activist well-being. The questionnaire had a combination of open and closed questions.

The survey was initially circulated in English, French and Spanish in November 2022 through Greenpeace, Amnesty International and Roots distribution channels. This included participants of the 2022 Climate Justice camp, Amnesty's regional offices, sections and national entities, and Amnesty's partner organizations. Further distribution of the survey in Arabic through these channels took place at the end of January 2023. Any activists receiving the survey link could participate (self-selection).

Analysis of open questions involved a process of identifying themes or 'dimensions' and tagging responses that mentioned those dimensions, consolidating the categories, and identifying words, phrases, and quotations that captured specific ideas. Analysis of closed questions involved calculating percentages and illustrating them through graphs (through the survey software Zoho), as well as disaggregation by region and age.

This method was chosen to allow us to see both the quantitative aspects (the disaggregation and prevalence of the dimensions) and qualitative aspects (descriptions and quotations). The seven most prevalent dimensions were used to structure the research report.

The "Regional and generational insights" boxes throughout the report aim to provide some insights into differences observed between different regions and different ages, as well as highlight where no major differences were observed. We had initially hoped to also provide disaggregated data according to the "focus of activism" – to get a sense of whether certain well-being issues are more important to activists working and acting on certain topics. However, we observed no major trends when disaggregating the data in this way. It is likely this is in large part because most activists reported working on multiple issue areas, with only 15% working on one topic, 10% working on two, and 75% of respondents reporting they work on three or more issues.

The case studies ([section 5](#)) were introduced to add more depth to the study, given the fact that the survey methodology enables greater breadth than depth. But also, to ensure representation from activists in countries underrepresented among survey respondents. Amnesty's regional and national offices supported identifying activists to ensure the country and issue representation with existing gaps among survey participants. Interviews were held in person where possible and over the phone where not. Interview transcripts were edited to create the case studies and were reviewed and validated by the activists themselves. Quotations from the case studies were also integrated into the "Dimensions of Well-being" section of the report, while the quantitative data presented throughout the report is based on the survey only and does not include the data of the individuals presented in the case studies.

The method for elaborating the "Looking Forward" section involved holding a workshop in May 2023 with 14 Amnesty International and Roots colleagues from different teams to discuss the findings of the survey and draw out the main ideas and conclusions for this section, which is also complemented by ideas shared by the activists interviewed for the case studies.

# LIMITATIONS

One limitation of the survey is the heavy representation of Europe in relation to the rest of the world (see the breakdown of participants [below](#)). This emerged despite the efforts to distribute the survey globally from the start. At the originally planned closing date of the survey, the responses from Europe were at 69% of the total. The survey timeline was extended for a further month and (within this period) translated into Arabic in addition to English, French and Spanish, with the aim of achieving a more balanced geographical participation. This lowered the percentage of respondents based in Europe to 51%.<sup>1</sup> In order to further redress this bias, we interviewed activists from countries which were under-represented in the study and produced seven case studies reflecting the experiences of these activists. We recognize that this does not fully compensate for the unequal regional representation in the survey results, but we believe that it both gives more space and voice to activists' experiences from other regions. We are further providing disaggregation of data where possible to show differences between European and non-European respondents.

There are certain key demographic data which were not captured by the survey, such as gender identity and whether activists carry out their work in urban or rural settings.

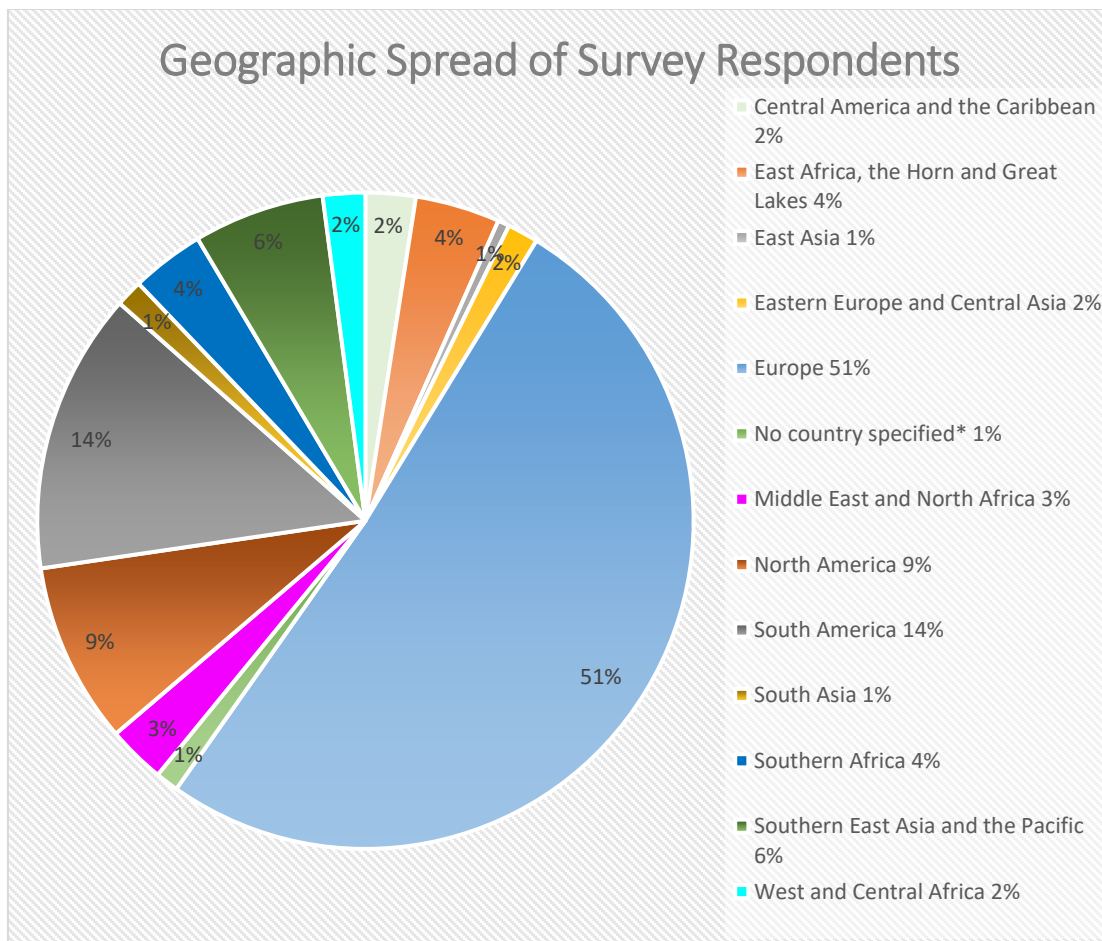
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<sup>1</sup> Of the respondents based in Europe, 8% (22 activists) were originally from countries in the Global South, such as Brazil, Turkey, Syria and South Africa.

# WHO ARE WE LISTENING TO?

## GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD

The following are responses broken down by region to the question, "Which country or countries are you based in/ do you carry out your activism in?"



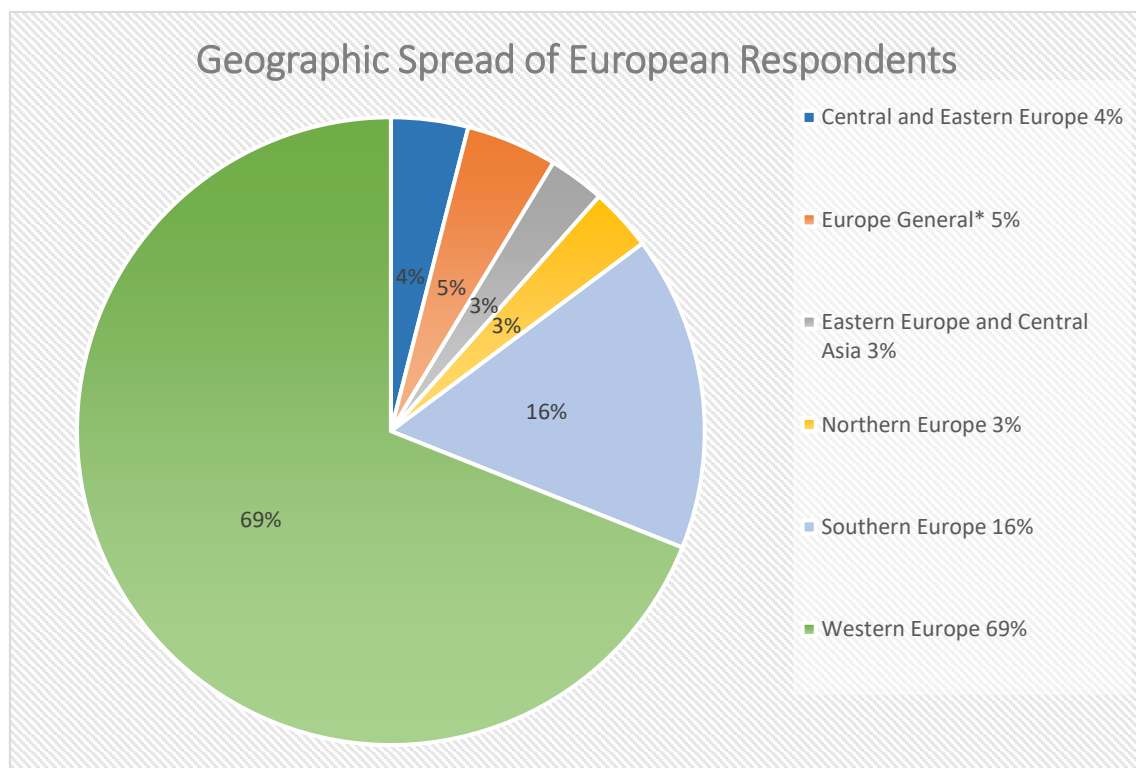
\*No country specified incorporates responses like "as per responsibility" or "global", as well as respondents who mentioned more than four countries or multiple continents



Of the 88 countries from which responses were received, the following table shows how many countries are represented from each region.

Central America and the Caribbean	6	South America	7
Central Europe	6	South Asia	5
East Africa, the Horn and the Great Lakes	8	Southern Africa	4
East Asia	2	Southern East Asia and the Pacific	7
Eastern Europe & Central Asia	2	Southern Europe	5
Middle East and North Africa (MENA)	12	West and Central Africa	7
North America	3	Western Europe	11
Northern Europe	3		

This graph shows the spread of European respondents among different regions of Europe, showing that Western Europe is dominant.



\*Europe General refers to those respondents who did not specify a country but responded to the question 'Where do you carry out your activism?' with 'Europe'.

We also asked the question, "Which country were you born in?". Eighty-three percent of respondents provided the same answer to this question: "Which country or countries are you based in/ do you carry out your activism in?". Seventeen percent – 90 respondents - carried out their activism in a country that was different from their country of origin.

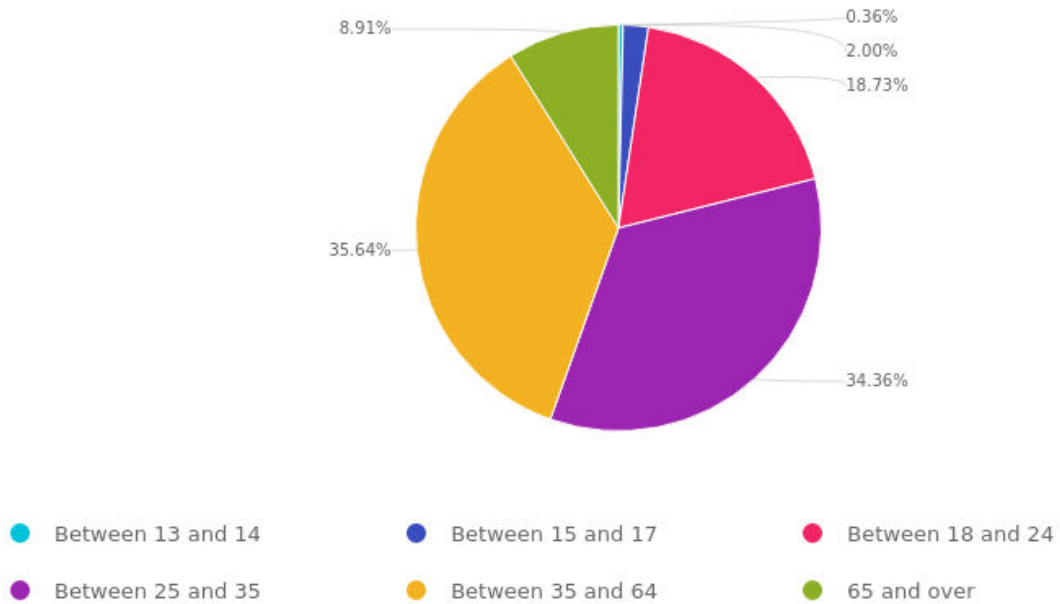
Of these, 27 people (5%) answered different European countries (for example, they had moved from Sweden to Germany or France to Belgium, etc.), and 26 (5%) had moved from countries in the Global South to Europe or North America. Twelve respondents had the same country but also included other countries (for example, they carry out their activism in the country they are from, plus others). The remaining 5% who reported different countries had moved from Europe to countries in the Global South, between Europe and North America, or between other regions.

# AGE

This graph shows that the biggest age group of respondents is between 35 and 64, followed closely by those aged 25 to 35. Young people and children (all those under 25) make up close to 22% of respondents.

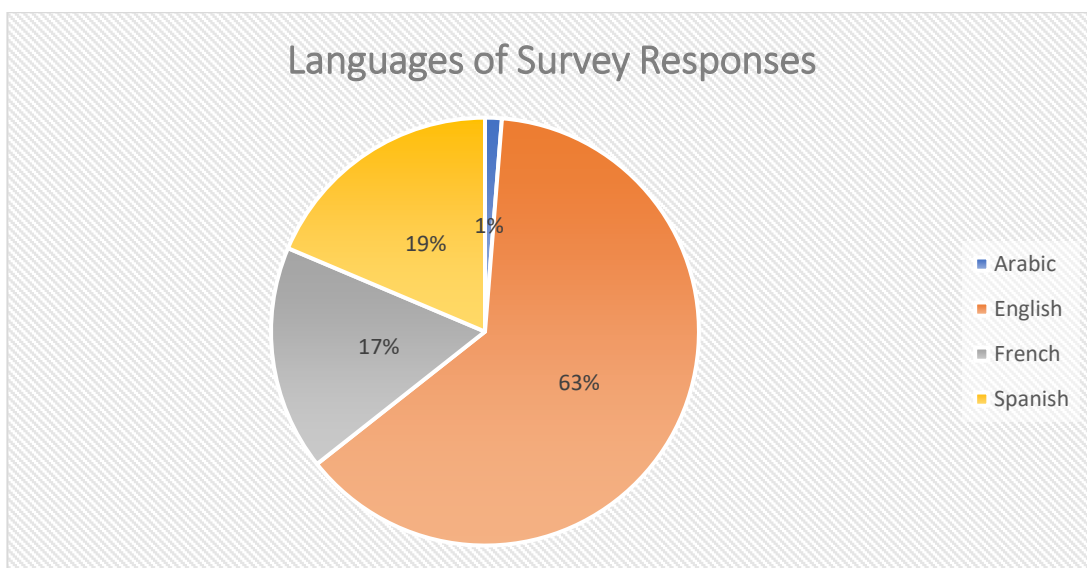
What age are you?

Answered: 550 Skipped: 3



# LANGUAGES

The majority of survey responses were received in English, with Francophone and Spanish-speaking respondents representing 17% and 19% of overall respondents, respectively. We received seven responses in Arabic. It is important to recognize that exclusion due to language barriers limits the diversity and representation of the survey as the survey was not translated into other languages beyond English, French, Spanish and Arabic.

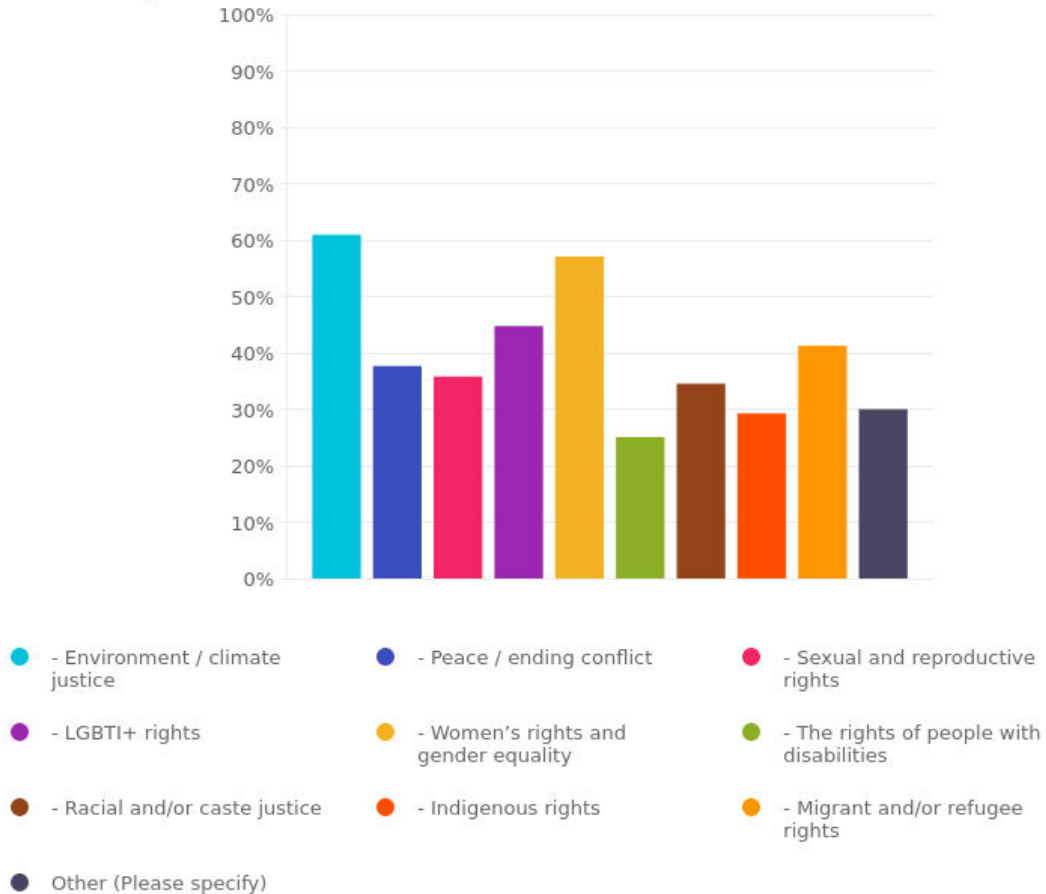


# FOCUS OF ACTIVISM

What is the focus of your activism?

Please tick all that apply

Answered: 550 Skipped: 3



All the categories which we had included in the survey's multiple-choice responses received a large number of responses, with the greatest being environment and climate justice (335 of the survey's respondents reported that they work on this), followed by women's rights and gender equality (with 314 respondents reporting this focus). The category which the fewest activists reported focusing on was the rights of people with disabilities, which received 138 responses.

The majority of activists reported working on multiple issue areas, with only 15% working on one topic specifically and 10% working on two. 75% of respondents reported they worked on three or more of the issues listed in the graph.

In addition to these categories, 165 activists reported working on "other" issues, which include the following:

- Human rights (27 respondents)
- Children's rights (9 respondents)
- Prisoners' rights (8 respondents)
- Animal rights (7 respondents)
- Abolition of the death penalty (7 respondents)
- Education (6 respondents)
- Freedom of expression/speech (6 respondents)

- Land rights (4 respondents)
- Housing rights (4 respondents)
- Protest rights (3 respondents)

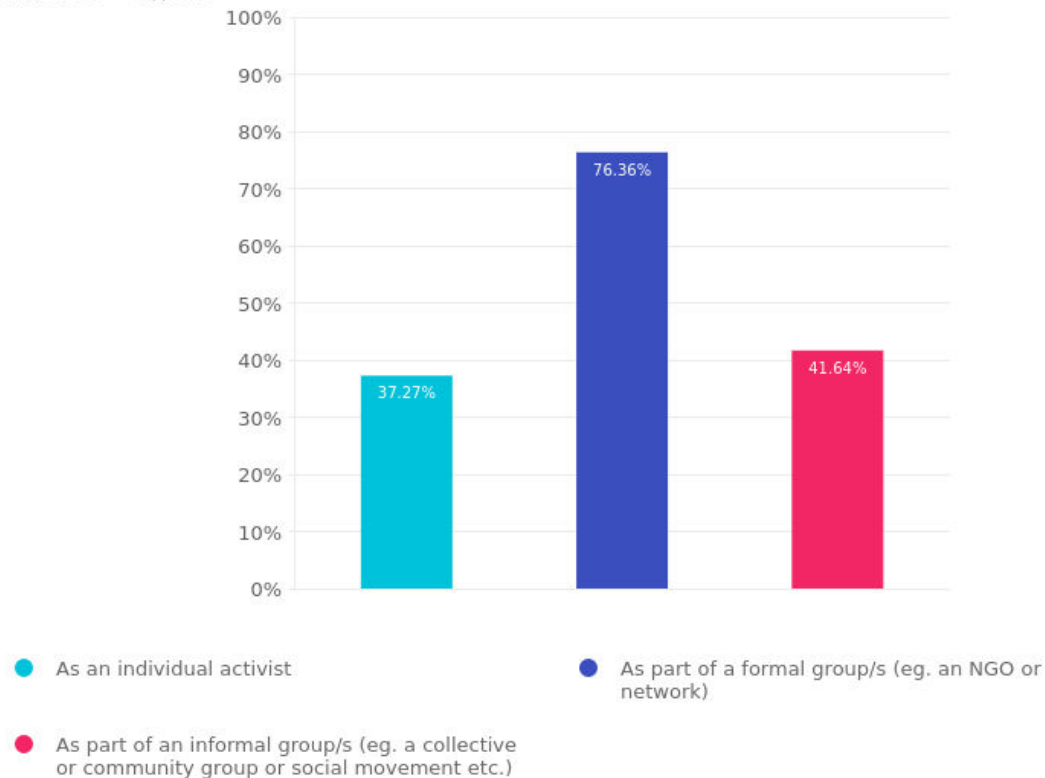
Individual activists mentioned working on defence of the rights of farmers, workers, sex workers, non-religious people, rivers and ecosystems, minorities, marginalized people, people living with HIV, students and victims. Other categories which were mentioned by individual activists include the defence of democracy, civil rights, social justice, class justice, economic justice, prevention of human trafficking, the right to healthcare, mental health, fighting against arbitrary arrest/detention, advocating for the release of political prisoners, wildlife preservation, anti-speciesism, biodiversity, freedom from religion, freedom of religion, media freedom, freedom of association, anti-capitalism, urban heritage, access to justice and anti-colonialism.

## FORMAL, INFORMAL AND INDIVIDUAL ACTIVISM

Which of the following best describes how you carry out your activism?

Please tick all that apply

Answered: 550 Skipped: 3



Respondents reported their association with a wide range of formal and informal groups (389 respondents mentioned a formal group they are associated with, while 197 named an informal group). Those associated with Amnesty were 157 or 27% of respondents (with most of them reporting their association within the “formal” category and 11 doing so within the “informal” category). Those who reported their association with Greenpeace were 60 (10%). The other entity mentioned by a considerable number of activists (33 in total, or 6%) was the Extinction Rebellion. The informal groups’ activists reported being associated with movements, collectives, networks, coalitions, associations, citizens’ assemblies, food banks, school groups, and mutual aid networks.

## REGIONAL AND GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

There were no significant differences in these responses between younger and older participants, with a handful more older activists describing themselves as working individually (21% versus 16%), just a few more doing their activism as part of a formal group (77% versus 73%) and a few less doing their activism as part of an informal group (40% of older activists versus 48% of younger activists).

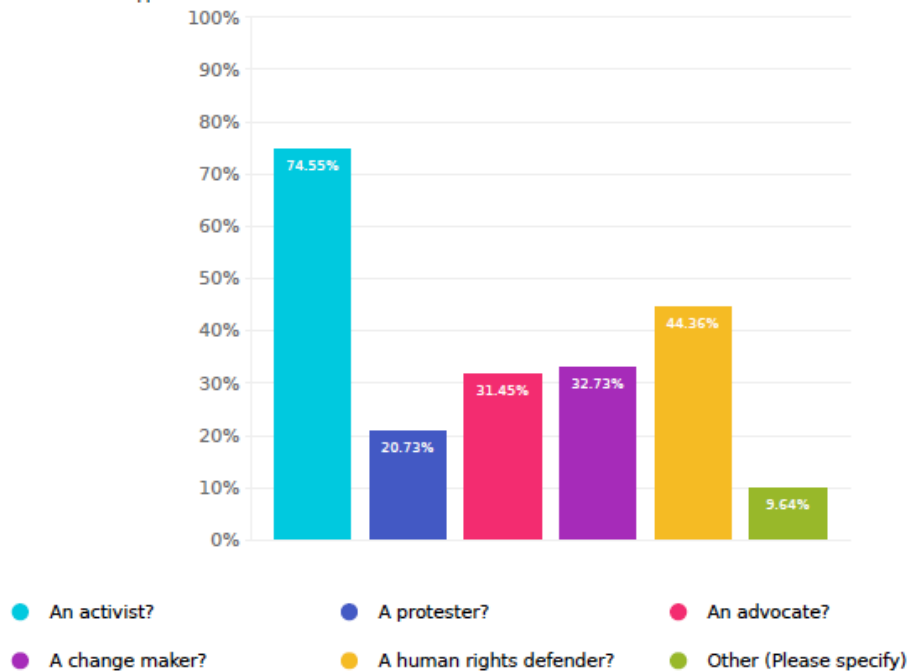
Carrying out activism as individuals was most prevalent among North American respondents (62%), then respondents from MENA (53%), followed by Asia (41%), Africa (40%), Europe (33%) and Latin America (30%). Similarly, carrying out activism as part of formal groups was highest among North Americans (96%). Second came Latin America (83%), then Asia (80%), followed by Africa (75%), MENA (73%) and Europe (71%).

Those who reported being part of informal groups the most were activists from Europe (83%). The percentages of respondents from other regions who reported being part of informal groups were between 32% and 42%. We feel this is likely to be a reflection of the types of activists who had access to and filled in the survey in these different regions and may also be a reflection of the growth of movements such as Extinction Rebellion in Europe.

## HOW DO YOU SEE YOURSELF?

Do you see yourself as...

Answered: 550 Skipped: 3



This question was multiple choice, with no limit to the number of responses, so respondents could identify with as many descriptors as they wanted. The majority, 300 respondents of 550 (55%), used more than one word to describe themselves.

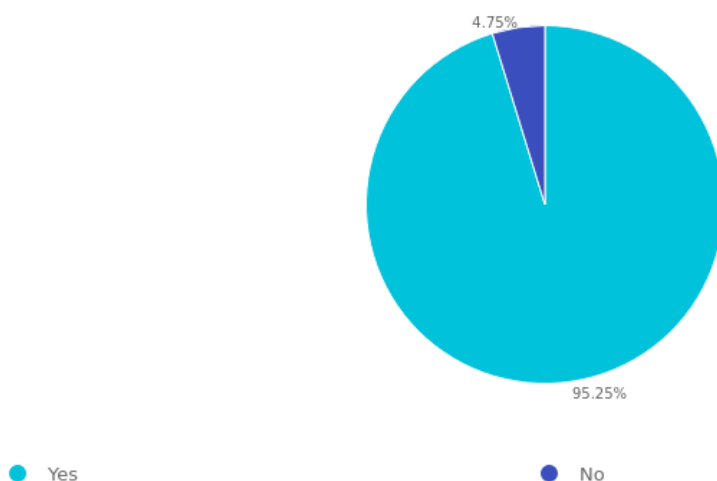
Fifty-three respondents (10%) responded in the “other” category, where five respondents described themselves as “educators”, two as “supporters”, two as “campaigners”, three as “volunteers”, three as “staff members/employees” and two as “anarchists”. Other nouns that were used by individual activists include “ally”, “networker”, “whistle-blower”, “watchdog”, “academic”, and “peacebuilder”.

# PARTICIPATION IN PROTEST

## PEACEFUL PROTEST

Have you taken part in any peaceful protests in the past?

Answered: 547 Skipped: 6



### REGIONAL AND GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

We saw no significant differences in responses from younger or older activists, or across different regions, with the vast majority of activists (a minimum of 92%) from all age groups and regions having participated in peaceful protests.

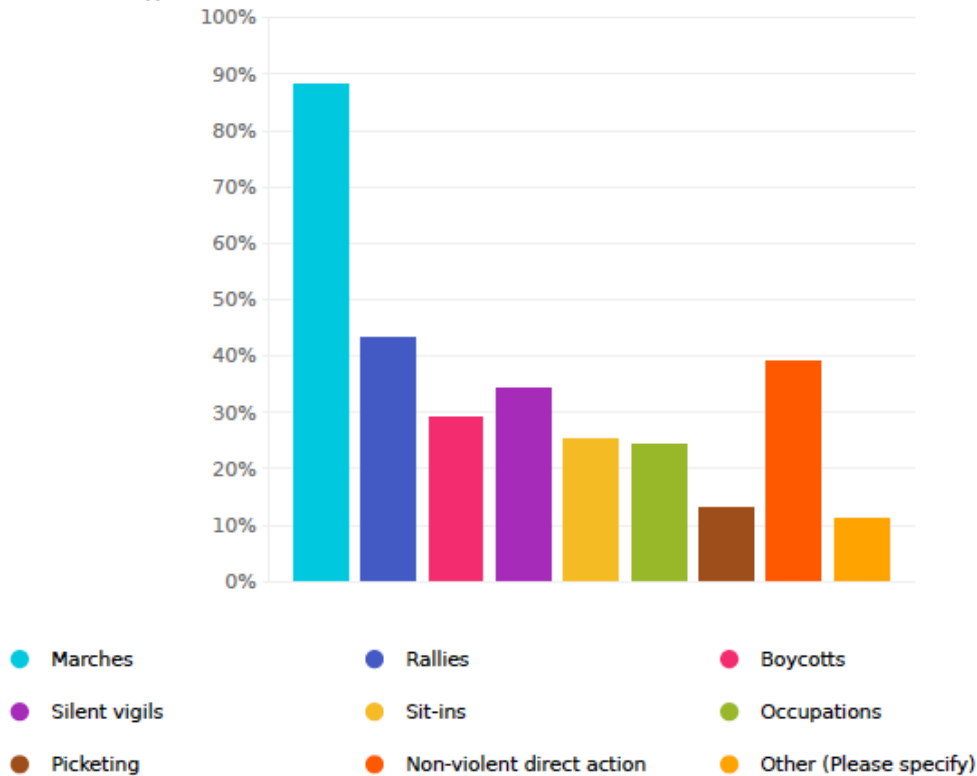
## IN-PERSON PROTEST

When asked what the main method of protest was for activists, marches were reported as the main form of in-person protest by participants of the survey, with 469 respondents citing it, followed by rallies, in which 229 respondents reported participating. Picketing was the least employed method of protest amongst respondents. Fifty-nine respondents cited 'other' means of protest, and among them, the most common were awareness-raising (mentioned 11 times), petitions (mentioned 10 times), and art (mentioned eight times).

### What has the nature of the protest/s been?

Please tick all that apply

Answered: 532 Skipped: 21



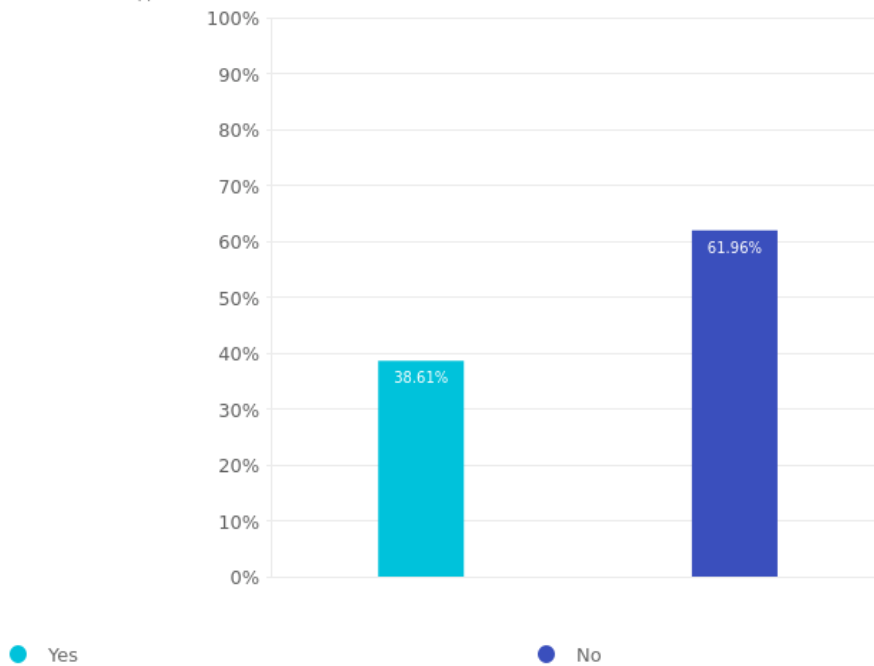
## ONLINE PROTEST

While the majority of respondents have not engaged in online protest before, a considerable number 39% (205 respondents) had participated in the following actions:

- Online petitions (35 respondents)
- Twitter rallies/tweetstorms (12 respondents)
- Online awareness raising (9 respondents)
- Online advocacy (6 respondents)
- Online campaigns/campaigning (5 respondents)
- Mail bombing (5 respondents)
- Online vigils (5 respondents)
- Letter writing (4 respondents)

Have you engaged in any form of online protest (eg. virtual sit-ins or vigils)?

Answered: 531 Skipped: 22



### REGIONAL AND GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

There was no significant difference in the responses from children and young people and those over the age of 24 to this question, with 5% fewer children and young people having participated in online protests than older activists.

More participants from countries in the Global South reported having engaged in online protests than those from Europe and North America. The highest percentage was activists from Africa at 57%, followed by those from Asia at 52%, MENA at 50%, and Latin America at 47%. Thirty-four percent of North American respondents reported having carried out some form of online protest, and 29% of European respondents did. This may be because engaging in an in-person protest tends to be safer and more accessible for activists in Europe and North America, so they resort less to online protest.

## PARTICIPATION IN FUTURE PROTEST

We asked activists, “What type of activism and/or protest can you envisage yourself engaging in in the future and under what circumstances?” We received a wide range of responses from 407 activists, which broadly fell into three categories:

- 1) the method of protest (as above, whether marches, vigils, sit-ins, etc.).
- 2) the focus of the protest (as above, for example, climate justice, women’s rights, etc.); and
- 3) the circumstances or conditions necessary for engaging in protest.

For many respondents (136 respondents, or 33%), the nature of protest they plan to engage in going forward is participation in marches or demonstrations. Fifty respondents (11%) said they would engage in non-violent direct action in the future, while 33 (6%) said they would engage in online protests of some form. Methods of protest, which garnered between 14 and 20 responses each, include activism, blockades or occupations, campaigning or lobbying, awareness-raising, boycotts, civil disobedience, education, letter writing, petitions, sit-ins and vigils.

Of those who specified the focus of the protest they hope to engage in in the future, the issue that the greatest number stated was climate justice (63 respondents or 24%). Thirty-nine activists (15%) reported they would protest in relation to human rights in general. LGBTI rights and women’s rights were the next priority issues, with 23 activists (4.5% of participants) saying that they would protest in support of LGBTI



rights and a further 22 activists (another 4.5% of participants) signalling a desire to protest in support of women's rights. Other issues that were mentioned between four and 10 times were peace, migrants' and refugees' rights, sexual and reproductive rights, animal rights and child protection.

In responses to the conditions under which people would protest in the future, 24 respondents said that the protest would have to be non-violent or peaceful. Seven respondents cited the importance of safe or secure conditions to carry out their protest; 21 respondents cited that they would carry out many or any type of protest, or whatever is needed; while 35 reported that they would continue with the protest they have engaged in in the past.

# DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING: WHAT DO ACTIVISTS NEED?

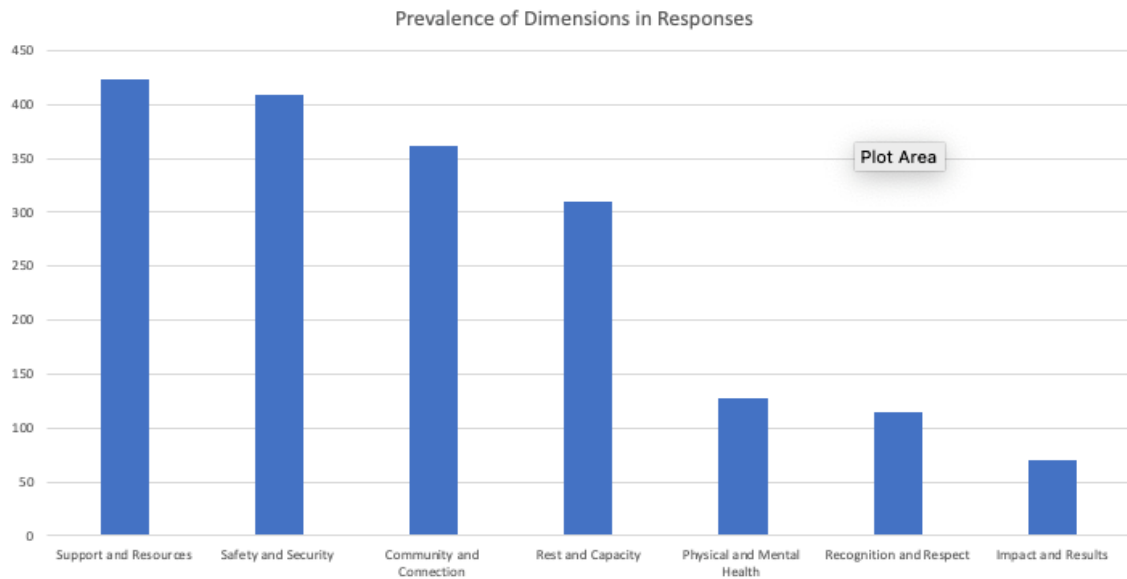
## OVERVIEW OF WELL-BEING DIMENSIONS

This section of the report looks specifically at activists' needs with regard to their well-being, as well as things they identified as important to contributing to and improving their well-being. Specifically, it analyses the survey responses to four questions:

- What does well-being mean to you in the context of your activism?
- What are the barriers you or other activists face?
- What has effectively contributed to you and/or your group's well-being in the past?
- What do you feel could improve you and/or your group's well-being in your activism?

In response to these questions, a set of seven themes and issues arose as priorities for activists themselves. The rest of the report is broadly structured around these issues.

This graph shows the prevalence of the issues in the responses. Some of these issues or themes were mentioned far more in response to some questions than others. For instance, community and connection were mentioned repeatedly in people's descriptions of well-being, and the lack thereof was barely mentioned as a barrier; a lack of safety and security was cited far more frequently as barriers to well-being than in other responses; support and resources were mentioned much more as something activists felt could contribute to their well-being than in their descriptions of well-being. Nonetheless, this graph combines the total number of mentions across all four of these questions.



**“These points are great because the seven of them make up something essential and something very beautiful to be able to weave together and offer an important result: overall well-being for women and men human rights advocates.”**

Wendy, a women’s rights activist from Mexico (see Wendy’s story [here](#))

**Well-being is... “Dejar huella en las demás personas. Generar cuestionamientos. Ayudar a sanar.” / “Leaving a mark on other people. Generating questions. Helping to heal.”**

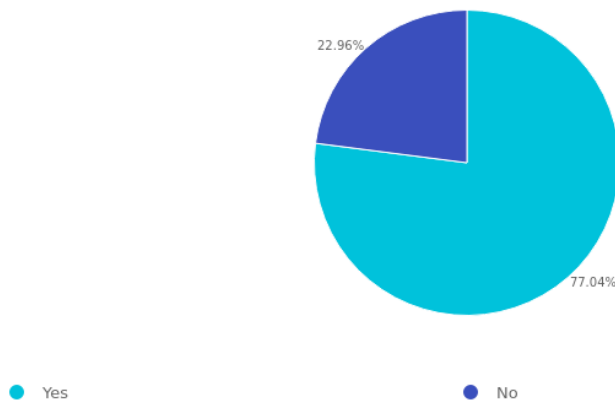
LGBTI activist from Perú

## HOW MANY ACTIVISTS FACE BARRIERS TO WELL-BEING?

The vast majority of respondents reported experiencing barriers to their well-being. Below, under each of the seven dimensions of well-being, you will find a breakdown of the barriers to activists’ well-being relating to the specific issue highlighted.

Do you or activists around you experience barriers to your wellbeing as an activist ?

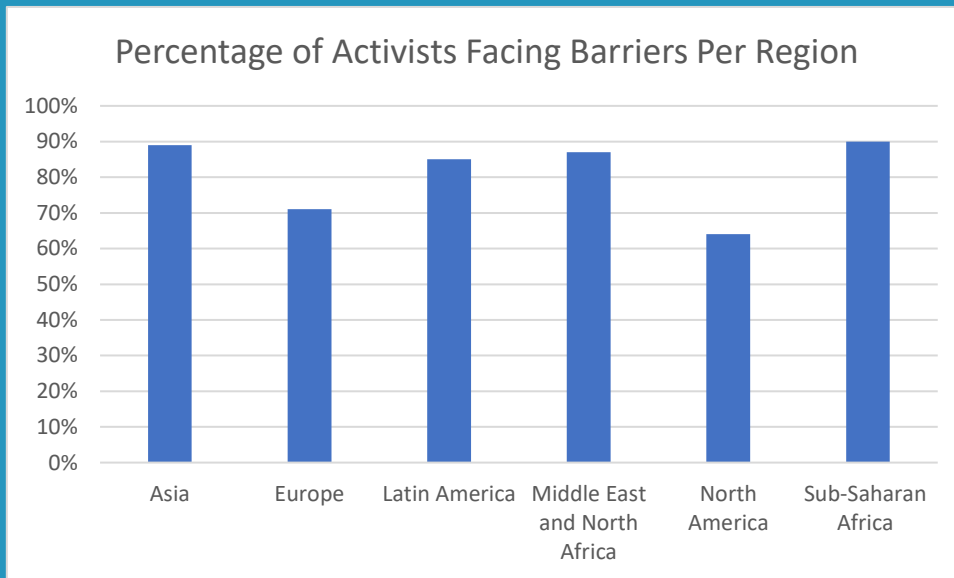
Answered: 527 Skipped: 26



## REGIONAL AND GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

Breaking down the responses regionally, the activists who reported facing barriers the most were those from Sub-Saharan Africa, with 90% of African activists reporting facing barriers. This was followed closely by activists from Asia (89% of which reported facing barriers to their well-being). Thirdly came activists from MENA at 87%, followed by those from Latin America at 85%. Seventy-one percent of European activists reported facing barriers, while those activists who reported facing barriers the least were North American respondents at 64%.

There was no difference between younger and older activists, with 77% of both under 25s and over 25s reporting facing barriers to their well-being as activists.



## 4.1 DIMENSION OF WELL-BEING: SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

**“I think support and resources is the foundation of many other well-being dimensions.”**

Lai, an activist from Hong Kong (see Lai’s story [here](#))

Support and resources were the most cited areas when it came to activists sharing what had contributed to their well-being in the past (with 126 activists (29%) mentioning support) and what they feel could contribute to their well-being (with 182 activists (46%) mentioning support). Support was also mentioned 31 times in activists’ descriptions of the meaning of well-being (by 8% of respondents).

The types of support mentioned were diverse. Respondents cited that support from their organizations is key, including a supportive culture and spaces for needs-based support within work teams. The different types of support which were mentioned in peoples’ definitions of well-being include training, support when you want to protect your family, support for your family when you are arrested, mental health support, legal support, support from other civil society groups when at risk, and support to prevent burnout. Several activists simply mentioned the importance of “feeling supported” by colleagues, buddies, organizers of activities, one’s organization, etc.

**Well-being is... “Avoir accès à des personnes ressources, telles que des juristes, pour pouvoir accéder à une crédibilité en société et renforcer l’impact de notre travail.” / “Having access to contacts, such as lawyers, in order to gain credibility in society and strengthen the impact of our work.”**

Activist from Belgium

A lack of support was cited 26 times (by 9% of respondents) when activists described the barriers they face. This was mentioned predominantly in the context of not receiving support from the public, duty-bearers, family or friends, as opposed to specific types of support which are lacking. A lack of resources was mentioned 44 times (by 15% of responses) as a barrier to their well-being.

**“Negativity from family and friends that means not having a proper support system for the work you are doing.”**

Activist from Zimbabwe

## Barriers to Well-being: **Lack of Support**

- Lack of public support
- Not enough responsivity and civil conscience from the general public
- Lack of political support/support from the government/state
- Discouraging media and news/stigmatization by the media
- No psychological support available
- Lack of political will

**“The negative reactions from people ... both on social media and in the physical world”**

Activist from Türkiye

## Barriers to Well-being: **Lack of Resources**

- Lack of financial resources/lack of donors’ financial support
- Discrimination in financing/granting (against smaller or local organizations)
- Lack of material resources
- Lack of time
- Not enough volunteers
- Economic insecurity of pursuing activism

“El primer obstáculo como activista es el sostenimiento, el acceso a los mínimos vitales a partir de un trabajo o subsidio. Ser activista no es un rol que se pague en ninguna empresa, es una decisión de vida que muchas veces se tiene que realizar paralelamente a un trabajo que nos garantiza la subsistencia.” / “The first obstacle as an activist is sustenance, access to the vital minimum from a job or subsidy.

**Being an activist is not a paid role in any company, it is a life decision that often has to be carried out in parallel to a job that guarantees our livelihood.”**

Climate and peace activist from Colombia

A major issue which stood out among the activists who were interviewed for the [case studies](#) was not being able to find work and concerns about their livelihoods. Three of the six explicitly said that they are not able to find work or have lost their jobs as a direct result of their activism. Two others also cited livelihood and financial instability as major obstacles to their well-being.

## WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO WELL-BEING?

Support and resources are featured heavily as elements which contribute to well-being. This incorporated a wide range of types of support, from general support from family and friends or duty bearers to legal, emergency and psychological support, to training, support groups, specific methods or tools for providing support, and financial resources.

### SUPPORT GROUPS

Support groups of different types were mentioned as having been key to supporting well-being, as well as being something activists feel would improve their well-being. What has contributed to activists' well-being in the past are working groups dedicated to sustainable activism, a support group for actions, affinity groups<sup>2</sup> that meet before, during and after an action, and a support and recovery network of activists. Having organizations or groups created which can listen to issues and navigate activists through tough patches, as well as having space set aside either in group meetings or separately for people to talk about personal well-being and discuss strategies, were mentioned as elements which could help improve well-being.

### SUPPORT TOOLS

Multiple practical tools and methods were cited as contributing to well-being, including:

- Check-ins (including group check-in sessions)
- Debriefs and after-action care (especially after stressful actions)
- Feedback and reflection sessions (after actions)
- A telephone number to call for after-action care
- Recovery time after actions
- Technical and logistical accompaniment
- Mentorship
- Wellness days
- Bootcamps for activists
- Retreats
- Having a contact person available in case of need
- Having a person inside the organization who is responsible for taking care of well-being
- Having somebody to reach out to when dealing with verbal abuse and harassment
- Being provided sunscreen, snacks, a first aid kit, sign language interpretation, and water and food during actions
- Guided meditations during meetings
- External support for issues of care or conflict resolution

### LEGAL SUPPORT AND SUPPORT FOR CASES OF ARREST AND EMERGENCIES

Several activists mentioned that having a legal team available, being supported by lawyers, free legal defence in cases of arrest, detention and imprisonment, arrest support, and/or making detentions public have or would all be key forms of support to their well-being. They would contribute to activists having greater

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<sup>2</sup> Affinity Groups are civil disobedience support groups which developed as an organizing structure during the Spanish Civil War and have been used with success over the last thirty years of feminist, anti-nuclear, environmental and social justice movements around the world. They were used as a structure for a large-scale non-violent blockade during the 30,000 strong occupation of the Ruhr nuclear power station in Germany in 1969. Affinity Groups are also "the basic unit of the Extinction Rebellion family, particularly for undertaking actions".

confidence to carry out their protests and activism. Similarly, support in emergency situations, having emergency funds and safe houses available in cases of threats and danger would be a useful contribution to activists' well-being. The protection provided by international organizations (for example, human rights protective accompaniment) was also mentioned.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT**

Counselling and therapy were mentioned by 19 respondents as having helped them in the past, and 19 believed it could improve their well-being. Group therapy with other activists was specifically mentioned.

**What would contribute to my well-being is... “group therapy with similar activists (sharing sessions with an open mind and heart, a safe space).”**

Activist from Malaysia

### **TRAINING**

An area that featured strongly in the responses about what contributes to well-being was training, information, and awareness, with 57 respondents (14%) saying that this would improve their well-being. Activists reported that their well-being would be improved if they felt equipped with the necessary knowledge and understanding to carry out their activism effectively and confidently.

### **WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCE TRAINING**

Training specifically to improve well-being was mentioned by several activists. In particular, to understand what type of approaches or practices one can use to improve well-being, well-being and mental health awareness training, workshops or discussions about self-care, resilience and well-being training and courses to help with well-being and the art of saying no, were cited as things which would improve respondents' well-being. A comment was made that such training should try not to present a Eurocentric version of well-being.

### **SECURITY TRAINING**

Activists also mentioned that training for dealing with security risks and hostile situations has helped them in the past and would also be useful for them going forward. This includes learning how to protect oneself and defend oneself against repressive practices by state actors, training to avoid risks, and cybersecurity training.

**What would contribute to my well-being is... “des formations pour apprendre à se protéger et se défendre face à des régimes répressifs” / “training to learn how to protect and defend oneself against repressive regimes”**

Activist from Algeria

### **HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION**

Some activists reported that being equipped with information to support their activism is crucial to giving them the confidence to effectively carry out their work. This was mentioned specifically in relation to defending the human rights of LGBTI people, as well as generally in relation to human rights and being able to express oneself and argue assertively and effectively based on legal rights and corresponding obligations under international human rights treaties.

**“Information, the more information we have, the more we can do. If we don't know what we could fight for, or potentially have been told misinformation, I think that lowers the well-being of our group.”**

Activist from Denmark

**What has contributed to my well-being is... “Tener una forma de expresarme asertiva, basada en argumentos basados en leyes, declaración de DDHH” / “To have an assertive way of expressing myself, based on arguments based on laws, human rights declarations.”**

Sexual and reproductive rights and LGBTI rights activist from Venezuela

## OTHER TRAINING AND LEARNING

Other types of training that were mentioned as elements that could improve respondents' well-being were training in non-violent communication, training in decision-making in a flat hierarchy, social media training, and public speaking and management training. Learning, in general, was mentioned as important by some respondents, and one participant wrote that learning about the histories of movements and wins in other movements can be a boost to well-being.

**What would contribute to my well-being is... “Recuperar las mutualidades, las cajas de resistencia...sindicatos en el sentido amplio del termino...formación específica...”/ “Recover mutual benefit societies, resistance funds...unions in the broad sense of the term...specific training...”**

Activist from Spain

## RESOURCES

Financial resources were cited both as something that has helped well-being in the past (by 9% of respondents) and as something that 48 respondents (12%) activists feel would improve well-being. Specifically, respondents mentioned the importance of having an independent source of funding and more unrestricted funding to enable more realistic staffing, proper remuneration and well-paid jobs. Resources to be able to dedicate to well-being, training, campaigns and networking, as well as the sharing of resources from more established and well-resourced groups to less-resourced grassroots groups, were also reported.

**What has contributed to my well-being is... “More unrestricted funding for our group. It has enabled more realistic staffing levels to lower capacity challenges contributing to overload.”**

Activist from the USA

**“If as activists we could get jobs, this would really improve our well-being and, for those who are on the frontlines, it would help us better confront the challenges we face.”**

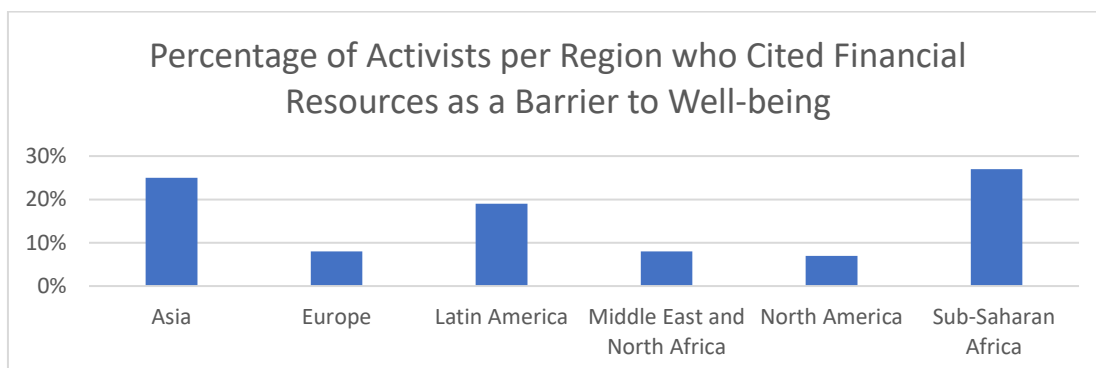
Martina, a women's rights activist from Angola (see Martina's story [here](#))

## REGIONAL AND GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

When reporting on the barriers to well-being, some differences can be seen across regions. 17% of respondents from Asia and 11% each from Europe and North America referred to a lack of support as a barrier to well-being. 8% of respondents from MENA, 5% from Africa and 1% from Latin America also cited a lack of support as a barrier.

When referring specifically to resources, however, the trend goes in the opposite direction, with 27% of African respondents, 25% of Asian respondents and 19% of Latin American respondents citing lack of resources as a barrier to their well-being. In contrast, 8% of European and MENA activists, and 7% of North American activists, included this as they reported on barriers to well-being.

There were no significant differences in responses from younger and older activists, with slightly more older activists citing support in their descriptions of well-being (8% versus 2%) and slightly more older activists citing lack of resources as a barrier to well-being (15% as opposed to 11%).





## INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

One of the major trends which emerged in response to the questions “What has contributed to your or your group’s well-being in the past?” and “What do you feel could contribute to your well-being?” was the importance of inclusive cultures of well-being and good organization.

### WELL-BEING CULTURE

Many activists pointed to the fact that prioritizing well-being and integrating organizational practices that prioritize true self-care is crucial to enhancing well-being. This means that movements must understand that self-care is equal to community resilience and that well-being is not possible without a systemic approach.

They must “leave time and space for regenerative culture, seeing it as a strategic element”, as well as hold more ongoing conversations about well-being and arrange structured moments to address topics such as self-care, community care, and mental well-being. The importance of embedding self- and group care into daily work – “being kind to ourselves and each other as a default” – was stressed. Conflict resolution processes to help overcome conflicts within movements and organizations were also mentioned as steps which would improve activists’ well-being.

### GOOD ORGANIZATION

For many activists, good organization and coordination contribute to well-being. This encompasses smooth team cooperation, well-organized meetings, good planning and management, efficient division of labour, well-planned campaigns, coordinated work across campaigns, effective assessment and planning based on learning (so as not to repeat activities which have been proven ineffective in the past), and having clear and operable policies and systems in place.

Good communication, sharing of information, transparency and dialogue are also key. Activists want to be part of organizations “that care and listen to the lived experience of their staff” and that are “open and listen to activists and workers”.

### LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

Some other things that respondents pointed to when it came to what could improve well-being were the importance of inclusion, meaningful participation, and democratic leadership. Some mentioned the need for committed leaders and facilitators and more explicit support from leadership. It was also mentioned that leaders should keep themselves in check, not micromanage, not be performative in their authority, not undermine others’ roles, and not be overly corporate in a grassroots environment. The importance of activists not being controlling towards one another was also cited. Several activists mentioned that working with horizontal leadership structures or decentralized leadership, or having a rotation of power roles within the association either has contributed to well-being in the past or they feel would contribute to well-being.

**What has contributed to my well-being is... “a very open and supportive environment in which you can ask questions if you don't understand something, that you can ask for help if you need any, that you can be vulnerable... and be embraced with warm and meaningful support.”**

Activist from the Netherlands

## 4.2 DIMENSION OF WELL-BEING: SAFETY AND SECURITY

Safety and security were cited repeatedly by respondents in their definitions of well-being when they reported on the barriers to their well-being and also in response to what contributes to their well-being.

When asked what well-being means to them, of the 466 responses, 105 respondents (23% of respondents) mentioned safety and security.

**“When you feel safe, have contacts with lawyers, and the overall environment signals that it’s safe to do your work – it’s good for well-being.”**

Ivan, an activist from Russia (see Ivan’s story [here](#))

The following were cited in the context of defining the meaning of well-being: activists' physical safety and the ability to work without being harmed; being able to carry out one's activism without interference from government or nongovernment actors or without being the target of anti-rights groups or experiencing backlash or harassment from online trolls; not suffering attacks or criticism which can harm one's psychological or physical integrity, and not having to censor one's views. Being able to protest and carry out one's activism without fear (of legal repercussions, prison or threats) was key to many respondents' understanding of well-being. Similarly, well-being to some means having protection or being or feeling protected.

**Well-being is... “No tener miedo de ser golpeado por militares, no tener miedo de una bala perdida, no tener miedo de que un amigo mío negro vaya a la cárcel sin razón, no tener miedo de una represión violenta incluso en medio de una protesta pacífica/ demostración.” / “Not being afraid of being hit by soldiers, not being afraid of a stray bullet, not being afraid of a black friend going to jail for no reason, not being afraid of violent repression even in the middle of a peaceful protest/demonstration.”**

Activist from Brazil

When asked what the barriers are to their or other activists' well-being, of the 368 responses, 137 respondents (37% of respondents) mentioned safety and security.

### Barriers to Well-being: **Safety and Security**

- Threats
- Fear
- Intimidation
- Online and offline harassment
- Police violence/repression
- Torture
- Inhumane and degrading treatment
- Abuse
- (Paramilitary and state) persecution
- Kidnapping
- (Unlawful/arbitrary) arrest
- Summary/extrajudicial killings
- (Online) advocacy of hatred
- Systemic oppression by the government
- Fear for the safety of family and friends

**“No siempre, pero en un minuto fue peligroso realizar activismo incluso en línea. Hubo muchas protestas y la policía comenzó a revisar las redes sociales y detener gente en la frontera por estar contra el gobierno. También nací en dictadura y sé lo riesgoso que puede ser decir lo que piensas en un país con estructuras quebradas. El principal obstáculo es cuando no hay protección ni aplicación de la ley por igual.” / “Not always, but at one point it was dangerous to do activism, even online. There were many protests and the police began to check social networks and arrest people at the border for being against the government. I was also born in a dictatorship and I know how risky it can be to say what you think in a country with broken structures. The main obstacle is when there is no equal protection or enforcement.”**

Activist from Chile

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**“Cuidarse que la policia no te mate, no te torture” / “Take care that the police don’t kill you, don’t torture you.”**

LGBTI rights and racial justice activist from Venezuela

**“I just don't like to fully embrace that I am an activist because it feels like I am a target in our country if I am one.”**

Activist from the Philippines

**“La policia puede llegar a ser violenta en muchos casos dentro de manifestaciones pacificas” / “The police can become violent in many cases within peaceful demonstrations.”**

Activist from Argentina

**“En mi país las protestas son penadas y la policia te captura, golpea y a veces "desaparecen" personas” / “In my country, protests are punishable and the police capture you, beat you and sometimes ‘disappear’ people.”**

Climate activist from Perú

**“Estar viva, estoy en el exilio y eso es el bienestar para mí, no estar en la cárcel” / "Being alive, I am in exile and that is well-being for me, not being in jail."**

Activist from Guatemala

**“(Un obstáculo) especialmente en países en conflicto como el nuestro (Colombia) es la seguridad y el respeto a la vida, donde simplemente por no estar de acuerdo con el sistema corporativo ya el activista se convierte en una amenaza que se debe eliminar.” / “(A barrier) especially in countries in conflict like ours (Colombia) is security and respect for life, where simply by not agreeing with the corporate system, the activist becomes a threat that must be eliminated.”**

Climate change and peace activist from Colombia

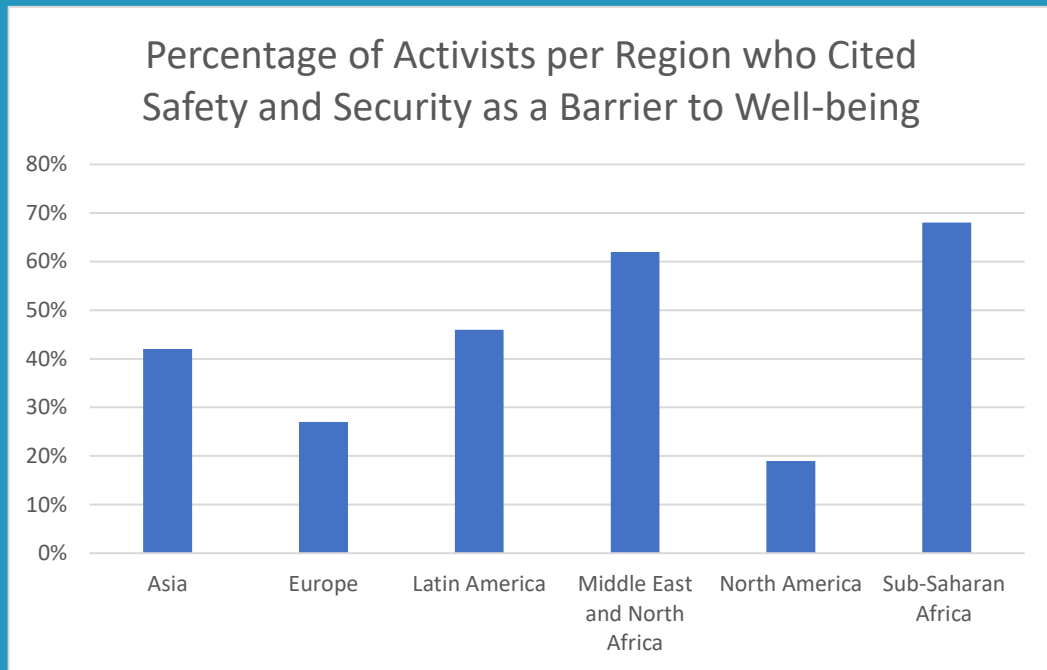
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## REGIONAL AND GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

Safety and security concerns were more prevalent among respondents from Asia, MENA, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa than among activists from Europe and North America. In their definitions of well-being, safety and security were mentioned by 54% of respondents from MENA, 37% from Latin America, 35% from Africa, 20% of respondents from Asia, 16% from North America and 15% from Europe.

When reporting on the barriers to well-being, 68% of respondents from Africa, 62% from MENA, 46% from Latin America and 42% from Asia said safety and security were barriers, while 27% of European and 19% of North American activists did.

There were no significant differences in responses from younger and older activists, with slightly more children and youth mentioning safety and security (29% versus 21% in the meaning of well-being responses, and 41% versus 37% in the barriers to well-being responses).



## WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO WELL-BEING?

When asked what has contributed to their well-being in the past, of the 440 responses, 21 (5%) mentioned safety, security and protection. And when asked what they feel could contribute to their well-being, 33 respondents (8%) cited things related to safety, security and protection. Specifically, activists reported that in the past, they have benefited from training, safe transport, having risk assessments and security plans in place, ongoing monitoring of the security situation, help getting out of dangerous situations and help in emergency situations, safe houses and/or resettlement, security measures, protocols in place in case of arrest, and digital security measures.

Activists specifically mentioned being able to travel and move around safely, the importance of being unlikely to experience serious reprisals as a result of one's activism, being able to communicate without risk of repercussions, and only taking calculated risks. Security briefings and code words for situations where it is necessary to leave quickly, and knowing how to behave in case of arrest were also cited. Police providing assurances of safety and protection to those involved and providing protection to those involved would help, as would having access to safe spaces to meet.

**What has contributed to my well-being is... "Creating a safe space for activists to exhale, take stock and gain new strength."**

Activist from Liberia

## BARRIERS TO WELL-BEING: SYSTEMIC AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Systemic issues, human rights abuses and different types of structural violence featured heavily among the barriers which activists face. Activists cited the challenges and risks associated with their activism and protest. The examples ranged from the Israeli occupation and the ruling authority in Palestine; Bangladesh's Digital Security Act 57, which hinders activists' online activity; the reduced liberties to arrange and attend protests in the UK, meaning that protesting feels like an overwhelming risk; the narrowing of protest rights in Italy and not being able to travel within territories controlled by the Damascus government, to mention a few of the examples.

Related to this, some other ideas that are featured in activists' understanding of well-being include freedom, justice, choice, and dignity.

**“Well-being is freedom. It's financial freedom to look after my basic needs and those of my family. It's freedom of expression and freedom to think. It's freedom of assembly and movement. It's the freedom to make conscious decisions without being manipulated, without being a victim of propaganda.”**

Dayani, a climate activist from Sri Lanka (see Dayani's story [here](#))

- Governments' disregard for human rights and the rule of law
- Denial of the right to protest
- Denial of freedom of speech and expression
- (Media) censorship and self-censorship
- Criminalization of dissent and protest
- Smear campaigns
- Worry the government will target us
- Surveillance by national security agents
- Capitalism/neoliberalism and consumption
- Lack of responsible and accountable responses from changemakers who have the power to enable the change we want to see
- Laws to protect activists are not respected
- Legal consequences
- Accusations from religious institutions and anti-rights groups
- Increasing authoritarian practices
- Political interference
- Dictatorial government
- Lack of democratic process
- Shrinking civic space
- Government blacklisting
- Non-governmental organization (NGO) suspension/closure
- Public disaffection with activism
- Not enough responsiveness and civil conscience
- Activism being equated unjustly to “terrorism”
- Corruption
- Greenwashing
- Threat of climate chaos

”تقييد على الحقوق والحريات، حرية الرأي، حرية المعلومة وحرية الحركة

“Restrictions on rights and freedoms, freedom of opinion, freedom of information, freedom of movement.”

Activist from Yemen

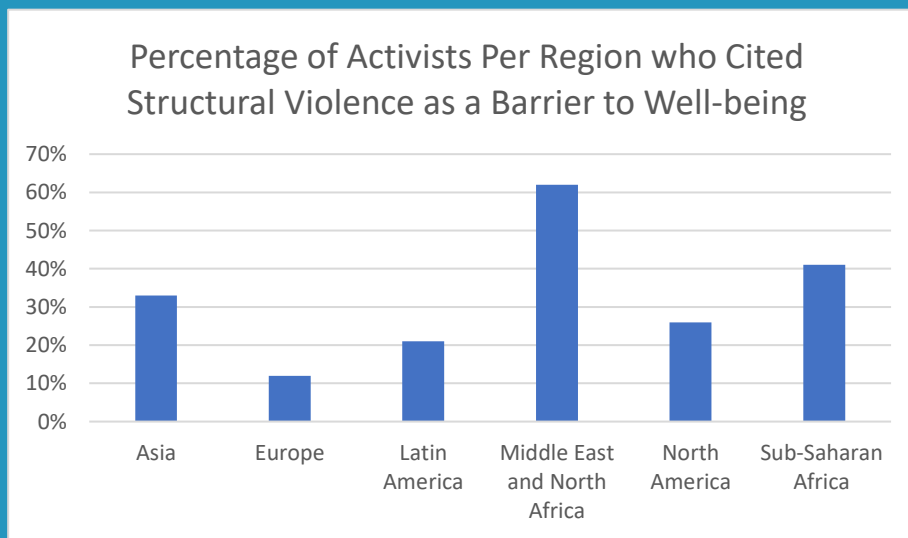
“Un sistema social de clase y una economía de mercado que rige todas las interacciones en nuestra sociedad.” / “A social class system and a market economy that governs all interactions in our society.”

Activist from Chile

### REGIONAL AND GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

Structural violence and political realities were cited substantially by respondents from MENA (62%), and Africa (41%). These issues were mentioned by 33% of Asian respondents, 26% of activists from North America, and 21% of Latin American respondents. Twelve percent of European respondents mentioned these things.

There was no significant difference in responses from younger and older activists, with slightly more older activists citing political realities than youth (24% versus 18%).



“The biggest challenge we face is negligent authorities. I mean they are the challenge; our challenge is the authorities.”

Wendy, a women’s rights activist from Mexico (see Wendy’s story [here](#))

“Quand votre engagement est réduit/ramener à des questions politiques alors que vous êtes neutre et impartial” / “When your engagement is reduced to political issues while you are neutral and impartial”

Women’s and sexual and reproductive rights activist from Guinea

**“Trampas gubernamentales por medio de leyes y acuerdos inconsultos de gobierno con empresas que vulneran sistemáticamente el medio natural” / “Government traps through laws and unconsulted government agreements with companies that systematically violate the natural environment”**

Climate change activist from Argentina

## WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO WELL-BEING?

**What would contribute to my well-being is.... “rights for all citizens... freedom of demonstration and speech.”**

Activist from Türkiye

The political realities and structural violence that activists aim to fight against were also mentioned repeatedly in response to “What would improve your well-being?” (while none of these were mentioned in response to “What has contributed to your well-being?” in the past). These elements are often linked with one’s activism because the structural violence, which presents barriers to well-being and, if done away with, would contribute to activists’ well-being, are often also the very things activists are fighting against. Activists participating in the survey said that what would help their well-being are freedom, channels for political participation, freedom of association, speech and movement (including laws to make these a reality). Having power over one’s own life through being free from the patriarchy, capitalism and other systems of oppression.

Respect for human rights for all (in particular human rights defenders) and equal treatment, as well as greater awareness of human rights (by activists themselves, the general public, the media, politicians and the police), were also mentioned as factors which would improve well-being. Stopping persecution of civil society activity and allowing activists to work freely and safely is mentioned as an essential part of this. Several activists pointed to the need for legal frameworks to be supportive and not detrimental to their work, citing the importance of legalizing protest, not criminalizing the climate action struggle, providing legal protections, and the repeal of repressive laws as a key part of this, too. A Peruvian activist specifically referred to the need for the proposed gender identity law to be approved to provide protections for transgender people to ensure inclusion and equal treatment. But also, to help reduce the high rate of stigma and discrimination towards trans women and men.

Other things that were mentioned include young people being taken seriously and included in decision-making processes, mainstream media supporting activists’ causes, world leaders and CEOs taking responsibility, and a reduction in police violence.

**“This one is hard. My well-being is compromised due to autism and transphobia. The things I fight for in my activism are the things that would improve my well-being.”**

Activist from Denmark

نحن نعمل في منظمات غير حكومية وهي غير مرخصة من حكومة دمشق وفي هذه الحالة لدي معلومات انني مطلوب الى الجهات الامنية في دمشق لذا لا استطيع التحرك في مناطق سيطرة حكومة دمشق وايضا لا استطيع الحصول على وثائق مثلا لا املك جواز سفر للسفر

**“We work in non-governmental organizations and they are not licensed by the Damascus government. I have information that I am wanted by the security authorities in Damascus. Therefore, I cannot move within the areas controlled by the Damascus government. Also, I cannot obtain any official documents like a passport, so I cannot travel.”**

Activist from Syria

تضييق السلطات على أنشطتنا + التحريض الإعلامي ضد المنظمة.

**“Authorities restricting our activities and media incitement against the organization.”**

Activist from Libya

**What would contribute to my well-being is... “Que no se criminalice la lucha ambiental”/ “for the climate struggle to not be criminalized.”**

Climate justice activist from Chile

**What would contribute to my well-being is... “Legal protections. Repeal of repressive laws.”**

Activist from the Philippines

“Safe space/s” for one’s activism was mentioned explicitly in 10 responses to “What does well-being mean to you?” in nine responses to “What do you feel could improve you and/or your group’s well-being in your activism?” and in 22 responses to “what has effectively contributed to your well-being in the past?”. Safe spaces can be understood to encompass physical safety as well as psychological safety – feeling comfortable and being able to be oneself and express oneself without fear of judgement. One activist expressed that it would be beneficial to have a “base-place” which is open perhaps once a week, where activists can talk freely, join efforts and console one another, “a place where you can relax and feel safe”.

**Well-being is... “Un buen clima organizacional, espacios de comprensión, contención y apoyo dentro del equipo de trabajo y sobre todo un espacio seguro que te garantice comodidad y te entregue tanto como lo que das.” / “A good organizational climate, spaces of understanding, moderation and support within one’s work team, and above all, a safe space which guarantees you comfort, and which gives you back as much as you give.”**

Activist from Chile

**“Si no hay espacios seguros explotamos, terminamos enfrentados y el activismo cansa, pesa, por eso lo considero una urgencia.” / “If there are no safe spaces, we explode, we end up turning on one another and activism tires us out, it weighs down on us, that is why I consider them an urgent need.”**

Activist from Colombia

**Well-being is... “un espacio seguro donde ser yo no ofenda a nadie y que también los demás se sientan bien conmigo.” / “a safe space where being me doesn’t offend anybody and similarly others feel ok with me.”**

LGBTI activist from Venezuela

**Well-being is... “when I feel safe to share my thoughts, ideas and opinions without any fear of all types of retribution.”**

Activist from South Sudan



## 4.3 DIMENSION OF WELL-BEING: COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION

**“The community and the networks are what help you and save you.”**

Wendy, a women’s rights activist from Mexico (see Wendy’s story [here](#))

Connection, community building and the ability to care for one another were prevalent in activists’ understanding of well-being and were mentioned by 19% of respondents in their definitions of well-being. Respondents cited the importance of feeling at ease with one’s group as being surrounded by people who share the same convictions and objectives. Feeling part of a movement and feeling a sense of belonging are crucial, as is a sense of shared responsibility. Solidarity was mentioned by 10 respondents, and empathy, inclusivity and trust were also cited.

**Well-being is... “estar en colectivo, comunidad, complicidad. La soledad o compañías intermitentes, me des-energiza.”/ “being in a collective, a community, complicity. Solitude or intermittent company takes away my energy.”**

Activist from Chile

Connected to having and relying on community, some activists mentioned the importance of talking as they defined the meaning of well-being for them: talking through difficult situations and strong emotions and taking the time to debrief. Empathy was mentioned as the key to well-being, and so was friendship.

**Well-being is.... “estar rodeado de gente maravillosa y diversa, con la que compartir el camino, las luchas, victorias y derrotas y las diferencias, con la que imaginar y crear un futuro y un presente mejores... un entorno de afinidad afectivamente reconfortante que siento como casa, seguro y amable.”/ “being surrounded by wonderful people with whom to share the journey, the struggles, the victories, the defeats and differences, with whom to imagine and create a better future and a better present... an environment of affinity which is emotionally comforting and in which I feel at home, safe and kind.”**

Activist from Spain

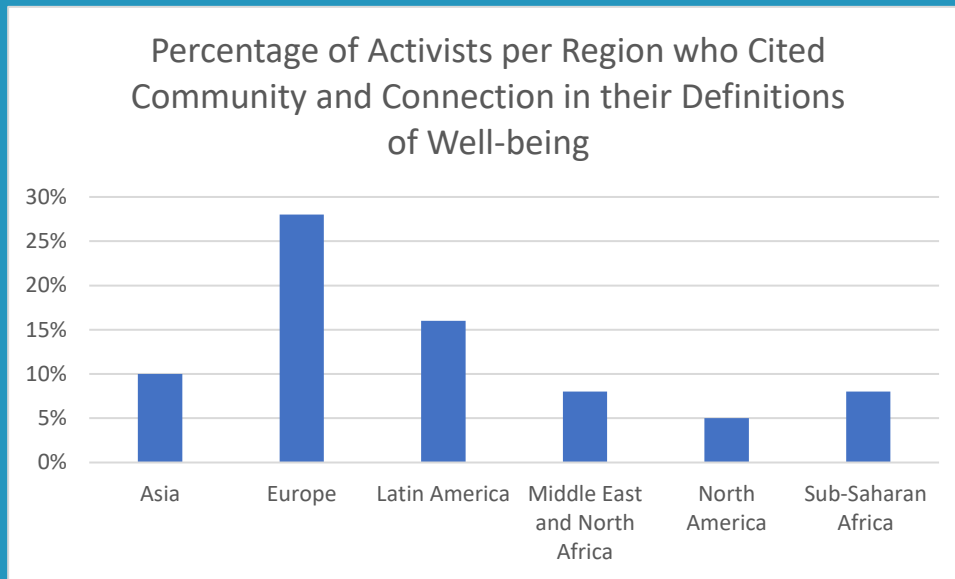
**Barrier to Well-being: “I think often we still don’t know how to work in a community but do it as individuals and then get burned out.”**

Activist from Côte d’Ivoire

## REGIONAL AND GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

A greater number of respondents from Europe (28%) cited community and connection in their responses on the meaning of well-being than activists from other regions. The next largest number of mentions was among Latin American respondents (16%), followed by activists from Asia (10%), activists from Africa and MENA (both at 8%) and those from North America (5%). We feel this is unlikely to be a reflection of community and connection having less importance outside of Europe, and more likely to reflect that activists in other regions have more immediate well-being barriers (such as security, as we have seen) which come through more strongly in their definitions of well-being.

There were no significant differences in responses from younger and older activists, with slightly more older activists citing community and connection in their responses on the meaning of well-being (20% versus 15%).



## WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO WELL-BEING?

**What has contributed to my well-being is... “Finding community with other activists who are truly kind, inclusive, and encouraging.”**

Activist from the USA

A sense of community, or “consciously building community”, has been beneficial for a significant number of activists (with 186 or 42%, saying this had contributed to their well-being in the past and 85 activists or 21%, feeling that a stronger sense of community and connection would improve their well-being going forward). Respondents pointed to the importance of living in a community, having group cohesion, being interdependent and feeling accompanied. The well-being of activists has been enhanced by knowing that “we always watch out for each other” and that “we’re there for each other”. The impression of being stronger as a group and “collective motivation” were cited as key elements that had contributed to well-being in the past.

It was mentioned that expressing frustration among like-minded individuals can help people move forward together and that the fact of not being alone and being surrounded by people who go through the same emotions and “understand your pain” helps contribute to well-being. Respondents mentioned the significance of “being a crowd which believes in the same cause” and sharing the same values, indignation and ideals. Having groups that are united, have shared responsibility, and are in solidarity with one another is key, as is having a sense of belonging.

**“What has contributed to my well-being is... tener una comunidad que me acepte y proteja / having a community which accepts me and protects me.”**

Activist from Honduras

Building friendships and socializing among activists and colleagues (outside of work) was repeatedly mentioned as having contributed to well-being. The importance of solidarity and humour, feeling connected, and sharing joy and gratitude were also reported.

Activists wrote about the importance of good communication and openness in groups so that things can be discussed honestly, openly and respectfully, “courageously talking about true feelings and thoughts”.

**What has contributed to my well-being is... “an open climate where it is encouraged to just do as much as you can/want to/have the strength to do.”**

Activist from Sweden

Practices for building community and integrating well-being into activism were cited, including empathy circles, singing together, sharing stories of hope, mutual support, interaction and discussion, clear rules around coexistence, mutual societies, resistance funds, and unions.

## **NETWORKING**

**What would contribute to well-being is... “Comprendre qu’ensemble on irait tellement plus loin” / “Understanding that together we would go so much further”**

Women’s rights and gender equality activist from France

Strengthening networks of contact and support among activists was specifically mentioned by several activists as they described what they felt would improve their well-being. This encompasses carrying out actions in alliance with other organizations, creating links between different social and climate movements (including having one person in each movement responsible for interconnections), “to show to us all that we are not all alone, that there’s a large community of people out there that want societal change”. One activist specifically referred to how the existing well-being networks are all separate and that they should be coming together to learn from each other. Avoiding competition or “squabbling about who is the better activist”, as well as having more empathy, were mentioned as crucial to enabling collective efforts and connections with other groups with common goals. Activists mentioned the value of sharing practices of non-violence with other organizations or groups and expressed that “by listening to each other, we would also become more aware of specific barriers that others encounter, which would in turn hopefully make us more inclusive in the future”.

## **4.4 DIMENSION OF WELL-BEING: REST AND CAPACITY**

Fifty activists (11%), in describing the meaning of well-being, mentioned the need to have or take time to recover from emotions and fatigue and to disengage and rest. Regeneration was mentioned, as was the need to carve out space to reset and rebalance and take a “restorative approach”. Respondents mentioned the importance of taking a break and doing things other than activism. It was also mentioned that not feeling guilty is key to well-being.

**Well-being is... “knowing you're allowed to take time out, actually taking the time out, no guilt.”**

Activist from the UK

## Barriers to Well-being: Safety and Security

- Threats
- Fear
- Intimidation
- Online and offline harassment
- Police violence/repression
- Torture
- Inhumane and degrading treatment
- Abuse
- (Paramilitary and state) persecution
- Kidnapping
- (Unlawful/arbitrary) arrest
- Summary/extrajudicial killings
- (Online) hate speech
- Systemic oppression of government
- Fear for the safety of family and friends

**“La imposibilidad de desconectar para ejercer el autocuidado / the impossibility of disconnecting to put self-care into practice”**

Activist from Peru

## WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO WELL-BEING?

Many activists reported that taking breaks, resting, having fun, as well as finding ways to manage workload and maintain capacity for carrying out one’s activism are key to well-being. It was cited by 71 activists (16%) as something that has contributed to their well-being in the past. In particular, respondents cited social time together, doing leisure activities together with other activists, taking time off, having fun and stepping back to keep perspective and life in balance. Some activists felt that more creativity, play and joy would improve well-being. Creating a safe space for activists to exhale, take stock and gain new strength, and taking a break to rethink strategy and objectives are crucial to maintaining psychological health, as is taking the time to debrief, celebrate and reflect. Retreats were mentioned as useful spaces to facilitate this.

**What has contributed to my well-being is... “Me détacher de toute culpabilité de ne pas me donner corps et âme pour la lutte” / “Detach myself from any guilt for not giving my all to the struggle”**

Activist from France

Acceptance of one’s and others’ capacity and what each individual can contribute has been key to achieving well-being for some activists. This includes accepting that one can only do what time, energy and physical safety allow, that there can be different levels of contribution and different paces, and that there will always be infinite needs out there, but one person cannot fulfil them all. Listening to one’s limits, not worrying about conforming to an idealized view of a ‘true activist’, removing unrealistic goals and expectations and instead having clear and achievable goals for one’s actions, and being satisfied with doing what you can with your capabilities, were all mentioned as things activists felt would improve their well-being. Establishing limits – and following them – was also mentioned. Discipline, meditation and saying no were also key.

Some of the elements which respondents reported on in terms of maintaining capacity and avoiding burnout were to share workloads: assisting each other with tasks/responsibilities where possible, encouraging

different people to take the lead and share the load, having several people being active so it does not all fall on one person, and having more people willing to participate on an ongoing basis. All of these are things which have contributed to activists' well-being in the past.

**“Getting out of our reality from time to time would be great.”**

Martina, a women's rights activist from Angola (see Martina's story [here](#))

Indeed, according to survey participants, it is key to find ways to ensure working cultures enable rest and reasonable workloads. This means, for instance, allowing people to step back and making it clear they can come back and get more involved again when they have the capacity and headspace without comment or judgement, normalizing breaks and rest, not glamourising overworking, and taking pressure off instead of adding it on. It also involves stepping back to reflect on the need for action or not, keeping track of what people can or cannot handle, restricting or reducing working hours and being clear about priorities (even adopting a policy that if something new is added, then something else is removed). One activist stated the importance of “making some things explicit, just by saying them: for example, 'we need to limit our hours to healthy levels so we can take care of ourselves', 'what's a realistic amount of time to give to X activity?'”. Leaving periods for recuperation between actions and respecting one another's obligations outside of activism (especially recognizing that many activists are volunteers) were also cited as key, as was taking leave/holiday.

**“Si ta révolution ne sait pas danser, ne m'invite pas à ta révolution” / “If I can't dance I don't want to be part of your revolution”**

Sub-Comandante Marcos

(quotation cited by an activist in their definition of well-being)

## **DEFINING WELL-BEING: NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

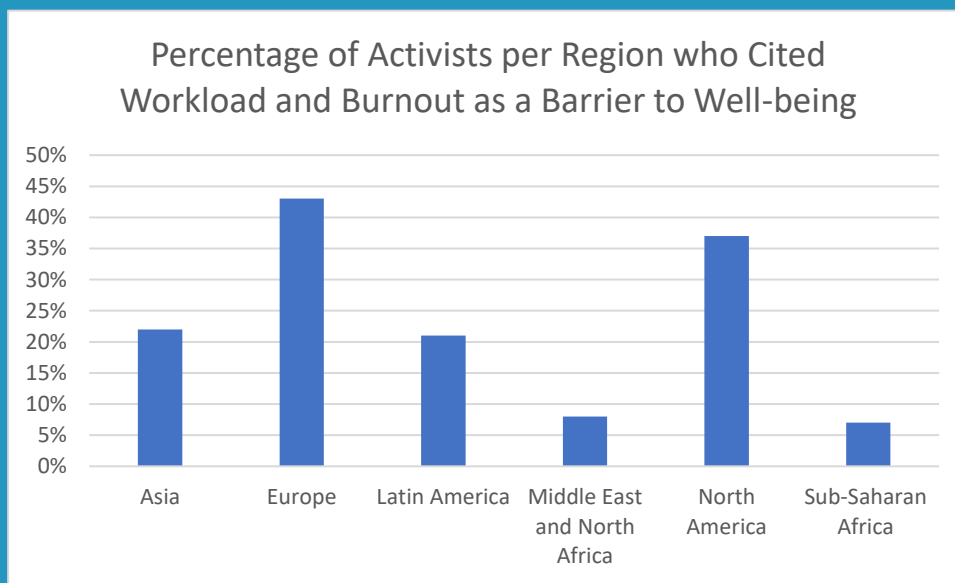
Eight activists cited nature and the environment in their descriptions of well-being: breathing fresh air, living in a healthy environment, having a connection with nature, or spending time in nature. For some, this was mentioned specifically in relation to their climate activism goals, such as “having the forest and clean environment to be enjoyed by future generations”. The fact that their well-being is tied to a healthy environment, in jeopardy due to the climate crisis, also reinforces their convictions and drive regarding climate justice and the need to see change, as well as their frustration at inaction.

## REGIONAL AND GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

When disaggregating by region, respondents from North America cited rest and leisure the most (22%) when describing the meaning of well-being. Fifteen percent of those from Asia and MENA mentioned it, while 12% of European respondents did. Just 4% of respondents from Africa and Latin America referred to rest and leisure in their definitions of well-being.

When it came to barriers, those activists that mentioned lack of rest and leisure, or burnout specifically, most were from Europe at 43%, followed by respondents from North America at 37%. Twenty-two percent of Asian respondents and 21% of Latin American respondents mentioned this as a barrier, and 8% of MENA and 7% of African respondents did. We imagine that these differences probably do not correspond to more European and North American activists facing issues of burnout more than their counterparts elsewhere, but that the greater prevalence among respondents from these regions may be reflective of there being more awareness and openness around these issues in these regions.

There were no significant differences in responses from younger and older activists, with slightly more older activists citing burnout as a barrier (32% versus 26%) and in their descriptions of well-being (12% versus 5%).



## 4.5 DIMENSION OF WELL-BEING: PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Some respondents mentioned that well-being is having the energy to be able to keep going. When defining well-being, 16 people explicitly mentioned avoiding burnout and the importance of not feeling the weight of the world on one's shoulders. An absence of anxiety and fatigue were also cited, as was endurance and perseverance. These elements were cited by 20% of respondents when defining well-being, and the opposite (burnout, anxiety, not having energy, etc.) was mentioned by 37% of activists when describing the barriers they face.

**Well-being is... “being sustainable with ourselves, meaning to make sure to not use more energy than we can regenerate.”**

Climate and animal rights activist from Belgium

“Resilience” was featured in seven activists’ definitions of well-being, and by one activist, it was defined as “strength and flexibility to roll with the work over time”.

**Well-being is... “engaging in activism from a place of peace, love and hope, rather than one of shame, obligation, and pain.”**

Activist from the USA

**“Slow and steady is well-being in activism. That we do not give up on our hope and solidarity but at the same time don’t burn all of our energy in fighting against the injustice.”**

Climate and indigenous rights activist from Nepal

The ability to maintain motivation and morale was similarly mentioned as fundamental to a sense of well-being, and some activists cited inner peace and mindfulness as their understanding of well-being. Feeling uplifted and feeling hopefulness, passion, and enthusiasm were important to some activists’ well-being. Creativity and inspiration were also mentioned, as well as confidence and courage and not feeling desperate. One respondent responded that in itself, “activism is a way of being hopeful”, pointing to the importance of hope driving activism. Fifteen respondents referred to happiness, joy and fulfilment in their descriptions of well-being. Five others mentioned *bienveillance* (kindness).

**Well-being is... “Comme un cocon de bienveillance, respect et régénération.” / “Like a cocoon of kindness, respect and regeneration.”**

Climate activist from France

**“Be gentle with each other so we can be dangerous together.”**

Håkan Geijer

(quotation cited by an activist in their definition of well-being)

## WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO WELL-BEING?

**“Understanding how grief and trauma work has helped me understand and accept myself.”**

Lai, an activist from Hong Kong (see Lai’s story [here](#))

Things which have helped activists’ psychological health, in addition to the support structures and tools mentioned above, include formal spaces for emotional release, such as conferences or conversation spaces, as well as informal spaces which occur spontaneously and integrating strategies to reduce stress and burnout.

**What would contribute to my well-being is... “Practicing hope and imagination of a better future. Learning to hold grief.”**

Climate justice activist from the UK

## Barriers to Well-being: State of Mind

- Burnout
- Emotional exhaustion
- Stress
- Lack of balance
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Hopelessness
- Powerlessness
- Lack of motivation
- Feeling constant grief
- Despair
- Depression
- Pressure
- Feeling tired and demoralized
- Fear and doubt about the future

**“In China, because of shrinking civic space and ongoing surveillance, we felt that there was very little we could do and there’s a strong sense of helplessness among activists.”**

Jing, LGBTI and women’s rights activist from China (see Jing’s story [here](#))

**“The sheer weight of activism as things seem to be getting worse.”**

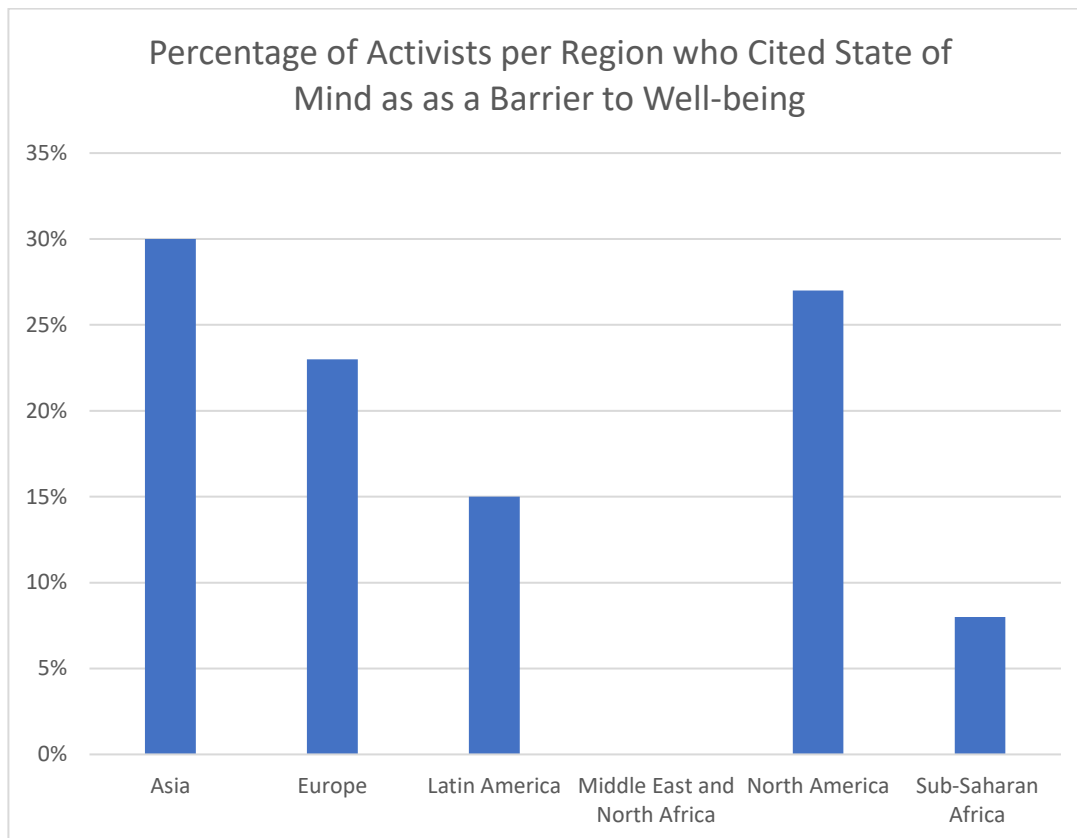
Women’s rights and gender equality activist from the UK

### REGIONAL AND GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

“State of mind” was cited by a higher percentage of Asian, North American and European respondents to the survey (30%, 27% and 23% respectively). Meanwhile, 15% of activists from Latin America, 8% from Africa and 0% from MENA mentioned state of mind in their descriptions of well-being. As above, when analysing the differences in relation to the reporting of workload and burnout as barriers, we imagine that these differences probably do not correspond to more Asian, North American and European activists facing psychological barriers than their counterparts elsewhere, but that the greater prevalence among respondents from these regions may be reflective of there being more awareness and openness around these issues in these regions.

There were no significant differences in responses from younger and older activists, with slightly more younger activists mentioning state of mind in their descriptions of well-being (23% versus 20%).





As mentioned by 9% of respondents, maintaining physical and mental health or ensuring that health is not compromised were important to some activists' understanding of well-being. Activists specifically cited key elements to maintain their health and take care of themselves: sleep/rest, nutrition, exercise and personal hygiene. Several respondents mentioned the need to have their "basic needs" or "the basics" covered in order to have well-being.

**"Checking in on each other and taking care of each other's basic needs, such as reminders to eat or hydrate or sharing food, helped during stressful times."**

Climate and Refugee Rights Activist from Romania

**Well-being is... "Avoir accès au service de base, pouvoir jouir d'une paix d'esprit sans souci d'inécurité." / "To have access to basic services, to be able to enjoy a state of mind without any concern for security."**

Activist from Haiti

**Well-being is to: "separate myself from external traumas while working to reconcile and heal with others as well."**

Activist from the USA

## DEFINING WELL-BEING: BALANCE AND ALIGNMENT

Balance was mentioned by 37 activists (8%) as they defined well-being, at points explicitly in the context of work/activism-life balance (and the importance of a manageable workload), as well as in the context of balancing taking care of others and of oneself. Understanding and respecting one's boundaries was cited as fundamental to well-being: balancing what one takes on and being able to say no or limit involvement when necessary to protect oneself or maintain well-being. Achieving a balance between passion and despair was key for some respondents – between caring but not to the extent that it becomes all-consuming or destructive.

Linked to balance, some people expressed that for them, well-being means alignment and coherence: alignment between your values and the work you do or the organization you work with, “feeling aligned between what we defend, say and do”, feeling agreement between ideas and actions, being in balance with one's standards or values or existing in harmony with our principles and what we feel deep down.

**Well-being is... “being in a working space where I do not need to compromise parts of my identity to do my job.”**

Activist from Colombia

## 4.6 DIMENSION OF WELL-BEING: RECOGNITION AND RESPECT

Recognition and respect are featured in some activists' descriptions of well-being. Respondents described how well-being for them means being “appreciated”, “having encouragement”, and “feeling seen”. A number of respondents pointed to the importance of being able to express opinions and that they are respected, even though they may differ from those of other people. Several people responded that for them, well-being is being listened to, being or feeling heard, or being understood.

**What has contributed to my well-being is... “Being acknowledged for contributions to society.”**

Activist from the Philippines

### Barriers to Well-being: Recognition and Respect

- Not being listened to
- Lack of understanding
- Lack of respect
- Not being recognized by friends and colleagues as an activist but just as a troublemaker
- Weak recognition of our commitment
- Lack of recognition of NGOs from the South

**“Recognition and respect are also important for me. I feel a boost in my well-being whenever someone recognizes the value of what I do. It gives me a sense of accomplishment.”**

Jing, LGBTI and women's rights activist from China (see Jing's story [here](#))

Overall, recognition and respect (like impact and results) were mentioned less than the other dimensions of well-being we have seen before, being mentioned by 8% of activists on average.

### REGIONAL AND GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

Recognition and respect were mentioned most frequently by European respondents, at 12%, followed by those from MENA (8%), Latin America (6%), North America (5%), Asia (3%) and Africa (0%). Given the low prevalence of this issue, we do not feel these differences are likely to be reflective or representative of any meaningful differences between regions.

There was no significant difference in responses from younger and older activists, with 11% of children and youth citing recognition and respect in their descriptions of well-being, and 8% of adult activists doing so.

Discrimination and prejudice were mentioned when activists wrote about the barriers that they face when doing their activism, with 68 respondents or 19% citing various types of discrimination that they and other activists face.

### Barriers to Well-being: **Discrimination and Prejudice**

- Racism
- Sexism and misogyny
- Gender discrimination in both power and pay
- Ageism
- Antisemitism
- Ableism
- Bullying
- Power relations
- Hierarchy
- Violence within our activist institutions
- Access (for example, lack of captions on videos) at marches/protests/online
- Bigotry and narrow-mindedness

**"Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance."**

Verna Myers  
(quotation cited by an activist in their definition of well-being)

**"Lack of acknowledgement of my identity, being asked to silence myself because my lived experience is not that of the people in the room."**

Activist from Colombia

**"Poor involvement of people living with disabilities in key decision-making platforms"**

Activist from Kenya

**"Being a black intersectional woman, my various identities follow me consistently. Thereby, issues varying from racism, sexism, classism, environmental oppressions and numerous other socio-**

**economic issues tend to block our access to all our rights in everything that we do, including our activism.”**

Activist from South Africa

**“Young people are oftentimes gaslit, treated with less respect, and not taken seriously. This is something that has affected my peers and me, and that generates a lot of frustration.”**

Climate and refugee rights activist from Romania

**“El prejuicio. Existe unas etiquetas y estereotipo hacia los activistas muy fuertes, sobre todo los activistas lgtbq” / “Prejudice. There is a lot of labelling and stereotyping of activists, especially of lgtbq activists.”**

Activist from Peru

**“Discrimination from the government and private sector and some of the community members who do not share the same values.”**

Activist from Cambodia

**“In the Somalia context, governance is clan-based, so the minority clan members, which my family is from, face discrimination, exclusion from all social welfare or networks, unemployment, poverty, violence, etc.”**

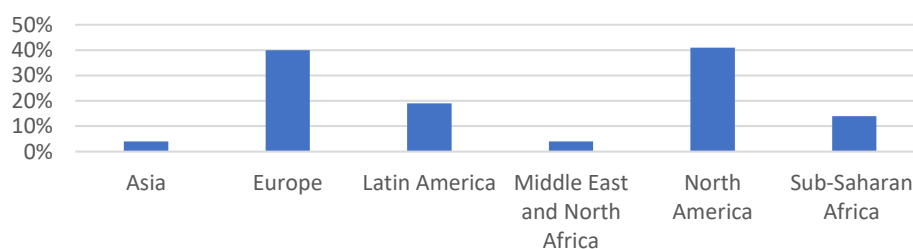
Activist from Somalia

## REGIONAL AND GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

The mention of discrimination and prejudice was higher among participants from North America (41%) and Europe (40%) than in other regions. In Latin America, it was mentioned by 19% of survey participants, in Africa by 14% and in Asia and MENA by 4%. This trend may be a reflection of a reckoning with discrimination and racism being particularly prevalent in North America and Europe and more openness to name them explicitly.

There was no significant difference in responses from younger and older activists, with 19% of children and youth citing discrimination and institutional barriers to their well-being, and 18% of adult activists doing so.

Percentage of Activists per Region who Cited Discrimination and Prejudice as a Barrier to Well-being



## WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO WELL-BEING?

Respondents pointed to recognition and respect as things which have contributed to their activism, and which could help improve it. This includes surrounding oneself with people capable of listening and respecting, being accepting of difference, avoiding toxic people and those who seek conflict as an end in itself, and complimenting each other for achievements and successful events/campaigns. Activists point to the importance of empathy and understanding, avoiding judgement and blame, and ensuring that trauma felt in the activism scene is heard and addressed. Integrating anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices into one's everyday work was also mentioned. The importance of allies being educated concerning the discrimination of black and indigenous people, people of colour, queer people, women and other marginalized groups was reported as a factor which would improve well-being.

## 4.7 DIMENSION OF WELL-BEING: IMPACT AND RESULTS

**Well-being is... “to know that my activism is useful.”**

Activist from Italy

Six percent of respondents pointed to the meaning, results and impact of their activism in defining the meaning of well-being for them, while 7% pointed to the opposite (ineffectiveness, not seeing results) as barriers to their well-being. They mentioned the importance of “feeling like you are contributing”, “seeing change, even if small”, and “seeing achievements which positively impact lives”. Some activists stated the importance of seeing “that we make a difference”, seeing change, or even the possibility of making change, and the need to feel like you are making advances or progress. Others mentioned that for them, well-being is purpose, a sense of a common purpose with others, or that the actions they carry out have meaning, allowing oneself to feel useful and legitimate.

**“I found it really important that in the movements I am part of, we celebrate the small victories and have a feeling that we actually achieved something.”**

Activist from Finland

### Barriers to Well-being: Ineffectiveness

- The feeling of not advancing
- Difficult to see impact
- Poor response from authorities
- Not knowing what you can do to be effective

**“Ultimately it would be that no one wants to give us the opportunity to address change.”**

Activist from the Philippines

## WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO WELL-BEING?

Seeing one's impact and results was also an element contributing to well-being. Activists mentioned how seeing the impact of one's efforts, celebrating victories, receiving "good news" regarding the objectives of their activism, and sharing success contribute to well-being. For those working to support prisoners of conscience, seeing them released has been very gratifying. Making breakthroughs, such as achieving equal treatment for trans women and men, seeing them breaking stereotypes and studying in public and private universities, is a boost to well-being.

Re-focusing on the why, believing that change is achievable and "the feeling that what we do makes sense" were also mentioned. Seeing the cause gain more traction and support and being heard by governments were cited as things that would improve activists' well-being. Other things which would help include "feeling more useful" and "more advice on how to act in a way that can really make a difference".

**What has contributed to my well-being is... "Belief that making change is achievable."**

Activist from Syria

### REGIONAL AND GENERATIONAL INSIGHTS

The importance of seeing one's impact and results was more prevalent among respondents from Europe (12%). Just 4% of activists from Africa, 3% each from Asia and North America, 2% from Latin America, and 0% from MENA cited this in their definitions of well-being. When it came to this as a barrier (that is, ineffectiveness or not seeing results), it was cited by more North American activists than others (19%), while 8% of Asian respondents, 6% of European and Latin American activists, and 0% of African and MENA respondents mentioned this. Given the low prevalence of this issue, we do not feel these differences are likely to be reflective or representative of any meaningful differences between regions. If anything, as with other issues we have seen, it may be the case that activists in other regions simply have more immediate well-being barriers (such as security, as we have seen), which come through more strongly in their responses.

Comparing responses from younger and older activists, there was no significant difference, with 2% of children and youth citing the importance of having an impact on their well-being, and 6% of adult activists doing so.

## CASE STUDIES

The following case studies are based on interviews with activists from Angola, Mexico, China, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Morocco and Russia, which explored their activism and their well-being.

## AFRICA: ANGOLA, MARTINA'S STORY

Martina\* is an activist from Angola working on women's rights. She's originally from Kwanza Sul but is now based in Luanda. She's 34, married and has one son. She engages in peaceful protest – both online and offline.

"I am an activist and an organizer. I fight for the right to freedom, and I mobilize other people in my country to speak freely without fear. I organize protests, and I've been working with young people since 2011 when we were fighting against the dictatorship of José Eduardo dos Santos. I work with people to fight for our basic rights, like the right to health, work, life, water, etc.

In Angola, activists are seen as bad people. Even formal civil society organizations view us in this way. This is because we are vocal when people act badly, and we don't discriminate against who we call out – whether the government or anyone else.

**Well-being is really important.** It has psychological, spiritual, and even ideological dimensions.

For me, well-being also means being able to pay my own bills, study, etc.

But in the Angolan context, for activists, well-being is a dream, a utopia. Even if we are fine as individuals, seeing other people in worse conditions, it inhibits our well-being. There is no individual or collective well-being in Angola. In Angola, you can't find an activist who is calm and relaxed.

**There are many barriers I face to my well-being as an activist.** My activism is the reason I can't get a job. Because the regime knows you for organizing demonstrations, you're blacklisted. There are people planted in our groups from the ruling party to keep track of us and control us. We are often seen as the opposition because sometimes we have common agendas. They try to deter us. When we protest, for example, they try to defame us. They do that to us to discourage other people from protesting. When they do that, it puts a lot of pressure on us and is extremely demoralizing.

As a result of not being able to get a job, I am poor. Being poor and hungry makes you vulnerable. I do whatever business I can so that I don't go to sleep on an empty stomach. In Angola, we don't talk about three meals a day. We only have two meals, but there are even activists who only have one meal a day.

The fact that our struggles do not always have a direct impact frustrates me. Government institutions never reply to our communications. And the other thing that is really hard is the lack of solidarity from society in general.

After independence in 1975, there were many massacres. As a result of the dangers, our families are very scared of us being involved in politics. They don't understand the importance of fighting for human rights. They see us leaving home each day, but they don't see us returning with a salary, and it's really difficult to explain what we are doing. Our families just see us as crazy people.

**Being a woman and a mother makes my journey even more difficult.** As a woman, the fact that I don't have a decent job means I am further marginalized. I have been a victim many times. I have been beaten up by police officers because I was fighting for my rights, and policemen told me that, as a woman, I couldn't fight for the right to protest. I suffer from double violence, being directly affected myself as well as for being the one who fights for other people's rights.

I remember a few years ago, I had been a victim of domestic violence, then I went to a protest, and I suffered from violence at the hands of the police. The violence I suffered at home got worse as a result of the violence I faced on the streets.

**There was a moment I felt well - when I was engaged in a project with other activists.** We had a salary. With the salary, I could pay my bills, and I felt like I had the power to buy things for myself. It was the only moment I felt some stability in my life. Also, that project had an impact, and people were inspired by it. As a result, other projects started, and I felt proud to see the initiative grow. The project ended but many more other initiatives were created as a result of it.

**If, as activists, we could get jobs, this would really improve our well-being, and, for those who are on the frontlines, it would help us better confront the challenges we face.**

Having better knowledge about international mechanisms to protect our rights would also help us. It makes us feel safe when we know big, international organizations can respond quickly in case of violations.

Likewise, when we are sick and there are contacts who can help, we feel better because we are not safe going to public hospitals, for example.

Participating in training and having opportunities to exchange with other activists can help our well-being, as it's important to learn how other activists are organizing. Getting out of our reality from time to time would be great. This is important for activists who don't speak English, too, as often it's only those who speak English that get the chance to travel. This would motivate me and also inspire other people to follow our path."

\*Pseudonym used to protect the activist's identity



## AMERICAS: MEXICO, WENDY'S STORY

Wendy is a Mexican activist from Cancún, Quintana Roo. She is an advocate for women's rights and is part of the Victims' Committee for 9 November<sup>3</sup> and the Network of Women Advocates in Mexico, as well as being an activist with Amnesty. She is 32 years old and single. She protested on the streets prior to Covid-19, then engaged in digital activism during the pandemic. As a result of what happened on 9 November 2020, she returned to protest in the streets.

"Currently, the work I am most engaged in is the Victims' Committee for 9 November. Based in Cancún, we have a very specific objective, which is to access justice, truth, and comprehensive reparations for all those who were victims on 9 November 2020. Over the course of 18 months following the 9 November, we took to the streets every month without fail, specifically in the same place where the police shot at us. After the 18<sup>th</sup> month, we decided to pause protesting in the streets for a time because the risk at that point was increasing significantly, both psychologically and physically, as a result of repression and revictimization from the authorities. At that stage, we threw ourselves into pursuing the legal route for justice. But this did not work, and three or four months ago, the court ruled to absolve the 11 police officers who had committed the abuses of all charges against them. So, we realized that that was not an option, and we returned to the streets. At this stage, we started to work with victims of the State of Quintana Roo more broadly because we realized that there were other people protesting against their cases of impunity. They were on the same path as us.

**The biggest obstacle we face is negligent authorities. I mean, they are the challenge; our challenge is the authorities.** This is because the system to access justice in Mexico is non-existent. It revictimizes people, and that is one of the biggest challenges: the complete lack of access to justice and total impunity on the part of the authorities. What happened when they released the police officers was traumatic to the extent that we all got sick. The next day, one of us had a terrible headache, another got sick with the flu, and another passed out and threw up all night. **That is the challenge: the revictimization and the total lack of access to justice continue to represent a setback in self-care for activists.** You may have good self-care practice, but then you backslide when they revictimize you, as you start to doubt whether those processes and your struggle, in general, are helping at all.

**When I look back to see other processes for access to justice for other women human rights advocates, it gets me down.** For example, recently, I had the opportunity to hear from a woman from Atenco about how they finally gave her land back, which was incredible. But it took them 20 years of fighting. I'm three years into this process. How long will I have to keep going? It is a shared experience for many activists to not see justice or truth in their processes. **But if I were to see results from my fight to access justice, truth, and comprehensive reparations, I could rest and work doing what I love.**

**We are also facing another terrible challenge, which is the complete lack of empathy from society.** This really weighs on us. For instance, people who work in tourism blame us for the lack of tourists, claiming it is thanks to us that tourists don't come. Of course, it is not. It is the authorities who are to blame for this situation of abuse and impunity. And this is not just the case for feminist activists, but any movement against impunity can't get very far because society itself tells you to shut up! Human rights advocates continue to be criminalized. There is zero empathy, zero dialogue, and a complete lack of recognition for the work of human rights defenders.

**Something else that is really tough is the precarity of activists' livelihoods.** When things got going with the Victims' Committee, my business collapsed. I have a nannying business. I'm a nanny, and I hire nannies to assign to other houses. When the people who'd hired me found out that I was in this situation, they said, 'I have to look out for the safety of my family, and I can no longer use your services'. I was screaming inside, but on the outside, I was like, 'I completely understand'. They would say to me with such affection: 'If you could tell me that you are going to stop being an activist, I can continue working with you.' And then I would reply very nicely: 'My apologies, but no, because my activism is going to help your daughter in 10 years' time'. They didn't know what to say to that.

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<sup>3</sup> On 9 November 2020, hundreds of people, predominantly women, took to the streets in Cancún, to protest against the femicidal violence plaguing the state and to demand justice for the recent femicide of Bianca Alejandrina Lorenzana Alvarado "Alexis", a young woman who was found lifeless on the outskirts of the city with clear signs of violence. The response of the authorities was to quash the demonstration and perpetrate serious human rights violations against the protesters, such as arbitrary detention, torture, sexual violence, attempted extrajudicial executions and fabrication of culprits. See [here](#) for more information.

**What we are missing is monetary compensation for the people who advocate for human rights.** I know this is a pipe dream, but I always think that I wouldn't have to be here defending my rights if you (the state) would guarantee them, and so because you didn't guarantee them, well, you should be paying.

**My self-care starts when I hear other female human rights advocates talk about this.** The state has always considered itself to be the owner of our bodies. They have wanted to take away our ability to make decisions about our bodies, such as our right to abortion. Our bodies have always been seen as objects for consumption through a patriarchal lens. They have taught us that caring for ourselves was to look pretty for men. **I think that to reclaim our bodies and make them our own, we need to be able to care for our bodies to heal them.** It is a clear message we need to send that our bodies belong to us. To finally reclaim what it means to care for ourselves is the most important thing, and much more in the defence of human rights. **To first care for my body is to be able to continue defending human rights in general.**

**The community and the networks are what help you and save you.** I think that networks and community help a lot with the process of self-care because when you forget, the other person is there. We have a metaphor that when you are inside the washing machine, everything is spinning, and you don't realize what is happening, and outside, there is someone who turns off the washing machine and says, 'stop: you can do this, you can open the door, get out of the washing machine and dry off, and then continue'. This can really help."

## ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: CHINA, JING'S STORY

Jing\* is a community organizer from Central China who works on LGBTI rights, gender issues and women's rights. She left China in 2019 and now resides in Europe.

"I used to mobilize communities in China, carrying out capacity building and organizing community events to advocate for sexual minorities' rights. When I was in China, **our main worries were whether we could actually organize events or continue our work and our own safety.** These were our main concerns because of the ongoing harassment and surveillance targeting us in the country.

Now, **being overseas, the biggest challenge is to cultivate a sense of belonging and retain community members.** This is because most of the community members are only outside China temporarily. Most of them struggle to find a way to stay overseas for an extended period of time. It means people in our communities constantly come and go. What is more, we are also increasingly worried about our safety, even when overseas. After the overseas protests against strict Covid-19 measures in China, some overseas activists reported that they were harassed or targeted on social media.

In the mid-2010s, awareness of mental health was quite low among activists in China. For instance, we used to manage a well-being hotline for the LGBTI community, but as activists, we never thought about seeking help ourselves. Mental health problems are prevalent in my circle. Everyone I know either has depression or another mental health problem. But at least now, the awareness is definitely higher.

Personally, **over the years, I have come to realize how our resilience and stress tolerance are closely related to our mental health.** Now, I have learnt to assess my own well-being when I make decisions about my work. I will take something on only when I know I can bear the stress of it.

**The two main barriers I face to my well-being and my work are powerlessness and constant harassment.**

This is a result of the repressive environment we operate in. In China, because of shrinking civic space and ongoing surveillance, we felt that there was very little we could do and there was a strong sense of helplessness among activists.

For me, **another big barrier is cost - both time and financial cost.** As activists in China, we constantly worry about our livelihoods. It is very difficult to get funding for our activist work, and many of us continue our work with little to no financial support. What is more, I am not seeking any professional help right now because of how expensive these services are. I asked for a quote but gave up on the idea after seeing how expensive it was.

Because of the repressive environment in China, we often needed to put in a lot of extra time and effort to make sure our community events could actually take place. For example, we needed to ensure encrypted communications and find a safe venue for our events. This means activists in China have very little time to take care of themselves.

**As members of the LGBTI community, we also face widespread discrimination.**

**In terms of things which contribute to my well-being, the first for me is a connection with my fellow activists.**

I enjoy chatting and sharing a meal with my activist friends. It makes me feel that we are connected, not only because of our work but also on a more personal level. Feeling accompanied really helps. **The second thing is taking a break.** I find taking a break and going on a short holiday (such as going hiking) really helpful.

**I think that higher awareness and visibility of well-being issues among activists may be helpful.** Activists usually only talk about their activism work, and we don't really talk about how tired we are. Many of us have repressed emotions. It is almost like a martyr mentality.

Resources for seeking professional mental healthcare support are also very helpful. We could really benefit from more systematic and consistent help. We often seek help from the activist community, but not everyone has the capacity all the time. It can be helpful to know that there is someone available on a more consistent basis to provide counselling and support.

**It would be really useful if we were able to have a three-pronged approach to take care of our well-being, meaning a balance of 1) self-care, for example, taking breaks, 2) professional help, and 3) connection and mutual aid in the community.**

**Recognition and respect are also important for me.** I feel a boost in my well-being whenever someone recognizes the value of what I do. It gives me a sense of accomplishment. Usually, this recognition comes from the activist community. When my fellow activists recognize or acknowledge my work, I feel proud, and it's really helpful.

This is also because, in my culture and my country, where CSOs are repressed, it is very difficult to explain what I do to my family.”

*\*Pseudonym used to protect the activist's identity*

## ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: HONG KONG, LAI'S STORY

Lai\* is an activist from Hong Kong who is now based in the UK. She is between 25 and 35 and carries out her activism individually as well as part of a formal group. With her activism, Lai aims to change the policies of governments around the world in order to pressure China to respect the rights of Hong Kongers.

**“To me, well-being is a prerequisite for being an activist.** Without good mental health, it is difficult to face stress, and activists cannot make responsible decisions for themselves, their organizations, or the people around them.

**Meditation and mindfulness have helped me with my well-being** in the past, as has my religion. I am a Buddhist, as are many other activists I know.

Other things that have helped are entertainment and working out. **It's good to do something that's completely unrelated to my activism.**

I also enjoy hanging out with my friends. Because of my work, I am able to travel to meet my activist friends in different countries. But, of course, this is really difficult for other activists who are applying for asylum and cannot travel easily.

I read a lot about trauma, therapy and grief. **Understanding how grief and trauma work has helped me understand and accept myself.** It has helped me be aware of my own situation so that I can accept that I am grieving and that there are days I just need to stay at home and process the sadness and the trauma. It has helped me be patient with myself.

Food from home can also be very comforting. Things like Hong Kong-style French toast and rice noodles are things from home that uplift me.

I know some activists feel support from the community, while others resort to negative coping strategies like alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana.

**I think support and resources is the foundation of many other well-being dimensions.** For example, without support and resources, it is hard to find a safe and secure place to stay. Without resources, it is hard to have access to physical health and capacity – for instance, you wouldn't know where or how to join a yoga class in a new country. Without resources, it is difficult to get healthcare, especially mental healthcare. Without resources, gathering with friends can be a luxury you can't afford.

**I am vocal,** and therefore, I am less worried for my safety as the reputation I have kind of serves as a protection. I am worried about being followed. I am worried about not being able to trust my therapist. I am worried that if I hang out with my friends, there may be repercussions for them. At the same time, because I am vocal, people know what I do, they are familiar with my work and are willing to provide help. I have easier access to resources because of the people who know my work and provide me with help navigating different systems.

One of the biggest challenges in our work is to condense our advocacy messages and explain the situation in a way succinct enough for parliamentarians to understand and get behind us. Parliamentarians have a limited attention span, and it's difficult for us to explain what is going on in Hong Kong in a very short time - when we talk about Hong Kong, we can only explain the situation clearly when we start from 1997. I also think Hong Kongers are simply not a big enough group of people, and helping this group is not a high priority for some countries. There are so many others who are in more urgent need. It is difficult to ask for more resources, especially knowing they are limited.

I am surprised that impact and results are on the list of well-being dimensions. This is just because of my sense of helplessness. Working on China and Hong Kong, I have kind of accepted that what I do yields very few positive results because it is very difficult to push for real change in the current climate.

Another thing I have found difficult, which has negatively affected my well-being, is navigating the healthcare system in a new country. I spent eight months trying to find a mental healthcare professional whose service is covered by my insurance and who can speak to me in a language I can communicate in. It is difficult to talk about one's experience and emotions in a second language, and it is not easy to find an interpreter. The issue is also that some therapists or counsellors don't understand our situation. They do not understand what it is like to be in exile, to have so many of your friends arrested.”

*\*Pseudonym used to protect the activist's identity*

## ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: SRI LANKA, DAYANI'S STORY

Dayani\* is a 36-year-old Sri Lankan climate activist. She founded an environmental organization working on climate justice in 2019, an informal group which connects individuals and organizations that care about the environment and raises awareness of the urgency of climate action. She also campaigns on minority rights and started working as a human rights consultant a few months ago.

**"I am an activist because I am a citizen because I'm a human being in the first place.**

In 2020, we started a campaign called to stop deforestation in state lands. This was just as the government decided to revoke Circular 5/2011, one of the country's most crucial forest protection directives. In 2021, at the height of de-forestation under the previous regime, I partnered with various youth and environmental organizations that were working on climate justice, and we held protests at Vihara Maha Devi Park.

Up until 2022, I knew about a lot of types of injustice in Sri Lanka, but until then, I did not take a personal or solid stance on injustice beyond climate activism. I would share information online, but that was it. But with certain experiences I had, I realized that when it comes to human rights, we need more solidarity, especially among and with minorities, people who don't have a loud voice or opportunities to stand up against the abuses they face.

I face many challenges in my activism and in my well-being. **One of the biggest challenges I face is finding work** after Aragalaya (the mass protests which took place in 2022 against the government). Before Aragalaya, I could find paid employment related to sustainability and the environment, but afterwards, I had interviews that went well, but I never got called back. They recognized me from the protests. It happened several times. People worry that you will be in trouble and may create problems for the company or tarnish their image. I've heard of people whose companies bring disciplinary action against them after their participation in protests or after posting on social media. I met a woman once who lost her job and now can't afford to send her child to school.

**Police violence is a major challenge for activists.** Last week, at a commemoration,<sup>4</sup> I was sitting trying to light oil lamps, and a police officer came and stamped on the lamps. It was very symbolic and felt like a threat, like "it could be you getting crushed if you're not careful". I automatically get scared when I see uniforms. It's a trauma that we experience, and they abuse their power to intimidate us, including through scaring our family members and neighbours. Politicians also try to use activists for their own ends, and police use the law to victimize people, and they selectively arrest and target activists. Sometimes, when activists are arrested, they are not charged with any offence, and their cases are not dealt with for up to a year and a half. And since August 2022, the number of lawyers available and willing to support activists has reduced due to fear and intimidation.

**Even pro-government social media influencers are against us and attempt to defame us.** An artist and music producer attacked Aragalaya activists by making a poster with my face and name on it, accusing me of taking money from protests and drugs. It was particularly stressful and difficult for my mother. They do this to tarnish our image in an attempt to dissuade us and others and punish us. We also have to face counter-protesters who have been attending recent commemorations and, fuelled by racism, are violent towards peaceful protesters.

**This emotional rollercoaster can be toxic.** I've noticed about myself that the more I face scary situations and am exposed to negative incidents, the more my sensitivity reduces. When you go through similar situations and hear the same news again and again, it becomes familiar, normalized... the intensity of what you feel lessens. That is not a good thing.

**I know of several activists who have committed suicide.** For many people, cost is a major barrier to seeking psychological support, combined with the stigma attached to it. Many doctors also have their own biases, and you don't know if you can trust them. What is more, in Sri Lanka, under the guise of mental health support, the government is trying to suppress people, such as through the "Rehabilitation Bureau".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Voa News, "Sri Lanka on Alert as Activists Commemorate Anti-Tamil Riots", 23 July 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/sri-lanka-on-alert-as-activists-commemorate-anti-tamil-riots/7192875.html>

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Sri Lanka: Draft 'Rehabilitation' Law Would Spur Abuse", 17 October 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/17/sri-lanka-draft-rehabilitation-law-would-spur-abuse>

Another challenge is just how hard it is to maintain a balance and manage my time because there are so many events and meetings to attend, including calls into the night. **Before last year, I used to go on hikes and camping, which helped to maintain my well-being and keep a balance.** In particular, when you focus on environmental work, being in nature makes you feel better because you understand why you do the work you do and what it is you are working to protect. After a year, I'm now starting to get back to going out and meeting friends. There was a time when I felt guilty. It just felt wrong to go out and have fun while some people are in jail.

**Well-being is freedom.** It's financial freedom to look after my basic needs and those of my family. It's freedom of expression and freedom to think. It's freedom of assembly and movement. It's the freedom to make conscious decisions without being manipulated, without being a victim of propaganda.

Within Extinction Rebellion, one of the main focuses for activists is regeneration because human beings need to regenerate as the natural ecosystem does. After each protest or action, they advise activists to take a break and for others to continue. That would be good if there were enough people. Right now, I don't think we have the capacity for this. They also have workshops that help people see oppressors without hate and understand they are also victims of the system.

Amnesty and Greenpeace can help people network through education because so many people don't know about social, economic and cultural rights or fundamental rights. A natural support network could form through such events. I've taken short courses with Amnesty, but they are not available in local languages. And if events are in person, people can meet up and build connections."

*\*Pseudonym used to protect the activist's identity*

## EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA: RUSSIA, IVAN'S STORY

Ivan\* is a human rights Russian activist from the Moscow region who left Russia in 2022 for Kyrgyzstan. Together with his wife and a young daughter, he then moved to Latvia in the summer of 2023.

"In Russia, my activism mostly revolved around monitoring freedom of peaceful assembly and training observers, which I did from the end of 2014 until 2021. I was also a participant in some peaceful assemblies, but not as much, as I try to separate the roles of participant, observer, and media. As coordinator of one of Russia's biggest peaceful assembly monitoring associations - the United Group of Civic Observers - I prioritized acting as an observer. We observed peaceful assemblies of all kinds – both authorized and unauthorized. We would monitor the compliance of law enforcement officers, given they have an obligation to guarantee the right to peaceful assembly. On the basis of our monitoring, we released reports and recommendations, and occasionally had a chance to meet and discuss with the authorities. Another strand of our work was trial observation to ensure the right to a fair trial. We also visited police departments (the parts accessible to the public), and we organized 'raids' to check whether police officers were complying with their obligations, for example, presenting their tokens containing personal ID numbers, etc. When we checked their documents, we would explain to the officers their obligations when approached by members of the public. Our monitoring activities were largely conducted in Moscow, but we also had observers in St. Petersburg.

**One major challenge we faced was to ensure the results of our monitoring were received and acted on by the authorities.** This must sound like an impossible challenge in the current situation, mainly because protests and assemblies are considered very political now. But I think it could be possible if it was a peaceful assembly unconnected to Navalny (the opposition leader) or the war and took place somewhere other than Moscow and St. Petersburg. When observers are present, wearing special vests and badges, this changes the atmosphere because the police know they're being observed, and their actions are being documented. Of course, it's also important to have an opportunity to dialogue with the authorities and, ideally, know that your work has an impact on them. Civic space has shrunk vastly, and I ask myself whether it's even possible to do protest observation in Russia now or whether the risks are simply too high.

**The other major challenge is ensuring observers' safety during a rally.** There's a big difference between authorized and unauthorized protests in Russia. Before, authorized protest rallies gathered up to 200,000 people, and people would go with their family and friends. It was generally safe. This is completely different from participating in an anti-war rally today when you don't know how it will end and whether you'll have problems. While your heart calls for you to go, the rational part of you asks why should I do it? If you decide to protest, you may get a blow to your head and a fine, and nothing will change in the end. There are huge fines, and detention can be lengthy and can impact your job. It can be a huge blow for some people. In such a situation, it is more difficult to ensure the safety of observers.

Of course, the priority is to have observers. Without observers, observing peaceful actions is impossible. You can work around other issues, while you can't observe without people on the ground. And for the past couple of years, police didn't see white vests during protests. There hasn't been an observation because it's too dangerous.

Overcoming these challenges could really boost well-being. **When you feel safe, have contact with lawyers, and the overall environment signals that it's safe to do your work – it's good for your well-being.** The things which raise well-being are safety, financial well-being, and feeling the impact of your efforts.

**I think safety is the first and main factor which would improve activists' well-being in Russia today.** Knowing that you have a lawyer, someone to defend you, is a big contributor to safety. I don't think Russian activists have paid enough attention to security. We used to organize events for activists about digital security, giving power of attorney in advance, etc. But, activists were reluctant to attend our events and continued to neglect issues of safety because they had no time for it or were just hoping they wouldn't be detained.

Also, enjoying financial well-being – whether through membership fees, donations, or grants, or if you have a stable job or the capacity to do your job pro-bono – is also important. **Financial support would also improve my well-being a lot.**

**We had community at the core of our activism. People enjoyed doing something together. When you're part of a peaceful action, you feel driven.** You always feel a degree of danger, like something could happen, but, at the same time, you're at the heart of the event, in the epicentre of the news; you see it with your own eyes,



and that gives you energy. I also personally thrive when I have people to engage with. My well-being would definitely improve if I could work with passionate observers again. I love to work with the community, in the community, to feel a connection with monitors, and also to feel recognition and respect for my work.

While I see impact and results as really important to well-being, we can have community and connection even without results. Creating a community of monitors is good for human rights in Russia and in every country. So, even without results right now, I think this will give us results at a later stage.

Other things that could help well-being are support groups where observers can talk through their experiences and decompress. Other types of support are also key. For instance, knowing that you can rely on journalists to spread information when necessary, would be great. And if human rights organizations in and outside Russia helped us raise awareness about the importance of monitoring, that would be a really useful support. It would also provide external validation and support our motivation, increasing the feeling that our activism is important.”

*\*Pseudonym used to protect the activist's identity*

## MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: MOROCCO, AMINA'S STORY

Amina is a 23-year-old youth activist with Amnesty International in Morocco, focusing on human rights issues that people face in the Middle East and North Africa region, such as freedom of expression, children and women's rights, and the impact of digitalization on human rights.

**The main challenges that I have faced in doing my work are, first, the social context,** and I mean here, the stereotypes that our surroundings have about human rights defenders. People often see us as our work does not produce real results as troublemakers. In addition to this, the challenging political and economic contexts in this region also make it difficult for human rights defenders to focus on their work; less democracy, and fewer job opportunities.

**Living in an affected community can make it sometimes less comfortable to keep the focus on human rights work.** Sometimes, even with strong work and passion for human rights activism, but living within a society that is not really used to human rights culture makes it more challenging for us to make change and to achieve our goals.

In the context of my activism, **well-being means to me living in a society where people are more aware of the importance of human rights and the importance of working to defend them.** Knowing that we, as human rights defenders, are not a minority and that everyone shares with us the same values is something that I always hope we can reach one day in our region. This will not only enable all activists to feel more comfortable and more passionate about their work but will also motivate people to continue fighting for human rights.

**I would say that what really contributed to our well-being in the past was the fact that we were many in the movement; my group was rich with many members and activists who did great work and were motivated and passionate about human rights work.** However, because of the crisis in the relationship with the government, members started to quit the group, so being currently a group with a very small number of members and activists does not really allow us to do greater work, unfortunately. I would say promoting and growing our membership [would improve our well-being]. Having a group with more positive, passionate, and motivated members and activists could really help spread more energy and passion for human rights work among our group. Hence, members will be more motivated to keep working with us. But the question here is how can we have/build this strong and passionate membership?"

# LOOKING FORWARD

The following are the main conclusions that we draw from this study and the elements we hope to integrate into our work going forward.

***The well-being needs of activists across different contexts and circumstances have to be better acknowledged.*** One of the main lessons we draw from these findings is the importance of acknowledging and understanding well-being needs across all contexts and circumstances of activism. With 77% of activists who responded to this survey reporting they face barriers to their well-being, and all of the activists interviewed for the case studies elaborating on the barriers they face, the study confirms that well-being is an important issue for activists across diverse geographies and identities.

***The seven dimensions of well-being are critical and cut across contexts and circumstances of activism.*** One of the main conclusions from the workshop held with 14 Amnesty International and Roots colleagues from different teams to discuss the findings and outline pathways forward was the fact that the survey findings resonated with other work, processes and research on the topic. The individuals participating in the workshop had been engaged with activists on issues of well-being across many contexts, and the dimensions outlined in this report resonated with all of them, independent of context. What is more, when asked, all the activists interviewed for the case studies related to and agreed with all or the vast majority of the well-being dimensions, further validating the significance of these. This strengthens our hypothesis around the areas of well-being which are key to activists.

***The importance of support and resources, safety and security and community and connection.*** While all the dimensions are important, these three areas, in particular, stand out. With 46% of activists mentioning that support in some form or other could contribute to their well-being, this dimension is key. The diversity of the types of support reported – from support groups to specific tools, to legal support and help in emergencies, to psychological support and multiple, varied types of training, to inclusive and supportive organizational culture – points to the importance of understanding the needs of activists in their individual circumstances. By a long way, the most cited barrier to activist well-being, also mentioned repeatedly in respondents' definitions of well-being, safety, and security, is clearly a prerequisite and fundamental building block for well-being. Likewise, the prevalence of responses centred on finding space to connect and build resilience in the community, which points to the fact that this element is absolutely fundamental to activists' well-being. The importance of these three dimensions also came through strongly among all the activists interviewed for the case studies.

***Well-being needs are diverse.*** While we have identified key dimensions and trends across these activists' experiences, sentiments and definitions of well-being, the data we have analysed here reveals a real diversity of needs. What these dimensions mean to activists varies vastly across contexts, cultures, identities and circumstances. This diversity points to the need for tailored responses, a deep understanding of intersectional identities and context, and the importance of avoiding "one size fits all" approaches.

***Well-being dimensions are interconnected.*** What is more, these dimensions, as well as having very different meanings depending on context, circumstances and identities, are not independent of one another. They are interconnected; they intersect and reinforce one another, such as the relationship between physical and psychological well-being.

***Unexpected results.*** We expected to see more than 40% of respondents reporting their engagement in online protests and questioned whether this might be connected to how the question was formulated and different understandings of what "online protest" means. Indeed, the fact that there were not more youth

respondents protesting online surprised us, as well as the fact that, in general, we saw very few differences in responses between younger and older activists when we disaggregated data (we might have expected to see more youth referring to the importance of recognition and respect for instance and, while there were slightly more, the difference was negligible). This may be explained by a shared sense of purpose and commonality across generations acting in support of human rights. While we were surprised that respondents from the Global South put less emphasis in their responses on community and connection, psychological challenges and burnout, and prejudice and discrimination, we do not conclude that these elements are of less significance for those activists. We imagine these differences might be due to there being other, more pressing priorities for those activists who did not highlight these areas.

**Acknowledging biases and blind spots.** While the diversity of the survey responses received should be celebrated – 553 respondents from 88 countries and all continents – its limitations must also be recognized. 51% of respondents were from Europe, and of those, 69% were from Western Europe (further details on this breakdown can be found on page 8). So, we recognize we cannot claim representativity from this data and know that the picture we have is a skewed one. While circumstances for these activists can also vary enormously, in general, they face fewer and/or less serious security threats (with a lower percentage citing security as a barrier to well-being) and enjoy better freedoms and greater security and stability relative to activists in other regions (with far fewer European activists citing structural violence and political realities as barriers to their well-being in comparison to other regions). Nonetheless, the case studies bring voices of activists from several repressive contexts in the Global South to the forefront and have gone some way to helping us diversify the perspectives present in the report and address some of the bias and the blind spots.

**Recognizing whom we are not hearing.** The activists excluded from this picture are likely to be among those facing more severe or repressive conditions and greater barriers to their well-being. Not surprisingly, of the top ten countries considered to be the worst violators of basic political rights and civil liberties - Afghanistan, Myanmar, Cuba, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, and Turkmenistan<sup>6</sup> - there was a total of eight respondents from all these countries combined,<sup>7</sup> with only four of those eight based in and carrying out their activism in the country they are from. There were also no survey respondents from China, only one respondent from Hong Kong originally (but based in the USA), and just two from Russia. These were contexts in which we were able to get a deeper set of insights through the case studies, which have enriched the report as a result and helped to bring in perspectives which were not present in the survey results. Yet, we recognize that this does not completely fill all the gaps. What is more, within countries, given the survey was distributed via email, there is also a bias towards those with easier access to the internet and linguistic barriers.

**Where do we go from here?** For Amnesty International and Roots, it is important that we embrace an anti-colonial approach to this work. To start with, that means continuing to seek out different viewpoints to diversify our understanding of well-being. While we are thankful for the insights gained through this survey and through the interviews with individual activists, we are cautious not to over-conclude or to assume in any way that we now know the answers. In fact, what we have seen through this process is that activists themselves often know the answers and know what they need.

We hope that this process helps us to build a well-being lens into our existing work and projects, and we want to use it to further foment cultures of well-being as organizations/movements and in the spaces in which we engage. Recognizing that well-being is an ever-evolving issue and a fluid concept, we plan to continue bringing in questions around well-being, co-creating well-being spaces and building communities of practice. In particular, recognizing that many activists are overworked and overloaded, we want to find ways to give back to the activist community and to avoid this process being an extractive one as much as possible. At the same time, we are beginning a process to understand what Amnesty International's and Roots' roles are and could be and where we could best add value, while being aware of our duty of care to the activists we support.

We hope that the commitment and resilience of the activists who responded to the survey and were interviewed for the case studies inspire you as it does us, and we thank all the activists who took the time to share their insights on this important issue with us.

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<sup>6</sup> Freedom House, *The World's Most Repressive Regimes, 2002*, [https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1161135/ds77\\_02257.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1161135/ds77_02257.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> There was one respondent from Afghanistan (not based there), three from Iraq (and based there), one from Libya (not based there), one from Sudan (not based there) and two from Syria (one of which is based there, the other is not).

# ANNEX 1. SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Do you see yourself as an activist or advocate, a protester, a change maker? yes/no
2. Which of the following best describe your activism?
  - Multiple choice question/multiple ticks possible
  - Individual activist
  - Part of a formal group: an NGO or network, etc.
  - Which formal group/s (e.g. NGO or network) are you part of?
  - Part of an informal group: collective/community/social movement etc.
  - Which informal group/s (e.g. NGO or network) are you part of?
3. What is the focus of your activism?
  - Environment/climate change
  - Peace/conflict resolution
  - Sexual and reproductive rights
  - LGBTI rights
  - Women's rights and gender equality
  - The rights of people with disabilities
  - Racial and/or caste justice
  - Indigenous rights
  - Migrant and/or refugee rights
  - Other: please specify

*We understand that activism can take multiple forms, and many activities could be considered activism. Given the current attack on freedom of assembly around the world, as well as the important role protests can play in bringing about change, we are particularly interested in knowing more about engagement in protests.*

4. Have you engaged in peaceful protest? y/n
5. If yes, Online or offline or both
6. If not, would you in the future?

7. Which country are you based in/do you carry out your activism in? 2 words max
8. What is your age? Tick box:
- Under 15
  - Between 15 and 17
  - Between 18 and 24
  - Between 25 and 35
  - 35-64
  - 65 and over
9. What does well-being mean to you in the context of your activism?  
*You can use words to describe or refer to a picture, tune, thing.*
10. Do you or activists around you experience barriers to your well-being as an activist? yes/no  
If yes - what are they?
11. What can improve your and/or your group well-being in your activism?
12. And/or what has effectively contributed to your and/or your group's well-being in the past?
13. What do you feel could improve your and/or your group's well-being?
14. Would you be interested in telling us more? If so, please email... leave email
15. Would you like to share any resources (reports, tools, projects you are aware of or participating in) on well-being?

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# WELL-BEING IN HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM

## PROTECT THE PROTEST

Let's talk about well-being and resilience in human rights activism!

Amnesty International and the Roots Project (by Greenpeace) have been collaborating on well-being and resilience in human rights activism and protest. From our collective work alongside activists of all ages and social movements across the world, we know that working for the world to be a better place can impact our well-being.

We have asked activists about what they do to enhance their well-being and what they think would help to tackle the barriers to well-being and create more opportunities for building resilience. The report is based on the responses from 550 activists in 88 countries, alongside detailed case studies from activists from China, Hong Kong, Russia, Morocco, Sri Lanka, Angola and Mexico.

Well-being in Human Rights Activism sets out recommendations that come directly from participating activists, including tangible ideas and suggestions that they believe can make a difference in looking after one's well-being and building and maintaining resilience and resistance when taking action on human rights.

This report and recommendations have been developed for activists within the Amnesty and the Roots Project (by Greenpeace) and will be shared with partner organisations. Our hope is to continue embedding a well-being lens within our existing and future campaigning and to strengthen our understanding of well-being, self-care, and resilience as we take action together for human rights, climate justice, and the right to protest.

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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IN COLLABORATION WITH  
THE ROOTS PROJECT (BY GREENPEACE)

