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Reaching
Further

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2022 – 2023 in figures Empowering Human Rights Defenders Amidst Unprecedented Challenges



6,700+
human rights defenders
received direct support from
ProtectDefenders.eu

WHRDs, defenders belonging
to gender minorities, gender
non-conforming, and non-
binary HRDs **58%**
Young Defenders **50%**



156
human rights
organisations receiving
direct support



97%
of the HRDs supported
from the most difficult
countries or belonging to
the most-at-risk groups



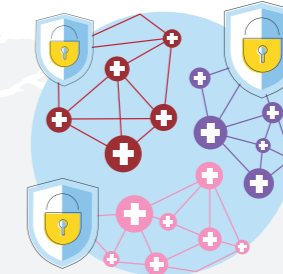
98
countries
worldwide



916
defenders and **281** family
members at risk receiving
emergency support for
protection



78
local human rights
organisations and
964 HRDs receiving core
support, seed funding, or
lifeline support



46
HRD protection
networks supported



45
human rights defenders
and **111** family members
receiving support within
comprehensive temporary
relocation programmes



100%
of HRDs reporting a
positive impact/ enhanced
capacities/improved
security following support



635
HRDs whose situations
were raised through
urgent advocacy and
political mobilisation



3,500+
individuals assisted
with direct guidance
and 24/7 support



134
human rights defenders
accompanied in field-
work activities



496
defenders better able to
manage their security
through training and
capacity-development



76
entities are members
of the European Union
Temporary Relocation
Platform

Highlight – A Growingly Inclusive Mechanism in a Complex Human Rights Landscape

In November 2022, ProtectDefenders.eu commenced the third phase of its implementation. Throughout the first year of this new phase, the renewed and consolidated European Union (EU) HRD Mechanism ensured **direct protection, support, and empowerment for over 6,700 at-risk human rights defenders** worldwide, with a strong focus on those facing the highest risks. Notably, 50% of beneficiaries were young defenders, and 58% identified as women human rights defenders (WHRDs), trans-male, trans-female, genderqueer, or gender non-conforming individuals. Additionally, ProtectDefenders.eu extended support to the families, communities, and organizations of human rights defenders. Despite facing extraordinary challenges amid protracted crises, the mechanism proved highly effective, efficient, and adaptive, addressing the pressing needs of HRDs in a tumultuous global and geopolitical environment.

This comprehensive support, encompassing not only financial aid but also technical support and guidance, was delivered through collaboration among consortium partners, demonstrating flexibility, creativity, and responsiveness in the face of evolving challenges, including civil society repression and increased hostility towards defenders and gender minorities. However, challenges persist, notably an overwhelming increase in requests for protection support amid prolonged crises in **Belarus, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Sudan, Tanzania, and beyond**. ProtectDefenders.eu consistently delivered emergency protection, investing in the capacity and resilience of human rights organizations and communities. The international temporary relocation system supported by ProtectDefenders.eu, including through the Shelter Initiatives program, further exemplifies the mechanism's commitment to HRD safety. ProtectDefenders.eu's reactive and preventative advocacy work has yielded multiple success stories globally. Furthermore, the consortium pioneered a collective advocacy approach on shared concerns, addressing international funding for HRDs and EU visas.

The significant enhancement in coordination among Consortium partners has not only facilitated continuous improvements and innovation but has also been instrumental in addressing the challenges faced by HRDs and organizations at risk. This approach fostered a more robust and united approach to protecting HRDs and addressing challenges, allowing for the efficient allocation and utilization of resources and ensuring timely and holistic support to those who need it the most.

A notable aspect of the implementation is the composition of the supported HRDs, with **58% identifying as women human rights defenders** (WHRDs), trans-male, trans-female, genderqueer, or gender non-conforming individuals. ProtectDefenders.eu's support is increasingly reaching WHRDs in all its programs, illustrating the effectiveness of the gender strategy adopted in 2020. Gender sensitivity is at the heart of all project aspects.



Read more about ProtectDefenders.eu's work with Women Human Rights Defenders:
<https://protectdefenders.eu/protectdefenders.eu-celebrates-international-women-day/>



Another significant achievement during the inaugural year of this new phase is the substantial progress achieved in **enhancing the Mechanism's outreach efforts**. Implementing partners have taken decisive steps to expand outreach, address localization needs, and develop strategies to support new groups, such as young defenders and those with disabilities – including increased collaboration with local actors, context-specific support, and prioritizing coordination among different components for maximum impact and sustainability. As a result, a record 93% of the organizations supported via the EU HRD mechanisms were not affiliated with Consortium partners, extending the impact of ProtectDefenders.eu widely and empowering local actors on the frontline.

Furthermore, an **unprecedented 97% of the defenders supported by ProtectDefenders.eu were either based in the most difficult countries or belonging to the most at-risk groups**. These groups include Women Human Rights Defenders, LGBTQ+ Human Rights Defenders, Environmental, land, and indigenous peoples' rights defenders, human rights defenders operating in a territory in conflict, young defenders, defenders with disabilities, and defenders from remote and less connected areas. ProtectDefenders.eu focused attention on new target groups, including HRDs with disabilities and Young defenders. The EU HRD mechanism underscores the lack of protection, inclusion, and resources devoted to these communities of HRDs. As ProtectDefenders.eu expands its scope to address the challenges faced by HRDs with disabilities, it acknowledges the unique vulnerabilities and barriers encountered by this group and actively engages in finding innovative solutions.

Inclusion of HRDs with Disability: Building a resilient Network of HRDs with disability in Eastern Africa

In the framework of ProtectDefenders.eu, Protection International held a capacity building event to bring together human rights defenders advocating for the rights of people with disability especially on matters inclusion and equality in service delivery

Protection International in Africa seeks to establish a network of Human Rights Defenders with Disability. Human rights defenders play a critical role in the society by advocating for the protection and promotion of human rights, which is integral for the realization of human rights by all citizens. They face various challenges in their work; these have an adverse negative impact on their right to defend human rights (RDHR). Most of these challenges are associated with restrictions of civil liberties, limiting their freedom to demonstrate peacefully, freedom of expression, freedom of association and the right to private communication. These challenges are further exacerbated for HRDs with disability. In light of the above PIA seek to conduct: Mapping of HRDs with disability in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania; Hold online webinars to identify the specific needs; and hold one regional conference/workshop to establish the HRD network for HRDS with disability as an advocacy mechanism.

PI identified a total of 45 HRDs with disabilities and their organisations from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. PI held a regional conference that brought together 30 HRDs with disabilities (12 from Kenya, 10 from Tanzania and 8 from Uganda). The meeting included an introductory session to advocacy, as well as a group discussion to evaluate the challenges and come up with recommendations. The recommendations were presented by the HRDs with disability on 11th October 2023 in a regional conference that brought together HRDs, Civil society organisations and National Human Rights institutions from five East Africa countries (Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda). The HRDs also formed a group that they will use for communication and share experiences, opportunities and work together in for advocacy and fundraising. PI then organised a webinar on the Inclusion, Protection, and Wellbeing of HRDs with Disabilities on the 30th of November.

As such, in the framework of ProtectDefenders.eu Protection International organised three activities in the same week so that human rights defenders with disabilities could benefit from the three activities:

- An advocacy action with all Protection Service Providers to encourage them to incorporate the needs of HRDs within their programmes
- A Regional conference/workshop to establish the HRD network for HRDS with disability as an advocacy mechanism to advocate for the inclusion and participation of HRDS with disability
- A three-day regional conference bringing together the human rights defenders from various thematic areas among them disability rights, LGBTQ+ rights, Protection service providers and National Human Rights Institutions from the five countries to share knowledge and ideas on the evolving protection environment in the region. This collaboration provided a platform for human rights defenders with disabilities to highlight the challenges they face and share recommendations on inclusion of HRDs with Disabilities. The HRDs also participated in the D+25 consultation on the United Nations Declaration on Human rights Defenders as it celebrated 25 years.

During 2023 and the first year of implementation of this new phase and with the coordination of the Secretariat of ProtectDefenders.eu, Protection International collaborated with other Consortium partners, namely Urgent Action Fund, and DefendDefenders on the topic of HRDs with disabilities.

The collaboration with HRDs with disabilities and their respective organizations creates a powerful synergy that amplifies the voices advocating for the rights of those with disabilities. Within this collective effort, the Kenya National Human Rights Commission, along with the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions, as well as the National Human Rights Commissions from Tanzania and Uganda, further strengthens the coordinated approach towards fostering inclusivity. The HRDs with disabilities play a crucial role in elucidating the specific needs and barriers faced by individuals like themselves to protection actors. By doing so, they pave the way for a more comprehensive understanding that enables protection actors to tailor their strategies, plans, and programs, as well as fortify protection mechanisms to better address and include the unique challenges faced by HRDs with disabilities. This collaborative endeavor not only promotes a more inclusive and supportive environment but also charts a course for a future where the rights and protection of all individuals, including those with disabilities, are at the forefront of human rights initiatives.



Kurdish women’s rights defender and lawyer was able to continue her practice with joint assistance from OMCT and FIDH

A WHRD and lawyer from Turkey combating rights violations and violence against women was supported. She provided legal support to women in vulnerable situations and defended activists, particularly women who have exercised their fundamental rights and freedoms



In 2020, she documented the ill-treatment of a Kurdish politician and activist who was subjected to torture during a police raid to her house. Afterwards, numerous investigations were launched against her, was even beaten and subjected to torture herself by the police after an event. She was later on detained herself. During this incident, her laptop, her phone and her law manuals were confiscated. She was released the next day and is currently banned from leaving the country and the judicial harassment against her continues.

OMCT in the framework of the Mechanism provided the WHRD with funding in order for her to replace her confiscated phone and law manuals which are vital for her work. As such, she was able to continue her work as a lawyer for the rights of Kurdish women who have been subjected to ill-treatment and prosecution. Currently, 23 Kurdish women’s rights defenders, 10 of whom are in pre-trial detention, are being tried in an Ankara-based investigation. The WHRD is present to support and defend them in this trial. They have been in pre-trial detention for a year for raising their objections against femicides, harassment and sexual assault at the hands of the forces of law.

To support the defender and Lawyer, consortium partner FIDH approached OMCT with the suggestion of supporting her jointly. Thanks to this joint assistance from OMCT and FIDH, with FIDH providing funds for the purchase of the confiscated laptop, and OMCT covering the purchase of a phone and law manuals, Gülistan was able to have access to the case files and was able to communicate with her clients in a safe manner. This joint approach allowed to ensure that the defender could have her needs met.

This case shows how the targeting of an individual defender has an impact on a broader group of people. The Woman Human Rights Defenders is not only targeted because of what she was doing but people she was supporting. This support not only helped her but also the 23 Kurdish women, who were able to receive proper legal defense under a very hostile climate.

Navigating an Increasingly Complex Human Rights Environment

The present global environment confirms concerning patterns identified by ProtectDefenders.eu over recent years, characterized by the ongoing restriction of civil society space and increasing challenges for human rights defenders (HRDs) globally. ProtectDefenders.eu, as a leading entity dedicated to the protection of HRDs, finds itself at the forefront of addressing these multifaceted challenges and adapting to the evolving dynamics of human rights advocacy

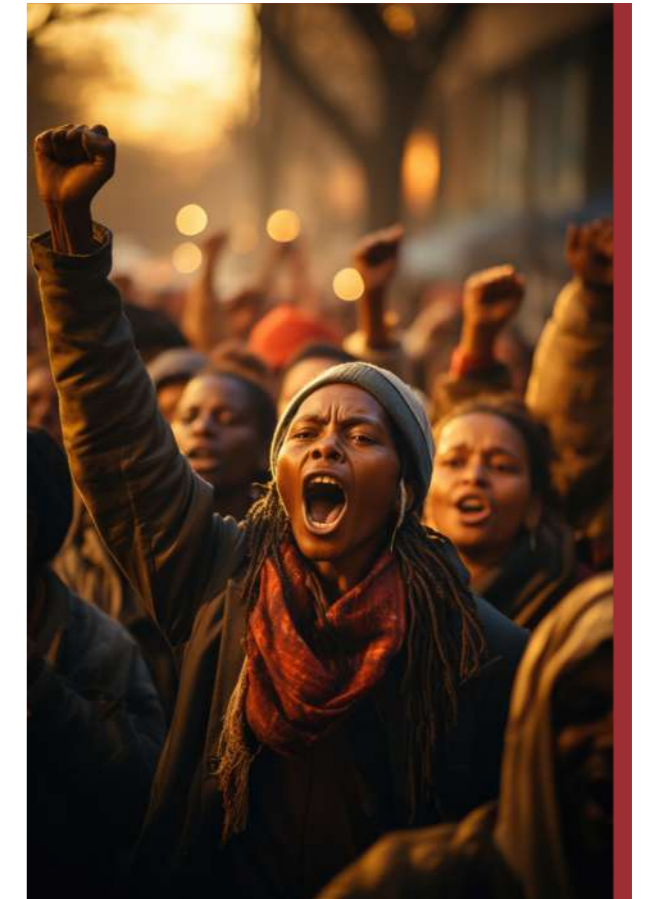


Trends in Increasing Authoritarianism and Digital Repression

In the past years, the space for civil society has continuously shrunk, not only in traditional authoritarian regimes but more and more in democratic regimes, grappling with internal conflicts, political violence, and the surge of populism and nationalism. Indeed, in navigating this complex landscape, ProtectDefenders.eu confronts the proliferation of authoritarian traits even within democracies. Defamation campaigns aimed at discrediting opposing forces have become widespread, fueling societal rifts and hindering the efforts of human rights defenders.

This trend is not confined to any specific region but is a global phenomenon, affecting both established democracies and those grappling with authoritarian governance. ProtectDefenders.eu has identified structural restrictions as a key challenge, manifesting through the adoption of laws that infringe on fundamental freedoms. These include onerous registration or reporting requirements and the weaponization of anti-terrorism and national security laws to arbitrarily detain HRDs. Through these measures, national authorities drain the resources of civil society organizations and impede their capacity to operate effectively, and continue their crucial work to defend rights.

The weaponization of the law and the criminalization of HRDs persist as disturbing trends. In numerous instances, HRDs supported by ProtectDefenders.eu faced unfounded criminal charges, often of a serious nature. National security legislation and laws aimed at combating organized crime are weaponized against HRDs, further threatening their ability to carry out legitimate human rights activities. ProtectDefenders.eu stresses the importance of continuous awareness-



raising efforts to ensure that authorities adopt a protection-oriented and human rights-based approach.

Furthermore, ProtectDefenders.eu partners have noted the expanding reach of digital repression, with online surveillance and increased control over internet information exacerbating the challenges faced by HRDs. Restrictions are no longer limited to physical spaces but have extended to the digital realm, and new threats arise. A concerning trend of sexual and violent online harassment targeting particularly Women HRDs arises globally. As such, the Mechanism expresses significant concern regarding the digital security of HRDs and underscores the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the challenges posed by both traditional and digital threats and restrictions on civil society, including more training on the topic.

Threats to Human Rights Defenders Confronting Corporate Power

ProtectDefenders.eu faces ongoing challenges in addressing attacks against HRDs related to “development” projects linked to corporate interests. Globally, communities are forcibly and violently displaced from their lands and livelihoods to make room for profit-driven endeavors. These dispossessions are accompanied by repression of resisting communities, with increasingly militarized methods, and violence. Indigenous and land-dependent communities bear the brunt of these actions, while urban movements also face threats, including assassinations of movement leaders due to corporate influence over democratic institutions. HRDs combating corruption and advocating for environmental and collective rights face threats, attacks, and criminalization. In the Americas, HRDs defending land, indigenous peoples’ rights, and environmental and labor rights have been met with a pattern of violent attacks and judicial harassment.

Fortress conservation and gold rush-style “green” energy development/extractivism as false solutions to environmental and climate crises have contributed to rights violations, dispossession, repression, and violence, particularly for Indigenous Peoples and other environmental/land defenders. ProtectDefenders.eu highlights the negative impacts of environmental initiatives not grounded in a human rights-based approach.

Shifting Dynamics: Non-State Actors and Emerging Defender Profiles in the Human Rights Landscape

Over the past year, ProtectDefenders.eu has continued to observe significant changes in the actors playing a role in the human rights landscape.

State and non-state actors use violence to maintain control over resources, with non-state actors gaining power amid state illegitimacy. Those who suffer most from dispossession and exploitation inherent to capitalism, including Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendent communities, women in all their diversity, and other marginalized and/or resisting communities, are disproportionately impacted by this violence. In response to these trends and due to state neglect, many communities movements have established alternative protection systems.

ProtectDefenders.eu observes the emergence of new groups that may not automatically self-identify as HRDs but are de facto becoming defenders due to the deteriorating space in which they work, including climate activists, humanitarian workers, refugees and migrants’ rights defenders, anti-corruption activists, and those defending land, environmental, and social and cultural rights. ProtectDefenders.eu recognizes the strategic shift to leaderless movements and the pivotal role played by women and young protesters in organizing and leading protests.

Exile and Transnational Repression: Challenges for Human Rights Defenders

A crucial aspect of the current landscape is the increasing number of HRDs forced into exile or hiding due to protracted situations of threats and persecution. ProtectDefenders.eu acknowledges the complex challenges posed by this phenomenon. HRDs fleeing persecution often face difficulties in resettlement, with ProtectDefenders.eu recognizing the need for creative tools to enable them to continue their vital work from abroad. The EU HRD mechanism grapples with the organizational and funding challenges that arise when HRDs are compelled to resettle and continue their advocacy efforts in a new environment. Moreover, ProtectDefenders.eu expresses concern about one of the long-term impacts of this trend. As HRDs and organizations relocate permanently for security reasons, questions arise about who will take up the human rights struggle locally in the future. Furthermore, ProtectDefenders.eu wishes to highlight gaps in the protection landscape for human rights defenders, particularly for human rights defenders in exile.

In relation to this, ProtectDefenders.eu has observed the trend of transnational repression as a new form of violation increasingly affecting human rights defenders, including those in exile. Transnational repression involves the cooperation between governments of two countries, normally through law enforcement agencies, immigration authorities, or even security services, leading to serious violations of defenders such as their deportation, enforced disappearance, or killing. Transnational repression implies activities against international human rights



law, conducted by state actors who are not held accountable.

Finally, In recent years, the succession of crises such as the war in Ukraine, armed conflict, forced displacement in the Sahel, the Taliban takeover of Kabul in 2021, and outbreaks of new conflicts in Armenia, Sudan, Niger, and Gaza, have affected funding available for human rights, human rights defenders and had an unprecedented effect on press freedom and journalists. Across the globe, governments and armed groups have used violence and intimidation to suppress and control media outlets and the narratives they produce. As highlighted by the 2023 edition of the World Press Freedom Index, ProtectDefenders.eu witnessed increasing threats to the right to freely reported, independent, diverse, and reliable information – with more difficulty to investigate, and journalists facing many attacks, verbal, digital, judicial and physical.

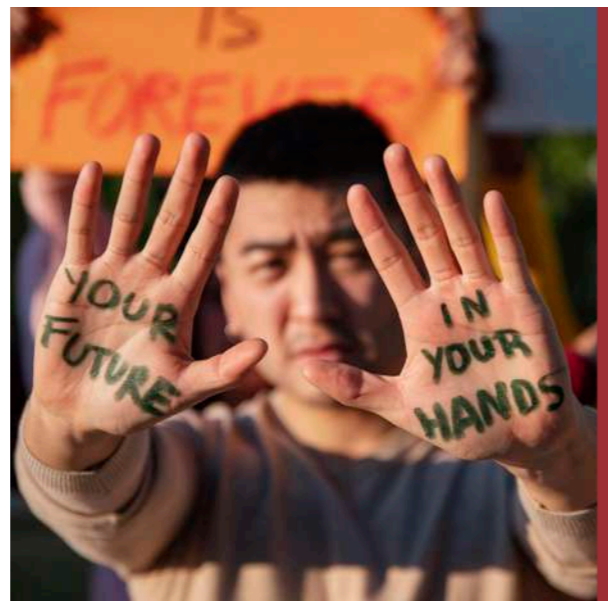
Celebrating Progress

Sustained Support and Collective Coordination in Fostering a Safer Environment for Human Rights Defenders Worldwide

Amidst the myriad of challenges faced by human rights defenders across regions, there have been noteworthy positive developments, underscoring the transformative impact of sustained international support. Human rights activists have showcased **remarkable resilience**, adapting to challenges by leveraging digital platforms for advocacy. The shift towards online campaigns has not only broadened the reach of awareness initiatives but has also facilitated the participation of diverse voices, addressing localized issues and fostering a more inclusive global dialogue on human rights. The implementation of **alternative safety and sustainability systems** by civil society organizations highlights their creativity and adaptability, addressing immediate challenges and contributing to long-term community empowerment.

Significant progress has been made in enhancing coordination among international civil society organizations, leading to united responses to crises and more impactful advocacy efforts to safeguard the rights of civil society actors worldwide. The **establishment of comprehensive, country-specific**

crisis coordination mechanisms reflects a collective commitment to addressing existential threats faced by civil society. Joint advocacy endeavors have resulted in favorable outcomes, including the creation of programs to support human rights defenders, thanks to the concerted efforts of international civil society. The ProtectDefenders.eu Consortium has been instrumental in driving these positive developments, actively campaigning for improved visa access for human rights defenders within the European Union. Through an inclusive work plan, ProtectDefenders.eu engaged EU institutions and Member States, demonstrating a dedication to facilitating visa access for HRDs and cultivating a safer environment for their work.



Exploring Dynamics: Regional and National Shifts Impacting Human Rights Defenders' Initiatives



Europe and Central Asia: Civil Society Organizations Face Pressure over Receiving Foreign Funding

The trends observed in Europe and Central Asia indicate an alarming pattern of governments using **legislation and administrative measures to restrict the activities of civil society organizations**, particularly those receiving foreign funding. The influence of Russian legislation on neighboring countries, as seen in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, raises concerns about the spread of restrictive practices. The proactive role of ProtectDefenders.eu in blocking restrictive legislation in Georgia demonstrates the importance of international organizations in supporting local activists and preserving civic space. The situation in Belarus serves as a stark example of a government escalating its repression, leaving human rights defenders and journalists vulnerable, even in exile. The regional assessment underscores the need for sustained international attention and advocacy to protect the rights and activities of civil society organizations and defenders in Europe and Central Asia.

Middle East and North Africa (MENA): Resilience Amid Legal Constraints, Discrimination, Authoritarianism, and Natural Disasters

Across the MENA region, the human rights situation has significantly deteriorated, with human rights defenders facing escalating challenges with increasing **restrictions on civic activity, discriminatory practices, authoritarian tendencies, and natural disasters**. In the region, several countries, including Libya, Egypt and Tunisia have intensified legal restraints on civic activity. Anti-gender narratives are rising, resulting in increased discrimination and violence, particularly against LGBTQ+ individuals and feminist activists. The situation calls for sustained international attention, support, and advocacy to address legal restraints, combat discrimination, and protect the rights and safety of individuals and organizations advocating for human rights in the region. The response to earthquakes and the positive development in the establishment of the Independent Institution of Missing Persons highlight the resilience and impact of human rights defenders in the face of adversity.

Africa: Struggles, Progress, and Collaborative Solutions in Diverse and Complex Contexts

Throughout Africa, HRDs face diverse and complex challenges, including **proliferation of negative narratives, legal limitations, attacks on minority communities and LGBTQ+ people, restrictions on freedom of expression, conflicts, and environmental issues**. The withdrawal of controversial draft laws in Mozambique and the adoption of protection laws in the DRC reflect both positive and concerning developments. East Africa has seen a spike in threats and attacks to HRDs from sexual minorities. Despite the proliferation of national laws and mechanisms to protect Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in West Africa and the Great Lakes region, the implementation has been lacking. The existing legal frameworks often serve more as declarations of intent than effective tools for protecting HRDs. Anti-money laundering laws meant to curb money laundering place cumbersome responsibilities on NGOs, hindering legitimate activities. The situation calls for sustained international attention and collaborative efforts to address these challenges and safeguard the rights of human rights defenders across the continent.

Asia & Pacific: Online Threats, Patriarchal Hurdles, and Legislative Strides

Asia witnesses a **rise in attacks against HRDs – both online and offline**. These attacks are compounded

by national authorities inability to effectively protect HRDs and pass protection law. To overcome this, **HRD protection laws are being localized** and developed at the Province level in the Philippines. Digital rights protections vary across countries, with some having robust frameworks while others **suppress online freedoms**. Governments resort to **ensorship, surveillance, and restrictive legislation**, stifling freedom of expression (FoE) and assembly online. Tech corporations contribute to digital threats, evading accountability. In Southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand and Indonesia, women's involvement in human rights defense has been hindered by **strong patriarchal cultures** at family, community, and state levels. These women human rights defenders face criminalization, harassment by state actors, and gender-based violence.

Americas: Challenges, Initiatives, and the Path Forward

In the Americas, there is a concerning trend of **criminalizing the defense of human rights**. Restrictive legislation, such as seen in Guatemala's NGO law, exemplify this tendency. Simultaneously, there is a **growing impunity for perpetrators of attacks against defenders**, often involving para-state entities, armed groups, private actors with economic interests, or even state entities like the police. Additionally, there's a noticeable **limitation of the right to peaceful protest** either by force or by closing civic spaces where this right can be exercised. Central America experiences an increase in authoritarianism leading to forced displacement, posing complex consequences for HRDs.

A comprehensive toolbox of programmes

Emergency grants

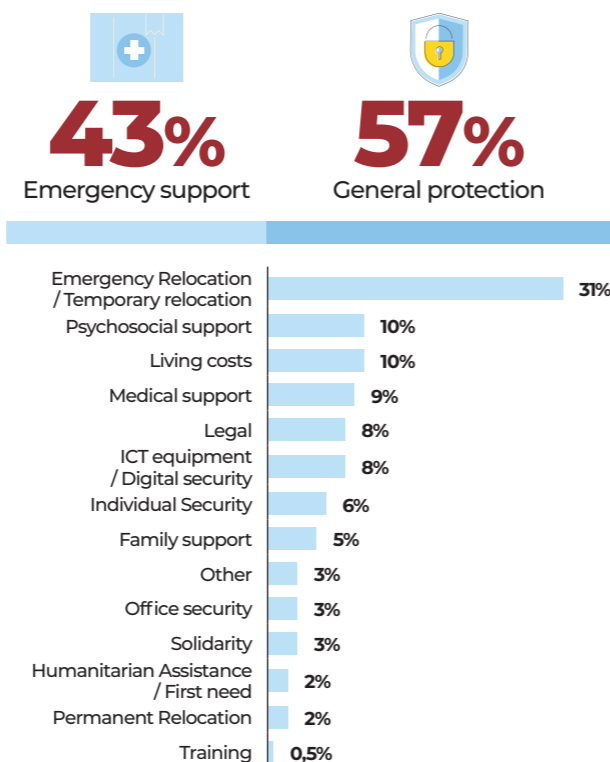
Providing Emergency Material Support to Human Rights Defenders and organisations Facing Urgent Threats and Risk

The emergency grants programme provided by ProtectDefenders.eu serves as a flexible and responsive tool designed to meet the evolving needs of Human Rights Defenders facing risks, as identified by the defenders themselves. Throughout the past year, consortium partners have dedicated considerable and reinforced efforts to **providing resources to address the material and financial needs of Human Rights Defenders and organizations facing high risks**. The coordination between implementing partners, supported by the secretariat, has successfully avoided duplication, enhanced complementarity, and offered comprehensive solutions.

Two notable developments observed during the period of November 2022 to 2023 are the consolidation of grants delivered to provide psychosocial support and grants supporting emergency or temporary relocation. These two developments underscore, on the one hand, how ProtectDefenders.eu's **support is increasingly holistic, and on the other hand, the need for support to HRDs facing extremely severe and/or sustained risks** and attacks. As demonstrated in the following story, through the emergency programme, ProtectDefenders.eu managed to support defenders who needed to relocate urgently, allowing them to protect themselves, their families, and their work.

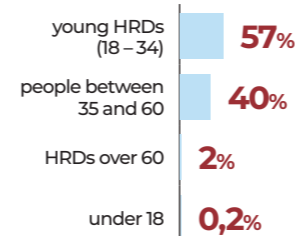


Find out about the programme's requirements and eligibility criteria: <https://protectdefenders.eu/protecting-defenders/#emergency>



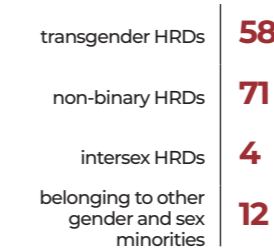
522

protection grants



916

human rights defenders including **363 WHRDs**



78%

grassroot groups accessing urgent protection



20%

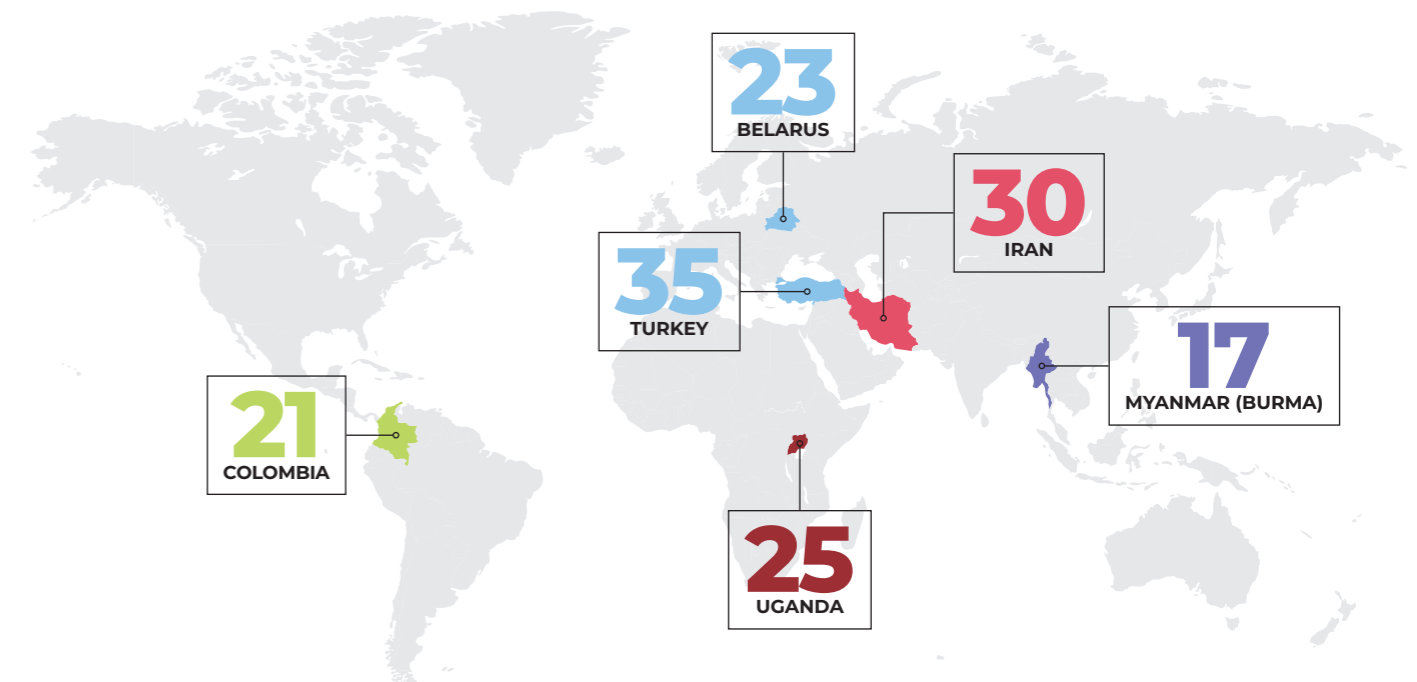
of the grants supporting family members

281

family members receiving urgent protection support

Top countries of origin of HRDs per region receiving emergency support (Grants)

■ Africa ■ Europe and Central Asia ■ Asia ■ Americas ■ Middle East and North Africa



Strengthening Resilience: A Flexible, Holistic Support System for Endangered Activists

In the framework of ProtectDefenders.eu, Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism provided support to two psychologists and LGBTQ+ activists Russia

The support given in the framework of ProtectDefenders.eu allowed the improvement in personal safety & psychological well-being for an LGBTQ+ activist & her wife. They faced constant threats from homophobic individuals, law enforcement & state scrutiny. The grant enabled them to evade immediate harm, diminish personal risks & secure mental & physical respite. Despite challenges such as adjusting travel plans due to unexpected spikes in ticket prices & navigating unfamiliar legal documentation, they managed to relocate to Europe. This move enhanced their ability to assess and manage risks in the future, providing them with invaluable experience and peace of mind. Their emotional & physical wellbeing improved & they continued counseling LGBTQ+ individuals from their new location. The grant enabled their temporary relocation to a safe environment, significantly lessening emotional exhaustion and allowing them to persist in their support for the LGBTQ+ community through online consultations, even amid intensified legal persecution in Russia. They have resumed planning their activist initiatives with renewed focus and resolve. Upon their intended return to Russia, they face a changed landscape, with colleagues encountering police searches and legal confrontations, which highlight the ongoing volatility and the need for continued caution and support mechanisms. Their experience underscores that a holistic approach to security—encompassing relocation, transportation, and family support—is critical for activist safety. The assistance received has been pivotal, enabling them to navigate and bolster their security through community resources and specialized training. In summary, the grant has been crucial in ensuring their safety and enabling the continuation of their activism, which remains essential amid repressive conditions, guaranteeing that they can continue offering aid to the community.

The relocation not only facilitated physical security but also fostered a substantial improvement in their psychological state, allowing for better sleep, reduced stress & restored capacity for daily planning. The relocation & accompanying support translated into increased efficacy in their work with LGBTQ+ clients. Additionally, they reached out to a Georgian organisation for holistic security training, consultation & planning for their relocation. The activists now operate with renewed vigor, less fear, and greater clarity, which in turn benefits the individuals they assist. The ability to continue their advocacy from a position of safety is critical for their ongoing work, making a tangible difference in the lives of those they support. The activists continue to be committed to supporting the LGBTQ+ community's psycho-social well-being in Russia from their new location. This professional support comes at a critical time when the Russian government just passed a law to prohibit gender transitioning & also expanded a ban on promoting "LGBTQ+ propaganda" that includes normalizing same-sex relationships & non-heterosexual orientations.

This story exemplifies the critical role of timely, flexible support for HRDs in creating an enabling environment where they can thrive & persist. The quick action & sensitivity to the immediate needs of the activists reflect a deep understanding of the unpredictable challenges HRDs face. Urgent Action Fund's approach, characterized by rapid grant-making & minimal application requirements, prevents additional stress on activists who already face significant threats. This method ensures that they can concentrate on their essential activities without the burden of cumbersome administrative processes.



More stories on our website <https://protectdefenders.eu/success-story-the-constant-resilience-of-hrds-in-colombia-the-resistance-of-the-peasant-movements-in-the-country>



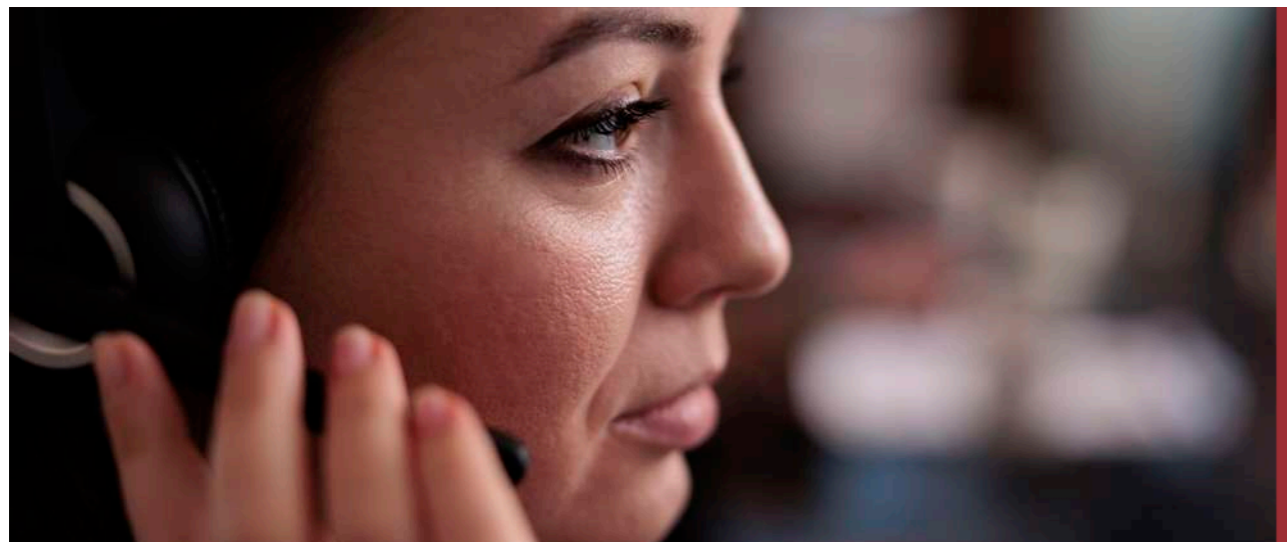
Their experience underscores that a holistic approach to security-encompassing relocation, transportation, and family support-is critical for activist safety

Emergency hotline: 24/7 assistance to HRDs at risk

3,500+ requests for support, coordination, and advice processed through the helpdesk and by the Secretariat

Over the past years, the number of requests received has been dramatically increasing, putting a strain over ProtectDefenders.eu's resources.

ProtectDefenders.eu operates a 24/7 help-desk available in five languages: Russian, English, French, Spanish, and Arabic, continuing its commitment to supporting Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) facing immediate risk. The emergency helpline, managed by Front Line Defenders, plays a crucial role in connecting HRDs with urgent assistance. Operating through **Skype and at +353 (0) 1 21 00 489**, the helpline acts as a lifeline for HRDs, enabling them to mobilize rapid international support. Front Line Defenders' protection coordinators, strategically located worldwide, offer ongoing support through encrypted channels like email, Signal, and phone, ensuring **HRDs have continuous access to assistance, regardless of their location**. This constant availability has been instrumental in **responding to urgent situations faced by HRDs**, providing a vital link for seeking help, guidance, and protection during threats, attacks, or arbitrary detentions. The rapid international support facilitated through these channels has been life-saving, preventing harm and contributing to the safety of HRDs facing immediate risks.



Funding to Local Organisations
Financial Support, including Core-Funding to At-Risk Groups and Communities

Throughout the past year, ProtectDefenders.eu has undertaken a series of initiatives geared towards promoting and safeguarding human rights in communities served by the supported local organizations. The grants have played a pivotal role in facilitating the execution of diverse projects, including raising awareness on human rights issues, advocating for policy changes, providing legal aid to organisations facing threats and harassment, and **fortifying local networks and coalitions**. These grants have been instrumental in enabling crucial activities such as legal support, advocacy, and community mobilization.

As a result, positive changes have been observed in the endeavors of human rights defenders, underscoring the efficacy of these initiatives in supporting and empowering local defenders. However, ProtectDefenders.eu continues to observe **that the number of eligible requests for organisational support far exceeds the capacity** of the mechanism. As such, additional and new ways of funding human rights initiatives is needed. The case study presented illustrates how impactful grants provided by ProtectDefenders.eu to local organizations can be.



78

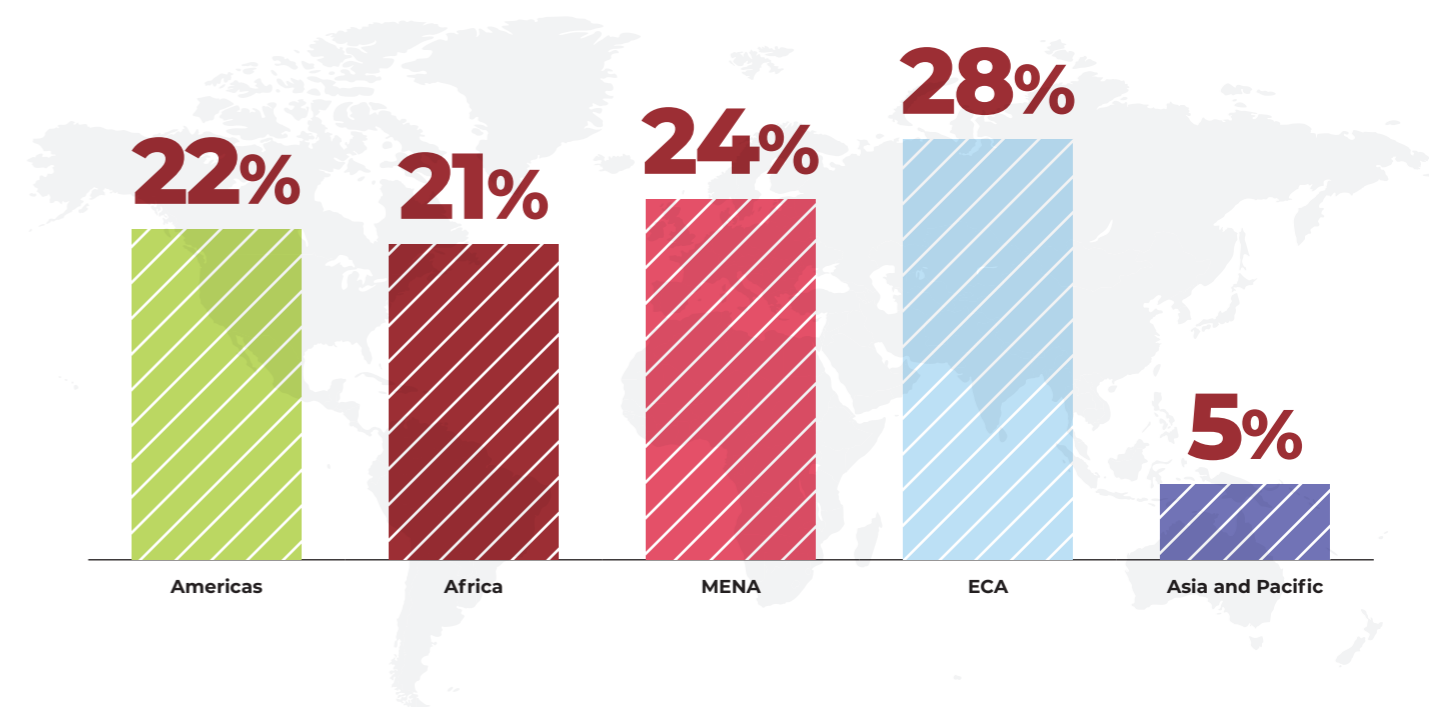
grants to local organisation allocated



Support to at least

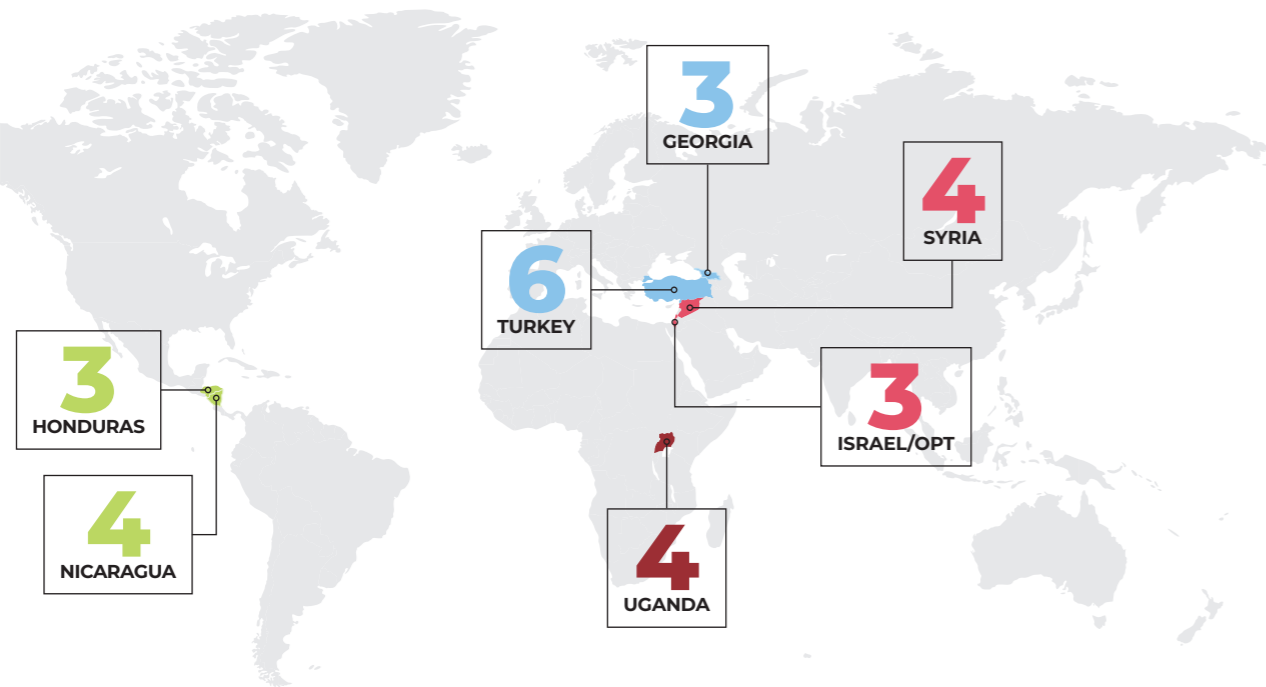
964

Human rights defenders

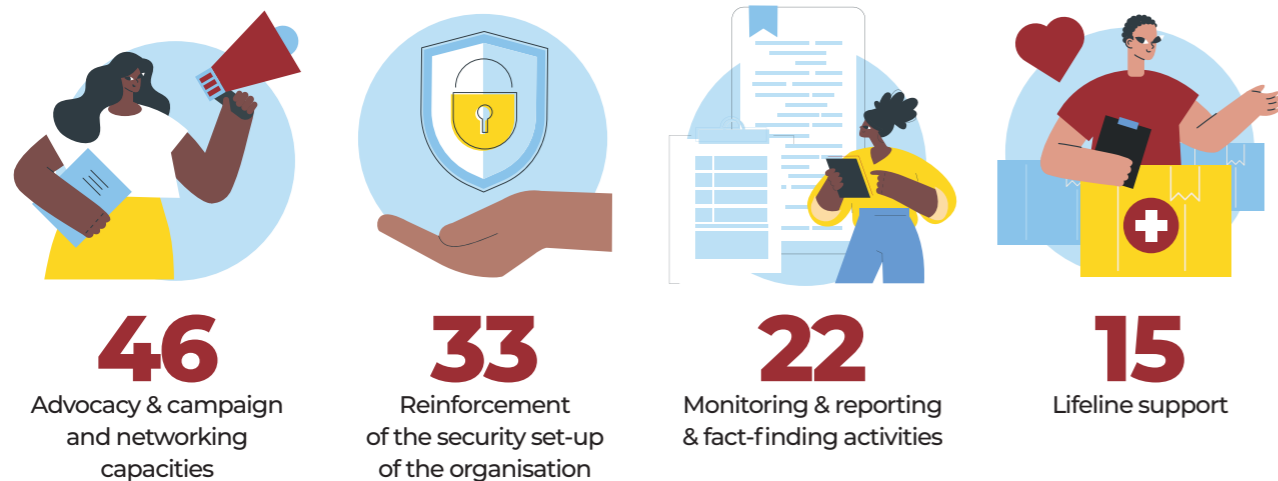


Countries with highest number of granted organisations

■ Africa ■ Europe and Central Asia ■ Asia ■ Americas ■ Middle East and North Africa



Main or secondary purpose of the total number of grants (%)



Young defenders at the center of human rights activism in Uganda

The human rights situation in Uganda has deteriorated sharply in recent years. Fundamental rights and freedoms have also been severely restricted since Covid-19 and the national elections in January 2021. Furthermore in a shrinking democratic space, organisations have condemned the use of force and harassment of political opponents, activists, human rights defenders and media before, during and after the elections in Uganda. As a result of multiple attacks on civic participation, it is very difficult today to operate as a human rights organisation and to speak up about human rights in the country.

In this context, human rights defenders, have been especially targeted in Uganda, particularly LGBTQ+ and youth defenders. In light of this situation, with financial support from FIDH in the framework of ProtectDefenders.eu, Students for Global Democracy-Uganda (SGD Uganda) – a grassroots Ugandan human rights, student-led non profit and non partisan organisation founded in 2005 – implemented a holistic project including the launch of a digital and physical security training for 127 student HRDs and pro-democracy young activists. The training has enhanced the knowledge, capacity and skills of student HRDs, and mostly female young HRDs and pro-democracy young activists in under-served communities to understand the concepts of human rights, human rights defenders, safety and security and how best to react to attacks in course of their work of promoting and striving for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms. This training responded to a need for young people who, although representing a large part of the Ugandan population, are under-served and not well equipped with practical expert training in security, information, strategic advice, advocacy support and legal assistance, to protect themselves in carrying out their work and to be effective

and influential in promoting, protecting and contributing to the realisation of human rights at the grassroots level. This support made it possible to place young human rights defenders - who are often “overlooked due to their age” and “lack of experience” - at the centre of human rights activism and to recognise their capacity for action and advocacy and for building collective self-protection networks.

As part of the work carried out within the Organisational support funded by the EU HRD mechanism, the FIDH grant to Students for Global Democracy Uganda enabled 4 significant changes: Firstly, the support has enhanced the knowledge, capacity and skills of student HRDs, and mostly female young HRDs and pro-democracy young activists in under-served communities to understand the concepts of human rights, human rights defenders, safety and security and how best to react to attacks in course of their work of promoting and striving for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Secondly, through the FIDH grant, a student HRD network has been created purposely to link together these student HRDs and bring attention to the situation of the HRDs threats to freedom of expression and rights pertaining to freedom of peaceful assembly as enshrined in the Ugandan constitution. Thirdly, SGD Uganda was able to link the student HRDs with other networks and institutions like “The Human Rights Centre Uganda” for visibility, increased protection and to enhance their work. Finally, the grant created visibility for the SGD Uganda as the organisation has been established as a “go-to-organization” for supporting the under-served grass-root based student HRDs and those facing risks in the course of their work. SDG Uganda reported in its narrative report that the organisation was granted a UN consultative status.



More stories on our website
<https://protectdefenders.eu/success-story-womens-leadership-in-grassroots-political-and-media-spheres-results-in-support-for-womens-rights>



Temporary relocation of human rights defenders at risk

During the initial year of its third phase, ProtectDefenders.eu has provided critical support to 45 human rights defenders undergoing temporary relocation, reinforcing the commitment to safeguarding the lives of defenders facing imminent threats. Through this programme, ProtectDefenders.eu has enabled **support to human rights defenders in a more holistic manner** – putting the emphasis on the quality of the relocation and on individualized support rather than on the quantity. As such, over 90% of the defenders relocated have reported a positive outcome following their relocation. A strong focus was also put on **family support**, with over 50% of the grants delivered supporting the families of the defenders relocated either financially or by including them in the relocation.



44

Temporary Relocation Grants

156

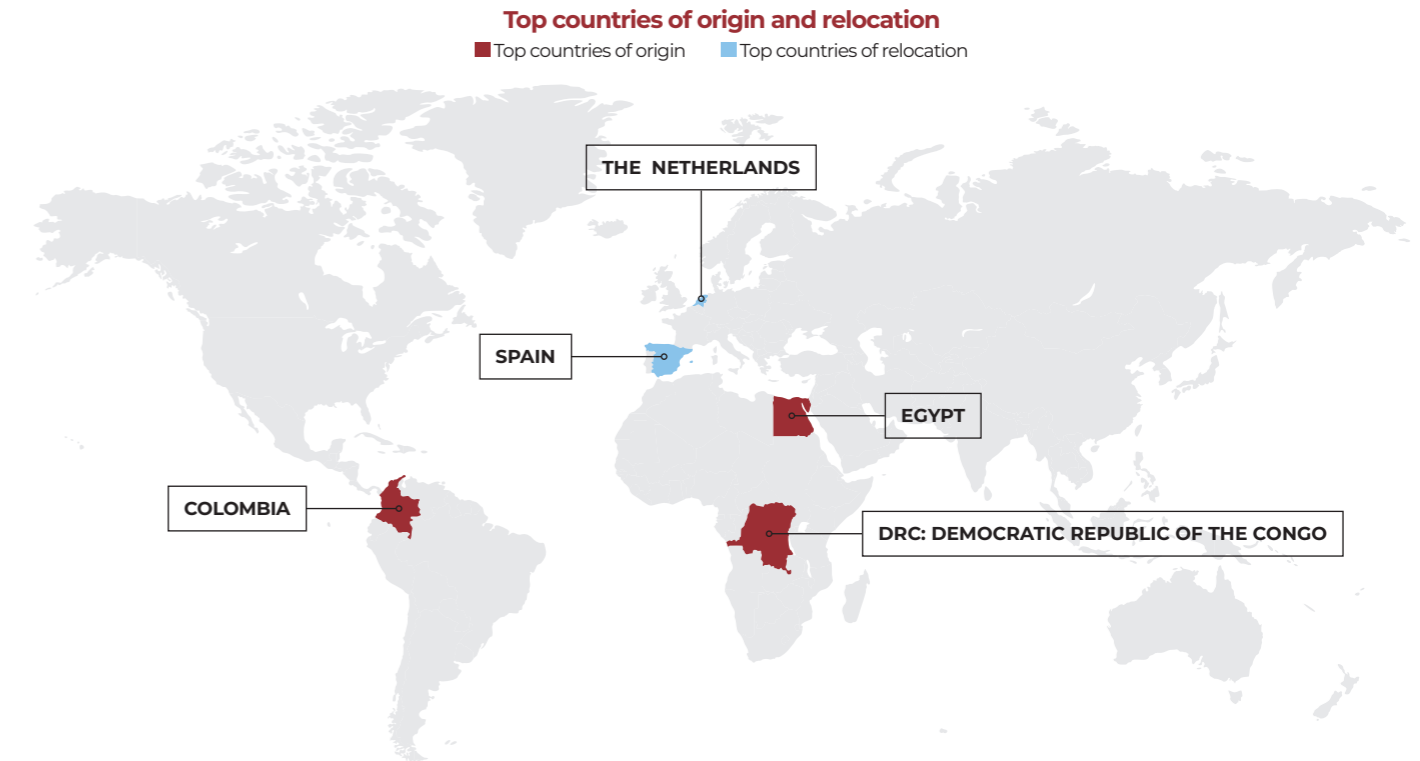
Individuals supported

45

Human rights defenders including **20 WHRDs** and **1 non-binary HRD**

111

Family members: **88** family members benefitted from a grants and **23** family members were able to relocate with the defender



Throughout the year, the Secretariat of ProtectDefenders.eu has also worked on new implementation modalities and guidelines for this programme, in order to strengthen its goal of supporting holistic temporary relocation for human rights defenders. The importance of **addressing challenges in the long run**, especially for defenders facing protracted situations of risk, remains a key consideration. Emphasizing the preparation for a **safe return after the completion of the relocation and the establishment of support networks** with organizations, public actors, and others are crucial for ensuring better continuity and long-term sustainability for defenders in precarious situations. The story below shows the importance of this holistic and flexible approach to temporary relocation, to support human rights defenders and enabling them to continue their work.



Learn more about the Temporary Relocation Programme:
<https://protectdefenders.eu/protecting-defenders/#programme>



A human rights lawyer at risk relocating to France

In June 2022, a defender from Africa faced intimidation, including visits to their home and office by national intelligence agents, death threats, and potential arrest. This occurred due to the defender's involvement in a case related to the intelligence agency and a figure associated with extractive industries in his country. The complainant alleged torture and filed a complaint against a group spying on them. Subsequently, in late June 2022, the defender went into hiding in a distant province, receiving support from the International Observatory of Lawyers in Danger. Finally, in September 2022, the defender managed to leave the country and travel to France under the RÉPIT program of the Paris Bar Association due to the aforementioned threats. The host institution secured an extension to the HRD's multi-entry Schengen visa on humanitarian grounds through advocacy activities, as the process has proved to be challenging. The HRD underwent a medical check upon his arrival in France, resulting in the diagnosis of a serious eye problem that required surgery to reduce the risk of blindness. Given the challenging and prolonged process of extending his visa and residency in France, this surgery was not covered by his health insurance. Consequently, the costs were covered by the TR grants. This was crucial not only for the HRD's continuation of human rights work but also for his overall well-being and ability to lead a normal life. During the relocation period, his family received a monthly stipend to sustain their living costs.

During his relocation to France, the HRD was able to access medical care that prevented him from going blind. Having completed the relocation process, the HRD could safely return home and reunite with his family. He emphasized a significant reduction in the level of risks, crediting this improvement to the security provided by the grant. Importantly, this feeling of security extended beyond the HRD to encompass colleagues and family members. The HRD's return was also possible because, in March 2023, his persecutors were apprehended: this made the HRD feel safer about going back to his country as there was a clear reduction in actual threats against him and his family. Finally, the support received from ProtectDefenders.eu was extended to the return phase. This enabled the defender to secure a new office since his previous office lease was terminated by the landlord, disrupting his usual return to work.

The Temporary Relocation team, through its commitment to provide a flexible and holistic support to HRDs, has promptly readjusted the initially approved budget to accommodate the ongoing medical needs of the HRD, therefore ensuring his physical and psycho-emotional wellbeing during the relocation. Besides covering the costs of the surgery, the temporary relocation grant also allowed the defender's family to receive monthly support during his relocation to France.

The coordination of the EU Temporary Relocation Platform

Over the past year, ProtectDefenders.eu has dedicated significant efforts to enhancing the coordination and collaboration among its 76 active members, marking notable progress with the acceptance of 13 new members and **furthering the regionalization of the platform.**

The Annual Meeting of the Platform organised in June 2022, was attended by a record number of over 90 people. This meeting is a good example of the added value of the platform when it comes to discussing the evolution of the temporary relocation landscape and fostering strong collaboration to provide a more enabling environment for human rights defenders. During this meeting, a strong emphasis was put on **emerging challenges due to protracted crises** and the decline of the human rights situation globally, especially when it comes to their mobility. Indeed, during the annual meeting and a side event to this meeting, organised with the EUTRP Member IPHR, discussions focused on the situation of defenders in

exile, and on the question of visas for human rights defenders. This led to stronger coordination between ProtectDefenders.eu's activities related to visas for human rights defenders, and the members of the platform active on the topic.

The coordination and collaboration of EUTRP members and ProtectDefenders.eu activities extend beyond the visa initiatives. Indeed, the trusted partners of ProtectDefenders.eu members of the Platform play an important role in the temporary relocation programme, enabling the relocations by hosting defenders, but also with the shelter initiatives programme, allowing for the exchange of expertise and knowledge.



Visit the EUTRP website: <https://eutrp.eu/>



The Shelter Initiatives programmes

The third phase of ProtectDefenders.eu marks the consolidation of the Shelter Initiatives programme. Started during the previous phase as a pilot project, the Shelter Initiatives programme has **shown its value in supporting organisations to develop new, or strengthen existing temporary relocation programmes** in a holistic manner. Throughout the inaugural year of this phase, substantial efforts were directed towards enhancing the Shelter Initiatives programme, streamlining its operations, and refining internal protocols. ProtectDefenders.eu also advanced on the selection of the organisations with existing temporary relocation initiatives who would be supported for the next years.

Finally, ProtectDefenders.eu provided financial and technical support to five organisations – based in Africa, Asia, Latin America and MENA – developing a **feasibility study** to decide whether or not they would implement a temporary relocation programme and what would be the characteristics of such a programme.

Capacity-building and Training of Human Rights Defenders

ProtectDefenders.eu continued its commitment to **enhancing the protection skills and capacities of human rights defenders** through the implementation of the capacity-development program. A total of 19 training initiatives were conducted, benefiting 496 HRDs globally. Notably, all beneficiaries were identified as the most at-risk HRDs, with 59% being women human rights defenders or trans and intersex defenders. The training reached individuals from at least 15 countries, with a substantial representation from the Americas and Africa regions.

Following these training and capacity-building activities, HRDs reported the support received **significantly increased their skills and tools for managing security situations** and advancing their work. The training contributed to the formation of protection networks and strategic activities, allowing HRDs to address restrictive contexts effectively. This was particularly vital for women human rights defenders and activists from marginalized communities, who face additional discrimination and threats.

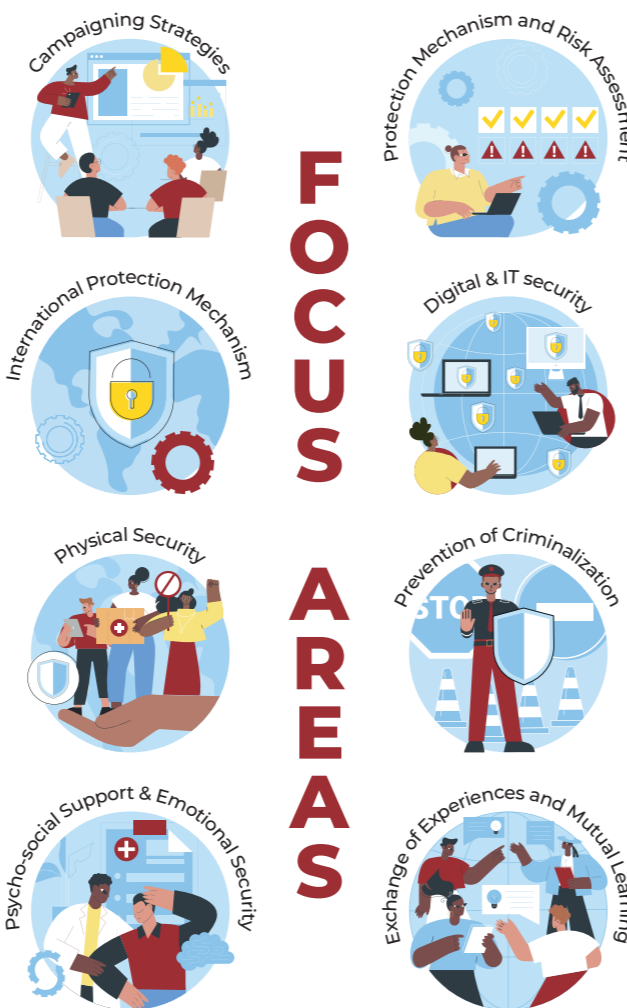


19
training and capacity-building initiatives



496
Human rights defenders benefited

These initiatives are crucial in strengthening the skills, knowledge, and resilience of HRDs, empowering them to better manage security situations, develop effective strategies, and confront challenges in their human rights work.



Enhancing the capacity of The Moroccan Forum of Young Journalists (FMJJ) to mitigate and respond to the emergence of new threats and risks at a time when disinformation is increasingly threatening press freedom

The primary beneficiary of this training is The Moroccan Forum of Young Journalists (FMJJ), based in Morocco. The FMJJ is an association who aims to strengthen the capacities of journalists, defend freedom of the press and expression in Morocco and defend the interest of women journalists in a cross-cutting manner.

In a global context impacted by the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, journalistic work is mainly centered on the Internet, which offers great opportunities for journalists to investigate and disseminate information, but at the same time raises numerous challenges linked to the spread of fake news and disinformation. Facing these news risks and threats, the FMJJ developed training courses for Morocco's community of young journalists to mitigate the risks linked to the spread of disinformation which was supported by RSF within the framework of ProtectDefenders.eu.

One of the most significant changes that was intended and which is a result of support from RSF to the FMJJ through the EU HRD mechanism, is that the local organisation is able to enhance its ability to mitigate and respond to new threats and risks, including ones related to the rise of fake news, its impact on press freedom and HRDs work. The FMJJ has developed thanks to this support training modules for Moroccan journalists to address the mitigation measures that can be implemented by journalists to avoid fake news and the impact it can have on their work.

Within ProtectDefenders.eu RSF supported the FMJJ in the implementation of training modules on fake news to raise awareness on the issues surrounding fake news, disinformation and fact-checking techniques and equip them with the necessary tools. 26 journalists were trained. RSF also supported the organisation of a round table with media stakeholders, the National Union of the Moroccan Press, journalists and civil society actors on the theme "The situation of press freedom in Morocco : achievement and challenges" which resulted in the production of 11 recommendations.

Fact-checking has become a major challenge for professional journalists in a context where disinformation methods are become increasingly sophisticated. Journalists themselves, in various contexts, are the targets of disinformation aimed at undermining their credibility. The training provided by the FMJJ to address these challenges and contributes to strengthening the resilience of journalists and enables them to carry out their work in this context.

More stories on our website
<https://protectdefenders.eu/success-story-human-rights-under-a-positive-light-narrative-lab-towards-protracted-rebuilding-of-trust-and-support-of-the-public-to-the-human-rights-movement>



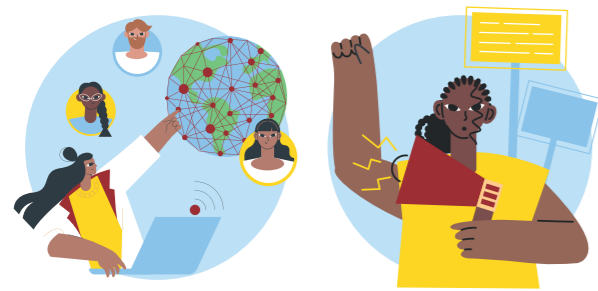
Field-work and accompaniment

Over the past year, ProtectDefenders.eu remained committed to monitoring the challenges faced by human rights defenders and advocating for an enabling protection agenda at local, regional, and international levels. As such, ProtectDefenders.eu and its partners have continued to carry out advocacy and monitoring actions. These field missions aimed at urgent advocacy, documenting human rights violations, and monitoring trials and played a pivotal role in documenting emerging trends, bringing

national and international attention to human rights issues, and initiating dialogues with relevant authorities. The missions also **identified defenders at risk, addressed their isolation, and connected them** with other components of the project.

Through its accompaniment activities in Honduras and Mexico, consortium partner Peace Brigades International (PBI) continued to demonstrate the **dissuasion potential of international observers for potential perpetrators of attacks** against HRDs. This contributed to maintaining a necessary space for defenders to continue their work, particularly during sensitive periods.

Judicial observation during trials proved impactful, increasing pressure on authorities and mobilizing support for cases. This often resulted in improvements in detention conditions, dropped charges, or the release on bail of defenders. These missions were closely tied to immediate advocacy actions, such as appeals, raising international attention and support for ongoing trials, as is shown in the following story.

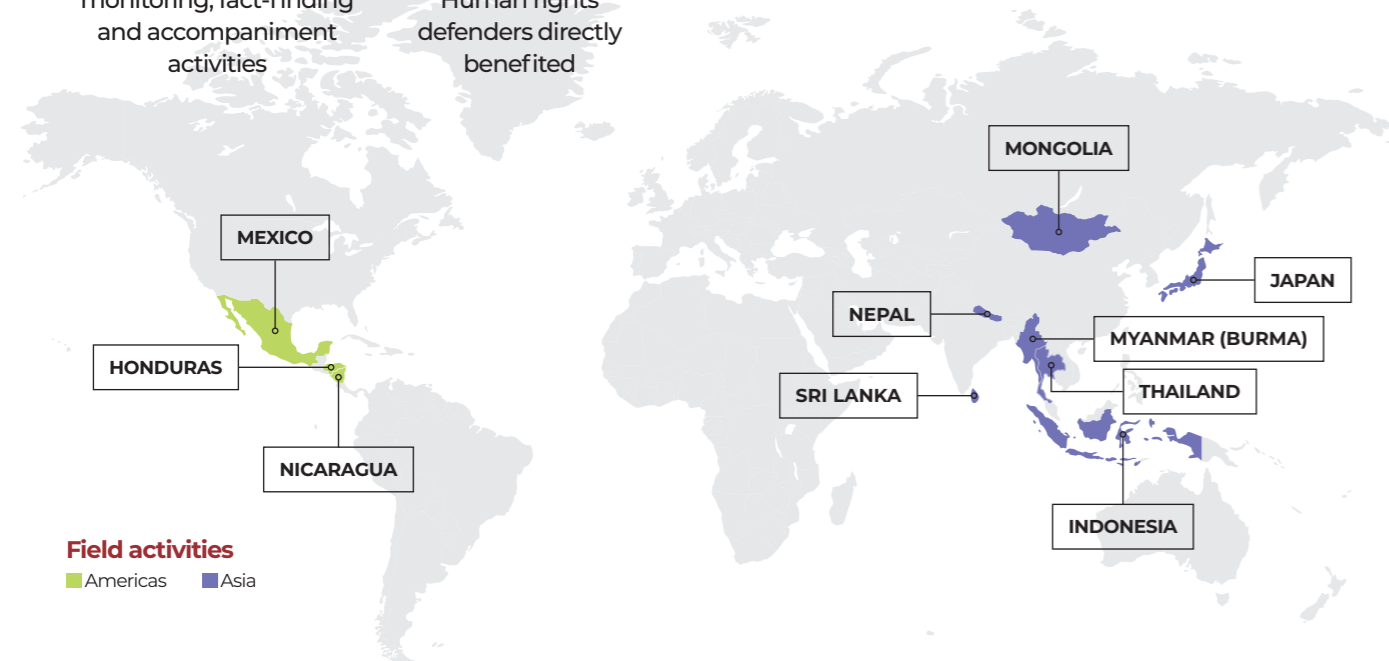


12

monitoring, fact-finding and accompaniment activities

130

Human rights defenders directly benefited



Trial Observation Mission and Fact-Finding Mission on the situation of land rights defenders in the State of Chiapas, Mexico

The OMCT organised a mission in Mexico to visit land rights defenders from Chiapas, including José Luis Gutiérrez and Cesar Hernández, who face criminalisation because of their peaceful human rights work on behalf of communities belonging to the Pueblo Maya Tzeltal de Chilón

On October 15, 2022, the Mayan Tzeltal community of Bachajón, in the municipality of Chilón, Chiapas state, called for a peaceful mobilization against the installation of a National Guard quarter on indigenous territory. The decision to build the quarters was taken without prior informed and culturally appropriate consultation, in violation of the regional and international standards on the human rights of indigenous peoples. The authorities repressed the demonstration with excessive and disproportionate use of force. An operation in which some 300 agents of the state and municipal police and the National Guard took part left 13 people injured, as well as threats and intimidation against the demonstrators. In this context, community defenders José Luis Gutiérrez Hernández and César Hernández Feliciano were arbitrarily detained for 15 days, tortured at the time of their arrest and accused of the crime of “rioting”.

The OMCT, in the framework of ProtectDefenders.eu and the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, followed the developments of this case and decided to travel to Chiapas to observe the final hearing of José Luis and César’s trial on 3 May 2023. OMCT also took this opportunity to conduct a fact-finding mission aimed at better understanding the trends of attacks against human rights defenders in the State of Chiapas, in particular regarding the use and abuse of the criminal justice system against human rights defenders. This mission resulted in the reduction of José Luis and César’s sentence following the trial observation mission, a better understanding of the situation of human rights defenders in the State of Chiapas and the adoption of a follow-up strategy with our local network member, Frayba.

International solidarity around the case, particularly through the trial observation, have contributed to significantly mitigate the sentence, which resulted in the defenders remaining free

Two OMCT representatives joined our member organisation Frayba in the court room and observed the development of the hearing including the announcement of the verdict. Moreover, the OMCT representatives met with the community representatives and their family members outside the courthouse. Although the verdict was negative considering that it did not recognise the innocence of the defenders, the analysis shared with Frayba and the community itself sees that this was the best possible scenario. The prosecutor was asking for the highest sentence possible and politically, but thanks to international pressure, the judge recognised the minimum level of guilt, allowing the defenders to remain free.

The criminalisation of the two land rights defenders José Luis Gutierrez and César Hernández was documented jointly by OMCT and FIDH as part of the Observatory for the protection of human rights defenders. The trial observation mission and fact finding mission were follow-up activities to this joint monitoring and advocacy. OMCT has teamed up with Frayba, our local network member, to conduct the mission. It was key to understand better the situation of human rights defenders in Chiapas and meet with local communities. ACAT France has joined the Observatory in documenting the case and reacting to the conviction through joint statements.

Provided that the land rights defenders have been convicted of a crime they did not commit, it might be difficult to perceive this story as a victory. Yet it seems important to recognise that international solidarity around the case, particularly through the trial observation, have contributed to significantly mitigate the sentence, which resulted in the defenders remaining free. This type of solidarity actions are also essential for the human rights defenders' well-being, for them not to feel isolated and for international support to denounce the abuses they face because of their human rights work.



More stories on our website
<https://protectdefenders.eu/success-story-expanding-mozambican-hrds-networks-advocacy-capacities>



Advocacy

ProtectDefenders.eu actively engaged in actions to mobilize relevant authorities, raise public awareness, and increase visibility about the situation of Human Rights Defenders at all levels. Through urgent alerts, appeals, dissemination of monthly bulletin, and other advocacy measures, addressed to authorities of concerned countries, human rights protection mechanisms, mandate-holders in various institutions, and influential pressure groups, ProtectDefenders.eu aimed to **prevent further violations, prompt immediate investigations, and improve conditions of HRDs** at the local level.

Thanks to this advocacy, ProtectDefenders.eu reportedly enhanced the protection of HRDs and contributed to **stopping or mitigating the repression** faced by them. Positive outcomes included the release of detained HRDs, improved detention conditions, access to healthcare, efforts to combat impunity, and other measures safeguarding the rights and well-being of HRDs. As shown below, the coordinated and collaborative activity efforts on specific cases have led to the acquittal of defenders in the Philippines.

Recognizing the need for coordinated and collaborative advocacy efforts, ProtectDefenders.eu and its Consortium partners developed joint advocacy strategies and plans. These strategies focused on addressing key issues, including the shrinking international funding available for HRDs and the challenges HRDs face in accessing EU visas reliably.



47

communications, letters, and statements

11

report



307

urgent appeals



365

Alerts updated on the ProtectDefenders.eu Index of Attacks

Urgent interventions, issued within a 48-hour period from verified violations, specifically addressed cases involving targeted and at-risk groups, including Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), LGBTQ+ HRDs, land and environmental rights defenders, indigenous rights defenders, migrant rights defenders, defenders from remote or isolated areas, and journalists.



Global solidarity supports W/HRDs successfully resisting criminalization in the Philippines

More stories on our website
<https://protectdefenders.eu/success-story-after-25-years-of-passivity-the-european-parliament-adopted-an-emergency-resolution-on-human-rights-in-morocco>





Since 2019, ten W/HRDs in the Philippines have been facing criminalization for their legitimate human rights work, including seven officers from Karapatan, as well as representatives from allies GABRIELA National Alliance of Women and the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP). Both organisations are part of the extended network of ProtectDefenders.eu, as members of Consortium organisations. Karapatan is an alliance of organizations, groups, and individuals advocating for the promotion and defense of human rights and people's rights in the Philippines and at the global level since the martial law regime of the dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos. As a member of the Advisory Group, Karapatan provides important leadership to ESCR-Net's System of Solidarity (SOS).


ESCR-Net's SOS has continued to mobilize in response to retaliatory perjury charges against the ten W/HRDs for their actions seeking legal protection for defenders. Following actions such as our global call outlining demands for Philippine authorities (June 2022) and facilitating engagement with diverse government delegates and diplomatic missions, members issued a joint statement on behalf of over 60 members to President Marcos Jr., urging him to firmly commit to respecting the right to defend human rights (December 2022). Subsequently, consortium partners ESCR-Net, the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Front Line Defenders and allies such as CIVICUS collaborated and coordinated their advocacy efforts. A side event 'Human Rights in the Philippines' was organized at the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council in advance of the adoption of the fourth Universal Periodic Review working group report on the Philippines (March 2023). Karapatan's Secretary General described the deteriorating situation of defenders in the Philippines, primarily as a result of "red-tagging" rooted in the draconian 2020 antiterrorism bill. Constituting the best possible outcome, all ten defenders were acquitted, a win they attributed to the power of international solidarity (January 2023). However, the three groups faced renewed judicial harassment, and the integrity and independence of judges was also attacked. With important leadership from FORUM-ASIA, ESCR-Net produced new letters to diplomatic missions and an open letter, as well as engaging members in online social media actions, to confront this harassment. Diplomatic missions from the EU, Norway, Finland, Germany, UK, and US, as well as priests, nuns, and former parliamentarians, attended their hearing (August 2023), demonstrating national and international interest in the case. Most recently, Karapatan celebrated what will hopefully be the final decision related to this baseless case, with the judge dismissing the petition for certiorari and upholding the acquittal of all ten HRDs (November 2023).


Reports and publications


The reports published by ProtectDefenders.eu partners in the framework of the EU HRD mechanism offer crucial insights into the human rights situation in crisis contexts, providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and risks encountered by HRDs. These reports are the result of meticulous research, reliable data, and in-depth analysis, contributing significantly to raising awareness among relevant stakeholders and audiences. This year, the following reports have been published:

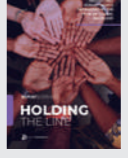
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Belarus: "Injustice Unveiled: The trial against Viasna activists in Belarus: the case of Ales Bialiatski, Valiantsin Stefanovic, Uladzimir Labkovich" (OBS/ FIDH lead)
https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/injustice_unveiled_the_trial_against_viasna_activists_in_belarus_the_case_of_ales_bialiatski_valiantsin_stefanovic_uladzimir_labkovich.pdf
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From Dreams to Dust: Examining the Impact of Mining on Herder Communities in Mongolia (Forum-ASIA)
https://forum-asia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/From-Dreams-to-Dust_compressed.pdf
- 


Belarus: "Suppression of the rights to defend human rights in Belarus: Policy and legislative changes in 2021-2023" (OBS/ OMCT lead)
<https://www.omct.org/site-resources/files/Suppression-of-the-Right-to-Defend-Human-Rights-in-Belarus-2021-2023-The-Observatory-Report-ENG.pdf>
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Defending in Numbers: Rising Together Against All Odds (Forum-ASIA)
<https://forum-asia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Defending-in-Numbers-Rising-Together-Against-All-Odds-com.pdf>
- 


Mozambique: "Silenced voices. Attacks Against Civil Society and Human Rights Defenders in Mozambique" (OBS/ FIDH lead)
https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/20230927_fidh_rapport_obs-mozambique_en_web.pdf
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ProtectDefenders.eu 2019 – 2022 Report: Holding the line (Secretariat)
<https://protectdefenders.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ProtectDefenders-Report-2023.pdf>
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Turkey: "Uncertain and eerie": Closure Cases Against Associations in Turkey" (OBS/ FIDH lead)
<https://www.omct.org/site-resources/legacy/Turkey-Report-OBS-IHD-HRFT--ENG.pdf>
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The Right to Defend Human Rights, not for all? A Case Study of Public Policies on Human Rights Defenders in the DRC (Protection International)
<https://www.focus-obs.org/documents/drc-the-right-to-defend-human-rights-not-for-all-a-case-study-of-public-policies-on-human-rights-defenders-in-the-drc/>
- 

Psychosocial support: a guidebook for human rights defenders. (OMCT)
<https://www.omct.org/site-resources/legacy/Resilience-Strategies-Guide-EN.pdf>
- 

Indigenous women and climate change: bringing together knowledge for the protection of the Colombian Orinoquia region (Protection International)
https://www.protectioninternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/7Mujeres-Indigenas-y-Cambio-Climatico-Mayo-2023_compressed_1-1.pdf
- 

Joint analysis on the situation of defenders in Asia (Forum-ASIA)
<https://forum-asia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/EN-Joint-analysis-final-red-compressed.pdf>

ProtectDefenders.eu Collective Advocacy

During the past year, significant progress were achieved on two coordinated processes that were initiated during the previous phase. These processes were started after the realization of the privileged position and added value of the consortium to advocate on two topics crucial to an enabling environment for human rights defenders globally.

Advancements in the #Visa4HRDs Initiative: The #Visa4HRDs Initiative gained significant traction, with over 70 international civil society organizations endorsing the joint statement following the release of the position paper. This collaborative effort not only articulates the primary challenges faced by human rights defenders in obtaining EU visas but also proposes practical implementations and policy improvements crucial for their protection. In 2023, ProtectDefenders.eu spearheaded numerous efforts to amplify calls for an enabling EU Visa Framework, marking significant milestones:

February: The 2023 European Parliament report on the implementation of the EU HRD Guidelines, led by MEP Hannah Neumann, emphasized the pivotal role of visas as a protective tool for Human Rights Defenders. The Commission was urged to proactively establish an EU-wide multi-entry visa scheme, with a plea for Member States to expedite visa issuance.

June: The Fundamental Rights Agency presented a comprehensive report highlighting the legal feasibility of facilitating visas for HRDs entering and staying in the EU for protection. The report outlined ways in which EU institutions and Member States could leverage existing legal provisions to provide shelter for defenders seeking protection.

October, under the Spanish Presidency of the EU, ProtectDefenders.eu and the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs co-hosted the seminar in Madrid, titled 'A Safe Haven for HRDs: Visas as an EU Protection Tool.' Representatives from member countries and EU institutions explored opportunities for enhancement and coordination, aiming to champion a supportive visa framework recognizing the needs of defenders.

Research on Financial Support for HRDs: This comprehensive study seeks to unravel the complexities surrounding financial support for Human Rights Defenders. With a particular focus on the allocation of Official Development Assistance (ODA), the research aims to provide a neutral and thorough examination of the landscape in which HRDs operate. The report systematically examines the dynamics of HRD funding, scrutinizing absolute and relative terms, channels of funding, geographical distribution, and the types of supported rights. Furthermore, it delves into the challenges faced by NGOs and international donors in accessing international funds. Voices from HRDs and donors merge, addressing potential diversions of HRD funds and offering recommendations for a more effective approach. This study is scheduled for launch in **2024**.



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This project is funded by the European Union

This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of ProtectDefenders.eu and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.