



PROTECTING
HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS IN THE
FACE OF GLOBAL
BACKLASH

REPORT | 2019-2022

HOLDING THE LINE



PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU

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01.

Forewords

PROTECT **DEFENDERS.EU**



Cristina Palabay

Secretary General of
Karapatan Alliance,
Philippines



Cristina Palabay at the ProtectDefenders.eu Conference 2022

“Our movements, our communities, and our solidarity remain our pillars of strength”

In the past years, we saw the **poorest of the poor and disadvantaged peoples bearing the heaviest impact of a pandemic**, wars of aggression inflicting massive loss of lives of civilians, the steady rise of authoritarianism and extreme repression of rights and freedoms, and unprecedented economic crises that have shaken the core of our rights and dignity as human beings. In our work as human rights defenders in the past years, **we have come together**, defying constraints of borders and State imposed restrictions, to strengthen, support, complement, and help each other overcome our grief, our loss, and our pains to provide life-saving, essential service for communities and peoples. **We celebrate and take our wins** whenever and wherever we get them, such as the release of some detained human rights defenders in Guatemala, Burundi, Philippines, and Saudi Arabia; UN resolutions on access to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, on environmental defenders, on the protection of human rights defenders in conflict situations and during the pandemic. Our movements, our communities, and our solidarity remain our pillars of strength.

However, the **great risks to our lives**, liberty, and security have gone on overdrive. Defenders have been increasingly **stigmatized** – called with various names and labels that depict us as criminals or as less than humans or to inflict harmful gendered impacts that increase our vulnerabilities in a world where patriarchy and discrimination still largely exist. Social media platforms and offline attacks have increased manifold. Lawfare – or the **weaponization of laws** – against human rights defenders, whether through criminal trumped-up charges, counter-terror or anti-money laundering or administrative policies and laws, have been vastly used to curtail and transgress our freedom of expression, press freedom, freedom of assembly and association, of mobility, of privacy, to access to funding and resources, and many other rights and liberties. In an environment that is likewise unprecedented, we see our journalists, our lawyers, our judges and magistrates, our truth-tellers from extremely distressed Palestine, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Colombia, South Africa, Myanmar, and many other countries, experiencing the **greatest challenges in a supposedly democratic and free world**, but they are increasingly gagged and attacked. **Extrajudicial killings** of human rights defenders and **arbitrary or illegal arrests and detentions** of our colleagues are on an uptick, especially among land, environmental and indigenous defenders, with nary a sliver of justice for the victims. **Civic and democratic spaces are repressed or are closing, if not already closed in many countries.**

We lament that as we see the 25th anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights Defenders and the 14th year after the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, **we are in a more difficult world**. Only 15 countries out of the 193 UN Member States or 8% have enacted national policies for the protection of human rights defenders. Legislations that protect us from direct and indirect actions of businesses that impact on the environment and on the quality of lives of those in communities have yet to be realized. As NGOs and HRDs supported by ProtectDefenders.eu, we take this occasion to say that **the EU HRD mechanism needs further, stronger, and broader support** as it takes on, adapts, or responds to the needs and risks faced by defenders and strengthens the current programmes it has to help us.

We likewise **call on and enjoin the EU and the Member States to ensure the effective, timely, relevant, and comprehensive implementation of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders** including regular briefings of country missions with defenders; increased support for defenders through political support for their causes and through funding and technical resources, and visa and relocation mechanisms, with strong gender-sensitive approach; pushing for enactment of human rights defenders protection legislation and mechanisms; and clear, definite indicators on justice for human rights defenders. We enjoin the EU to promote the guidelines among States including the US, Canada, Australia, ASEAN, and SAARC, among others.

Guidelines on enabling the environment for civil society and **strong language on the protection of human rights** defenders in the mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence likewise need to be developed. We propose to the EU engage with social media and internet-based companies to uphold and protect the rights of human rights defenders against attacks and disinformation. Similarly, we call on the EU to ensure corporate accountability for their involvement in attacks on human rights defenders around the world, including by supporting the UN process for the development of a binding instrument on corporate accountability. **Let us all hope and work relentlessly in addressing the seeming backsliding of our democracies and in promoting the vision that everyone should enjoy our rights to promote, protect and defend human rights.**

A Message from the Consortium of ProtectDefenders.eu

The EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism - **ProtectDefenders.eu** was established in 2015 with the primary objective of enhancing the resilience and protection of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) worldwide, particularly those operating in harsh environments. Since then, the consortium of organisations implementing the **EU HRD mechanism has delivered and accomplished its goals with pride**. The existence of ProtectDefenders.eu has provided vital support to HRDs and HRD organisations, enabling them to continue their important work even in the face of severe threats and risks. Since its establishment, the mechanism has provided **tangible support to HRDs, empowering them to continue their vital work** in the face of adversity and contribute to the promotion of human rights globally.

Today, ProtectDefenders.eu is instrumental in **saving lives and preserving the physical and psychological well-being of HRDs** and their families. The mechanism is effectively **addressing the emergency needs** of HRDs and **mitigating the threats** and risks they face due to their activities. It also

plays a crucial role in **preventing or alleviating backlash and pushback against local organisations** supported through its various components, creating a resilient environment conducive to sustained human rights protection and democratic development in the midst of unparalleled global socio-economic and political challenges. Furthermore, ProtectDefenders.eu is **strengthening the capacity-building and resilience skills of HRDs** operating in the most difficult contexts while also increasing the **visibility of the situation of HRDs at risk** in international diplomacy actions.

The added value of ProtectDefenders.eu includes its ability to provide protection **support without discrimination**, its diverse consortium members who offer a wide range of **expertise and networks** across regions, its **complementarity** of components, its ability to stretch and **build bridges** to respond to the needs of defenders, and its space for **collaboration and peer-to-peer learning**. The twelve international NGOs that form the consortium have **generated**

“The mechanism serves as a lifeline for HRDs operating in challenging environments, offering them protection, support, and resources to carry out their crucial role in advancing human rights globally”.

significant value through their collaboration, shared learning, and enhanced cooperation, resulting in effective implementation, increased outreach, and complementarity. They have demonstrated remarkable **flexibility, creativity, and responsiveness** in an ever-changing environment. This unique partnership has been crucial in facilitating **collective responses** to the challenges posed by the pandemic, as well as the deteriorating environment for civil society and increased hostility towards human rights defenders due to political instability and conflict.

However, the level of **repression and risk faced by the human rights defenders community has worsened year after year**, reaching an unprecedented dimension, unlike any seen since

the inception of the EU HRD mechanism. The global context in which HRDs operate has become **increasingly increasingly dangerous and precarious** and in fact, the implementation period covered by this publication has been marked by **complex challenges**, including **concerning human rights developments globally** and **overwhelming pressure on the resources** of the EU HRD Mechanism.

The combination of the socio-economic effects and political and civic restrictions imposed by the **pandemic**, along with a global phenomenon of **extreme crisis against civil society**, has created a perfect storm situation that puts grassroots human rights defense movements at stake and in critical situations. In some contexts, there has been a **regression or**



FRONT LINE DEFENDERS



REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS



THE WORLD ORGANISATION AGAINST TORTURE (OMCT)



THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (FIDH)



ESCR-NET



ILGA WORLD



URGENT ACTION FUND FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS



PROTECTION INTERNATIONAL



PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL



EURO-MEDITERRANEAN FOUNDATION OF SUPPORT TO HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS (EMHRF)



ASIAN FORUM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT (FORUM-ASIA)



DEFENDDEFENDERS – EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS PROJECT

ProtectDefenders.eu is led by a Consortium of 12 International NGOs

Some staff members of the organizations within the ProtectDefenders.eu consortium



even a brutal dismantling of these movements. Engaging in human rights work remains a **high-risk activity**, especially in environments where democratic structures, good governance, and independent judiciary systems are lacking, or in the midst of conflicts or political unrest. HRDs continue to pay a heavy price for their legitimate and essential work. Furthermore, a **negative narrative** portraying HRDs as anti-development, terrorists, or pro-revolution has been spreading unchecked. HRDs have also faced increased violence, attacks, and intimidation, while civic space has continued to erode or even be dismantled in many parts of the world. These alarming circumstances and phenomena highlight the **critical challenges faced by HRDs and the urgent need for mechanisms such as ProtectDefenders.eu to continue their efforts** in protecting and supporting HRDs, particularly those working in the most difficult and dangerous environments.

This general aggravation of the situation facing civil society and a severe backlash against human rights defenders in specific countries, has resulted in the **highest level of demand for resources** that ProtectDefenders.eu has recorded since its establishment. The unprecedented high volume of requests for support has strained the verification processes and emergency response times, while also **putting immense pressure on the human resources of the implementing partners**, especially those whose thematic or geographic mandate was activated

during various crises in the past years. The Consortium's collaboration has been vital in mitigating the challenges arising from a consistently **insufficient budget to cater to the actual needs** of at-risk human rights defenders, particularly in unpredictable critical situations where the **demand for support** from defenders and communities **exceeded the funding available**.

As a consequence, the need for a **sophisticated and proactive coordination** of efficient responses has become more crucial than ever. The efforts in terms of programme coordination, fundraising, advocacy, and prioritization of resources, as well as **building solidarity and co-responsibility with external partners and actors**, have highlighted the key role that the EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism can play, provided it is allocated sufficient resources and agility, and accompanied by necessary **expressions and actions of political support** from key stakeholders.

Despite these challenges, one thing remains clear: the coordinated and global mechanism of ProtectDefenders.eu, mandated to respond to emergencies faced by defenders and organisations, has **played a critical role in mitigating the devastating consequences that grassroots individuals and groups defending rights** in high risk contexts would have otherwise faced.

In late 2022, the ProtectDefenders.eu Consortium successfully concluded negotiations for an immediate continuation of its activities, thanks to the **renewal of the EU HRD Mechanism for four and a half years**, along with a budget increase of 30 million euros. The consolidation achieved during this phase, along with the lessons learned, has given the implementing partners **confidence in taking this unique partnership to the next level**, to deliver even **greater and more qualitative impact and support** to the community of defenders at risk around the world. This renewal and increased budget will allow the mechanism to continue its work of providing protection, emergency grants, relocation support, capacity building, advocacy, and other forms of assistance to HRDs and local human rights NGOs. The implementing partners will also **focus on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the mechanism**, building on the lessons learned during the previous period. Furthermore, the implementing partners continuously aim to explore new methodologies and approaches to enhance their support for the psychosocial well-being of HRDs, their families, and communities. We also plan to **increase our collaboration with local actors** and organisations to ensure that the support provided is context-specific and responds to the unique needs and challenges faced by HRDs in different regions. In addition, we will **continue to prioritize the coordination and synergy among the different components** of the mechanism to maximize the impact and ensure the sustainability of the support provided. We will also seek to **engage with external stakeholders**, including the EU and non-EU actors, to build alliances and mobilize support for the protection and promotion of human rights defenders globally.

Overall, the renewal and increased budget of the EU HRD Mechanism represent a **significant opportunity for the ProtectDefenders.eu mechanism to continue and expand its crucial work** in protecting and supporting HRDs at risk worldwide. The mechanism is renewed to **improve the financial support landscape available to human rights defenders and organisations, raise the visibility of their work, and facilitate connections between grassroots defenders and support mechanisms**.

However, in fast-changing and increasingly conflict-affected contexts, **the need for assistance to defenders at risk is immense and will likely continue to increase** in the coming years. Therefore, **expectations on ProtectDefenders.eu should be framed accordingly**. The EU HRD mechanism has

demonstrated its ability to adapt to changing circumstances and address the evolving needs of HRDs and the implementing partners are committed to maximizing this opportunity, but **increased solidarity, coordination, and political and financial support will be essential to ensure the sustainability of the mechanism** and an ever-lasting impact on the global community of at-risk human rights defenders.

02.

Highlights

PROTECT **DEFENDERS.EU**



A Global Model For Protecting Human Rights Defenders Amidst Unprecedented Challenges

From 2019 to 2022

The European Union’s Human Rights Defenders Mechanism - ProtectDefenders.eu, has yielded impressive results during its second phase of implementation. Throughout the years 2019 to 2022, **over 23,000 human rights defenders across all regions have received vital protection measures, support, and tools for empowerment.** Additionally, their families, communities, and organisations have received strengthened support. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and an increasingly unstable global geopolitical climate, the EU HRD mechanism has remained efficient and effective in protecting human rights defenders. It has taken a **comprehensive approach to emergency response and provided holistic support to human rights defenders and their communities.** The resilience and flexibility of ProtectDefenders.eu have proven indispensable in delivering protection and support, particularly in challenging contexts. As a flagship programme, it has become a **successful model for protecting human rights defenders worldwide.**

ProtectDefenders.eu has been unwavering in its efforts to provide swift and decisive emergency protection to human rights defenders facing the gravest dangers. It has also made significant **investments in strengthening the resilience and capabilities of human rights organisations and local communities** operating in challenging environments by providing funding for core operations, institutional support, and vital resources. The EU HRD Mechanism has

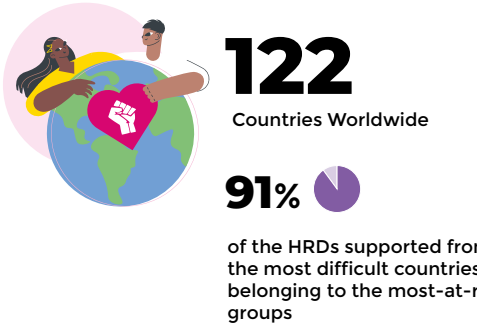


remained at the **forefront of coordinating the international temporary relocation system** for human rights defenders, thereby ensuring the safety of these defenders and their families. The **Shelter Initiatives programme** has been launched to augment regional relocation structures, while ProtectDefenders.eu has continued to coordinate the **European Union Temporary Relocation Platform (EUTRP).** The EU HRD mechanism has provided comprehensive support to at-risk human rights defenders through various means, such as training, capacity building, outreach, visibility, 24/7 hotline support, monitoring, advocacy, and coordination. Through its reactive and preventative advocacy efforts, including urgent interventions, reports, and proactive initiatives to galvanize the international community, ProtectDefenders.eu has played an **instrumental role in numerous successful outcomes globally,** providing vital support to individual HRDs and NGOs alike.

ProtectDefenders.eu has emerged as a **global reference in providing comprehensive protection** to human rights defenders in the face of unprecedented risks across the globe. The EU HRD mechanism has prioritized **gender-sensitive assistance** and has shown a clear commitment to supporting women HRDs, defenders belonging to gender minorities, gender non-conforming individuals, and non-binary HRDs. The mechanism has also directed a remarkable 91% of its support to particularly targeted HRDs and those operating in the most difficult countries, where they face aggravated challenges, including harassment, persecution, and violence.

ProtectDefenders.eu has been recognized by external observers and direct beneficiaries for its significant role in the global human rights landscape. It has been applauded for its ability to provide timely protection and support that enables human rights defenders to continue their work in challenging and dangerous environments. However, the period from 2019-2022 presented ProtectDefenders.eu with unprecedented challenges, **as the number of requests for protection support from defenders and communities increased by 450%.** This surge was driven by various crises such as civil society repression in Belarus, the coup in Myanmar, the collapse of Afghanistan, or the crackdown in Nicaragua. As a result, the EU HRD mechanism’s mandate increasingly overlapped with humanitarian needs, placing a significant strain on its capacity

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Direct support to



while creating powerful alliances. The complexity and range of support required by defenders and their families exceeded the resources and mandate of the EU HRD mechanism, leading to gaps in the support that could be mobilized. **Persistent threats have left some defenders struggling to find sustainable solutions**, underscoring the urgent need for increased and long-term support for HRDs, their communities, and their families.

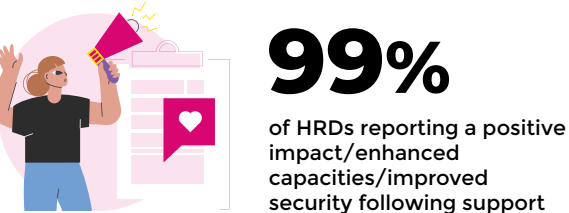
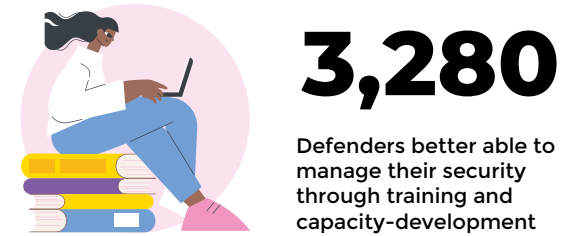
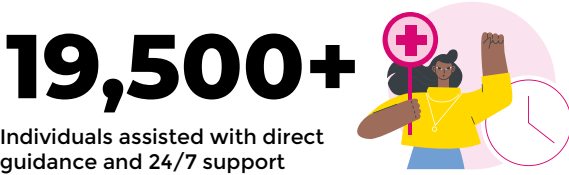
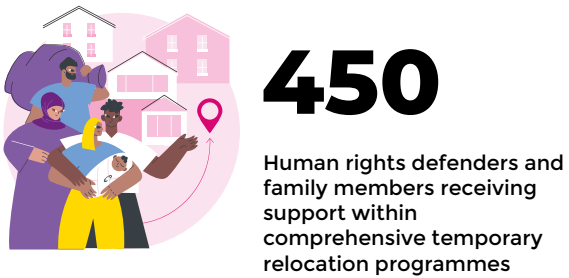
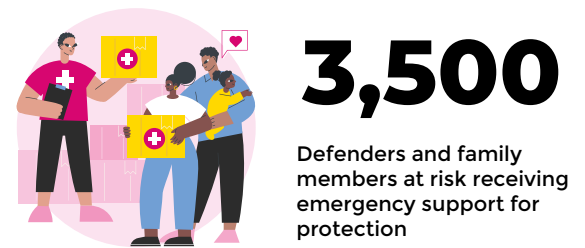
Despite the challenges faced, ProtectDefenders.eu has shown its strength as a key player in coordinating resources and expertise for the protection of defenders, as demonstrated by **the launch of a HRD refugee resettlement stream in partnership with the Canadian government**. Additionally, the ProtectDefenders.eu Consortium has advocated for policy change through joint campaigns, including efforts to improve the mobility and protection of human rights defenders in the European Union. One

such campaign is the launch of the position paper “**Visa for Defenders**” in September 2022, which calls for an enabling framework for at-risk HRDs to access visas to the EU. These initiatives illustrate the potential for synergies and added value of the EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism in supporting defenders and promoting human rights globally.

The achievements and results of ProtectDefender.seu, along with the synergies and coalition-building that have been achieved so far, have **solidified the EU HRD mechanism as a global model for the protection of human rights defenders**. ProtectDefenders.eu continues to make a significant contribution to upholding human rights worldwide, holding the line in the face of complex challenges. Nonetheless, the critical need for increased and long-term means of support for HRDs, their communities, and their families, as well as reinforcing the resources available for actors supporting HRDs, cannot be overstated.



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Our support in figures



In Depth:

The Growing Challenges Faced by Human Rights Defenders Globally



In the period from 2019 to 2022, ProtectDefenders.eu documented the **emergence and exacerbation of challenges faced by HRDs**, primarily due to the ongoing closure of civic space and the erosion of democratic values. The repercussions of this trend extend beyond authoritarian regimes and have begun to affect countries that were previously considered democratic. Governments, seeking to silence the voices of HRDs and curtail their activism, have resorted to the **exploitation of repressive laws and compliant courts**. This has resulted in the criminalization, arrest, and detention of HRDs under fabricated charges.

The proliferation of **legislative and administrative barriers** across different regions have effectively suffocated civil society by **cutting off funding and impeding the operations of civil society** organizations (CSOs). Consequently, the vital work of HRDs has been hindered, posing further challenges to the human rights movement. Furthermore, the **misuse of counter-terrorism and national security frameworks** has become a common tactic to silence HRDs in numerous countries. HRDs often find themselves depicted as terrorists, foreign agents, or threats to national security, subjected to slander and judicial harassment. These tactics undermine the right to defend human rights and perpetuate a climate of fear. The **“censorship of HRDs by detention”** has also emerged as a concerning trend. The detention of HRDs, which is frequently



arbitrary and politically motivated, serves as a tool to suppress dissent and hinder human rights advocacy.

The risk faced by HRDs has been further amplified by the **emergence of death threats**, which are often a direct consequence of their work in exposing human rights violations and advocating for change. This normalization of threats against HRDs has become a significant challenge, demanding immediate attention to safeguard the right to defend human rights. Governments and non-state actors have also been actively targeting and undermining HRDs through **online surveillance technologies and censorship**. Unlawful surveillance has resulted in severe human rights violations, including the **targeted killings of defenders and journalists**. HRDs frequently encounter online aggression, such as blackmail, extortion,

persistent harassment, and humiliation, exacerbating the existing discrimination and threats they face. These tactics aim to control public information and suppress the expression of opinions, employing slander, public attacks, and judicial harassment to restrict defenders from reporting online.

Lastly, the pervasiveness of **negative narratives against HRDs has created a hostile environment** for human rights defenders in many parts of the world. This hostile environment particularly impacts defenders from marginalized communities, leading to a surge in violence, attacks, and intimidation against them, often with impunity.



The Impact of the Pandemic on Human Rights Defenders

Human rights **defenders have remained at the forefront of the Covid -19 pandemic**, despite personal risks to themselves and their families. The global health crisis has had a detrimental impact on the human rights movement, resulting in a sharp rise in violations against human rights defenders (HRDs) worldwide, and aggravation of already existing risks and challenges faced by defenders.

Opportunistic governments have taken advantage of the pandemic to target civil society and human rights activism. Authoritarianism, nationalism, militarization, and extremism have intensified attacks on human rights, democracy, and information. States have used the pandemic as an

excuse to increase repression and surveillance, and erode human rights while persecuting human rights defenders. Discriminatory systems such as white supremacy, racism, xenophobia, occupation, colonialism, settler violence, patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and ageism intersect, further threatening the lives and security of marginalized groups. **The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these inequities across every region.** Women, trans, and gender non-conforming human rights defenders, particularly those facing intersecting forms of discrimination and violence, have faced heightened risks, disproportionate impact from the pandemic, targeted attacks, as well as exclusion from decision-making processes.

Challenges Faced by HRDs in Global Crises

Widespread conflicts and human rights crises around the world have resulted in **devastating attacks against local human rights defenders** (HRDs), impacting the human rights movement and its ability to monitor and document human rights violations or provide assistance to victims.

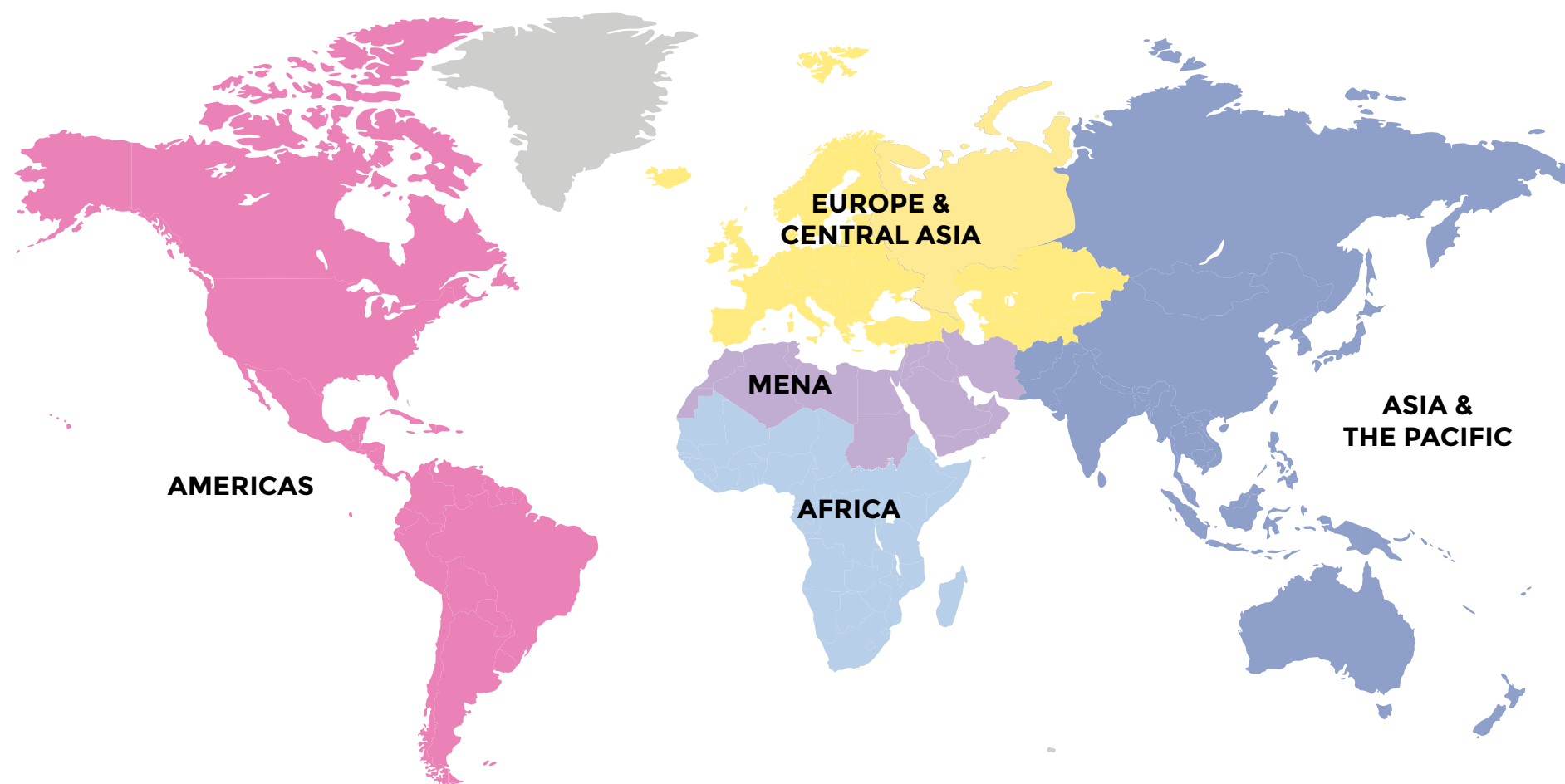
These crises have created **incredibly challenging situations for HRDs**, who have had to adapt their working methods, often operating from exile or in hiding. In fragile contexts, HRDs with their local knowledge and access to vulnerable communities play an indispensable role in exposing human rights violations and advocating for victims, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable threats. Three major crackdowns on human rights defenders and civil society have emerged since 2019: **the crackdown on civil society and**

HRDs in Belarus, the worsening of the situation in **Myanmar following the 2021 coup** and the **humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan** after the Taliban takeover. These crises have resulted in an unprecedented increase in demands received by ProtectDefenders.eu, and highlighted the **urgent need for increased support and protection for HRDs operating in crises.**



Navigating Regional Challenges

The challenges faced by HRDs globally can be exacerbated by regional and national trends that impact the operating environment for HRDs, affecting the implementation of action plans and strategies aimed at protecting their rights. From Latin America to Africa, Asia to Europe, these **trends highlight the complex and evolving landscape in which HRDs operate**, and the ongoing efforts needed to support and protect their vital work.



Scan to read
in-depth regional
analysis



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Asia & the Pacific

The civil and political landscape in many Asian countries remains a cause for concern, as there is **severe push-back on human rights and fundamental freedoms and threats to civil society space**. Despite holding periodic elections, most countries in Asia routinely deny compliance with the rule of law and resist promoting respect for fundamental human rights. The **rise of populist parties** propagating ultra-nationalist and ethno-religious agendas through democratic elections has further created **challenges for civil society organizations and human rights defenders**. The authoritarian push-back against democracies remains the single most significant challenge to democracy and human rights in Asia, with evidence of new repressive laws and policies and the use of existing ones to justify crackdowns on civil society.

MENA

The MENA region has witnessed **governments persistently suppressing peaceful protests and silencing dissent through intensified repression**, rather than addressing the fundamental reasons behind the protests and building new social contracts. This has resulted in **growing authoritarianism**, repression of dissent, and human rights abuses, despite the initial hopes of the Arab Spring. Human rights defenders in the region face **increasing threats to their legitimacy and agency**, with public health measures having been used as a pretext to crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators, activists and journalists; as well as **serious restrictions on access to resources and overall funding limitations**, threatening the sustainability of the human rights organisations.

Africa

Over the past three years, **conflict and crises** in Africa have had serious impacts on the populations, and specifically on human rights defenders. State and non-state actors are using **a set of repressive laws to harass, intimidate and detain** HRDs and journalists. Furthermore, the pro-democracy movements and activists in the region have been facing many risks and an **important crackdown** during pre and post-electoral periods. However, in some countries, such as Niger or the Democratic Republic of Congo, there have been positive developments with institutional reforms, the creation of special protection mechanisms and discussions around laws on the protection of HRDs.

Americas

The region is home to the **most dangerous country in the world** for HRDs (Colombia) and violence against defenders has been increasing since the pandemic. The deterioration of human rights situations in several countries in the region has been accompanied by additional challenges for human rights defenders to carry out their work, such as repeated bureaucratic obstacles, restrictions of funds and **overall repression of civil society**. Negative narratives against human rights defenders and organisations have also further developed in a region where violence against HRDs led to the death of hundreds of defenders in 2022 alone. **Environmental, indigenous, and land defenders have been facing aggravated repression**, harassment and attacks for their crucial work.

Europe & Central Asia

The situation for HRDs in Europe and Central Asia has been deteriorating over the past three years. The **full-scale invasion of Ukraine** by Russia and war in the country, but also the severe crackdown on civil society in **Belarus**, have led to massive human rights violations and a strong backlash against civil society, including harassment of human rights defenders, violence, risk of torture, disappearance. In the rest of the region, civic unrest spread throughout the period 2019-2022 in the whole region, leading to the violent repression of human rights defenders and protesters with excessive and lethal force, criminalization and internet shutdowns.

In Depth:

Positive Strides in Supporting Human Rights Defenders



Throughout the challenging period faced by human rights defenders (HRDs), there have been notable positive developments that **highlight the power of sustained international support for civil society** and those working tirelessly to protect human rights. ProtectDefenders.eu takes pride in its contributions to these advancements, either directly or indirectly.

Amidst the unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the international **community of HRDs has demonstrated extraordinary resilience and adaptability**. Despite the limitations imposed by the global health crisis, human rights activists have engaged in broader awareness campaigns, addressing critical issues such as gender-based violence and fair trials. They have effectively utilized technological tools to **disseminate information and advocate for human rights to wider audiences**, primarily through digital platforms. The growing use of online advocacy has emerged as a response to the pandemic, providing opportunities for HRDs who faced barriers in accessing international forums through traditional means. These online campaigns have facilitated localized awareness-raising efforts, allowing for the promotion of fair trials in specific regions and advocacy for the rights of marginalized communities.

In the face of growing repression and abandonment by the state, **marginalized communities have implemented alternative, community-driven systems for safety** and sustainability. These communities, often experiencing the state's presence only through violence and the absence of essential services, have found **creative solutions to meet their basic needs**. Their endeavors have contributed to building resilience within marginalized communities, empowering them to assert their rights, reclaim their land, and foster self-sufficiency.

A significant **strengthening of coordination among international civil society organizations** has also been observed. Solidarity has brought these organizations together to address the existential threats faced by civil society worldwide. Despite the challenges and risks involved, this phenomenon has yielded substantial results, including the establishment of **comprehensive schemes for country-specific crisis coordination**, increased attention and action from governments and international bodies in addressing the needs of civil society, and an enhancement of the complementarity of mandates and resources.

Furthermore, **several EU Member States have taken steps towards creating safer operating environments** for HRDs. The French government has established a specific project or mechanism for the protection of HRDs, which includes provisions for relocation and core funding for organizations dedicated to protecting HRDs. Similarly, the German government launched the Elisabeth-Selbert-Initiative, a temporary relocation program providing a lifeline to HRDs at immediate risk in their home countries. Additionally, the Spanish government has established a temporary relocation program for HRDs in the Aragon region.

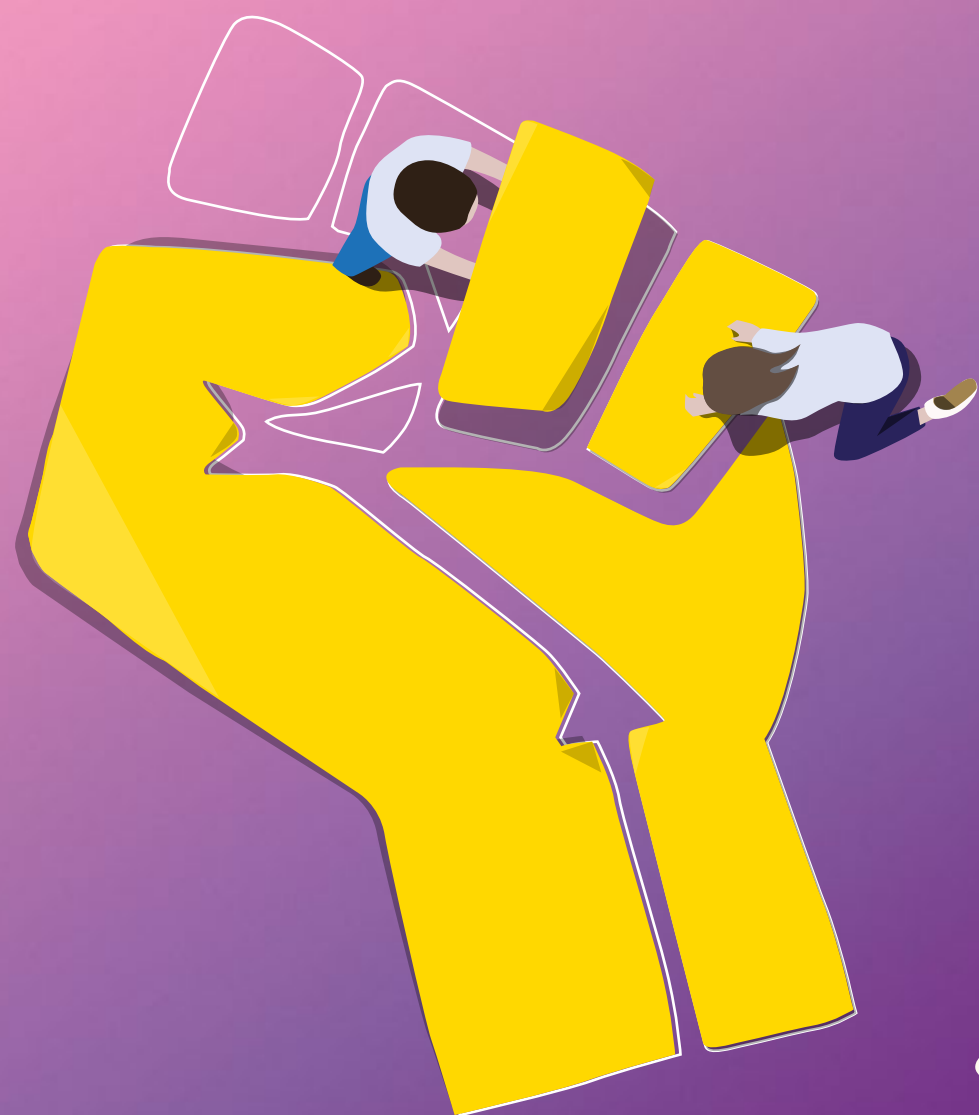
Through **successful advocacy efforts**, ProtectDefenders.eu and its partners have played a crucial role in the **renewal of the mandate of the UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI)**. This mandate has been instrumental in supporting local LGBTI HRDs and advancing the mainstreaming of sexual orientation and gender identity issues within the UN system. Coordinating coalitional efforts with local, regional, and international partners, ProtectDefenders.eu has contributed to the recognition and prioritization of the rights of LGBTI individuals and the work of HRDs advocating for these rights at the international level.

Lastly, a **redefinition of the risk approach for HRDs** has emerged as a significant development, gaining recognition and endorsement from various stakeholders. ProtectDefenders.eu, in consultation with the human rights community, has played a pivotal role in this redefinition and the development of Protection International's protection manual, which serves as a vital tool for addressing the global protection of HRDs. The risk approach offers simple and applicable tools for conducting a situational analysis of threats and vulnerabilities faced by HRDs. It provides a **framework for effective decision-making in protecting HRDs**, considering the specific context and circumstances they face. The risk approach aims to reduce threats and vulnerabilities while enhancing the capacities of HRDs to confront and overcome these challenges. It recognizes the importance of addressing both immediate threats and the underlying conditions of vulnerability. It emphasizes the need to enhance the capacities of HRDs, not only to mitigate risks but also to continue their vital work in promoting and defending human rights. By taking a **holistic approach that addresses both threats and capacities**, the risk approach provides a more nuanced and effective approach to protecting HRDs in their critical work.

03.

A Holistic and Comprehensive EU Mechanism

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Advancing Gender-Sensitive Protection and Support for WHRDs



The intricate web of challenges faced by women human rights defenders (WHRDs), trans-male, trans-female, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming defenders is an urgent matter demanding recognition and amplification. **WHRDs confront a multifaceted spectrum of hurdles**, including gender-based violence, targeted assaults from both families and state actors, and the alarming surge of anti-gender and anti-trans rhetoric. Compounded by the far-reaching impact of the pandemic, these adversities emphasize the pressing need for **collective protection measures that holistically integrate a psychosocial and gender perspective**. Such measures are essential to address the unique vulnerabilities of these defenders, ensuring their well-being, and safeguarding their safety.

In this crucial second phase, ProtectDefenders.eu has placed significant **emphasis on the integration of a gender-sensitive approach across all its programs**. Recognizing the distinctive challenges faced by women, trans individuals, and gender non-conforming HRDs, as well as the imperative of adapting programs to cater to their specific needs, the Mechanism adopted a comprehensive gender strategy in 2020. This strategy encompasses various vital components, including conducting direct work with HRDs in a gender-sensitive manner. One notable aspect is the inclusion of **family support as a key element of holistic assistance** within different programs, acknowledging the crucial role of familial networks in sustaining and empowering defenders.

Moreover, ProtectDefenders.eu actively applies a **gender-sensitive and intersectional lens in the formulation of policies, communication strategies, and reporting mechanisms**. By

doing so, ProtectDefenders.eu strives to ensure that the unique concerns and experiences of WHRDs are adequately represented and addressed. Promoting the presence and visibility of WHRDs within the broader human rights landscape is a paramount goal, fostering recognition and amplification of their invaluable contributions. Additionally, mainstreaming gender in monitoring and evaluation practices ensures that the impact and effectiveness of initiatives are accurately measured, enabling continuous improvement and targeted interventions.

The outcomes of these concerted efforts are noteworthy. From 2019 to 2022, a **remarkable 55% of HRDs who received support from ProtectDefenders.eu identified themselves as WHRDs, trans-male, trans-female, genderqueer, or gender non-**

conforming activists. This substantial figure signifies reach of the Mechanism's work, with **over 12,665 WHRDs benefitting from comprehensive support** and resources.

By **recognizing their specific challenges, tailoring programs accordingly, and embracing a gender-sensitive approach**, ProtectDefenders.eu paves the way for inclusive and effective protection mechanisms that resonate with the diverse realities of women human rights defenders.



Support to the Center for the Protection of Afghan Women Journalists

In an effort to support and strengthen the capacity of women journalists in difficult situations and contexts that are particularly dangerous for women and vulnerable HRDs, RSF provided **support to the Center for the Protection of Afghan Women Journalists** to help them pursue their activities.

The CPAWJ (Center for the protection of Afghan Women Journalists) is the first Afghan organization created by women journalists for women journalists, to defend a free press in Afghanistan and monitor the situation of women journalists and encourage women in the profession. Created in 2017, the center aims to combat all of the various forms of social and material pressure that women media workers face in Afghanistan. It also aims to be a forum where women journalists, especially those operating in remote regions, can obtain and exchange information and contacts that can assist them in their work.

In August 2021, the Taliban swept into power. This coup resulted in very serious threats to independent journalists and especially, women journalists. According to RSF, the **country has lost 39.59% of its media outlets and 59.86% of its journalists**, three quarters of whom are now unemployed and no longer exist in 11 provinces. Women journalists have been impacted most – 76.19% of them have lost their jobs. Indeed, most women journalists have been forced to stop working in the provinces, where almost all privately-owned media outlets ceased operating as the Taliban forces advanced.

RSF provided two grants to the CPAWJ. The first one provided core support to allow the CPAWJ to implement and operate its activities. This grant was renewed right before the fall of Kabul in 2021. With this second grant and considering the evolution of the context, RSF provided an emergency fund to allow the center to continue implementing and operating training and advocacy activities until the shutdown of the center.

Thanks to RSF's support, the CPAWJ was able to conduct **workshops and training on physical and psychological security**, specifically for women journalists in Kabul, and to monitor cases of violence and threats on women journalists as well as publishing reports, press releases, and videos which provided essential qualitative data on the situation of women journalists in the country.

The support provided by RSF before August 2021 allowed the CPAWJ to conduct their activities and provide key information and data about the situation of women journalists in the country. During this period, the partnership between CPAWJ and RSF allowed the Center to **extend its network of women journalists based in remote areas**.



With the fall of Kabul, **most of the female journalists were forced to stop working** or to reduce their professional activity, including the staff from the CPAWJ. The emergency support allowed the CPAWJ to maintain some of their activities (mainly the monitoring activities) despite the crisis and. By relying on their network in the country, the CPAWJ provided support to the Assistance Desk of RSF to identify and verify the cases of the journalists requesting support from RSF.

In order to better understand the situation and identify the needs on the field, RSF relied on the CPAWJ. This partnership allowed RSF to access the local network of women journalists of the organization and to provide a more adequate response to the crisis.

Thanks to the **flexibility of the funding through ProtectDefenders.eu, CPAWJ was able to cover the salaries** of its staff remaining in Afghanistan. The staff members were the focal points of RSF, they were able to collect information and therefore help RSF to better assess and understand the situation and the needs of the journalists. With this financial support, they were able to transition towards a progressive close-down of the organization, by accompanying the staff progressively without putting them at risk.

Scan for more stories of change:
Support for WHRDs in Venezuela



PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU

ProtectDefenders.eu's Success in Prioritizing Outreach to Most-at-risk HRDs



ProtectDefenders.eu has adopted an **outreach-sensitive approach as a core value**, prioritizing human rights defenders who face acute risks due to their work in dangerous contexts or belonging to specific thematic, professional, or identity categories that are particularly threatened. This proactive approach has resulted in **unprecedented success in reaching and supporting those HRDs** facing risks and challenges. The Consortium partners of ProtectDefenders.eu have continuously assessed the situation and needs of specific groups of HRDs to identify those who are particularly vulnerable or threatened, and have prioritized their support accordingly. This approach has allowed ProtectDefenders.eu to effectively concentrate its resources on those HRDs who are most at risk, ensuring that urgent assistance is provided to those who need it the most.

In the period 2019-2022, ProtectDefenders.eu mobilized its resources in an unprecedented way to respond to the needs of defenders working in the most difficult countries in the world and those groups considered to be particularly targeted. These groups include **Women Human Rights Defenders, LGBTI+ Human Rights Defenders, Environmental, land, and indigenous peoples' rights defenders, human rights defenders operating in a territory in conflict, and defenders from remote and less connected areas**. In fact, for the first time since the creation of the EU HRD mechanism, a record **91% of beneficiaries belonged to these categories or came from those countries** considered to be of particular concern. The remarkable emphasis on prioritizing support for the most targeted HRDs is a clear indication of the urgent **need for such prioritization in an environment where resources are limited**, and the demand for support is much higher than what is available. Nonetheless, while this level of prioritization has been necessary to safeguard the most vulnerable HRDs, it raises the concern that defenders who do not fall within the designated categories or operate in equally challenging countries may face difficulties in accessing the support they require to continue their critical work.

The outreach-sensitive approach has been integrated into both **global strategies and specific actions** of ProtectDefenders.eu, reflecting the commitment of the EU HRD mechanism to prioritize the protection of HRDs facing heightened risks. The number of most-at-risk HRDs accessing the mechanism has consistently increased, indicating the effectiveness of

the outreach-sensitive approach in reaching and supporting those in need. ProtectDefenders.eu has also taken into account annual lists of **countries of particular concern**, staying updated on the evolving human rights situation in different countries and adapting its strategies and actions accordingly to provide targeted support where it is most needed. **One out of every four defenders supported by the mechanism identifies themselves as isolated defenders**, living in remote areas far from major social, economic, and political centers, or in places lacking adequate communication and transportation infrastructure. Furthermore, there has been a significant increase in the number of supported defenders and groups who were previously not connected to any protection instrument or international solidarity.

The Consortium members of ProtectDefenders.eu have played a crucial role in disseminating information among their **extensive networks, which cover over 2,000 affiliated entities**. These networks have been instrumental in reaching out to HRDs at risk, including isolated and vulnerable groups who may lack access or networks to secure support on their own. Field teams and volunteers working in remote areas have informed isolated and targeted defenders about the assistance available to them. This outreach has helped raise awareness about the EU HRD mechanism, expanding the reach of ProtectDefenders.eu and **making it more accessible to HRDs in need** of assistance.

Supporting Indian villages resisting forced evictions

ESCR-Net are collaborating with several partners to support communities in Odisha, India that are resisting corporate land grabs and, in the process, facing massive levels of repression.

Communities in Odisha, India have been **resisting a corporate takeover of their land** for more than a decade. The takeover aims to construct a steel plant on community farming land and if successful is estimated to impact more than 40.000 people. Initially, the land grab was to make way for the Korean POSCO company in what was at the time, the largest foreign direct investment in Indian history.

The communities, along with their international allies, were able to expel POSCO who eventually withdrew their investments. Subsequently, the land was given to the Indian Jindal Steel Corporation to construct a similar project. The **land grab has been accompanied by massive repression of the communities** by the police and corporate “goons” in the form of criminalization of protesters and movement leaders, beatings of protesters including women and children, destruction of community property and militarization of the area through deployment of large amounts of security forces.

ESCR-Net and fellow consortium members Front Line Defenders, FORUM-ASIA, FIDH and OMCT in collaboration with allies and partners released this **joint statement on 11 October 2022 calling on the Indian government to end illegal forced land acquisition** and criminalisation of human rights defenders in the region .

ESCR-Net continues to look for ways to support the communities including through **ongoing advocacy with UN mandate holders**. Similarly, the members involved in the struggle are bringing this to the wider membership by sharing their experiences and analysis in social movement dialogues in the Network. This contributes to deepening solidarity and cross regional solidarity.

However, there are real challenges to address violations on a massive scale such as this. **No funders are able to provide grants to thousands or hundreds of arrested HRDs**. We are exploring ways to adjust our strategies including by contacting UN mandate holders as well as exploring ways to target investors.

“In our state, so many corporations are very powerful with the help of the State.[...] The government is trying to divide the different villages to give the land to the corporation, without the consent of the Gram Sabhas, the village councils, despite the provisions that guarantee consultation with villagers. They don’t listen to the villagers and if they protest peacefully, criminal charges are brought against them”

Prashant Paikray
(Posco Pratirodh Sangram Samiti - PPSS)



Scan for more stories of change: Supporting isolated HRDs in Antioquia



PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU

Contributing to the Long-term Sustainability of Human Rights Defenders Movements



Building the **long-term sustainability of human rights defender movements is crucial**, but for ProtectDefenders.eu this is heavily dependent on the political environments in which the EU HRD mechanism operates. In many parts of the world, political repression, violence, and instability pose significant challenges to the long-term sustainability of human rights defender movements. As a programme created to mobilise support to those who are facing the highest risk in the most challenging circumstances, **ProtectDefenders.eu frames sustainability in the context of the fast-changing and increasingly conflict-affected environments** in which human rights defender movements operate.

While emergency support actions such as **protecting the lives of defenders** and organisations at risk or relocation programmes may not necessarily prioritize long-term sustainability at a first look, they have **long-term implications when combined with social support, advocacy efforts, and changes in the political environment**. Therefore, the short-term actions of ProtectDefenders.eu have been designed to create a long-term impact on human rights defenders. These actions focus on capacity building, monitoring, and advocacy activities, which aim to strengthen the skills, knowledge, and resources of human rights defenders. Moreover, supporting families, communities, and groups of defenders has given them the opportunity to connect with others who have similar experiences, develop tools for the long term, and **foster networks, built resilience, and empower defenders to navigate challenges** in the long run.

By building their capacity, defenders are better equipped to continue their work in the long run and effectively advocate for the protection of human rights. Through monitoring, ProtectDefenders.eu can track the situation of defenders, identify threats, and develop targeted interventions to address them. Advocacy activities also play a critical role in creating long-term impact by raising awareness about the challenges faced by defenders, calling for action from governments and other actors, and promoting positive changes in policies and practices. The EU HRD mechanism recognizes that **addressing the root causes of threats to human rights defenders is critical** to achieving long-term sustainability. Therefore, ProtectDefenders.eu seeks to work with stakeholders at all levels to advocate for policy changes that address the underlying causes of threats to defenders.

In addition, ProtectDefenders.eu recognizes the importance of **supporting local solutions that are developed by and for the affected communities** or that build upon existing activities and campaigns led by local actors. This approach recognizes the value of local knowledge, expertise, and ownership of interventions, which can help ensure that they are contextually appropriate and sustainable in the long term. Moreover, by engaging with local actors and communities, ProtectDefenders.eu can better understand the specific challenges and opportunities facing human rights defenders in a given context and identify locally relevant strategies to address them. Ultimately, this can contribute to building stronger, more resilient human rights defender movements that are **better equipped to sustain their work** over time.

Urgent protection, peer-to-peer coordination and long-term support:

the journey of a young Syrian LGBTIQ+ defender who is today developing a rare civil society initiative to protect their rights

EMHRF renewed its urgent support to **protect the safety of a young Syrian LGBTIQ+ defender who was abducted and subjected to severe torture** by extremist armed groups in Syria because of his feminist activism, in order to relocate to Türkiye. Once in Gaziantep, and despite improved legal, psychological and physical conditions, he continued to receive online threats and his family in Syria was also threatened because of his activism.

Beyond the renewed financial support for his and his family protection in 2021 and 2022, EMHRF referred him to the **Canadian government's refugee stream** in February 2022, which enabled him to get an interview at the Canadian Embassy in Türkiye on 3 December. It also recommended his participation to a capacity development programme for HRDs in exile (IDREAM project by CVT) in November 2022.

While advising and supporting him in the development of a new association he co-founded with other Syrian and foreign activists, EMHRF introduced him to the UAF's urgent support programme to develop the website and virtual identity and to register the new association.



This new civil society initiative is now receiving operational support from EMHRF to: provide members of the Syrian LGBTIQ+ community with **protection services, including psychosocial support and counselling** as well as security advice; document violations against the community and advocate for their rights at the international level; raise awareness about gender equality and the risks faced by LGBTIQ+ people in Syria and neighbouring countries; and **empower the community through tailor-made capacity building trainings**. The young association has already published statements, stories and interviews with members of the community that have been featured in regional and international media (including Al Monitor, The New Arab) and community media such as MyKali, LQIOO, Lesbian News.

Thanks to **combined protection and operational grants and tailored follow-up**, the defender could not only help his family inside Syria, cover his relocation in Türkiye and benefit from trauma-informed therapies and physiotherapy, which significantly improved his moral and physical conditions, but also develop his human rights work in exile by co-founding with other Syrian and foreign activists a new initiative to protect and empower the Syrian LGBTIQ+ community.

Peer-to-peer coordination, tailored referrals and pooling of resources are fundamental to breaking isolation and ensuring sustainable opportunities for defenders to act in defence of the rights of the most vulnerable people in the face of the multiple threats and crises they face.



Scan for more stories of change: Holistic support for exiled HRDs from Tajikistan



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Holistic protection achieving long-term sustainability

Following 3 years of sustained advocacy and collective protection support, community **members of the Indigenous Citizens' Council of Nahuatzen in Mexico are released** and have sentence against them revoked (see here).

Since 2019, FLD has been working with an indigenous defenders group, the Consejo Ciudadano Indígena de Nahuatzen (Indigenous Citizens' Council of Nahuatzen) in Mexico following the **erroneous arrest and criminalisation of members in retaliation for their work** in the fight for self-determination for the Nahuatzen community. FLD provided a range of support, which was adapted to the needs of the community, including physical security training, skills to combat defamation of WHRDs of the community, a collective protection grant and ongoing advocacy around the case of those arrested.

FLD's Visibility for Protection team also engaged the community. In January 2021, Front Line Defenders supported the Nahuatzen community to produce a community calendar as **alternative collective protection tools**. The calendar was designed collectively with the community and

"Today [the day of release] was a very important day, not only for us who represent the community but for the community of Nahuatzen and for many communities that are seeking their self-determination. This decision from the Supreme Court that orders the freedom of the HRDs is very important. We wanted to take a moment to greet you [FLD] and thank you personally."

HRD from the Indigenous Citizens' Council of Nahuatzen

was to serve as a protection and communicative tool to explain, celebrate, and **honour their struggle and counter delegitimization** and threats faced due to their human rights work. The long term accompaniment that FLD provided since 2019 was finalised in 2022 due to the positive outcome of the case for the community.

In February 2022, members of the community who had been arbitrarily detained since November 2018, were released from prison and had their sentences revoked.

FLD worked on this case with other organisations such as SERAPAZ AC, Red Solidaria de Derechos Humanos, Centro de Derechos Humanos "Fray Francisco de Vitoria O.P" AC., Red Nacional de Organismos Civiles de Derechos Humanos "Todos los Derechos para Todas y Todos" (Red TDT)

This case exemplified **best practice in terms of collective protection** and has fed into FLD's internal learning on how to implement collective protection across the component areas.

This case was successful because the **support provided to the community was holistic and sustained over a longer term period of time**. FLD's Protection Coordinator took an accompaniment approach with the community and liaised with the programmes within FLD to ensure that the different protection needs of the community was sufficiently addressed.



Scan for more stories of change: Long-term support for organisations in Burundi



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04.

A Toolbox of Programs that Delivers Successful Protection

PROTECT **DEFENDERS.EU**

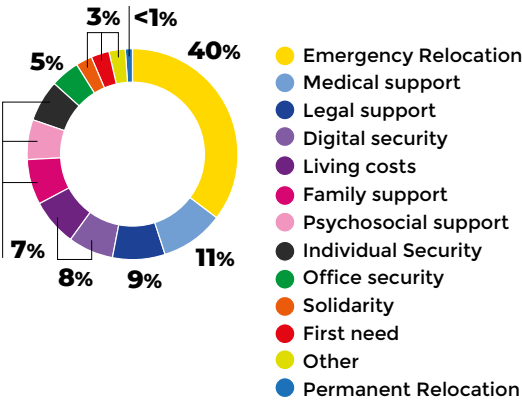
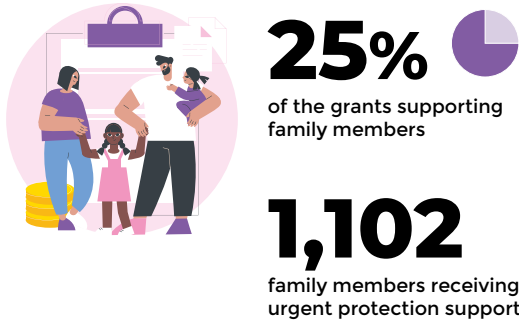
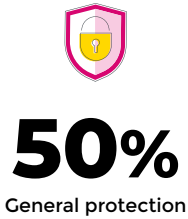
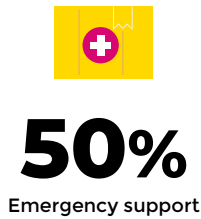
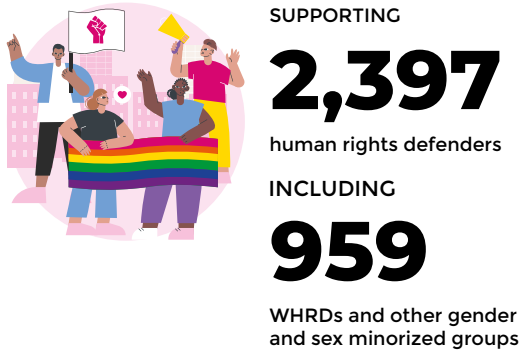
Protection grants:

Providing Emergency Support to Human Rights Defenders and Organisations Facing Urgent Threats

ProtectDefenders.eu's grant-making programme has made a significant impact by providing **1,299 protection grants** to human rights defenders and organisations facing urgent threats and risks, through the delivery of **emergency direct material support** to HRDs and organisations at risk for physical and digital protection, medical support, psychosocial and well-being, support, legal support, support to families, basic subsistence and urgent relocation. Emergency and protection grants have been instrumental in **meeting the extreme and urgent material support demands from the community** of defenders. ProtectDefenders.eu has provided **support to nearly 3,500 people, including defenders and their family members, which is an unprecedented level of support reflecting the unprecedented risks and crises** faced by HRDs.

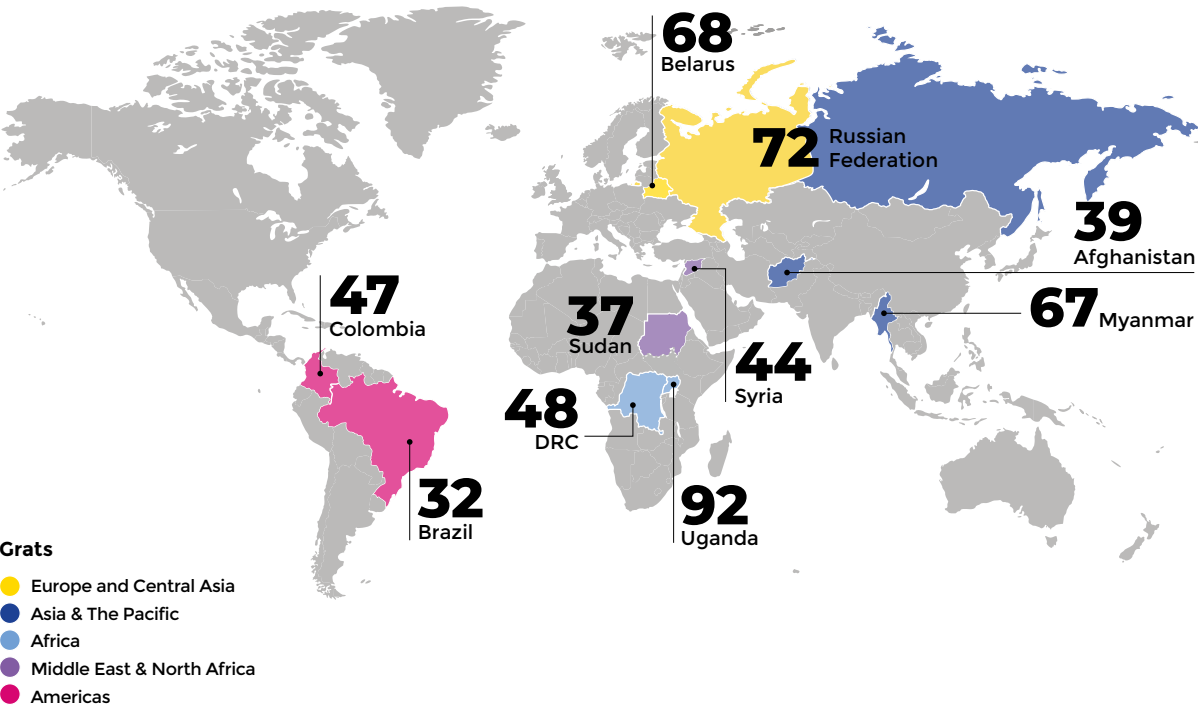
The flexibility and responsiveness of ProtectDefenders.eu's grant-making programme have enabled HRDs to access critical support to enhance their security and protection

Protection grants
PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU



A toolbox of programs
that delivers successful protection

TOP COUNTRIES
PER REGION:



measures, address urgent needs, and mitigate risks they face in their human rights work. This has helped HRDs to continue their vital efforts to promote and protect human rights, despite facing severe threats and challenges. By addressing the urgent material support needs of HRDs, **ProtectDefenders.eu** has contributed to the resilience of the human rights community and has helped HRDs to continue their essential work in promoting and protecting human rights in their communities and countries. Protection grants have allowed HRDs to take immediate action to mitigate risks and enhance their security measures, enabling them to operate in challenging environments without having to compromise their safety or

the safety of their families. In several cases, the emergency support provided by **ProtectDefenders.eu** has been the key factor in **preventing HRDs from having to leave** their areas of operation to save their lives and the lives of their families.

ProtectDefenders.eu's support has ensured that **HRDs are provided with a range of protection measures that can be tailored to their specific needs** and risks. This has enabled HRDs to implement a combination of measures that best address their security concerns. Emergency relocation has remained the preferred protection measure, as it allows HRDs to quickly leave an area when their security and integrity

A toolbox of programs
that delivers successful protection

are at the greatest risk. In situations where no other viable options are available to ensure the safety of HRDs and their families, **relocation has been a critical measure to protect their lives** and well-being. **ProtectDefenders.eu** has recognized the importance of providing **comprehensive support to human rights defenders facing lengthy judicial procedures** and the need for access to medical care and rehabilitation, including psychological rehabilitation. Grants have been provided to HRDs and organisations to cover legal fees or appropriate support from a lawyer, ensuring that they have access to legal representation in order to navigate lengthy legal processes and defend their rights. In addition, **ProtectDefenders.eu** has prioritized **access to medical care and rehabilitation for HRDs** who may have experienced physical attacks, torture, assaults, and other traumatic situations that can have severe effects on their physical and mental health. Within the realm of medical support, **ProtectDefenders.eu** has given high priority to **rehabilitation from torture and psychological support**, recognizing the importance of addressing the holistic well-being of HRDs in need.

The **grants prioritize those who are at the most risk**, and the highest number of grants were given to organisations working on freedom of expression, civil and political rights, LGBTI rights, women's rights, and defenders combating impunity. This trend also includes a significant increase in emergency support to Women Human Rights Defenders, which highlights the successful implementation of proactive actions within the gender strategy and outreach towards these specific groups. **ProtectDefenders.eu** recognizes the importance of **family support as a key element in providing holistic support with a gender perspective** to the needs of defenders, especially women human rights defenders. Therefore, there has been a significant increase in the number of family members receiving support, and a significant percentage of emergency grants have included an element of family support. This sheds light on the direct impact of access to support from **ProtectDefenders.eu** not only on the defenders themselves, but also on **broader groups and communities whose integrity, needs, livelihoods, and empowerment are safeguarded and protected** through the provision of emergency support.

However, in some cases, despite the support received, the defenders still could not continue their work. This can be attributed to the **extreme situations that arose globally over**

the past years, including human rights crises in countries such as Afghanistan, Myanmar, Russia/Ukraine, Nicaragua, and Belarus. Many defenders facing these situations were forced to go into exile, which hindered their ability to resume their human rights work. The **capacity of some human rights defenders to continue operating has been compromised** to varying degrees. Some of them **are still in need of support**, and in some cases, basic sustainability issues have yet to be resolved. The ongoing challenges faced by human rights defenders in protracted situations highlights the **need for continued support** and attention to address their **protection issues effectively also in the long term**.



Grant to a feminist activist from Myanmar

WHRD from
Myanmar requested
support to return
to Myanmar from
Thailand to be able
to continue her work

A grant was given to a feminist activist from Myanmar, who founded an organisation promoting sexual and reproductive health among young people and advocating against gender violence. In 2021, following the coup, **she left the country due to the risk of arrest**, imprisonment and physical attacks by authorities and she moved to Thailand where she continued her work through trainings.

However, she made the decision to return to Myanmar and following a security consultation from FLD's Security Advisor, **a grant was provided to support her return to her country**, covering travel, accommodation on return, as well as for strengthening the security in her accommodation.

Thanks to the support she received, she safely returned to Myanmar where **she is now continuing her work in-country** advocating for the rights of women, girls and young people.

The HRD sucessfully relocated and **reported increased capacity to carry out her work**. "Since I relocated, I have been more present and productive with [my] work. We are running the mental health project which required many communications back and forth with experts and collaborators inside Myanmar with whom I was able to do active communication because of the fact I am here."

"My return to Myanmar has improved my mental health dramatically. While I was in Thailand, I quite feel isolated and disconnected from the world... I was safely able to return to my home country without having to worry about the financial aspects of it. It was mentally freeing to know that I can arrange to go back without having to wait to save up or harm the work I was doing"

WHRD from Myanmar

"Due to the facilities (such as CCTV and burner phones) and secure location plans as well as the digital security workshop I received from the FLD, I feel physically, digitally, and mentally safe enough to continue the work efficiently. "

WHRD from Myanmar

Facilitating a HRDs safe return to their country of origin following a period of temporary relocation can be critical. This case underlined the importance of ensuring that HRDs have a security consultation with FLD's Security Adviser before a repatriation grant, to ensure all needs are addressed with in the grant, including physical security once returned home.



Scan for more stories of
change: Supporting exiled
Libyan HRDs



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Securitization of APRODEH office in Peru

The Peruvian
organisation APRODEH
has succeeded in
increasing the security
of its members through
the installation of
security cameras,
after several episodes
of intimidation and
harassment by far-right
groups in the country.

APRODEH is a Peruvian non-governmental organisation committed to the comprehensive defense and promotion of human rights, whose mission is to contribute to the development of social, legal and political processes that safeguard and promote the enjoyment of all rights for all citizens, within the framework of greater **efforts to build an equitable and democratic country**. APRODEH is a member organisation of FIDH and works with many organisations both within and outside of Peru.

The organisation has played an important role in uncovering the truth and **seeking justice for the grave human rights violations committed during the conflict** in Peru, particularly under the regime of Alberto Fujimori.

In this framework, APRODEH, and in particular its Director Gloria Cano, have recently been subjected to harassment and intimidation by extreme right-wing individuals and groups in the context of the legal proceedings against Alberto Fujimori. **Gloria and her colleagues have received threats and have been accused of being “terrorists”** at the APRODEH offices. It is important to mention that Gloria is the representative of several victims of assassinations committed during Fujimori’s government.

During the implementation period, FIDH provided an holistic support to APRODEH, through different ways of action:

During the implementation period, FIDH provided an holistic support to APRODEH, through different ways of action, such as delivery of emergency material assistance for office security. Thanks to the grant,

“On August 3rd of this year, our institution suffered a new attack by fascist groups. Thanks to the high quality equipment we had installed, we were able to have the necessary material to file the corresponding necessary complaint with the competent authorities”.

Gloria CANO
Director of APRODEH

Aprodeh was able to improve the security of its offices and members through the installation of cameras and a video door entry system. 10 human rights defenders at risk benefited from this grant (6 women and 4 men). Furthermore, an urgent alert denouncing acts of intimidation against APRODEH and its director Gloria Cano.

APRODEH reported that the **installation of the cameras has provided greater security and better conditions** for institutional staff to carry out their work. Beneficiaries have felt safer in the work premises. The grant has reduced the risk of harassment and aggression on the organisation’s premises and against APRODEH members by organized sectors and groups that support violence, human rights abuses, corruption and impunity. The cameras make it possible to clearly identify these groups. In addition, the cameras help to obtain information as evidence for the filing of a complaint.



Learn more about our
Emergency Grants Program



PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU



A toolbox of programs
that delivers successful protection

24/7 assistance to HRDs
at high risk

ProtectDefenders.eu has continued to provide **round-the-clock support to Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) facing immediate risk** through various channels, including an **emergency helpline operated by Front Line Defenders**. The emergency helpline, which can be reached at +353 (0) 1 21 00 489 or through Skype, serves as a vital communication system through which HRDs can request urgent assistance and mobilize rapid international support and action. In addition to the emergency helpline, Front Line Defenders' **protection coordinators**, located both at headquarters and in different regions around the world, provide ongoing

support to HRDs through encrypted email, Signal, and phone. The emergency helpline and the support provided by Front Line Defenders' protection coordinators have been crucial in responding to urgent situations faced by HRDs at risk. They **provide HRDs with a lifeline to seek help, guidance, and protection in critical situations**, including threats, attacks, or arbitrary detentions. The rapid response and mobilization of international support facilitated through these channels have saved lives, prevented further harm, and contributed to the safety and security of HRDs facing immediate risk.



The **Secretariat of ProtectDefenders.eu also plays a crucial role in ensuring a rapid and efficient response** to the needs and requests of individuals who contact ProtectDefenders.eu through various channels, including telephone, emails, single-entry points, general contact, and social media. The Secretariat's quick **daily response to inquiries and requests ensures that HRDs and individuals in need of protection and support receive timely assistance**. This includes providing guidance on security measures, facilitating urgent relocation, coordinating with local partners and stakeholders, and mobilizing international support, among other forms of assistance.

Over the past years, ProtectDefenders.eu have been confronted with an **unprecedented surge in requests for information, advice, and support** from human rights defenders at risk. The help-desk has processed **over 56,000 requests, highlighting the immense demand for support from HRDs facing threats and challenges in their work. This represents a significant and abrupt 700% increase in requests compared to previous years**. These unprecedented figures attest to the **urgent need for additional resources and capacity to effectively address the increasing demand**.



Reach out to our 24/7
helpdesk



PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU

LGBTIQ HRD from
Ukraine sought
support via the
hotline

A **LGBTQI+ HRD from Ukraine** who is based in the Netherlands was suffering from psychological distress following the war in the country. FLD's Protection Coordinator provided emergency mental health support.

FLD's hotline received a phone call from a **Ukrainian HRD** working on LGBTIQ rights who moved to the Netherlands following the Russian invasion. The HRD was suffering from acute psychological distress, including suicidal ideation, due to several traumatic experiences due because of the war in Ukraine. He was seeking mental health support from the hotline. FLD provided the HRD with options for support, including a grant for psychological support. However, the HRD said that support provided via the hotline was sufficient.

The HRD is now in direct contact with FLD's Protection Coordinator and has received several referrals to local organisations in the Netherlands who can provide him with further support.

This HRD has now been added to FLD's network of defenders and **he is aware of the support that ProtectDefenders.eu and its partners can provide** him in the future. Furthermore, as he works with other HRDs who are in the Netherlands and other countries in Europe because of the war, he can connect other new HRDs to FLD and ProtectDefenders.eu.

The hotline does not always provide tangible outcomes for HRDs who seek emergency support because they are not necessarily eligible for support or are not facing immediate risks. However, this case highlights the importance of the hotline in providing a pathway for HRDs who have nowhere else to turn to. This HRD told the organisation that **having someone on the phone who would listen during a moment of distress has helped him immensely**. It is also representative of the wide range of support provided through the hotline that is not directly linked to the provision of protection grants or security advice, but falls within solidarity support and referrals/advice – which is highly regarded by HRDs.

Funding to local organisations:

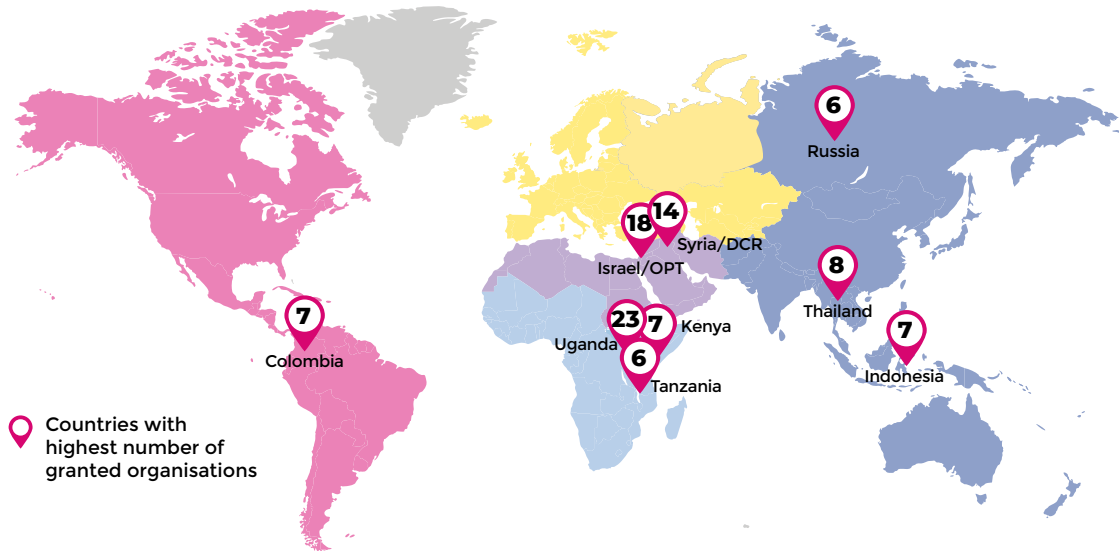
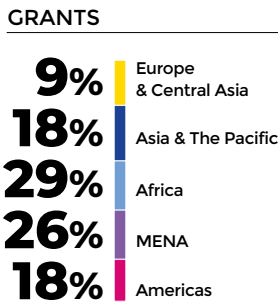
Financial Support and Core-Funding to at-risk Groups and Communities



212
Grants to local
organisations allocated
SUPPORTING AT LEAST
6,260
Human rights defenders



51 Different
countries

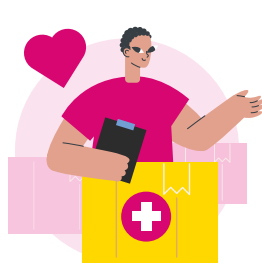


Main or secondary purpose of the grants
PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU



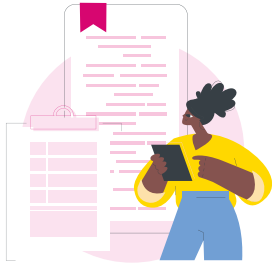
46%

ADVOCACY,
CAMPAIGNING, AND
NETWORKING
CAPACITIES



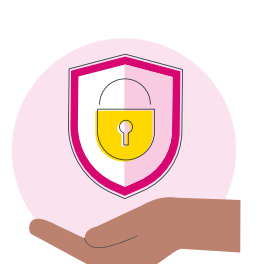
30%

LIFELINE SUPPORT



25%

MONITORING,
REPORTING, AND
FACT-FINDING ACTIVITIES



29%

REINFORCEMENT OF THE
SECURITY SET-UP OF THE
ORGANISATION

Through a multi-dimensional and comprehensive grant-making programme, ProtectDefenders.eu has supported over **210 human rights organisations and groups**, enabling them to enhance their operational capacities, develop sensitive initiatives, and prevent and respond to increasing infringements faced by human rights organizations and their members. These grants have been instrumental in empowering local actors on the frontlines of human rights protection, helping them to continue their important work and promoting a safer environment for human rights defenders to operate.

The flexible and responsive grant-making process for this programmes reflects ProtectDefenders.eu's commitment to catering to the diverse needs of HRDs at risk. Human rights organisations and groups who benefitted from this

programme greatly **appreciate the grant's flexibility and minimal reporting requirements**. Recognizing that each situation is unique, **ProtectDefenders.eu has ensured that its support is tailored to the specific needs and contexts of HRDs and their organizations**.

Through multipurposes grants, ProtectDefenders.eu has **enabled organisations to develop advocacy and campaigning activities**, playing a crucial role in advocating for policy change, raising awareness, and promoting human rights at local, regional and international levels; enabled organisations to carry out crucial **monitoring and fact-finding initiatives**, crucial to hold perpetrators of human rights violations and threats and violence against HRDs accountable; supported **new local protection initiatives** aimed at increasing the protection of HRDs in highly adverse

or transition contexts, where the risks and challenges are severe; supported organisations facing critical situations and at **risk of closure**; and reinforced the security set-up of the organisation as well as their **capacities to enhance their security**.

There is a **continued demand for support from human rights defenders and civil society organizations** operating in challenging environments, where they face risks and threats due to their work in promoting and protecting human rights.



Organizational support to a media organisation

“By the time of DefendDefenders’ grant support we were faced with terrible eviction notice from our operational office following the government raid of March 2022. But following your grant we were able to pay the office rent which enabled us to secure our operational space as we await resuming our work fully.”

Organisation

A media organisation based in Uganda received **support to continue their journalist work after their offices were raided** and journalists arrested.

On 10th March 2022, security operatives from Chief Military Investigation (CMI) raided the offices of the media organisation located in Kampala, and nine of their staff members were arrested on the premises. All their equipment found at the offices were confiscated to support the security operatives in further investigations. They were held incommunicado for four days. On the 14th March 2022, it was revealed that the arrested journalists were being detained at Kireka Special Investigations Unit.

On 15th March 2022, seven of the staff members were released on a police bond while two of them were remanded to Luzira maximum prison. On 16th March 2022, they were charged with cyberstalking and annoying the President of Uganda, still being remanded at Luzira Prison until 21st March 2022 when they were released on cash bail of 500,000 UGX each. Increased joint advocacy efforts and pressure around this incident resulted in them being fully released, and the charges against them being dropped.

Within the framework of ProtectDefenders.eu DefendDefenders granted the media house organisational support. **Thanks to this grant, the organisation was able to cover the rent of their operational office for six months and to secure their operational space.** As such, they were able to resume their journalistic activities and human rights operations.

DefendDefenders collaborated with Free Press Unlimited and the National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders Uganda in providing a variety of emergency protection interventions to the journalists, both at individual and organizational level. The mentioned actors offered individuals journalists with **medical, counselling and relocation support** for their homes since they had started facing threats from their landlords as a result of the raid. DefendDefenders offered them organizational support.

Other civil society organisations in the country and media houses engaged in advocacy on the immediate release of the journalists.



Scan for more stories of change:
Empowering HRDs in
Cameroon through training



PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU

Temporary Relocation

Protection and Respite for Defenders in High-Risk Contexts

In the period 2019-2022, ProtectDefenders.eu approved **198 Temporary Relocation Grants in direct support of 448 individuals** - 220 human rights defenders and 228 family members - Among the family members, 153 were relocated as part of the programmes, while 75 received different forms of support while remaining in their countries of residence.

The Temporary Relocation programme offers crucial medium-term support to human rights defenders who face immediate threats to their security and well-being. On average, defenders benefited from the programme for a period of 6 months, during which they receive essential protection and assistance. The impact of the Temporary Relocation programme has been far-reaching, with beneficiaries hailing from **52 different countries across all regions**. Notably, ProtectDefenders.eu has allocated a substantial portion of grants to **human rights defenders from Colombia, Egypt, and Myanmar**. These countries have been confronted with formidable challenges, exposing defenders to heightened risks and threats.

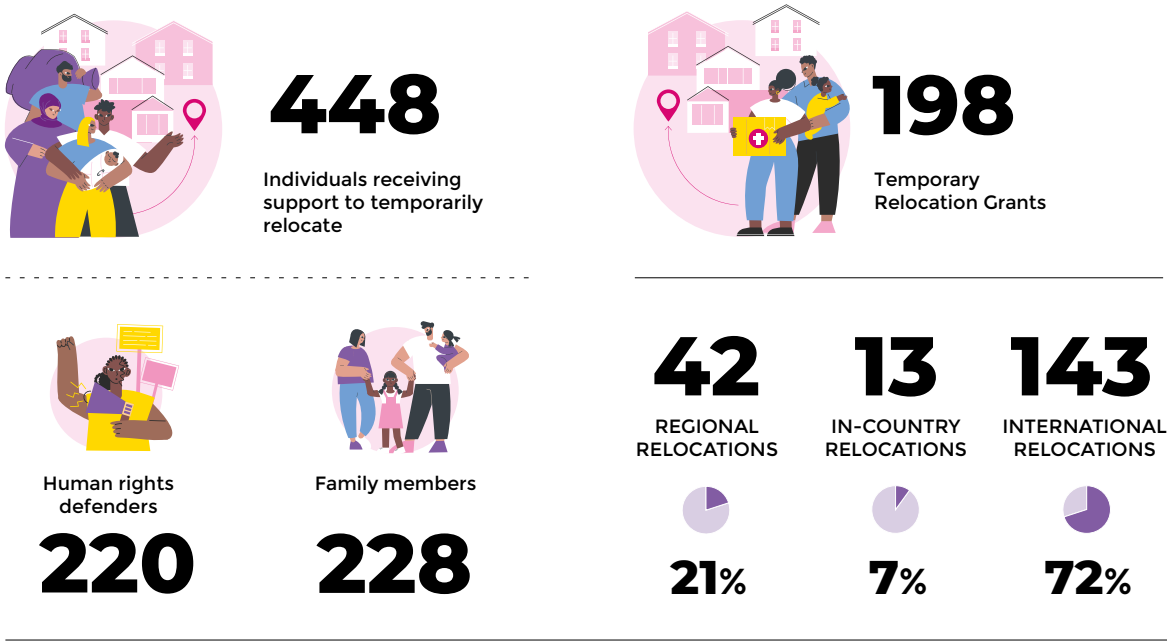
ProtectDefenders.eu's programme guidelines prioritize promoting internal and regional relocation for human rights defenders at risk. However, the **majority of relocations were implemented at the international level**. During the implementation of the programme, more than half of which has been characterized by the pandemic, the **options for**

choosing relocation destinations have been significantly limited and the decision on the country of relocation was primarily based on security assessments, as well as the availability and relevance of hosting infrastructure, and opportunities for relocation. **Visa processing has taken longer than ever before**, including for EU countries, and the pandemic has been used as a pretext to refuse visas for HRDs on multiple occasions. ProtectDefenders.eu has been working closely with its partners to **mitigate these challenges and find alternative solutions to ensure the safety and well-being of HRDs at risk**.

Spain and the Netherlands have been prominent countries for relocations under the Temporary Relocation programme. Both countries have recognized the need for providing safe temporary spaces for human rights defenders and have shown commitment through their NGO sector and governments. These countries have established rich expertise within civil society organisations that have been implementing relocations for HRDs for many years. In addition, dedicated **streams of funds and expedited visa processes facilitated by national and regional governments have made Spain and the Netherlands stand out as reliable destinations** for temporary relocation.

The approval of **new programme implementation guidelines that prioritize the quality of relocations over the number**

Temporary Relocation in figures
PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU



of relocated human rights defenders (HRDs), has reinforced holistic aspects of support during relocations. ProtectDefenders.eu has been proactive in **applying a gender lens to the entire temporary relocation process**, taking into consideration specific needs and challenges faced by women human rights defenders and LGBT+ defenders. This includes using gender-sensitive language, proactively recognising specific needs such as support for children, psychological support for survivors of gender-based violence, or HRDs who have experienced trauma due to their sexual orientation and gender identity. These efforts reflect a comprehensive approach to **ensuring inclusivity and addressing the diverse needs of HRDs at risk**, and contribute to promoting gender equality and inclusivity within the scope of the relocation programme. Notably, the **provision of support to families is recognized as a crucial element in providing holistic support with a gender perspective** to the needs of defenders, particularly women human rights defenders.



The Temporary Relocation programme implemented by ProtectDefenders.eu recognizes the **importance of addressing the psychological and medical needs of human rights defenders (HRDs) as an integral part of the support** provided. This approach recognizes the complex nature of the work carried out by HRDs and the **impact it can have on their mental and emotional well-being**. It also emphasizes the importance of addressing these needs as part of a holistic approach to supporting HRDs and ensuring their well-being during temporary relocation, as well as their ability to continue their human rights work effectively in the long term. The provision of psycho-social support is often accompanied by **capacity-building training to enhance the resilience and well-being of HRDs. 71% of the grants funded different types of psycho-social support, reflecting the importance of holistic well-being in the relocation programmes.**

The Temporary Relocation programme has given the HRDs room and time to retreat and reflect on their work and redesign their next steps as individuals and as activists. For many of them, it has been a turning point which has long term implications for their ability to continue their work after the grant. The majority of beneficiaries **reported a positive impact on their security**, capacity, and ability to continue their human rights work. However, some HRDs **unable to return to their country of origin** after their initial relocation period, and **longer-term support may be needed for these defenders.**

As the EU HRD mechanism moves forward, it will remain crucial to **strike a balance between providing protection and support through relocation, while also addressing the impacts on local communities**. This may involve exploring ways to strengthen local support systems, engaging with local stakeholders, and ensuring that defenders have the opportunity to **maintain their connections with their communities and continue their work** in a sustainable and impactful manner – including those resorting to exile or longer term relocations.

Safe return of Colombian human rights defenders and their family after the relocation

In June 2022, ProtectDefenders.eu allocated a grant under the temporary relocation programme to a couple of human rights defenders and their two children in order to **support their return phase to Colombia from a 6 month relocation** in Spain.

The male human rights defender is a leader of indigenous community in Colombia who was **displaced from his territory** in 2004, following the threats to his family and the murder of his mother. Since 2017, the defender and his family have been caught in the crossfire of **a war between the army and paramilitary groups at the service of the landowners** in the area.

In 2021, the HRD was shot 3 times in his leg while his other colleague and other two people died as a result of an **armed attack by a paramilitary group**. His partner, who is also a women's human rights defender, was pregnant at the time and as a result of this event their baby was born prematurely. The father of her first baby, a human rights defender too, was killed when the baby was two years old and she had to move to another part of the country.

Because of the above mentioned threats, **the defenders and their two children were relocated to Spain** in January 2022 for a 6-month relocation with the main goal of rest and respite. The relocation to Spain was funded by the Catalan Agency For Development Cooperation and hosted by Comisión Catalana de Ayuda al Refugiado, close partners of the temporary relocation programme.

In June 2022, toward the end of their temporary relocation, the HRDs received a grant from close partners of the ProtectDefenders.eu Temporary Relocation Programme to support their return phase to Colombia over a period of 6 months.

During the return phase, the family was accompanied by a host organisation, Colectivo Maloka, which helped them to settle down again in Colombia, followed up and advised on their security situation.

The defenders received a couple of **vocational trainings** such as Doula training course, course in embroidery and coffee production. Beyond the **psychological support**, the family followed music classes and learned to play guitar which resulted in the creation of music, helping them within the healing process.

The vocational trainings resulted in **the economic activities which are currently the main source of income for the family** and ensure their financial sustainability.

The ProtectDefenders.eu staff met the defenders during a verification mission to Colombia in March 2023, one year after the end of relocation, and the **defenders were highly satisfied with the support received for their return phase**, especially regarding the accompaniment of Colectivo Maloka and possibility to follow the vocational trainings.



Learn more about our Temporary
Relocation Program



PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU



Coordination of the EU Temporary Relocation Platform

Over the past three years, ProtectDefenders.eu has developed various initiatives and activities to strengthen the internal functioning of the European Union Temporary Relocation Platform, and **foster the collaboration among its 78 members – including the 10 members who recently joined the platform.**

New governance documents were created and approved, a new website for internal and external purposes was developed and communication and identity were given significant attention reflecting coordination efforts made throughout the 2019-2022 period.

Furthermore, the coordination role of the Platform became increasingly crucial in **facilitating connections and interactions** among its members as well as with external actors, coordinating the response to individual cases of HRDs

at risk, and **strengthening the capacities of its members** while encouraging networking through various activities. A total of 16 webinars were organized during this phase, with a remarkable participation of 457 attendees, indicating the **active interest and involvement of members in the platform's activities.** Additionally, two face-to-face events were organized, providing opportunities for 91 participants to come together, exchange ideas, learnings and good practices, and foster closer connections.




www.eutrp.eu

Shelter Initiatives

Advancing Regional and Local Relocation Programs

Over the period 2019–2022, ProtectDefenders.eu has developed a new programme – “Shelter Initiatives” – aimed to offer institutional **support to regional structures providing shelter and support to HRDs facing risks** because of their human rights work.

During this phase of the Mechanism, **this innovative programme provided support to 14 co-parts** from Africa (Tanzania and South Africa), Asia (Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Indonesia), ECA (Georgia), Latin America (Mexico, Costa Rica, and Brazil), and MENA (Iraq). “Shelter Initiatives” supported the **establishment of eight new shelters** for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) – including three after the completion of feasibility studies supported by ProtectDefenders.eu, and reinforced and expanded the scope of six existing programs.

Financial support is only one among many other types of support provided by this programme which includes a significant component of **technical support and accompaniment.** The co-parts of the “Shelter Initiatives programme” welcomed this accompaniment and support. It has enabled organisations to further develop procedures and protocols, strengthen their security, and supported their effort to ensure their sustainability, through workshops, pieces of training, and individualised support to organisations.

The support from “Shelter Initiatives” contributed to the creation and strengthening of fourteen local and regional shelters for human rights defenders, implementing a **holistic approach to temporary relocation with a gender perspective** – contributing to filling a gap identified by local and regional organisations.

14

SUPPORT TO SHELTERS

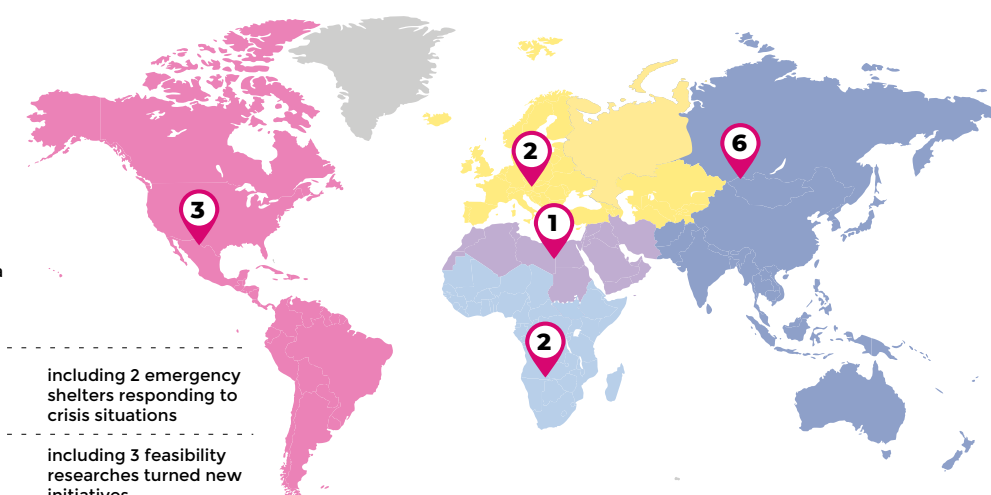
- Europe and Central Asia
- Asia & The Pacific
- Africa
- Middle East & North Africa
- Americas

6 EXISTING INITIATIVES

including 2 emergency shelters responding to crisis situations

8 NEW INITIATIVES

including 3 feasibility researches turned new initiatives



Creation of a Shelter for LGBTQI+ defenders in Tanzania

With the continuous support of ProtectDefenders.eu through its Shelter Initiatives Programme, a coalition of organisations in Tanzania started hosting LGBTQI+ defenders.

ProtectDefenders.eu started to support the organisation in 2021. With a first grant, the co-part realised a **feasibility study to assess whether or not they would establish a new local temporary relocation program in Tanzania** for Tanzanian LGBTQI+ defenders. Tanzanian LGBTQI+ human rights defenders face heightened threats, harassment, judicial harassment and even extrajudicial execution.

Based on the result of their feasibility research, the organisation decided that a local temporary relocation programme for Tanzanian LGBTQI+ defenders was needed, and applied for funding to implement the pilot phase. Through a **second grant, ProtectDefenders.eu supported the organisation financially and technically so that they could implement the pilot phase of the temporary relocation programme** and develop further their policies and procedures. The organisation participated in workshops organised by ProtectDefenders.eu to strengthen their capacity, build their networks and have access to fundraising opportunities.

During the implementation of the **pilot phase of the temporary relocation programme**, the organisation set up the TRP work team, advisory committee, and selection committee, secured and equipped a two bedroom house, developed procedures, protocols, and policies to support the efficient functioning of the programme, increased community awareness of the project, and facilitated the relocation of four LGBTQI+ HRDs for a period of every three months.

According to the co-part, this **programme is having a positive impact on the beneficiaries and other stakeholders** by providing protection to at-risk HRDs, allowing them to continue their work on LGBTQI+ rights and bolstering collaboration between LGBTQI+ organisations in Tanzania. The strengthening of this network and platform should allow for more sustainability of the action.

Furthermore, ProtectDefenders.eu has recommended this organisation and introduced them to other donors to **ensure the sustainability of this programme**. The organisation managing this shelter has also joined the EUTRP – to coordinate and exchange with other temporary relocation programmes – and will thus remain in contact with ProtectDefenders.eu.

In order to ensure that the support received by this organisation, and other Shelter Initiatives co-parts was comprehensive, ProtectDefenders.eu coordinated with a number of external and internal actors, such as the **European Commission and the EU Delegation in Tanzania**, and other donors, to present the programme and give access to more funding opportunities; with consortium partners to provide the right expertise to the co-part; and with EUTRP members for experience sharing and exchanges.



“The opportunities provided to discuss not only available grants but also receive advice on ways of better conceptualizing the research are invaluable.”

Learn more about the Shelter
Initiatives Program



PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU



Training

Empowering Human Rights Defenders through Comprehensive Training and Capacity-Building

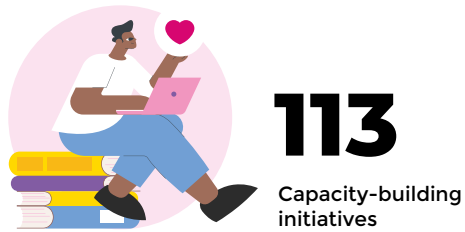
Training and capacity-building initiatives have consistently **increased the skills and tools of HRDs**, enabling them to manage their security situation and advance their work. This has led to the development and strengthening of protection, support, and advocacy networks, as well as strategic activities to address restrictive contexts. The training has also **improved the well-being of HRDs**, especially women human rights defenders (WHRDs) and activists from marginalized communities, by combating the shrinking space for human rights work. HRDs have gained expertise in **risk assessment, digital and physical security, campaigning strategies, and psychosocial support**, empowering them to navigate challenging environments and respond to threats and challenges.

Furthermore, the training has facilitated the formation and **strengthening of networks among HRDs** and groups, fostering collaboration, shared experiences, and learning opportunities. These networks provide support, a safe space for discussions, guidance, and access to resources and assistance. The training has been particularly **impactful for WHRDs and activists from marginalized communities**, who

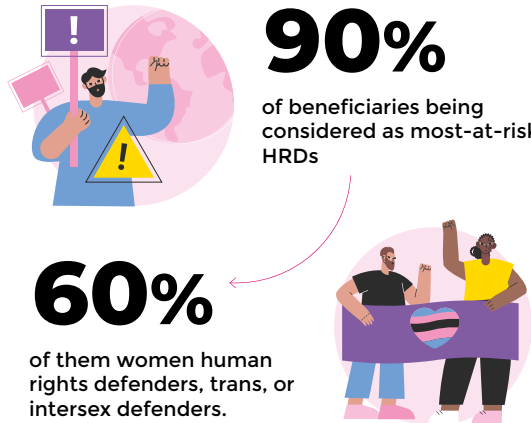
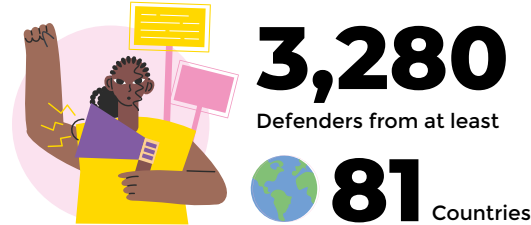
face additional layers of discrimination and threats. The capacity-building initiatives have helped them develop specific strategies, amplify their voices, advocate for their rights, and create positive change in their communities.

The training programs had a significant impact on defenders by helping them **develop security plans and implement new measures in both physical and digital realms**. They also gained insights and approaches related to campaigning, advocacy, and psychosocial accompaniment, applicable to their respective organizations. Follow-up sessions were conducted to reinforce and consolidate the acquired knowledge, ensuring effective implementation of the **skills and strategies in their day-to-day activities**.

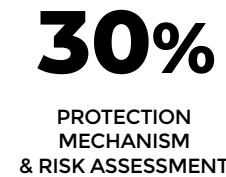
Our training programs in figures
PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU



----- BENEFITING -----



FOCUS AREAS



Workshop for women journalists working in community radios on freedom of expression and safety

RSF supported the Union of Associative and Community radios of Senegal (URAC) and the International Network of Women, Senegalese section (RIF) to provide a **workshop to strengthen women's freedom of expression and safety** by promoting their autonomy in community radio stations and in their communities.

The Senegalese audiovisual landscape has undergone profound changes in recent years with the development of **community or associative radio stations. This expansion of community radio has also been observed in the sub-region. Community radio is a way to gain new spaces of intervention in the political decision-making process** at the local level as well as reach out to certain groups of the population. Community radios have the ability of giving a voice to the voiceless. Women play an essential role in the dynamics of social dialogue within societies. However, **women journalists often face cultural and socio economic barriers** that don't allow them to express freely, let alone claim more responsibility in editorial decision-making. The International Women's Network RIF-AMARC reached out to RSF to organize a workshop aiming at initiating a discussion about the

position of women, the obstacles that women face as well as ways to empower women, in a context of profound change in the media space.

This sub-regional training took place during three days in October 2022. The 19 participants discussed the **challenges they face, particularly to tackle the obstacles that prevent their freedom of expression** and autonomy.

The meeting covered various topics, including the analysis of freedom of expression violations, empowering women's leadership in media and communities, addressing obstacles to women's leadership, discussing women's insecurity in media and public spaces, and promoting women's empowerment in community radio and local communities.

The **training allowed the participants to reflect on strategies for mobilizing resources and promoting alliances** for freedom of expression and the security of women community actors in the target countries.

80% of respondents say they often use the content of the training in their work and **100% declare that they changed their practices as a result of the training**. One participant said that the sharing of good practices allowed her to discover ways of doing things that brought a new face to the daily practices of her organization.

Thanks to the RIF-AMARC's broad network, **synergies between women journalists in the sub-region have been developed**. For example, the workshop made it possible to develop recommendations such as the establishment of a sub-regional code for the safety of women journalists in conflict zones.

In a previous support provided by RSF, the RIF had set up a workshop on security for women journalists of community radios in Senegal. The capitalisation on this first experience led to the implementation of a larger workshop at regional level and a **scaling up of the project based on the lessons learned** from the first project.

"Sharing good practices has allowed me to discover ways of doing things that have brought a new dimension to our daily practices."

A participant to the training



WHRDs Yasmine Shurbaji (Families for Freedom, Syria) and Monika Maritjie Kailey (Komunitas Masyarakat Adat Marafenfen, Aru Islands), at the ProtectDefenders.eu Annual Conference



Scan for more stories of change: Afghan HRDs in exile



PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU

Field-work and accompaniment

Monitoring Programs Addressing At-Risk Human Rights Defenders

Trial monitoring, advocacy missions, prison visits and
accompaniment of HRDs

The implementation of this phase of **ProtectDefenders.eu** has been marked by strong limitations and restrictions for in-person activities due to the pandemic. Despite these challenges, ProtectDefenders.eu has remained committed to monitoring the situation of human rights defenders in the field and **nearly 2,000 HRDs have directly benefited from this field work.**

The missions conducted by ProtectDefenders.eu were instrumental in **documenting emerging trends, raising national, regional, and international attention to human rights issues, and initiating dialogues with concerned authorities.** During these missions, urgent actions were taken to **advocate for individual cases**, particularly those involving human rights defenders who were arbitrarily detained or facing threats. The missions also played a crucial role in **identifying defenders at risk, addressing their isolation, and connecting them with other programmes** of ProtectDefenders.eu.

Judicial observation during trials proved to be impactful, as it increased the pressure on authorities and mobilized support

around the cases. This often led to improvements in detention conditions, dropping of charges, or release on bail of several defenders. By closely monitoring trials and **documenting violations**, ProtectDefenders.eu has played a vital role in holding authorities accountable and pushing for positive changes in the situation of human rights defenders at risk.

Finally, the field-accompaniment activities conducted in Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Mexico have been effective in **dissuading potential perpetrators and providing human rights defenders with a sense of recognition and moral support.** These activities have contributed to maintaining a necessary space for defenders to continue their work, particularly during sensitive periods.

Monitoring Activities
PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU



6

ADVOCACY TRIPS
(GUATEMALA, PHILIPPINES,
INDONESIA, AND MULTIPLE
COUNTRIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA)



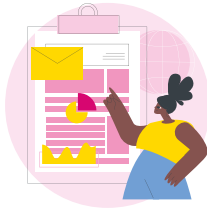
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FACT-FINDING MISSION
(MEXICO)



49

FIELD MONITORING MISSIONS



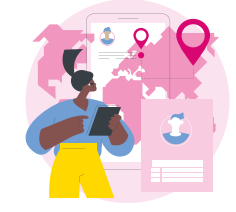
7

OTHER AND MULTIPLE FIELD
WORK ACTIVITIES



1

PRISON MONITORING MISSION



6

TRIAL MONITORING MISSIONS

Thailand: Thammakaset trial observations

Observation of
defamation hearings
lodged against
migrant workers
and women human
rights defenders by
a poultry company,
Thammakaset Co, Ltd.

Despite travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, during the implementation period, **FIDH was able to observe eight hearings concerning several defenders** who were victims of judicial harassment in Thailand.

Since 2016, the poultry company **Thammakaset Co, Ltd. has filed a total of 39 criminal and civil complaints against 23 defenders** and journalists for alleged defamation. The complaints were filed following allegations of labour rights violations committed by Thammakaset. FIDH has been following this case since early 2019, and had published a report on this case in May 2019.

In terms of documentation, the evolving nature of the case has prompted FIDH to continue updating a **dedicated webpage on its website, entitled “Thammakaset Watch”**.

The webpage is regularly updated to reflect new developments and is now a reference point where human rights specialists, some Bangkok-based diplomats, journalists and the general public can find first-hand and up-to-date information on the case. The page also **allows diplomats in Thailand to observe trials** themselves, thus helping to maintain visibility and solidarity with criminalised defenders at the local level.

This series of judicial observations has so far led to the acquittal or discontinuation of proceedings against 17 defenders.

Some of the defenders targeted by the Thammakaset company and which hearings were observed in the framework of those trial observations also **benefited from ProtectDefenders.eu via emergency grants**, mainly for legal aid and advocacy costs.



*“I find your page
dedicated to the
Thammakaset
case very useful,
well documented,
and particularly
up-to-date.”*

Diplomat from an EU Member
State in Bangkok

Making the risk of peasant leaders visible in order to reduce danger

Through national
and international
advocacy actions,
PBI makes visible and
reduces the risk faced
by Cahucopana, a
peasant organization
in northeastern
Antioquia, Colombia.

Cahucopana defends the rights of peasant communities in Antioquia, Colombia. Its president, Carlos Morales, suffered an attack in February 2022. Men shot at him and his family in Barrancabermeja in a context of **systematic violence due to paramilitary expansion** in the region. In response, PBI organized virtual meetings with foreign ministries of European states and EU institutions. In May, PPBI facilitated two face-to-face tours in several European countries by Carlos Morales and Cristy Lozano of Cahucopana, where they met with different EU institutions, local and national parliamentarians and UN Special Procedures.

Thanks to Advocacy actions, PBI ensured at that time the reduction of the risks faced by Carlos Morales and the entire organization. PBI managed to get questions asked in the European Parliament about the case and important public pronouncements from allied international organizations such as the communiqués of the Observatory for the Protection of HRDs, joint initiative of the OMCT/FIDH and the Taula Catalana. **Three UN Special Rapporteurs and the Barcelona City Council sent communications to the different Colombian institutions** responsible for the protection of CAHUCOPANA and the investigations of the attacks suffered.

Cahucopana continues to be at high risk due to the escalation of the conflict in its territory. In August, Elmer Lenin Guerra, an ally of the organization, was murdered. In recent months, PBI organized meetings between

“PBI is the ally that will always protect us; without them we would not dare to go to the regions. PBI’s international accompaniment is an important shield, not only for us, but also for the campesinos in a territory where the army and the paramilitaries and heirs of the paramilitaries are present, and at one point, the FARC was also present.”

Cristy Lozano, Cahucopana

Cahucopana and the High Commissioner for Peace, Danilo Rueda, and the Minister of Defense, Iván Velásquez. As a result, and thanks to the articulation between PBI and Cahucopana, **Rueda visited Northeastern Antioquia to attend a Humanitarian Action where he witnessed the absences of the State** and the dynamics of the conflict in that region.

PBI ensured the coordination of actions in order to be able to carry out the two face-to-face tours of Carlos Morales and Cristy Lozano of Cahucopana in May 2023 in several European countries such as Germany, Switzerland, Norway, France, the Netherlands and Spain.

One lesson has been that one cannot assume that with an allied government the country's problems will be solved overnight, as it was made evident with the assassination of Elmer Lenin Guerra in August. It happened in the first days of the new government when there was already a lot of expectation about ceasefires with the illegal armed groups. It was a reminder that these **historical and structural dynamics can take a long time to resolve.**



Advocacy Work

contributing to address the root causes of HRDs’ vulnerability and to open spaces for human rights work

ProtectDefenders.eu has been actively engaged in various actions to **mobilize relevant authorities, raise public awareness, and increase visibility** about the situation of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) at all levels. This has included dispatching urgent alerts and appeals, sending petitions and letters to stakeholders, and generating adequate warnings to improve the situation of HRDs at the local level.

As a result of these appeals and actions, ProtectDefenders.eu has reportedly contributed to **enhancing the protection of HRDs in general and has succeeded in stopping or alleviating the degree of repression** faced by HRDs through actions taken by concerned authorities or pressure from influential third parties. These actions have contributed to the **release of detained HRDs, improvement of their detention conditions, access to healthcare, efforts to combat impunity**, and other measures to safeguard the rights and well-being of HRDs.

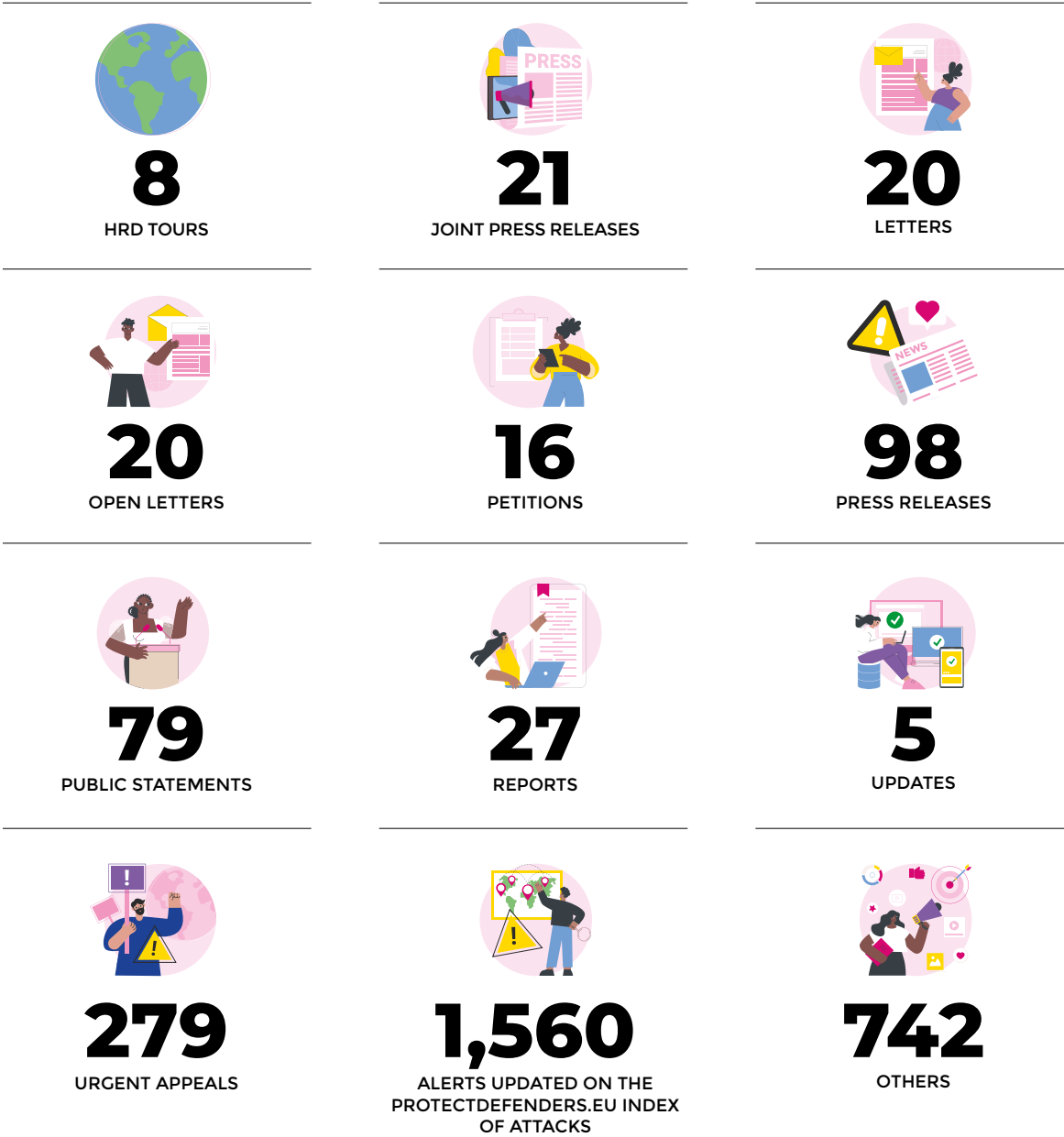
In addition, the advocacy efforts have had subjective impacts, such as providing HRDs at risk with **support and solidarity from the international community**, potentially preventing other acts against HRDs in their communities or countries due to the reactions generated by these cases. The **broad dissemination of information about cases of harassment, threats and specific contexts through ProtectDefenders.eu’s Monthly Bulletin has increased its visibility**, and publicity has often created or strengthened a **protective effect for HRDs**.

Finally, for the first time since its inception in 2015, ProtectDefenders.eu developed joint advocacy strategies and plans with its Consortium partners focusing on two key issues: the **shrinking international funding available for HRDs**, and the **difficulties HRDs face in accessing EU visas** in a reliable, consistent, and predictable manner.



The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor, at the ProtectDefenders.eu Annual Conference

Advocacy materials produced by
PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU





Release of HRDs in Egypt

The mobilisation of FIDH, along other international human rights organisations, contributed to the release of HRDs in Egypt



Scan for more stories of change: Solidarity with a WHRD in Mexico



PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU

FIDH has consistently **advocated for the release of Egyptian HRDs**, most of the time in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, through the documentation of their arbitrary detentions and the publication of **urgent alerts, press releases, statements, open or closed letters** etc, sent to national authorities as well as international institutions and human rights protection mechanisms, and relayed on our website and social media. For example, we advocated for the release of blogger and HRD Alaa Abdel Fattah, his lawyer Mohamed AL-Baqer and many others, including Patrick George Zaki, Ramy Shaath, Ibrahim Ezz El-Din, Ahmed Samir Santawy, Amr Imam, Haytham Mohammadein, Hoda Adbel Monein, Ibrahim Metwally, Mohamed "Oxygen", or Ziad EL-Elaimy.

Advocacy was also undertaken at the diplomatic level, targeting for example French and other MFAs, Heads of State, etc. and led to the release of a number of HRDs.

Patrick George Zaki was effectively released from Mansoura police station in Cairo on December 8, 2021.

Ramy Shaath was released on January 8, 2022, after an unjustified two-and-a-half-year ordeal behind bars in Egypt's Tora prison.

Ibrahim Ezz El-Din was effectively released on April 26, 2022, without probation requirements, after 1,050 days of pre-trial arbitrary detention. However, the charges against him were not dropped.

If some defenders were effectively released during the implementation period, **many others are still behind bars**, including Mohammed al-Baqer and Alaa Abel Fattah, who conducted a very mediatic hunger strike during the recent COP27 in Egypt.

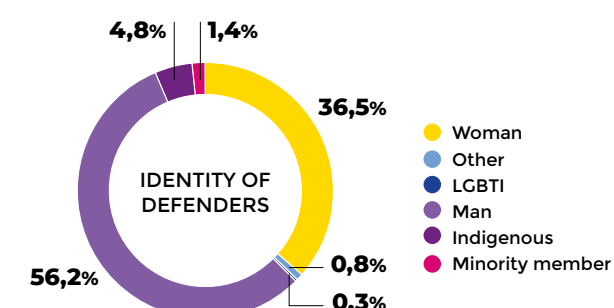
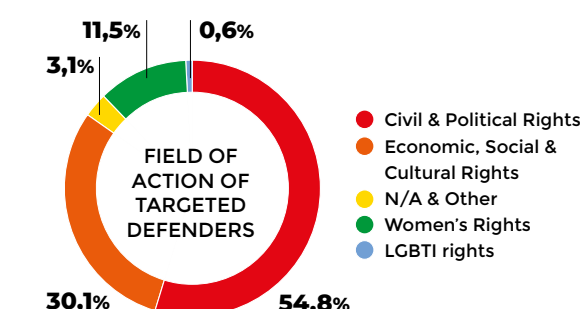
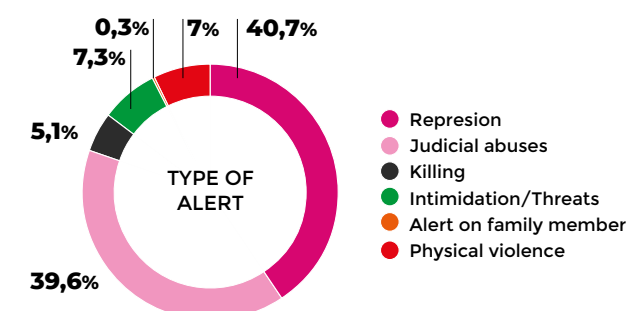
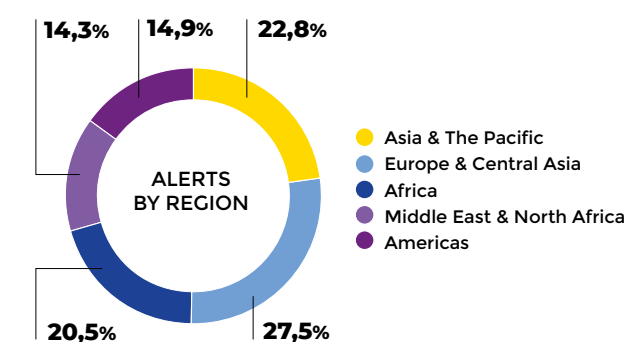
FIDH has collaborated with several organisations to advocate for the release of Egyptian HRDs, including OMCT in the framework of the **Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders** ; FIDH member organisations in Egypt: the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) and the Human Rights Association for the Assistance of Prisoners (HRAAP); and other international organisations, such as the MENA Rights Group, EuroMed Rights, ISHR, CIVICUS, or PEN International, in the framework of ad hoc campaigns and publications. FIDH, in the framework of the Observatory, and in coordination with other international and Egyptian human rights organisations **will continue to advocate for the release of all the HRDs still behind bars** in Egypt.

Global Efforts to Raise Awareness for At-Risk Human Rights Defenders

Index of Attacks

The ProtectDefenders.eu Index of Attacks and threats against HRDs features on ProtectDefenders.eu's website the compilation of the public alerts on the situation of HRDs, issued by Front Line Defenders, RSF, and the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (FIDH-OMCT partnership). The Index of alerts had reinforced awareness and visibility on the individual situation of defenders facing attacks and threats. Our Index of Alerts **reports more than one attack a day against HRDs and has documented more than 4,500 attacks against HRDs**. However, real figures are higher, as many alerts still go unreported.

Reported Alerts in 2022



“Visa for Defenders”

In September 2022, ProtectDefenders.eu and more than 50 international civil society organisations issued a joint statement **urging the European Union and its Member States to prioritize access to EU visas for human rights defenders.**

The joint statement proposed the creation of a special **visa process that ensures consistency, protection, and predictability for those most at risk.** The proposed visa should be user-friendly, financially accessible, and available in local languages, with provisions for urgent procedures. The embassies would be responsible for receiving and processing visa applications, and gender-sensitive, and confidential human rights defender visa contacts would be created to ensure the process runs smoothly. In addition, the signatories called on EU stakeholders to create an **EU Directive to protect human rights defenders**, outlining ways to support and protect them in accessing and staying in the EU, and to amend legal instruments on visas, such as the Visa Code.



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WEBPAGE



THE PROMOTION OF **AN ENABLING VISA FRAMEWORK FOR HRDS IN THE EU MUST BE ADDRESSED IN A COMPREHENSIVE AND UNIFORM MANNER**, ONE THAT IS CONSISTENT AND SENSITIVE TO THE SITUATION AND NEEDS OF AT-RISK DEFENDERS.

FOR THIS, **PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU RECOMMENDS THE CREATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A SPECIAL ACCELERATED VISA PROCESS FOR HRDS.**



The ProtectDefenders.eu Bulletin

ProtectDefenders.eu publishes a monthly bulletin that offers extensive **coverage of countries of concern and successful instances** of positive impact. The bulletin also includes updates from supported human rights defenders (HRDs) and consolidated alerts found in the ProtectDefenders.eu Index, as well as monthly highlights and notable developments from partners’ activities. This bulletin has **highlighted over 700 cases of positive impact on defenders and organisations**, featuring profiles of HRDs who are at the greatest risk or most vulnerable, and updates from over 90 countries with significant concerns. The monthly bulletin is **targeted towards public authorities and significant stakeholders**, such as the EU Delegations, and serves as a valuable tool for increasing awareness, advocating for HRD protection, and promoting best practices in defending human rights. By

disseminating these updates and alerts, ProtectDefenders.eu contributes to increasing the visibility and protection of HRDs worldwide, while also fostering cooperation with vital stakeholders like EU Delegations and other partners.



To receive these updates,
subscribe to the bulletin here:



PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU

ProtectDefenders.eu Annual Meetings

The organisation of an **annual beneficiaries meeting** continued to be a crucial aspect of the coordinated work of the Consortium. The beneficiaries' meetings play an important role in strengthening the relationship between ProtectDefenders.eu and the human rights defenders supported by the EU HRD mechanism, fostering a sense of community, and ensuring that the programmes and activities remain responsive to the needs and realities of the defenders on the ground. These meetings facilitate **dialogue, networking, and mutual learning among the defenders, and also offer an opportunity for the Consortium to gather valuable input and feedback** on the effectiveness of its support. The inclusion of an online modality for one of the beneficiaries' meetings during the reporting period highlights the adaptability and flexibility of ProtectDefenders.eu in response to the limitations posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

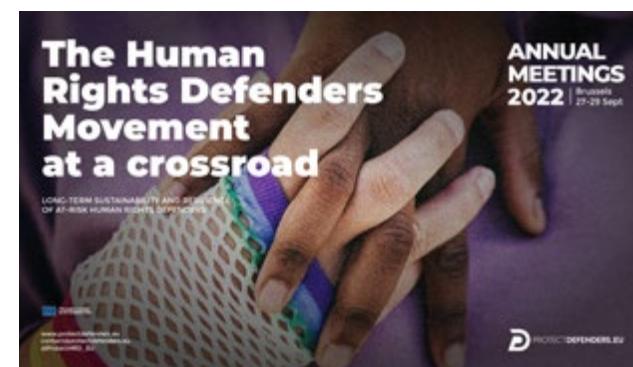
In response to the limitations posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the **Annual Meeting in 2021** was held online, offering a platform for HRDs to discuss how to advocate for human rights and gain support from stakeholders. The meeting included a public roundtable with the UN Special Rapporteur and the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, focusing on three key challenges facing HRDs during the pandemic: digital risks, increased violence against women HRDs, and shrinking spaces for advocacy and mobilization. Strategies were discussed to mitigate these risks, combat violence against women HRDs, and uphold the rights of HRDs to advocate and mobilize in spite of restrictions imposed by the pandemic.

In 2022, ProtectDefenders.eu organized an **in-person Annual Meeting in Brussels** with over 30 human rights defenders from diverse backgrounds and regions. The meeting focused on the challenges and opportunities facing HRDs, and facilitated dynamic discussions, workshops, and plenary sessions. The event also provided **opportunities for HRDs to network and establish new partnerships**, and to engage with relevant EU actors. The meeting culminated

in a public **closing conference, featuring the voices of grassroots activists from different regions who shared their stories, challenges, and strategies for promoting and protecting human rights**. Overall, the meeting served as a vital forum for HRDs to engage in direct dialogue with relevant EU actors, exchange ideas, and strengthen solidarity among themselves. The event underscored the significance of human rights defense and raised awareness of the challenges faced by HRDs, contributing to the visibility and legitimacy of their work.

Relive the conference "The Human Rights Defenders Movement at a Crossroad"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hpf1UAR73M>



ProtectDefenders.eu Annual Conference, Brussels 2022

The Inter-mechanisms meeting

The tenth **inter-mechanisms meeting** on the protection of human rights defenders was held in 2022 in the margins of ProtectDefenders Annual Meetings. The focus was specifically on the situation of **migrants and refugees' rights defenders worldwide**, which is also the focus of the upcoming report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders to the General Assembly. The meeting was attended by various participants, including the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, the Rapporteur of the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (IACHR) on the Rights of Human Rights Defenders and Justice Operators, the Deputy Head of the Human Rights Department of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), as well as representatives from the Council of Europe Office

of the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS). Migrants' rights defenders and representatives of some international NGOs involved in defenders' protection were also invited to contribute to the discussion.

Reports and publications

The reports published by ProtectDefenders.eu's partners through their activities within the EU HRD mechanism have provided **essential information about the human rights situation in crisis contexts**, highlighting the risks and challenges faced by human rights defenders. These reports are the result of **extensive research, reliable data,**

and comprehensive analysis and have been shared with relevant stakeholders and audiences. As a result, they have contributed to raising awareness and generating informed discussions about human rights issues, and have **helped inform policies and actions** aimed at promoting and protecting human rights.

DATE	PARTNER	TITLE	LINK
07/2020	OMCT-FIDH	DOWN, BUT NOT OUT - Repression of human rights defenders in Cambodia	https://www.omct.org/files/2020/07/25954/cambodia_hrd_report_2020.pdf
01/2021	OMCT/FIDH	Guatemala - Una deuda sin saldar	https://www.omct.org/site-resources/files/Guatemala_UnaDeudaSinSaldar.pdf
01/2021	FIDH/OMCT	Thailand: Women human rights defenders at the forefront of pro-democracy protests	https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/rapport-tailhande2021_1_-3.pdf
01/2021	FIDH/OMCT	Brazil: Covid-19 kills human rights defenders due to dismantling of social policies and government neglect	https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/rapport-bresil2021ang.pdf
02/2021	OMCT/FIDH	Undermining Rights- The Defence of Human Rights hampered by economic interests in Peru	https://www.omct.org/site-resources/legacy/OBS-Peru-UnderminingRights-EN-250221-FV.pdf
03/2021	ProtectDefenders.eu	2020 ProtectDefenders.eu Annual Report Building the resilience of human rights defenders at risk worldwide	https://protectdefenders.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2020-ProtectDefenders.eu-Annual-Report.pdf
04/2021	Protection International	Understanding Death Threats Against Human Rights Defenders	https://protectioninternational.org/en/publications/reflection-paper-understanding-death-threats-against-human-rights-defenders
04/2021	FIDH/OMCT	Target Locked: The Unrelenting Israeli Smear Campaigns to Discredit Human Rights Groups in Israel, Palestine and the Syrian Golan	https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/obs_palestine2021ang.pdf
06/2021	Protection International	Redefining the risk approach: designing and implementing a human rights defender-centric approach to protection	https://www.protectioninternational.org/sites/default/files/final_riskapproachrecommendations_eng.pdf
06/2021	Forum-Asia	Psychosocial Well- being for Human Rights Defenders in the Philippines (Tagalog and Cebuano version)	Tagalog: https://www.forum-asia.org/uploads/wp/2020/06/Tagalog-Translation_Psychosocial-Well-being-Handbook.pdf Cebuano: https://www.forum-asia.org/uploads/wp/2020/06/Cebuano-Translation_Psychosocial-Well-Being-Handbook.pdf

DATE	PARTNER	TITLE	LINK
11/2021	OMCT-FIDH	Nicaragua: Las nuevas leyes de la represión	https://www.omct.org/site-resources/legacy/OBS-Nicaragua_informe.pdf
11/2021	FIDH-OMCT	Europe: Open Season on Solidarity	https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/obs-rapport_ang-151121-web-2.pdf
02/2022	OMCT/FIDH	Undermining Rights- The Defence of Human Rights hampered by economic interests in Peru	https://www.omct.org/site-resources/legacy/OBS-Peru-UnderminingRights-EN-250221-FV.pdf
02/2022	ProtectDefenders.eu	THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT AT A CROSSROAD	https://protectdefenders.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DEF_maqueta_Final_V2.pdf
03/2022	FIDH	Brazil / Threats to Environmental and Human Rights Defenders in Brazil. Legal and policy gaps.	https://www.oecdwatch.org/extended-research-on-environmental-and-human-rights-governance-gaps-in-brazil/
06/2022	OMCT	Guatemala - Una Deuda sin Saldar: Ciudadanía en Resistencia	https://www.omct.org/site-resources/files/Guatemala_UnaDeudaSinSaldar_actualizacion%CC%81n.pdf
06/2022	FIDH-OMCT	Turkey / Drowned in Procedure, Sentenced to Fail: Administrative Harassment Against Civil Society in Turkey	https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/obs_turkey_report_administrative_harassment_june_2022.pdf
09/2022	ESCR-Net	Women Standing Together	https://www.escr-net.org/news/2022/whrd-report-women-standing-together
09/2022	OMCT-FIDH	Human rights defenders and Covid-19: the impact of the pandemic on human rights defenders and their work	https://www.omct.org/site-resources/files/Covid-19-HRDs-Report_EN.pdf
09/2022	ProtectDefenders.eu	Visa for Defenders: International civil society organisations call for an effective and enabling EU Visa Framework for at-risk Human Rights Defenders	https://protectdefenders.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Visa4HRD-ProtectDefenders.eu-Joint-Statement-October-2022.pdf.pdf
09/2022	Protection International	The Psychosocial Approach Applied to the Protection of Human Rights Defenders	Launching: https://www.protectioninternational.org/en/defender-tools/psychosocial-approach-applied-protection-human-rights-defenders PDF: https://www.protectioninternational.org/sites/default/files/en_psychosocial_approach_final.pdf



Learn more about the advocacy projects funded by ProtectDefenders.eu



Human Rights Defenders Poetry Challenge

A Poetry Challenge was organised to honour those artists and activists who, despite the global pandemic, continued to defend human rights towards a greater peace, equality and justice.

In a context of global pandemic, restrictions have strongly affected the work of Human Rights Defenders at all levels, from **working in isolation to a decreased access to resources**. For that reason, Protection International believed in the importance and the added value that creativity can bring during times of crisis. Thus, Protection International envisioned the Poetry Challenge as a way to discuss the Right to Defend Human Rights in a new and approachable manner. As part of the **#StayWithDefenders campaign**, it represented an act of solidarity with all those Human Rights Defenders who by no means abandoned their honourable task. All in all, the initiative aimed at using the beauty of poetry as an instrument of inspiration and as a source of power, nevertheless rooted in the day to day realities of defenders.

After receiving 438 poems from over 58 countries, Protection International, ProtectDefenders.eu Secretariat and the Centre for Applied Human Rights of the University of York collaborated to read and select the 30 finalists. Protection International published the stories of 32 artists from 20 different countries in 6 languages: English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Thai and Swahili. The final outcome, in the form of a **poetry book, showcased the power of emotions and its relation to protection**. Poetry was a uniting force for all the participants. It constituted a space of exchange for HRDs to express themselves and communicate to the international community in their own language.

“Stay with the defenders who in heart and in deed speak truth to power brave hearts defying powers, pandemic and pestilence to be a bastion of defense for those whom powers seek to devour great unsung heroes standing up for victims of circumstance”

Yewande Akinse,
Nigerian author of the poem Awake



In June 2022, Protection International organised an online session devoted to the reading of the finalists' poems and to the launching of the book. This event brought together artists and activists, opening up a space for new connections. A space for discussions was created to further delve into the importance of protecting HRDs, keeping critical conversations alive, and social movements moving.

The **poetry challenge** has provided Protection International with a deeper and more diversified vision on the struggles that HRDs face in their daily lives through the tangible examples described in the poems, exacerbated by the pandemic. It has constituted an active learning experience that we are already incorporating into the development and design of projects, to increase their inclusivity and efficiency.



05.

Coordination

PROTECT **DEFENDERS.EU**



ProtectDefenders.eu’s Coordinated Efforts Strengthen the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

The coordination of ProtectDefenders.eu as a consortium is a crucial and complex element that affects the effectiveness and impact of the mechanism. Through coordination, the mechanism has been able to **respond holistically to cases and put emerging issues on the agenda** in an aligned way. The strengthened coordination among consortium partners and programs results in consistent support for human rights defenders and organizations at risk. The collaborative and cooperative environment fostered through coordination has facilitated **continuous improvements and innovation**, contributing to the overall success of the Mechanism’s interventions in promoting and protecting the rights of HRDs globally.

The demand for resources by HRDs and organizations under threat has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and country crises, creating a challenging situation. However, it has also accelerated deepened and coordinated work among Consortium partners. This high level of coordination has enabled reliable and consistent support for HRDs, accommodating **new types of requests and emerging challenges**. The coordinated work has facilitated a cohesive and integrated approach in addressing the needs of HRDs and organizations at risk, responding effectively and efficiently to evolving threats and challenges, and maximizing the impact of the Mechanism’s interventions.

The Consortium’s structure and **complementarity among its partners have allowed for a holistic response** to the challenges



faced by human rights defenders. The effective coordination of responses to the civil society crisis in Afghanistan has been a notable achievement of ProtectDefenders.eu. Despite the chaotic institutional and financial response of public actors, the Consortium mobilized its own resources and successfully secured funding for **emergency aid to at-risk human rights defenders in Afghanistan** and support for local civil society. This initiative demonstrated ProtectDefenders.eu’s proactive response to emerging crises and its ability to adapt and effectively address urgent needs in challenging circumstances.

In terms of external coordination, ProtectDefenders.eu has actively pursued collaboration with entities, actors, and organizations outside of the consortium to achieve the greatest impact and efficiency. This collaborative approach has resulted in numerous successful joint efforts and outcomes. The examples of coordination are extensive and varied, including **joint training programs** organized with external organizations, co-signing and publishing **urgent alerts** with other actors, enhanced coordination in **mobilizing practical assistance**, and organizing **joint activities**, conferences, and events with Consortium partners, external NGOs, and other actors.

Another notable advancement has been the establishment of regular and frequent **communication channels with the European External Action Service (EEAS)** headquarters, the **European Commission** focal points, and supportive actors in the **European Parliament** for human rights defenders. During this reporting period, ProtectDefenders.eu has forged a special partnership with a Friendship Group of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to coordinate activities and provide practical support to

HRDs facing risks. Additionally, ProtectDefenders.eu consistently contributes to policy briefings of the EEAS and the European Union, including public speeches by EU representatives and reports on human rights defenders and at-risk civil society. As a result, **ProtectDefenders.eu has been regularly referenced and featured in public speeches, reports, and other policy documents**, showcasing its prominent role in shaping EU narratives and actions in support of HRDs.

One of the most impactful demonstrations of added value and distinct coordination role at the external level has been the establishment and implementation of a dedicated **refugee and resettlement stream in Canada for human rights defenders** facing risks. This particular case serves as a prime example of **ProtectDefenders.eu’s ability to forge unique collaborations and achieve concrete outcomes in support of HRDs**, further underscoring its effectiveness and influence in the field.

The strengthened coordination and collaboration have fostered a **more robust and united approach to protecting HRDs and addressing challenges they face**, ultimately enhancing the impact and effectiveness of ProtectDefenders.eu’s work. By working together, ProtectDefenders.eu ensures a more comprehensive and effective protection mechanism for HRDs facing the greatest risks, optimizing the utilization of limited available resources. Furthermore, ProtectDefenders.eu enables enhanced coordination of strategies and planning, broader networks of influence, and minimizes missed opportunities, resulting in stronger impact of messages and increased access to key stakeholders. Through its holistic approach and pooling of expertise, **ProtectDefenders.eu has elevated HRD protection to a new level.**



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CANADA RESETTLEMENT STREAM FOR HRDS





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Contact us

contact@protectdefenders.eu



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