

2020

Annual Report

**BUILDING
THE RESILIENCE
OF HUMAN
RIGHTS DEFENDERS
AT RISK
WORLDWIDE**



Index

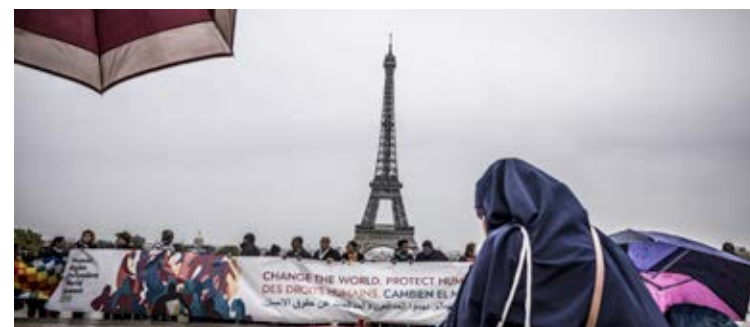
PROTECT **DEFENDERS.EU**

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Forewords



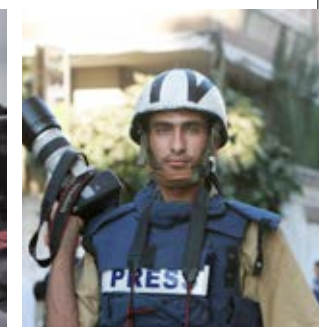
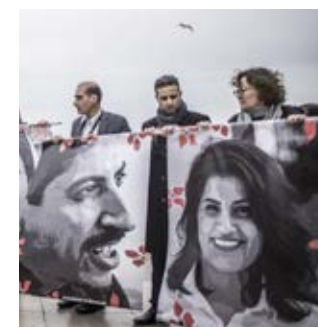
01. Summary



02. Our programmes in action



03. Coordination



A woman with short grey hair and glasses is smiling and shouting into a red megaphone. She is wearing a dark t-shirt with a red patch that says "If women stop, the world stops." and a black strap across her chest. In the background, other people are visible, some holding signs, including one that says "STOP".

FOR

Forewords

PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU

EW

ARDS



Mary Lawlor

UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

This year and around the world, **human rights defenders have continued to confront a range of assaults** from State and non-State actors, including stigmatization, criminalization, physical attacks, arrest and torture. Attacks, including killings of human rights defenders, have often happened in a context of structural violence and inequality, including in societies in conflict, and as the product of patriarchal, heteronormative systems. Human rights defenders working on some issues continued to be particularly vulnerable to attacks, such as environmental human rights defenders, those protesting land grabs, or those defending the rights of people, including indigenous peoples. This year, the risky situation facing the HRD community has worsened due to the impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic around the world.

Since I took office in May 2020, I have continuously received information from civil society about human rights violations against HRDs. It is my mission to use this information to raise my concerns with Governments via formal letters, called **communications** - which become public 60 days after being sent. Also, alarmed by the number of killings of HRDs, my first **thematic report** presented at the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly will address the pattern of murders against defenders, as one of the priorities of my mandate. I continue **engaging with States**, formally and informally, about the situation of human rights defenders in their countries through meetings, webinars, and other events. In normal times, I would make two official visits to States annually to assess the situation of HRDs and produce a report afterward, including recommendations to the

government on how to better support and protect them. However, due to the movement restrictions imposed by the pandemic, I have not been able to travel yet.

Throughout my previous experience in the field of the protection of defenders and in developing my mandate, I continue to assess that **many Governments are failing in their obligations to protect human rights defenders** from threats. Even if some States have established dedicated protection mechanisms to prevent and respond to risks and attacks against human rights defenders, human rights defenders often complain that these mechanisms are underresourced, or that States lack the necessary political will to properly protect defenders.

That is why I warmly **celebrate the remarkable impacts of the EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism, ProtectDefenders.eu**. In a year of extraordinary challenges, the consortium of international civil society organizations implementing ProtectDefenders.eu has continued to provide **indispensable and often crucial support** to ensure the safety, protection, accompaniment, and training of people who defend rights in the most vulnerable contexts and situations, as well as their families. While I advocate for the enhancement and **reinforcement of this strategic alliance** of international civil society with the European institutions in order to ensure access to fast and flexible support for defenders in distress, I also encourage the EU Delegations and the EU Member states' missions to contribute to these efforts and **fully implement the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders** in a systematic and conscientious manner.

Finally, I reiterate my call to States to comply with their international commitments and take special measures to protect human rights defenders wherever they are at risk. Furthermore, in order ensure effective protection, it is time to **start changing how political leaders and the public perceive and speak about the value of the work of human rights defenders** and communities defending rights, emphasizing their **essential and positive contributions** to society.

“Human rights defenders have continued to confront a range of assaults from State and non-State actors”



Eamon Gilmore

EU Special Representative for Human Rights

2020 was **a year like no other in our lifetime**. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only been a global health crisis, but it has also shown us very clearly how the enjoyment of one right is linked to the fulfilment of many others. It has starkly illustrated the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights. However, the pandemic has also aggravated a prior gradual but persistent backsliding in democracy and human rights. Women's rights are being questioned and undermined and many governments are choosing to censor journalists, manipulate information, close civil society space and attack human rights defenders.

In any crisis, the need for independent monitoring and reporting on the impact of that crisis on human rights and democracy is essential. This makes the role of **human rights defenders, as gatekeepers of the protection of human rights in this difficult period**, even more important.

Every day we see the extraordinary courage of human rights defenders in action to defend and safeguard human rights and democracy. We have seen some particular risks increasing due to the pandemic, such as prolongation of incommunicado detentions, a slow-down in judicial processes, a downscaling of state protection measures or a higher degree of digital surveillance, cyber harassment or reprisals. Many defenders who were already at risk have seen their situation worsen. Defenders who need to relocate abroad to escape danger in their country are not able to do so, due to restrictions on freedom of movement and travel.

Imprisoned human rights defenders affected by serious health issues, are at high risk. They are often unable to see their families, lawyers and doctors. One of my main activities

during the pandemic has been to advocate for the humanitarian release of human rights defenders or political prisoners with Governments around the world.

Despite a year of unprecedented challenges, the EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism, ProtectDefenders.eu, has continued to provide critical support to ensure the protection, security and training of human rights defenders, even in the most difficult environments, as well as their families.

The European Union is proud to support ProtectDefenders.eu and I commend the implementing civil society organisations for their invaluable work.

The **protection of human rights defenders and support for their work will continue to be a central part of EU action**. Wherever crackdowns on human rights defenders happen the world, the EU is committed to act. The need for strong, coherent and effective, collective action on human rights and democracy is more vital than ever. That is why we have a new EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, agreed by all EU 27 Member States, and I will play central role in guiding implementation of the Plan.

Strengthening the protection of human rights defenders is mainstreamed throughout Plan and of course, human rights defenders are crucial partners in its implementation. This is not just through promoting and supporting the Plan, but also contributing directly to its implementation through your work and advocacy.

This comes at a critical moment, a moment of many challenges, but also of huge potential. I look forward to **working with you all in this endeavour and to ensuring human rights defenders are better protected**, supported and respected everywhere.

“Despite a year of unprecedented challenges, the EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism, ProtectDefenders.eu, has continued to provide critical support”



Aura Lolita Chávez Ixcaquic

Woman land and environmental rights defenders, Guatemala

We are connected in a network and in all possible worlds! We are life, energy, water, air, fire, we are earth. I write from these mountains that embrace us every day, recognizing that writing does good for women defenders, deeply linked to the commitment to continue weaving **strength, dignity, justice, freedom and peace in the worlds**. It is important to reinvent ourselves in our surroundings because that is what we are called upon by biodiversity, by the land and by the cosmos. Because WE ARE! Respecting and honoring the ancestral expressions of the communities woven in the territories for millennia. What is our call, then? We call to protect ourselves, take care of ourselves, love ourselves to heal with the true medicine that is in our territory, in our body... to heal from our very essence, from our cosmic consciousness.

In embracing the work and mission of ProtectDefenders.eu, it is important to recognize that this 2020 report gives an overview of where women human rights defenders find ourselves and how difficult this path is for us. The pandemic situation shows more clearly what we have been shouting from the territories we defend: We are in a civilizational crisis! The **repressive states confined us by force of arms**, they silenced us by force of control, but the extractive companies were not confined and the multinationals came out with juicy profits. It has been shown that, for oppressive systems, there are lives that matter and lives that do not matter, and there are **lives that make the powers uncomfortable!** Those lives are ours, those of human rights defenders.

For us, the **confinement meant a regression in the exercise of our rights** as women and as defenders, mainly in territories in dispute by extractive companies. In the name of safety

and health, many abuses were committed: violence against women in different spheres, murders, torture, rapes, forced pregnancies increased in Abya Yala (America) and throughout the world, and it has increased the burden of work on women, sustaining aspects of economic submission.

We defenders, we who walk in the mountains, **we healers, weavers, guardians, we have very clear challenges**. Isolating ourselves and individualizing ourselves is not the way. It is necessary to recognize the failures of the systems, and improving the same systems is not the worthy answer. We need to transcend and we will do so with **new paradigms, with feminist emancipatory paths**, with liberation of originary peoples' territories, with the redistribution of collective assets, with **protection communities**, where LGTBIQ communities can exercise their free determinations and where humanity recognizes the great errors of systems that were imposed.

There remain great challenges for humanity: we must claim that we continue to exercise

the right to defend rights, that we have not renounced it despite having gone through genocide and femicides. **Zero tolerance policies for acts of violence, threats, intimidation, and murders against human rights defenders need to be expressed in practice, not on paper**. We urgently need international platforms to be activated so that we can continue to make our demands heard.

I celebrate **ProtectDefenders.eu, recognizing its work to give strength and immediate response to protection initiatives and networks led by women and communities** in hostile contexts of higher risk, and I advocate that it continue to update its protocols and procedures to **continue responding to the new pandemic contexts**, in those places with the greatest presence of military personnel with weapons of massive repression, and in territories where States are increasing budgets for actions against mobilizations of peoples.

For the opening of this report, I will leave sacred words from my Mayan ancestors: May the sun rise, may it brighten, may the dawn come, may we peoples have peace!

“We need to transcend with new paradigms, with feminist emancipatory paths, with liberation of originary peoples' territories, with the redistribution of collective assets, with protection communities”

A message from the Board of ProtectDefenders.eu



Throughout 2020, **ProtectDefenders.eu** has offered **life-saving support to hundreds of defenders and enabled thousands of them to continue their human rights work** with a higher level of security. ProtectDefenders.eu has provided timely emergency responses to human rights defenders (HRDs), their families, and their communities, often with a holistic or multi-pronged approach, and has shown great efficiency and flexibility in continuing to deliver results within the extraordinary context created by the COVID-19 pandemic and in responding to the aggravated risks defenders have faced.

Thanks to our collective work, ProtectDefenders.eu has reportedly improved the support landscape available to HRDs and organisations, increased the visibility of the work that HRDs do and has further expanded connections between grass-roots human rights defenders and solidarity mechanisms. The unique combination of different strategic interventions available within ProtectDefenders.eu, including immediate support, financial assistance, capacity building, strategic communications and advocacy, **together amplify one another and present a strong, comprehensive approach to supporting human rights defenders**, which again this year has proven to be successful.

The coordinated implementation and a holistic and complementary approach between partners, actions, strategies, and programs, have stepped up the practical support available to HRDs at risk and local human rights NGOs in a timely and comprehensive manner, in a context marked by evolving challenges. Although the extreme situation created by COVID-19 has pushed the mandate of the EU HRD mechanism and the human resources of implementing partners to the

limit, this report intends to demonstrate and make visible a highly satisfactory and impact-driven implementation, which has managed to maintain and still generate a consistently noticeable and **positive impact on the HRD community at high risk**.

It is precisely this ability to manage various programmes in an interconnected and exhaustive way that has been one of the key factors in achieving results and enhancing the impact of our collective action. To a large extent, this comprehensive strategy has been possible thanks to a structure of coordination that has become increasingly sophisticated and the synergies within the group of implementing organisations, which individually have a remarkable track record but, as a collective, have shown a complementarity that has generated constant added value. The results highlighted in this publication were made possible thanks to a **unified consortium of NGOs, each bringing their own specific expertise**; an efficient and well-structured secretariat ensuring coordination and coherence; and a constructive relationship with the European Union institutions.

The achievements and results reported as well as the synergies, spill-overs and coalition-building achieved so far, have built upon the EU HRD mechanism for it to remain a **global reference for the protection of human rights defenders**, and an instrument to generate added value throughout all its chain of actions. Most

importantly, ProtectDefenders.eu is credited by the community of human rights defenders at risk as a highly efficient mechanism in its procedures, reliable, timely, reactive and able to provide a tailored and relatively flexible response to those operating in the most difficult environments. This critical support has been shown in multiple positive outcomes and favourable impacts on specific situations.

Yet, in our collective work, **we continue to face major challenges**. While throughout this year we have ensured significant, improved financial and material assistance to at-risk HRD communities, the demand for this support continues to exceed the resources available to us. The increasing volume of requests emphasises the discrepancy between the reality of legitimate needs in the contexts where human rights defenders operate, and the financial capacity available at international level – a gap that is more and more disproportionate. In too many cases, **defenders continue to struggle to find sustainable solutions** due to the persistence of threats. Furthermore, the devastating impact of COVID-19 in vulnerable communities is bringing uncertain sustainability prospects for some human rights defenders, who are prevented from continuing their work and struggle to secure a stable source of income. This harsh reality attests to the crucial **need to consider making increased and long-term means of support available to human rights defenders, to their communities, and to their families**.

“ProtectDefenders.eu is credited by the community of human rights defenders at risk as a highly efficient mechanism, able to provide a tailored and relatively flexible response to those operating in the most difficult environments.”

SUMMARY

01. Summary

PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU



2020: Building resilience in the most difficult contexts

01.1



In 2020, ProtectDefenders.eu has delivered on the political commitments of the European Union in a critical way, providing practical and comprehensive assistance to **nearly 6,500 of the most at-risk human rights defenders worldwide**. Strategic and tailored support has strengthened the resilience and protection of human rights defenders globally, and specifically in the most difficult contexts, making a significant contribution to an enabling environment for human rights defenders around the world. ProtectDefenders.eu has ensured HRDs at risk are empowered, resilient and enabled to continue their work, notwithstanding numerous challenges, and more particularly the extraordinary and extremely adverse situation created by the **eruption of the coronavirus pandemic**. Due to its severe impact on people's health, its devastating socio-economic effects, and the unprecedented global political scenario of restrictions, limitations, and uncertainty that it has generated, the pandemic has

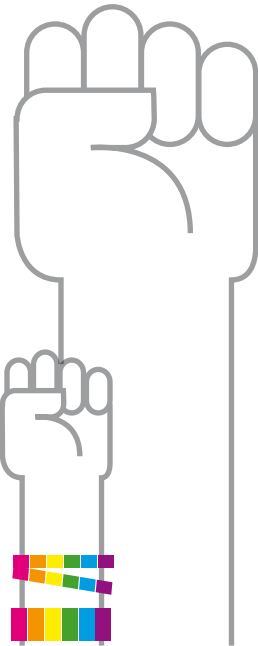
significantly impacted the collective work of ProtectDefenders.eu at all levels.

A very positive outcome has been reported on the situation of both human rights defenders and HRD organisations supported by ProtectDefenders.eu, and had it not been for the existence of this coordinated and global mechanism - mandated to respond to the emergencies of defenders and organisations, this unprecedented crisis situation would have had even more devastating consequences on grass-roots individuals and groups that defend rights in the most vulnerable places and contexts. At the most fundamental level, some human rights defenders report that their **lives were saved thanks to this mechanism**.

At-risk HRDs, human rights organisations and movements have had greater access to flexible, urgent material and financial support to respond to the security threats and protection needs they face and

6,494

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS RECEIVED DIRECT SUPPORT FROM PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU

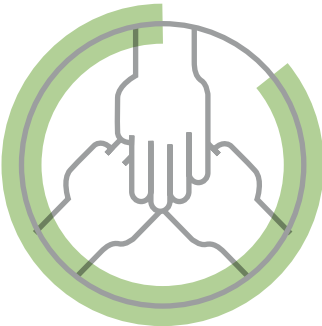


55%

WHRDS OR TRANS-MALE, TRANS-FEMALE, GENDER QUEER OR GENDER NON-CONFORMING

81%

OF THE HRDS BELONG TO THE MOST TARGETED GROUPS OF HRDS, INCLUDING LESS CONNECTED AND MOST MARGINALISED DEFENDERS



277

HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS RECEIVING DIRECT SUPPORT



122

COUNTRIES WORLDWIDE

99%

OF HRDS REPORTED A POSITIVE IMPACT/ENHANCED CAPACITIES/IMPROVED SECURITY FOLLOWING SUPPORT

INDIVIDUALS AT RISK RECEIVING
EMERGENCY SUPPORT

1,308

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS
RECEIVING CORE SUPPORT, SEED
FUNDING, OR LIFELINE SUPPORT

1,475

LOCAL HUMAN RIGHTS
ORGANISATIONS AND GROUPS
RECEIVING CORE SUPPORT, SEED
FUNDING, OR LIFELINE SUPPORT

68

build their resilience. **Requests for material support from defenders and communities have dramatically increased**, and the ProtectDefenders.eu grant-making programmes have responded by exponentially reinforcing their mobilisation of resources, demonstrating a remarkable **reactivity and flexibility** to deal with emergencies – including those derived from the risks and dangers related to the impact of COVID-19 on the work to defend human rights and protect the most vulnerable defenders. This urgent support has particularly benefited **communities** and groups working to defend rights and **families of defenders**.

Human rights defenders operating in the most difficult contexts and facing immediate risks, and their families when needed, have increasingly had access to comprehensive and enhanced **shelter and temporary relocation programmes**. Despite the fact that mobility restrictions have directly impacted the implementation of relocation programmes, a significant number of defenders have been supported by relocation initiatives, as well as their family members. In the same way, the foundations have been laid for the implementation of a strategic new programme to promote and create regional relocation shelters. Furthermore, the entities linked to relocation within the European Union Temporary Relocation Platform have benefited from an enhanced coordination and facilitation throughout this year.

Human rights defenders facing immediate risks, and their families when needed, have had access to comprehensive support

ProtectDefenders.eu has successfully contributed to **addressing the needs of HRDs and the pushback against shrinking space for local organisations** supported via the core-funding mechanism and other grant-making programmes, and to building an environment conducive to sustaining the work for improved human rights protection and democratic development at a time of unparalleled, global socioeconomic and political upheaval. The **Capacity building and resilience skills of HRDs working in the most difficult contexts have been reinforced** and sustained, and the situation of human rights defenders at risk has been more visible and has been reflected in international diplomacy actions. Finally, at-risk HRDs have been extensively supported through outreach and visibility actions, a 24/7 helpdesk, and reactive and proactive monitoring, advocacy and coordination work, despite limitations to the organisation of activities in the field.

In 2020, human rights defenders have been better equipped to navigate their work in the face of repression and threats and to pursue their activities for the respect and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms at a local level. Human rights defenders who have accessed grants, support and assistance have reported an **increased ability to manage their own security, positively impacting their ability to continue advocating for human rights**, mobilising for action and forming or joining social movements. Defenders benefiting from the EU HRD mechanism have overwhelmingly reported feeling supported and encouraged to continue their struggle.

DEFENDERS BETTER ABLE
TO MANAGE THEIR SECURITY
THROUGH TRAINING AND
CAPACITY-DEVELOPMENT

1,470

INDIVIDUALS RECEIVING
COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT
WITHIN TEMPORARY RELOCATION
PROGRAMMES

258

MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN
UNION TEMPORARY RELOCATION
PLATFORM

69

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS
ACCOMPANIED IN FIELD-WORK
ACTIVITIES

575

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS
ASSISTED WITH URGENT
ADVOCACY AND MOBILISATION ON
THEIR SITUATION

1,650+

INDIVIDUALS ASSISTED WITH
DIRECT GUIDANCE AND 24/7
SUPPORT

3,200+



Defending human rights amid an unprecedented global pandemic

01.2



In every region of the world, human rights work remains a high-risk activity, particularly in those national or local environments that lack democratic structures, good governance and a functioning and independent judiciary. HRDs continue to **pay a very high price for doing their legitimate and essential work**, with an increasing number of them being killed every year. In these circumstances, threats, violent **attacks, and killings have increased**, affecting in particular human rights defenders that are grass-roots leaders and members of social movements confronting business-related human rights abuses, as well as HRDs working to defend human rights related to **land and the environment**. HRDs have also faced increased intimidation, while civic space has continued to erode in many parts of the world. The **negative narrative against HRDs** portraying them as being anti-development, terrorists and pro-revolution has spread wild and unchecked, including via social networks.

At the global level, one of the main trends suffered by the human rights movement and

HRDs have faced increased intimidation and attacks, while civic space has continued to erode in many parts of the world

by HRDs remains **an increasingly shrinking space** that extends from authoritarian countries towards previously democratic ones, across not only the developing world but also the developed one. Administrative and legal **criminalisation processes** have been set up to slow, hamper, or prevent civil society

organisations activities in favour of human rights or democratic processes. States have continued adopting and developing **repressive laws** and subservient courts to criminalise, arrest and detain HRDs in all regions, in an attempt to silence them. Amid a context of a geopolitical crisis fuelled by dictatorial, authoritarian and populist governments, there is growing concern over the **backsliding of democracy and closure of civic space** in national, regional and international contexts including through the rise of populist leaders and the timidity of traditional champions of human rights, aggravated by the continuous trend of increasing corporate influence on democratic and judicial institutions, as well as **collusion between state and non-state actors** which aim to impose their vision of a world without pluralism.

Despite the global, aggravated backlash against human rights defenders, the COVID-19 crisis has also highlighted a number of **potential opportunities for human rights movements**, including incipient steps at local,

A politically unique opportunity to advance a more ambitious reform agenda

regional and global levels. And this year, HRDs are witnessing a politically unique opportunity to advance a more ambitious reform agenda, with broader public support for more radical reforms, in a number of countries throughout the world. The following are some human rights defenders victories this year:

- The continued failure of governments to provide protection for HRDs has led to the creation and **strengthening of HRDs' networks in East and Southern Africa**. The establishment of networks has quickly taken root, and coalitions exist in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Somalia and South Sudan. The Ethiopian coalition was launched in early December 2019. New coalitions are now present in Zambia and Malawi, and HRDs in Mozambique and Lesotho have begun to initiate their own networks as well. A critical support for HRDs has also been provided through the sub-regional networks. On a more continental level the Pan-African Human Rights Network has become a strong grouping, particularly with the strengthening of its Ubuntu Hub Cities programme for HRDs.
- In the Middle East and North Africa, the **second wave of sustained uprisings in the region has again broadened horizons** and confirmed that young women and men will continue to defy the persistence of authoritarianism, exclusion and poverty. They echo a **global outcry of a young generation that wants to reclaim its future** threatened by rampant inequality, rising repression, restrictions to individual freedoms and climate change. Despite police brutality, arbitrary arrests, intimidation, assassinations and smear campaigns, this process attests to a profound and constantly evolving political consciousness within the Arab region.

- While the health crisis has contributed to containing popular mobilisation in the streets, it has generated **new forms of activism and peaceful resistance** in the shape of solidarity initiatives to protect vulnerable populations, and awareness-raising campaigns to combat disinformation and fake news online. It also created openings for increased and awareness-raising and for defending change that would address the root causes of injustice and inequalities as the most effective way to prevent future systemic crises and increase protection for the most vulnerable.
- Many **LGBTI human rights groups have reportedly strengthened their articulation and networking** during the pandemic to make sure that they can continue their work. As such, several funds have been established to support grass-roots LGBTI human rights defenders during the crisis. Moreover, some advocacy platforms, including under the United Nations, continue to operate online which provided more opportunities to human rights defenders who had not been able to travel to Geneva or New York.



- In December 2019, FORUM-Asia in collaboration with FIDH and partner organisations including Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma, Community Resource Centre, People's Empowerment Foundation and Asian Network for Free Elections **launched the Temporary Relocation Mechanism Thailand**. Since then, this initiative has had several discussions with potential partners for relocation initiatives in Nepal which aims to host HRDs from South Asia mainly from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. Similarly, the consultation in Indonesia collected collected information regarding the existing support mechanisms in place for at-risk HRDs that are necessary for setting up a temporary relocation mechanism in the country.
- As reported by ProtectDefenders.eu partners' security experts during the crisis, groups of HRDs have had more time to assess their security and protection needs, and have undertaken steps to further **develop security plans, and implement changes to increase their protection**, as reported, for instance, in Central America.

- In the Democratic Republic of Congo, despite a slight fall in press freedom violations, the level of violence in the country continues to be worrying. However, the government's opening on the will to proceed with **institutional reforms involving the legal framework and the creation of a special mechanism to protect journalists** are encouraging. ProtectDefenders.eu partners are keeping their joint work with the local partner Journaliste en Danger (JED) to engage directly with the government to pursue this positive path.
- The international advocacy work and the **engagement with the UN Special Procedures Mandate Holders (SPMHs)**, including the United Nations Special Rapporteur (UNSR) on HRDs, has been sustained and enlarged. Cases of violations and abuses originating from tens of countries across all regions have been reported thanks to the support provided by ProtectDefenders.eu partners to HRDs. The nature of abuses and violations of submitted cases range from judicial harassment, criminalisation, arbitrary arrest and detention, intimidation and threats, and killings. As a result, SPMHs sent official communications, either jointly or individually, to concerned governments.



CHALLENGES AGGRAVATED BY THE OUTBREAK OF COVID-19

In 2020, risks have worsened for defenders as the COVID-19 pandemic broke into the daily lives of communities and determined the political and governance agenda of states and public actors at the national and international levels.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, **human rights defenders have been on the front lines of the pandemic**, despite the personal risks to them and their families, including contracting COVID-19 while doing their jobs, working long hours, enduring psychological distress and fatigue. While human rights defenders have continued to demonstrate extraordinary resilience in the face of such extraordinary circumstances, they have been facing a range of additional risks. This **unprecedented situation has aggravated and amplified existing challenges**, as well as created specific, new threats. In this context, ProtectDefenders.eu has flexibly adapted its programmes, especially by reinforcing the mobilisation of practical support and urgent protection. The coronavirus pandemic provided further proof of the relevance of ProtectDefenders.eu's work in fostering and enabling work to continue in defence of human rights, especially in the most difficult contexts and situations.

- With the rest of the world distracted by the pandemic and a public unable to gather in protest, many states, on all continents, have been using the COVID-19 crisis to arbitrarily increase their prerogatives, retain power, control their populations, and reduce fundamental rights and individual freedom.

Some **governments have used the opportunity to impose restrictions** on rights that are disproportionate and go far beyond what international law allows in times of crisis, and to further target civil society and human rights activism, imposing drastic restrictions of civic space, censorship, and expanding state surveillance – all at a time when civil society groups are less able to fight back. In the current sanitary context, a large number of State authorities have abused the prohibition of protests to specifically target and harm human rights defenders, or have implemented sweeping **restrictions on freedom of movement and freedom of assembly** to limit the work of HRDs.

In other countries, the pandemic has been used by the military regimes to further **suppress any dissent, arresting dozens**, denying HRDs basic assistance in places of detention and placing several on terrorist lists. More generally, various legal grounds have been used to **criminalise the freedom of speech of human rights defenders** and hinder them from continuing their legitimate work, such as “violation of lock-down rules”, “disobedience of police orders”, “dissemination of false information”, “participation in unauthorised assemblies”. The **judicial harassment** of defenders and rights groups often resulted in **arbitrary arrests and detention**, in breach of states' international obligations to respect freedom of expression, which also applies on the Internet.



“Fake news” accusations and defamation are being used as a means to criminalise any criticism about the authorities' management of the crisis. Allegedly to limit the spread of false information on the virus, some state authorities have arrested and judicially harassed independent journalists or online activists who criticised their respective governments' management of the crisis. In most serious cases, **media outlets have been shut down** completely. Not only does this practice constitute a lack of access to information for the population, it also contributes to the erosion of freedom of expression through the censorship of independent media.

- As the virus has spread, the risk to HRDs has escalated and ProtectDefenders.eu has documented a **rise in the number of threats and violations against them, including family members, communities and NGO**, with incidents related to COVID-19 accounting for a significant part of the cases.

Community-based HRDs such as land and environmental rights defenders, media workers, and pro-democracy defenders are among the most affected groups of defenders.

Judicial harassment and criminalisation have been the most common violations - oftentimes coupled with arrest, followed by **intimidation and physical attacks** as a result of defenders' exercise of their right to freedom of expression and assembly, and smear and defamation campaigns. Individuals and groups who denounce rights violations in the context of the crisis have been particularly targeted, as documented in several countries such as Colombia, Venezuela, Cambodia, Egypt, Honduras, the Philippines, or Guatemala.

As human rights defenders have increasingly had to work from home, they have become **easier targets for physical and digital attacks**. HRDs are being forced to work from insecure locations, and restrictions on movement leave them even more

vulnerable to surveillance and attacks. These growing **attacks continued to remain unpunished** in contexts of curfews and restrictions of movement: while attention is focused elsewhere, numbers of human rights defenders have been killed or attacked by armed groups. The situation is particularly worrying in Latin America, where the introduction of curfews and restrictions on movement have led to an increase in the risks faced by defenders in less populated and most remote areas.

- Within the current sanitary context, **imprisoned human rights defenders are disproportionately affected** by the crisis. While several countries have released prisoners as part of their response to the pandemic in an attempt to decongest prisons - often known as virus hotspots -, human rights defenders, peaceful protesters and prisoners of conscience are often not among those being released. Most governments have refused to release HRDs from prison, despite their increased risk of them being contaminated given the deplorable

conditions in which they are held. Worse yet, they have been **denied access to health care as a form of punishment**; and amnesties and early release schemes often denied release to HRDs on a discriminatory basis.

Governments' responses to the crisis demonstrate – if not exacerbate – failures to take adequate measures to protect the most vulnerable people, including scores of human rights defenders behind bars. The pandemic has also made the issue of **arbitrary and incommunicado detention** of HRDs even more salient. In some countries, defenders kept in arbitrary detention were eventually infected by the virus. Others already in critical health condition have been particularly at risk. Moreover, as a means to keep human rights defenders in detention for an indefinite period of time without trial, some states decided to report hearings sine die, while in other countries, some hearings were held

by videoconference, thus violating the right of publicity of debates.

- Defenders traditionally exposed to greater risk, including those working on the margins of society and without much access to resources or support are facing particular challenges and increased vulnerability.

Racial, ethnic, religious, and other minorities are disproportionately falling ill and dying due to structural inequalities. Indigenous, environmental, and land rights defenders are especially at risk, due to their unequal access to resources, to state and non-state actors using the crisis as an opportunity to dispossess and criminalise them and, in the case of **indigenous defenders**, due to their specific vulnerability to viruses brought into their communities by outsiders.

Women human rights defenders, traditionally confronting gender-based

targeting in all areas and contexts, have seen their situation particularly aggravated, as they have continued to be exposed to specific dangers and attacks – while sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) attacks in domestic contexts have considerably increased during confinement, as well as those vulnerabilities derived from their role as caretaker or source of family income, especially in socio-economically devastated communities.

LGBTI defenders experience increased violence resulting from states using the pandemic as an excuse to adopt militarised policing practices and transphobic laws. In some countries, they were blamed for the pandemic by public leaders. In many places, because of the closing of organisations' premises and the need to go back to hostile households, LGBTI human rights defenders found themselves in much more dangerous situations – in particular, in terms of access to safe



communications and safe places for gathering. The pandemic has also exacerbated already existing problems related to mental health and minority stress experienced by LGBTI defenders. Travel restrictions have made it much harder for LGBTI human rights defenders at risk to obtain visas or leave their countries. Some legislative and judicial processes, including those that are potentially beneficial for LGBTI human rights defenders – such as challenging criminalising laws in courts, have been postponed because of the authorities' limited capacities. In addition, many organisations had to focus primarily on ensuring community members' access to food, health care and housing, and limit other activities, including advocacy.

Disability rights defenders report structural barriers and discrimination, including when it comes to triage and other healthcare practices. Also, **sex workers and informal, domestic, and low-wage workers rights defenders** are experiencing threats

to their livelihoods. **Migrant, displaced, refugee, or stateless defenders** and those affected by conflict and occupation face severe safety and security threats, including those working in refugee camps without proper sanitation, water supplies or food. Their immigration status makes them even more vulnerable in this crisis, since they often lack access to social protections and can be trapped in unsafe situations due to closed borders and other travel restrictions – in particular those in detention centres and those living under occupation or blockade.

- There are severe concerns relating to the medium- to long term impacts of COVID-19 on grass-roots communities defending rights. Poor and **marginalised community-based organisations and social movements have been devastated as a result of the socio-economic impact** of the pandemic on their livelihoods, and their ability to continue engaging in human rights defence has been compromised.

The **COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated once again how crucial human rights work is**, and the essential role that HRDs play in this context. In addition to being an obligation for states, it is indeed in the interest of states and society at large to protect and enable HRDs to carry out their crucial work. Only then can we mitigate the worst effects of the crisis and ensure that those most at risk are not left behind in the process.

While the fight against the spread of COVID-19 must be a priority for every government, states must ensure that HRDs are protected and that they do not become increasingly targeted. Surfing on a wave of popular anxiety, governments of repressive states may use the COVID-19 crisis to engage in significant long-term human rights setbacks which could last well beyond the end of the pandemic. There is **a strong concern that once the COVID-19 crisis is over, the restrictions and increased risks currently faced by HRDs will remain.**



A protection mechanism that works for Women Human Rights Defenders

01.3

ProtectDefenders.eu has adopted and embraced a **gender strategy that permeates all programmes**, implementing partners, and actions, and de facto mainstreams gender in all aspects of the support provided. This strategy grants a greater consideration of the needs and contexts of women, trans and non-binary HRDs in the design, implementation and follow-up of activities across all ProtectDefenders.eu programmes, by ensuring that all direct work with defenders - such as grants, relocation, training, capacity-building, accompaniment and missions, is conducted in a gender sensitive manner. Furthermore, it applies a **gender-sensitive lens throughout all ProtectDefenders.eu's policies**, communication, and monitoring and evaluation programmes.

All ProtectDefenders.eu partners have recognised the importance of **protecting against sex or gender-based harassment and**

violence such as sexual, cyber and sexist harassment, reputational threats, threats against the family, children, etc. as part of their definition of a security incident. As such, any risk analysis takes into account the specific and intersectional needs of women, trans and non-binary HRDs, as well as the particular contexts and patterns of violations against them. Procedures for processing requests for support allow enough flexibility to **accommodate the specific circumstances of women HRDs**, also taking into account the cross-cutting issues WHRDs face, including but not limited to language skills, well-being and self-care measures. Moreover, ProtectDefenders.eu's grant-making for protection measures takes into account the **impact of attacks on the wider group of individuals that WHRDs may represent** or work with, so these measures also work to prevent violence against other WHRDs from the same group, community or those who



share similar causes. Moreover, our protection grants provide childcare, family, or community support in case of imprisonment. Our temporary and urgent relocation programmes systematically consider further assistance for WHRDs during relocation, where they may be subject to gendered violence, including from family members. During relocation, education and schooling for children is assessed and considered. Furthermore, during field work activities, ProtectDefenders.eu makes sure

to meet and involve directly women's / LGBTI + organisations including those that are particularly disconnected or isolated. In addition, ProtectDefenders.eu ensures there is a gender balance among the participants conducting the missions. When inviting HRDs to training sessions, missions, arranging travel, the provision of funding for childcare, travel of a guardian, visa application costs and related travel to the capital or neighbouring country is included when necessary.

1 SUCCESS STORIES

Grass-roots women's rights organisation enabled to confront an increase in requests for assistance during the COVID-19 crisis and to strengthen the movement against gender-based violence (GBV) in remote communities in Ramle, Lod and Jaffa (Israel)

“We have led the way on demonstrations to protest government policy or lack thereof. At the beginning of the first lock-down, we organised, together with several other women's and social justice groups, a virtual demonstration. It was the first such demonstration in the Arab community, and over 100,000 people joined in our call to stop the gender-based killing. A coalition of organisations against violence has grown out of this action. We also helped organise a mass physical demonstration, and I was the main speaker in this well-attended and important protest. This effort was a wonderful example of a community coming together to assist one another.”

Organisation representative

With COVID-19 imposed lock-downs in Israel, like in the rest of the world, violence against women significantly increased, and addressing increased needs for assistance of women victims of GBV proved challenging for local organisations. Thanks to Euro-Mediterranean Foundation Of Support To Human Rights Defenders (EMHRF) core-support funded by ProtectDefenders.eu, this organisation purchased new phones for volunteers to handle an increased number of calls for assistance and helped secure accommodation for 18 battered women in April and May alone, when they would usually help 10 in a whole year. It also **assisted 25 women, who were not eligible for welfare or governmental benefits, to avoid eviction** and provided more than 300 food packages to families headed by single mothers. Beyond this tangible assistance, the organisation seized the opportunity to ask the government to act quickly on reforms long called for by the movement, by organising online and street protest actions, addressing a policy paper on improving emergency welfare services to the Knesset, and advising the police on coordinating responses to domestic violence and handling victims.

The organisation is working closely with several other women's and social justice groups and EMHRF is assisting the organisation in exploring additional means of support to sustain its essential work at local level.

- Many local organisations recorded an increase of over 200% in victims of GBV since the first lockdown, compared to the same period last year. Nearly two dozen women were murdered in Israel this year, compared to 17 last year.

2 SUCCESS STORIES

Tahani Abbas, a Sudanese women's rights defender, was able to document sexual violations through her phone and to offer a safe respite to some SGBV victims thanks to ProtectDefenders.eu support



“ This grant was an act of solidarity that gave me strong confidence that as a WHRD, I am not alone and that the world see our struggle as Sudanese WHRDs and can take action to support or fight for justice and equality.”

- Ms Tahani Abbas

Tahani Abbas Ali Balelshib is a Sudanese women's rights defender with a special focus on women affected by SGBV. She tries to offer legal, psychosocial and medical support to survivors of SGBV, as well as shelter and care for women and girls at risk. She has received different kinds of threats for her work. She is the 2020 laureate of the Martine Anstett Human Rights Award. She has been monitoring, documenting and doing some advocacy around the cases of rape that occurred during the events of June 3rd 2019, also known as the “Khartoum massacre”. On this occasion, in the aftermath of the Sudanese Revolution, the Transitional Military Council, headed by the Rapid Support Forces – the successor of the Janjaweed militia - used gunfire and tear gas to disperse a sit-in by protestors in Khartoum, killing more than 100 people (the exact figure being difficult to estimate). Hundreds of unarmed civilians were injured and/or arrested and it is estimated that at least 70 women and men were raped by the security forces. The internet was totally shut down in Sudan during the days following the “massacre”, making it difficult to assess the number of victims. An investigation commission was created in October 2019 under the authority of the transition period Prime Minister, with no women members.

In January 2020, with the support of an emergency grant funded by FIDH within ProtectDefenders.eu, Tahani bought a high-quality smartphone with a large memory to **record videos and audio testimonies of sexual violence survivors during the crackdown in Khartoum**. The phone with all the testimonies and evidence collected was handed over to the investigation

- Tahani Abbas kept on working and defending women's rights. In October 2020, she was running training sessions about how to deal with COVID-19 in Khartoum women's prison.

committee in February 2020 as evidence of the crimes committed during the June 3rd, 2019, “massacre”. This led to significant progress since the testimonies in the phone are being used as part of the ongoing investigations. The second part of the grant was used for renting a house for one month to **host sexual violence victims who were afraid to return to their homes or suffering from trauma** and looking for psychological support. This home was a place for these women to meet or talk with peers and find solidarity. During one month of stay in the safe home, the survivors were able to partly recover from the trauma and find a support network and safety net to help them continue their life as normal as possible.

Tahani Abbas provided shelter and solidarity to women affected by SGBV



Reaching out to those who are most-at-risk

01.4

ProtectDefenders.eu aims to **reach out to the less connected defenders**, as well as to those who are particularly threatened or especially vulnerable. From our global strategies to our specific actions, ProtectDefenders.eu has integrated an outreach-sensitive approach as a cross-sectional value, and the number of most-at-risk HRDs accessing the mechanism has consistently increased. ProtectDefenders.eu have agreed on an annual list of countries of particular concern to better coordinate efforts and programmes, and agreed on the set of groups considered as most-at-risk globally, who **are 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 areas and who are less connected.**

Consortium partners with membership structures and field offices have continued to make use of their networks to give visibility to ProtectDefenders.eu and disseminate information among their members (covering more than 2,000 affiliated entities). These **vast networks have helped reach out** to defenders at risk, isolated and vulnerable groups who may lack access or networks to secure support on their own. Field teams and volunteers working in remote areas are briefed so that they are able to inform isolated and targeted defenders about the existence of ProtectDefenders.eu and the support it can provide. Many **HRDs in remote areas or otherwise isolated** still engage over social media via mobile devices and a robust push to disseminate information about ProtectDefenders.eu on Twitter and Facebook has also helped facilitate access, notably through the development of several targeted social media campaigns about the resources available, and the production and translation of products and materials into several languages.

In 2020, the EU HRD mechanism has been accessed by an **increasing number of defenders and groups previously not connected to any protection instrument**, as well as by an increased number of particularly targeted and isolated defenders, who have benefited from advocacy and monitoring actions, from the allocation of grants, and the provision of training. In-person outreach has been limited due to COVID-19 and related travel bans, however partners have developed some activities when it has been possible.

1 SUCCESS STORIES

Short-term outreach project to assist journalists and media workers who tested positive for Coronavirus in Pakistan



“The assistance helped (the journalist) bear all expenses he had made at the hospital while being treated for coronavirus”

Freedom Network, on Asham Bashir, working with Dunya News TV Channel

In Pakistan, as the first case of a journalist contracting COVID 19 was verified, the organisation Freedom Network (FNPk) immediately raised the issue of journalists who were as much frontliners as paramedics, doctors or security workers. FNPk highlighted that journalists stood a high chance of risking their lives while keeping the public informed about the virus in order to help them stay safe. However, **neither the government nor the media outlets took adequate measures to protect journalists** in the field against the virus. As of the end of May 2020, FNPk had identified 81 Pakistani journalists who had tested positive for the virus, and one who had died. Most of these journalists could not afford medical treatment. Within ProtectDefenders.eu, RSF (Reporters Without Borders) granted financial support to FNPk to cover the medical fees of the most vulnerable journalists.

In all, **30 journalists were assisted to help them recover from the virus**. Priority was given to women journalists and those from remote areas of the country, and most beneficiaries were located in Punjab province.. All journalists assisted through the RSF grant recovered from the virus and resumed their work. The project proved to have a very positive impact on journalists, as no other support mechanism was available. In fact, the grant was the single largest assistance given to journalists during the COVID crisis through a civil society platform in the country.

- Reaching out to the beneficiaries was a key challenge while implementing the grant, as requests for assistance were pouring in from all over the country. FNPk decided to engage a coordinator to support in reaching out to the journalists who were eligible for the financial support. This strategy proved to be successful and allowed to support and follow-up more cases than foreseen when financial support was granted.

2 SUCCESS STORIES



“ The grant definitely improved our security, since the relocation prevented the danger to which I was exposed, and also allowed us to strengthen a regional space, from Lambayeque, which continues to promote the advocacy and community mobilisation work that we carry out from the organization”

Miluska Luzquiños

Emergency assistance to a trans women organisation and its Director in Peru

Organización Feminista por los Derechos Humanos de las Personas Trans is a trans-feminist organisation that was formed as a result of repeated violent events against trans women HRDs in Peru, seeking to develop strategies to reduce the high rate of gender-based violence. Since the presentation of the Gender Identity Bill (Proyecto de Ley de Identidad de Género) in December 2016, **fundamentalist groups have systematically attacked the work of the organisation** and more directly the work of Miluska Luzquiños, including through the theft of sensitive documents, when her house was burgled on September 2019.

With the support of an emergency grant delivered by the OMCT (World Organisation Against Torture), the organisation's office was equipped with security cameras and the doors and windows were secured. Miluska Luzquiños was relocated to Lambayeque for three months, from where she was able to continue working without fearing for her safety. Miluska Luzquiños reported that this also allowed the trans women hosted by the organisation to feel safer, thus enabling the development of new initiatives to promote their rights.

• Ms. Luzquiños reported that while the situation of trans women in Peru is still critical in terms of the violence they are confronted with, the organisation has been able to continue its activities with greater confidence due to the improvement of its security and solidarity network.

After relocation, Miluska was able to continue working without fearing for her safety



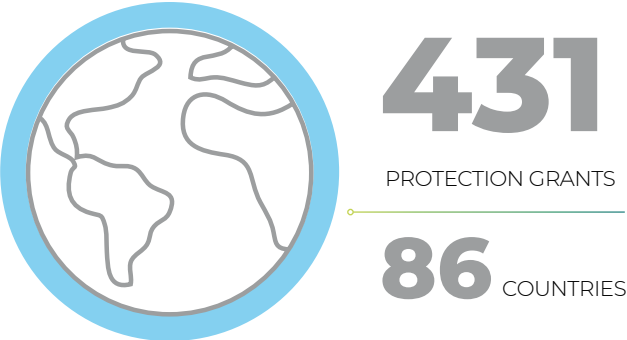
PRO GRAM MES

PROTECT **DEFENDERS.EU**

02.
**Our
programmes
in action**

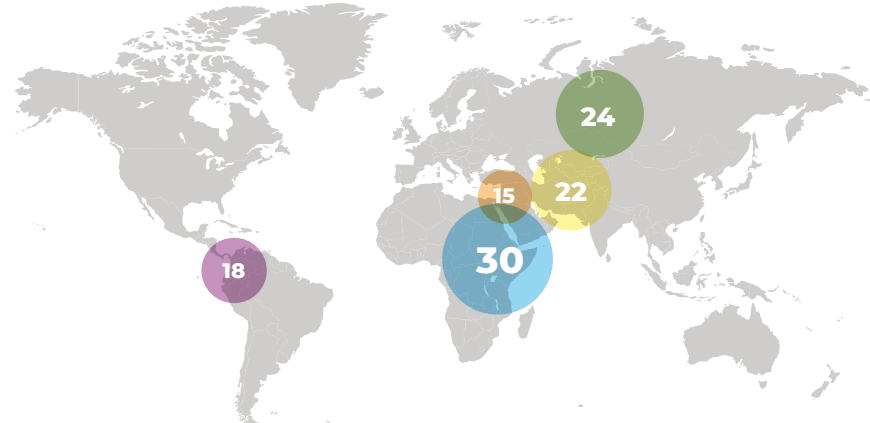
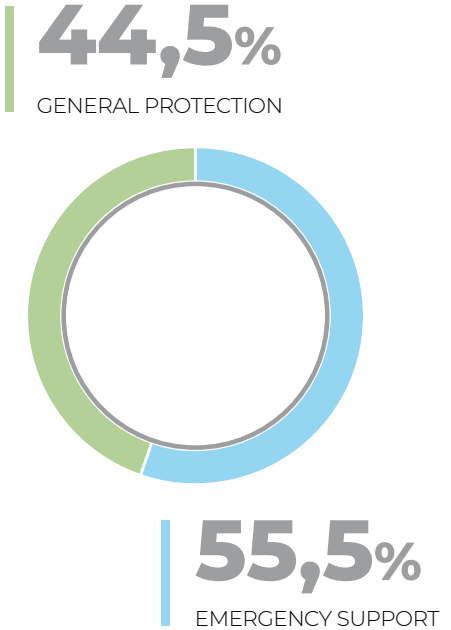
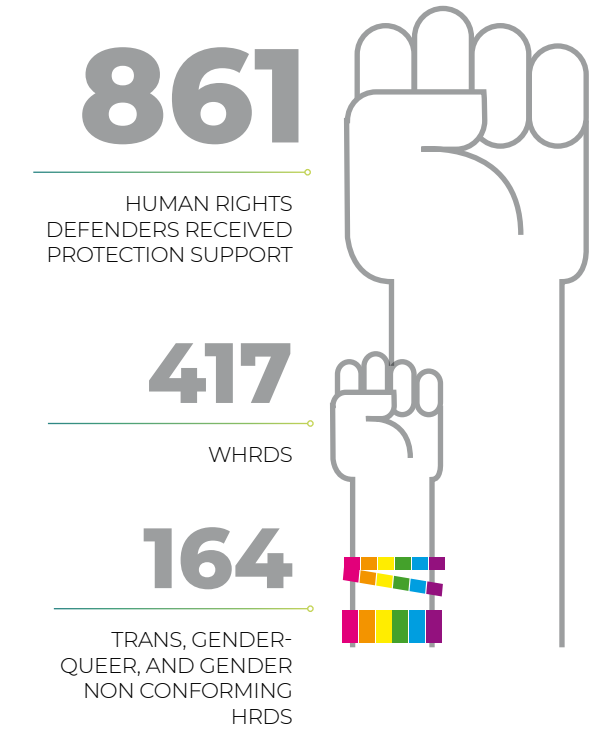
02.1 Protection grants

URGENT MATERIAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO RESPOND TO SECURITY THREATS

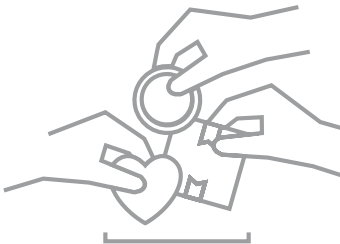


During 2020, ProtectDefenders.eu has mobilised more than 430 protection grants for human rights defenders and organisations facing urgent threats and risks. The grant-making under this programme has continued operating in a flexible and responsive way, and provided comprehensive support to the different needs of HRDs at risk. In the context of the spread of the pandemic, **ProtectDefenders.eu has doubled its emergency material support and protection for individuals, supporting more than 1,300 people in total**, including defenders and family members, in an unprecedented situation that has brought unprecedented risks and unprecedented responses. Emergency grants have been allocated in an unprecedented number of countries, across all regions. The supported defenders and groups developed their work in a wide array of fields related to the promotion and protection of human rights, however, the highest number of grants was mobilised to organisations working in defence of **freedom of expression, women's rights, and LGBTI rights**.

Protection grants have allowed the defenders to take **immediate action to increase their safety** on the ground, enabling them to continue their work while feeling safer and to put in place protection measures for physical and digital protection, medical support, psychosocial and well-being. support, legal support, support for families, basic subsistence and urgent relocation.

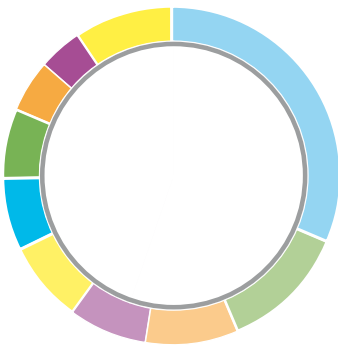


- UGANDA (AFRICA)
- RUSSIAN FEDERATION (EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA)
- AFGHANISTAN (ASIA)
- COLOMBIA (AMERICAS)
- SYRIA (MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA)



57

ORGANISATIONS RECEIVED FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL SUPPORT FOR PROTECTION



- 31% EMERGENCY RELOCATION
- 12% LEGAL SUPPORT
- 9% MEDICAL SUPPORT
- 7% ICT EQUIPMENT / DIGITAL SECURITY
- 8% INDIVIDUAL SECURITY
- 7% FAMILY SUPPORT
- 6% OFFICE SECURITY
- 5% LIVING COSTS
- 4% PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT
- 9% OTHER

1 SUCCESS STORIES

Comprehensive support to enhance the protection of a journalist at risk in Uganda



“ I am grateful for the support from DefendDefenders and ProtectDefenders.eu. I can now continue my work which is especially needed during the upcoming elections”

Aaron Mukama

Aaron Mukama is a Ugandan journalist who works for a television company in Uganda called NTV. He reached out to us reporting **various threats he was receiving regarding his work and his covering of the elections** in Uganda. Aaron came up in the headlines when he stopped coverage of a strike at Makerere University to save a student who had fainted because police tear gas was thrown to disperse striking students. The journalist's glasses were broken during the rescue operation, his equipment destroyed, and he was injured during the strike. While covering the opposition leader, he was hit by a canister and his teeth were broken. He was required to get an implant.

Within ProtectDefenders.eu, DefendDefenders was able to provide Aaron with a one-on-one engagement where his security and psychological worries were dealt with. He was given security and well-being tips after having suffered a traumatic experience. Aaron was also enabled to get the medical support that he required and received the implant that has helped him with his speech since he was struggling to speak effectively after the injuries he had sustained. Aaron's equipment was also replaced to enable him to continue with his work in journalism.

After the support, **Aaron is able to continue with his work in a safer manner** with the skills and knowledge in physical and digital security and his new equipment that was provided for him, and he continues financially providing for himself and his family.

- Preventive strategies such as capacity-building of HRDs are essential in mitigating some threats before they materialise. Reactive protection strategies should be a last resort. In Aaron's case, if he had had the necessary skills and knowledge in security, he might have been able to handle some of the threats against him.



2 SUCCESS STORIES

Legal Support grant for an emblematic case in Serbia

“ We have been inspired by the knowledge that we are not alone”

IMPULS Tutin

Within ProtectDefenders.eu, Front Line Defenders delivered an emergency grant for a gender rights organisation, IMPULS, located in Tutin, a very remote area of Serbia. IMPULS pushes for gender equality and fights against all forms of violence and discrimination, particularly against women and marginalised groups, such as LGBT, youth, Roma people, and migrants. They organise educational programmes, festivals, seminars, forums, campaigns to empower women and young people, to raise awareness among the general and professional public on domestic violence and social issues. **IMPULS**

- The head of the organisation reported that the grant had not only made her more secure, but also her colleagues and family. As a result of the grant, the WHRDs reported that their capacity as HRDs had improved.
- This grant proved to have both a preventative impact against attacks and threats and a long-term impact in terms of supporting the organisation and movement to continue and strengthen their resilience. Although it was a legal support grant, it had an overall impact on their security, well-being and the sustainability of their organisation.

has been the target of defamation, intimidation campaigns and received death threats on social media from very conservative people, including some politicians. The risks have increased since they hosted the Festival of Women's Friendship, an event they organise every year. Staff members were insulted, videos of them were posted on social media, and so forth.

They initiated court proceedings because of the discriminatory harassment they are subjected to and the threatening messages they have been receiving. They wanted to seek justice and prosecute the perpetrators and feel less at risk. In April 2020, they were supported with a grant that contributed to the legal fees of the case.

The organisation was able to resume work, although there were a few limitations, mainly due to the pandemic. However, they were able to organise the Festival of Women's Friendship in Tutin [2020]. The festival gathered around 30 women from Serbia and the neighbouring countries. The police monitored the participants' safety and security. This proves that they have regained the strength and assertiveness needed to carry out their humanitarian and human rights work.

The grantee felt that the legal support provided for this case was extremely important for setting a precedent and was emblematic. The HRD reported that they felt that without pursuing this case, they would not have been able to initiate legal proceedings, and thus, the violence would have been legitimised. They also felt that the women would have been further intimidated and would not have continued to get involved in activism. The HRD also reported that the grant had a very important solidarity impact. She stated that “The knowledge that there is someone out there supporting us, valuing our work and efforts to bring about changes in the society is truly empowering”.

24/7 ASSISTANCE TO HRDS AT HIGH RISK

ProtectDefenders.eu has continued providing **24/7 support to human rights** defenders facing immediate risk through, among other channels, an emergency helpline **(+353 (0) 1 21 00 489 and Skype)** run by Front Line Defenders. This hotline provides an emergency communication system through which requests for immediate assistance may be submitted and for mobilising rapid international support and action. Moreover, the functioning of this hotline is complemented and enriched by the operability and constant availability of Front Line Defenders protection coordinators, including those based in every region of the world. The Secretariat of ProtectDefenders.eu also plays a key role in ensuring a quick daily response, even on call, to the needs and requests of people who contact ProtectDefenders.eu through

any of its centralised methods. The Secretariat and Front Line Defenders have maintained this helpdesk, accessible in five languages, and have processed **more than 3,200 requests for information, advice, and support from human rights defenders at risk**. Numerous requests for emergency grants and urgent dispatches have been processed and facilitated through this structure.

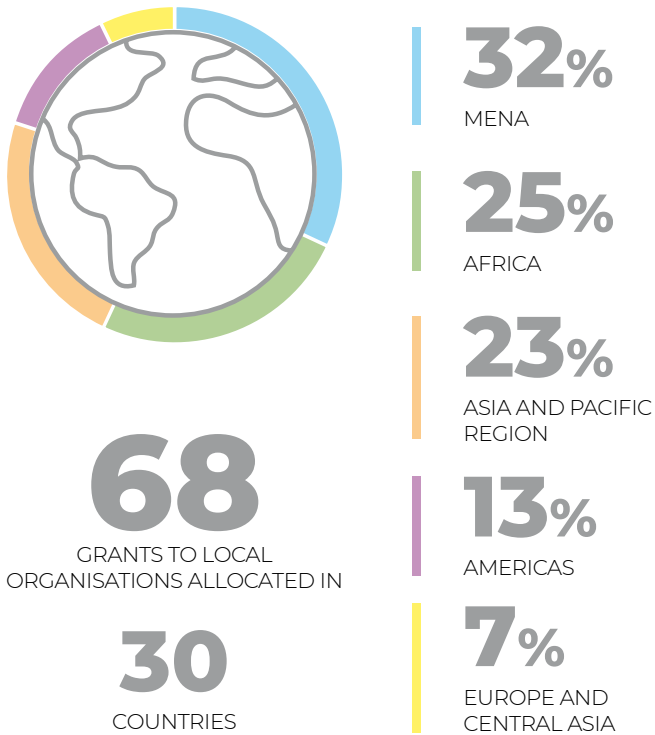
A significant number of urgent requests have been triggered by a risk derived from the pandemic or by restrictions linked to it – from the health situation of incarcerated defenders to crackdown on the rights of HRDs under the pretext of the restrictions, or common but aggravated risks due to the impact of COVID-19 such as intra-community or family violence, or aggravated isolation.



Funding to Local Human Rights Organisations

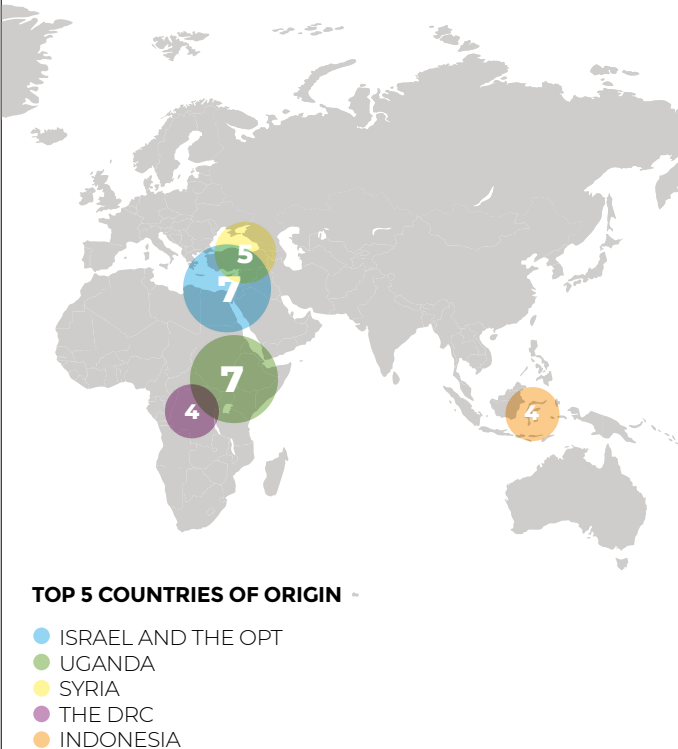
FINANCIAL SUPPORT, INCLUDING CORE-FUNDING TO AT-RISK ORGANISATIONS, GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES

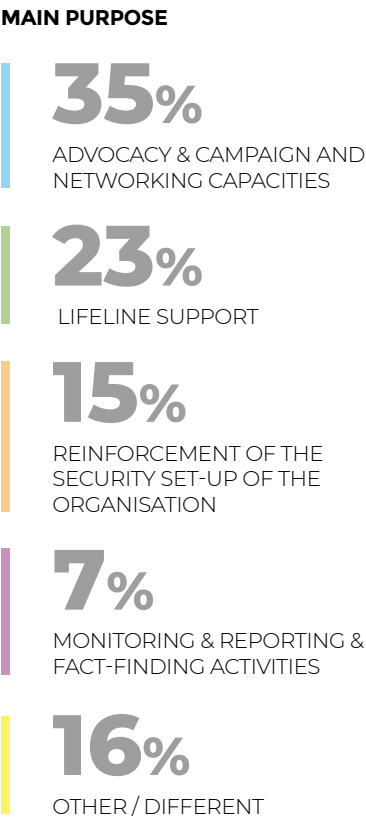
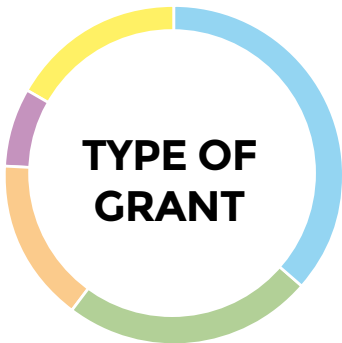
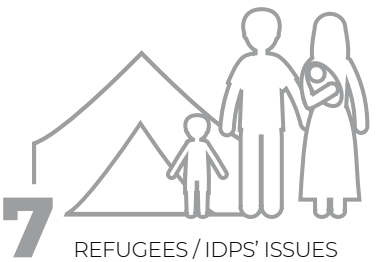
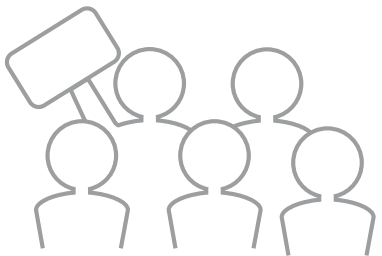
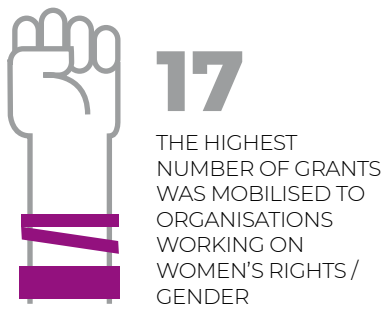
02.2



During 2020, ProtectDefenders.eu has funded 68 grants to grass-roots civil society organisations operating in the most difficult contexts, delivering financial support and direct material support to local groups and organisations facing severe restrictions. The ProtectDefenders.eu funding support provided a **lifeline to organisations** facing a shrinking space for their work, promoted the **creation of new initiatives** aimed at increasing the protection for HRDs or enabled them to **expand their work in new areas** affected by crises.

This support was instrumental for organisations to **maintain their core activities**, increase their capacity in security and protection and therefore improve their ability to continue their work in this repressive context, and to find and access funding and set up new initiatives. Some **organisations in particularly critical situations avoided closure** thanks to that support.





1 SUCCESS STORIES

Support for the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) to support Syrian journalists and their families by creating a safe and secure environment for them to continue carrying out their work.



“We would like to thank the institutions that recently extended a helping hand, namely Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders (EMHRF), the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), and all the friends who supported us and stood by us.”

Al-Jisr Press representative

Syria continues to be **one of the world's most dangerous and challenging environments for media workers**. Media has been used as a war tool during the Syrian crisis due to the polarisation and politicisation of the media's work by the various actors in the conflict. 455 Syrian journalists have been killed in and outside the country between March 2011 and December 2019, whereas 361 journalists were arrested and forcibly disappeared between 2011 and 2018. Protection measures and urgent support are still needed by the Syrian journalists reporting from the ground or from neighbouring countries.

In such a difficult context, RSF decided to keep working with its historical local partner, the SCM, and provide financial support within ProtectDefenders.eu for its Journalists House (JH) project. Within the framework of the project, different types of support were provided to journalists and media workers: **legal support, IT and digital security support, medical support, financial support and safe relocation**. The Journalist's House (JH) project, co-funded by RSF, is the focal point for different media-related safety and protection mechanisms for Syrian journalists, such as International Media Support, Committee to Protect Journalists, and Free Press Unlimited. The grant was crucial to allow the JH team to manage, process and follow up a considerably high amount of requests, namely **257 requests from journalists** (155 old cases received by the SCM during 2019, 54 cases received by the SCM during the reporting period, and 48 cases received by partner organisations during the reporting period for additional checking). In parallel, 5 media outlets received support within the framework of the JH project, while 4 more are in the process of receiving support.

- The critical situation has been further weakened by the COVID-19 outbreak, which has had a significant impact on Syria, as well as its neighbouring countries. It has also affected the safe relocation requests of journalists in danger as the embassies and consulates suspended their services, and stopped receiving or processing any applications.
- All journalists who received support in the framework of the JH project could resume their journalistic activities.

2

SUCCESS STORIES

Enhancing the capacity of Yemeni WHRDs in human rights protection instruments and mechanisms against SGBV at national, regional and international levels.

Around one million Yemeni are living in Egypt, fleeing the war in Yemen, including many women’s CSO (civil society organisation) leaders and women human rights defenders. The voice of WHRDs and peace advocates that promote human rights protection in Yemen is divided, weak and under continuous threat. The Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights (SAF) has been one of the leading women human rights protection NGOs in Yemen and the MENA region, and needs to stand again as a strong voice on justice and peace and to overcome the challenges imposed by the war and the global security situation.

A training funded by ProtectDefenders.eu and funded by FIDH took place in Egypt and was focused on women’s rights defenders’ protection and SGBV. It targeted 30 Yemeni women human rights defenders representing CSOs which are at the same time members of important national entities including the Constitution Drafting Committee, Women Technical Council of the UN Envoy to Yemen, Members of the National Dialogue, Members of the National Authority for Monitoring the Outcomes of the National Dialogue, and women rights defenders from diverse CSOs including

Yemeni Women Forum in the Diaspora, Southern Aden Women Forum, Women Pact for Security, Tawafuq, independent media and from different social backgrounds to ensure their effective role in the protection of WHRDs and civilians in the ongoing armed conflict, particularly women and children subjected to sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, sexual harassment, and unlawful detention.

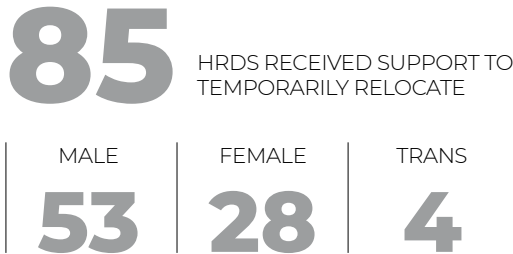
A training funded by ProtectDefenders.eu and funded by FIDH took place in Egypt and was focused on **women’s rights defenders’ protection and SGBV**. It targeted 30 Yemeni women human rights defenders representing CSOs which are at the same time members of important national entities including the Constitution Drafting Committee, Women Technical Council of the UN Envoy to Yemen, Members of the National Dialogue, Members of the National Authority for Monitoring the Outcomes of the National Dialogue, and women rights defenders from diverse CSOs including Yemeni Women Forum in the Diaspora, Southern Aden Women Forum, Women Pact for Security, Tawafuq, independent media and from different social backgrounds to ensure their effective role in the protection of WHRDs and civilians in the ongoing armed conflict, particularly women and children subjected to sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, sexual harassment, and unlawful detention.

- The training was put in place by the SAF in coordination with the Karama organisation, working in youth and women’s rights in Palestine.

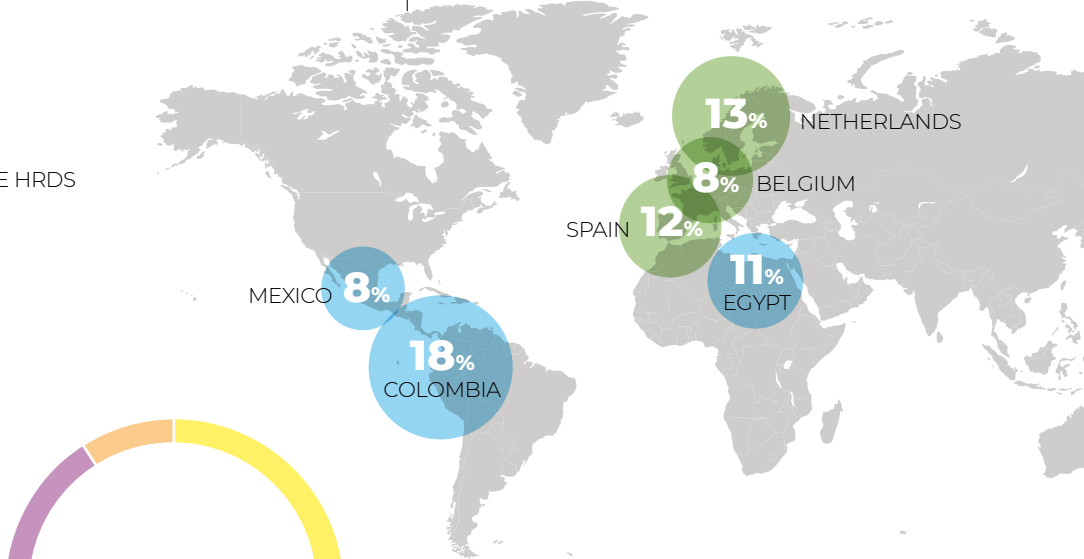
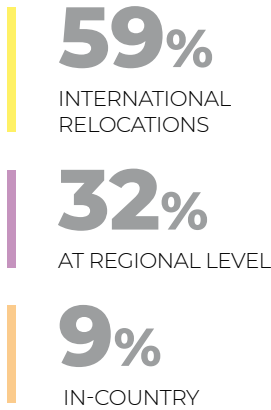
02.3

Temporary relocation grants

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE MOST DIFFICULT CONTEXTS AND FACING IMMEDIATE RISKS, AND THEIR FAMILIES WHEN NEEDED, HAVE ACCESSED COMPREHENSIVE AND ENHANCED SHELTER AND TEMPORARY RELOCATION PROGRAMMES



● TOP 3 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN
● TOP 3 COUNTRIES TO HOST THE HRDS



In 2020, despite the notorious limitations on national, regional and global mobility, the ProtectDefenders.eu Temporary Relocation programme has remained fully operational. This year, ProtectDefenders.eu has paid special attention in applying a gender lens during the whole cycle of the temporary relocation grants management process. Furthermore, the temporary relocation programme takes into account the **psychological and medical needs of the defenders as an integral part of the support** as of the outset of the project. Moreover, psychosocial support is considered an important tool, especially when accompanied by capacity-building training, to help defenders regain confidence in their work, overcome tense and stressful periods and to offer them counselling services to plan their future work or return to their country of origin more strategically, taking into account the risks they face.

1 SUCCESS STORIES

Ensuring the safe return of an environmental rights WHRD to Colombia



“ On behalf of my family, I want to thank ProtectDefenders.eu for the opportunity to return, develop and be back to our country more calm and protected. I have grown a lot as a human being and the training received allows me to better support my community. Thanks to this return support, we have also advanced as a family and we have had the opportunity to take care of each other “

“ There are no words to thank this program, because it has been a lifesaver in times of quarantine and confinement. They were very difficult days for everyone but we did not feel fear because we felt protected by the support of ProtectDefenders.eu”

Milena Florez

Over the last 10 years, WHRD Milena Florez has been fighting against a large construction project that heavily and irreversibly affected the environment of her region and therefore left those working in fishery and agriculture, which were mostly women, jobless. Six fellow defenders were assassinated and the WHRD herself received direct threats from armed groups and consequently had to leave to go to Spain for a few months. Given the visibility of her activism, she feared that she would be at risk if she returned.

ProtectDefenders.eu allocated a grant that helped her to **move to another region upon her return from Colombia, from where she could continue her activism.** The grant helped her to open a small chicken farm, and purchase a sewing machine to make clothes, in order to ensure income for the whole family. The grant also included psychosocial support for the WHRD, her husband and her children, to help them adjust to their new environment and tackle the traumas experienced. Milena Florez has not reported new security incidents since she established herself in another region. The small farm has been running well and the situation of the whole family is stable.

- The sustainability of return is crucial yet challenging in the implementation of the temporary relocation programmes, affecting particularly those defenders who belong to the most vulnerable groups.

2 SUCCESS STORIES

Fellowship programme for a journalist at risk



“ Thanks to the ProtectDefenders.eu Temporary Relocation programme, Noorani received customized training from Missouri School of Journalism faculty and trainers with Investigative Reporters and Editors, a non-profit organization affiliated with the university”

Ahmad Noorani was working for The News International in Islamabad when he started receiving threats because of his reporting on the influence of the military in politics and unreported assets of leading politicians and family members. In 2017, he was attacked by an unidentified group and nearly killed. In 2020, he was nominated and selected for the fellowship managed by Alfred Friendly Press Partners in the US. Noorani received **customised training from Missouri School of Journalism faculty and trainers** with Investigative Reporters and Editors, a non-profit organisation affiliated with the university. Noorani also received training on website development and running the business and legal aspects of establishing an online news platform, and received assistance in website development and implementation from a developer.

Noorani received assistance in website content, including the naming of his news organisation, its vision and mission statements, ethical standards, coverage categories, editorial decisions such as using anonymous sources and eliminating opinion and undocumented assertions. Noorani has been able to continue his human rights work during his relocation. He launched his website, FactFocus.com, on August 27 with an exposé of the undeclared assets of a retired general and special assistant to the prime minister, a story edited by an adjunct faculty member. He **continues to publish stories on his website** that help keep the military and government leadership accountable. At this very moment, his relocation has been extended due to COVID-19.

- Ahmed’s family, who remained in Pakistan, receives a monthly stipend to cover their basic expenses while the HRD is abroad, as part of the Temporary Relocation programme.



European Union Temporary Relocation Platform

COORDINATION THE EU TEMPORARY RELOCATION PLATFORM

In 2020, the EUTRP has made significant steps in strengthening its coordination. Currently, the EUTRP has 69 members including non-governmental actors, EU institutions, national Governments and regional/local Governments. This

year, frequent learning and mutual exchange spaces were facilitated to address how COVID-19 has affected the temporary relocation programmes, and new possibilities of collaboration among the members are systematically explored.

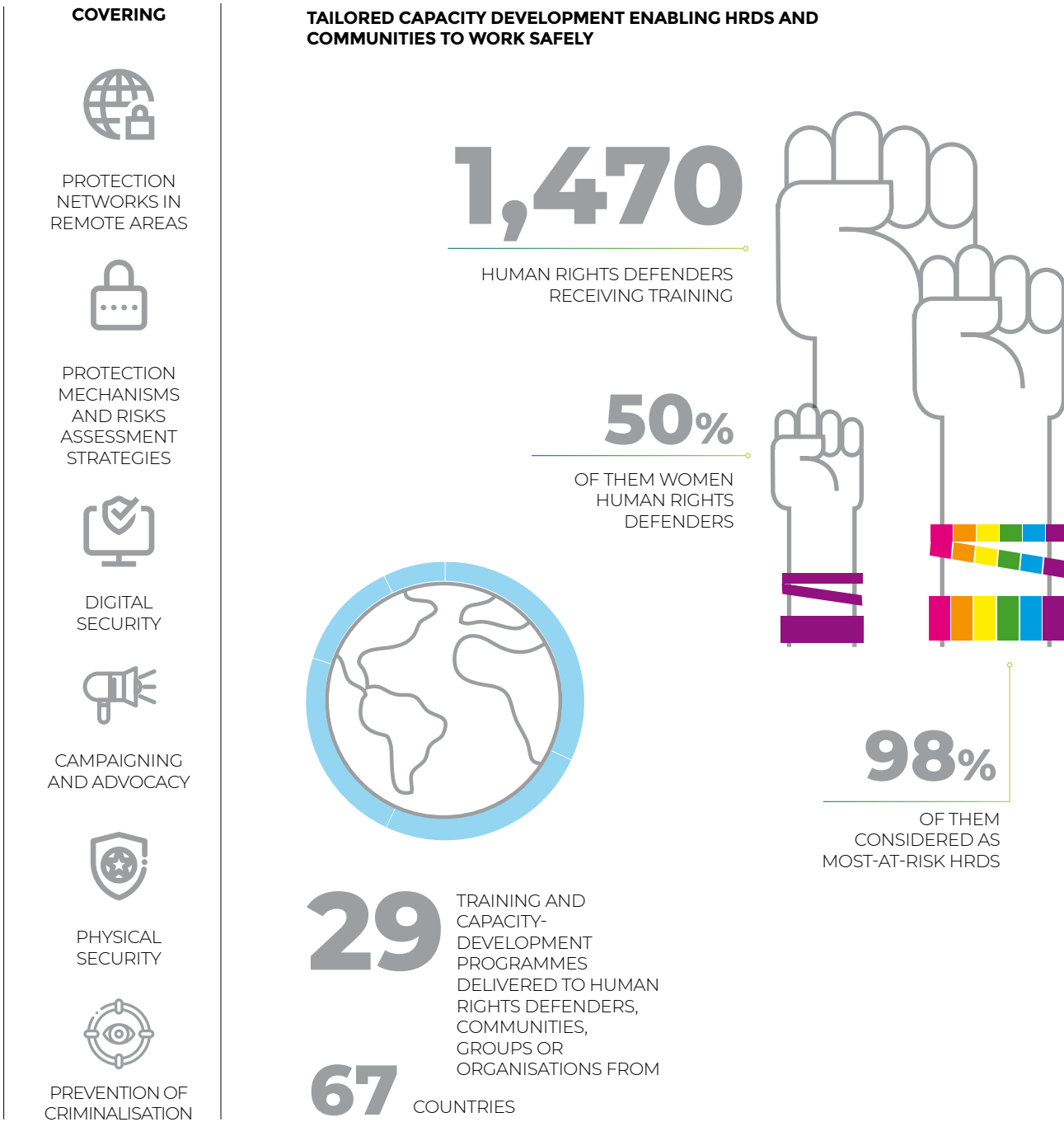
THE SHELTER INITIATIVES PROGRAMME

In 2020, ProtectDefenders.eu launched the Shelter Initiatives programme, which will support the creation of new host structures and programmes and the strengthening of existing ones at regional level, making ProtectDefenders.eu an increasingly referenced and essential source of support for human rights defenders in need for relocation. The Shelter

Initiatives programme will provide funding and capacity building to entities involved in relocation schemes, by co-funding and supporting relocation programmes worldwide and providing solid and reliable support to key relocation organisations.

Training and Capacity- Development

02.4



In 2020, ProtectDefenders.eu has developed its capacity-development programme of activities, which aims to **reinforce the protection skills of HRDs and human rights communities**. As a result of training, the defenders could draft security plans, implement new security measures and approaches in their organisations. Some of the initiatives included follow-up sessions to reinforce the implementation of the knowledge acquired during the training. ProtectDefenders.eu has helped promote a **holistic approach to capacity building and proactive strategies for long-term and sustainable social change**, informed by the communities and individuals most affected by inequality and injustice.

Unfortunately, the drastic reduction of travel possibilities and face-to-face interactions with NGOs and defenders has seriously impacted the implementation of training in 2020 and most convening spaces were postponed or conducted on a very limited schedule online. Nevertheless, the flexibility allowed by ProtectDefenders.eu has facilitated **innovation to adjust training activities** to meet the specific needs of particular groups of HRDs working in difficult contexts, as well as the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Human rights defenders, including groups and communities, reported unanimously that support received via training **and capacity building has increased their skills and tools to better manage their security situation and to better develop their work**. Defenders and groups have been able to develop and strengthen protection, support and advocacy networks, as well as strategic activities enabling them to address the restrictive contexts in which they carry out their activities. Training contributed to the improvement of the well-being of HRDs and strategies to fight shrinking space and challenges faced by HRDs when conducting human rights work, including WHRDs and activists from marginalised communities.

1 SUCCESS STORIES

Capacity-building programme to respond to the pressing protection issues for LGBTI defenders facing homophobic violence and hate crimes in DRC



“Thanks to this programme, our two organisations have strengthened their capacity in terms of risk management, preventive security and digital security; techniques for monitoring, reporting and issuing action alerts in relation to hate crimes and other homophobic violence.”

Rainbow Sunrise Mapambazuko

A training programme funded by Protection International within ProtectDefenders.eu put in place protection mechanisms so that LGBTI people can live in increased safety and dignity in the face of the countless human rights violations to which they are victim and witnesses. In view of the critical situations that the LGBTI community has been going through in the last two years in DRC, with repressive policies, the prevalence of discrimination and anti-LGBTI hate crimes, this project represented a timely and important approach.

The objectives were to be achieved through capacity-building activities for LGBTI people on **techniques of monitoring, reporting and**

publishing action alerts in relation to hate crimes and on risk management, as well as preventive security and digital security measures for LGBTI human rights defenders. Three training sessions enabled members of two organisations to acquire the necessary knowledge on human rights, monitoring, reporting and publishing action alerts in relation to hate crimes and other homophobic violence to which they are victim and witnesses. In addition, seven educational talks were organised with the support of lawyers.

Members of two organisations, RSM and ALCIS, were given interactive tools on legal instruments and international and national standards for the promotion and defence of human rights. Through these information and education sessions on fundamental human rights, LGBTI defenders were encouraged to become aware that they have the opportunities and means to address the abuses and violations of their human rights that they experience, capitalising on individual and collective mobilisation and commitment.

2 SUCCESS STORIES

Enhancing Safety and Security for Sudanese WHRDs in armed conflicts



“The workshop helped me develop my knowledge of human rights and how to protect myself, my family, and the victims I work for. Thanks to this workshop, I became an effective and more efficient person to serve my community”

Hajer Fandama, participant and WHRD

A five-day training course on physical and digital security was organised by DefendDefenders within the framework of ProtectDefenders.eu and conducted for 14 WHRDs from the Kordofan region of Sudan. This training is **the first of its kind to be carried out in Sudan for women human rights defenders**. Sudanese women defenders, especially those working in the Kordofan region, have suffered from violations over the past thirty years, including war crimes and sexual and physical violence. Throughout this period, women defenders in the region were unable to obtain the support and protection necessary for them to continue their work in defending human rights.

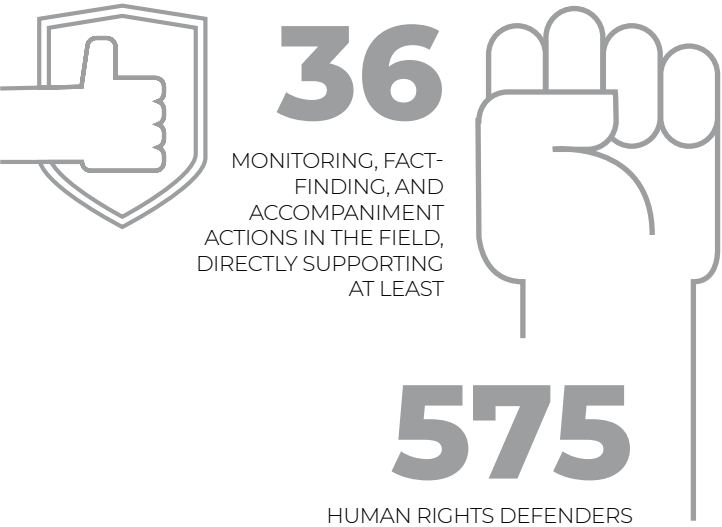
As a result of this training, 14 WHRDs from the Kordofan region equipped with knowledge and skills in physical and digital security, the situation of WHRDs in Kordofan has been assessed and participants have become able to carry out risk assessment and analysis of their working environments.

- Participants drafted follow-up action plans that include developing individual and organisation security plans, and formed an association for WHRDs in the Kordofan region.

02.5

Fieldwork

MONITORING AND ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAMMES, INCLUDING FACT-FINDING AND FIELD MISSIONS



Despite the limitations and restrictions for in-person activities, ProtectDefenders.eu has continued to monitor the situation of human rights defenders in the field and advocated for an enabling protection agenda for Human Rights Defenders at local, regional and international level.

Fieldwork has usually **included field missions to conduct urgent advocacy**, to document human rights violations faced by the defenders or to monitor trials, as well as garnering public attention to severe situations thanks to the publication of appeals, reports and statements. These missions were used **to document the detected trends**, attract national, regional and international attention to them and start a **dialogue with the concerned authorities**. During these missions, authorities were urged to take action on individual cases, particularly regarding defenders in arbitrary detention, or to act to protect threatened HRDs. The missions also helped to identify defenders at risk, break the situation of isolation some were in and connect them to other components of the project.

Furthermore, the presence of foreign observers during trials of HRDs reportedly contributed to increasing the level of pressure on authorities and the mobilisation around the cases, which

usually had an impact on the situation of the HRDs – from the improvement of detention conditions through to the charges being dropped or the release on bail of several defenders. In several cases, these missions were linked to immediate advocacy actions (appeals, mostly) to raise and mobilise international attention around the unfolding and results of the trial being monitored.

Finally, by supporting the work of Peace Brigades International (PBI) in Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico, ProtectDefenders.eu has contributed to maintaining **physical and subsequently virtual accompaniment during sensitive periods**. This accompaniment and international presence reportedly dissuaded potential perpetrators, gave the defenders a feeling of recognition and moral support, and contributed to maintaining the necessary space for them to be able to continue their work.



1 SUCCESS STORIES

Accompaniment for the “Minas de Oro” community in Honduras: a successful virtual accompaniment

“Since the calls to the commissioner, things on the part of the police have changed a lot and now the community is very happy with the good climate of collaboration with the police”

Donald Hernández, CEHPRODEC

- The work carried out remotely has served to improve collaboration between the local police and the community of Minas de Oro, highlighting the progress that can be made through contacts with authorities.

The organisation CEHPRODEC informed PBI during the confinement that there were tensions between the community of Minas de Oro (Comayagua) and the local police due to threats from the police against the community leaders. The community was managing itself in order to prevent the entry of people from outside the community to avoid coronavirus infections, creating disagreement with the police, who considered that they were exceeding their functions. Following PBI's calls with the National Police Commissioner and CONADEH, the community expressed its appreciation for the support and revealed that the police intend to collaborate with the population. This incident highlights the work of telephone accompaniment carried out during the pandemic and confinement. Thanks to PBI's intervention and contact with both the local police and CONADEH, the local police have offered the community their collaboration to manage the entry and exit of people from the community during the health crisis.

2 SUCCESS STORIES

Accompaniment of a mixed group of Nicaraguan defenders in exile with diverse ethnic origins

Within the framework of the work carried out by PBI within ProtectDefenders.eu with the “Colectivo de Mujeres Volcánicas”, women representatives of the Bloque de la Costa Caribe en el Exilio were invited to take part in the different capacity-building and accompaniment activities. As a result of this, the women of the Bloque de la Costa Caribe en el Exilio requested to extend the support, forming a group from the Caribbean coast made up of men and women who are part of these processes. Participants reportedly valued that it was important also for men to join since they are part of many of the families in exile and that they need to work on the psychosocial impact of what they have experienced, as well as having protection tools and strengthening collective capacities.

Other remarkable aspects were identified in this group, such as their ethnic origin, considering that they are mestizo, Afro-descendant and indigenous, in addition to the language with which they communicate (Misquito and Managua). This characteristic is in other spaces a limitation for their participation, since this is a group that has historically been excluded. However, this group reportedly valued the differences and similarities to form a single front of struggle and resistance.

“Social gaps and access to humanitarian living conditions continue to affect indigenous peoples and ethnic communities.”

Member of Bloque Costa Caribe en el Exilio

- Methodological adaptations and new approaches to activities developed by PBI with this group are expected, considering the impact of exile on the world view of these mixed cultures and that they cohabit the Nicaraguan territory.

02.6

Monitoring, advocacy and public mobilisation

ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF HRDS' VULNERABILITY

ProtectDefenders.eu has continued to carry out actions to **mobilise relevant authorities**, build **public awareness** and enhance **visibility** about the situation of Human Rights Defenders at every level. ProtectDefenders.eu has regularly dispatched **urgent alerts and appeals**, and sent petitions and letters to relevant stakeholders to generate an adequate warning and to contribute to improving the HRD situation at the local level.

Urgent alerts also dealt with cases of particularly targeted and at-risk groups, including WHRD, LGBTI HRD, land and environmental rights defenders, indigenous rights defenders, migrant rights defenders, defenders from remote areas or otherwise isolated, and journalists. Many of these urgent interventions highlighted the **repression that defenders have faced during the pandemic**, as well as the use by some states of the sanitary crisis as a pretext to challenge the right to defend human rights and to further reduce civil society space and fundamental freedoms. Preventive work for the protection of HRDs has



OUR ADVOCACY WORK IN FIGURES

913

ADVOCACY MATERIALS PRODUCED

21

PUBLIC
STATEMENTS

448

APPEALS

50

PRESS RELEASES

393

PETITIONS, URGENT
SUBMISSIONS, PRIVATE
DEMARCHES

1

REPORTS
(CAMBODIA)



also included key highlights such as **proactive advocacy or litigation actions**, the publication of **country reports** or online side events in the margin of the sessions of the UN Human Rights Council. Urgent appeals serve as a basis for advocacy before the EU and international organisations, as they are systematically transmitted to relevant UN Special Procedures as well as to Members of the European Parliament, including the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), to the European External Action Service (EEAS) and to diplomatic missions to the United Nations in Geneva. Targeted requests for demarches, such as petitions or letters concerning individual cases are also sent to governments, UN mechanisms or EU Delegations.

The advocacy work has had substantial impacts on the situation of individual HRDs, contributing to the improvement or at least the non-deterioration of the situation of concerned HRDs or their working conditions, or helping prevent further violations. Thanks to appeals and actions, ProtectDefenders.eu has reportedly contributed to enhancing the protection of HRDs in general and to stopping or alleviating the degree of repression faced by HRDs thanks to action taken by the concerned authorities or pressure from influential third parties. These actions have led to the **release of detained HRDs**, improvement of their detention conditions, access to health care, fight against impunity, etc. Strategic advocacy has proven to be useful to release defenders from detention, to facilitate the **withdrawal of charges** against them, to promote the adoption of **protection measures** or the conduct of an impartial investigation into violations.

1 SUCCESS STORIES

Student activist Safoora Zargar released following intense and successful advocacy



“ We have just met Safoora Zargar upon her release from Delhi’s Tihar Jail. She expressed her gratitude and appreciation for the solidarity expressed with her during the times of her incarceration. She thanked all the efforts and advocacy undertaken collectively by HRDA and OMCT, which secured her release and brought her much-needed respite during her pregnancy. If not for such efforts, the Indian State wouldn’t have looked through the humanitarian lens and granted her release on bail”

Representative of OMCT local partner in India HRDA, upon Safoora Zargar’s release on bail

In June 2020, **student activist Safoora Zargar in India was released on bail following intense and coordinated advocacy** work on her behalf.

On 10 April 2020, student activist Safoora Zargar was arrested in relation to a peaceful protest against a discriminatory law, the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 (CAA), and detained under the repressive Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Ms. Zargar was 14 weeks pregnant at the time of her arrest. She was brought to Delhi’s Tihar Jail, where she was placed in solitary confinement for almost two weeks, despite her pregnancy. The OMCT, within the framework of ProtectDefenders.eu, multiplied the démarches to ensure her release, notably through the publication of several urgent interventions and the direct mobilisation of relevant international actors that could contribute to our efforts for her release, including UN Special Procedures, the European External Action bodies and the EU Delegation in India.

On 10 June 2020, the EU Delegation in India wrote to the National Human Rights Commission to denounce her arbitrary detention and call for her release. In May 2020, the Chair of the European Parliament’s Subcommittee on Human Rights wrote to the Indian authorities to express serious concerns about recent arrests of activists in India, including Safoora Zargar. UN experts similarly called on Indian authorities to release HRDs arrested for protesting against changes to Indian citizenship laws.

Only a few weeks later, on 23 June 2020, the Delhi High Court granted bail to Safoora Zargar, who was effectively released from Delhi’s Tihar Jail the next day. According to local partners, **her release came clearly as a result of international pressure** on her behalf. Nevertheless, the harassment of anti-CAA activists continues.

- This case highlights the relevance of using a comprehensive, coordinated and multi-layered advocacy approach to human rights defenders’ protection.

2 SUCCESS STORIES

Demanding justice for Zara and Ka Randy, two HRDs murdered in the Philippines



In August 2020, two HRDs, Zara Alvarez and Randall Echanis were killed within the span of a week in the Philippines. On 24 August 2020, ProtectDefenders.eu partner ESCR-Net sent a collective letter to the Philippine authorities calling for an end to the killing of HRDs in the country, an investigation into the killing of the two HRDs and an end to the criminalisation and targeting of HRDs. Likewise, ESCR-Net co-organised a **Global Day of Action calling for an international investigation into human rights violations in the Philippines** including attacks on HRDs. Finally, ESCR-Net supported Karapatan with media work in the regional media outlets.

It would appear that the national and international pressure generated by ESCR-Net and many others has resulted in the Philippine Commission on Human Rights opening an investigation into the killings of Zara Alvarez and Randall Echanis. This investigation is still ongoing. Likewise, there was international support, including from the European Parliament, for the opening of an international investigation on human rights violations in the Philippines.

- There is a strong potential in a mixed approach that includes a collective letter and media work, as well as de-centralised member-to-member solidarity actions.

3 SUCCESS STORIES

Monitoring of Cambodia Class Action Lawsuit



“ Thai Appeal Court decision paves the way for Asia’s first trans-boundary class action on human rights abuses”

Equitable Cambodia

- The trans-boundary class action *Hoy Mai & Others vs. Mitr Phol Co. Ltd.* is the first of its kind in Southeast Asia. This decision changes the landscape, enabling class action legislation to be used in trans-boundary cases and to protect some of the region’s most vulnerable people.

Thai Court of Appeal allowed the plaintiffs representing more than 700 farming families of Oddar Meanchey Community in Cambodia to litigate the case as a class-action lawsuit against Thai corporation Mitr Phol Co, which was monitored by Forum-Asia within the framework of ProtectDefenders.eu

In March 2018, a class action was brought by two community members representing a class of approximately 711 families from five villages in Oddar Meanchey province, Cambodia. The case relates to offences that occurred after Angkor Sugar Co. Ltd, a wholly owned and controlled subsidiary of the major Thai corporation Mitr Phol, was unlawfully granted an Economic Land Concession over residential and farmland that had belonged to the affected families for decades. The families in the affected class suffered violent forced evictions, burning of their homes and loss of their farmland between 2008 and 2009 to make way for the Mitr Phol concession. The impacts of the rights violations suffered over a decade ago continue to be felt to this day. In June 2019, the Bangkok South Civil Court held a hearing on whether to admit the case as a class action. Unfortunately, in August 2019, the court declared that the case could not be admitted as a class action lawsuit. An appeal against this decision was submitted by the plaintiffs; they believe the decision was legally flawed and could not be justified in accordance with class action provisions under Thai law.

On 31 July 2020, the Bangkok South Civil Court decided that there were sufficient grounds for the **court to allow both plaintiffs to litigate the cases as a class action lawsuit** under the Civil Procedure Code, Section 222/12 and Section 222/10. The Court of Appeals ruled to accept the case as a class action, reversing the Court of First Instance’s order.

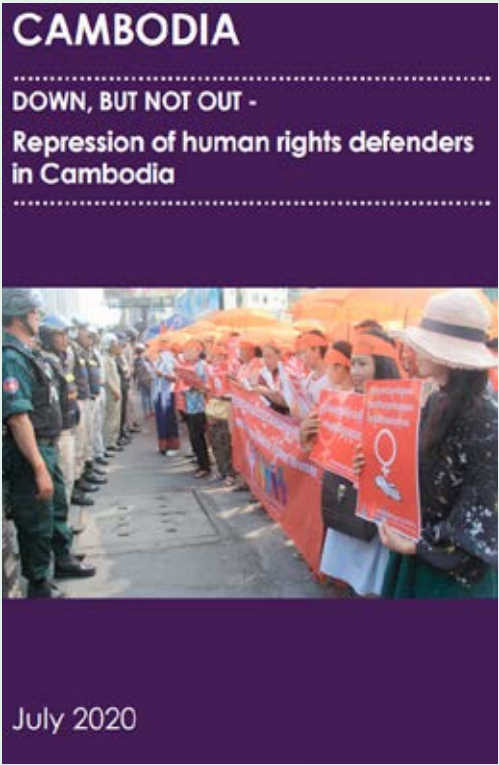
THE PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU INDEX OF ATTACKS AGAINST HRDS



Launched in 2017, the Index features a compilation of all the public alerts and reports of attacks and threats against defenders, issued by Front Line Defenders, RSF, and the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (an OMCT-FIDH partnership). The Index had reinforced awareness and visibility of the individual situation of defenders facing attacks and threats, and had already compiled more than 3,500 reports and alerts.

DOWN, BUT NOT OUT Repression of human rights defenders in Cambodia

In a report produced within the framework of ProtectDefenders.eu, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (FIDH-OMCT) documents the severe persecution faced by human rights defenders in Cambodia and the deepening crackdown on civil society and independent media. The report shows how human rights defenders including land and environmental rights defenders, labour leaders, women's rights defenders, cyber activists and journalists have all faced increased violence, intimidation, detention and judicial harassment from the state, while civic space has continued to erode. Scores of human rights-related events, including peaceful demonstrations and human rights workshops, have been monitored and interfered with by government authorities. The report also documents how the Cambodian government has used repressive laws and subservient courts to harass and attempt to silence human rights defenders.



HRD WORLD SUMMIT ACTION PLAN

ProtectDefenders.eu has continued to disseminate and raise awareness about the Action Plan issued following the World Summit of Human Rights Defenders, held in Paris in October 2018. This Action Plan proposes a concrete set of measures and calls for a lasting commitment from states, businesses, financial institutions, donors and intergovernmental institutions to act to protect human rights defenders and to take concrete actions to offer better protection and create a more favourable environment for their work.

CONFERENCE ON WHRD AND ENVIRONMENT AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

On 21 January 2020, ProtectDefenders.eu organised the conference "Women human rights defenders, at the forefront of environmental preservation", co-hosted by MEP and vice-chair of DROI Subcommittee Ms. Hannah Neumann and MEP and member of FEMM and ENVI Committees Ms. Soraya Rodríguez. This conference featured the testimonies of Cristina Palabay and Milena Florez, 2 environmental WHRD from the Philippines and Colombia, and high-level speakers from the European Commission, and it was chaired by Liliana De Marco, executive director of Protection International - a member of the Consortium of ProtectDefenders.eu.



COORD

DINA

ATION

03.

Coordination

PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU



The EU HRD mechanism has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to provide practical support

ProtectDefenders.eu is perceived by human rights defenders and organisations around the world as a **fast, flexible and useful instrument providing a rapid response** to their most pressing needs. Human rights defenders that benefited from the project consistently report in a positive manner about the project's reactivity and stress the effectiveness of the mechanism in responding to their demands and improving their situation.

The EU HRD mechanism has demonstrated a **remarkable capacity to provide practical support through grants, capacity building, advocacy and monitoring**, with speed, flexibility and an increased ability to respond to cases of urgency, allowing human rights defenders at high risk to quickly implement measures directly impacting their personal and security situation. This reactivity benefits from the flexibility of the programmes available to meet HRD's needs as they identify them, a specificity considered as vital by beneficiaries.

A broader network of influence, less missed opportunities and stronger impact

ProtectDefenders.eu is considered by defenders as particularly **reactive and efficient when conducting due diligence processes thanks to their local networks of partners and contacts** and supporting HRDs acting in some of the most repressive contexts and conflict situations. The structure of the EU HRD mechanism and the **complementarity between its partners and programmes** has generated added value and allowed for coherent and holistic support when addressing specific cases and needs of human rights defenders at risk.

The **credibility and diversity** of partners have brought together a wealth of experience in ProtectDefenders.eu that has strengthened **learning and synergies**. The fact that several of the most relevant organisations working for the protection of HRDs are working together and setting joint priorities and strategies sends a very strong message and is seen as a very positive milestone that will contribute to increased impacts in the joint mission to protect HRDs worldwide. ProtectDefenders.eu enables a **significant enhanced coordination of strategy and planning**; a broader network of influence, fewer missed opportunities and stronger impact of the messages and increased access to key stakeholders.

ProtectDefenders.eu has reportedly brought HRD protection to a new level by facilitating the pooling of expertise, and addressing **protection from a holistic approach**, enabling joint work so that the available resources can be put to the best use.



ProtectDefenders.eu is the European Union Human Rights Defenders mechanism, established to protect defenders at high risk and support their work in the most difficult situations worldwide. It is led by a Consortium of 12 NGOs active in the field of Human Rights.

fi FRONT LINE
DEFENDERS

fidh

OMCT
SOS Torture Network

REPORTERS
WITHOUT BORDERS
FOR PRESS FREEDOM

URGENT
ACTION
FUND
FOR WOMEN'S
HUMAN RIGHTS

WOMEN'S
DEFENDERS

FORUM-ASIA

DEFENDEDEFENDERS
FOR THE PROTECTION OF DEFENDERS' RIGHTS

pbi
making space for peace

PROTECTION
International

ilga
europe

الشبكة العالمية
للحقوق الاقتصادية
والاجتماعية والثقافية

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