



The Landscape of Public International Funding for Human Rights Defenders

Updated Financial Analysis



The Landscape of Public International Funding for Human Rights Defenders

Updated Financial Analysis

The Landscape of Public International Funding for Human Rights Defenders – Updated Financial Analysis

Copyright © 2025 ProtectDefenders.eu

Reproduction of this publication for advocacy or other non-commercial purposes is authorised, without prior written permission, provided the source is fully acknowledged.

Acknowledgments

ProtectDefenders.eu is grateful to everyone who contributed to the study.

Author: The study was conducted on behalf of ProtectDefenders.eu by Andreia Oliveira.

Steering Committee: Laurent Aldenhoff, Susanna Tuccio, Anne-Sophie Schaeffer, Radosh Piletich, Otibho Obianwu, Javier Roura Blanco, Adelaide Mazwarira.

Editor: Tara Madden.

Coordinator: Javier Roura Blanco.



Index

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations.....	6
Executive Summary.....	7
Recommendations.....	9
Methodology.....	11

1. HRD Funding in absolute and relative terms.....	12
2. Channels of funding.....	15
3. Considering the type of aid.....	17
4. Geographical Distribution of HRD funding.....	18
5. Type of rights supported.....	20
6. Purpose of the funding.....	22
7. Linking to the Sustainable Development Goals.....	25
8. Women and LGBTIQ+ HRDs.....	26
9. HRDs in the Middle East & North Africa.....	27
Conclusions and Looking Ahead.....	28

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CRS	Creditor Reporting System
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
ESCR	Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
FoRB	Freedom of Religion or Belief
HRFN	Human Rights Funders Network
HRD	Human Rights Defender
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and other sexual identities
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
Mn	Million
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PD.eu	ProtectDefenders.eu
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TA	Technical Assistance
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
WHRD	Woman Human Rights Defender

Executive Summary

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) promote and defend the rights enshrined in the core Human Rights Treaties, agreed consensually by States. These rights and those who promote and defend them are essential in the achievement of sustainable development. The **increasing shrinking space for human rights work has led to an escalation in the targeting of human rights defenders**, placing them in grave danger and deliberately obstructing their efforts to support victims of violations, speak out, organise, and improve respect for human rights by all.

In 2024, ProtectDefenders.eu (PD.eu), the EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism led by a Consortium of 12 international NGOs, published '**The Landscape of Public International Funding for Human Rights Defenders**'¹ to outline existing institutional funding for HRDs from 2017 to 2020. The report, which considered the availability and effectiveness of Official Development Assistance (ODA) for human rights defenders, found that the **need for support for HRDs had never been greater, yet funding levels had stagnated**, with only marginal increases observed over the 2017-2020 period.²

This new study updates those findings by providing an analysis of the financing of HRDs by public actors for the years 2021-2023, which is the most recent available data on donors' ODA. It also provides a forecast of what is to be expected in the challenging years to come.

In 2021-2023, public donors contributed a total of USD 612 million to human rights defenders - a positive step in absolute terms, reflecting an annual increase in funding compared with 2017-2020. Yet paradoxically, despite this increase, **funding for human rights defenders has lost ground as a share of overall ODA, dropping to an average of just 0.10%**. Despite rising in absolute terms, funding for human rights

defenders remains marginal, far **outpaced by other ODA priorities**. If the current share of total ODA allocated to human rights defenders remained at the same rate, public resources for HRDs would only reach an annual amount of USD 500 million after 2040.

Between 2021 and 2023, international NGOs received 79-84% of donor funding towards HRDs, making these the most common channel of support. While local NGOs directly received 16-21% of donor funding, the analysis finds that approximately half of all funding reached local actors, both directly and indirectly. **Unspecified or global grants** – i.e., resources that are not targeting a specific geography - **continue to dominate funding for HRDs**. Meanwhile, **two regions have experienced marked declines**: support for the MENA region has been steadily decreasing since 2017, and support for Asia, since 2019.

While more than half (56%) of HRD-related ODA was dedicated to defenders that do not necessarily fall under a specific category of issues or type of rights, the remaining resources were mostly dedicated to supporting women's rights, followed by freedom of expression and association, environmental, land and indigenous rights, and LGBTIQ+ rights.

Among the main priorities, the protection of HRDs remained a key and increasing area of investment by donors between 2021 and 2023, representing a third of overall funds, with approximately 30% of the protection funding allocated to temporary relocation programmes. Other areas that received increased support during the 2021-2023 period include organisational strengthening and work towards improved State protection of human rights, while support to victims of human rights violations was the area that received least attention.

¹ <https://protectdefenders.eu/study-urgent-need-funding-human-rights-defenders/>

² [The Landscape of Public International Funding for Human Rights Defenders \(2024\)](#)

In 2024, countries representing roughly half of the world's population held elections, bringing the far right close to power in several states. This **evolving political context has heightened the risks faced by HRDs, including threats, regulatory repression, prosecution, and killings**. Combined with intense conflicts across the globe, such as the wars in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan and Yemen, and a growing concern for defence, this political shift is contributing to the weakening of international cooperation and raising concerns over potential reductions in ODA in the coming years. The effects of these political developments and early 2025 reductions in ODA, including severe cuts to USAID programmes, are already being felt at the time of writing, and the situation is expected to deteriorate further over time. In fact, human rights-focused ODA is projected to decline by up to USD 1.9 billion annually by 2026 according to a new report³ published by the Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN). **With the announced reductions, the outlook is that donor funding towards HRDs would not even reach USD 300 million per year by 2080, which is extremely concerning.**

The effects of these political developments and early 2025 reductions in ODA, including severe cuts to USAID programmes, are already being felt at the time of writing, and the situation is expected to deteriorate further over time.

Given the changing political landscape, this report calls on **donors to re-assess and appreciate the gains and value that years of human rights and rule of law advances have produced for societies worldwide, and to increase rather than decrease their level of funding to HRDs on the frontlines**. Their work remains essential not only for fostering peaceful, democratic societies and promoting multilateral cooperation grounded in human rights and the rule of law; but for driving change and achieving progress in all areas, from health, to housing, and to combatting climate change. It is **urgent to match political commitments to human rights defenders with adequate financial support, given the risk that conflict will be heightened and long-term stability undermined**.

Recommendations

The following key recommendations build on the findings of this study and the forecast emerging from the changing political landscape:



Donors should reiterate their recognition of the universal and inherent value of fundamental human rights and **increase the level of their funding for HRDs** commensurate to their commitments. This study shows that levels of support remain marginal compared to overall ODA and that much more can be done. It is urgent to match the political commitment to HRDs with respective financial support despite the announcements from several governments to reduce ODA. Even if the overall financial envelope of ODA does decrease, donors should increase, or at least sustain, the available financial resources to support the work of HRDs, both in nominal and relative terms.



Donors should **reverse the OECD DAC draft guidelines** on the eligibility of human rights activities for ODA, which intend to differentiate objectives that are 'developmental' and the so-called 'moral and legal' motivation of human rights activities. Both areas are considerably intertwined and separating them will lead to a drastic reduction of funds and the needs of HRDs unattended.



In addition to increasing, or at least sustaining, the quantity of funds, donors should also **consider the quality** of their support:

- » It is essential to **achieve more balance in the resources** going to international actors and local HRDs – one should not be funded at the cost of the other but rather ensuring a more proportionate share between these actors would align with the recommendation made by HRDs to further localise development aid.
- » There should be a **significant increase in the core funding** provided to HRDs operating at the international and national levels. HRDs often carry out their work in high-risk contexts, and they need to be able to prioritise both their work in the defence of human rights and their own protection.
- » **HRDs should always be part of the programming process**. This is crucial to ensuring the donor is investing in the appropriate area of work for a given context.
- » Donors should **translate their political engagement in a given sector into action in support of the HRDs** working on the issue; for example, the level of support provided to defenders working on environmental, land and indigenous rights is not representative of how high this issue is on the political agenda, and this should be significantly increased in the years to come.



Donors should resume investments **in the Asia and MENA regions**, as these geographic areas have lost support in recent years, and receive the lowest levels of funding after Oceania. This disinvestment occurs despite the pervasive threats and violence against HRDs, and the increasingly restrictive environment observed in many countries in both regions.

Furthermore, donors should:



Ensure that WHRDs, LGBTIQ+ rights defenders and mechanisms for their protection are resourced, considering the backlash against gender equality and the increased and intensified reprisals against them across the globe.



Invest in nascent, unregistered groups and individual HRDs who operate outside of formal organisations by providing funding through intermediary and local funds.



Ensure consistent reporting:

- » Explore the possibility of reporting on engagement with HRDs in a more consistent way across donors. While it is understandable that donors report in different ways and that not all granular information is available on HRD projects, it would be beneficial to consider further alignment of approaches and strategic focus for ODA reporting; this is particularly relevant for OECD DAC members, as some of them have developed or are in the process of reviewing guidelines to engage with HRDs. This is even more important considering some donors' announcements to reduce their levels of overall ODA, as this tracking would allow for the measurement of what is in fact being done in support of HRDs.
- » Several donor governments explicitly mention support to key human rights issues in their policy framework, but this is not always tangible in the way donors report on their financial support for individual projects. Aligning the project description with the government's strategy would facilitate donors' own evaluation of their level of investment, progress and relevance. At a minimum, it would be useful for donors to systematically track how much of their funding ends up benefitting grassroots movements, even if channelled through intermediary donors.
- » The security of HRDs must be a critical consideration in all reporting by donors so as not to place human rights defenders at risk.



Maintain coordination: The protection of HRDs and promotion of their work could be further emphasised in all contexts. There are efforts already underway, particularly in the context of political dialogue against restrictive legislation and measures, but donors could reinforce their level of coordination, namely around levels of funding, under the auspices, for example of OECD DAC. This is important given announcements of ODA cuts as any reduction will impact human rights defenders and the communities they protect.

- » Coordination could be strengthened by creating a Working Group specific to this topic, in the context of the OECD DAC Working Party on Development Finance Statistics, and on how to better portray donors' reporting on HRD work on an annual basis.
- » A valuable step would be to reinforce and actively engage with existing communities of practice dedicated to HRDs – including the one facilitated by OHCHR – turning them into a more effective platform for strategic discussions on how to sustain and adapt support to HRDs in light of recent announcements.
- » Alignment of results frameworks where existent, would allow for further consolidation of support going to HRDs; this should be done at both Headquarters and Embassy level, given the crucial role of embassies in supporting HRDs.

Methodology

This study is based on a thorough examination of OECD data on foreign aid, complemented by interviews with key representatives of selected donor governments⁴. The analysis includes an assessment of the disbursed volumes of funding for human rights defenders; funding modalities and channels; geographic distribution; the issues addressed by the funding; sub-groups of HRDs receiving support; focus areas and strategic approaches.

Donors report on their ODA in different ways, often with different focal points overseeing this process, therefore, the analysis is based on the most relevant sectorial codes from the Creditor Reporting System (CRS) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) that may include projects related to HRDs. The identification and categorisation of individual projects were carried out manually to ensure consistent selection criteria for projects benefiting HRDs. This detailed approach ensured the comprehensive tracking of all donor contributions by aligning them with officially reported expenditure. To cover also development work that can be both led by HRDs or on behalf of HRDs, the selection of CRS codes was broader than those that include a human rights narrative in the project identification.

In alignment with the study on 2017-2020⁵, the research assesses funding going towards a comprehensive group of organisations focused on supporting HRDs⁶ and funding made available to other HRDs, HRD-targeted mechanisms and global funds that promote the human rights work of individuals and grassroots organisations. Projects that are not-ODA funded and funding to multilateral organisations⁷ were excluded.

It is important to acknowledge the potential limitations of this approach, as disbursements are based on the descriptions of reported projects, which may not always reflect the actual allocation of resources. Similarly, the distinct reporting approaches of various donors lack consistency and, in general, the reliability of this research relies heavily on the quality of ODA databases and data availability.

The financial analysis was combined with key informant interviews with focal points from donor governments⁸ to learn more about their approach and therefore mitigate against such limitations, ensuring that the information was as comprehensive as possible. No artificial intelligence was used in the analysis.

The section that forecasts donor funding into the future relies on projected data that is the average of two functions commonly used to predict future values by using existing ones: linear regression⁹ and the Holt-Winters method¹⁰. A provisional forecast was also made for the years to come based on announcements of ODA cuts from key donors¹¹. The respective percentage of overall ODA cut was applied to financial support to HRDs based on funding in previous years, though it is understood that this may not be the case.

⁴ Canada, Denmark, the EU, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom

⁵ [The Landscape of Public International Funding for Human Rights Defenders \(2024\)](#)

⁶ Amnesty International, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum Asia), Civil Rights Defenders, Defend Defenders, Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders (EMHRF), Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH), Freedom House, Front Line Defenders, Fund for Global Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-NEC), International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), Peace Brigades International, Protection International, Reporters without Borders (Reporters sans Frontières), Somos Defensores, Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos, Guatemala (UDEFEQUA), Urgent Action Fund, World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

⁷ A review of the available funding confirmed that, in addition to OHCHR, there is little benefitting this group, so this absence does not skew the key findings of the research.

⁸ Canada, Denmark, the EU, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the UK

⁹ For more information about the linear regression method please consult [here](#)

¹⁰ For more information about the Holt-Winters method see [here](#)

¹¹ <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/charting-fallout-aid-cuts>

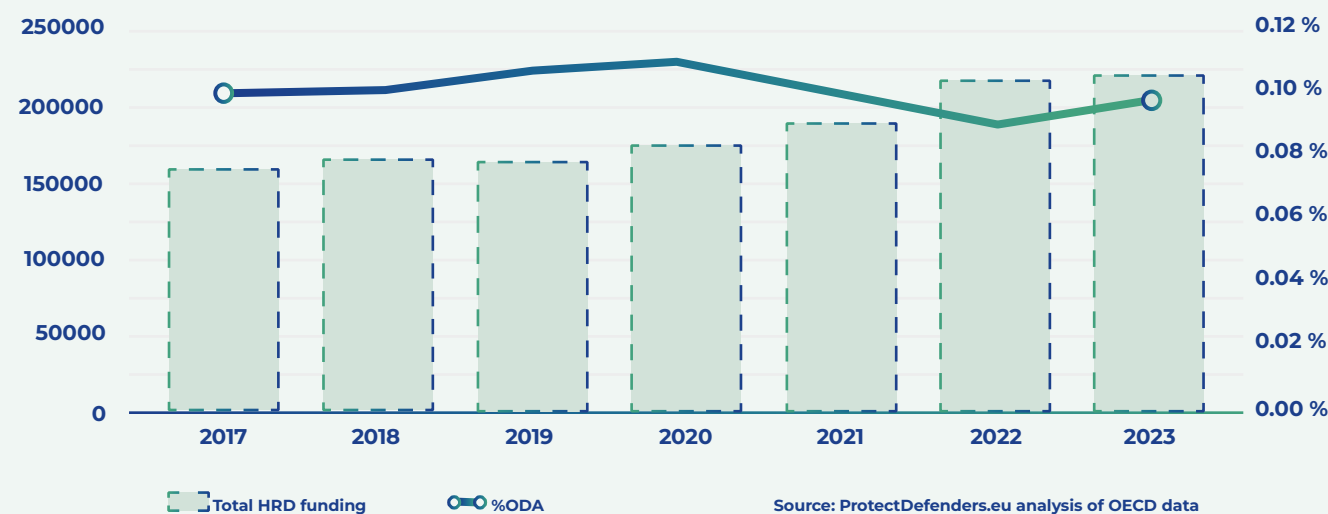
1. HRD funding in absolute and relative terms

Over the three years from 2021 to 2023, the analysed donors¹² contributed a total of **USD 612 million** to human rights defenders. This is a welcome investment, considering that funds provided to HRDs over the four years from 2017 to 2020 amounted to USD 691 million.¹³

However, while disbursements dedicated to human rights defenders have gradually increased over the years, they represent a lower weight in terms of overall ODA from those governments: **an average of 0.10%**. So,

while the volume of global funding disbursed towards HRDs has increased in nominal terms, it represents a lower percentage of total official development assistance provided by donors during those years.

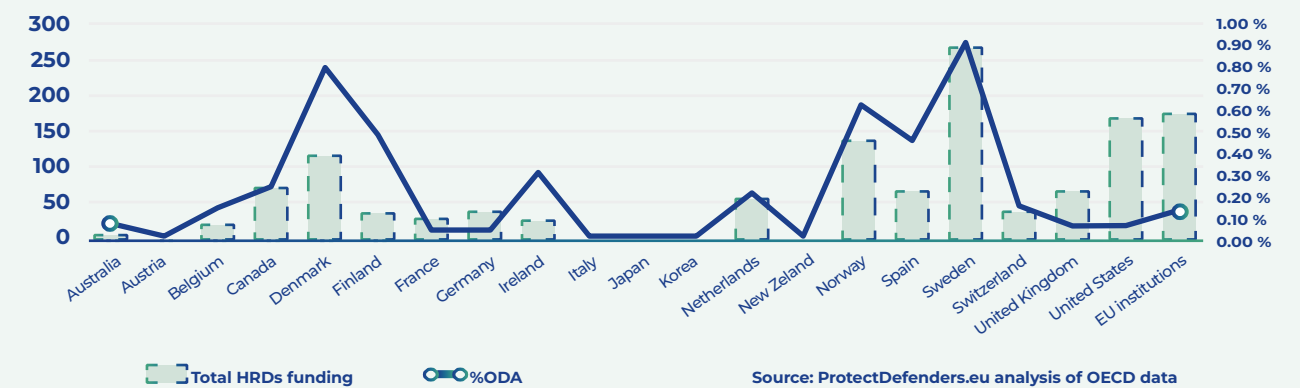
Total HRD funding 2017-2023 (mn USD)



The increased support to HRDs in nominal terms and the continuous support in relative terms can be explained by different factors. Funding for organisations focused on supporting HRDs¹⁴, many of whom are members of PD.eu, has continued to rise, with an annual average increase of approximately 12%. Meanwhile, the levels of ODA during the period

2021 to 2023 have been the highest recorded since 1960, with the increase partially due to an increase in humanitarian assistance, given the war in Ukraine. This is also why donors' support to HRDs decreased as a percentage of ODA from 2021 to 2022, which had grown exponentially that year.

Individual contributions to HRDs 2017-2023 (mn USD)



Note that this graph captures ODA resources only, while some of the identified governments¹⁵ also use non-ODA to support HRDs.

When analysing individual donor contributions to HRDs during the three years, a mixed picture emerges.¹⁶ Similar to the analysis for the period 2017-2020, **Sweden** was the country that contributed the most both in nominal terms and as a percentage of ODA between 2021 and 2023: a total of almost USD 125 million and 0.8% of the country's total development assistance. Despite this, it represented a lower ratio of total ODA compared to the previous period (1.07%). Nonetheless, the country still ranks first in terms of ODA ratio dedicated to the work of HRDs throughout the full period 2017-2023, having contributed 0.9% of its assistance. **Denmark** also ranked relatively high in terms of contributions to HRDs, be it for 2021-2023 or the longer period 2017-2023.¹⁷

Moreover, **Sweden, the EU institutions and the US**¹⁸ together continue to represent **almost half** of total

contributions to HRDs that can be tracked, be it between 2021 and 2023 or for the full period 2017-2023; however, the latter two donors allocated a maximum of 0.13% of their ODA to HRDs. Two other aspects that are worthy of note: Finland, Sweden and Spain significantly increased their funding during the 2021-2023 period, due to investments in the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) by Finland and Sweden, and the focus on women human rights defenders by Spain. Finally, Austria, Italy, Japan and Korea ranked the lowest, as they did not report any HRD-focused projects during the analysed period.

The analysis shows that from 2020 to 2023 there has been an increase of almost 50% in the references to HRDs in project descriptions, which helps explain the overall increase observed during the period 2021-2023. This is a welcome trend, albeit not always followed by the proportional increase in attached funding. Considering the levels of funding since 2017, the research shows that donors have been steadily supporting the work of HRDs, with an upwards trend

¹² For comparability with the 2017-2020 period, the donors analysed here are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the US, and the EU Institutions.

¹³ This excludes contributions made through the multilateral system.

¹⁴ See methodology section

¹⁵ The Netherlands, for example

¹⁶ Disclaimer: key informant interviews were crucial for identifying relevant support to HRDs where this was not fully recognisable via database research. However, some gaps in the data persist for some countries even after these exchanges, given the difficulty of accessing relevant information through the OECD database, which was kept as the key source for the sake of accuracy and consistency of analysis across all donors.

¹⁷ The country's significant volume of resources can be explained by disbursements to Dignity, a human rights organisation fighting against torture, in addition to initiatives under the platform Globalt Fokus, the Danish Institute for Human Rights and other programmes that safeguard democracy and human rights (such as the Digital Democracy Initiative, launched in 2023).

¹⁸ Note that the dataset used as a basis for the analysis excludes US grants to the National Endowment for Democracy.

throughout this period, which was more evident between 2022 and 2023. The steady increase from 2020 can be attributed to certain factors:



A renewed **focus on building movements for economic, social and cultural rights**, given the inclusion of the Decent Work agenda in the OECD CRS code list.



Additional **efforts to address COVID-19**, as restrictions brought in by the pandemic led to abuses, often against HRDs themselves, inspiring new working modalities and highlighting the need to apply a human rights-based approach to efforts to build back better.



A growing **focus on climate action**, for which indigenous and environmental activists have been instrumental, in addition to the growing global need to protect and promote women's and LGBTIQ+ rights, given the rise of right-wing extremism in several places.

HRD funding in comparison with funding for the facilitation of orderly migration

It is worrying however, that the volume of funding going to HRD-related projects is still much lower than what donors provide as ODA for other issues. For example, ODA for 'Facilitation of orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility'¹⁹, excludes projects addressing root causes of forced displacement and irregular migration and is focused on building the capacity of partner countries. Migration and mobility can and should be intrinsically

linked to human rights, but **migration concerns appear to override the protection and promotion of fundamental rights**, given the rapid expansion of funding in that area in a short timeframe, compared to the stagnation of HRD funding: from 0.03% of donors' spending in 2017, investment in the management of migration quickly represented 0.5% of the ODA of the analysed donors in 2023.

Draft guidelines on eligibility of human rights activities for ODA

It is also concerning that information about donor funding benefitting HRDs may become even more diluted in the future, considering the draft guidelines²⁰ on eligibility of human rights activities for ODA, proposed by the Working Party on Development Finance Statistics of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (June 2025). While DAC donors have enlarged the scope of activities that can be considered as ODA for reporting under the 'Facilitation of orderly migration', these draft guidelines refer to an unprecedented and distressing distinction between objectives that are 'developmental' and the so-called 'moral and legal' motivation of human rights activities, as if one does not depend on the other.

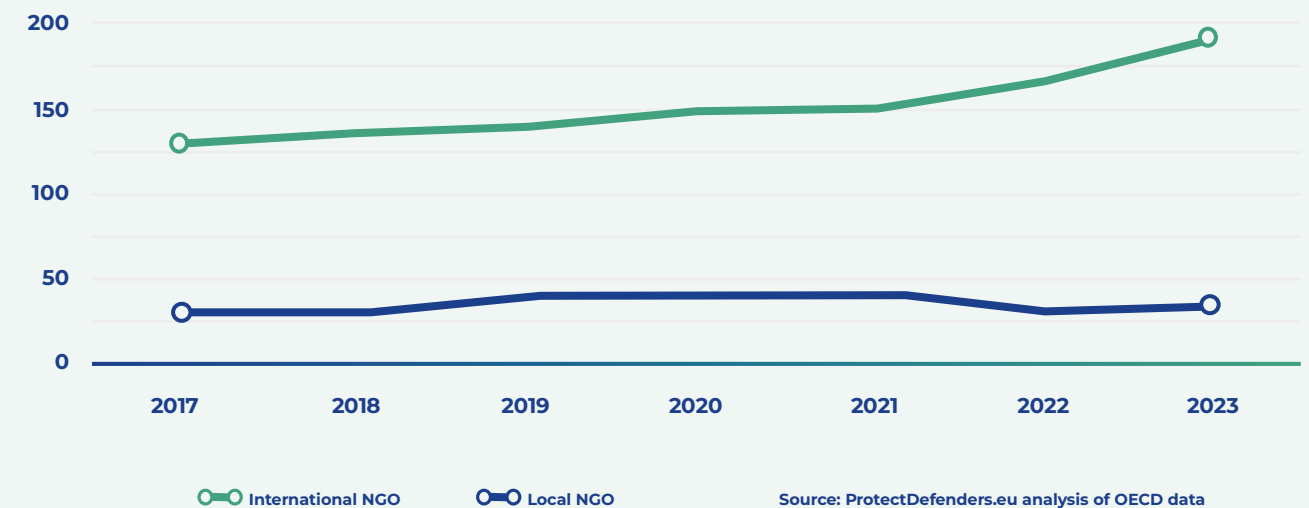
By excluding core contributions from ODA to organisations currently identified as supporting HRDs, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs and the International Commission of Jurists, to name a few, there is a risk of decreasing even further the funding going towards the protection and promotion of human rights where this is needed the most. This is notwithstanding the fact that such an approach to differentiate between human rights and development is problematic and ethically questionable.

2. Channels of funding

International or donor country-based NGOs²¹, from now on referred to as international NGOs, continue to be by far the most common channel of support to HRDs: they received **79-84% of donor funding** towards HRDs between 2021 and 2023. This represents a slightly higher reliance on this channel of funding compared to 2017-2020, when international NGOs received 77-80% of the funding.

Developing country-based NGOs, from now on referred to as **local NGOs**, directly received **approximately 16-21%** of donor funding between 2021 and 2023. This represented a decrease compared to 2017-2020, which had seen 29% of overall funding going to these organisations in 2019.

Channels of HRD funding 2017-2023 (mn USD)



Despite the small share of direct contributions going to local NGOs in comparison to international NGOs, most donors supported local actors. This overview confirms the trend observed by ProtectDefenders.eu since 2013, when it began analysing financial trends in support of HRDs, that local actors are more often indirectly supported through international organisations.²²

As far as can be learned via desk research, **50-53% of donor funding reached local NGOs, either directly or via international NGOs**, between 2021 and 2023. This represented a lower proportion than in the period 2017-2020, when local NGOs had received 48-58% of donor funds, directly or indirectly.

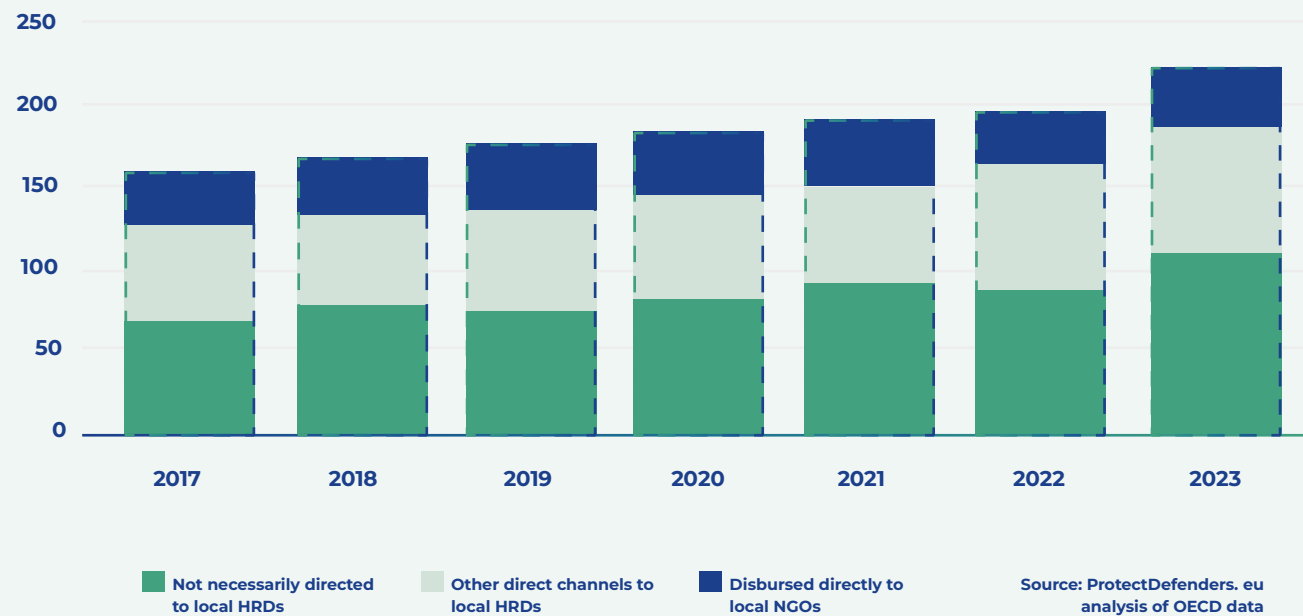
¹⁹ OECD CRS code 15190, which was added to the OECD DAC system in 2017, justifying the lower level of disbursements that year. The code reflects donors' concerns over the so-called 2015 European migration crisis and raised [criticism](#) from civil society.

²⁰ Draft OECD DAC guidelines - [Eligibility of human rights activities for ODA \(DCD/DAC/STAT\(2025\)31\)](#).

²¹ According to the OECD, donor-country based NGOs are 'NGOs organised at the national level, based and operated either in the donor country or another donor country', while international NGOs are 'organised on an international level. Some international NGOs may act as umbrella organisations with affiliations in several donor and/or recipient countries.' More information is available here: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/5d646dd8-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5d646dd8-en>

²² For more information about this trend see Chapter 3 on pages 47-53 of [The Landscape of Public International Funding for Human Rights Defenders \(2024\)](#).

What trickles down to local HRDs 2017-2023 (mn USD)



In addition to what donors report as going directly to local NGOs (16-21%), it is possible to ascertain that between **29% and 37% of donor funding goes via international NGOs to local HRDs** (while in 2017-2020 it oscillated between 31% and 39%). This implies that, while donors increased their level of support to international NGOs in 2023, keeping approximately the same level of funding for local NGOs, those additional funds did not necessarily get passed on from the international to the local level.

Funding channelled through international NGOs went towards projects with a specific focus on the protection of HRDs and their organisational strengthening. Resources passed to local NGOs may also be part of specific sub-granting mechanisms²³ and there are also cases where local NGOs fund HRDs themselves²⁴.

As with the 2017-2020 period²⁵, **there is still a significant proportion of the funding that does not necessarily reach local HRDs**. Though it is not a certainty that this is the case, the lack of available information does not allow for an alternative categorisation of the data. Should this be confirmed, there is reason for concern, as local HRDs have a deeper understanding of their contexts, and a more efficient capacity to adapt to emerging challenges.

²³ Examples include the Global Fund for Women and the Global Equality Fund, which subgrant directly to local NGOs.

²⁴ Examples include the Human Rights Support Mechanism in Turkey, supported directly by the EU, and the Manusher Jonno Foundation based in Bangladesh, funded by the UK.

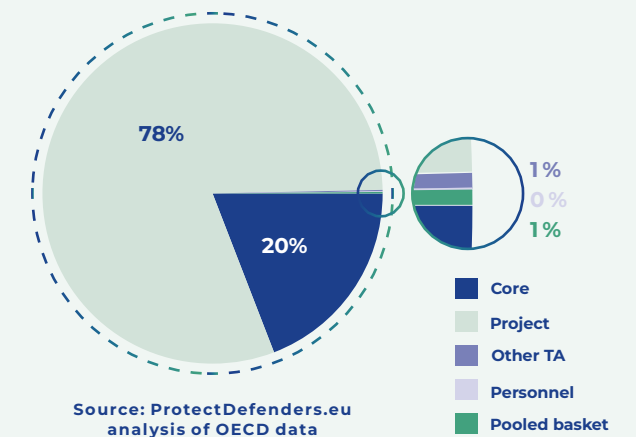
²⁵ See Chapter 1: Section 2 on page 21 of [The Landscape of Public International Funding for Human Rights Defenders \(2024\)](#).

3. Considering the type of aid

Donors disburse their ODA in different ways, ranging from core contributions to pooled programmes and funds, project-type interventions, experts and other technical assistance (TA).²⁶ As with the 2017-2020 analysis²⁷, donor contributions towards HRDs between 2021 and 2023 relied the most on **project-type interventions**.

When combining channels with modalities, the analysis shows that, even though donors provide core funding to both international and local NGOs, **it is the international NGOs that receive considerably more core funding**. Analysis of financial data for 2021-2023 shows that, in addition to having kept the same level of core funding for both international and local NGOs (which had decreased in the 2017-2020 period), donors have in fact now opted more for core funding than before. In 2021-2023, core funding represented 24% of overall support to HRDs, local and international, while it amounted to 20% between 2017 and 2020. This is a welcome development; however, the modality of core

Types of aid supporting HRDs 2017 - 2023



funding needs to be made more available to local organisations working on the frontlines.

Combined channels and types of aid for HRDs 2017-2020 (mn USD)



Core funding has several advantages for HRDs, including stability, the flexibility to combine their work for the rights of their community with their own protection, the capacity for long-term planning, the ability to adopt innovative approaches and adapt their work in contexts of increased instability and

risks, and a reduction in administrative burdens. Core funding is therefore a welcome modality, in line with the development effectiveness agenda, and a priority identified by HRDs themselves, as outlined in the report on funding from 2017 to 2020²⁸.

²⁶ In 2021-2023, the support via other technical assistance was 1% and basket funds/pooled funding was 1% - for the Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund and Outright International's COVID-19 Global LGBTIQ Emergency Fund, for example.

²⁷ See Chapter 1: Section 3 on page 22 of [The Landscape of Public International Funding for Human Rights Defenders \(2024\)](#).

²⁸ See Chapter 2: Section 2 on page 36 of [The Landscape of Public International Funding for Human Rights Defenders \(2024\)](#).

4. Geographical distribution of HRD funding

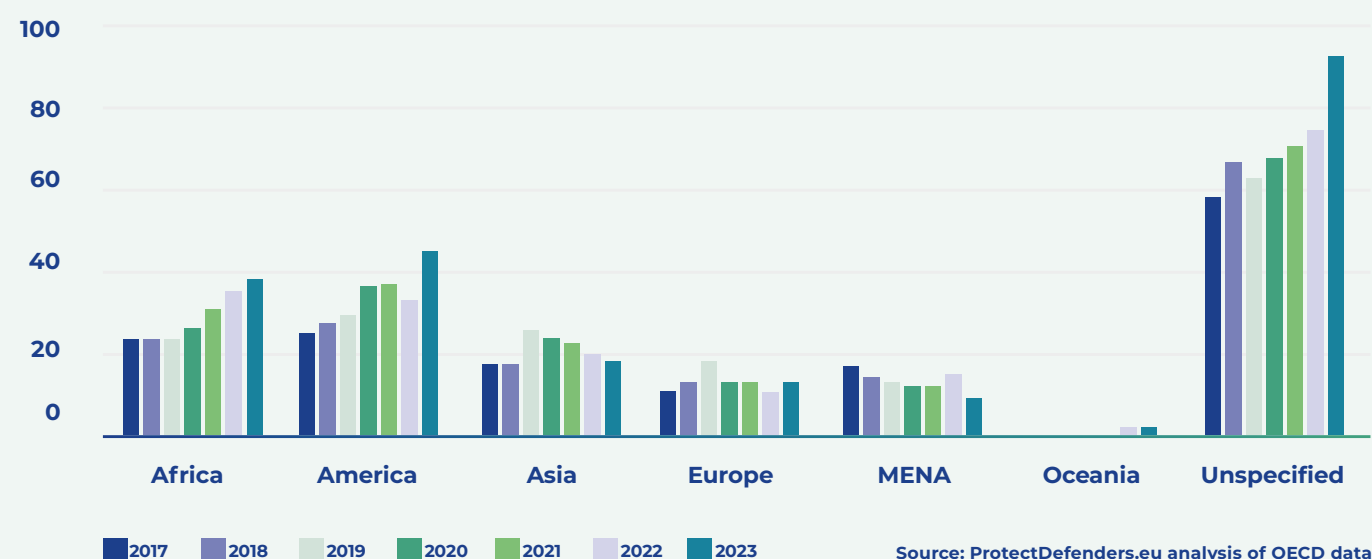
In 2021-2023, donor support to HRDs continued to be spread out across the globe, with variations by region. **Unspecified or global grants** that do not target a specific geography, remained the most common stream of funding towards HRDs, which is unsurprising considering donors' focus on international NGOs. Although this predominance was expected, it raises the issue of the need to further localise support programmes at national and regional levels, as recommended by HRDs in the report on funding from 2017 to 2020²⁹.

In 2021-2023, the **American** and **sub-Saharan** regions received the highest volume of funds, both amounting to USD 114 million, albeit with some variations across the three years. Donors' attention to the Americas is unsurprising, as the continent remains stage to the highest number of HRD killings, and was in fact the recipient of the largest volume of funding in 2017-2020. On the other hand, the sub-Saharan region has the highest number of countries and has been the focus of bilateral strategies, such as by Denmark and Sweden.

As with 2017-2020, **Oceania** received the lowest amount of funds, with only a handful of projects targeting women's rights, LGBTIQ+ rights and persons with disabilities. This was followed by the **MENA region**, which still receives a relatively low amount compared to other regions despite facing significant ongoing human rights crises, just as severe as in other parts of the world. In the three years of analysis, HRDs in the MENA region received USD 29 million or 5% of total funding going to HRDs³⁰.

During this period, donor contributions to HRDs seemed to have increased for the most part except for Asia, which received USD 22 million in 2021 and 19 million in 2023, and the Middle East and North Africa, which received 12 million in 2021, 16 million in 2022 and 11 million in 2023. The trend of increased funding in most regions is very welcome, but **it is of serious concern that Asia and the MENA region remain of low priority.**

HRD funding per region 2017-2023 (mn USD)



When assessing donor funding to HRDs from the different regions for a longer period, the picture is slightly different. While the growing or steady trend of financing HRDs in most regions since 2017 is welcome, there are some trends that may be of concern. Investment in the work of HRDs in Europe remained relatively stable throughout this period, even though the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine triggered a renewed interest in the protection of human rights in the region. And donors have not reversed the level of disinvestment in Asia since 2020, which is of concern since at least one of the region's countries (the Philippines) has been consistently reporting some of the highest numbers of annual attacks and killings of HRDs³¹.

Donor funding in countries with the highest numbers of killings of HRDs

Even though Colombia remains the country with the highest number of HRD casualties, donors have kept the same level of directly allocable or geographically targeted projects in the country through 2021-2023. This does not mean that much of the unspecified / global funding does not also benefit the country, in addition to the earmarked projects reflected here, however. It is not surprising that due to the increased conflict in Ukraine starting in 2022, the country received increased funding in 2023.

The fact that these countries have the highest number of attacks and killings of HRDs³² shows the need to reinforce funding in these locations. It goes without saying that this reinforcement should not take place at the expense of other regions, even if they do not portray similar indicators on HRD killings.

Unavoidably, existing or growing restrictions on foreign funding or civic space impacts the extent to which donors can continue to support projects in such contexts. In many of those contexts, there are national organisations that are willing to take on the administrative burdens and legal fees needed to receive global funds, and they can be a channel for funding smaller organisations and individual HRDs. Where there is a deterrent effect on donors' financial support due to the limitations of the context, this should be offset by non-financial support. Several donors have outlined guidelines for human rights defenders to harmonise efforts towards HRDs, such as Canada, the EU, Finland, Ireland and Norway.

Unspecified or global grants that do not target a specific geography, remained the most common stream of funding towards HRDs, which is unsurprising considering donors' focus on international NGOs.

²⁹ See Chapter 3 on page 47 of [The Landscape of Public International Funding for HRDs \(2024\)](#)

³⁰ This refers to funds earmarked to the region only, and not those provided to unspecified or global mechanisms that can then be channelled to those countries.

³¹ See the [Front Line Defenders Global Analysis](#) and the [HRD memorial](#)

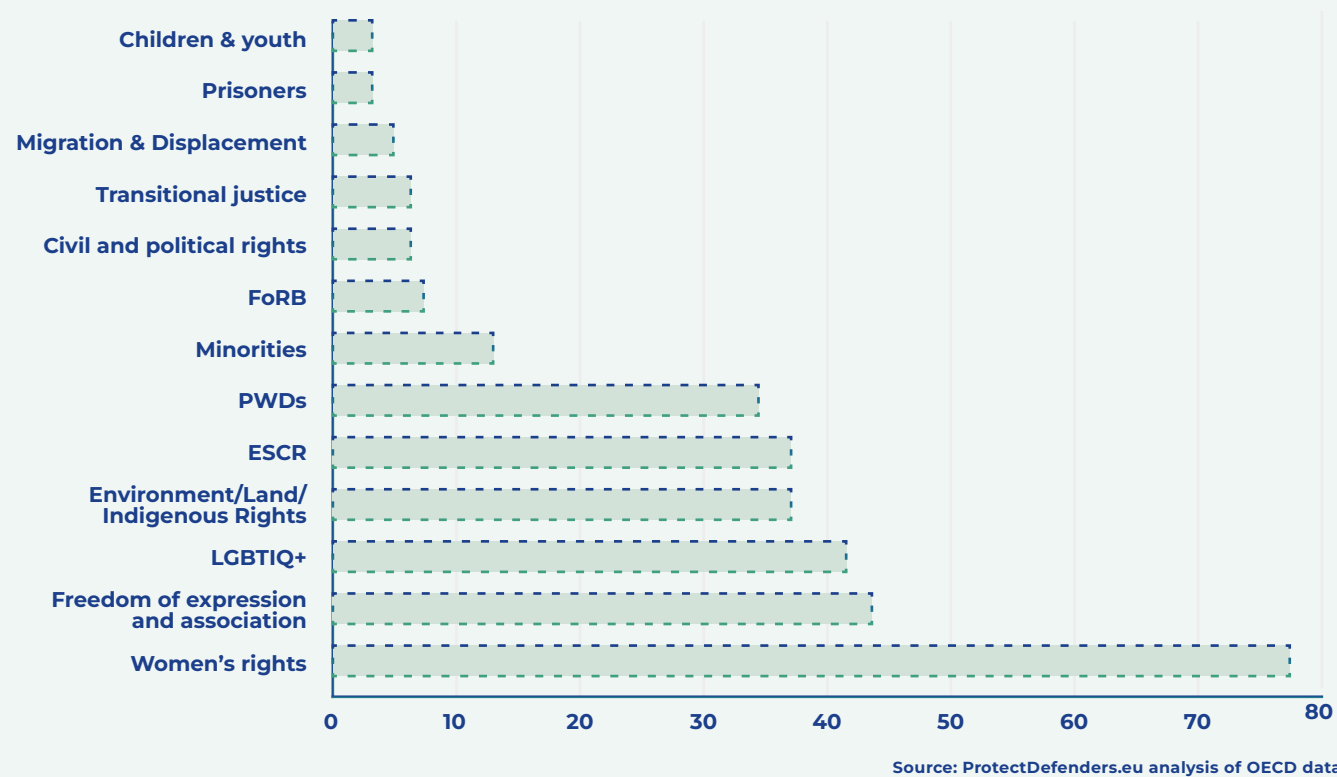
³² See the [Front Line Defenders Global Analysis](#) and the [HRD memorial](#)

5. Type of rights supported

Human rights are universal, as they are inherent to all human beings, and interdependent, as one set of rights cannot be fully enjoyed without others. Defenders thus work on a wide array of issues and concerns that are often interwoven or simultaneously addressed by a project. Between 2021 and 2023, more than half (56%)

of HRD-related ODA was dedicated to defenders that do **not necessarily fall under a specific category of issues or type of rights**. This is similar to 2017-2020, when the percentage was 58%. The remaining 44% can be categorised in the following way.

Typology of rights under funding analysis 2021-2023 (mn USD)



Funding for **women's rights** is once again³³ reported as the highest amount disbursed between 2021 and 2023. This is followed by **freedom of expression and association**, given the role of journalists in promoting and defending human rights, and which seems to have surpassed the attention given to environmental, land and indigenous rights, together with LGBTIQ+ rights.

Funding for women's rights was subject to an increase of 33% between 2021 and 2023. Nonetheless, the **largest increase** for the reported period was observed in the **defence and promotion of economic, social and cultural rights**, which more than doubled during this reporting period.³⁴ Attention provided to this sector was mostly dedicated to strengthening the capacity of local trade unions, and key donors include Finland, Norway and Sweden.

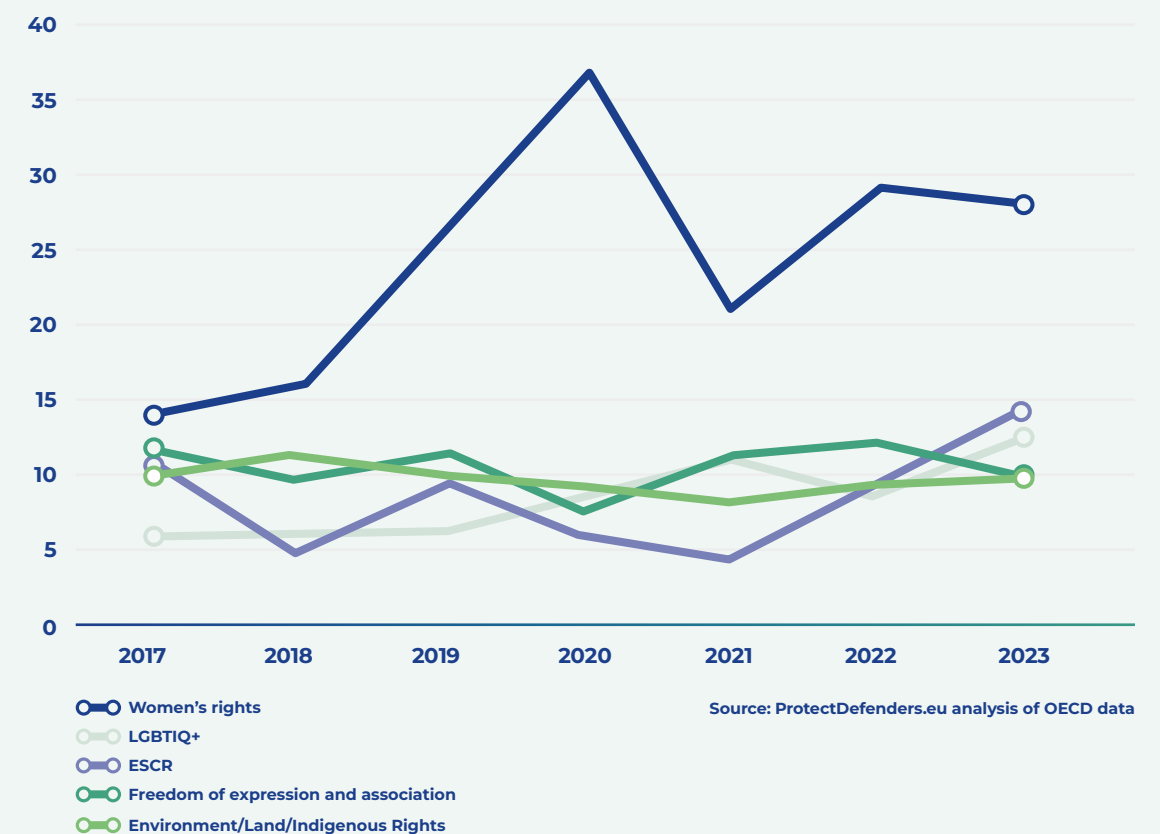
Although **environmental, land and indigenous rights** are high on public agendas, given the escalating need for climate action, support to these HRDs only ranked fourth for 2021-2023. Traceable funds to this sector increased by 25% between 2021 and 2023. But because this followed a decrease of funding of approximately 12% between 2017 and 2020, it was not enough to keep investments in these rights in the top three priorities of donors.

Support to **LGBTIQ+** rights also remained a top priority, as several donors prioritise the fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in their development strategies.

The rights that received the same level of investment in 2021-2023 as in 2017-2020 were civil and political rights, and the rights of persons with disabilities, prisoners, children and youth – the latter of which had been subject to a recommendation around the need for strengthened political support in the report on funding from 2017 to 2020³⁵.

The trends are relatively similar when looking back to 2017, except that during the longer period, support to environmental, land and indigenous rights defenders surpasses LGBTIQ+ in terms of cumulative support over the seven years.

Funding evolution to the top 5 types of rights 2017-2023 (mn USD)



³³ See Chapter 1 Section 5 on page 24 of [The Landscape of Public International Funding for HRDs \(2024\)](#)

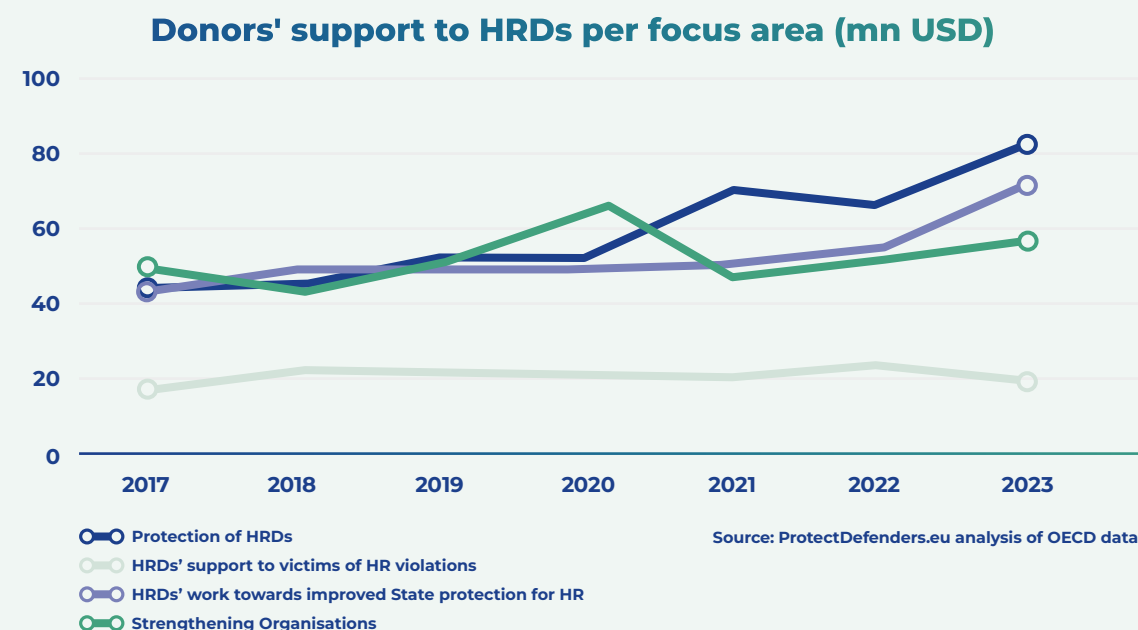
³⁴ Some of the disbursements reported in 2023 might correspond to multiannual payments, and thus amounts could be significantly reduced after 2023.

³⁵ See Chapter 2 Section 4 on page 40 of [The Landscape of Public International Funding for Human Rights Defenders \(2024\)](#)

6. Purpose of the funding

Donors provided diverse support to human rights defenders between 2021 and 2023. The strategies can of course be intertwined, but the four highlighted below were selected based on the emphasis on this funding in all individual projects. Most strategies received increased funding between 2021 and 2023, except for HRD support to victims of human rights violations.

When considering financial support to HRDs over the seven years from 2017 to 2023, all four focus areas have received more support. **Protection of HRDs is the area that increased the most** during the seven years, by 80%, followed by HRD work towards improved State protection of human rights, which increased by 59%.



Protection of HRDs

Protection of HRDs remained a key area of focus for donors during the period 2021-2023, amounting to investment of USD 214 million. This is very welcome in a context of continuously increasing reprisals against HRDs. Almost half of the funds were dedicated to emergency protection measures, which include, inter alia, temporary shelters, relocation, immediate litigation/ legal aid and post-trauma support in the form of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). In this context, key informant interviews reconfirmed the relevance of flagship initiatives, such as Spain's Programme for the Protection and Temporary Shelter

of Human Rights Defenders, the German Elisabeth-Selbert-Initiative and the EU's ProtectDefenders.eu.

Capacity-building in protection and security, in addition to digital protection, received increased attention from donors. Other areas of investment include advocacy for standard setting and visibility of the work of HRDs, all of which also increased during this period. Approximately 40% of the funding allocated to protection measures between 2021 and 2023 focused on a holistic approach to the safety of defenders rather than prioritising a specific strategy.

In terms of type of HRDs, donors provided more attention to the protection of defenders of freedom of expression and association between 2021 and 2023.³⁶ Renewed attention to this group is welcome, given the increased threats they face – the most targeted sector of human rights defence in 2022, according to

Front Line Defenders³⁷. ESCR defenders received by far the least support for protection, as most programmes focused more on the capacity-building and policy work of trade unionists. This does not mean of course that defenders from these groups did not benefit from non-earmarked or general protection projects.

Temporary relocation as a protection tool

Under protection measures, donors provide support for litigation, legal aid, physical, political and psychosocial accompaniment, in addition to temporary relocation. Temporary relocation is a crucial tool for HRDs to be able to leave their location quickly when facing an immediate risk and several donors have their own relocation programmes³⁸, while others support temporary relocation via other organisations³⁹.

Several of the key informant interviewees confirmed that temporary relocation is a priority in the long-run and acknowledged new risks that the development community should tackle, namely transnational repression. Given this political acknowledgement of the importance of temporary relocation, it is important to also consider how this is translated into funding.

Data shows that, while overall support and protection of HRDs have increased, specific earmarked funds for temporary relocation have not followed this growth between 2021 and 2023, representing **only 11% of overall funds in favour of HRDs and 31% of total protection measures**. While efforts from donors to support temporary relocation are welcome, it is essential to increase respective funding. In a world that is facing exacerbated challenges to human rights, the security and protection of human rights defenders is more critical than ever.

³⁶ 10% of defenders of freedom of expression and 9% of freedom of association and protest, which are aggregated by this analysis

³⁷ [Front Line Defenders Global Analysis 2022](#)

³⁸ ProtectDefenders.eu and the European Union Temporary Relocation Platform (EUTRP), funded by the EU; Germany's Elisabeth-Selbert-Initiative; the Spanish Programme for Support and Protection of Human Rights Defenders at risk; the Claim Your Space initiative funded by Denmark; the Oslo Breathing Space City funded by Norway; the Marianne Initiative for human rights defenders in France; Finland's new pilot programme of temporary relocation; and the National Endowment for Democracy's Gershman Fund for Democrats at Risk

³⁹ Such as Front Line Defenders, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), the Coalition for Human Rights Defenders (NCHRD-K), Shelter City or the Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund

Improved State Protection for Human Rights

The second area that received more funding between 2021 and 2023 was HRD work towards improved State protection for human rights. This was in fact the focus area that increased most between 2021 and 2023, by approximately 35%. Policy work was once again the most supported strategy including advocacy, research, monitoring of human rights violations, documentation of cases of enforced disappearances and campaigning. Financing as a strategy followed very closely, given the significant amount of global funds, mechanisms and projects that aim to subgrant to grassroots organisations.⁴⁰

Organisational strengthening and HRD capacity-building

Between 2021 and 2023, donors invested USD 157 million in organisational strengthening and HRD capacity-building. Donors have mostly supported journalists, trade unions and disabled people's organisations, through direct capacity-building or by forging alliances and movements between groups. A third strategy is donor support to intermediary organisations who can then subgrant to HRDs and their organisations for training purposes. Donors also invest in awards such as the Martin Ennals Award, supported by Ireland and Switzerland.

Donors' growing focus on the Decent Work Agenda – as evidenced by their respective official reporting – justifies the increased focus once more on building the capacities of ESCR-related HRDs. 2023 shows a peak of funding in this area due to projects from different donors in favour of local trade unions, some of which are multiannual payments, so not necessarily to be sustained the following years.

HRD support to victims of violations

Finally, HRD support to victims of human rights violations in 2021-2023, represented 10% of traceable funding, in comparison to 13% in 2017-2020. As in the past, and according to available information, HRDs use two key strategies to support victims of human rights violations: litigation/legal aid and rehabilitation support. The volume of donor support in this area may be underestimated however, as it can be reported under the guise of development work⁴¹

Key informant interviews reconfirmed the relevance of flagship initiatives, such as Spain's Programme for the Protection and Temporary Shelter of Human Rights Defenders, the German Elisabeth-Selbert-Initiative and the EU's ProtectDefenders.eu.

7. Linking to the Sustainable Development Goals

Since 2018, all donors have been encouraged by the OECD to link their ODA to the Sustainable Development Goals. This helps us understand which lenses are used by donors to support the work of HRDs. For the years 2021 – 2023, financial support to HRDs has been mostly linked with SDG 5 (Gender equality), which is a significant change from the period 2017 – 2020, when SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) had been the main Goal to which HRD support contributed.

While it was expected that SDG 5 would be preponderant during this analysis period, given donors' focus on women's and LGBTIQ+ rights, it is still somewhat surprising that this surpasses references to SDG 16 by more than 60% (almost 1,700 projects prioritise SDG 5, while about 1,000 are linked to SDG 16). This is mostly because, in addition to targeted projects that promote women's and LGBTIQ+ rights, several programmes that would be expected to be broader than gender equality do prioritise SDG 5.⁴²

Between 2021 and 2023, governments also linked HRD work to SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth), given their support to economic, social and cultural rights, and, to a lesser extent, SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities), given the focus on the promotion of essential rights to well-being. Other SDGs that donors report as relevant to HRD projects, although at a much lesser degree, include SDG 1 (No poverty), SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), SDG 4 (Quality education), SDG 15 (Life on land) and SDG 17 (Global partnerships).

While the overall transversality of HRD work is welcome, there is significant room to further mainstream support to this group. For example, even though environment, land and indigenous rights are the fourth most addressed issue between 2021 and 2023, there were hardly any projects linked to SDG 13 (Climate action), and only a handful prioritising SDG 15 (Life on land). This may indicate that there is still a long way to go in ensuring that all donors' services consider including support to HRDs in their work.

Financial support to HRDs has been mostly linked with SDG 5 (Gender equality), which is a significant change from the period 2017 – 2020, when SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) had been the main Goal to which HRD support contributed.

⁴⁰ Examples include the Global Equality Fund, Mama Cash, and a project led by international NGO Plan, supported by Canada, aimed at supporting grassroots women's rights organisations to do local advocacy.

⁴¹ Organisations engaged in these strategies include the Dui Han in China and Addameer in Palestine, funded by Norway, Ireland and Spain; the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights funded by the Netherlands, and the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, financed by Sweden to support survivors of torture with holistic rehabilitation services.

⁴² Examples include the European Roma Rights Centre, projects in support of persons with disabilities and their organisations, investments to the Swedish umbrella organisation Olof Palme International Center, projects working with media and the safety of journalists, and the EU emergency fund for HRDs at risk.

8. Women and LGBTIQ+ HRDs

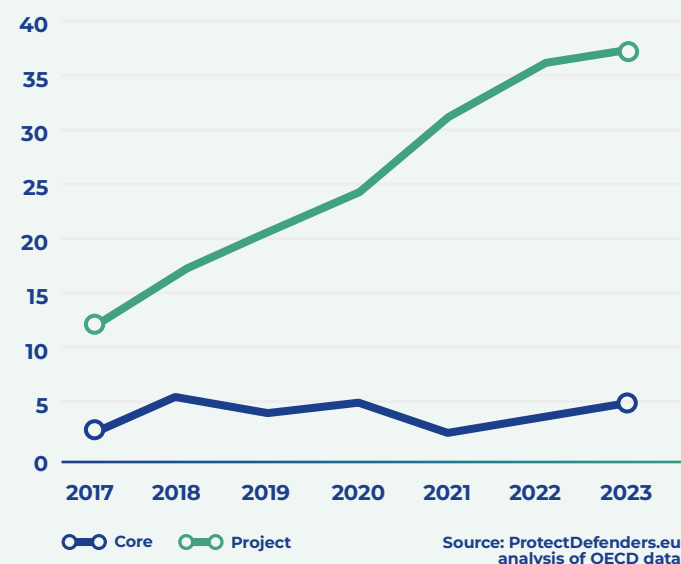
While the top five types of rights⁴³ that were supported remained relatively steady across the seven-year period from 2017 to 2023, with slight increases noted in all of them, support to women's rights remained at an outstanding level in nominal terms. This is due, inter alia, to the anniversaries taking place of several international conferences under UN auspices dedicated to women's rights, new movements created as a response to right-wing extremism, and the inclusion of violence against women as a new CRS code after the adoption of the SDGs.

Moreover, some of the analysed donors have long identified women and girls as a priority of their development strategy and this is reflected in corresponding support to HRDs. Several donors have also adopted feminist foreign policies, which have led to mainstreaming support to WHRDs through their external programmes. Such examples include Canada, France, Germany, Spain and Sweden. Spain has invested greatly in the capacity and movement-building of women human rights defenders in 2021-2023, with funds coming from the central government, regions and municipalities.

In relative terms, **resources for both women's rights and LGBTIQ+ rights have mostly risen since 2017**, with the volume of funds having doubled during this period, even though the report on funding from 2017 to 2020 had shown that WHRDs, including indigenous activists, considered that their capacities were not recognised or invested in.⁴⁴ It is important to note however that most funds available to groups or organisations focused on women and LGBTIQ+ rights have been channelled as projects, rather than as core support, which remained at approximately the same level as before.

Several of the analysed funds are programmed in a way that addresses overlapping social identities and concurrent forms of oppression based on two or more grounds. For example, several of the project-based one-year initiatives analysed in 2021-2023 targeted women indigenous activists, namely in the Americas. The breakdown per type of rights thus relies on the information available about the project but is based on the premise that all rights are interconnected.

Evolution of project vs core support for WHRD, LGBTIQ+ and women's rights organisations worldwide (mn USD)



Donors invested more in the organisational strengthening, be it through capacity-building or support for coalition-building, of WHRDs between 2021 and 2023. Many of the contributions, provided directly or indirectly, were aimed at building their capacity as development actors and creating movements across geographies and sectors.

Of concern is the fact that LGBTIQ+ defenders were subject to a marginal amount of targeted protection measures between 2021 and 2023, even though they remain one of the most targeted groups.

Defenders of women's and LGBTIQ+ rights, in addition to freedom of expression and association were the groups that mostly received funds to support victims of human rights violations.⁴⁵ Finally, women's rights defenders were by far the highest recipient of funds to improve State protection throughout the three years. Several targeted funds and programmes led by international NGOs were implemented in such a way to support the advocacy work of grassroots feminist movements.

9. Funding for HRDs in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Contributions to HRDs in the MENA region remain **far below what is urgently needed**, even as they confront systemic and widespread violations carried out with near-total impunity. Among other wars and crises, the unresolved Israel-Palestine conflict has been in an acute stage since the Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023, with relentless Israeli bombardments that have killed tens of thousands of civilians, displaced almost the entire population of Gaza, destroyed infrastructure on a massive scale and plunged hundreds of thousands of people into starvation and preventable disease. While donors may be protecting HRDs in this context, the data available to the end of 2023 cannot reflect this support yet.

Additionally, much of the ODA channelled to the region has been taking the form of humanitarian assistance, making it difficult to discern if it includes HRD protection. Nonetheless, the situation in the MENA region seems to be deteriorating across the board, as detailed in the report on funding from 2017 to 2020.⁴⁶ It is thus deeply troubling that

donor support for HRDs in the region declined between 2021 and 2023 precisely when increased investment was most urgently needed in response to escalating threats and growing needs on the ground. According to key informant interviews, the MENA region is considered as much a priority as other regions. However, central government support is often not specifically earmarked from the outset, leaving regional embassy-managed funds to play a critical role in filling the gap and shaping the support landscape.

As reported in the 2024 study, human rights actors in the Middle East and North Africa believe that funding has been decreasing over time, given the diversion of donors' focus from human rights to issues such as stability, counterterrorism, migration and trade, all of which rely heavily on the fulfilment of rights. Analysis from 2021 to 2023 shows that funding available to local NGOs increased slightly during this period, though it did not revert to 2017 levels.

Human rights actors in the Middle East and North Africa believe that funding has been decreasing over time, given the diversion of donors' focus from human rights to issues such as stability, counterterrorism, migration and trade.

⁴³ See Section in this report on Type of Rights

⁴⁴ See Section on Challenges for Women-Led, LGBTIQ+ and Feminist Organisations on page 61 of [The Landscape of Public International Funding for HRDs \(2024\)](#)

⁴⁵ Of relevance is the volume of funds specifically targeting LGBTIQ+ defenders by the Act Together for Inclusion Fund, funded by Canada in 2022.

⁴⁶ See Case Study on MENA on pages 67-76 in [The Landscape of Public International Funding for Human Rights Defenders \(2024\)](#)

Conclusions and Looking Ahead

Human Rights Defenders are indispensable actors in the achievement of sustainable development and safeguarding the protection and promotion of human rights, freedom and civil liberties. This research makes the following findings:



Despite increased overall financial support from donors to HRDs between 2021 and 2023, this is still a modest contribution, be it in nominal or relative terms. This is notable given that ODA reached a historical peak during this period, which could have contributed to boosting support to defenders. The level of financial support available to HRDs from donors is simply not enough.



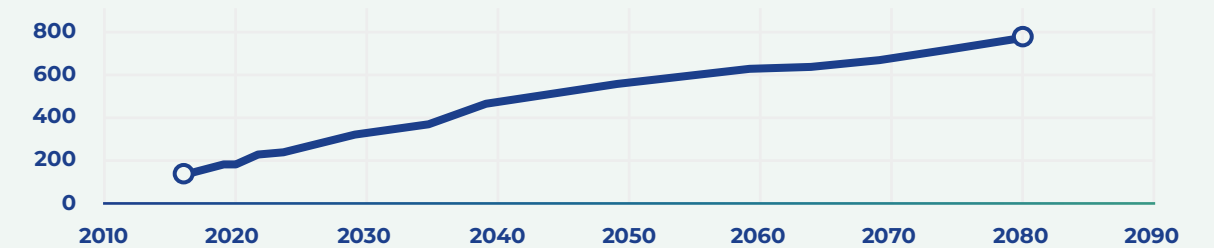
Human rights defenders are increasingly under attack, and the modest levels of funding available are now of even more concern, given the rise of right-wing extremism in different geographies around the world. 2024 was considered by many as 'the' year of elections, with countries representing about half of the world population going to the polls. This year redefined political landscapes across the world, with voters expressing frustration towards their incumbents, and bringing the unprecedented electoral successes of far-right parties. This has also been the case in countries that have been traditional donors of human rights work. This new political landscape is of great concern for HRDs who need to fight for their lives, let alone to live them with dignity, as the far-right ideology tends to legitimise violence. The ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza have been placing emphasis on defence and militarisation to the detriment of ODA, especially in European countries. These multiple challenges put at risk any gains in promoting human rights and they make the work of HRDs even more precarious.



Despite this outlook, donors continue to prioritise the work of human rights defenders in their development cooperation. **Key informant interviews confirm that protecting and promoting human rights defenders is expected to remain a priority in the years to come**, even with changes in government. However, this does not mean that such prioritisation will be backed by adequate resources – some of the interviewees confirm that a significant amount of support provided by Embassies is more a political support that relies on non-financial means, such as attending and following court hearings of HRDs, or facilitating visa mechanisms. In fact, what will happen in terms of financing remains an open question for most interviewees.

Based on the key findings from this financial analysis, it is possible to produce a forecast for the years to come in terms of how donors' support could/will evolve if the rate of funding is kept at the same level⁴⁷:

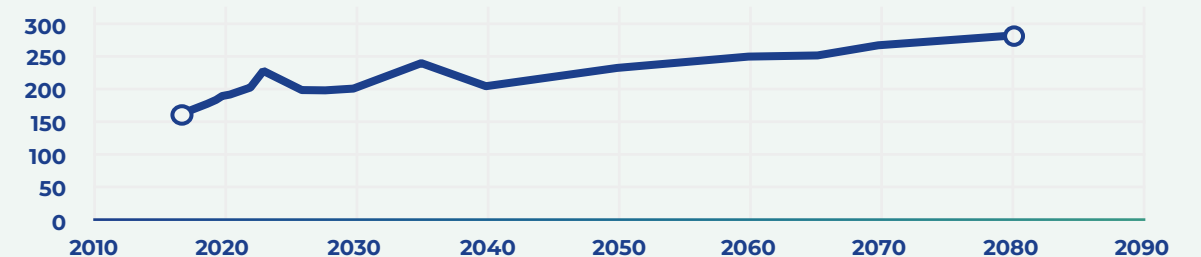
Forecast of donors' funding to HRDs at the current rate



Source: ProtectDefenders.eu analysis of OECD data

This forecast shows that, if the rate of funding was kept at the same level, and even though there has been growing support from donors to HRDs in nominal terms, this would remain a relatively small investment in absolute – and possibly – relative terms, **reaching an annual USD 500 million only after 2040**. This rate of investment would remain too low for the needs of HRDs.

Forecast of donors' funding to HRDs given recent announcements of ODA cuts



Source: ProtectDefenders.eu analysis of OECD data

However, the rise of far-right movements to power, especially but not exclusively in Europe, in addition to the growing concern for defence, have led to several announcements of ODA cuts⁴⁸ from key donors of HRDs. If these reductions were to materialise, the scenario becomes much bleaker: donors would **not even reach USD 300 million per year by 2080**⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ For more information about this forecast, please refer to the methodology section.

⁴⁸ <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/charting-fallout-aid-cuts>

⁴⁹ This is based on official announcements from Canada, France, Germany, the UK and the US, as outlined in a [recent analysis from the Center for Global Development](#), in addition to Sweden and the Netherlands. For more information about this forecast, please refer to the methodology section.

⁵⁰ [Funding-at-a-Crossroads-HRFN-Sept-2025.pdf](#)

It is worth noting also that the Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN) has outlined⁵⁰ how human rights-focused ODA is projected to decline by up to USD 1.9 billion annually by 2026.

It is crucial to ensure that this forecast does not become a reality.

This is even more important in a climate marked by uncertainty around the future of ODA, both in terms of the quantity of available funds, and of how these will support activities intended to protect and promote human rights. While the political landscape framing development cooperation in the years to come is bringing significant uncertainty, it will be important to safeguard the important role of HRDs in protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms.

While the demand for support is expected to far surpass the available resources, there are other elements that must be maintained, namely:



Donors continue to rely mainly on international NGOs (79-84%), which seems to go against HRDs' recommendation to further localise support. This over-reliance on international channels – often specialised actors in the field of human rights protection and promotion – does not imply that funds do not reach local organisations, but it does show that donors could **adopt a more balanced approach**.



It is crucial **not to leave regions behind**, as has been observed with Asia and the Middle East and North Africa.



Donors continue to prioritise project-type interventions (about 75%) rather than core funding. There is a need to prioritise core funding for local actors, so that these can continue working independently and in a manner that is relevant to their context. This is the case for specific groups, such as WHRDs and LGBTIQ+ rights defenders, who receive only a small share of core funding for their work.



This study also shows that **temporary relocation remains relatively steady as a proportion of protection and overall support to HRDs.** While donors acknowledge the importance of investing in these approaches, much more could be done, especially given the growing risks that defenders are facing – and are expected to face in the near future.

There is inconsistency in the reporting among donors, making it difficult to clearly assess levels of resources channelled to HRDs. Donors do not evaluate their level of input to HRDs, and it is difficult to have a clear overview of what goes to them. This is understandable considering the need to safeguard confidentiality in many contexts, and the blurry line between human rights defenders and engagement on human rights. However, more coordination would be welcome between government focal points for normative work and those points or agencies that in fact fund HRDs.



48 <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/charting-fallout-aid-cuts>

49 This is based on official announcements from Canada, France, Germany, the UK and the US, as outlined in a [recent analysis from the Center for Global Development](#), in addition to Sweden and the Netherlands. For more information about this forecast, please refer to the methodology section.

50 [Funding-at-a-Crossroads-HRFN-Sept-2025.pdf](#)



ProtectDefenders.eu is the European Union Human Rights Defenders mechanism, led by a Consortium of 12 NGOs active in the field of Human Rights.



Learn more

about our funding programmes for defenders, grassroots organisations and communities on our website
www.protectdefenders.eu

Join our community in social media

facebook.com/protectdefenders.eu
twitter.com/ProtectHRD_EU

Contact us

contact@protectdefenders.eu



This project is funded
by the European Union

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