

## 2025 CONSULTANCY VACANCY

### Mid-term evaluation of the EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism, ProtectDefenders.eu

#### **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

The EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism, ProtectDefenders.eu, was established in October 2015 with the financial support of the EIDHR. It is operated by a Consortium of 12 international NGOs namely, Front Line Defenders (FLD), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Network (ESCR-Net), International Gay and Lesbian Association (ILGA), Urgent Action Fund for Women Human Rights Defenders (UAF), Protection International, Peace Brigades International (PBI), Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders (EMHRF), Forum Asia and East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project/Defenddefenders (EHAHRDP), with the support and under the coordination of a Secretariat established in Brussels. The EU HRD mechanism is currently in its third phase of implementation, which started operating on November 1, 2022 with a contract of 54 months.

#### **SCOPE AND FOCUS**

The evaluation is carried out given that half of this implementation phase has already passed and in the context of the subsequent renewal of the mechanism. The aim is for its recommendations and findings to contribute to improvements and learning for the remaining current implementation and in the next programming phase.

The evaluation should primarily focus on assessing the *relevance* and *effectiveness* of the EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism.

This includes examining whether the mechanism remains fit-for-purpose in today's increasingly restrictive political and operational environment for HRDs, and to what extent it aligns with the evolving needs, contexts, and strategies of the defenders it seeks to support. Effectiveness should be understood not only as goal delivery, but as the capacity to respond in a timely and targeted way, while maintaining legitimacy and adaptability.

It should also examine the *progress made* during this third phase and assess the *impact* of the mechanism on the lives, security, and work of HRDs and their organisations. This includes understanding to what extent the mechanism has contributed to preserving civic space, enabling activism, strengthening local organisations, and mitigating the effects of repression. The evaluation should

consider both quantitative and qualitative indicators of progress and change, and include the voices of those directly impacted.

The evaluation should explore the *flexibility and responsiveness* of the mechanism, particularly its capacity to adapt to emerging or critical developments—such as abrupt escalations of repression, conflict and displacement, new authoritarian legislation, or geopolitical shifts.

It should further explore to what extent the mechanism contributes to the *long-term support* and sustainability of HRDs and their work. This includes assessing whether ProtectDefenders.eu helps build resilience and continuity over time for individuals and organisations, and whether its support leads to strengthened protection ecosystems and more autonomous human rights communities.

The evaluation should assess whether and how previous recommendations and lessons learned have been implemented, and what learning culture exists within the mechanism.

The evaluation should also measure how gender-sensitive the mechanism is in practice, and to what extent it has operationalised its gender sensitivity strategy across its interventions.

It should assess whether ProtectDefenders.eu is effectively reaching its priority constituencies: the most at-risk defenders—including WHRDs, LGBTI+ defenders, environmental and land rights defenders, defenders of minorities, journalists, HRDs in conflict areas, etc.

Importantly, the evaluation should begin to surface the *impacts of shrinking international funding* for human rights, and the implications this may have for the mechanism's capacity to respond to growing demands. This includes understanding how funding cuts from other sources are increasing reliance on this mechanism, and whether this additional pressure is being acknowledged and absorbed.

The evaluation should analyse to what extent the mechanism is affected by and able to *overcome growing operational limitations*, including legislative restrictions, difficulty in transferring funds, limitations in delivering protection services, and constraints to physical movement.

Given the contingency element embedded in the mechanism, the evaluation should explore how ProtectDefenders.eu is equipped to respond to emergencies in conflict and crisis zones, including the extent to which contingency responses are effective, safe, and context-sensitive.

It should assess the complementary and added value role of the mechanism compared to other EU or international instruments, and its distinctiveness and positioning among these.

In a forward-looking manner, the evaluation should highlight *contextual needs* that ProtectDefenders.eu is currently unable to address due to scope, mandate or resource constraints.

Finally, the evaluation should examine how ProtectDefenders.eu institutionally articulates with EU institutions and acts as a credible and legitimate actor in the broader EU external action and human rights ecosystem. This includes reviewing how the mechanism contributes to EU visibility, coherence, and leadership in the protection of human rights defenders globally.

## **PROPOSED GUIDING QUESTIONS**

### **RELEVANCE AND COVERAGE**

- To what extent does the Mechanism address the real and evolving needs of HRDs?
- How aligned is the support with defenders' strategies and contexts of operation?
- Are interventions timely, tailored, and accessible to the most at-risk defenders, as defined by the Consortium?
- How gender-sensitive and inclusive are the interventions?
- Is the Mechanism reaching priority constituencies (e.g. WHRDs, LGBTI+, land/environmental defenders, defenders in the move)?
- What is the added value of the mechanism within the global landscape of organizations that support HRD protection work ?

### **EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT**

- To what extent have the programme's objectives been achieved so far?
- What has been the impact of support on the security and wellbeing of beneficiaries?
- How has the support contributed to defenders' ability to continue or strengthen their work?
- What outcomes have been observed at individual, organisational and systemic levels?
- What have been the most successful and unsuccessful interventions—and why?
- Are there visible multiplier or ripple effects stemming from support provided?

### **FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY**

- How rapidly and appropriately does the Mechanism respond to emerging threats and crises?
- How does it adapt to shifting contexts such as conflict, repression, forced displacement or global crises?
- Has it demonstrated resilience and responsiveness in the face of operational restrictions?
- Is the contingency mechanism effective, safe and fit for purpose in emergency zones?

### **SUSTAINABILITY AND LONG-TERM SUPPORT**

- To what extent do interventions contribute to the long-term resilience of HRDs and their organisations?
- Is there evidence that support strengthens broader protection ecosystems?
- How well are different components of the Mechanism integrated to provide sustained support?
- Are there practices that promote autonomy and continuity beyond direct support?

### **EFFICIENCY AND INTERNAL COORDINATION**

- How efficient is the consortium model and internal governance of ProtectDefenders.eu?
- How well are resources allocated in relation to outcomes and priorities?
- What coordination mechanisms exist among partners and how effective are they?

### **EXTERNAL COORDINATION AND VISIBILITY**

- How effectively does ProtectDefenders.eu coordinate with relevant EU institutions (e.g., EEAS, DG INTPA, EU Delegations, European Parliament) and other international stakeholders?
- To what extent does the mechanism contribute to a shared understanding within the EU of the challenges faced by human rights defenders globally?
- How relevant and strategic is ProtectDefenders.eu's advocacy and policy work in influencing EU human rights policies, funding priorities, and external action related to defenders?

- How is the mechanism perceived by EU institutions, Member States, and other partners in terms of credibility, reliability, and expertise?
- Does ProtectDefenders.eu play a unique or complementary role in the EU's human rights ecosystem? How does it differentiate itself from other actors?
- Are there any gaps or opportunities to strengthen the mechanism's external coordination, advocacy, and visibility to better support its mission?

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- How is the mechanism affected by international funding cuts and what are the implications?
- How are operational challenges—such as legal restrictions, transfer difficulties, or limited mobility—managed and overcome?
- What risks or threats are emerging for the continued delivery of support?
- What gaps or unmet needs exist within the current scope and mandate of ProtectDefenders.eu, and how could the mechanism evolve to address these limitations more effectively, considering the changing global context?

## METHODOLOGY

The consultant should use the following methodologies to conduct the assessment :

1. **Desk review:** The desk review should include all available internal documentation (proposal, Project strategies, quarterly reports, interim and final reports from ProtectDefenders.eu to the Donor).
2. **Key Informant Interviews and field visits:** Interviews should take place with the Donor, with ProtectDefenders.eu implementing Partners and Secretariat, with Project's beneficiaries and with partner organisations, including human rights INGOs, EU delegations in the field, mandate-holders of international and regional protection mechanisms and representatives of the EU Temporary Relocation Platform. Interviews can be organised online but should also take place on the ground, in particular with beneficiaries. At least three field visits should be organised to meet in person with individual human rights defenders and human rights local NGOs that benefited from the Project. For these visits, a geographical balance is to be observed, as well as a balance in the categories of human rights defenders met. The field visits

are to be organised together with ProtectDefenders.eu members and the Secretariat so that security considerations are duly addressed, both for the consultant and for the concerned beneficiaries.

### **DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Under the overall supervision of ProtectDefenders.eu's Board, the consultant is expected to:

- Prepare a workplan for the implementation of the assignment;
- Provide an update on the evaluation's progress in the monthly meetings of ProtectDefenders.eu's board;
- Deliver the following outputs during the evaluation assignment/process:

i. Comprehensive evaluation report (50-70 Pages excluding annexes) including:

1. Executive summary (including main findings and recommendations)
2. Introduction
3. Methodology
4. Evaluation of the EU HRD mechanism including a presentation of the findings and their analysis
5. Lessons learned and good practices
6. Recommendations
7. Annexes

ii. Two presentations to be delivered summarizing methodology and findings:

1. Presentation of the draft report
2. Presentation of the final report

### **CONTACT POINT**

The evaluation will be facilitated by ProtectDefenders.eu's Secretariat and carried out under the supervision of ProtectDefenders.eu's Board. The Secretariat will provide all necessary material for the desk review, as well as contacts for key informants and will help organise field visits.

### **TENTATIVE TIMELINE**

The timeline for the consultancy is tentatively as follows:

Start of the evaluation: 20 September 2025

- Submission of finalised workplan (including field visits): 20 October 2025
- Desk review and initial interviews: September – November 2025
- Field visits: October – November 2025

- Submission of draft evaluation report: Early December 2025
- Presentation of draft report: Mid December 2025
- Board feedback and revision of recommendations: Mid December 2025 – Mid January
- Submission of final evaluation report: End February 2026
- Presentation of final report: Early March 2026

## **PAYMENT SCHEDULE**

Payments will be scheduled against deliverables:

- Signed Contract – 30% up-front.
- Draft Evaluation Report including first presentation – 40%.
- Final Evaluation Report - 6 hard copies -1 PDF soft copy – Second presentation – 30%.

All deliverables should be provided in English.

## **DESIRED QUALIFICATIONS**

- Advanced University degree in Human Rights, International Relations, Law, Political Science or related field;
- At least seven years of work or academic experience in a professional capacity in Human Rights, International Relations, Law, Political Science or related field;
- Extensive experience in conducting evaluations of human rights projects preferably involving multiple partners and the European Union as a donor, including designing and employing both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, which are participatory and sensitive to the needs of the target group;
- Deep understanding of non-governmental organisations, human rights organisations, call for proposals procedures, legal and practical aspects of funding frameworks and Project management;□
- Experience liaising with different stakeholders, including individuals, governmental and international entities and civil society;
- Advanced critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis skills required to draw conclusions from several sources of information and data;
- Fluency in written and spoken English. Ability to express clearly and concisely ideas in written materials and presentations; working knowledge of French/ Spanish is an asset.
- Proven skills in interpersonal communication and networking.

## **SUBMISSION OF OFFERS AND SELECTION CRITERIA**

Applicants are requested to send their submissions to [recruit@protectdefenders.eu](mailto:recruit@protectdefenders.eu), with the subject "Mid-term evaluation consultant" by Date September 4 2025 – early applications are encouraged.

Applications must include:

- A cover letter
- A statement (10 pages maximum) detailing the understanding of the task, the proposed study methodology, a work plan and the proposed evaluation team (CVs annexed)
- A detailed financial proposal in Euros including consultancy fees and other eligible costs (transport and accommodation for field visits, printing, etc)
- Three samples of abstracts of previous relevant research/work.

The review of the submissions will take into account the following criteria:

- Understanding of the ToRs (10%)
- Suggested methodology (30%)
- Experience of the suggested team (30%)
- Quality of submitted samples (10%)
- Financial offer (20%)

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information presented, obtained and produced concerning the EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism, the Partners and beneficiaries during the Evaluation process/Consultancy is to be treated as confidential. The selected consultant will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement upon signature of the contract.