

Never Alone: 10 Years of Protection, Impact and Solidarity with Human Rights Defenders





Index

PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU

00.

FOREWORDS

PAGE 5

- Mary Lawlor
- Kasja Ollongren
- Mounir Satouri

01.

HIGHLIGHTS

PAGE 13

- Celebrating 10 Years of ProtectDefenders.eu
- 2024-2025 in Figures
- The Evolving Global Landscape for Human Rights Defenders
- Exploring Dynamics



02.

A COMPREHENSIVE TOOLBOX OF PROGRAMMES

PAGE 29

- Emergency Grants
- Funding to Local Organisations
- Temporary Relocation Programmes
- Capacity-Building and training of HRDs
- Field-work and Accompaniment
- Advocacy

03.

COORDINATION AND COLLECTIVE ADVOCACY

PAGE 49

04.

REPORTS AND PUBLICATIONS

PAGE 52





00.
Forewords

Mary Lawlor

UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders (2020-2026)

“Supporting and protecting human rights defenders – a crucial investment in building of more just, equal societies everywhere.”



Around the world, people exercising their right to defend human rights continue to face **serious and increasing risks**. Many are subjected to harassment, criminalization, surveillance, arbitrary detention, physical attacks and, in far too many cases, killings. These violations occur in a **global context marked by disregard for international law, attacks on civic space, growing authoritarianism, and deep structural inequalities** perpetuated and reinforced by our political and economic systems. People defending human rights linked to the environment and land, and the rights of indigenous and marginalised communities remain especially exposed to fatal reprisals.

As United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, I regularly receive information about restrictions on the right to defend human rights and reprisals against human rights defenders in every region of the world. The picture that emerges is **deeply concerning**. In many countries, the **space for human rights activism is narrowing rapidly**, while the risks faced by those who stand up for the rights of others are intensifying.

At the same time, defending and promoting human rights has never been more important. Human rights defenders play an **indispensable role in protecting fundamental freedoms, promoting accountability for grave crimes, and building democracy**. Supporting and protecting them is not only a legal obligation for States under international human rights law, but also a crucial investment in the **building of more just, equal societies everywhere**.

It is particularly significant that this report marks the tenth anniversary of ProtectDefenders.eu, the European Union's

Human Rights Defenders Mechanism. Over the past decade, the mechanism has been one of the **most important global initiatives dedicated to the protection of people at risk for defending human rights**.

Through the **collective efforts of the civil society organizations** that implement it, ProtectDefenders.eu has provided essential and often life-saving support to thousands of human rights defenders and their families. From emergency assistance and relocation to advocacy, capacity-building and long-term accompaniment, the mechanism has demonstrated its capacity to **respond quickly, flexibly and effectively to the needs of human rights defenders in danger**.

Over the past year alone, more than 10,000 human rights defenders in over 110 countries have received support through ProtectDefenders.eu. Beyond these figures, what matters most is the impact: this **support enables defenders to continue their work, often in extremely difficult circumstances**, and contributes to the protection and realisation of human rights in communities around the world.

Over the years, the mechanism has also evolved into a **key platform for coordination and policy engagement** around the right to defend human rights. By bringing together civil society organizations, European institutions and international actors, ProtectDefenders.eu has contributed to **advancing discussions on critical issues** such as protection pathways, safe mobility for human rights defenders at risk, and stronger international responses to emerging forms of repression.

However, these achievements must be understood in the context of an **increasingly worrying global environment**. Across many regions, governments are adopting restrictive legislation that targets civil society and human rights defenders, including through copy-cat “foreign agent” laws and other measures designed to stigmatize and silence human rights advocacy and activism. At the same time, flagrant disregard for international law, particularly international human rights and humanitarian law, are creating extreme insecurity for defenders.

This situation is compounded by a **widening gap between the needs of those at risk for defending human rights and the financial resources available to support protection initiatives**. Mechanisms such as ProtectDefenders.eu receive far more requests for assistance than they are currently able to meet. In a global context where funding for human rights is under increasing pressure, this gap risks leaving many defenders without the support they urgently need.

For this reason, the **continued commitment of the European Union and its Member States to the protection of human rights defenders is of critical importance**. ProtectDefenders.eu represents a unique and highly effective model of cooperation between public institutions and civil society organizations to provide rapid, flexible and meaningful

protection to defenders worldwide. Support for the mechanism is also a positive signal of the EU and its Member States commitment to human rights and support for human rights defenders, at a time of significant backsliding within the bloc and by the EU itself.

As this report marks ten years of ProtectDefenders.eu, it is an opportunity not only to **celebrate its achievements, but also to reaffirm and strengthen this commitment**. Sustained and increased political and financial support will be essential to ensure that the mechanism can continue to respond to growing needs and adapt to the evolving risks faced by people for defending human rights around the world.

Human rights defenders are essential actors in the global human rights system. Ensuring their protection must remain a priority for governments, international organizations and societies everywhere. The success of ProtectDefenders.eu over the past decade shows what is possible when strong political commitment is combined with the expertise and dedication of civil society. At a time when defenders face mounting threats worldwide, this collective effort is more necessary than ever.

“Beyond these figures, what matters most is the impact: this support enables defenders to continue their work, often in extremely difficult circumstances, and contributes to the protection and realisation of human rights in communities around the world.”

Kajsa Ollongren

EU Special Representative for Human Rights

Standing with the Brave in an Age of Global Backsliding.



We are witnessing a period of profound democratic recession, where the spaces for civic action are not merely shrinking—they are being systematically dismantled. Around the globe, those who stand up for justice, equality, and the rule of law are facing a **rising tide of repression, digital surveillance, and physical violence**. Yet, amidst this deepening darkness, **the courage of human rights defenders remains a steadfast beacon of hope**.

The past year has been defined by **further deterioration**. From the surge in transnational repression to more of foreign agent laws, the tools of authoritarianism have become more sophisticated. We have seen a disturbing trend of judicial harassment used to silence environmental activists, as well as an escalation of targeted attacks against women human rights defenders and LGBTQIA+ activists. In many regions, the simple act of documenting a violation or peaceful assembly has become a life-threatening endeavour.

In this volatile context, ProtectDefenders.eu—the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism—has proven to be more than just a support programme; it is a **vital lifeline**. Over the ten years of its existence, it has provided emergency assistance, relocation, and legal support to thousands of defenders at high risk. Whether it was facilitating an emergency visa for a journalist fleeing a crackdown or providing digital security training to an indigenous land defender, the mechanism has acted with the speed and flexibility that these crises demand.



However, despite our best efforts, the **demand for protection continues to outpace available resources**. In the past year, only a fraction of eligible requests for long-term support could be fully met. This is a sobering reminder that the **international community's political commitment to human rights must be matched by sustained financial resources**, including in the upcoming EU Multiannual Financial Framework. Because an effective protection is not a one-off intervention; it is a continuous process of building resilience.

In my position as the EU Special representative for Human Rights, I work with human rights defenders on daily basis. I can inject their direct experience in preparation for human rights dialogues and during my missions to all corners of the world. I never cease to be fascinated by their **determination to fight for the human rights of others**, knowing that in doing so they may be putting themselves and their loved ones in danger.

As you read this report, I invite you to look beyond the numbers and see the faces of the individuals who refuse to be silenced. **Their resilience is the true story of this year**. Our task—as the European Union, and as a global community—is to **ensure they never have to stand alone**.

I myself remain committed to the mission: to protect those who defend our rights. The struggle for human rights is far from over, but as long as there are brave individuals willing to stand on the front lines, we will be there to stand with them.

“Effective protection is not a one-off intervention; it is a continuous process of building resilience.”

Mounir Satouri

Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

“Our responsibility is to ensure that [those who defend human rights] are not left unprotected”



This year marks the tenth anniversary of ProtectDefenders.eu, the European Union’s flagship mechanism for the protection of human rights defenders (HRDs) at risk worldwide. Over the past decade, it has established itself as a **unique, comprehensive, and flexible instrument**, providing emergency support, temporary relocation, holistic accompaniment, and longer-term assistance to thousands of defenders under threat. This milestone offers an opportunity to recognise the **tangible impact of the mechanism**, as well as the dedication of those who work tirelessly behind it to **support individuals committed to the defence of fundamental rights**, often at great personal risk.

Yet this anniversary comes at a time of mounting global challenges. The **environment for HRDs is deteriorating**, shaped by the rise of authoritarianism and the steady erosion of civic space and democratic standards. Around the world, we are witnessing increasing cases of arbitrary detentions, unfair trials, executions, assassinations, digital surveillance, and transnational repression targeting HRDs, independent journalists, political opponents, and members of social, ethnic, and religious minorities. These developments are **compounded by a significant decline in funding for civil society** organizations, human rights institutions, and independent media, creating an increasingly fragile environment for the protection of fundamental freedoms.

In this context, **strengthening our response is both necessary and urgent**. This requires enhancing the effectiveness of existing instruments, exploring new approaches and methods, and deepening cooperation and coordination with international partners at all levels.

“Respect for human rights is enshrined in the EU Treaties; accordingly, the protection of those who defend these rights is not optional, but a fundamental obligation.”



In doing so, we reaffirm our commitment not only to the protection of individuals, but also to the defence of the European and universal values and principles that underpin open and democratic societies.

In a period of growing challenges for HRDs and the proven relevance and effectiveness of the ProtectDefenders.eu, the continuity and strengthening of our support to this mechanism, providing with the **necessary human and financial resources to meet evolving threats should remain a clear political priority** for the European Union and its Member States.

The European Parliament, and in particular its Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), has consistently demonstrated its determination and commitment to supporting HRDs. By providing a platform for defenders to speak freely, organising debates and hearings, adopting reports and resolutions, and conducting missions to third countries, the Parliament has played a key role in **keeping protection of HRDs at the forefront of the EU agenda**, ensuring that funding and political

support are not curtailed. In these efforts, ProtectDefenders.eu has proven to be an **indispensable partner**, particularly in responding to urgent and life-threatening cases.

At a time when global attention is often dominated by conflicts and geopolitical crises, it is essential not to overlook the individuals who continue to defend human rights under the most difficult circumstances. **HRDs' courage is a call to action for all of us.** Those who defend human rights often stand alone. Our responsibility is to ensure that they are not left unprotected. This commitment must be universal, extending to all HRDs regardless of their ideology, ethnicity, or religion.

In an international environment increasingly shaped by power politics and populism, I want to send a **clear and resolute message of solidarity and unwavering support for HRDs.** Standing with HRDs means standing for the values that define and unite us as Europeans.





01. Highlights

Celebrating 10 years of ProtectDefenders.eu



Since its establishment in October 2015, to protect and support human rights defenders (HRDs) who are most at risk around the world, ProtectDefenders.eu has supported over 97.000 HRDs.



This year, we celebrate a **decade of existence and impact of ProtectDefenders.eu**, the EU HRD Mechanism. The work carried out by ProtectDefenders.eu is essential, ensuring that thousands of HRDs can continue their critical missions defending human rights despite relentless threats.

The last ten years have seen a **continuous deterioration in the global environment** for HRDs, with numerous crises and violent crackdowns on civil society. Amid this complex landscape, ProtectDefenders.eu has shown **remarkable resilience and adaptability**, ensuring that those who face risks to defend rights receive essential support and protection. The Mechanism empowers HRDs to persevere in their vital work while bolstering their security and effectiveness. Its multifaceted approach encompasses emergency assistance, temporary relocation and the development of robust shelter networks, capacity-development programmes, and monitoring, advocacy, and visibility strategies and actions to counter immediate threats.

The past year has proven yet again how indispensable and successful ProtectDefenders.eu is for the protection of HRDs globally by delivering **exceptional performance**. The Mechanism provided **timely, direct protection and vital support to 10,460 HRDs facing risks** in 110 countries across the globe, predominantly in some of the most hostile environments.

Despite increasing challenges, ProtectDefenders.eu has used resources effectively, providing **rapid and comprehensive support** to HRDs at risk. The programme's capacity to deliver

ProtectDefenders.eu has shown remarkable resilience and adaptability, ensuring that those who face risks to defend rights receive essential support and protection.

flexible protection, financial assistance, relocation options, and capacity-building initiatives has been instrumental in reinforcing the **resilience** of HRDs worldwide. 98% of HRDs supported reported a **positive impact**, improved security, or an increased ability to continue their work. HRDs consistently praised the **speed, accessibility, and effectiveness** of **ProtectDefenders.eu's support mechanisms**.

ProtectDefenders.eu remains committed to providing adapted support to the HRDs facing the most risks. A **gender-sensitive approach** is central to every intervention of the Mechanism, with a deliberate focus on supporting the most vulnerable **WHRDs**, including those championing **environmental and indigenous rights**. Over the past year, ProtectDefenders.eu developed a specific focus on young defenders and defenders with disabilities aiming at addressing underrepresented voices within the human rights landscape. Efforts initiated last year to engage these groups have already yielded promising outcomes, setting the stage for deeper and more comprehensive support in the coming years.

The elevated coordination across the consortium has enabled ProtectDefenders.eu to respond efficiently to an unprecedented volume and complexity of cases, including through refined grant allocation processes, burden-sharing practices and rapid collective responses **to crises in Sudan and the DRC**.

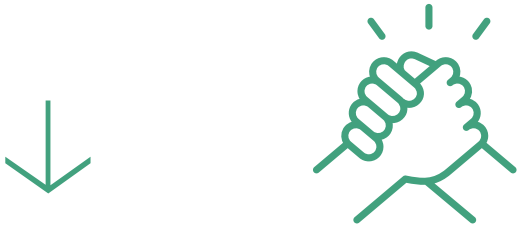
Each new year of existence also highlights the growing **political relevance** of ProtectDefenders.eu as a **key player** in **global human rights advocacy**. The

mechanism has gained increasing recognition as an influential actor in contributing to shape **policies** that affect the **safety** and **freedom** of HRDs, both within the EU and globally. This success is largely due to the concerted efforts of the **consortium**, which has built strong **alliances** and leveraged **collective advocacy** to amplify the voices of HRDs at high levels of decision-making.

Despite the exceptional results achieved, **financial sustainability** remains a **critical challenge**. The demand for support continues to grow at an alarming rate, and the financial resources available are increasingly insufficient to meet this demand. It is estimated that ProtectDefenders.eu is **only able to collectively respond to less than 20% of the legitimate requests it receives**, and in many cases, it can only do so partially, threatening the long-term effectiveness of protection efforts.

While ProtectDefenders.eu has adapted with remarkable flexibility, the stark reality is that without increased political will and financial commitment from the international community, including the EU, the mechanism's ability to sustain and scale its operations will be jeopardized. The **growing political and financial challenges demand an immediate response**. It is essential that the international community, and the EU in particular, renew their commitment to the protection of HRDs by addressing the systemic funding gaps and supporting a more enabling environment for those who risk their lives to defend human rights. Without decisive action, the sustainability of critical protection programmes remains at risk, threatening the very individuals who stand on the frontlines of human rights defense.

2024-2025 in Figures



10,460+

human rights defenders received direct support from ProtectDefenders.eu

343

human rights organisations receiving direct support

55%

WHRDs, defenders belonging to gender minorities, gender non-conforming, and non-binary HRDs

63%

Young Defenders (aged 34 or below)



110

countries worldwide

89%

of the HRDs supported belonging to the most-at-risk groups

22%

journalists and media HRDs

50%

land, environmental, indigenous people's rights HRDs

46%

LGBTQI+ rights HRDs

12%

HRDs in conflict areas



1,197

defenders and **365** family members at risk receiving emergency support for protection



173

local human rights organizations receiving core support, seed funding, or lifeline support



106

HRD protection networks supported



72

human rights defenders and **62** family members receiving support within comprehensive temporary relocation programmes



103

entities are members of the European Union Temporary Relocation Platform



1,619

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



20

human rights defenders accompanied in field-work activities



Urgent advocacy and political mobilisation on the situation of

285

human rights defenders at risk



98%

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

3,970+

individuals assisted with direct guidance and 24/7 support

The Evolving Global Landscape for Human Rights Defenders

Persistent Challenges

Human rights defenders (HRDs) across the globe are operating in increasingly **precarious and hostile environments**. The rise of **authoritarianism and nationalism** has reshaped political landscapes worldwide, with autocracies outnumbering democracies for the first time in two decades. Governments are consolidating control, restricting **civic space**, and using **legal, political, and digital tools** to silence dissent, even across borders. Repressive measures are often justified under the pretext of **counter-terrorism, national security, or public**

order, while security forces, corporate actors, and non-state armed groups exploit these political conditions to target defenders. Across the world, far-right and conservative actors are leveraging **anti-rights rhetoric**—including accusations of promoting “**gender ideology**,” “**LGBT ideology**,” or “**foreign influence**”—to delegitimize HRDs and justify harassment, defamation, and/or violence.



Weaponization of legal systems

HRDs are increasingly subject to **arbitrary prosecutions, burdensome lawsuits, and Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs)**, which drain resources and obstruct activism. Governments are introducing **foreign agent and anti-NGO laws**, effectively criminalizing international support and branding defenders as threats to national security. These measures have profound operational

consequences: organizations must divert scarce resources to legal defense and survival, reducing their capacity to provide **protection, emergency support, or community services**. Prolonged detention, unfair trials, and incommunicado confinement remain common, particularly for defenders of **environmental rights, Indigenous lands, and freedom of expression**.

Digital threats

Governments and non-state actors employ **surveillance technologies, spyware, cyberattacks, doxxing, and shadow-banning** to infiltrate HRD networks and intimidate defenders. Online harassment and defamation campaigns are particularly severe for **women HRDs (WHRDs)**, who face **gendered attacks**,

including the exposure of intimate materials and targeted disinformation. Social media, once a platform for advocacy, have become sites of **psychological pressure, self-censorship, and reputational harm**, restricting defenders' ability to mobilize, report abuses, and access critical information.



Transnational repression

Governments collaborate across borders to **deport, surveil, or forcibly silence HRDs**, highlighting the global reach of authoritarian strategies and the urgent need for **robust international protective measures**. In this context, HRDs

risk being pursued and silenced regardless of location, emphasizing the importance of **cross-border solidarity and protection mechanisms**.

Marginalized defenders and intersecting vulnerabilities

Certain groups of HRDs are **particularly targeted**. **Environmental, land, and Indigenous defenders (LIE)** represent over a third of killings documented globally in 2024. In Latin America, Brazil, and Mexico, they face **threats** from paramilitary groups, organized crime, and state collusion, often linked to extractive industries. Many LIE defenders are **forcibly displaced or murdered** as they resist land grabs, extractive projects, and environmental degradation. **Women HRDs** experience both general and **gendered risks**, including sexual violence, harassment, and public slander, being often accused of promoting “gender ideology.” **LGBTQI+ defenders** are criminalized

and publicly vilified under regressive laws, subjected to **legal persecution, arbitrary arrests, and social stigmatization** in hostile contexts. Similarly, **migrant rights defenders** face stigmatization, legal persecution, and harassment.

HRDs with disabilities experience compounded vulnerabilities due to limited inclusion, lack of protective infrastructure, and insufficient tailored support. These intersecting vulnerabilities illustrate the urgent **need for inclusive, intersectional protection mechanisms** that recognize the specific risks faced by marginalized defenders.



Conflict and crisis contexts

HRDs working in **conflict and crisis contexts** face exceptionally acute risks. The ongoing wars and violent conflicts in **Sudan, Gaza, Ukraine, Myanmar, Afghanistan, and the DRC** expose defenders to **detention, torture, sexual violence, targeted killings, and forced relocation**. WHRDs, and other marginalized groups are disproportionately affected by **gendered and intersectional attacks**, including sexual violence and intimidation. In Sudan, HRDs staffing **Emergency Response Rooms** have provided critical aid

despite threats and attacks, while in Gaza, Palestinian defenders and journalists continue to **expose atrocities at great personal risk**. Myanmar's military crackdowns have **criminalized** defenders, forcibly conscripted some, and targeted families in retaliation. In Afghanistan, Ukraine, and the DRC, HRDs must continually relocate or adapt their work in response to the changing dynamics of conflict, including shifts toward **humanitarian protection and support for affected communities**.

Unprecedented threat to press freedom

Journalists in many contexts including Armenia, Sudan, Niger, and Gaza are subjected to **violence, harassment, and censorship**. Media outlets struggle to survive, while HRDs depend on an independent press

to amplify their voices, expose abuses, and strengthen accountability. The erosion of media freedom further isolates defenders and reduces their visibility and protection.

Financial constraints

International donor retrenchment, including US funding cuts and broader reductions in **Official Development Assistance (ODA)**, has starved civil society of **core, flexible support**. Organizations are forced to scale back programmes, reduce geographic coverage, and lay off staff, leaving defenders—especially those in **high-risk or remote**

areas—more exposed. Requests for **emergency grants and protection funding** have surged, reflecting the urgent gaps created by shrinking resources. Restrictions on funding also increase dependence on politically motivated donors, reducing the **independence and resilience of civil society** and amplifying the impact of state repression.



The Evolving Global Landscape for Human Rights Defenders

Celebrating Progress



Despite the increasingly challenging environment, there have been notable positive developments for human rights defenders (HRDs) around the world. These developments offer a **hopeful outlook for the future of human rights defenders**. From significant legal victories to growing international recognition and localized solutions, these achievements underscore the resilience of HRDs and the ongoing commitment of the global community to protect them.

Successful collective advocacy

One of the most significant achievements in the past year is the creation and establishment of the **UN Independent Investigative Mechanism for Afghanistan**, adopted through a UN resolution on 6 October 2025. This milestone reflects **the power of collective international advocacy** in advancing mechanisms that hold perpetrators accountable and provide justice for victims of human rights violations. In Brazil, the release of MAB defenders highlighted the importance of international solidarity and advocacy in securing justice and protecting environmental defenders.

Growing recognition of environmental, Indigenous and land rights defenders

The legal victory for Garífuna defenders in Honduras represented a **critical recognition of Indigenous and Afro-descendant rights**, setting a precedent for the protection of marginalized communities. Additionally, the growing visibility of environmental defenders at COP30 underscores the expanding international awareness of systemic violence against those defending land, water, and the environment.

Strengthened grassroots and holistic protection practices

At the community level, **strengthened grassroots protection practices** have emerged as a crucial tool for resilience.

Local initiatives in Tolima, Honduras, and Zimbabwe have demonstrated that community-led strategies can effectively safeguard HRDs even in contexts of extreme risk.

Globally, there is **growing recognition of the importance of holistic protection**, which goes beyond legal and physical security to include psychosocial well-being, trauma-

informed care, and rapid-response mechanisms. In Kenya and Indonesia, new resources and protection strategies have been implemented to strengthen HRD resilience, including digital security support, well-being manuals based on feminist methodologies, and targeted training for small communities of defenders. Donors and international mechanisms are increasingly supporting these approaches, acknowledging that **a secure and sustainable environment for defenders requires attention to both mental health and collective protection.**



Exploring Dynamics:

Regional and National Shifts Impacting Human Rights Defenders' Initiatives

Regional and National Shifts Impacting Human Rights Defenders' Initiatives

The global environment for human rights defenders continues to be shaped by deeply uneven and rapidly evolving regional dynamics. The risks faced by defenders have intensified while simultaneously revealing pockets of resilience, legal progress, and coordinated protection responses. The following analysis draws on ProtectDefenders.eu's operational experience and field-based evidence to map the most significant regional and national developments of the reporting period.

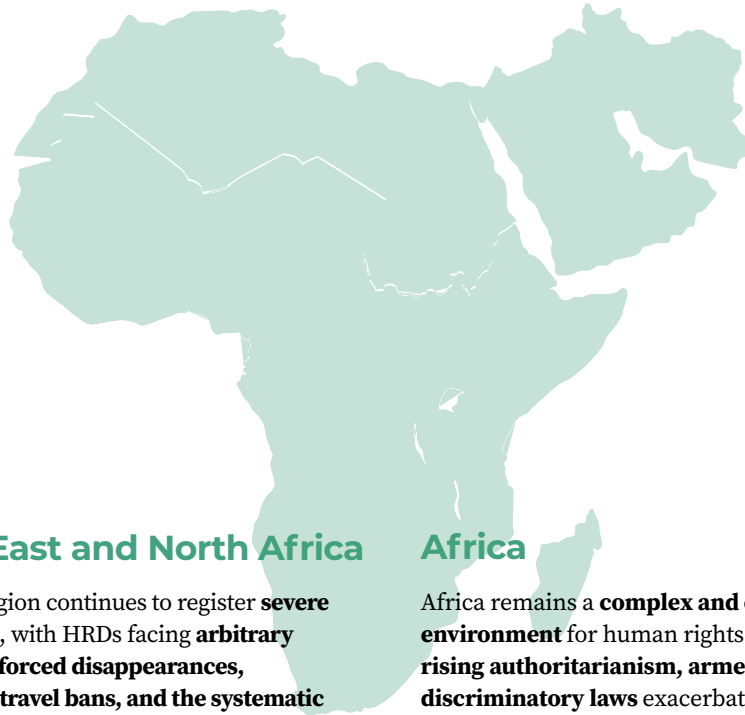
Europe and Central Asia

The human rights landscape across Europe and Central Asia is characterized by **rising repression, state-led control of civil society, and growing legal obstacles for defenders**. Russia's regional influence continues to destabilize neighboring countries.

In **Belarus**, the deterioration that began with the 2020 contested elections has deepened, with defenders, trade unionists and opposition figures facing arbitrary detention, torture, and politically motivated prosecution. Many operate in hiding or have been forced into exile.

In **Georgia**, since the passing of the foreign-agent legislation, defamation provisions have enabled judicial harassment, account freezes, and smear campaigns against CSOs. Several organizations previously engaged in HRD protection were forced to suspend operations. Likewise, **Kyrgyzstan** enacted laws that restrict freedoms of expression, assembly, and association. In **Moldova**, energy blackmail and political coercion have weakened institutional capacity. In **Turkey**, LGBTQI+ defenders and civil society organizations continue to face surveillance, judicial pressure, and administrative restrictions.





Middle East and North Africa

The MENA region continues to register **severe deterioration**, with HRDs facing **arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, surveillance, travel bans, and the systematic weaponization of counterterrorism and cybercrime legislation**.

In **Egypt**, thousands of defenders have been referred to Anti-Terrorism Courts, and feminist and LGBTQI+ activists face intensified state-backed harassment. In **Tunisia**, the consolidation of authority under President Saïed has pushed civil society underground, with organizations defending migrants and LGBTQI+ communities subjected to bank account freezes, denial of registration, and forced exile. **Algeria's** civic space continues to contract under military influence, while in **Morocco**, feminist advocates for family code reform face heightened threats and inadequate state protection.

The situation for HRDs in **Gaza** is catastrophic. More than 220 journalists have been killed since October 2023, with media infrastructure deliberately targeted. Palestinian defenders face extreme physical risk, arrest, and forced exile. In **Syria**, following the collapse of the Assad regime in late 2024, civil society mobilization has cautiously re-emerged, with exiled HRDs returning and NGOs expanding operations, though lawlessness and armed group activity continue to pose serious risks. In **Iraq**, newly adopted legislation restricting gender identity has intensified persecution of LGBTQI+ defenders and activists.

Africa

Africa remains a **complex and challenging environment** for human rights defenders, with **rising authoritarianism, armed conflicts, and discriminatory laws** exacerbating risks across the continent. Despite these threats, HRDs continue to demonstrate **remarkable resilience**, advocating for justice, equality, and fundamental freedoms under increasingly hostile conditions.

The Sahel has experienced acute instability following successive coups in **Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad**, with systematic repression of civil society including arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and restrictions on press freedom. In **Uganda**, the Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2023 has dramatically worsened conditions for LGBTQI+ defenders, while environmental defenders opposing extractive projects face arrest and judicial harassment. The **DRC** continues to experience intense violence in the east, with over 50 attacks on media professionals recorded in North Kivu alone.

In **Ethiopia**, extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detentions persist across conflict-affected regions, and recent amendments to the Mass Media Proclamation have consolidated state control over information. **Kenya** has seen a significant decline in civic freedoms, with protests in 2024 and 2025 met with deadly crackdowns. **Rwanda** has intensified targeting of critics and, in March 2025, barred NGOs from cooperating with Belgian institutions. **Sudan** remains in crisis following the April 2023 outbreak of conflict between the SAF and RSF, with journalists and HRDs deliberately targeted and humanitarian access severely restricted.



Asia-Pacific

The Asia-Pacific region remains one of the most hostile environments for human rights defenders, marked by **authoritarian consolidation, shrinking civic space, and systemic violations**. HRDs face harassment, arbitrary detention, judicial persecution, physical violence, and intimidation, often under the pretext of national security, counterterrorism, or public order. Across the region, transnational repression has emerged as a growing concern, with HRDs in exile facing harassment and surveillance across borders.

Myanmar's military junta has executed journalists, detained hundreds of defenders, and forced media organizations into exile.

Afghanistan's Taliban government has devastated the media landscape, with over 80% of women journalists having abandoned their careers and active media outlets declining by more than two-thirds. In **Hong Kong**, the enactment of Article 23 in March 2024 further eroded civil society space, criminalizing broad categories of political engagement.

Bangladesh saw a student-led uprising in 2024 that led to the resignation of Prime Minister Hasina, though the transition has been accompanied by repression of youth activists.

In **Nepal**, security forces opened fire on unarmed protesters in September 2024, killing 19 people. In **Indonesia**, nationwide protests in 2025 were met with excessive force, and legislative amendments have expanded military jurisdiction and introduced new restrictions on civil society. **The Philippines** continues to record extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances targeting defenders.



Americas

In 2025, the **Americas** have experienced a **worsening environment for human rights defenders**. **Rising authoritarianism, criminalization, organized crime, transnational repression, and shrinking civic space** have placed HRDs at severe risk. **Legal restrictions, political polarization, and international policy shifts** further exacerbate vulnerabilities, leaving defenders exposed to intimidation, violence, and forced exile.

In **Colombia**, despite constitutional protections, armed groups are expanding territorial control and defenders face violence and reprisals with insufficient state protection. **Mexico** records systematic killings and disappearances of land rights, Indigenous, and environmental defenders, with widespread impunity. In **Venezuela** and **Nicaragua**, entrenched authoritarian governments have criminalized dissent, forced organizations to close, and driven defenders into exile.

In **Guatemala**, Indigenous leaders involved in the 2023 national strike have been imprisoned. In **Brazil**, defenders of Indigenous lands and the Amazon face escalating threats from state and corporate actors. A regional pattern of “foreign agent” legislation — mirroring frameworks already seen in Russia and Georgia — has taken root in **El Salvador** and **Peru**, criminalizing legitimate civic work and restricting international funding. In **Honduras**, political polarization ahead of the 2025 elections has heightened risks for defenders despite promises of reform.







02. A Comprehensive Toolbox of Programmes

Emergency grants



532

protection grants

1,197

HRDs

542

who identify as Women (WHRDs)

79

who identify as transgender (HRDs)

63

who identify as non-binary

2

who identify as intersex

18

who identify as belonging to other gender and sex minorities.

At least

46%

are young human rights defenders aged 18 to 34

21%

between 35 and 60

1%

individuals over 60



137

grassroots groups accessing urgent protection



21%

of the grants supporting family members

365

family members receiving urgent protection support



89%

of the grants directed to the most hostile environments worldwide



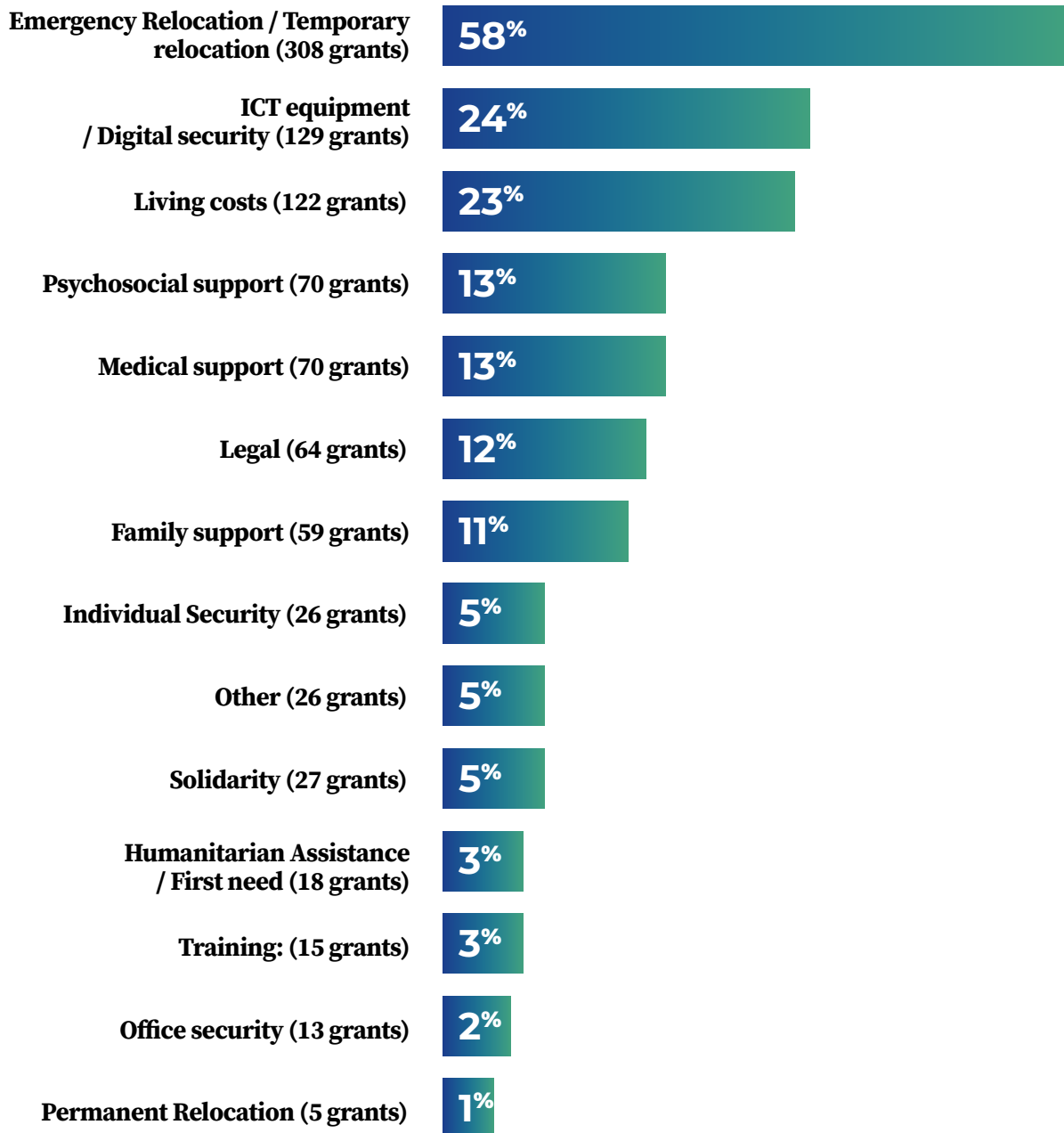
65%

Emergency support

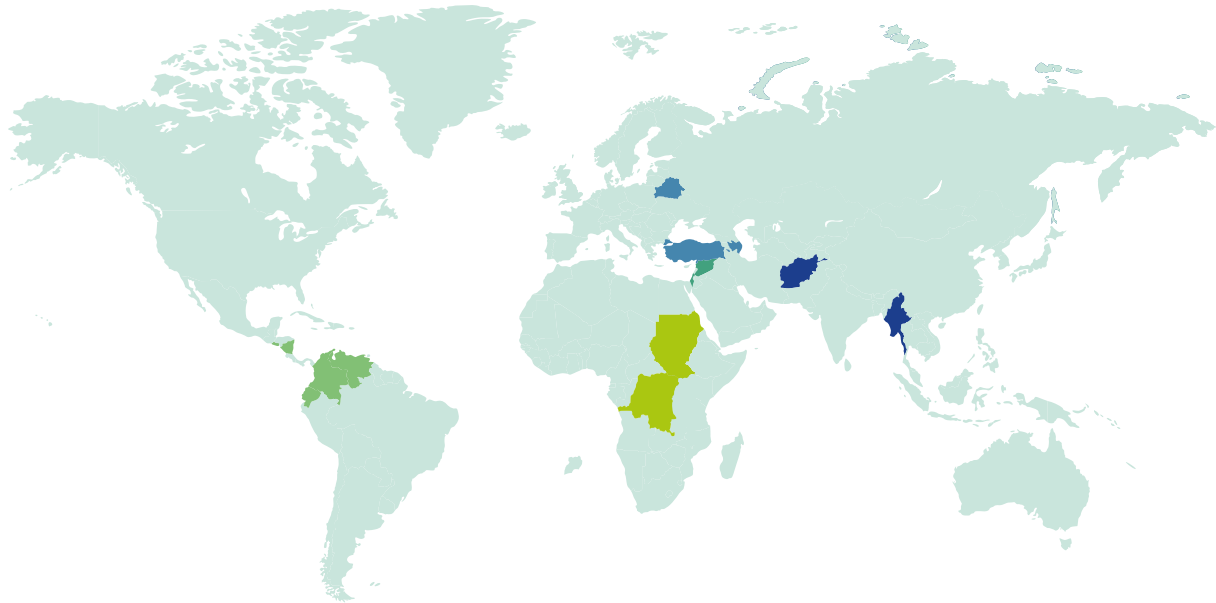


35%

General protection



Top countries per region



- Sudan and the DRC (Africa)
- Afghanistan and Myanmar (Asia and the Pacific)
- Palestine and Syria (MENA)
- Azerbaijan, Belarus and Turkey (Europe and Central Asia)
- Venezuela, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Ecuador and Colombia (Americas)

The emergency grants programme provided by ProtectDefenders.eu is a **flexible and responsive tool** designed to meet the evolving requirements of defenders facing risks, as identified by the defenders themselves. This programme is a lifeline for HRDs and can be used for a number of measures to enable them to continue their crucial work. The information we can extract from the past year of this programme's implementation can help us understand further some trends in the global landscape for human rights defenders.

This year again, **emergency support grants represent the bulk of grants provided**, with **65%** of all grants allocated under this category compared to **35% general protection grants**. This underscores the **escalating threats** faced by HRDs globally. Similarly, the number of **emergency relocation grants** has continued to rise, now accounting for **58% of the total grants**. This highlights the **worsening security**

conditions that force defenders to flee their communities, further emphasizing that attacks have either **remained at unsustainable levels or worsened** in several regions.

The **consolidation of psycho-social support grants**, which now represent **13%** of the total grants awarded reflects a continued and growing recognition of the **importance of psycho-social well-being** as a **fundamental component** of **holistic protection strategies** for HRDs. The consistent demand for such support indicates the sustained **pressure and trauma** faced by defenders in their line of work. While the situation globally continues to deteriorate, ProtectDefenders.eu Consortium partners continue to **improve their collaboration** and find **innovative solutions** to ensure that defenders facing high risks can have access to support.

In October 2024, the EU Emergency Fund for Human Rights Defenders at Risk was incorporated as part of the EU HRD Mechanism. Through this programme, ProtectDefenders.eu awarded 47 grants, providing support to 65 HRDs, 24 family members and 7 human rights organizations.

Our Support in Action

Protecting families to sustain HRDs in Zimbabwe

The EU HRDs mechanism emphasizes on the importance of holistic protection for human rights defenders, recognising that safeguarding their families is essential to sustaining their work. The experience of F.M., a Zimbabwean human rights activist and Executive Director of the Rights Action Center (RAC), illustrates this critical approach. Operating in Zimbabwe's increasingly repressive environment, F.M. has faced years of intimidation, including arrest and surveillance, due to his advocacy for justice, institutional reform, and the protection of vulnerable communities, but despite these risks, he has continued to mobilise grassroots networks and strengthen community resilience against systemic repression. Recently, escalating threats and a smear campaign targeting his organization placed his family in immediate danger. Through support from International Federation for Human Rights under ProtectDefenders.eu, an emergency grant enabled the temporary relocation of his family to safety.

This intervention had a profound impact, it ensured his family's protection, F.M. was able to regain a sense of security and continue his human rights work at a critical moment; the support not only reduced immediate risks but also reinforced his capacity to document violations and advocate for accountability in a highly volatile context. Coordinated through the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of International Federation for Human Rights and World organization Against Torture, this response reflects the importance of strong collaboration across protection mechanisms. This story underscores a key lesson: protecting the families of human rights defenders is not secondary, it is central to effective protection.



Funding to Local Organizations



111

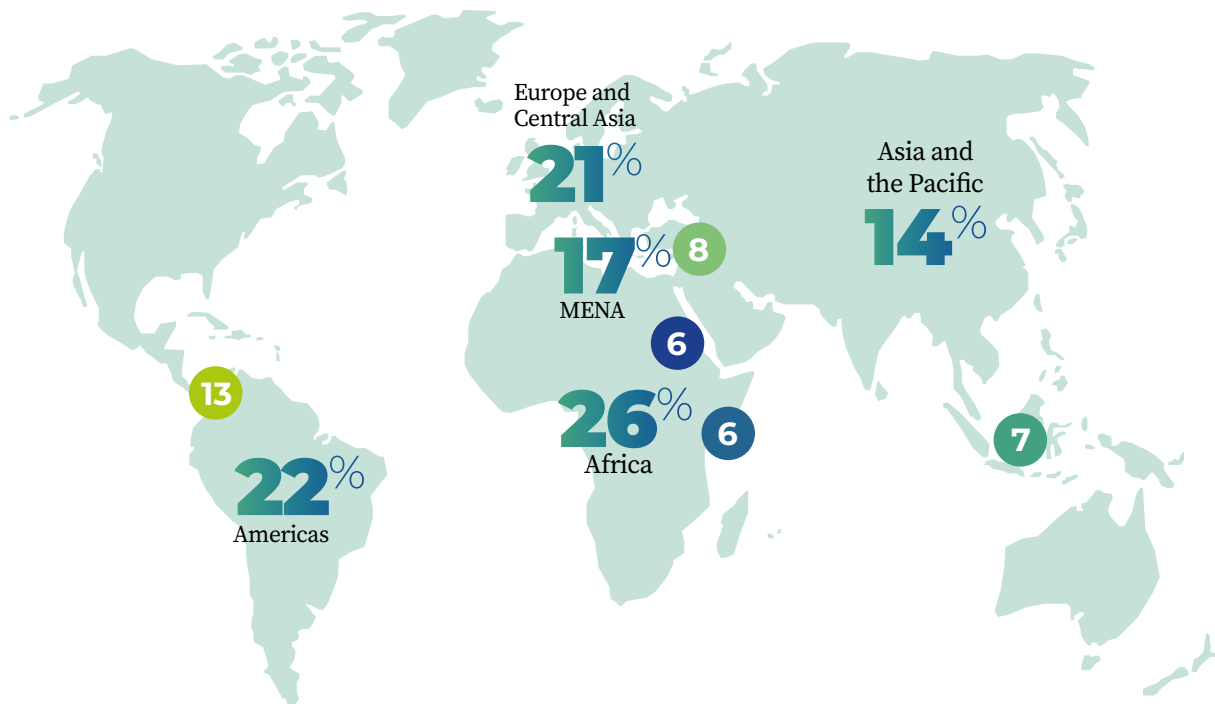
grants to local organizations allocated

Supporting at least

3,200 HRDs

Countries with highest number of granted organizations

- Colombia
- Syria
- Indonesia
- Kenya
- Sudan



29%

Advocacy & campaign and networking capacities: main or secondary purpose of 32 out of 111 grants

Throughout the past year, ProtectDefenders.eu has enabled a wide range of initiatives through these grants. The dominance of advocacy and campaigning activities within the grant portfolio highlights a continued emphasis on **strengthening human rights networks, amplifying defenders' voices, and engaging stakeholders at various levels.**

28%

Reinforcement of the security set-up of the organization: main or secondary purpose of 31 out of 111 grants

The **reinforcement of organizational security setups**, accounting for a quarter of the grants, underscores the pressing need to **enhance resilience against escalating threats**, demonstrating ProtectDefenders.eu's capacity to **respond strategically to security challenges** in hostile environments.

16%

Monitoring & reporting & fact-finding activities: main or secondary purpose of 18 out of 111 grants

The increase in grants dedicated to **monitoring and reporting**, though a smaller proportion at 9%, indicates that local organizations are increasingly prioritizing **evidence-based advocacy** and documentation of human rights violations, a key pillar in ensuring accountability and awareness. Likewise, the 7% allocated to **lifeline support** showcases the organization's continued focus on **ensuring the sustainability** of defenders in precarious situations, offering vital assistance to sustain their operations.

9%

Lifeline support: main or secondary purpose of 10 out of 111 grants

Crucially, the grant-making approach remains **reactive and flexible**, responding to the expressed needs of local organizations. The diversity of grant purposes attests to an increasingly **multi-dimensional and comprehensive** support framework that strategically combines different lines of assistance to bolster resilience and effectiveness.

Our Support in Action

How the Feminist movement in Nepal is fostering intergenerational leadership to reimagining the future of women in Politics

In Nepal, women human rights defenders are raising their voices against violence despite facing serious discrimination on the basis of their gender, their work and the rights they advocate for. Their struggle to change patriarchal norms, values, and structural violence has resulted in growing efforts to control their bodies and undermine their physical integrity. The lack of recognition for the work of women human rights defenders leads to further marginalization, and the increasing security issues they face contribute to burn out and often force them to leave work entirely. They have been targeted, criticized, threatened, intimidated, surveilled, and harassed, including via online attacks and even murder. At the local level, women rights defenders in Nepal are repeatedly threatened and have faced various forms of violence while doing their work and raising their voices

against women's rights and WHRD issues, while a low response from government bodies and relevant agencies continues.

In this context, collective and coordinated work by feminist networks is leading efforts to address systemic patriarchal challenges. Today, more than ever, in a landscape where according to UN Women "one in three organizations have suspended or shut down programmes on ending violence against women due to funding cuts", feminist groups and networks need urgent global solidarity action and financial support.

In the framework of Protectdefenders.eu, OMCT supported The National Alliance of Women Human Right Defenders (NAWHRD) - one of the largest existing



grassroot networks whose mission is strengthening the networks of women human rights defenders, campaigning for the full protection of women human rights defenders and guaranteeing women's human rights in coordination with various social campaigns – with an institutional grant. This allowed the alliance to gather more than 165 Women Human Rights Defenders from across Nepal in a national consultation which served as a powerful space to foster collective resilience and solidarity, strengthen intergenerational leadership, and integrate younger activists into the movement, helping ensure continued progress towards women's rights and meaningful political participation by creating a pathway for true transformative leadership in Nepal.

This grant enabled the network to strengthen its capacities, increase its sustainability while enabling to preserve the history of the Nepalese feminist movement.

Direct financial support for feminist networks can empower and strengthen the movement fighting for women's rights, especially in a context where women's rights organizations are losing significant funding

and experiencing setbacks in the global women's rights agenda. It also raises a strategic question about sustainability and the possibility of building an intergenerational and multigenerational feminist movement where leaderships coexists, ensuring the transfer of knowledge and expertise while also bringing newer, younger voices into the fold to capture the struggles of young women human rights defenders (WHRDs). Feminist thinkers and authors have taught us the fundamental importance of networks for sustaining life, growing, healing, breaking through systemic oppression, and imagining a better future for all. Feminist networks think, feel, and act together. They are one of the places where invisible changes are initiated and sustained. Sometimes they operate in the shadows with little to no funding, without legal registration, and with unpaid work and unsafe conditions. Nevertheless, they demonstrate incredible resistance and persistence in protecting and building social justice for everyone, not just women. This case shows that providing tailored and flexible financial support to grassroots networks enables a safe and sustainable environment for human rights defenders and their work.



Temporary Relocation Programmes

The **Temporary Relocation Programme (TRP)** continued to play a central role in ProtectDefenders.eu's protection framework, providing **flexible and tailored support to 72 HRDs at heightened risk**. This past year, the programme provided support to diverse profiles of HRDs – demonstrating an inclusive approach.

In 50% of the relocations that took place in 2025, ProtectDefenders.eu provided **support to the family of the defenders** – either financially or by joining the temporary relocation. Inclusion of family members in the temporary relocation programme represents a **critical element in the success of the programme**, ensuring that HRDs are protected, supported and can continue their work with the confidence that their families are also protected.

The programme placed growing emphasis on **psycho-social support, rest and respite, advocacy**, and the remote **continuation of human rights work**, recognizing the cumulative impact of trauma, displacement, and prolonged insecurity on defenders.

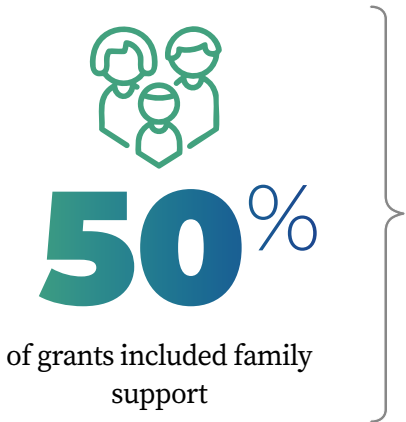
Over the past year, ProtectDefenders.eu has **witnessed numerous challenges to the operating environment**. The shrinking availability of regional safe havens, the rise of transnational repression, and increasingly restrictive visa regimes—particularly in the EU and the United States—created significant obstacles to timely and effective relocation. Transnational repression expanded into jurisdictions previously considered safe, including within EU Member States and the United States. Due to the erosion of civic space, the Mechanism has witnessed increased difficulties for HRDs seeking to return home. In face of these challenges, the past year has confirmed both the continued relevance and adaptability of the Temporary Relocation Programme and the need for further investment in **regionalized, flexible, and sustainable protection mechanisms**. As risks facing HRDs intensify globally, temporary relocation remains a vital lifeline—while also highlighting the structural and political constraints that must be addressed to ensure lasting protection.



72
Human rights
defenders relocated:

65% of relocated defenders are women or belong to other gender minorities

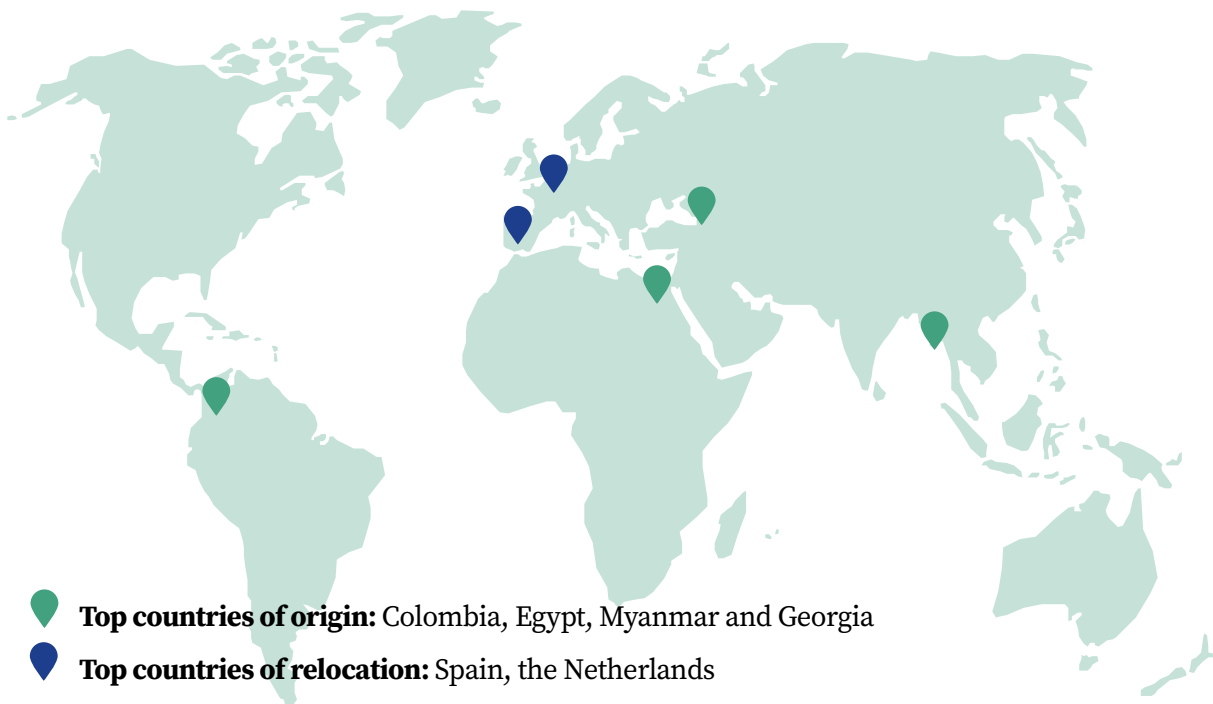
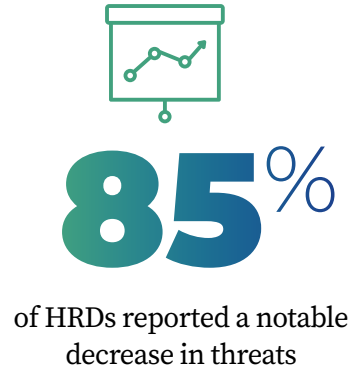
36% of relocated defenders are young HRDs



127 family members were supported through the TR programme:

62 family members benefited from financial assistance

31 family members were able to relocate with the defender



Our Support in Action

Temporary relocation strengthens Afghan WHRD

The EU HRDs mechanism demonstrates the vital role of temporary relocation in protecting and empowering human rights defenders at risk, particularly in highly repressive contexts like Afghanistan. The experience of Z.S., a woman human rights defender advocating for the rights of women and girls, highlights this impact.

Following the return of Taliban rule in 2021, women's rights in Afghanistan have been severely restricted, and defending them has become both dangerous and, in many cases, prohibited. Despite these risks, Z.S. continued her work supporting girls' education and women's rights, navigating an increasingly hostile environment.

Through support from ProtectDefenders.eu, and in collaboration with Catalan Commission for Refugee Aid, she benefited from a temporary relocation programme in Spain. This provided immediate

safety while also offering holistic support, including psychosocial care, digital security training, and opportunities for advocacy.

Beyond protection, the relocation proved transformative. From a secure environment, Z.S. strengthened her engagement in advocacy at local, national, and EU levels, while collaborating with Pons per la Pau to support other women human rights defenders. The experience enabled her to regain resilience, rebuild her well-being, and continue her activism despite being unable to safely return to Afghanistan.

This case highlights a key lesson, that temporary relocation is not only a protection tool, but also a catalyst for empowerment by combining safety with capacity building and international advocacy opportunities, such support enables defenders to remain active, resilient, and impactful.



The Shelter Initiatives Programme

The “Shelter Initiatives” programme contributes to create, enhance and increase the capacity of shelters and other initiatives for the temporary relocation of HRDs at risk at the local and regional levels. Despite a highly restrictive global environment in 2025, the Shelter Initiatives Programme has produced **tangible and strategically significant outcomes**. Pilot projects were launched in Uruguay and Lebanon, strengthening crucial relocation initiatives for defenders in the regions. ProtectDefenders.eu also put an emphasis on reinforcing the regional collaboration among shelters.

This programme continues to play a **critical role in expanding protection options** for human rights defenders, particularly in contexts where local civil society is under acute pressure. A new strategic orientation was developed for the programme based on a contextual risk assessment and identified protection gaps, particularly in West Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and parts of Asia. Growing interest from potential new partners in West Africa, Taiwan, and Sudan signals increasing demand for shelter-based protection solutions, with several partnerships expected to be confirmed in the coming years.

Coordination of the EU Temporary Relocation Platform (EUTRP)

The **European Union Temporary Relocation Platform (EUTRP)** continues to serve as a unique forum for the exchange, articulation, and collaboration among organizations and entities working in the field of **temporary relocation for HRDs**. It is also a privileged partner for ProtectDefenders.eu’s temporary relocation programme.

During the past year, the focus of the EUTRP was on strengthening membership (with the approval of 18 new

member organizations), ensuring **sustainable growth**, and fostering **ongoing engagement** within the programme.

The plan also focused on **sector-specific activities** including **advocacy on TR funding**, the creation of **learning spaces for secondary trauma** for TR providers, and collaborative work on **mobility frameworks**. Moreover, it also reinforced the **regional coordination**.



Visit the
EUTRP website



Capacity-building and Training of Human Rights Defenders



51 Training and capacity-building initiatives

Benefiting at least

1,600
HRDs

FOCUS AREAS



Campaigning Strategies



Protection Mechanism and Risk Assessment



International Protection Mechanism



Digital & IT security



Physical Security



Prevention of Criminalization



Psycho-social Support & Emotional Security



Exchange of Experiences and Mutual Learning

In 2025, **51 training initiatives** were implemented by the EU HRD Mechanism, directly benefiting over **1,600 HRDs** from at least 34 countries, with a strong focus on the Americas and Africa regions – a notable increase from the past years. The rising demand for capacity-building initiatives highlights the **critical need for HRDs to acquire new skills and tools to navigate shrinking civic space, digital surveillance, and legal harassment**. The higher-than-expected participation indicates an increasing awareness among defenders of the importance of strengthening their capacities in areas such as security, advocacy, digital protection, and well-being.

Over **50% of the participants were women human rights defenders (WHRDs)**, as well as trans and intersex defenders, demonstrating an emphasis on inclusivity and addressing the needs of those most at risk.

To meet this increased demand and respond to the evolving needs of HRDs worldwide, ProtectDefenders.eu and its partners continue to demonstrate remarkable adaptability. They adjusted their capacity-building efforts to **address emerging threat and evolving challenges**, fostered **strategic alliances with local, regional and international partners**, **diversified training modalities**, and developed **specialized programmes** tailored to the needs of specific groups of defenders.

The programme placed a particular emphasis on building **resilience** and fostering **local expertise**. By including a **training-of-trainers model** and grounding the capacity development in the **local knowledge** and experience of HRDs, ProtectDefenders.eu ensured **long-term impact** and **sustainability**. The initiative also prioritized creating and strengthening **protection networks**, particularly in **remote and isolated areas**, to support HRDs working in challenging and high-risk environments.

Our Support in Action

When Solidarity Becomes Protection: Building Movement Safety and Power Across Through Global Networks

In response to escalating physical, legal, digital and political threats faced by social movements and human rights defenders across ESCR-Net's network, the System of Solidarity Advisory Group (SOS AG) organized a virtual event titled "Urgent Protection and Solidarity: Emergency Support for Members at Risk" on 22 May 2025. The session convened 76 registered participants, primarily social movement organizations, many of whom had recently experienced criminalization, surveillance, digital threats, forced displacement, or community-level violence. The goal of the training session was to increase access to timely, lifesaving protection resources. The session brought together members of the SOS AG, protection specialists, and allies to outline available mechanisms such as emergency grants, rapid-response funds, digital security support, and temporary relocation programs, while creating an open, trust-building environment for members to ask questions and express needs. The event marked a turning point in strengthening the Network's collective confidence in protection pathways. Many movement members expressed that they were previously unaware of the scope of resources available through ProtectDefenders.eu and the System of Solidarity. Others reported that the session helped them clarify eligibility, prepare documentation, and identify safe, gender-responsive strategies for their communities. Several members experiencing ongoing threats followed up immediately to begin exploring emergency support, relocation possibilities, or digital/physical safety interventions. By centering voices from social movements and providing accessible guidance in a multilingual, participatory format, the event improved understanding of protection systems, expanded the use of available mechanisms, strengthened solidarity, and laid the foundation for more coordinated responses to future crises. It

demonstrated that collective safety requires collective knowledge and that solidarity is both a political and practical tool for survival.

The dialogue with members and the short survey completed by 76 participants across regions provided valuable insights into emerging trends in repression, common patterns of attacks, and urgent protection needs faced by defenders globally. This generated a clearer picture of regional dynamics, enabling the SOS AG to better identify risk patterns, anticipate needs, and refine solidarity strategies based on real-time information shared directly by movements. Taken together, these changes collectively enhanced the enabling environment for HRDs and social movements at risk and strengthened the Network's capacity for coordinated, informed, evidence-based protection.

Equipping at-risk HRDs with knowledge, tools, and confidence to access urgent support before crises escalate strengthened the enabling environment for defenders. Many defenders, especially women, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and rural community leaders, face significant barriers to accessing institutional protection, including lack of information, language challenges, bureaucratic complexity, and fear of stigmatization. By ering a collective, trust-building, movement-centered space, the event helped dismantle these barriers. Members learned not only how to request protection, but also that they are supported by a global community willing to mobilize quickly. This shift from isolation to collective readiness enhances resilience and sovereignty, enabling defenders to continue their vital human rights work with greater safety and solidarity.

Fieldwork and Accompaniment



In 2025, ProtectDefenders.eu carried out 8 field missions, including fact-finding, monitoring, and accompaniment activities, directly supporting 20 human rights defenders and 3 organizations. The missions focused primarily on the Americas, with activities in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, targeting cases of arbitrary detention and direct threats. Peace Brigades International played a **key role in providing physical accompaniment, acting as a deterrent to potential aggressors and creating safer spaces for defenders to continue their work.**

Despite the challenges due to constraints on the ground – from security risks to restrictive political environments – the missions carried out produced meaningful results, connecting isolated defenders to broader protection networks and generating evidence used in national and international advocacy. ProtectDefenders.eu remains committed to expanding its field presence and to adapting to evolving conditions.

Our Support in Action

Collective solidarity secures freedom for Afro-Indigenous defenders in Honduras

The EU HRDs mechanism demonstrates the power of coordinated international solidarity in protecting human rights defenders at risk. The experience of the Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña highlights how collective presence can directly influence justice outcomes. In fact, in 2025, amid escalating criminalisation and violence against Garífuna communities defending their ancestral lands, a solidarity visit coordinated by ESCR-Net brought together grassroots movements and international organizations to accompany communities on the ground. The delegation observed court hearings, documented abuses, and engaged directly with Honduran authorities.

At a critical moment, five Garífuna land defenders were facing severe criminal charges linked to their legitimate land defense work. Here, the visible international presence, inside courtrooms and

through high-level advocacy, shifted institutional behaviour. Shortly after these coordinated efforts, the court dropped the case and the five defenders were released.

Beyond this immediate impact, the visit strengthened protection for OFRANEH by increasing international visibility, challenging stigmatizing narratives, and generating pressure through media coverage and engagement with UN mechanisms. It also reinforced community resilience and affirmed the legitimacy of their struggle. We can observe how collective international presence can act as a powerful protection tool. By amplifying local voices and increasing scrutiny, coordinated solidarity can reduce risks, influence institutions, and help secure justice for defenders facing criminalisation.



Advocacy



502

Materials produced

11

Reports

181

Urgent appeals, communications, letters and statements

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



310

Alerts updated on the ProtectDefenders.eu Index of Attacks



During the past year, **ProtectDefenders.eu** actively undertook advocacy actions aimed at mobilizing relevant authorities, **raising public awareness, and increasing visibility about the precarious situation of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) worldwide.** These efforts included the issuance of urgent alerts, appeals, and targeted advocacy measures sent to national authorities, human rights protection mechanisms, institutional mandate-holders, and influential pressure groups. These materials serve as essential tools for informing key stakeholders—including policymakers, civil society organizations, and the general public—about the critical role played by human rights defenders in advocating for

fundamental rights and freedoms.

The impact of advocacy efforts was visible worldwide, with tangible success stories highlighting improvements in HRDs' conditions and preventing further violations. Beyond these achievements, the advocacy also carried a profound symbolic value, demonstrating international solidarity and support for HRDs at risk. The public dissemination of documented harassment cases through mailing lists and social media not only raised awareness but also fostered accountability by increasing pressure on national and international authorities.

Our Support in Action

Report and advocacy activities on trends of repression against human rights defenders and civic space in the Sahel region

Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger have experienced major upheavals since 2020. The accession of military leaders to power and the subsequent “transition” periods in these four countries have been accompanied by intensified repression of human rights defenders and a drastic closure of civic space. Between 2020 and 2024, FIDH documented several cases of arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, torture, threats and judicial harassment in these countries through the Observatory for the protection of human rights defenders' urgent appeals. Faced with the multiplication of the cases and the systematisation of the repression, FIDH decided to produce a report to analyse the common trends of repression against human rights defenders in these four countries. To this end, FIDH compiled the existing data and carried out additional interviews with dozens of defenders from the concerned countries and in exile to confirm, update and gather new data. This report was drafted in collaboration with the World organization Against Torture (OMCT), in the framework of the partnership of the Observatory for the protection of human rights defenders and was launch publicly during an online webinar gathering near to 200 people on 20 February 2025.

The report was then used as a basis for advocacy, notably during an advocacy tour at the 58th UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in March 2025 and an advocacy tour at the 83rd session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Banjul in April 2025. During these two events, FIDH organised side events with human rights defenders from the concerned countries to present the report. It was also used as a basis for discussions with the UN Independent Expert on Human Rights in Mali and for FIDH's submission for Niger's next UPR (March 2026).

This report and the advocacy activities that followed helped to highlight the ongoing repression of human rights defenders and civic space throughout the Sahel region. It helped to raise public awareness of various cases involving defenders and contributed to international pressure for their release or for the charges against them to be dropped.

This initiative allowed human rights defenders from the Sahel region to make their voices heard and their stories known widely. It allowed the mobilisation of different stakeholders at the local, regional and international levels around the cases and challenges faced by defenders at risk in the region.



টিকা সংরক্ষণ

THE WORLD STOPS FOR GAZA

MURDER LIAR

HIGH PERFORMANCE



03.

Coordination and Collective Advocacy

Coordination and Collective Advocacy



2025 marked a significant **consolidation of the coordination efforts** within the ProtectDefenders.eu Mechanism, with the expansion of the collaboration among Consortium partners. This period witnessed a continuous integration of efforts, strengthening the collective ability to respond to the increasingly complex challenges faced by HRDs. Central to this enhanced **coordination** is a series of strategic **inter-partner engagements** that have deepened collaborative ties and fostered a culture of shared responsibility. This **networked approach** has been crucial in addressing the growing demand for protection and support by HRDs, ensuring the timely and efficient delivery of resources and interventions.

Key developments highlight the Mechanism's ability to adapt to emerging challenges. Notably, the year saw significant progress in the area of **advancing enabling mobility and protection policies**, where ongoing advocacy efforts contributed to a **broader understanding of the need for flexible and tailored visa procedures** for HRDs at risk. This was achieved thanks to the facilitation of a series of training of EU delegations as well as a landmark **Multi-stakeholder Dialogue held in Brussels** in October 2025, co-organized with OHCHR, which brought together over 120 participants from civil society, EU institutions, and Member States to address growing protection gaps for defenders both inside and outside the EU. This led to an increase in visibility for the Mechanism, which has become a central reference point in discussions around HRD protection and mobility, both within and outside the EU. The **strategic positioning** of ProtectDefenders.eu as a key player in shaping EU policies for HRD protection has further solidified its role in driving **systemic change**.

In parallel, there was a marked contribution to advancing discussions on the **funding landscape** for HRDs, with ProtectDefenders.eu initiating several innovative projects aimed at **addressing funding gaps**. These efforts included a focused push to **increase the availability of emergency funding** for HRDs under immediate threat, in crisis contexts, as well as the development of new strategies to address the

long-term **financial sustainability** of HRDs' work. The close **coordination** between partners has ensured that these funding projects align with the immediate needs of HRDs, while also contributing to more sustainable support mechanisms. Throughout the year, ProtectDefenders.eu updated its study on the "The Landscape of Public International Funding for Human Rights Defenders". This updated financial study released in December highlights the **need for increased and improved funding for human rights defenders** and alerts to the danger of ODA cuts for the protection and support to the essential work of human rights defenders.

This comprehensive approach to **coordination** has allowed ProtectDefenders.eu and its partners to not only meet the urgent needs of HRDs but also anticipate future challenges. The collective **expertise** and **commitment** of **Consortium partners**, alongside the Secretariat's **proactive leadership**, have been essential in navigating this complex landscape, ensuring that HRDs continue to receive the critical support they need, even in the face of escalating threats.



Civil Society Gathering on Human Rights Defenders Mobility and Protection in the EU, 30 September and 1 October 2025



Amaya Eva Coonens

Damian Gallardo

No



04.

Reports and Publications

Abdulahdi Al-Khawaja

Reports and Publications

The reports published by ProtectDefenders.eu partners in the framework of the EU HRD mechanism offer crucial insights into the human rights situation in crisis contexts, providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and risks encountered by HRDs. Here is a list of the key reports and materials published:



1. Observatory Report: “We are coming after them” – The State of Civic Space in Zimbabwe



2. Observatory Report: Civic space and human rights defenders in the Sahel – A regional convergence of repressive practices



3. Observatory Report: Venezuela: La continuación de una política de persecución, intimidación, estigmatización y hostigamiento



4. Observatory Report: Iran: Tab'eed: Internal Exile as a Punishment for Human Rights Defenders and Minorities in Iran.



5. Observatory Report: Lebanon Joint Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review, 51st Session



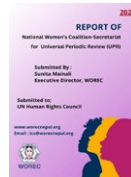
6. OMCT: Censorship by detention: 2024 report (SOS-Defenders).



Subscribe to receive updates and news through our [monthly newsletter](#):



7. OMCT: Libertés publiques en danger: alerte sur la répression en France. A report of the Observatory and the French League for Human Rights



8. OMCT: Report of National Women's Coalition-Secretariat for Universal Periodic Review (UPR)



9. Protection International: Annual Report 2024



10. Forum-ASIA: Defending in Numbers 2023-2024: Reclaiming Civic Space, Unbroken Voices



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www.protectdefenders.eu

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contact@protectdefenders.eu

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**This project is funded
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