

# FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

PROTECTDEFENDERS.EU REPORT



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In recent years, Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) have been facing increasing difficulties with the rise of authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes, the arrival of populist nationalisms in western democracies, and the persistence of various conflicts. This context led to a surge of emergency grants requests to protect HRDs: between 2013 and 2016, emergency requests from HRDs received by three members of ProtectDefenders.eu increased by 37%, 50% and 54% respectively<sup>1</sup>. However, some civil society organizations that work with HRDs across the globe have expressed concern that public and private donors have not answered these new challenges and even reduced their support.

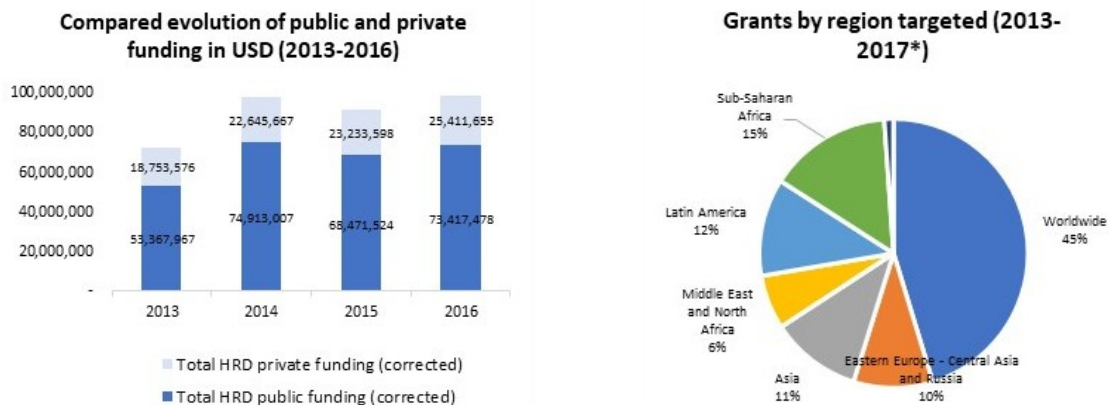
The objective of this study is to assess the volume of funding available for Human Rights Defenders (organizations and individuals) and to identify trends.

Data has been collected from the grants database of 23 donors: 10 public donors and 13 private donors, and covers the period 2013-2017<sup>2</sup>. All grants containing key words related to HRD and all grants allocated to 20 NGOs (called “the target group”) considered as key supporters of HRDs have been accounted for.

HRD FUNDING AT A GLANCE

Despite a worsening environment, HRD funding only grew by 1%, from USD 97.6 to 98.8 million<sup>3</sup> between 2014 and 2016 with important annual variations. Private funding gradually increased between 2014 and 2016, from USD 22.6 million in 2014 to USD 25.4 million in 2016 (+12%) while public funding declined by 2% (74.9 million to 73.4 million).

If we only consider the target group, the evolution has been more volatile: +14% between 2013 and 2014, -18% between 2014 and 2015, +19% between 2015 and 2016. Funding to the target group has represented between 50% and 54% of all accounted HRD funding, except in 2015 (39% only).



1 Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights Defenders; Front Line Defenders; Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Foundation.

2 The study encountered many limitations (scope of HRD´ definition, quality of grants database and data availability) and results should be read with caution. Results are more reliable when they are narrowed to the “target group”.

3 Data has been corrected: ProtectDefenders.eu’ grant from EIDHR was divided into 3 years, 11 million grant to Human Rights Watch from the Open Society Foundations in 2013 was not taken into account to not distort results.

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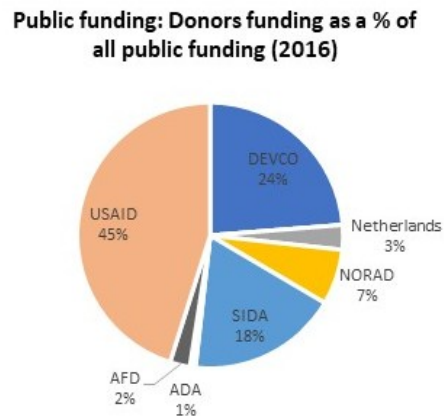
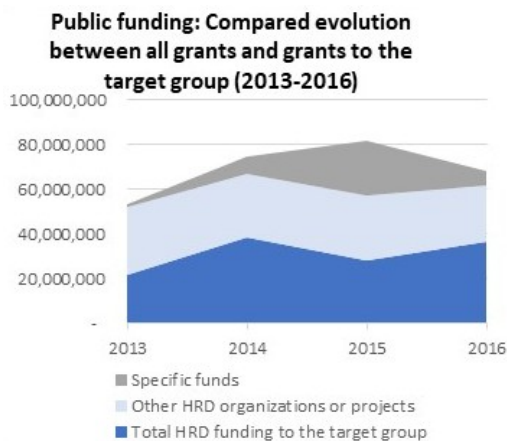
In terms of volume, HRD funding remains marginal in donor’s budgets: it only represents between 0.01% (U.K) and 0.25% (E.U) of ODA budgets, while it represents less than 3% of most private donors’ budgets.

**Global grants** – grants that support international activities or activities implemented in more than one region - **accounted for 45% of all grants for HRDs** registered between 2013 and 2017. Sub-Saharan African recipients receive the highest proportion of funding which is country or region specific (15% of all funding), followed by Latin America with 12% and Asia with 11%. Despite the Arab spring and the turmoil in several countries in the Middle and North Africa, only 6% of all funding between 2013 and 2017 was allocated to the region, and the trend is negative. Regarding Central Europe, although the situation for human rights defenders has worsened (especially in Hungary and Poland), it almost did not receive any funding that is country or region specific.

**A large share (55%)** of HRD funding from public and private donors **supported HRDs in general** and was not tied to specific types of HRDs. Specific groups of HRD such as women HRD, journalists, LGBTI activists, and indigenous leaders represent between 4 and 5% of all HRD funding each. However, actions targeting specifically environmental, land and indigenous rights defenders only received 5% of all HRD funding although those groups represented 50% of all HRDs killed in 2016 as reported in the Front Line Defenders’ annual report<sup>4</sup>.

**PUBLIC DONORS: A WORRYING TREND**

In 2016, public funding for HRDs reached USD 74.4 million, up by USD 20 million compared to 2013, but below 2014 level (-2%). In the same year, the United-States, the European Union and Sweden accounted for more than two thirds of all public funding for HRDs.



**The funding trend for HRDs is worrying as traditionally important donors have been reducing or will reduce their budget. North European countries and The Netherlands** have traditionally ranked among the greatest supporters of HRDs. However, funding has significantly fallen in the past years due to governments’ new priorities or to budget reallocation in favour of migration issues. While, according to data collected, The Netherlands cut its funding to HRD by 40%<sup>5</sup>, Denmark reduced it by 50%, and

4 Front Line Defenders, [Annual Report on the Human Rights Defenders at Risk in 2016](#)

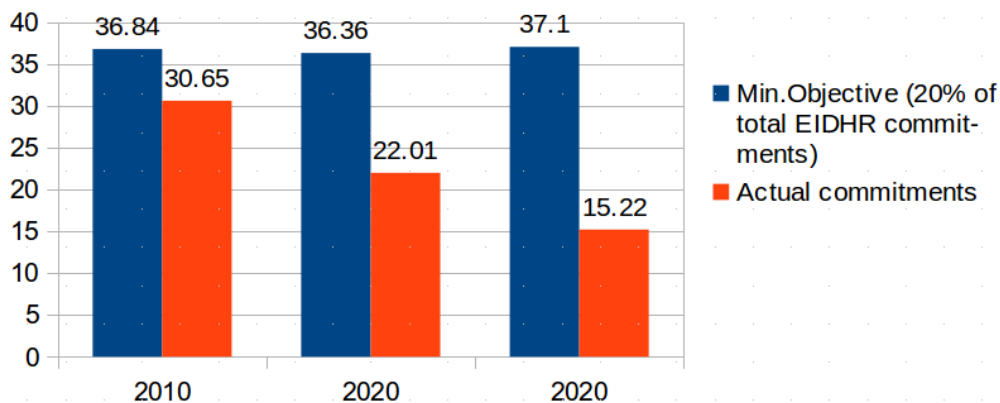
5 However, due the peculiar system of grants allocation (first come, first served), funding volume could be affected by a cyclical evolution.

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Sweden reduced by 11% its support to HRD organizations between 2013 and 2016. Norway seems to be the exception with a 5% increase during the same period.

Until 2016, this fall has been compensated by the surge of EU and US funding. With a funding volume of USD 20 to 30 million between 2013 and 2016, **the European Union** through the EIDHR remains the greatest supporter of HRDs along with the US. However, according to the data collected<sup>6</sup>, **current funding levels have been far below EU objectives**. According to the multiannual indicative program 2014-2017, between 20 and 25% of the annual EIDHR budget should be allocated to objective 1 (“Support to human rights and human rights defenders in situations where they are most at risk”) (EUR 35 to 45 million). Nevertheless, in 2014, commitments for HRDs only reached EUR 30.65 million, equivalent to 17% of all 2014 EIDHR commitments, below the objective of 20-25% of commitments for HRD defined in the indicative program. In 2015, commitments for HRDs fell to EUR 22 million, equivalent of 12% of all 2015 EIDHR commitments<sup>7</sup>.

**EIDHR - Gap between objective 1 indicative budget and actual commitments (2014-2016)**  
Source: EIDH mid-term evaluation annex



**The United States** have also been in the past years an important supporter of HRD organizations and projects across the globe. HRD funding is mainly channelled to two private organizations: Freedom House and the National Endowment for Democracy. The US are also the main contributors to the Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund (from 18 public donors and 2 private donors). HRD funding level could be impacted by the 2017 new presidential administration which announced a **budget cut for USAID of 32% in 2018**.

In addition, **funding modalities are not always adapted to specific HRDs’ needs and situations**. Because it is subjected to public scrutiny, funding from certain public donors tends to take the form of “project funding”, even in the case of HRD funding: applicants should present a specific project, with specific objectives and activities and a budget allocation defined in advance. Any deviation has to be carefully justified in advance. It ensures that public money is spent according to what has been previously defined. Funding conditions might be even stricter when they have to comply with anti-terror

<sup>6</sup> External Evaluation of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (2014 – mid 2017) Final Report Volume 2 – Annexes June 2017.

<sup>7</sup> 2016 CBSS final commitments are not yet known as agreements might be signed until the end of 2017. As a consequence commitments could be higher but they will remain far below the objective.

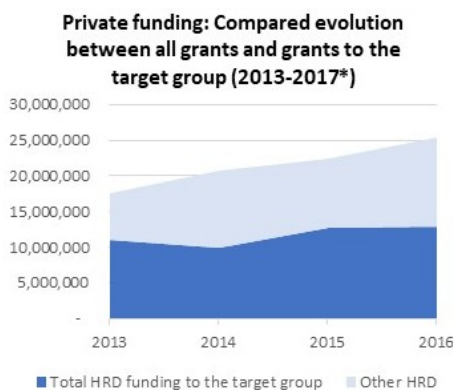
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legislations. However, these modalities are not adapted to support HRDs protection activities. Protection measures are emergency measures that cannot fully be anticipated.

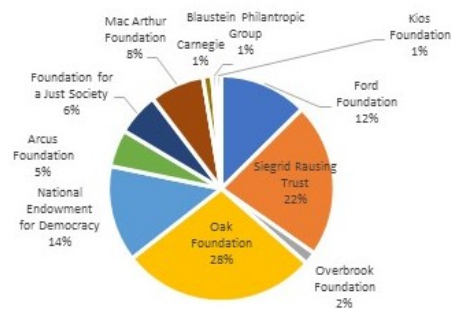
It is complicated to anticipate the exact volume of demands and its geographical distribution. It also may be needed to use non-official channels to support HRDs in countries where they are at-risk and/or where international funding of NGOs is prohibited. As a consequence, HRDs organizations need more flexibility while the trend in public funding is to have stricter criteria. Nevertheless, NGOs interviewed have observed a positive shift among some public donors in the past years which went back to core-funding and more flexible modalities (Sweden and Norway).

PRIVATE DONORS: A POSITIVE TREND WHICH DOESN'T COMPENSATE THE FALL OF PUBLIC FUNDING

In 2016, private funding – mainly from US-or UK-based foundations or Trusts - to HRDs reached 24.4 million USD, 26% of all accounted funding to HRDs. According to the data collected<sup>8</sup>, the total of HRD grants from private donors accounted grew by 28% (more than 5 million USD up) between 2013 to 2016. The results regarding the target group of 20 HRD NGOs seem to confirm the global evolution of HRD grants. Indeed, grants to the target group grew by 31% between 2014 and 2016 after a 11% fall between 2013 and 2014 (a fall which might be a little higher as data regarding NED grants in 2013 are not available). However, as public donors are three times as significant as private donors, the rise of HRD funding from private donors won't be sufficient to compensate the fall of public funding.



**Private funding: Donors funding as a % of all private funding (2016)**



The highlighted increase comes from a rise of HRD funding from the following private donors: The MacArthur Foundation (+121%), Foundation for a Just Society (+88%), Arcus Foundation (+87%), Oak Foundation (+48%), Overbrook Foundation (+34%) and Ford Foundation (+26%). Despite changes in their strategies, the Ford Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation remain important donors for HRD, behind Sigrid Rausing Trust and Oak Foundation. **However, among many private donors, HRD grants remain relatively marginal.** The Oak Foundation, the largest donor for HRD organizations and projects with more than 7 million USD distributed in 2016, only spent 3.3% of its total grants budget on this issue. The Ford Foundation, which was the 4<sup>th</sup> largest donor in 2016 with more than 3 million USD distributed, only spent 0.5% of its annual budget on HRDs. The Sigrid Rausing Trust is the only organization that allocate a significant share of its budget to HRDs (around 15%).

<sup>8</sup> Excluding data for the Open Society Foundations which is not fully available after 2014

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Funding modalities from private donors are more adapted to the needs of HRDs than public funding as they tend to more often offer flexible core-funding at international level rather than project funding in specific countries. Nevertheless, selection criteria might differ from one donor to another and funding is considered by recipients as being less recurrent than public funding.

### A SHRINKING SPACE FOR HRDS WHICH CALLS FOR AN INCREASE IN RESOURCES AND MORE FLEXIBILITY

Human rights defenders have been facing an unprecedented clampdown from authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes all over the globe. This clampdown takes the form of legal and administrative barriers, as governments impose new legislations regarding NGOs. These legislations impose new status registrations or previous financial approval of foreign funding from the government such as in Russia, India, China, Egypt, Algeria, various Latin-American countries (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador) and even some European countries (Hungary, Poland). In practice, they prevent or discourage NGOs to get funding from abroad. As they cannot access to national public funding when they exist (public funds are primarily given to organizations close to the government), prohibiting funds from bilateral or multilateral agencies is a way to shut them. International NGOs that support HRDs still may find some ways to help HRDs at risk. However, they may struggle to maintain a physical presence in these countries and need even more flexible modalities such as core-funding and confidential grants to not put beneficiaries at risk.

### CONCLUSIONS

1. Although funding available for HRDs has shown slight increases during the period, the level of funding available from both private and public donors year-on-year has been highly volatile.
2. There are worrying indications that public funding for HRDs may be set to decrease in coming years due to loss of support from traditional allies. The increase of private funding should not be enough to compensate this fall as private donors still hold a minority share of all HRD funding.
3. Funding for HRDs continues to make up a very small proportion of funds allocated by public donors. Equally, funding for HRDs continues to make up a limited proportion of funds allocated by private donors (with some notable exceptions)
4. While HRDs need flexibility in funding modalities (for instance core funding and confidentiality) because of the specific nature of HRDs activities, they face increasing requirements and unsuitable conditions from certain public donors.
5. These findings were observed in a context where the level of need and demand from HRDs has significantly risen. Increased support will be required in the coming years to meet the demands of HRDs operating in the context of a global backlash.

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ProtectDefenders.eu is the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism implemented by international civil society and established to protect defenders at high risk and facing the most difficult situations worldwide.



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