

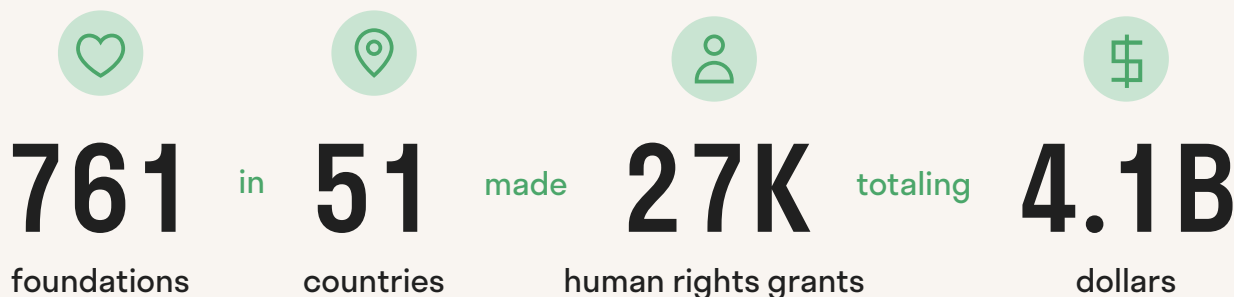
The Trust Gap

The Troubling Lack of Direct, Flexible Funding for Human Rights in the Global South and East

Year after year, Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN) and our partners have documented marked differences in the number, size, and type of foundation grants that human rights activists and institutions in different regions receive.¹ Organizations based in the Global North² control the vast majority of human rights grant dollars and largely determine the geographies, issues, and communities that are prioritized and funded to undertake human rights actions around the world. Our findings show that limited funding is reaching communities leading change in the Global South and East despite strong evidence that “self-led organizing,” or social justice action led by affected communities themselves, generates longer-lasting and more relevant change.

Who has access to and control over funding—including flexible funding that gives recipients discretion over how to best use it—has serious repercussions for human rights movements globally.³ In [this report](#), we explore what we call the “trust gap”—significant regional disparities in human rights funding for groups in the Global South and East versus those in the Global North.

Overview of Global Human Rights Funding (2019)

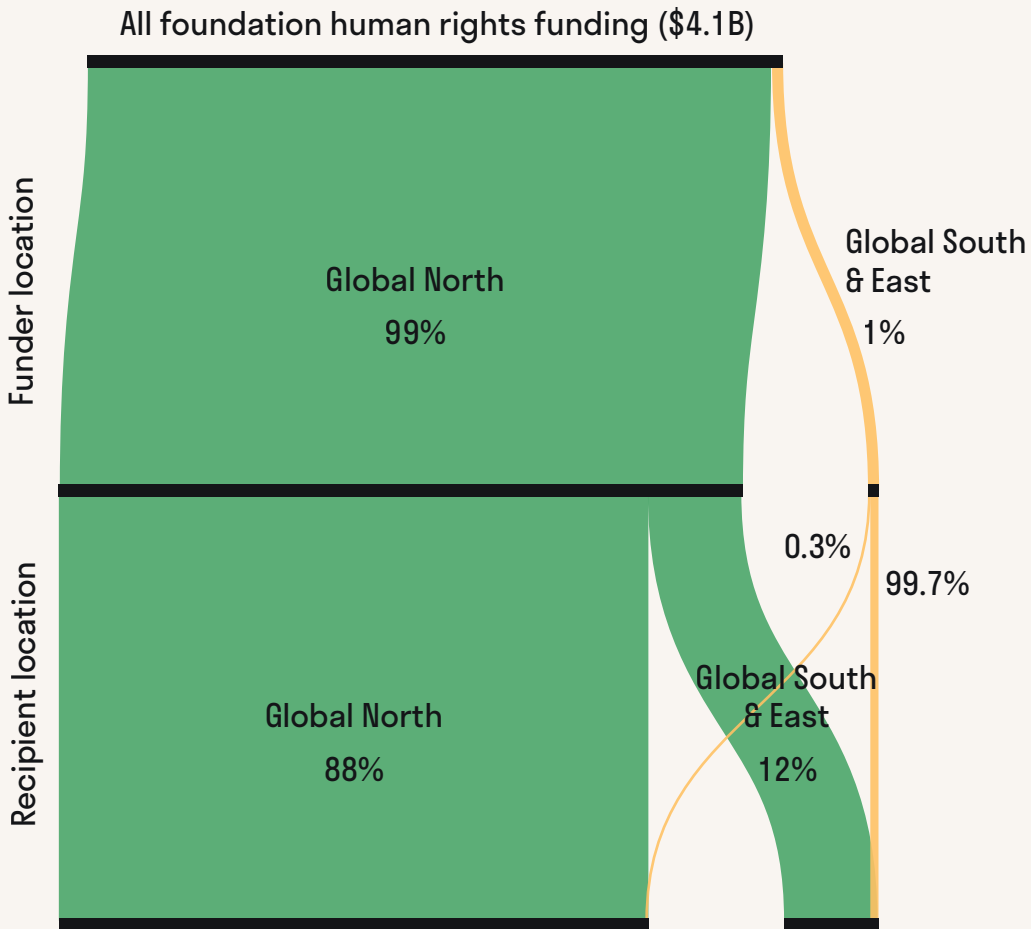


Here are our key findings:

1. Foundations in the Global North control 99% of global human rights funding and award 88% of that funding to organizations based in the Global North. The remaining 12% of grant dollars go to groups in the Global South and East.

2. Of the human rights funding earmarked for each region, the proportion that directly reaches recipients in the Global North is significantly higher than the proportion that directly reaches recipients in the Global South and East. Only 1% of grant dollars that benefit the Global North go to organizations outside the beneficiary regions. In contrast, 36% of grant dollars that benefit the Global South and East go to organizations outside the beneficiary regions. For example, 40% of the funding meant to benefit the Middle East and North Africa goes to organizations in other regions.

99% of human rights funding is granted by funders in the Global North, and 88% of that funding stays in the Global North.



Organizations based in the Global North control the vast majority of human rights grant dollars and largely determine the geographies, issues, and communities that are prioritized and funded to undertake human rights actions around the world.

3. Bias and power inform the scale, flexibility, and directness of grants. Many in the field have documented the ways race, gender, and other forms of power inform implicit and explicit ideas about who can be trusted to receive grants—particularly direct, sizable, and flexible funding. Our findings affirm that there is a trust gap in philanthropy in how funding flows on a global scale that exceeds what would be explained by laws and regulations alone.

4. Two thirds of the funding from Global North foundations to benefit the Global South and East that is not granted directly to the beneficiary regions instead goes to Global North-based INGOs and NGOs. Some of this funding is used for advocacy within the Global North that impacts the Global South and East, but much of it is used for projects that are very specific to Global South and East contexts.

5. Large grants are rarely directly reaching organizations in the Global South and East that are leading change in their own contexts. When funding initiatives to benefit the Global South and East, foundations typically give smaller grants to organizations based in the beneficiary regions than to those outside these regions. For example, direct grants to recipients in Asia and the Pacific or Latin America and the Caribbean are more than three times smaller than the grants organizations outside these regions receive to work there.

6. Organizations in the Global South and East have considerably less access to flexible funding. A third of the grant dollars for human rights initiatives focused on North America are awarded to recipients in North America as flexible support, which gives grantees autonomy to decide how to best use the funding to achieve their missions. In comparison, just one in 10 grant dollars for Eastern Europe and Central Asia is granted directly to in-region recipients as flexible support.

7. Local and regional foundations in the Global South and East play an essential role in supporting community-grounded movements. Despite controlling only 1% of global human rights funding, these foundations provide crucial expertise and infrastructure to support grassroots activism and advocacy. Nearly all of their funding stays in the Global South and East, directly benefiting the communities they serve.

8. Women’s funds are at the forefront of direct and flexible grant-making to organizations in the Global South and East. 92% of Global North women’s funds fund organizations in the Global South and East directly and half of their direct funding is flexible. This is more than any other type of funder. Among funders based in the Global South and East, women’s funds also provide more flexible funding than any other funder type.

9. Our field will not change if we don’t address bias, shift power, and close the trust gap in philanthropy. There is hope. A growing number of funders and movements are working to redefine funding relationships through participatory grantmaking, movement-led funds, and direct and flexible funding models. Still others are looking at the systemic change needed to truly grapple with the legacy of wealth, inequality, and power that underpins philanthropy. It is only through this kind of reflection, coordination, and action that we can build a funding ecosystem that centers trust and shifts power to frontline organizations and movements.

“Be part of HRFN’s global network where you can meet peers, ask questions, share grants data, and strategize with a community on how to shift resources and power to those most affected by injustice and inequality.”



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HRFN newsletter

¹ We conduct our *Advancing Human Rights* research in partnership with Candid, Ariadne–European Funders for Social Change and Human Rights, and Prospera International Network of Women’s Funds.
² For this analysis, the Global North includes Western Europe, Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States and the Global South and East includes all other countries. We recognize that these terms are not perfect, that people use different terms to define groups and geographies (e.g. “global majority,” “majority world”), and that this language is often shaped through the same unequal power dynamics that our research works to bring to light. At HRFN we are considering whether and how to adjust the terminology we use.
³ We use the terms “flexible” and “unrestricted” interchangeably in this report to reflect grants that give recipients discretion over how to use the funding. This includes grants that foundations describe as general support, general operating, general mission, unrestricted charitable contribution, discretionary, and similar terms.