

ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS



ANNUAL REVIEW OF GLOBAL FOUNDATION GRANTMAKING

KEY FINDINGS 2020



As the landscape of human rights today is shaped by intersecting crises, **how is philanthropy responding on a global scale?**



Every year, Human Rights Funders Network's (HRFN's) analysis of grants data offers important insights into the priorities, gaps, and changes in human rights funding.¹ This analysis is not just any year. Looking at grants data from 2020, we track a field amidst a global pandemic and world-wide uprisings for justice. The world was burning. Movements were organizing. Communities were at once deeply interconnected and at a breaking point. Racial, economic, and gender inequalities were laid bare on a global scale. This report answers the question: how did human rights funders respond?²

In the data, we see a record-breaking \$4.9 billion in human rights funding.³ In addition to the overall increase, we track promising shifts, including leadership by Global South and East funders and more agile, responsive grantmaking across the board. The findings also point to concerning trends we have raised in recent years: persistent **global disparities**, few grants going toward **intersectional organizing**, and short-term funding at the expense of longer-term support.

The lessons of 2020 capture a moment in time, and also raise crucial questions about how philanthropy mobilizes on a global scale. This data offers insights that both confirm and challenge prevailing narratives about human rights funding during crisis. As the landscape of human rights today is shaped by intersecting crises like genocide, climate change, and rising authoritarianism, and movements organize across issues and geographies, these findings are more relevant than ever.

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. The pandemic also has impacted the human rights funding data we've been tracking since 2010. Data collection was hindered by reporting delays from both funders and government sources. Only now do we have the full picture of field-wide grants awarded in 2020.

3. We excluded 367 grants (totaling \$114 million) awarded by foundations in the data set to other foundations in the data set to prevent double counting. All figures are in U.S. dollars.

Our analysis shows:



1 Record high funding

Amidst a global pandemic, human rights funders substantially increased grantmaking in 2020, reaching a record high of \$4.9 billion, a 21% increase over 2019.^{4,5} Of the additional \$800 million awarded in 2020, 43% (\$348M) explicitly addressed the COVID-19 pandemic.



2 Trade-offs in funding priorities

Many grant dollars shifted from long-term systemic change efforts towards immediate emergency organizing and basic needs in response to the pandemic. Longstanding human rights funders pivoted to support service provision – from food insecurity to housing to health education – as movements expanded their mandates and filled gaps wrought by the pandemic. The 2020 response shows a field able to step up, but underscores the need for stronger infrastructure to address both long-term and short-term human rights concerns effectively in times of crisis.



3 Persistent regional disparities in direct funding

Just 58% of funds designated for the Global South and East were granted to organizations based there, a drop from 64% in 2019. The remaining funds went to groups outside the regions they were meant to benefit. In contrast, 99% of grant dollars for the Global North went to organizations based in the Global North.⁶ The **trust gap** continues to reinforce global disparities in direct funding.



4 Surge in grantmaking by Global South and East funders

Between 2017 and 2020, a set of the largest 11 funders in the Global South and East awarded over 1,500 additional grants (from 772 in 2017 to 2,347 in 2020). This likely reflects a twofold trend: expanding capacity to support local human rights movements and increased access to resources from other funders. This points to a more nuanced and locally-focused approach to human rights work.

4. In this report, we use the terms “funders” and “foundations” interchangeably to refer to private foundations, public foundations, and donor collaboratives.

5. Funding change is assessed through two methods. Comparing all funding identified in 2020 to 2019 shows a 20% increase. Focusing on funders with data for both years (a more reliable comparison) yields a 21% increase, mirroring the overall trend.

6. 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. We are considering whether and how to adjust the terminology we use.



5 Increased network funding to the Global South and East

Global North foundations in human rights networks (HRFN, Ariadne, and Prospera) notably increased direct funding to the Global South and East by 8%, from 65% of their funding for these regions in 2019 to 73% in 2020. They also consistently allocate a substantially larger proportion of their funding to the Global South and East (29%) than their non-member counterparts (8%). This suggests a growing commitment among network members to support locally-led initiatives.



6 Regional disparities in unrestricted funding

Only 27% of human rights grant dollars are considered flexible, unrestricted support, and access to such grants varies widely by region.⁷ Just over a quarter of the funding for North America and Latin America and the Caribbean that goes directly to these regions is considered flexible. This figure drops precipitously to 11% for Sub-Saharan Africa and a mere 6% for Eastern Europe and Central Asia. For the latter, a staggering 94% of the funding is earmarked for specific projects or doesn't directly reach the region at all.



7 Increased focus on racial justice

In 2020, racial justice commitments among human rights funders mirrored movements for Black lives and racial justice around the world. Funding increased 67% (+\$661M) for racial and ethnic groups, and totaled \$1.7 billion in 2020. The average grant size also increased, from \$175,000 to \$224,000, with both new and longstanding funders awarding unprecedentedly large grants. Despite the increase, funding for racial and ethnic groups still represents between just 1% and 3% of total philanthropic giving.⁸



8 Mixed progress on intersectional grants

Just 28% of grants consider multiple identities, with most (58%) still focused on single identities. While progress is slow, the number of grants for LGBTQI communities and persons with disability that consider additional identities jumped from 33% and 37%, respectively, in 2018 to 60% each in 2020. However, intersectional grants for racial and ethnic groups dropped 10% to 43% – the lowest overlap of any group we explored. This decrease is particularly troubling given the growing recognition of the interconnectedness of race, class, disability, gender and other factors, especially during the pandemic.

7. 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.

8. To estimate the share of philanthropic giving allocated to racial and ethnic groups’ human rights, we used two approaches. The most conservative approach, comparing grantmakers within Candid’s Foundation 1000 data set, estimates this figure at 3%. Alternatively, a broader comparison considers the total funding in this research identified for racial and ethnic groups (\$1.7B) against the [Global Philanthropy Report’s](#) estimate of annual foundation spending (\$150B), resulting in a lower 1% estimate.