

# ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS

ANNUAL REVIEW OF GLOBAL  
FOUNDATION GRANTMAKING

2020 KEY FINDINGS



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## 2020 KEY FINDINGS

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# Key Findings

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.<sup>1</sup> 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?<sup>2</sup>

In the data, we see a record-breaking \$4.9 billion in human rights funding.<sup>3</sup> 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.



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



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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.<sup>4,5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>



## 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.

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# The State of Foundation Funding for Human Rights in 2020

As we look back on the past several years, the landscape of human rights has fundamentally changed. The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered our world in ways we are only starting to understand. We weathered years of lockdowns, moved to Zoom, and envisioned new ways of resourcing movements for justice.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the field of human rights philanthropy is only now coming to light. In this report, we take a look back at this foundational year to understand how philanthropy reacted and ask what has changed – and what has not – about how our field responds to crisis.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly reshaped philanthropy. Human rights movements immediately became first responders. LGBTQI activists shifted to care for their communities in need, Black feminists organized mutual aid, and human rights groups around the world suddenly attended to health, poverty, and the compounding effects of near-global shutdowns. Even at the time, HRFN and our partners foresaw the need for swift and sweeping transformation for the field of human rights philanthropy and committed to taking action.<sup>(A)(B)</sup>

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.<sup>(C)</sup> Only now do we have the full picture of field-wide grants awarded in 2020. This data offers insights that both confirm and challenge prevailing narratives about human rights funding during crisis.

First and foremost, we saw a field not known for agility move significant resources quickly and on a massive scale. In 2020, human rights funding from foundations increased by 21% from 2019, reaching an all-time high of \$4.9 billion.<sup>9</sup> The magnitude of the jump (+\$800M) is larger than any single-year change on record, as human rights funders dug deeper to respond to needs wrought by the pandemic. At least 43% of the increased funding (+\$348M) explicitly addressed the pandemic, reflecting the important role



We saw a field not known for agility move significant resources quickly and on a massive scale. **Human rights funding increased by 21%, reaching an all-time high of \$4.9 billion.**



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9. 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.



The data show the **trade-offs for human rights in crisis**. Some long-term systemic change work lost funding to more short-term emergency responses.



this community of funders plays in times of crisis.<sup>10,11</sup> This substantial increase aligns with findings from other analyses of foundation funding in 2020, highlighting a broader trend in philanthropic response to the pandemic.<sup>12</sup>

Second, the data show the trade-offs for human rights in crisis. Some long-term systemic change work lost funding to more short-term emergency responses. Emergency grants – which ranged from funding immediate needs like food and housing to preventing nonprofit closures – highlight the pandemic’s urgency and its demands on human rights movements. They also underscore philanthropy’s unique ability to fill gaps that government funding can’t or won’t reach, especially in times of crisis. The funding was, in large part, critical to sustaining human rights actors and actions. At the same time, these pivots may have long-term implications for how the hard work of deep systemic change is supported through periods of acute crisis.

In response to the pandemic’s widespread impact, foundations aimed to ease access to funding for many organizations, including historically oppressed groups that have been disproportionately affected. This included reducing funding restrictions, streamlining application processes, and prioritizing racial equity initiatives.<sup>(D)(E)(F)(G)</sup> These changes initially sparked optimism that long-desired reforms were taking root.<sup>(H)</sup> However, research suggests these positive shifts may not be permanent, with some practices reverting to pre-pandemic norms in terms of funding restrictions and reduced support for racial justice.<sup>(I)(J)</sup>

Promisingly, some foundation grants related to the pandemic showcased intersectional funding. For instance, a Ford Foundation grant supported research on how COVID-19 impacted informal workers, ultimately aiming to influence labor policies. Similarly, a Global Greengrants Fund grant raised awareness of the link between COVID-19 and climate change, demonstrating the interconnectedness of these issues. These examples highlight the potential of intersectional funding to address complex concerns.

We also saw an encouraging 67% increase (+\$661M) in funding for racial and ethnic groups.<sup>13</sup> This rise in funding mirrored the surge in movements for Black lives and racial justice happening around the

10. We included any grant that mentioned COVID, coronavirus, or pandemic in the grant description, program, or title. The true level of funding related to the pandemic is likely higher since many grants lack detailed descriptions.

11. The remaining increase (+\$456M) is consistent with the level of steady growth we have seen in human rights philanthropy each year since 2016.

12. Based on grants from 1,000 of the largest U.S. private and community foundations, Candid’s Foundation 1000 data set revealed a 22% increase in funding between 2019 and 2020.

13. A subset of funders with data available for both 2019 and 2020 shows funding growth for racial and ethnic groups among both U.S.-based funders (28% more grants, 70% more funding) and funders outside the U.S. (40% more grants, 31% more funding).

world, grounded in decades of advocacy. However, as we discuss below, very little of this new funding supports intersectional organizing. As our baseline report on **intersectional funding** shows, the lack of intersectional support remains an issue across the board for human rights philanthropy. Indeed, in 2020, most grants (58%) still focus on single identities, and only 28% consider two or more identities, with little improvement from the previous two years.<sup>14</sup> This underscores the need for increased attention to and support for individuals whose identities intersect in complex ways.

Though we heard widespread reports of increases in flexible, unrestricted funding in response to the pandemic, our data show no real change in human rights funders' practices.<sup>15</sup> In 2020, 27% of human rights funding was unrestricted, a figure that has hovered between 26% and 28% since 2016. (As we'll explore later, these percentages vary greatly by region, with just 6% of the funding for

Eastern Europe and Central Asia, for example, granted directly to groups there as flexible support.) This lack of change is surprising. It's possible that funders that were already providing flexible funding adapted more readily to the pandemic's demands.<sup>16</sup> Alternatively, the grants captured in our 2020 data may not yet reflect the full extent of the shifts.

## Examples of COVID-19 Emergency Grants

*to address food insecurity in Sierra Norte de Oaxaca caused by the closure of roads as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic by distributing maize to indigenous communities who have already been disproportionately affected."*

**- American Jewish World Service**

*to provide emergency support...for transgender refugees facing insecurity, homelessness and lack of nutrition as a result of the movement limitations and prohibitions placed by the government of Kenya as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic."*

**- UHAI EASHRI**

*to undertake COVID-19 prevention education in marginalized communities, especially among women, who have not been reached with vital COVID-19 prevention information."*

**- African Women's Development Fund**

14. "Single identities" and "two or more identities" refers to one or more of the nine populations included in our analysis, such as racial and ethnic groups, persons with disabilities, and women and girls. See the full list in the populations section of this report.

15. 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.

16. Human rights funders are more likely to provide unrestricted grants compared to philanthropy as a whole. For example, prior to 2020, the proportion of unrestricted grants from U.S. foundations in general was around 20%.<sup>(K)</sup>



While promising developments emerged, **troubling issues remain**. As movements organize across issues and geographies, **these findings become even more relevant**.



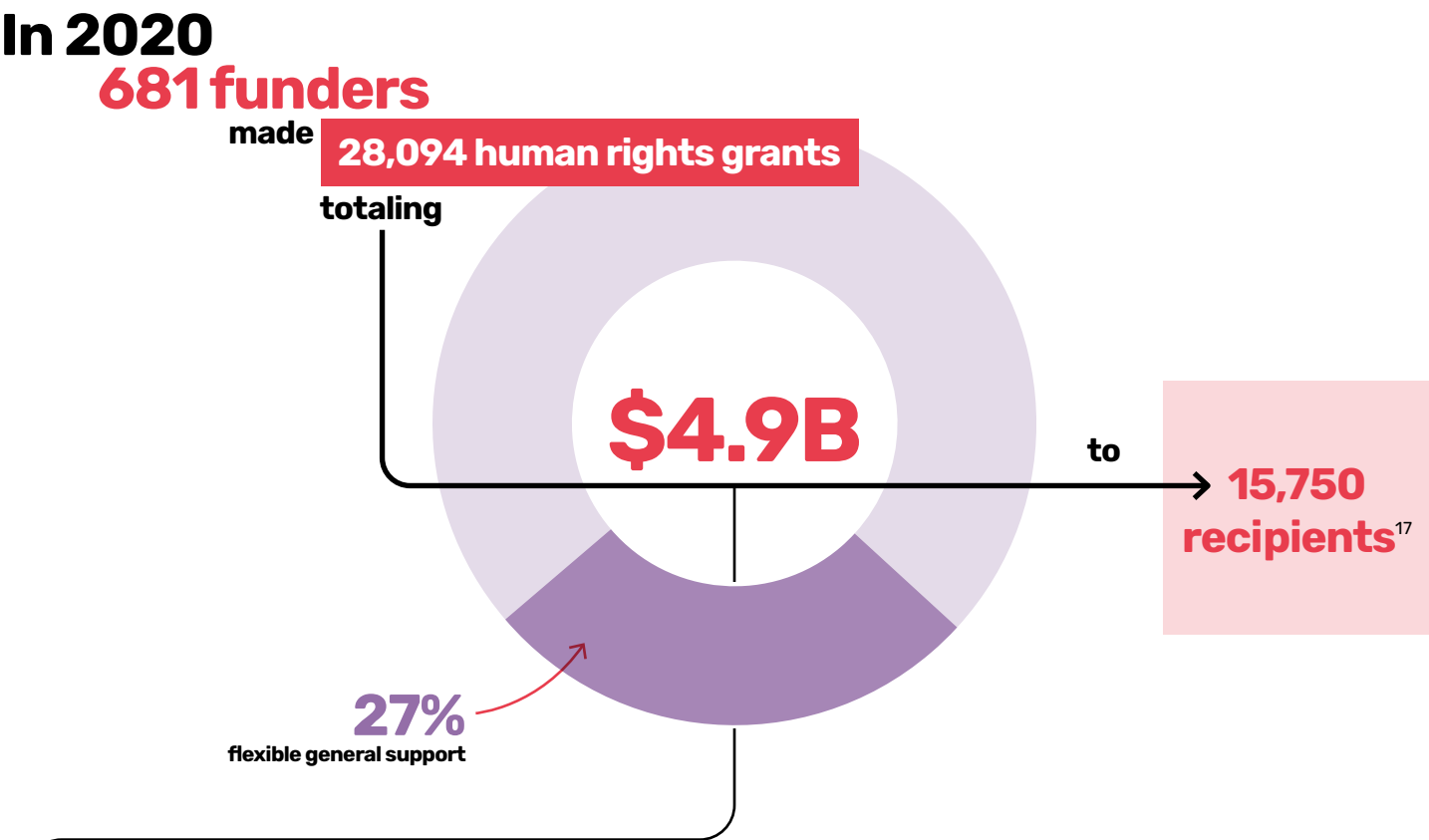
Despite ongoing regional disparities in how resources flow to human rights movements globally, 2020 brought a glimmer of hope. Make no mistake: a persistent **trust gap** remains. Only 58% of funding designated for the Global South and East actually went directly to organizations based there in 2020 (down from 64% in 2019). However, we witnessed an encouraging shift: funders from the Global South and East themselves became a stronger force. Over a short three-year period (2017-2020), a set of the largest 11 funders in the Global South and East more than tripled their grantmaking. They made over 1,500 additional grants, reaching 2,347 grants in 2020 from 772 in 2017. This suggests a twofold trend: increased capacity to support local movements and potentially greater access to resources from other funders. This trend aligns with a notable increase in direct funding for the Global South and East from Global North foundations within human rights networks (HRFN, Ariadne, and Prospera). Their direct funding rose from 65% of the grant dollars they designated for these regions in 2019 to 73% in 2020, representing an 8% increase. This suggests a growing commitment within these networks to supporting locally-led efforts.

The lessons of 2020 capture a moment in time. While promising developments emerged, including more funding overall, increased support for racial justice, and hopeful signs for accessible grantmaking, troubling issues remain. High rates of restricted funding, persistent global disparities, and limited intersectional support paint a complex picture. They also raise crucial questions about how philanthropy mobilizes on a global scale.

The human rights landscape is increasingly complex, shaped by intersecting crises like genocide, climate change, and rising authoritarianism. As movements organize across issues and geographies, these findings become even more relevant. The challenge now lies in building upon these advancements to ensure a more effective and just response to future crises, where upholding human rights remains a cornerstone.

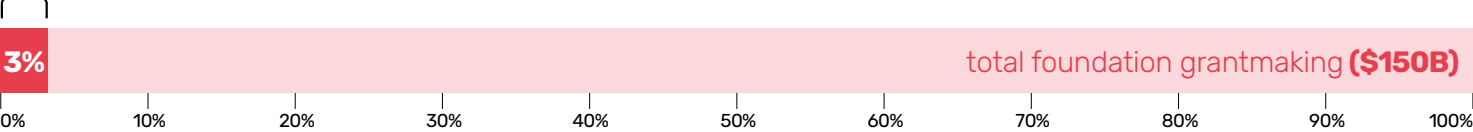
# Human Rights Funding: Overview, Context, and Comparisons

## Funding Overview



## Contextualizing the Funding

It is difficult to know exactly how much philanthropic support exists globally. We estimate that human rights funding represented between 3% and 8% of total foundation grantmaking in 2020. Our most conservative estimate – looking solely at Candid’s Foundation 1000 data set for human rights versus non-human rights grants – places funding for human rights at 7.6%. The lowest estimate (3%) comes from comparing all the human rights grants we found in this research (\$4.9B) to a [study](#) which calculates that foundations globally spend an estimated \$150 billion annually.<sup>18</sup>



17. 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.  
18. This includes the costs of grants and other financial support to third parties, foundation-led programming, and administrative costs. The authors of the [Global Philanthropy Report](#) estimate that actual amounts of annual philanthropic expenditure are likely much higher.

# Matched Subset

In this report we frequently mention the “matched subset.” This refers to a specific group of 497 foundations, which represent 73% of the funders and 92% of the funding in our 2020 data set. Here’s why they’re important:



## Consistent Data

These foundations have grants data available for both 2019 and 2020. This allows us to directly compare their funding across those two years.

## Focus on Trends

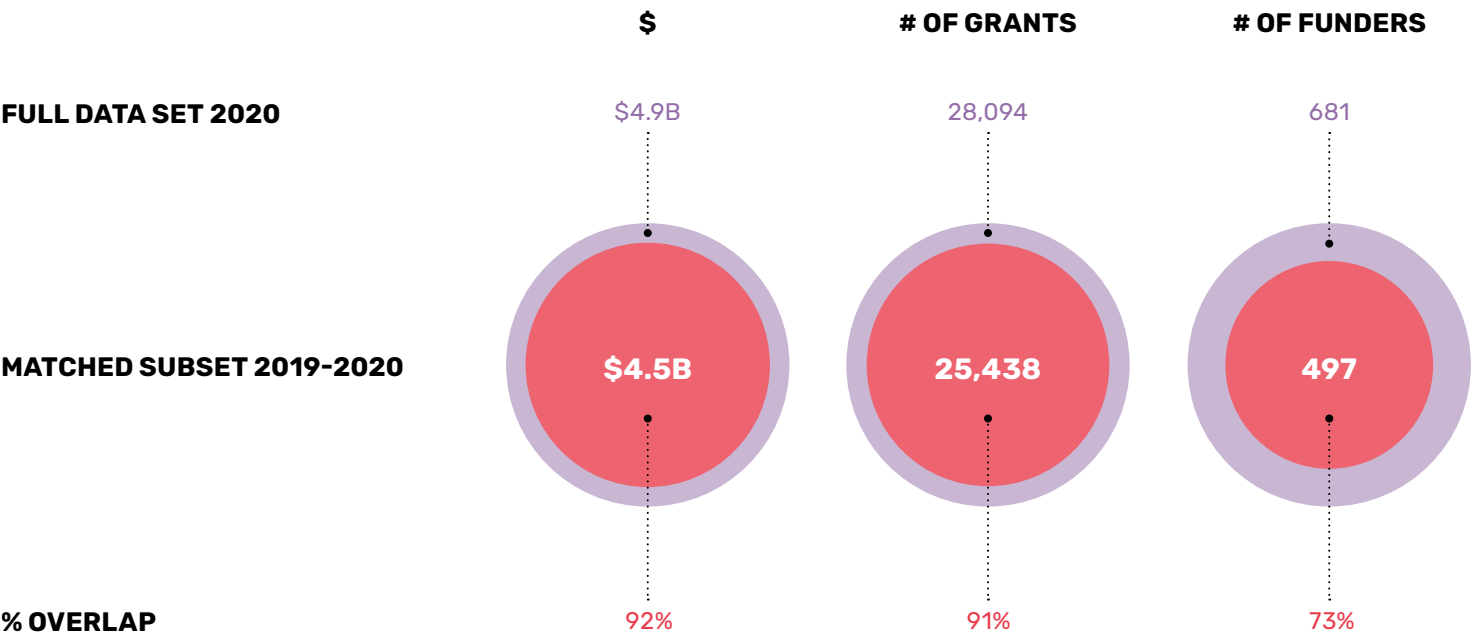
By looking at a consistent group, we avoid biases caused by year-to-year changes in the list of funders submitting data. This ensures we’re measuring actual trends in foundation funding, not just changes in who shares data.

## Reliable Comparison

Focusing on funders making human rights grants in both years provides a reliable and focused measure of changes in human rights funding.

Overall, the matched subset strengthens our analysis by allowing us to track true year-to-year changes in foundation grantmaking for human rights causes.

## COMPARING OVERLAP: FULL DATA SET VS. MATCHED SUBSET



# Who Makes Human Rights Grants?

Through close examination of individual grants, our *Advancing Human Rights* research creates a comprehensive annual picture of human rights funding. This extensive research combines data from two sources:

- 1. **HRFN, Ariadne, and Prospera:** Network members share their grants data each year, providing valuable insights into human rights funding. In 2020, 173 members across the three networks contributed data.<sup>19</sup>
- 2. **Candid:** Our research partner Candid compiles annual grants data from 1,000 of the largest U.S. private and community foundations, representing roughly half of all U.S. grantmaking by these institutions. While some may not explicitly identify as human rights funders, our analysis reveals that over half (52%) awarded at least one grant aligned with our human rights criteria in 2020.<sup>20</sup>

HRFN +Ariadne  
+Prospera

173  
members

What are human rights grants? .....

Human rights grants promote structural change to ensure the protection and enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent human rights treaties. We include any grant that meets this definition in our research, regardless of whether funders consider their work to be human rights focused.

19. Network members include any foundations that contribute membership dues or submit grants data directly to HRFN, Ariadne, or Prospera for this research.  
20. Eleven foundations that are included in Candid's Foundation 1000 data set are also members of HRFN or Ariadne.

## Geographic Representation and Data Availability

While our analysis incorporates data from 681 funders in 46 countries,<sup>21</sup> the distribution is heavily concentrated: 85% are based in North America, compared to 9% in Western Europe, for example, and 2% in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>22</sup> This reflects the reality of global philanthropy, where wealth is concentrated in the Global North,<sup>23</sup> but it also highlights the challenges of data accessibility. Unlike the U.S., which mandates foundation disclosure, acquiring data from other regions proves more difficult.

To bridge this data gap and create a more representative global picture, we actively encourage HRFN, Ariadne, and Prospera members to share their data, while continually seeking contributions from additional funders around the world. Expanding our reach is crucial for providing a more accurate representation of global human rights funding. However, even with the current data limitations, our research yields significant findings.

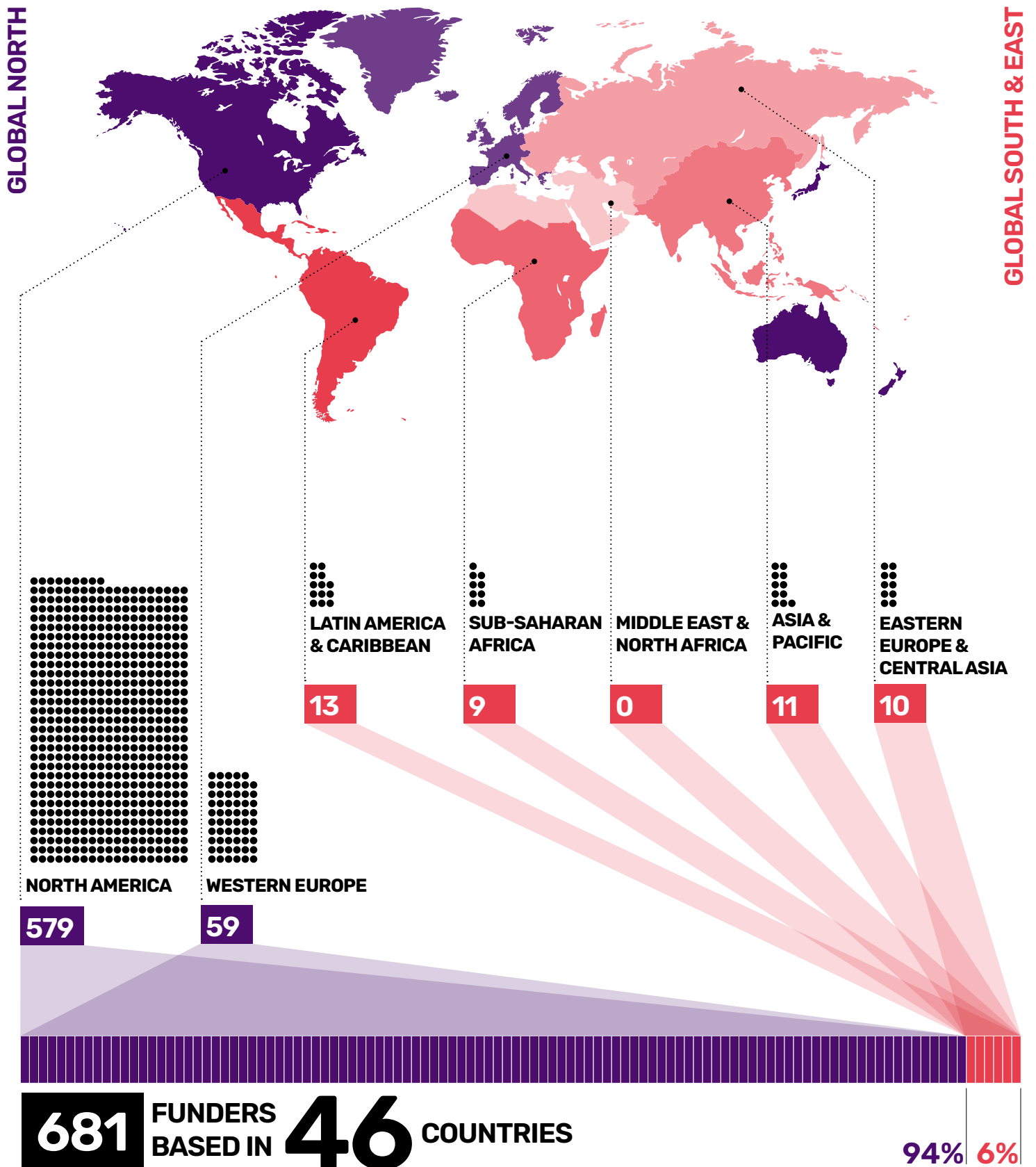
Although total human rights dollars grew in 2020, we identified 11% fewer funders making human rights grants compared to 2019. The primary cause of the decline is a decrease in one-off human rights grants from U.S. foundations. This is partly due to a refinement in our methodology, with stricter scrutiny applied to funders that made just one or two grants to ensure these grants meet our definition of human rights funding. While data submissions from Western European funders also fell by 9%, contributions from other regions remained relatively stable. Importantly, this decline in identified funders does not indicate a decrease in overall dollars reaching human rights movements.

21. Visit our research hub to see a list of the **681 funders** included in the research.

22. In our analysis, North America is limited to Canada and the United States. Three Canadian funders contributed 2020 grants data: Equality Fund, FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund, and International Freedom of Expression Exchange.

23. A **study of global philanthropy** estimates that 60% of all foundations are based in Europe and 35% are based in North America.

## HUMAN RIGHTS FUNDERS BY REGION (2020)



## Network Member vs. Non-Member Funding

Our analysis examines the potential relationship between membership in three human rights networks (HRFN, Ariadne, and Prospera) and giving patterns. While we cannot claim a direct cause-and-effect relationship, our data indicate dramatic differences between network members and non-members in terms of their funding practices.

Network members constitute approximately one-quarter (26%) of the funders in our analysis, with non-members comprising the remaining three-quarters. Consistent with past findings, network members continue to provide more support to human rights movements in the Global South and East and offer more flexible funding than non-members, although their grants tend to be shorter in duration.

Two positive trends have emerged since 2019: Global North network members have increased direct funding to the Global South and East, and Global South and East members are awarding a larger proportion of their funding as flexible, unrestricted support.

Global North network members consistently allocate a greater share of their funding (29%) to the Global South and East than their non-member counterparts (8%). Notably, network members channel a much larger portion of these funds directly to groups located in these regions. This commitment to direct funding has soared since the pandemic, with the gap between Global North network members and non-members widening from 26 points in 2019 to 43 points in 2020. In 2020, Global North network members granted nearly three-quarters of their grant dollars (73%) for the Global South and East directly to groups based there, up from approximately two-thirds (65%) in 2019. This eight-point shift reflects a growing commitment among network members to support locally-led human rights work in the Global South and East.

Another notable shift is the five-point increase in flexible funding provided by network members in the Global South and East, from 13% of their grant dollars in 2019 to 18% in 2020. This growth could potentially boost autonomy for local organizations by allowing them to adapt their work to evolving needs – especially crucial in the face of the pandemic’s impact on human rights. However, this promising development still lags behind the 35% flexible funding offered by Global North network members, who may benefit from greater internal flexibility in their grantmaking. This ongoing disparity highlights the need for continued efforts to promote flexible funding practices across all regions.

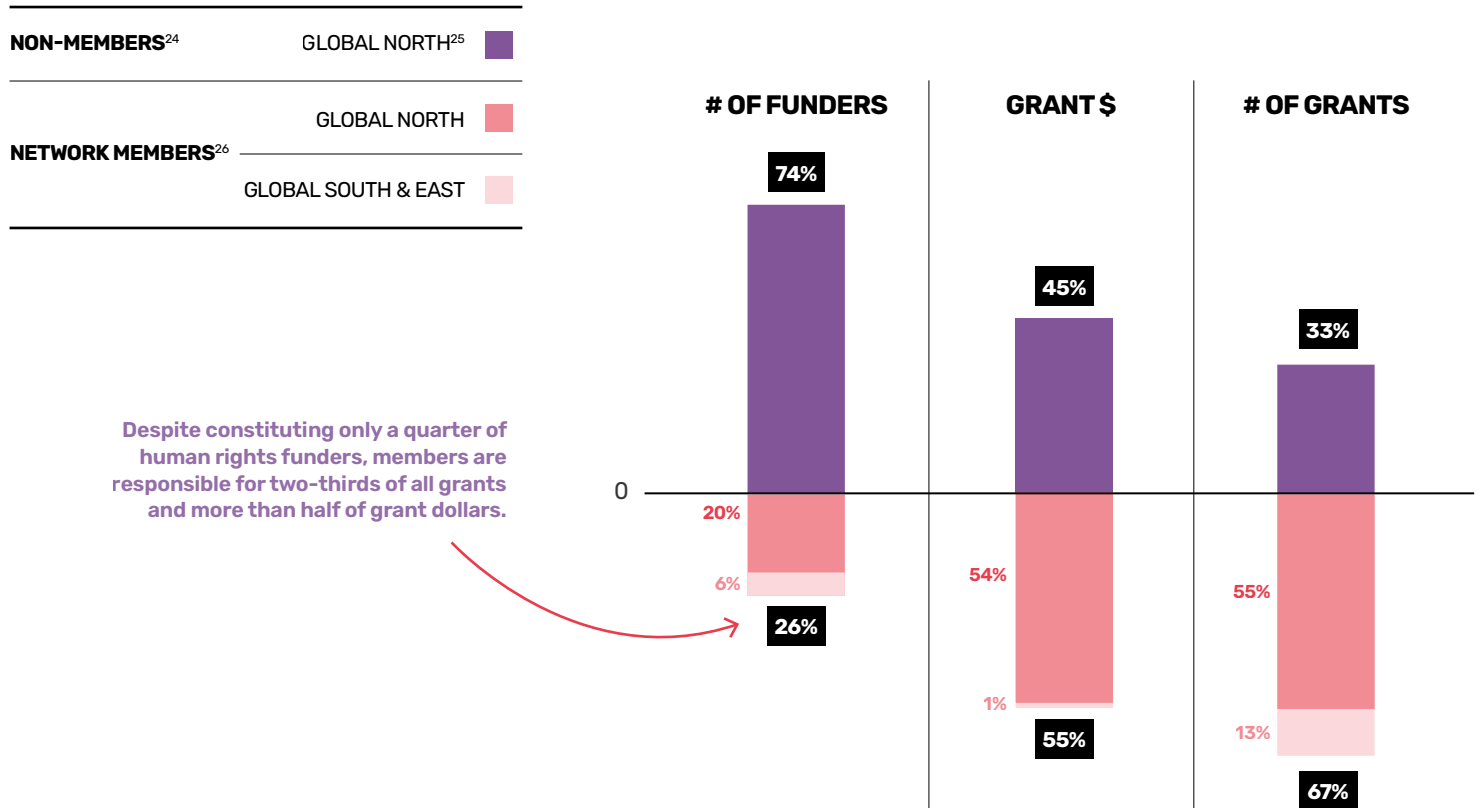


Our data indicate **dramatic differences between network members and non-members** in terms of their funding practices.

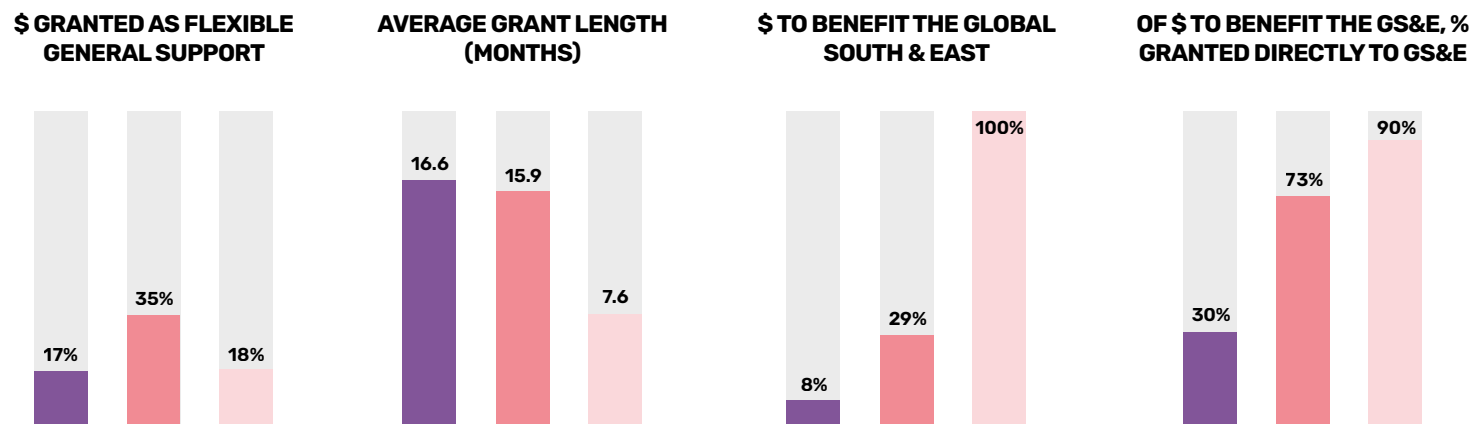


## HOW DOES NETWORK MEMBER AND NON-MEMBER FUNDING COMPARE?

### % OF FUNDERS, FUNDING, AND GRANTS



### GRANTMAKING PRACTICES



While most figures in this graphic consider all human rights grants (including regranteeing), data on funding to benefit the Global South and East is based on a subset of grants with complete location information (26,797 grants totaling \$4.4B).

24. Data from non-members is based on Candid's Foundation 1000 data set, which represents roughly half of all U.S. private and community foundation grantmaking. There are no non-members from the Global South and East.

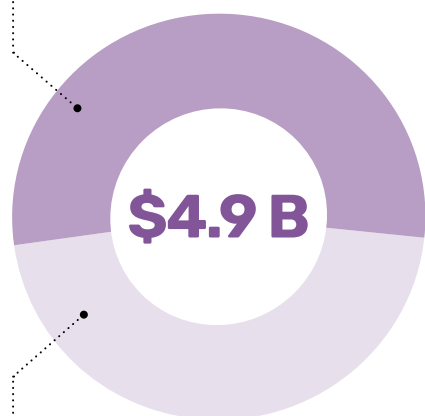
25. For this analysis, the Global North includes Western Europe, Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States and the Global South and East includes all other countries.

26. Network members include any foundations that contribute membership dues or submit grants data directly to HRFN, Ariadne, or Prospera for this research.

# Who are the Largest Funders by Grant Dollars?

The **top 12 funders** accounted for 53% (\$2.7 B) of human rights funding.

**53%**



**47%**

The remaining 669 funders accounted for 47% (\$2.2 B) of human rights funding.



Despite controlling just 1% of human rights funding, **Global South and East funders are crucial** to supporting movements on the frontlines of human rights progress.



In 2020, a dozen funders wielded immense power over the human rights funding landscape. Collectively, they oversaw \$2.7 billion in human rights grants – more than half (53%) of all human rights dollars awarded. While their rankings may fluctuate from year-to-year, these funders hold profound sway, shaping which causes and movements gain vital financial backing.

When major funders adjust their priorities, it can have a ripple effect. Their decisions can dramatically impact the human rights movements they once supported, especially in regions where they've been a long-time champion. This is why tracking funding trends among these grantmakers is crucial – to understand the long-term consequences of these shifts and whether other funders step in to fill the gaps.

## Updated Reporting on Open Society Foundations

In 2021, the Open Society Foundations (OSF) – the largest funder in our analysis – announced considerable changes in their grantmaking. Given OSF's historical weight and the potential impact of these changes on the human rights funding landscape, we've taken a new approach to mapping OSF's funding: we've combined the grantmaking details from all 10 OSF entities for which we have data. Analyzing OSF's 2020 grantmaking in this way provides an important baseline for understanding the long-term effects of their evolving focus, particularly in Europe, Central Asia, and other regions where they have been instrumental in advancing justice.<sup>(L)(M)</sup> This consolidated view helps us understand the broader implications of these shifts. However, this concern about shifting priorities extends beyond OSF and applies to all foundations – especially those commanding large-scale resources.

## Shifting Spotlight: Global South and East Funders

While the largest funders warrant attention, it's crucial to recognize the essential role played by funders based in the Global South and East. Though the funding from Global South and East funders is a smaller share (around 1%) of total human rights funding, their deep local knowledge and networks are critical for supporting movements on the frontlines of local, national, and regional efforts to protect and promote human rights.

## TOP FUNDERS BY GRANT DOLLARS (2020)

FUNDER	LOCATION	SCOPE	HUMAN RIGHTS \$	% OF ALL HR \$
1 Open Society Foundations*	Various	global	\$546 M	11%
2 Ford Foundation*	United States	global	\$534 M	11%
3 Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	United States	global	\$239 M	5%
4 Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation	United States	global	\$217 M	4%
5 Oak Foundation*	Switzerland	global	\$204 M	4%
6 William & Flora Hewlett Foundation*	United States	global	\$160 M	3%
7 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	United States	national	\$153 M	3%
8 Wellspring Philanthropic Fund*	United States	global	\$145 M	3%
9 Tides Foundation	United States	global	\$130 M	3%
10 Silicon Valley Community Foundation	United States	global	\$119 M	2%
11 Andrew W. Mellon Foundation	United States	global	\$111 M	2%
12 Lilly Endowment	United States	national	\$101 M	2%

## TOP FUNDERS BASED IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH AND EAST BY GRANT DOLLARS (2020)

1 Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres*	Costa Rica	regional	\$10 M	0.20%
2 African Women's Development Fund*	Ghana	regional	\$8.3 M	0.17%
3 Fundación Avina*	Panama	regional	\$6.0 M	0.12%
4 Women's Fund Asia*	Sri Lanka	regional	\$2.8 M	0.06%
5 Urgent Action Fund Africa*	Kenya	regional	\$2.8 M	0.05%
6 Fondo Semillas*	Mexico	national	\$2.6 M	0.05%
7 Fondo De Mujeres Del Sur*	Argentina	regional	\$2.3 M	0.05%
8 Foundation for Civil Society*	Tanzania	national	\$1.9 M	0.04%
9 Brazil Human Rights Fund*	Brazil	national	\$1.8 M	0.04%
10 Urgent Action Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean*	Colombia	regional	\$1.6 M	0.03%
11 Korea Foundation for Women*	Republic of Korea	national	\$1.5 M	0.03%
12 UHAI EASHRI*	Kenya	regional	\$1.3 M	0.03%

The \* denotes membership in HRFN, Ariadne, and/or Prospera. The shading provides a comparison of grant dollars. The amounts reflect the full value of each funder's grantmaking for human rights, including grants to other foundations in the data set.

# Who are the Largest Funders by Grant Numbers?

The **top 12 funders** accounted for 31% of human rights grants.

**31%**



**69%**

The remaining 669 funders accounted for 69% of human rights grants.



In a positive development for 2020, **foundations from the Global South and East** landed spots on the global top funders list for the first time.



The distribution of human rights funding reveals an interesting dynamic. Unlike grant dollars, of which more than half were concentrated in the top 12 funders, grants themselves were more widely distributed. In 2020, the top 12 grantmakers awarded 31% of all human rights grants. Nonetheless, a substantial portion of human rights grants (almost a third) is awarded by a small fraction of funders.

Commitment among funders that make human rights grants varies greatly. While a dedicated 22% consistently prioritize human rights with at least 40 annual grants, the remaining majority award far fewer. Over half (51%) provide less than 10 human rights grants a year, and a quarter (26%) make only one or two. This disparity highlights an opportunity to expand the field by engaging with funders whose values align with human rights, even if they don't self-identify as human rights funders or haven't made many human rights grants in the past.

A positive development in 2020 is growth in the reach of funders in the Global South and East. For the first time in our research, foundations in the Global South and East landed spots on the global top funders list. In just three years (2017 to 2020), a set of the largest 11 funders in the Global South and East awarded over 1,500 additional grants, increasing their total from 772 to 2,347.<sup>27</sup> This growth is exemplified by funders like Fondo Semillas, which upped its grantmaking by 33%, and Fondo Lunaria Mujer, whose grants jumped a staggering 1489%. This surge in grantmaking by Global South and East funders suggests a dual trend: a growing capacity to support local human rights movements and increased access to resources from other funders. In our **previous research**, we highlight the importance of private foundation support for these funds. Across the board, this development points toward a more nuanced and locally-focused approach to human rights work.

Looking at the top funders by both total grant dollars and total grant numbers reveals two ends of the spectrum in our field. Four foundations (OSF, Tides Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Wellspring) appear on both lists. These leaders not only award a high number of grants, but also contribute sizable amounts through each grant. They are instrumental in supporting human rights movements and institutions. At the same time, a number of public foundations, including women's funds and activist funds, dominate the top funder

27. Our list includes 12 top funders, but we excluded Fundación Avina from this comparison because its 2017 data was unavailable.

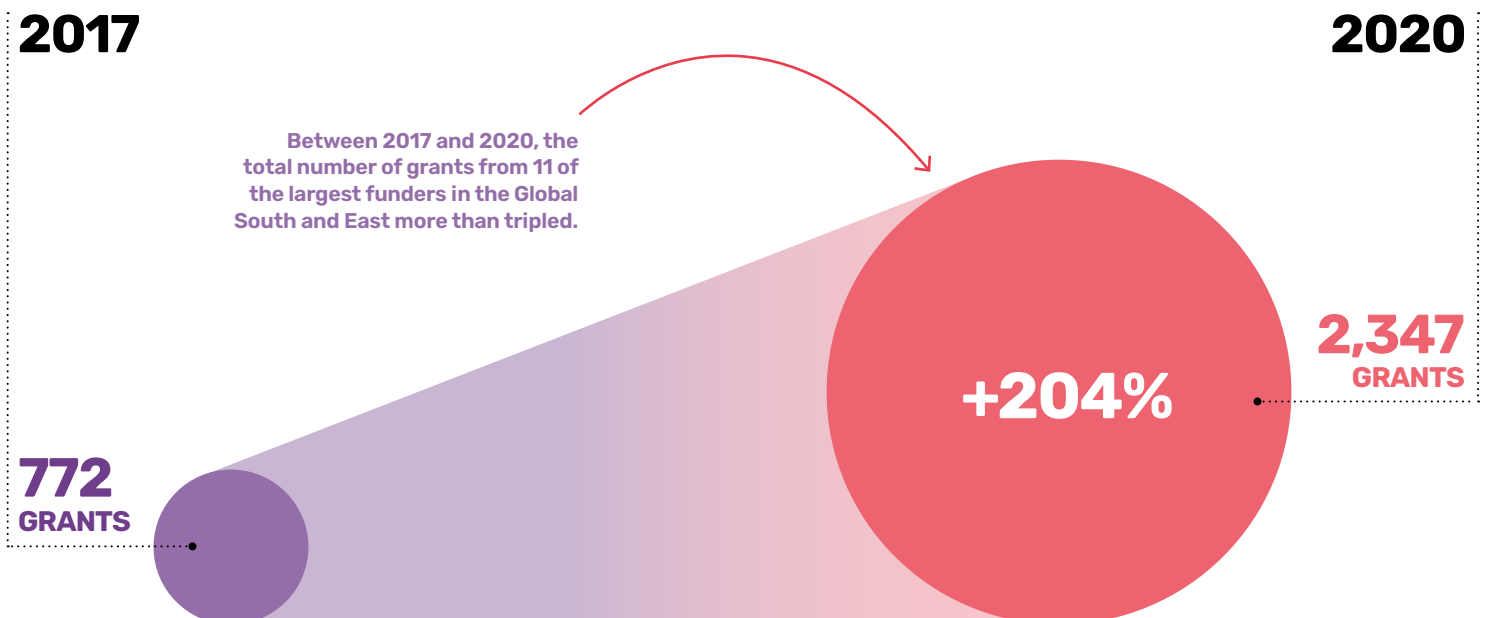
list for the volume of grants they make. As we describe in detail in our reports on [philanthropy's trust gap](#) and [funding for intersectional organizing](#), these foundations play a vital role in the human rights funding ecosystem by mobilizing resources and redistributing them as smaller grants.

Indeed, we would be remiss not to uplift the prominence of the women's and feminist funds on our top funders lists on page 20. Notably, three of these funds appear on the global top funders list, and a significant number of funds (10 out of 12) on the Global South and East list identify as feminist. These funds are a driving force in supporting human rights actors. Their grants not only increase the overall pool of funding but also prioritize direct and flexible support, particularly for organizations in the Global South and East. As we write in a [previous report](#), focused on funding trends in 2019:

*Women's funds are at the forefront of direct and flexible grantmaking 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.*

As this current analysis shows, in 2020, a year of massive social upheaval, feminist funds provided the kind of direct, agile, and movement-grounded funding they have long pioneered.

## GROWTH IN HUMAN RIGHTS GRANTS BY GLOBAL SOUTH AND EAST FUNDERS (2017-2020)



## TOP FUNDERS BY NUMBER OF GRANTS (2020)

FUNDER	LOCATION	SCOPE	# OF HUMAN RIGHTS GRANTS	% OF ALL HR GRANTS
1 Open Society Foundations*	Various	global	2,175	7.6%
2 Ford Foundation*	United States	global	978	3.4%
3 Seattle Foundation	United States	regional	965	3.4%
4 Global Greengrants Fund*	United States	global	897	3.2%
5 Tides Foundation	United States	global	666	2.3%
6 American Jewish World Service*	United States	global	617	2.2%
7 Wellspring Philanthropic Fund*	United States	global	547	1.9%
8 Silicon Valley Community Foundation	United States	national	502	1.8%
9 FRIDA   The Young Feminist Fund*	Canada	global	451	1.6%
10 Urgent Action Fund Africa*	Kenya	regional	416	1.5%
11 Brazil Human Rights Fund*	Brazil	national	380	1.3%
12 Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice*	United States	global	326	1.1%

## TOP FUNDERS BASED IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH AND EAST BY NUMBER OF GRANTS (2020)

1 Urgent Action Fund Africa*	Kenya	regional	416	1.5%
2 Brazil Human Rights Fund*	Brazil	national	380	1.3%
3 Fondo Lunaria Mujer*	Colombia	national	286	1.0%
4 Urgent Action Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean*	Colombia	regional	253	0.9%
5 Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres*	Costa Rica	regional	216	0.8%
6 Fondo De Mujeres Del Sur*	Argentina	regional	201	0.7%
7 UHAI EASHRI*	Kenya	regional	138	0.5%
8 Fondo Semillas*	Mexico	national	137	0.5%
9 Fondo Alquimia*	Chile	national	127	0.4%
10 Fundación Avina*	Panama	regional	124	0.4%
11 African Women's Development Fund*	Ghana	regional	108	0.4%
12 TASO Foundation*	Georgia	national	85	0.3%

The \* denotes membership in HRFN, Ariadne, and/or Prospera. The shading provides a comparison of grant dollars. The amounts reflect the full value of each funder's grantmaking for human rights, including grants to other foundations in the data set.

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# Where Do Human Rights Grants Go?



While human rights funding overall has grown consistently during this period, **much of this growth has benefitted** human rights initiatives focused on **North America**.



Analyzing how human rights grants are distributed globally reveals where funders are directing their resources. We track funding allocated to specific regions, regardless of the grant recipient's location. For instance, if a Dutch organization receives a grant for a project in Kenya, the funding gets categorized under Sub-Saharan Africa. This approach helps us understand the overall support each region receives. (For a more nuanced discussion on direct versus indirect funding, see pages 24-25.)

A concerning trend emerges: North America consistently receives significantly more funding compared to other regions.<sup>28</sup> This can be partially attributed to the dominance of U.S.-based funders in our data set. However, it also exposes a deeper issue – a historical imbalance in the human rights funding landscape. Wealth and philanthropic funding are concentrated in the Global North, leading to a situation where 71% of human rights grant dollars focus solely on North America or Western Europe. This figure might be even higher if data from European funders were more comprehensive.

Despite an overall 21% increase in human right funding in 2020,<sup>29</sup> growth has been uneven across regions. Among our matched subset of foundations, we saw notable growth in five regions ranging from an increase of 56% (+\$46M) in Eastern Europe and Central Asia to 32% (+\$743M) in North America. Conversely, funding for Latin America and the Caribbean saw a meager 2% (+\$4M) increase compared to 2019,<sup>30</sup> and funding for Asia and the Pacific actually declined by 1% (-\$1M).

A separate graphic (page 23) illustrates how regional support has fluctuated between 2016 and 2020. While human rights funding overall has grown consistently during this period, much of this growth has benefitted human rights initiatives focused on North America. While some year-to-year fluctuation is expected, it's surprising to see funding for Asia and the Pacific decrease each year from 2018 to 2020, and stagnate in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2019 and 2020. Encouragingly, funding for Eastern Europe and Central Asia has grown steadily during this timeframe, though in 2020 it still comprised just 3% of all human rights grant dollars (\$142M).

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28. For this analysis, North America includes Canada and the United States. Mexico is incorporated in Latin America.

29. Human rights funding growth 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.

30. For this analysis, we've combined Latin America and the Caribbean (previously reported separately) into a single category.

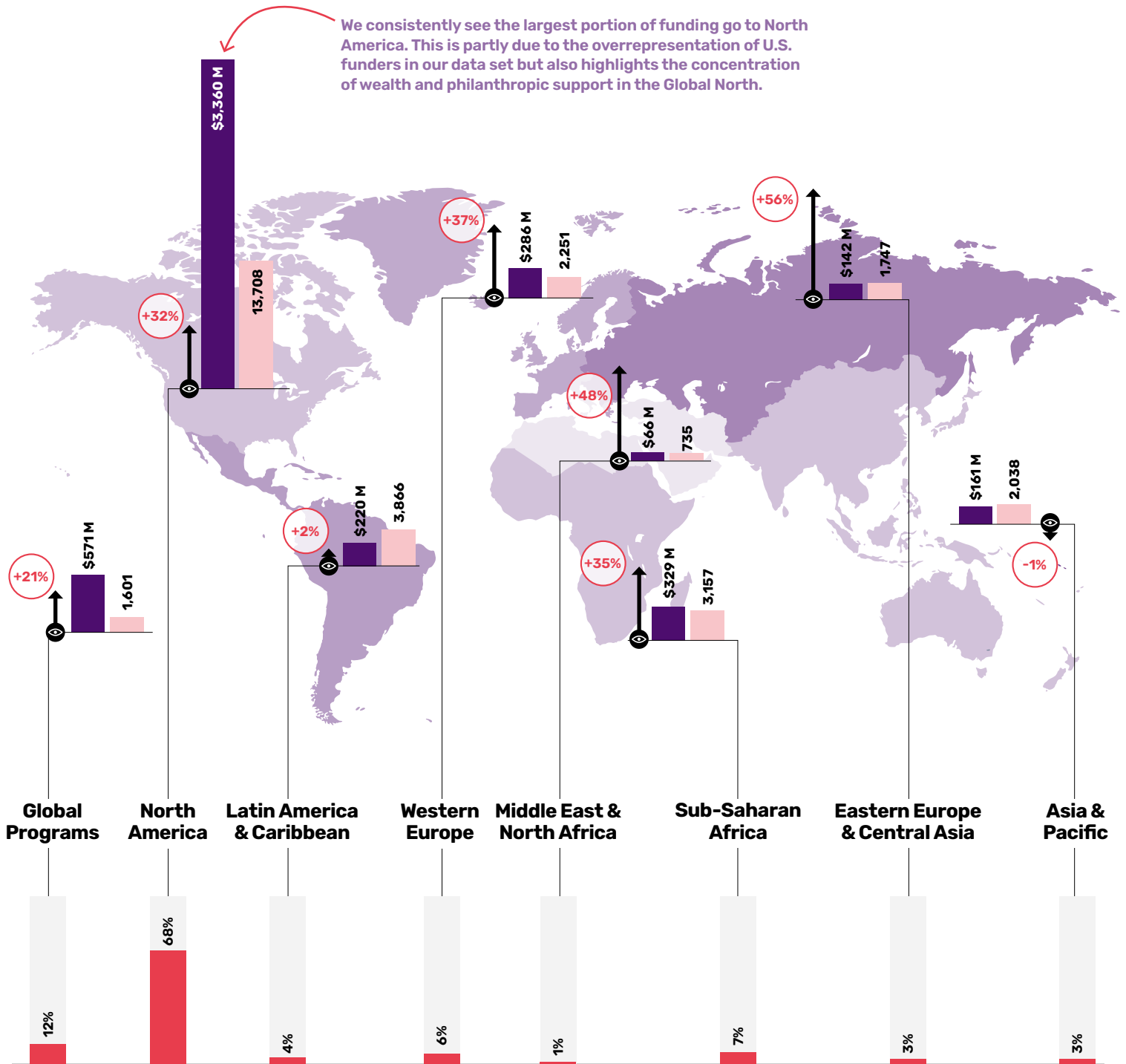
# FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS BY REGION (2020)<sup>31</sup>

○ % \$ CHANGE 2019-2020

■ \$

■ # OF GRANTS


■ % OF ALL HR \$



Change is calculated based on a matched subset of foundations with data available both years of comparison.

31. Human rights grants generally benefit a specific country or region. However, because grants that focus on multiple regions do not specify how much money goes where, the full value of these grants is counted in the totals for each region. In 2020, these "multi-region" grants comprised 760 grants totaling \$140 million. The "global" category encompasses grants intended to support human rights issues on a worldwide scale.

## CHANGES IN FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS BY REGION (MATCHED SUBSET: 2016-2010)

 \$ INCREASE  \$ DECREASE

REGION	% \$ CHANGE			
	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Asia & Pacific	+50%	-21%	-4%	-1%
Eastern Europe & Central Asia	+13%	+7%	+52%	+56%
Latin America & Caribbean <sup>32</sup>	–	+4%	+4%	+2%
Middle East & North Africa	+39%	+37%	-23%	+48%
North America	+34%	+16%	+19%	+32%
Sub-Saharan Africa	+1%	-11%	-16%	+35%
Western Europe	-20%	+16%	+8%	+37%
<b>Overall Human Rights Funding</b>	<b>+23%</b>	<b>+13%</b>	<b>+15%</b>	<b>+21%</b>

Change is calculated based on a matched subset of foundations with data available both years of comparison. Due to a methodology change combining Latin America and Caribbean data, 2016-2017 data is omitted for comparability.

32. The reported growth rates for human rights funding in Latin America and the Caribbean are lower than the figures presented in previous reports that looked at these regions separately. This difference is due to a methodological change in this report. Previously, grants supporting both regions were counted in both totals, inflating the growth percentage. This report combines the data to provide a more accurate picture of overall funding growth across the region.

## The Persistent Trust Gap

Beyond overall funding disparities, stark regional differences exist in how funding is granted. These include which organizations are funded to lead human rights work in their own contexts and how much flexibility they have to decide how to use the funding.

Our research consistently shows a substantial funding gap between human rights activists and institutions in the Global South and East compared to those in the Global North. We have documented this "trust gap" in philanthropy over many years, including in our [detailed analysis](#) of 2019 grants data.<sup>33</sup> Our 2020 data confirm the persistence of this pattern, which is even more disturbing in a year marked by a global pandemic and rhetoric about supporting the most impacted communities around the world.



The **consistent, sizable imbalance** in direct funding for the Global South and East in comparison to the Global North **demands further investigation into potential biases** within human rights funding practices.



### Direct Funding

A striking finding relates to access to direct funding. Nearly all human rights grant dollars for the Global North (99%) are awarded to organizations based within the regions the grants are intended to benefit. In sharp contrast, only 58% of grant dollars for the Global South and East in 2020 were awarded to organizations based in the target regions, down 6% (from 64%) since 2019. This significant disparity suggests that factors beyond standard philanthropic practices influence decisions over who receives funding for human rights initiatives. More specifically, while 100% of human rights funding for North America and 90% of funding for Western Europe went to organizations within those regions in 2020, only 42% of the funding designated for Eastern Europe and Central Asia was granted to organizations based there. The remaining funds were granted to groups outside the region.

Of note, grant dollars to benefit the Global North are nearly twice as likely to be awarded directly to recipients in those regions compared to grant dollars for the Global South and East. However, this disparity is less extreme when we look at the number of grants themselves. For the Global South and East, 85% of grants are awarded directly, while for the Global North that figure reaches 98%. This difference reflects a higher number of smaller grants for the Global South and East, but doesn't erase the reality: millions of dollars and many larger grants are held by organizations outside these regions.

This consistent, sizable imbalance in direct funding for the Global South and East in comparison to the Global North demands further investigation into potential biases within human rights funding practices. While we recognize the role of indirect funding in a

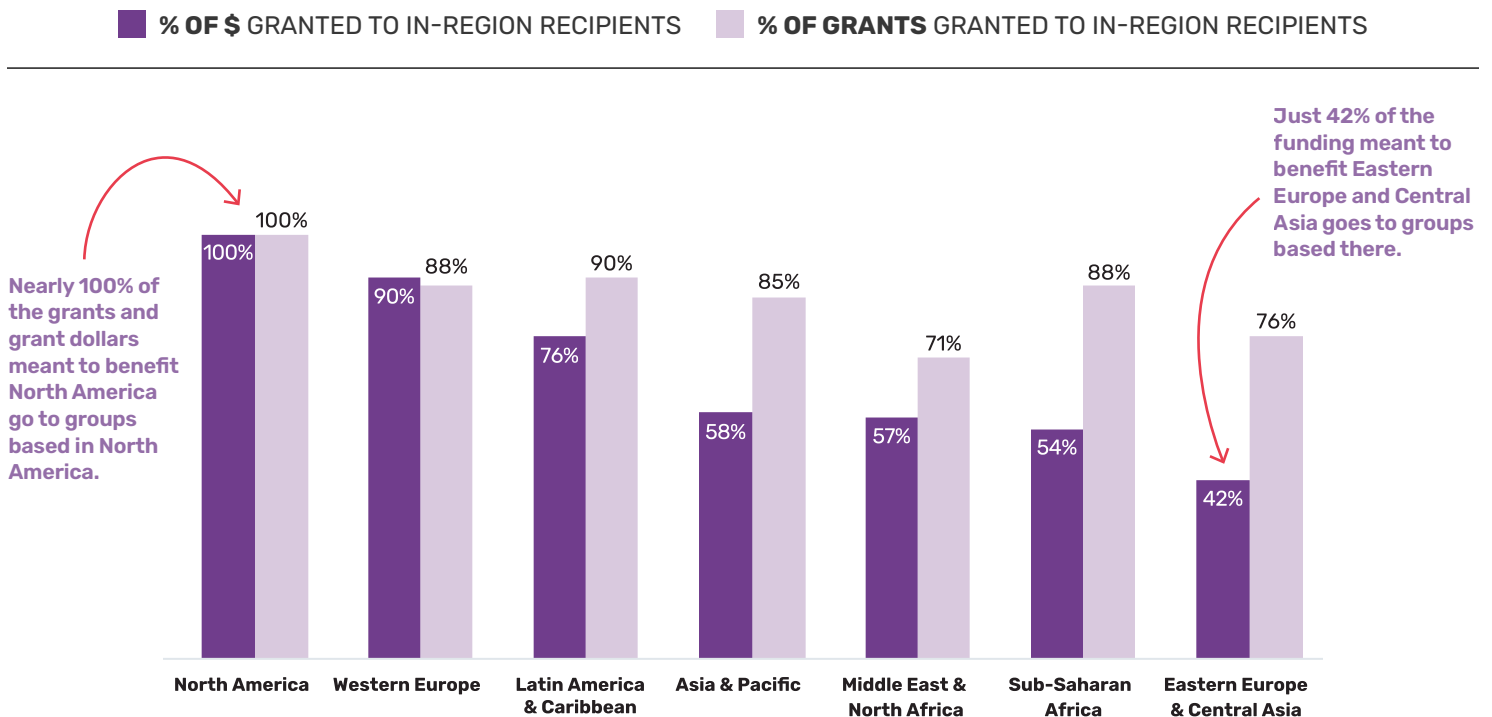
33. While a trust gap in philanthropy can manifest in a variety of ways, here we focus on what we can measure through the grants data we collect.

comprehensive human rights funding ecosystem, the stark regional disparities in direct funding raise serious concerns.

The proportion of direct funding remained relatively stable for most regions from 2019 to 2020, but there were some notable exceptions. Latin America and the Caribbean saw an encouraging 11-point increase in direct funding. Conversely, Eastern Europe and Central Asia faced a jarring 30-point decrease.

This decline in direct funding for Eastern Europe and Central Asia can be attributed to a key difference in how resources are allocated. Only 48% of the funding designated for Eastern Europe and Central Asia was directed solely to this region. The remaining 52% supported initiatives in other regions alongside Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In contrast, funding designated for multiple regions is much lower elsewhere, ranging from 27% in Western Europe to just 2% in North America. When grants target multiple regions, the funds typically go to a single location – often in the Global North – for redistribution or to support cross-regional work. In the case of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, a third (34%) of the grant dollars were awarded to groups based in Western Europe, with another 10% going to North America. Though these grants may aim to support local human rights action, the control of resources often remains with the Global North.

## REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN DIRECT HUMAN RIGHTS FUNDING (2020)



The funding totals are based on 26,797 human rights grants totaling \$4.4 billion that specify the countries or regions meant to benefit from the funding and include recipient locations. We typically exclude regranteeing from our analysis to prevent double-counting grant dollars. However, here we have included regranted funds to reflect every grant that is designated for a particular location.

## Flexible Funding

Flexible, unrestricted grants give recipients discretion in allocating funds to best achieve their missions. Unlike project-restricted grants, flexible funding offers greater autonomy in supporting core operations, addressing unforeseen challenges, and seizing emerging opportunities. This flexibility fosters stability, sustainability, and agility – qualities crucial for human rights work, especially in the face of rapidly evolving situations like pandemics.

Our data reveal troubling regional disparities in access to flexible funding. Over a quarter of human rights funding for North America and Latin America and the Caribbean is provided as flexible funding directly to organizations within these regions, which aligns with the flexible funding average across our grant pool. However, this figure plummets to just 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. While there were slight increases in flexible funding for Asia and the Pacific (+8%) and the Middle East and North Africa (+9%) in 2020, the overall picture remains largely unchanged.

This limited access to flexible funding hinders the ability of human rights actors in these regions to sustain movements and respond effectively to new challenges like those brought on by COVID-19. This disparity underscores the urgent need for increased access to flexible funding, particularly in regions most likely to face unforeseen challenges requiring swift and adaptable responses.

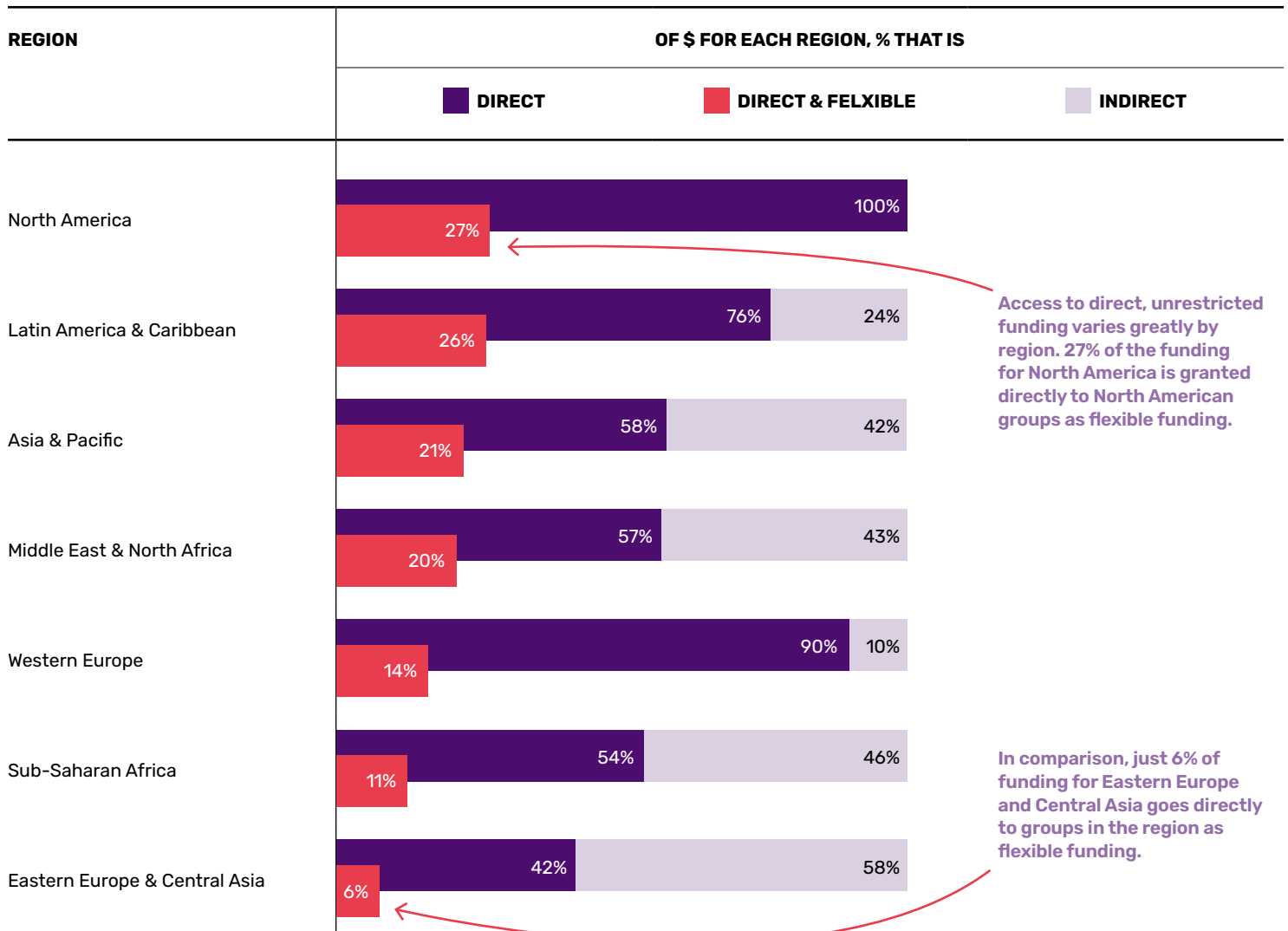
Our findings expose a systemic challenge: human rights organizations in the Global South and East face major barriers to accessing direct, flexible funding. To address this imbalance, a minimum standard should be established: at least two-thirds of human rights funding should be granted directly to the beneficiary region, if not the country, and predominantly offered as flexible support. This shift is crucial to adequately resourcing human rights defenders and fostering sustainable change globally.



**To address this imbalance, a minimum standard should be established:** at least two-thirds of human rights funding should be granted directly to the beneficiary region, if not the country, and predominantly offered as flexible support.



## REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN DIRECT AND FLEXIBLE HUMAN RIGHTS FUNDING (2020)



The funding totals are based on 26,797 human rights grants totaling \$4.4 billion that specify the countries or regions meant to benefit from the funding and include recipient locations. We typically exclude regranting from our analysis to prevent double-counting grant dollars. However, here we have included regranted funds to reflect every grant that is designated for a particular location.

**These disparities underscore the urgent need for increased access to flexible funding,** particularly in regions most likely to face unforeseen challenges requiring swift and adaptable responses.

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# What Issues Do Human Rights Grants Address?

To understand whether and how funding reaches diverse human rights needs, we categorize all grants into **27 specific issues**, further grouped into 13 broader categories. This approach provides a clear picture of funding distribution across different areas such as health, education, and environmental rights.

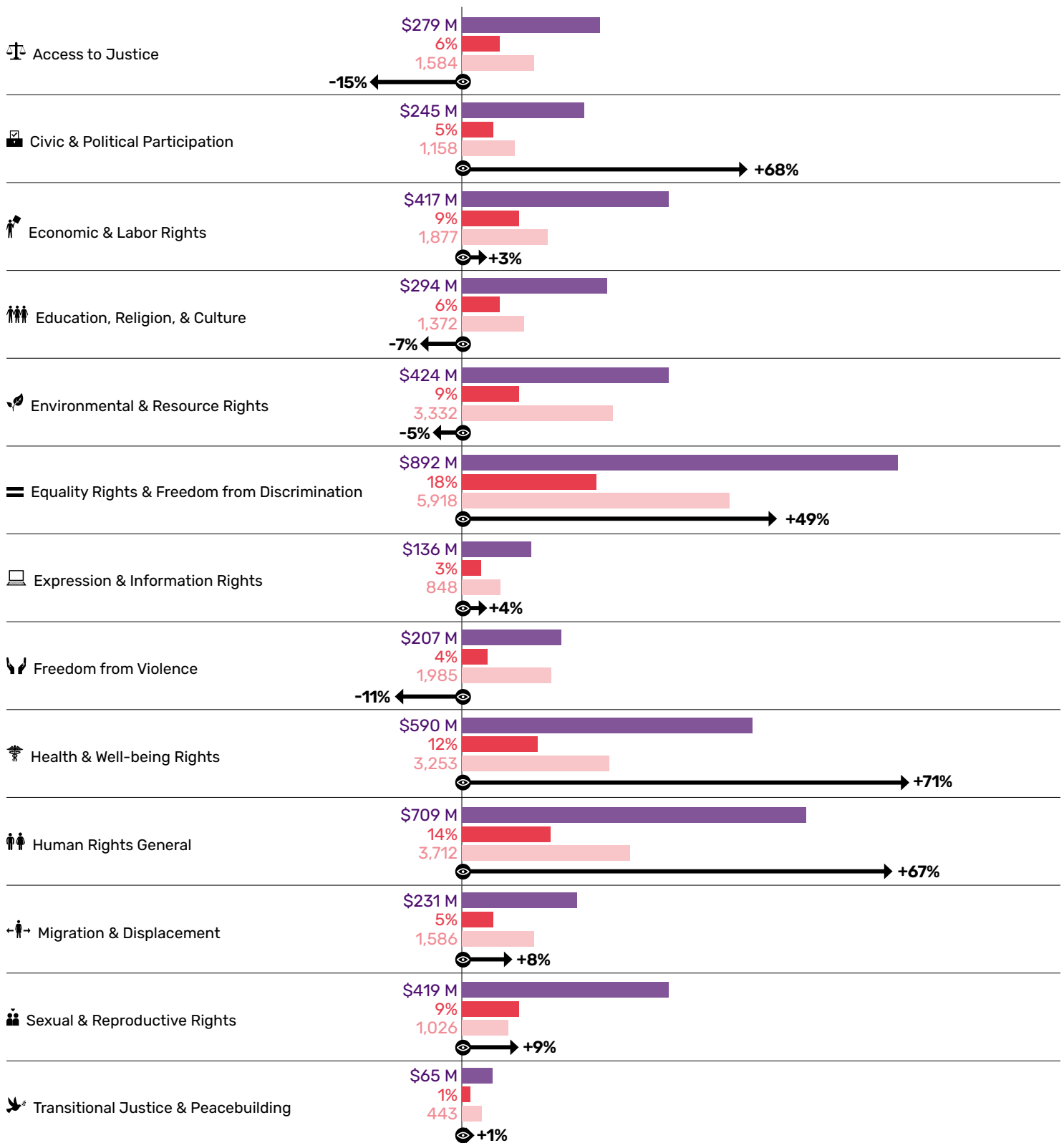
While this categorization helps us analyze funding patterns for these issues, we recognize their inherent complexity. For example, the ability to cast a vote or petition the government is closely tied to the freedoms of assembly, information access, and meeting basic needs like adequate food and housing. Our **research hub** and report on **intersectional funding** delve deeper into the relationships among these issues.

Analyzing data from a consistent group of funders between 2019 and 2020 reveals significant shifts in support. The graphic on page 30 highlights these trends. Three issues saw a notable increase of more than 40% (health and well-being, civic and political participation, and equality rights and freedom from discrimination). The general “human rights” category also increased. Two areas experienced a decrease (freedom from violence and access to justice), and the remaining seven categories showed relative stability (less than 10% change between years). Unsurprisingly, funding for health and well-being rights surged by the highest percentage (+71%) as funders prioritized health in response to the pandemic with an additional \$229 million. The other two areas of increase reflect the focus on racial justice and other movements for civic participation that followed closely in the wake of the pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, and efforts to push back on rising authoritarianism.

A separate graphic on page 30 provides a broader view, showcasing how support for the 13 overarching categories has changed from 2016 to 2020.


## FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS BY ISSUE (2020)



■ \$ 
 ■ % OF ALL HR \$ 
 ■ # OF GRANTS 
 ➔ % \$ CHANGE 2019-2020 
 



Change is calculated based on a matched subset of foundations with data available both years of comparison.

# CHANGES IN FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS BY ISSUE (MATCHED SUBSET: 2016-2010)

 \$ INCREASE  \$ DECREASE

ISSUE	% \$ CHANGE			
	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
 Access to Justice	+23%	+14%	+15%	-15%
 Civic & Political Participation	+7%	-5%	+16%	+68%
 Economic & Labor Rights	+15%	-19%	+278%	+3%
 Education, Religion, & Culture	+11%	+35%	-24%	-7%
 Environmental & Resource Rights	+33%	-4%	+43%	-5%
 Equality Rights & Freedom from Discrimination	+16%	+19%	-4%	+49%
 Expression & Information Rights	-25%	+2%	+42%	+4%
 Freedom from Violence	+16%	+25%	+4%	-11%
 Health & Well-being Rights	+21%	+11%	-3%	+71%
 Human Rights General	+58%	+25%	-6%	+67%
 Migration & Displacement	+60%	+9%	-10%	+8%
 Sexual & Reproductive Rights	+23%	+11%	+54%	+9%
 Transitional Justice & Peacebuilding	+109%	-2%	-6%	+1%
<b>Overall Human Rights Funding</b>	<b>+23%</b>	<b>+13%</b>	<b>+15%</b>	<b>+21%</b>

Change is calculated based on a matched subset of foundations with data available both years of comparison.

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# What Populations Do Human Rights Grants Support?

To understand who benefits from human rights funding and where gaps exist, we analyze grants awarded across nine populations facing unique challenges: children and youth, human rights defenders, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQI people, migrants and refugees, persons with disabilities, racial and ethnic groups, sex workers, and women and girls.<sup>34</sup> These grants can address the needs of a single population or cut across multiple identities.<sup>35</sup>

The results are promising. In 2020, 86% of human rights grants included an explicit focus on one or more of these groups. This represents a steady rise from 64% in 2018 and 83% in 2019, suggesting not only potentially improved data quality, but – we hope – a genuine increase in support. This targeted approach is crucial to improving human rights outcomes for historically oppressed communities. By directing resources towards the specific needs and challenges of these groups, funders and movements build a more just and equitable world.

The funding trends provide an important window into who received resources during this pivotal year for human rights. Consistent with past years, racial and ethnic groups (\$1.7B, 34% of all human rights funding) and women and girls (\$1.2B, 25%) remained the top funding categories. However, it's crucial to contextualize this funding. These figures represent a modest portion of overall foundation giving, ranging from 1% to 3% for racial and ethnic groups and 0.8% to 2% for women and girls.<sup>36</sup>

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34. While this list serves as a vital starting point, it's important to acknowledge that human rights concerns impact a wide range of communities. Ongoing analysis remains essential to identify and address emerging needs.

35. In our analysis, the full value of a grant is counted toward each population named as a focus for the grant. For example, if a grant mentions girls, its full amount is counted in the funding totals for both "children and youth" and "women and girls."

36. To estimate the share of philanthropic giving allocated to the human rights of racial and ethnic groups and women and girls, we used two approaches. The most conservative approach, comparing grantmakers within Candid's Foundation 1000 data set, estimates that 3% of funding supports racial and ethnic groups, and 2% supports women and girls. Alternatively, a broader comparison considers total funding identified in this research: \$1.7 billion for racial and ethnic groups and \$1.2 billion for women and girls. These figures are compared against the [Global Philanthropy Report's](#) estimate of annual foundation spending (\$150B), resulting in lower estimates of 1% and 0.8%, respectively.

Our analysis of the matched subset of funders highlights encouraging growth. Funding for all nine populations saw an increase between 2019 and 2020, mirroring the increase we see in human rights funding overall. Funding for sex workers jumped 150% (+10M), while funding for persons with disabilities increased by 67% (+66M). Though these percentage increases are significant, it's important to consider the baseline funding levels.<sup>37</sup> For example, the 68% increase (+630M) for racial and ethnic groups is even more striking given the higher initial funding. Nonetheless, these are undeniably positive trends across the board.

Notably, funding for all groups except children and youth increased at a rate exceeding the 21% growth in human rights funding overall. Our upcoming annual analyses will be crucial to determine whether these increases are a temporary response to the COVID-19 pandemic or signal a longer-term shift in funding priorities.

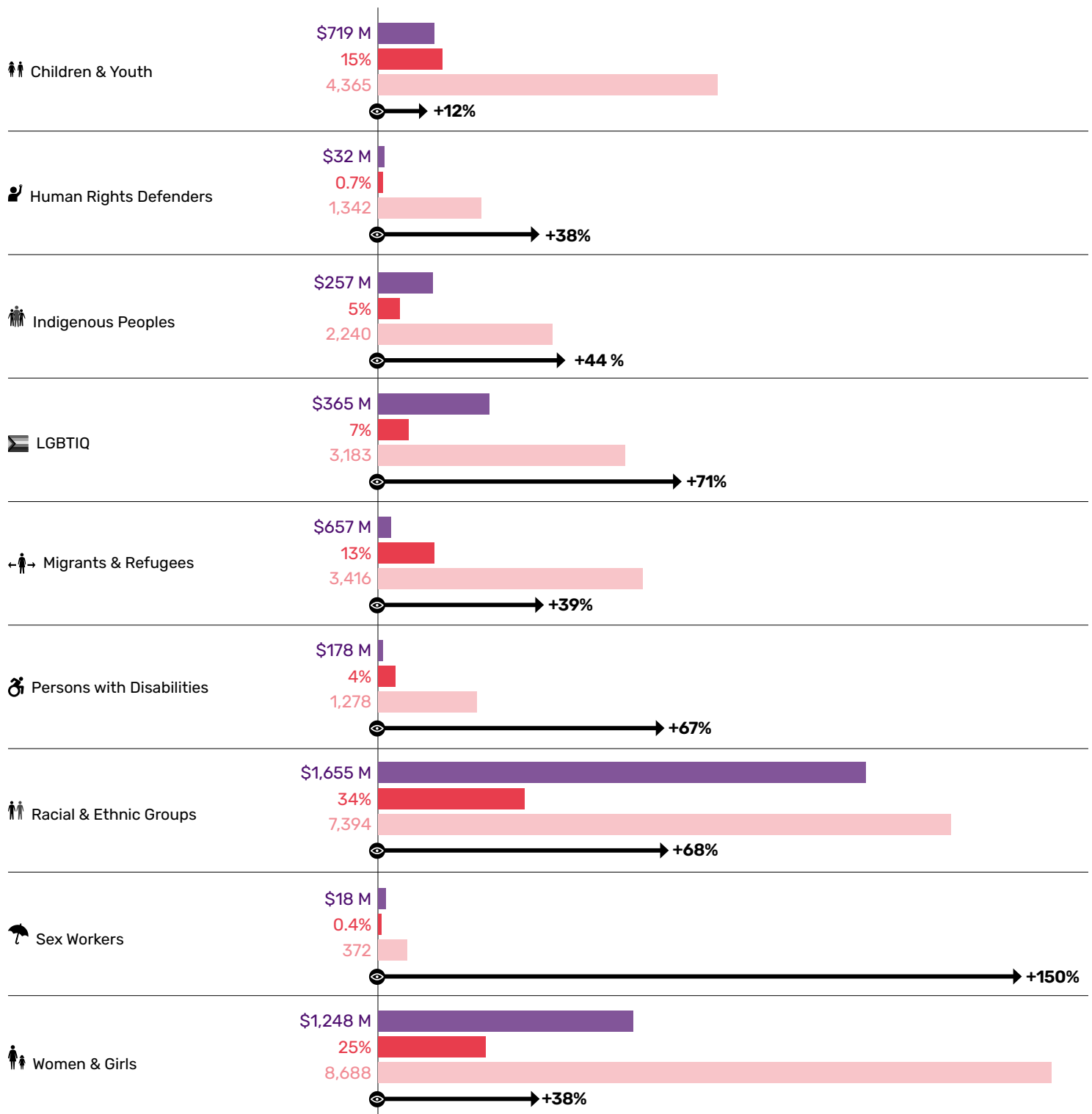
A separate graphic on page 34 showcases shifts in support across all nine populations from 2016 to 2020.

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37. The funding change for racial and ethnic groups here (+68%, +\$630M) differs slightly from other sections of the report (+67%, +\$661M) due to methodological differences. This analysis utilizes a matched subset of foundations with data available for both 2019 and 2020. This approach helps control for variations in reporting practices across different years, leading to a more reliable comparison. In other sections we note overall funding changes across all foundations year-over-year, providing a broader view.

## FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS BY POPULATION (2020)




■ \$ 
 ■ % OF ALL HR \$ 
 ■ # OF GRANTS 
 ➔ % \$ CHANGE 2019-2020 
 



Change is calculated based on a matched subset of foundations with data available both years of comparison.

## CHANGES IN FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS BY POPULATION (MATCHED SUBSET: 2016-2010)

 \$ INCREASE  \$ DECREASE

POPULATION	% \$ CHANGE			
	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
 Children & Youth	+15%	+33%	-12%	+12%
 Human Rights Defenders	-14%	+186%	-36%	+38%
 Indigenous Peoples	+46%	+9%	-10%	+44%
 LGBTIQ	-2%	+43%	+17%	+71%
 Migrants & Refugees	+28%	+16%	+9%	+39%
 Persons with Disabilities	-6%	-14%	+38%	+67%
 Racial & Ethnic Groups	—	—	+60%	+68%
 Sex Workers	-11%	+4%	+11%	+150%
 Women & Girls	+16%	+11%	+17%	+38%
<b>Overall Human Rights Funding</b>	<b>+23%</b>	<b>+13%</b>	<b>+15%</b>	<b>+21%</b>

Change is calculated based on a matched subset of foundations with data available both years of comparison. The 2019-2020 funding change for racial and ethnic groups shown here (+68%) differs slightly from other sections of the report (+67%) due to methodological differences. The matched subset controls for variations in reporting across years. In other sections we note overall funding changes across all foundations. Our analysis of racial and ethnic groups begins with data from 2018.



## Intersectional Funding

Building on our previous report on [intersectional funding](#), this section explores how grants address the needs of people with intersecting identities. Our findings highlight where funding reaches (or doesn't reach) different communities. Looking at funding across population categories is not a definitive measure of intersectional funding, which considers the complex interplay of identities and power dynamics.<sup>(N)</sup> However, on this global scale, it provides an indicator of where funding approaches might be moving beyond single-identity groups to address the interconnected nature of multiple forms of oppression. This can be a valuable sign of where true intersectional funding might exist.

We see a positive trend: more funders are specifying the populations their grants target. In 2018, 36% of grants lacked population information. This dropped to 17% in 2019 and further to 14% in 2020, meaning roughly six in seven grants now include population data.

However, this improvement doesn't translate directly to better news on intersectional funding. Most of the shift is towards single-identity grants, which represent over half (58%) of the grants in our analysis. While an increase in funding directed towards specific populations is encouraging, a crucial aspect of human rights funding is its ability to address the interconnected experiences of historically oppressed groups. This concept is known as intersectionality. In the next section, we will explore how human rights grants address the needs of people with intersecting identities.

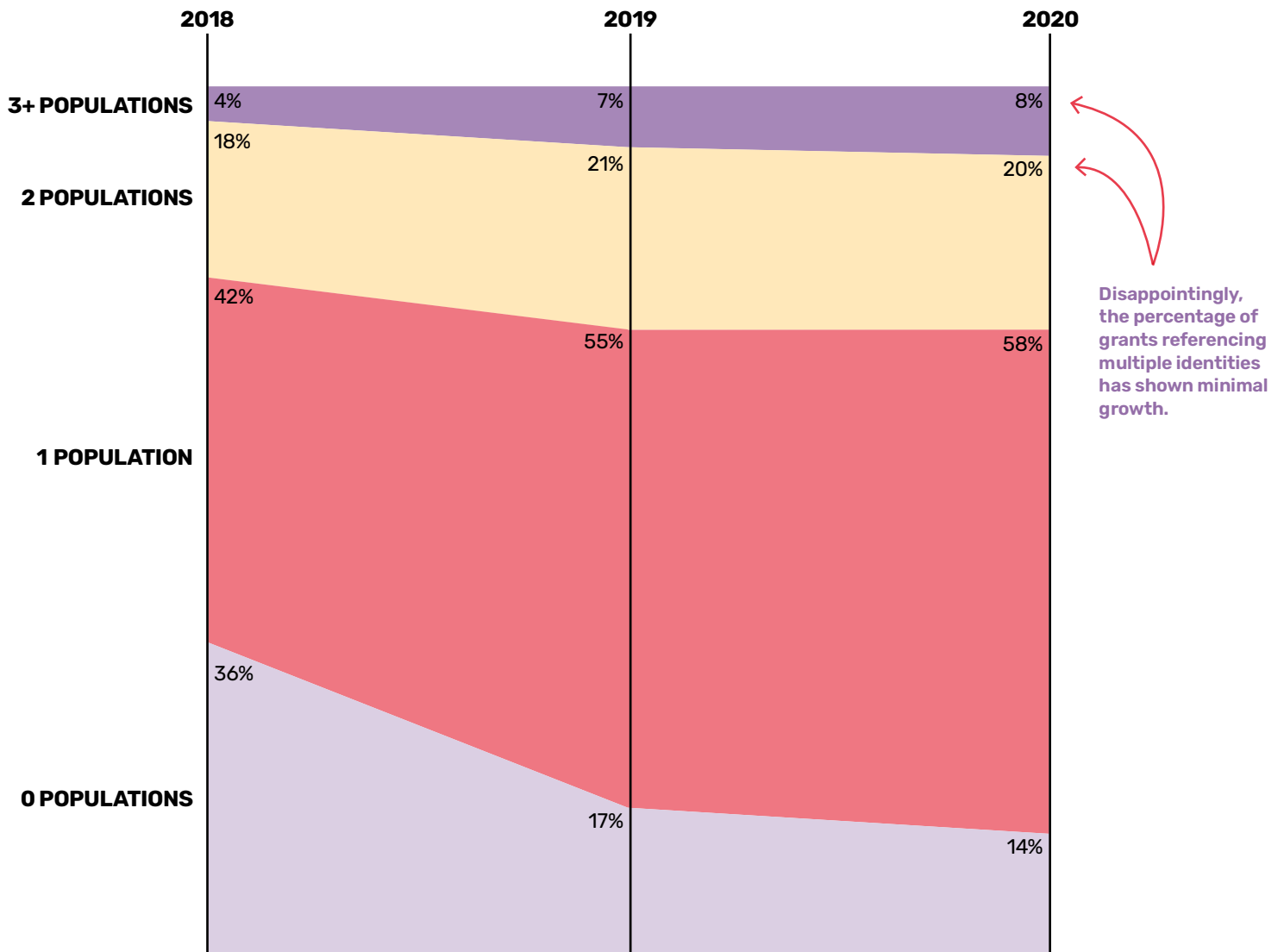
Disappointingly, the percentage of grants referencing multiple identities has shown minimal growth, increasing from 22% in 2018 to just 28% in both 2019 and 2020. In 2020, while some funders modeled intersectional approaches, especially in response to the pandemic, the lack of funding that considers multiple identities is striking. Even in the middle of a pandemic in which intersections of race, class, disability, gender and more were in stark relief, intersectional funding did not measurably increase.



**The lack of funding that considers multiple identities is striking.** Just 28% of grants consider multiple identities, with most (58%) still focused on single identities.



## % OF HUMAN RIGHTS GRANTS BY THE NUMBER OF POPULATIONS SPECIFIED



These findings are based on the nine populations we track in our research.

## A Closer Look at Overlapping Populations

Drilling deeper into funding for specific populations reveals where grants may address the nuanced experiences of people with overlapping identities. Although the overall percentage of grants targeting two or more populations (28% in 2020) remains similar to our 2018 baseline (22%), the degree of overlap continues to vary significantly by population. Racial and ethnic group grants have the least overlap (43%), while grants for sex workers show the highest overlap (79%) – a 36-point difference. The gap between the lowest and highest overlap has narrowed slightly since 2018, where LGBTQI individuals and persons with disabilities had the lowest overlap with other populations (33% and 37%, respectively), and sex workers had the highest (76%).



**Encouragingly, in grants for both LGBTQI people and persons with disabilities, we see consecutive increases** in the proportion that consider at least one additional population.



Our 2018 analysis categorized groups based on their overlap with other populations (high, medium, and low), as shown on page 40. While most remained stable, some, like LGBTQI people and persons with disabilities (both with low overlap in 2018), saw significant increases (over 20 percentage points) and shifted to the medium range by 2020. However, a particularly striking shift emerged for racial and ethnic groups. Despite a surge in racial justice pledges from funders in 2020,<sup>(1)</sup> grants for these communities saw the only decline in the share of grants that considered additional identities (down 10%). This suggests that new funding was focused on single racial or ethnic identities, rather addressing the multi-layered needs of these communities.

### Increased Intersectionality in LGBTQI and Disability Funding

Encouragingly, in grants for both LGBTQI people and persons with disabilities, we see consecutive increases in the proportion that consider at least one additional population. Our 2018 analysis revealed that these two groups received grants that were largely siloed, with minimal recognition of overlapping identities. Back then, only 33% of LGBTQI grants and 37% of disability grants mentioned additional identities. This suggested a lack of intersectional funding approaches. However, the picture has begun to change. In 2019, these figures jumped to 53% and 49% respectively, and by 2020, they had both reached 60%.

For LGBTQI grants, increased overlap is evident across all identities, with the most significant jumps seen with women and girls (now reaching 40% of LGBTQI grants as compared to 14% in 2018) and racial and ethnic groups (up to 19% from 10%). This is extremely promising for several reasons. First, funding for LGBTQI populations grew



Despite a surge in racial justice pledges, **intersectional grants for racial and ethnic groups dropped 10% to 43%** – the lowest overlap of any group we explored.



by \$144 million (+71%) from 2019 to 2020. This growth, combined with the rising overlap, suggests an understanding of the need for intersectional support for LGBTQI communities. This seems especially true of funding related to gender, where the overlap with women and girls nearly tripled. It also suggests that LGBTQI-focused funding that previously used more siloed approaches has more explicitly incorporated additional communities. This growth mirrors expanding resources for LGBTQI, explored in depth in the Global Philanthropy Project's annual **Global Resources Report**, and likely spurred by dedicated advocacy and outreach by LGBTQI movements and funders. Still, these hopeful signs must be tempered by the persistent underfunding of LGBTQI rights, which amounts to \$365 million per year, even as anti-gender ideologies continue to threaten LGBTQI communities around the world.

Following a similar trend to LGBTQI funding, grants for persons with disabilities show another area of human rights funding where advocacy, research, and funding expansion have paralleled a growing number of intersectional grants. Previously siloed, funding for persons with disabilities has steadily increased since 2018 and its position has reversed, moving from one of the lowest levels of overlap squarely to our "middle overlap" category. The strongest overlap increase is with women and girls (now 33% of grants, compared to 16% in 2018) and LGBTQI people (11% of grants as compared to 1%). This increase in LGBTQI overlap reinforces the finding above that previously focused or siloed LGBTQI funding might be more intentionally reaching across movements and communities. The doubling of overlap with women and girls aligns with the findings for LGBTQI communities: gender-focused funders appear to be expanding the express overlap with these more marginalized populations. Whether these are longer-term trends remains to be seen.

### **A Divergent Trend: Racial and Ethnic Groups**

In contrast to the positive shift toward intersectionality seen in funding for LGBTQI and disability communities, we see a decrease in the proportion of grants for racial and ethnic groups that consider additional identities. In both 2018 and 2019, 53% of grants for racial and ethnic groups mentioned at least one other identity. In 2020, this number dropped to 43%. It is vital to put this decline into context: in 2020, the total number of grants for racial and ethnic groups increased by 30% (1,705 additional grants), representing an absolute funding increase of \$661 million compared to 2019. The average grant size also increased, from \$175,000 to \$224,000, with both new and longstanding funders awarding unprecedentedly large grants. This coincides with the heightened global focus on racial justice following the pandemic's disproportionate impact on racial and ethnic groups, the murder of George Floyd, and the rise of Black Lives Matter

movements. Culminating years of tireless advocacy by racial justice organizations worldwide, these mobilizations were accompanied by a sharp rise in racial justice pledges and grants from funders.



















What is striking here is that grants that intersect with other population categories only increased by 159 grants (+5%) and \$162 million (+31%), while grants focusing solely on racial and ethnic groups increased by 1,546 grants (+58%) and \$499 million (+105%). That means that 91% of additional grants and 75% of additional grant dollars focused on single identities. Many of these grants offer minimal details beyond broad concepts like “racial justice” or “ethnic equity.” As we noted in our report on **funding for intersectional organizing**, a lack of specificity has been shown to diminish the focus on true racial justice. More importantly, in a year when intersectional activism was on the rise, philanthropy responded with single-issue funding. As an indicator of philanthropic action, this category is both hopeful – in terms of new money raised – and concerning when it comes to maintaining a more nuanced intersectional approach in moments of mobilization.<sup>(P)(Q)</sup>

## RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS: FOCUS ON SINGLE VS. MULTIPLE IDENTITIES



Change is calculated by comparing all grants identified for racial and ethnic groups in 2019 and 2020.

## NUMBER OF HUMAN RIGHTS GRANTS FOR EACH POPULATION AND THE % THAT OVERLAP WITH OTHER POPULATIONS (2018 & 2020)



















YEAR	POPULATION	TOTAL GRANTS	ONLY THIS POPULATION	THIS POPULATION PLUS OTHERS	OVERLAP WITH OTHER POPULATIONS
2020	 Sex Workers	372	21%	79%	High Overlap
	 Human Rights Defenders	1,342	23%	77%	
	 Children & Youth	4,365	33%	67%	
	 Migrants & Refugees	3,416	39%	61%	Medium Overlap
	 LGBTQI	3,183	40%	60%	
	 Persons with Disabilities	1,278	40%	60%	
	 Indigenous Peoples	2,240	41%	59%	
	 Women & Girls	8,688	42%	58%	
	 Racial & Ethnic Groups	7,394	57%	43%	Low Overlap
YEAR	POPULATION	TOTAL GRANTS	ONLY THIS POPULATION	THIS POPULATION PLUS OTHERS	OVERLAP WITH OTHER POPULATIONS
2018	 Sex Workers	153	24%	76%	High Overlap
	 Human Rights Defenders	574	35%	65%	
	 Children and Youth	4,971	41%	59%	Medium Overlap
	 Migrants and Refugees	3,293	43%	57%	
	 Racial and Ethnic Groups	4,911	47%	53%	
	 Indigenous Peoples	1,702	47%	53%	
	 Women and Girls	6,439	49%	51%	
	 Persons with Disabilities	934	63%	37%	Low Overlap
	 LGBTQI	1,625	67%	33%	

Sex workers and human rights defenders consistently have the highest overlap with other populations.

Racial and ethnic groups had the lowest overlap with other populations, with just 43% of grants mentioning additional identities (down 10% from 2018).

## % OF GRANTS FOR EACH POPULATION BY INTERSECTING POPULATIONS (2020)

VERY LOW INTERSECTION
  LOW INTERSECTION
  MEDIUM INTERSECTION
  HIGH INTERSECTION

INTERSECTING POPULATION	POPULATION									
										
	Children & Youth	Human Rights Defenders	Indigenous Peoples	LGBTQI	Migrants & Refugees	Persons with Disabilities	Racial & Ethnic Groups	Sex Workers	Women & Girls	
	 Children & Youth		6%	19%	14%	15%	21%	12%	6%	19%
	 Human Rights Defenders	2%		5%	7%	3%	6%	2%	17%	11%
	 Indigenous Peoples	10%	8%		4%	3%	5%	3%	1%	11%
	 LGBTQI	10%	17%	5%		11%	11%	8%	49%	15%
	 Migrants & Refugees	12%	7%	5%	12%		8%	17%	9%	8%
	 Persons with Disabilities	6%	5%	3%	5%	3%		2%	1%	5%
	 Racial & Ethnic Groups	21%	11%	10%	19%	37%	11%		8%	14%
	 Sex Workers	1%	5%	0%	6%	1%	0.3%	0.4%		2%
 Women & Girls	38%	69%	44%	40%	20%	33%	16%	47%		

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# What Strategies Do Human Rights Grants Support?

In addition to analyzing grants by regions, issues, and populations, we also look at the strategies funders support through their grantmaking. For instance, a grant to advance environmental and resource rights might prioritize strategic litigation, grassroots organizing, protecting environmental defenders, or some combination of these approaches. In 2019, 66% of human rights grants provided sufficient information for us to categorize them under at least one funding strategy.<sup>38</sup>

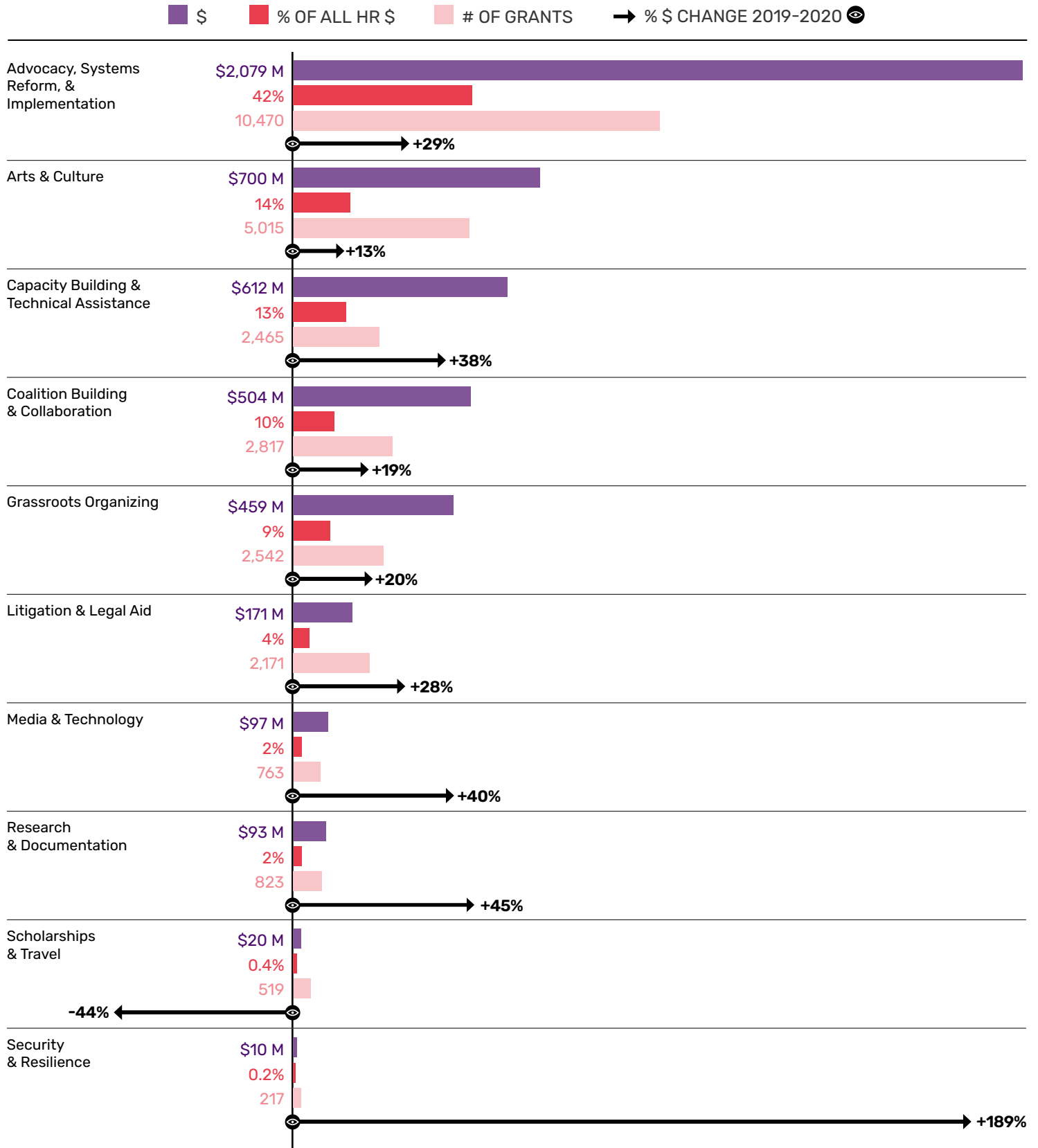
Comparing grants data from a consistent group of funders between 2019 and 2020 reveals overall increases, with the exception of a 44% decline (-\$7M) in scholarships and travel. This aligns with pandemic-related travel restrictions. The largest percentage growth occurred in security and resilience (+189%, +\$13M), followed by capacity building and technical assistance (+38%, +\$180M). These trends reflect the challenges brought on by the pandemic as funders stepped in to support human rights organizations and activists.

A separate graphic on page 44 offers a broader view, illustrating shifts in support across all ten strategies from 2016 to 2020.

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38. In our analysis, the full value of a grant is counted toward each strategy named as a focus for the grant. For example, if a grant mentions documenting human rights abuses to support strategic litigation, its full amount is counted in the funding total for both "research and documentation" and "litigation and legal aid."

## FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS BY STRATEGY (2020)



Change is calculated based on a matched subset of foundations with data available both years of comparison.

## CHANGES IN FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS BY STRATEGY (MATCHED SUBSET: 2016-2010)

 \$ INCREASE  \$ DECREASE

STRATEGY	% \$ CHANGE			
	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Advocacy, Systems Reform, & Implementation	+24%	+6%	+7%	+29%
Arts & Culture	+10%	+57%	-7%	+13%
Capacity Building & Technical Assistance	+79%	-4%	-14%	+38%
Coalition Building & Collaboration	+1%	+20%	+19%	+19%
Grassroots Organizing	-57%	+33%	+4%	+20%
Litigation & Legal Aid	+2%	-11%	-8%	+28%
Media & Technology	-8%	+10%	+11%	+40%
Research & Documentation	+30%	-5%	-6%	+45%
Scholarships & Travel	-1%	+100%	0%	-44%
Security & Resilience	+40%	+189%	-63%	+189%
<b>Overall Human Rights Funding</b>	<b>+23%</b>	<b>+13%</b>	<b>+15%</b>	<b>+21%</b>

Change is calculated based on a matched subset of foundations with data available both years of comparison.

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# Looking Forward

The COVID-19 pandemic forced a reckoning for human rights philanthropy in 2020. While human rights funders played a critical role in scaling up resources, it was the human rights movements on the frontlines that truly rose to the challenge. Their tireless work – attending to health, poverty, and the compounding effects of near-global shutdowns – served as a powerful testament to their vital role in protecting and promoting human rights.

The report underscores a key takeaway: effective human rights philanthropy supports these movements. Moving forward, funders must prioritize flexible funding mechanisms that dismantle barriers for grantees. Eliminating racial and regional disparities in grant distribution remains essential, ensuring resources reach the communities most affected by human rights abuses. Crucially, funders must also prioritize intersectional funding that acknowledges the interwoven nature of oppression and the interconnectedness of human rights issues, particularly in moments of crisis. Rather than constrict funding, this is precisely the moment to support intersectional activism making deep and lasting change.

A beacon of hope lies in the growing reach of funders in the Global South and East. This shift towards a more equitable philanthropic landscape, where locally-based movements have greater access to resources, holds immense promise. By building upon these advancements and continuing to take an honest stock of barriers within our field, human rights funders have a significant role to play in ensuring their support strengthens movements on the frontlines. Indeed, dedicated and direct resourcing – across movements, geographies, and crises – is our best hope for a more effective and just global response to the ever-complex challenges threatening human rights today.



While human rights funders played a critical role, it was the human rights movements that truly rose to the challenge. **Effective human rights philanthropy supports these movements.**



## Share your grants data!

Our research relies on you. Foundations can submit their grants data safely and securely using this [template](#). Or, if you use software from any of [these providers](#) to manage your grants, you can simply export your data to the template. To be included, grants data is due by June 30 each year for the previous fiscal year. If you are interested in contributing to this research or have any questions, please email us at [AHR@hrfn.org](mailto:AHR@hrfn.org).

To access more information about the human rights funding landscape, visit [humanrightsfunding.org](https://humanrightsfunding.org)

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# About Advancing Human Rights

Within the field of philanthropy, a dedicated community of funders commits time and money to supporting human rights actions around the world. Though human rights grant dollars are a small part of the overall funding ecosystem, these resources are critical for supporting and connecting movements working across human rights struggles.

Launched in 2010, *Advancing Human Rights* tracks the evolving state of global human rights philanthropy. Led by Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN) in collaboration with Candid, Ariadne–European Funders for Social Change and Human Rights, and Prospera–International Network of Women’s Funds, this research is the single most comprehensive analysis of where philanthropic money goes for human rights around the world. In our annual analysis, we unpack which issues get funded and which don’t, where human rights issues overlap and intersect, and how funding changes from year to year. Grounded in more than a decade of grants data, we use rigorous methodologies to understand funding trends.

Our research is part of a larger effort to better understand and influence the funding landscape. Mapping funding for key issues and movements has been critical for advancing what advocates have called “more and better funding,” increasing both the quality and the size of resources for social change.<sup>(R)</sup> Leading examples include research by the **Association for Women in Development (AWID)**, **Funders Concerned About AIDS**, **Funders for LGBTQ Issues** and **Global Philanthropy Project**, **Peace and Security Funders Group**, and the **Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity**, among others. Within this growing body of work, *Advancing Human Rights* provides a global overview, offering a comprehensive picture of funding for human rights at large.

This research brings field-wide evidence to support what human rights organizations and activists know firsthand: philanthropy has a critical role to play in meeting the moment and advancing human rights globally and there is considerable untapped potential.

## The Power of the Findings

Many of the funders included in this analysis see themselves as expressly contributing to human rights, on one issue or many. Others do not use that language, but some of their grants actively support human rights activities. We see power and potential in naming, tracking, and comparing this funding so that it might expand and reach the frontlines where it is most needed.

We also hope this research can support those working to advance human rights – whether as activists or as funders – by providing evidence to advocate for more and better funding.

Whether you are new to *Advancing Human Rights* or a seasoned reader, you can use the findings to increase your knowledge of the funding landscape, understand where your organization fits in human rights and philanthropic fields, inform your strategies, identify partners, and mobilize resources. Funders and activists have shared these reflections on the power and potential of the data:

*“Quantitative data is critical to philanthropy.... [it] begins to ground conversations in the reality of what’s really happening, and provide a benchmark to measure change over time to see how the field is evolving.”*

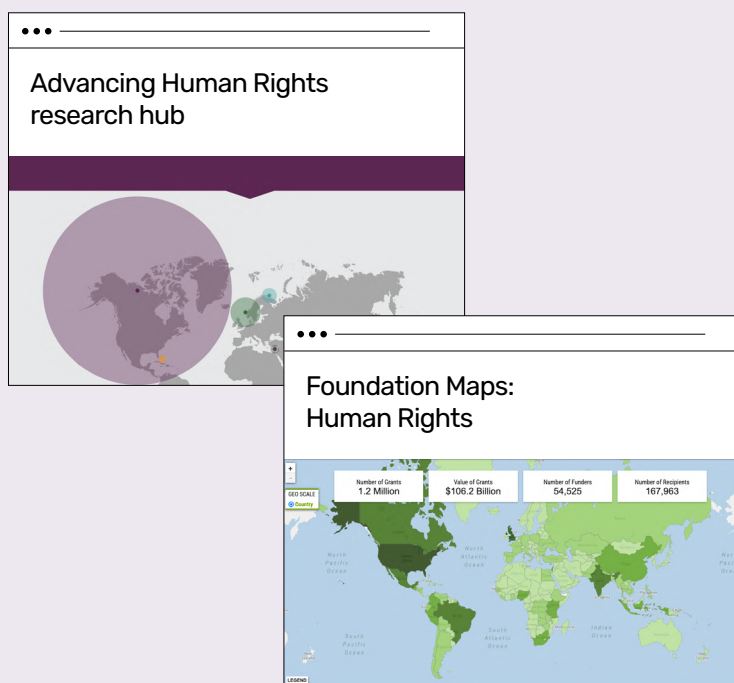
*“When I shared the [Advancing Human Rights] data at a convening of our grantees, it gave them a baseline and some associated righteous anger to push for more inclusion in funding to other groups and issues. It encouraged them to think outside the disability box and to consider ways in which their organizations could apply for women’s rights funding, environmental rights funding, etc.”*

*“[The data] helped us form a new relationship with another foundation that we might have previously identified as unlikely potential allies. Their grants got included in the AHR research because those grants have a human rights focus, even though the foundation does not publicly describe itself as a ‘human rights funder.’”*

## Dig Deeper into the Data

The findings in this report are just a starting point. In addition to this analysis, *Advancing Human Rights* includes powerful ways to tailor the data to your areas of interest.

- > Use our **research hub** to explore funding over time by regions, issues, populations, and strategies.
- > Dive into the **grants database and mapping platform** to see grant-level details and find peers.
- > Follow our **blog series** where we showcase diverse perspectives to contextualize the numbers.
- > Learn from our additional **reports and analyses** of the field of human rights funding.



# Methodology

Our research aims to incorporate all human rights grants in a given year. To do so as comprehensively as possible, we collect data from three networks of global human rights donors and review individual grants housed by Candid, the leading source of information about foundation funding. For 2020, the most current available year, we identified 681 foundations in 46 countries that gave \$4.9 billion for human rights.

For our data analysis, we use a combination of machine learning techniques, rules-based search strategies, and extensive data review to identify grants that meet our definition of human rights funding. In total, we reviewed over 220,000 grants, roughly 93% of which came from Candid's data set of grants of \$10,000 or more made by 1,000 of the largest private and community foundations in the U.S.<sup>39</sup> The remaining grants were collected directly from human rights funders, including 173 members of the three global networks (HRFN, Ariadne, and Prospera).<sup>40</sup> Across all four sources, 28,461 grants, 13% of those analyzed, met our definition of supporting human rights.

To avoid "double counting" grant dollars, we excluded grants that were regranted from one foundation to another within our data set, unless otherwise noted. These accounted for 367 grants (1% of human rights grants), generally from private foundations to public foundations, which raise funds from a range of sources to support their grantmaking. We also use a matched subset – funders that are consistent across research years – to compare trends and track changes over time. This is important because we can identify variations that are indicative of larger shifts in the field, even as we work to bring in more data each year.

In the course of our research, we have to make some hard choices about how to categorize grants. A single human rights grant may focus on multiple regions, support several populations, or incorporate various strategies like research, litigation, and advocacy. Because most grants do not specify the share of funding for each facet, we count the full value of each grant in the totals reported for three facets: 1) regions; 2) populations; and 3) strategies. For example, we would include the full \$20,000 for a grant to address violence against migrant women in Haiti and South Africa in each of the totals for migrants and refugees, women and girls, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Sub-Saharan Africa. While this approach is instrumental in helping us understand the relative funding flows by category, the drawback is that it may inflate the actual funding for each category.

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39. Candid's Foundation 1000 data set represents roughly half of all U.S. private and community foundation grantmaking.

40. Members include any foundations that contribute membership dues or submit data directly to HRFN, Ariadne, or Prospera for this research.

While we assign multiple regions, populations, or strategies to grants, where relevant, each grant is only assigned one human rights issue category. Where grants address multiple issues, we use a combination of grant descriptions, and knowledge of funder or grant recipient priorities, to determine the most relevant category. We include **27 unique human rights issues**, which are grouped into 13 overarching categories. We have included the category “human rights general” to capture grants where there is not enough detail to assign a specific human rights issue. This single-issue approach helps us to better conceptualize how funding is divided among human rights needs, but limits our ability to capture cross-cutting work. In 2022, we produced a **separate analysis** that specifically looks at cross-issue funding to deepen our understanding of intersectional grantmaking.

As with any research, there are limitations. We may not capture very small grants (those under \$10,000 through Candid), and we continually strive to bring in more global data. Still, through our data collection, research methodologies, and regular engagement with the field, our *Advancing Human Rights* research provides a well-grounded understanding of the allocations and trends shaping human rights philanthropy around the world.

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# Endnotes

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# Acknowledgments

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## Cover Photos

Top: Flood in Assam, India, May 30, 2020 (photo by Simanta Talukdar/Shutterstock.com, cropped from original)

Bottom: Black Lives Matter protest in Boston, Massachusetts, June 7, 2020 (photo by Maverick Pictures/Shutterstock.com, cropped from original)

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## About Human Rights Funders Network

Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN) is a network of funders from the Global South, East, and North dedicated to resourcing human rights actions around the world. For 30 years, HRFN has brought funders together to collaborate, strategize, and strengthen the field of human rights philanthropy. Since our inception, our community has grown into a global network of almost 450 institutions across 70 countries. We are committed to advancing human rights through “open philanthropy,” an approach and ideal through which resources are distributed ethically in a way that is abundant, justice-centered, open in knowledge and power, and informed by movements. Learn more at [hrfn.org](https://hrfn.org).

Designed by Vito Ramondi.