

ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS

FUNDING AT A
CROSSROADS:
**FOREIGN AID CUTS
AND IMPLICATIONS
FOR GLOBAL
HUMAN RIGHTS**

Table of Contents

Key Findings	2
Key Findings: The Global ODA Landscape.....	3
Key Findings: The Impact on Human Rights Funding	4
Looking Forward	5
The Global ODA Landscape: Cuts and Core Trends.....	6
Plummeting ODA.....	6
Driving Trends and Future Projections.....	10
The Rise of Anti-Rights Agendas	10
Securitization and Military Spending	10
Uneven ODA Commitments.....	11
Direct Impact: Human Rights ODA Under Threat.....	12
ODA Cuts and the Implications for Global Human Rights	12
The Role of Human Rights Philanthropy	14
The Ripple Effects of ODA Cuts on Philanthropy	14
Human Rights Organizations Grappling with Funding Cuts	15
Recommendations	17
Endnotes	19
Acknowledgments	21

Key Findings

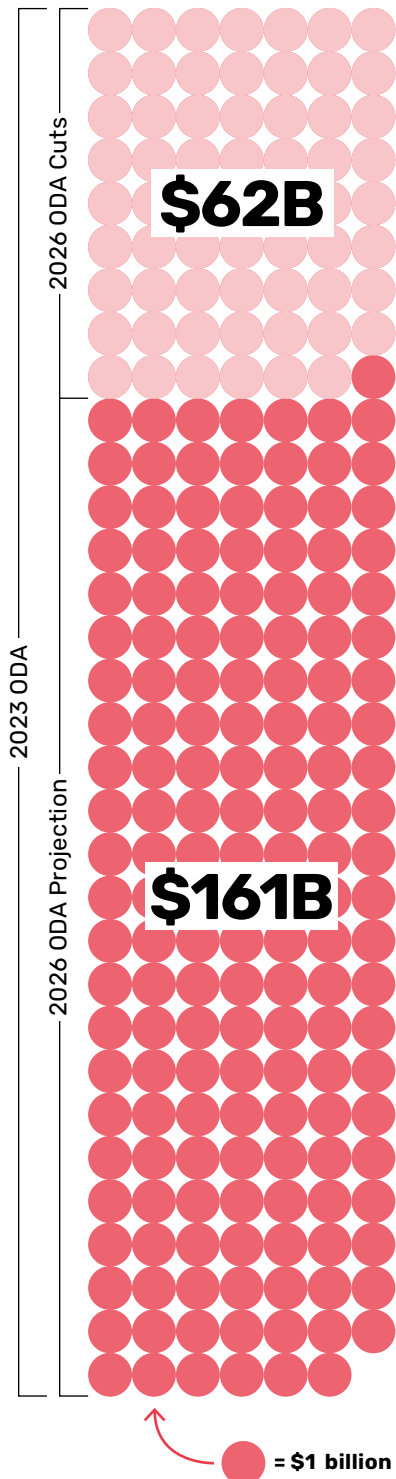
Funding for global human rights movements is rapidly contracting, spurred by significant cuts to foreign aid and increasing uncertainty within philanthropic foundations. This brief from Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN) provides a real-time assessment of projected funding cuts and their impacts on human rights resourcing, alongside pathways for funders to respond and glimmers of hope.

Our brief combines data available through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) Creditor Reporting System, forecasting of Official Development Assistance (ODA) by SEEK Development,¹ and comprehensive human rights funding data from Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN).² Our top-line findings are drawn from analysis detailed on pages 6 to 16, followed by proposed interventions on pages 17 and 18.

1. The OECD-CRS is one of the most comprehensive datasets of ODA flows available and contains information about tens of thousands of disbursements annually. We chose SEEK Development's [research](#) for projecting 2026 ODA figures due to its timely and data-driven approach. The data used in this brief was retrieved on 18 June 2025.

2. We conduct our annual [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.

ODA is projected to plummet by **\$62 billion annually** by 2026.



Key Findings: The Global ODA Landscape

Global Official Development Assistance (ODA) is projected to decline significantly by 2026 due to major cuts from key donor countries, threatening millions of lives. We find:

1

ODA is projected to plummet by \$62 billion annually by 2026: An estimated decline to \$161 billion is projected by 2026,³ representing a 28% reduction from a record high of \$223 billion in 2023.^(A)

2

12 countries have announced ODA reductions amidst waning support for human rights:⁴ These announced cuts reflect a growing trend of reduced ODA, increased military spending, and declining political support for human rights. These data assume no additional countries reduce aid allocations and that projected cuts do not further increase.

3

Three countries are driving 84% of the projected ODA decrease: Just three nations—the United States (\$36 billion), Germany (\$10 billion), and the United Kingdom (\$7 billion)—are responsible for the vast majority of this projected annual ODA decrease.

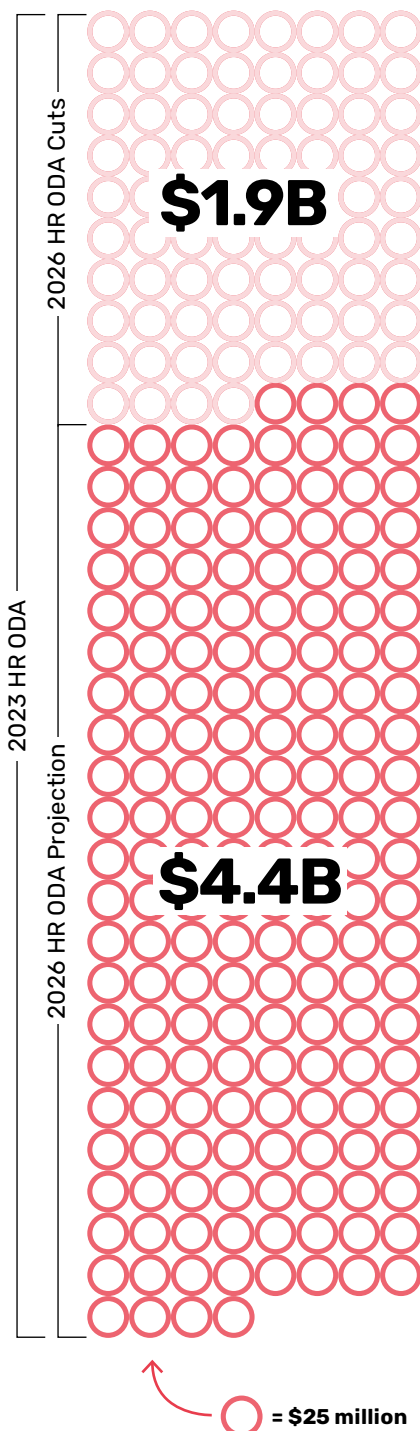
4

Funding cuts threaten millions of lives: Human rights and humanitarian organizations predict these reductions will put millions of lives at risk,^(B) potentially leading to up to 3 million additional HIV-related deaths by 2030^(C) and nearly 2 million children killed by preventable illness due to reductions in global immunizations.^(D)

3. See footnote #6 for more on our methodology.

4. The 12 countries include Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Human rights-focused ODA is projected to decline by up to **\$1.9 billion annually** by 2026.



Key Findings: The Impact on Human Rights Funding

Projected ODA reductions will critically impact human rights-specific funding and broader philanthropic support, exacerbating challenges for human rights movements. We find:

1

Human rights-focused ODA is projected to decline by up to \$1.9 billion annually by 2026: Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN) conservatively estimates that this vital source of support will decrease by between \$1.4 billion (22%) and \$1.9 billion (31%) by 2026 as compared to 2023.

2

ODA reductions are having an immediate impact on philanthropic support: Foundations currently provide nearly \$5 billion a year for human rights action worldwide.⁵ These ODA cuts are already having a significant effect on philanthropic support, through both direct funding losses and the rapid depletion of resources across the broader ecosystem, increasing overall demands.

3

Political conditions are increasingly undermining foundations' grantmaking: Beyond funding, political environments are further impeding foundations' ability to support movements, with increasingly restrictive measures hindering their cross-border grantmaking.

4

Human rights movements face immediate and severe impact: While the effects are already taking hold, the full scale of funding cuts will be felt in the next 6 to 12 months. Human rights movements for LGBTQI rights and gender equality will be especially hard-hit. Strategies to shore up funding for these and other social movements are critical protection against democratic backsliding.^(E)

5. Foundations provided approximately \$4.9 billion to advance human rights in 2020 (the most recent comprehensive annual data available).



Looking Forward

Overall ODA cuts will inevitably and indelibly impact the infrastructure of civic space, humanitarian aid, and human rights. The specific human rights funding shortfall of \$1.4 to \$1.9 billion is a severe setback, but it is not insurmountable. This challenge has the potential to galvanize movements targeted by the shifting political economy and resisting democratic backsliding around the world to innovate and adapt. How foundations contribute to or rally against the depletion of the funding ecosystem—and bolster these movements—will depend on the actions they take by the end of this year.

The remainder of this brief provides more in-depth analysis of the cuts to overall ODA and human rights-related ODA, trends shaping the future of funding, and what is needed in the near term to shore up human rights movements.

The Global ODA Landscape: Cuts and Core Trends

Plummeting ODA

Official Development Assistance (ODA), the primary form of foreign aid provided by donor governments, is facing unprecedented cuts. While estimates vary, current real-time data suggest that projected ODA cuts from 12 major donor countries could amount to roughly \$64 billion annually by 2026 compared to 2023 levels. Even after factoring in increased contributions from other nations, this would result in a net deficit of approximately \$62 billion per year—representing over a quarter of total ODA from all OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries, the world’s leading group of development donors.⁶ Among these 12 major donors, individual national ODA reductions are projected to range from Norway’s 7% to the United States’ 56%, as the chart on page nine shows. These figures assume no further reductions, either from these 12 countries or from additional ODA-contributing nations.

The US, the largest foreign aid funder globally in absolute terms, has an especially uncertain outlook, with the Trump administration’s sweeping proposed cuts to longstanding foreign assistance programs.^(F) While a number of US funding withdrawals are under congressional review or facing legal challenges, the estimated ODA decline (\$36 billion per year) represents over half of the total projected cuts to ODA globally.

A small group of seven countries is projected to either maintain their ODA contributions (Australia, Denmark, Japan, and Luxembourg) or increase them (Italy, Korea, Spain). However, the combined increase from these latter three countries is estimated to be less than 3% (\$2 billion) of the deficit caused by the 12 countries that announced reductions.⁷

6. In our analysis, we focus on ODA from the 32 OECD DAC member countries, minus Latvia which joined in 2025. Our 2026 projections utilize data from SEEK Development’s donortracker.org for the 19 OECD DAC members with available forecasts. For the 12 DAC countries without forecasts, their 2023 contributions were held constant. We use 2023 as our baseline for comparison, as it represents the highest year of ODA on record.

7. Denmark and Luxembourg, for example, consistently meet the UN’s 0.7% GNI ODA target (a benchmark only five nations achieved in 2023) and are projected to maintain their giving. However, their smaller national incomes mean their effect on the overall ODA totals is limited. Likewise, while Korea, Italy, and Spain are working to increase their ODA as a percentage of GNI, their current modest ratios (e.g., Korea 0.17%, Italy 0.27%) mean their individual contributions will not significantly impact overall ODA funding levels.

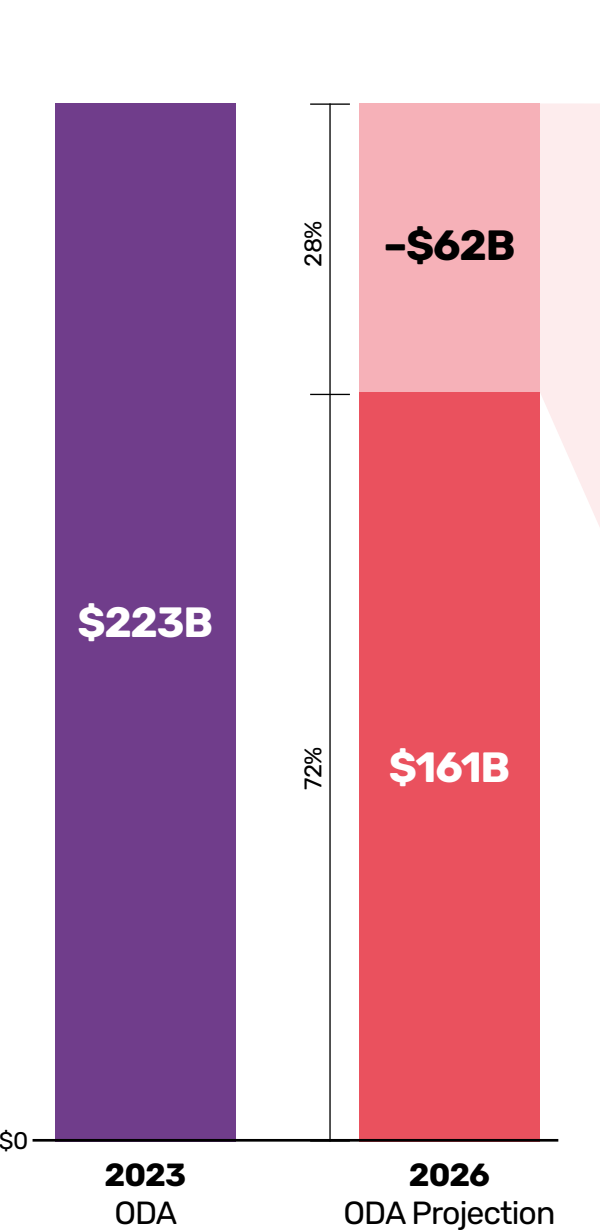
While anecdotal reports suggest some governments are attempting to offset ODA decreases from their peers, our analysis finds that any observed increases tend to be a continuation of long-standing commitments and part of longer-term trajectories, with little evidence of new money compensating for recent cuts.

The sheer scale of the funding cuts threatens to undo years of progress in development, humanitarian aid, and human rights, placing millions in greater peril in countries where aid has shored up critical and life-saving services.⁽⁶⁾ Such broad repercussions will disproportionately affect oppressed groups—including LGBTQI people, women and girls, immigrants and refugees, sex workers, persons with disabilities, and people living with HIV and AIDS—who often rely on this international support for essential programs and services. The cost to human life is grim. For instance, recent freezes in US foreign assistance have already led to the termination of global LGBTQI equality programs, causing the cessation of vital services like shelters and HIV support.^(H) Beyond this, a new study estimates unmitigated funding cuts could result in between 4.4 and 10.8 million additional new HIV infections and 770,000 to 2.9 million HIV-related deaths by 2030, predominantly in low- and middle-income countries.^(I) Researchers anticipate nearly 2 million children could be killed by preventable illness in this same period due to cuts in global immunizations.^(J)

Global ODA Faces Severe Cuts: 2023 vs 2026 Projections*

Total ODA

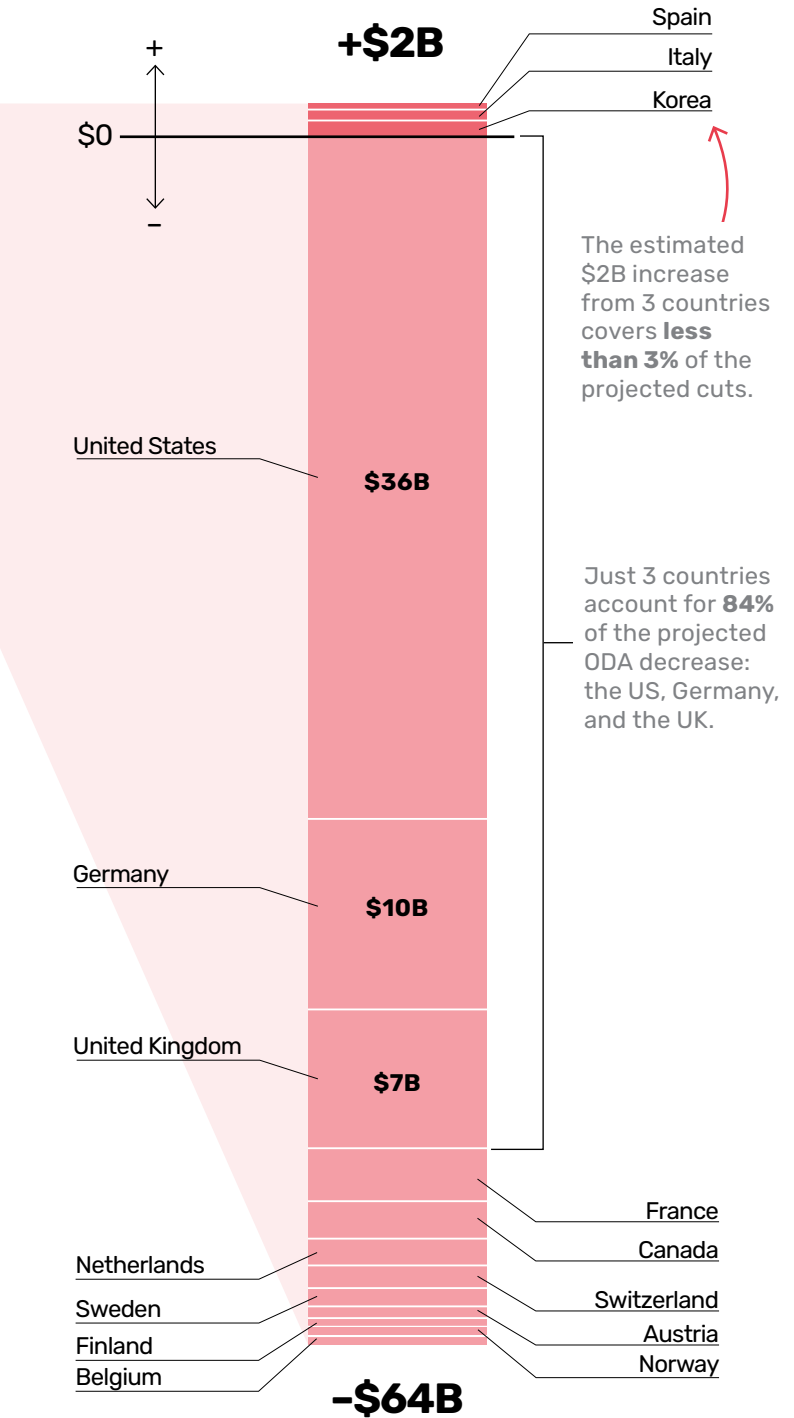
ODA is projected to drop by \$62 billion annually by 2026, representing a 28% reduction from a record high of \$223 billion in 2023 to \$161 billion.



*In our analysis, we focus on ODA from the 32 OECD DAC member countries, minus Latvia which joined in 2025. Our 2026 projections utilize data from SEEK Development's donortracker.org for the 19 OECD DAC members with available forecasts. We use 2023 as our baseline for comparison, as it represents the highest year of ODA on record.

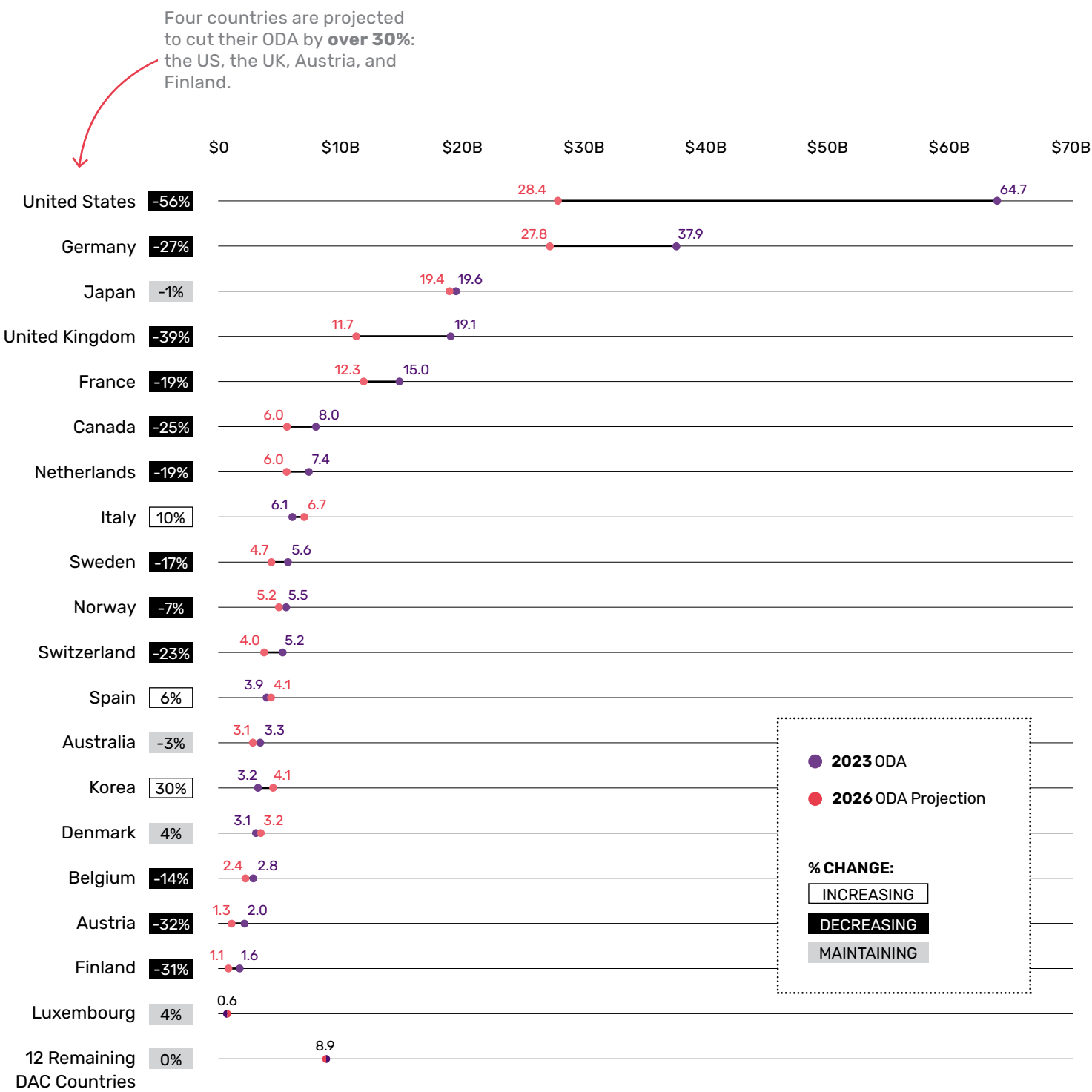
ODA changes by country

The projected net reduction of \$62 billion in ODA is driven by \$64 billion in cuts from 12 countries that largely outweigh \$2 billion in increases from 3 countries.



ODA Shifts by Country: Who's Up, Who's Down, Who's Steady: 2023 vs 2026 Projections*

This chart compares country ODA contributions to highlight the major donors driving ODA shifts.



*In our analysis, we focus on ODA from the 32 OECD DAC member countries, minus Latvia which joined in 2025. Our 2026 projections utilize data from SEEK Development's [donortracker.org](#) for the 19 OECD DAC members with available forecasts. Countries were classified by projected ODA change (2023-2026) as: decreasing (a fall of ≥5%); increasing (a rise of ≥5%); or maintaining (a change between -4% and +4%). For the 12 DAC member countries without forecasts, their 2023 contributions were held constant. We use 2023 as our baseline for comparison, as it represents the highest year of ODA on record.

Driving Trends and Future Projections

Though distinct to each national political and economic landscape, the cuts to foreign assistance reflect three key trends.

1 The Rise of Anti-Rights Agendas

First, the rise of conservative and right-wing governments has brought a wave of nationalist political agendas and attacks on human rights. This political shift extends beyond aid-sending countries; it is significantly limiting the ability of funders of all kinds to move money across borders. Countries as varied as Russia, Georgia, Ethiopia, India, El Salvador, and the United States are on a long list of nations that have started to limit, track, and constrict international funding for civil society organizations.^(K) These tactics are hallmarks of a well-resourced and expanding anti-rights agenda and are likely to continue to proliferate without targeted and well-resourced opposition.^(L)

These government shifts and national agendas are actively intertwined with more specific funding changes, such as the Netherlands moving away from gender equality and climate initiatives,^(M) and the US targeting groups that support equal opportunity.^(N) As detailed above, these funding cuts have hit LGBTQI and feminist movements particularly hard and could lead to even greater losses for human rights-related support.

2 Securitization and Military Spending

Second, the perceived threat of conflict has propelled the highest rates of military spending since the end of the cold war.^(O) This global surge is particularly evident among European nations ramping up military spending in response to Russia's war in Ukraine and its potential regional fallout.^(P) The Trump administration's unpredictability is also a factor, driving allies to question long-held US commitments. For example, European countries are considering nuclear armament—a stark reversal of 60 years of nonproliferation.^(Q)

In some instances, increased military expenditure has been directly linked to significant reductions in foreign aid, revealing a clear trade-off with other national priorities.^(R) All 32 NATO members increased military spending in 2024 and committed to a new target of investing 5% of their Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) annually in defense by 2035.^(S) Last year, Germany's military spending jumped by 28% to \$88.5 billion, its highest level since reunification.^(T) This trend is likely to continue, as the rhetoric of securitization outpaces—and in some cases entirely replaces—narratives around economic security, development, and global cooperation.

3 Uneven ODA Commitments

Third, ODA's recent upward trend is deceptive, and not reflective of sustained growth or political commitments. Global ODA reached a record high of \$223 billion in 2023, yet this growth was largely driven by spending related to the war in Ukraine and domestic refugee support.^(U) This meant a historically low share of ODA actually reached low-income countries.^(V) The recently announced budget cuts now mark a stark departure from even this skewed growth and will inevitably lead to even lower levels of vital funding for low-income countries, including for human rights.

Direct Impact: Human Rights ODA Under Threat

ODA Cuts and the Implications for Global Human Rights

Since 2010, Human Rights Funders Network and its partners have systematically mapped global funding to support human rights. This funding is crucial for protecting and promoting the fundamental rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent human rights treaties, such as ensuring freedom from violence, securing access to education, and demanding equitable treatment, especially for those most at risk of discrimination.

Our data predict a significant decline of between \$1.4 and \$1.9 billion (22 to 31%) in annual ODA for human rights initiatives from OECD DAC member countries by next year as compared to 2023.⁸ Both ends of this range are based on countries' announced shifts in overall ODA. The lower estimate (\$1.4 billion, a 22% decrease from \$6.3 to \$4.9 billion) assumes donor countries will maintain consistent percentage allocations to human rights causes across years. This is highly unlikely. The expanded estimate (\$1.9 billion, a 31% decrease from \$6.3 to \$4.4 billion) factors in explicit policy statements by the US and the Netherlands that they will cut funding related to human rights.

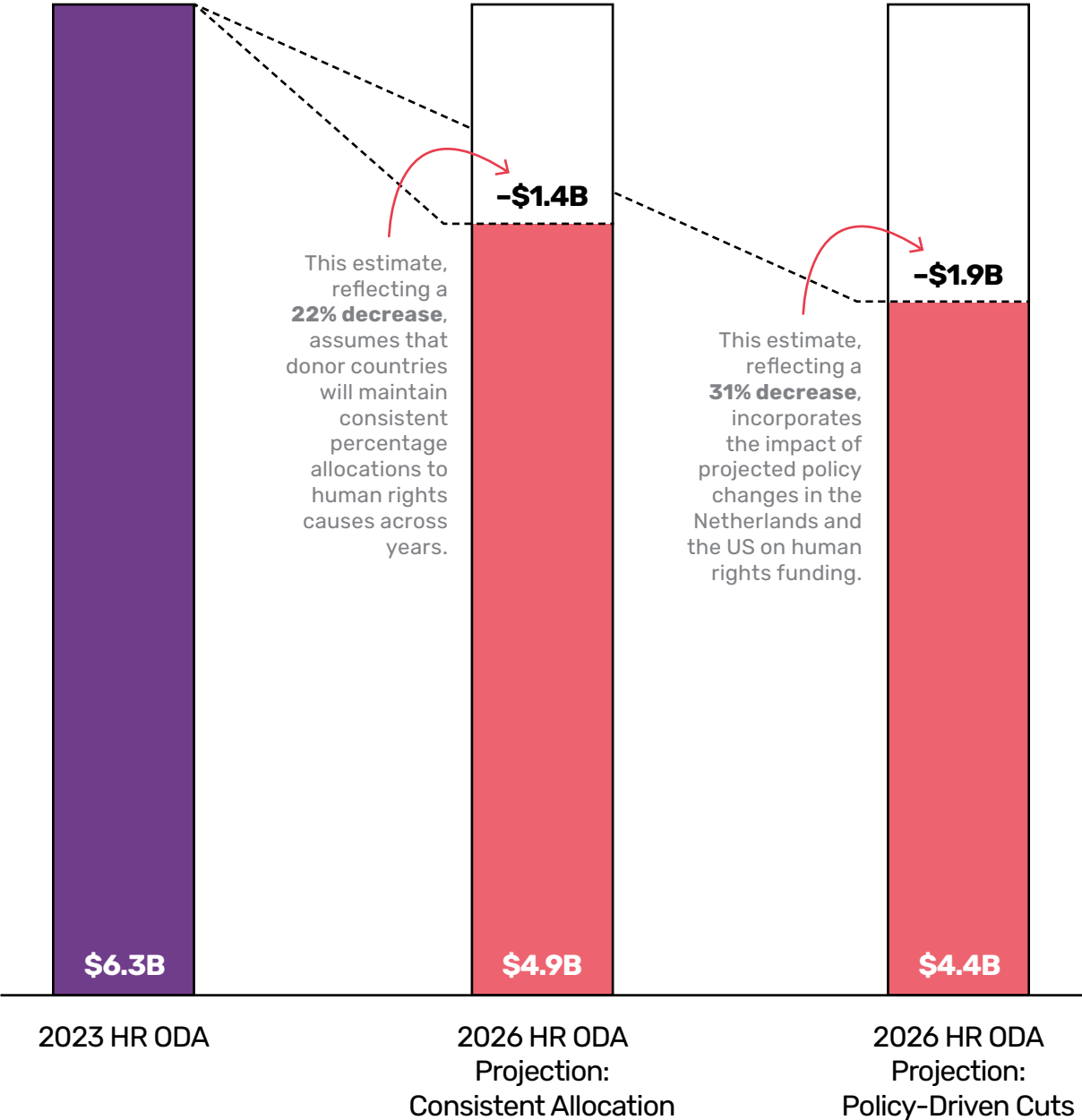
The chart on page 13 illustrates these projected declines in ODA for human rights work, which stem from the 12 donor countries where we anticipate substantial ODA reductions. It depicts both our lower and expanded estimates. The impact of these specific countries is magnified by their outsized role: in 2023, these 12 donors alone accounted for a striking 81% (four out of five grant dollars) of the human rights ODA from OECD DAC member countries.

Given the ideological shifts we are witnessing, we anticipate the full impact of these cuts will be far more erratic and profound than even these calculations suggest. While many of the largest aid-providing countries are significantly cutting human rights support, the net impact is likely to be even beyond the scope of direct cuts. For instance, the Trump administration's shuttering of USAID halted funding to over 10,000 organizations around the world, and also left many organizations that did not receive any US funding scrambling as their US-funded partners lost resources.^(w)

8. See footnote #6 for more on our methodology. To identify human rights funding, we use a combination of OECD-CRS issue codes and keyword searches.

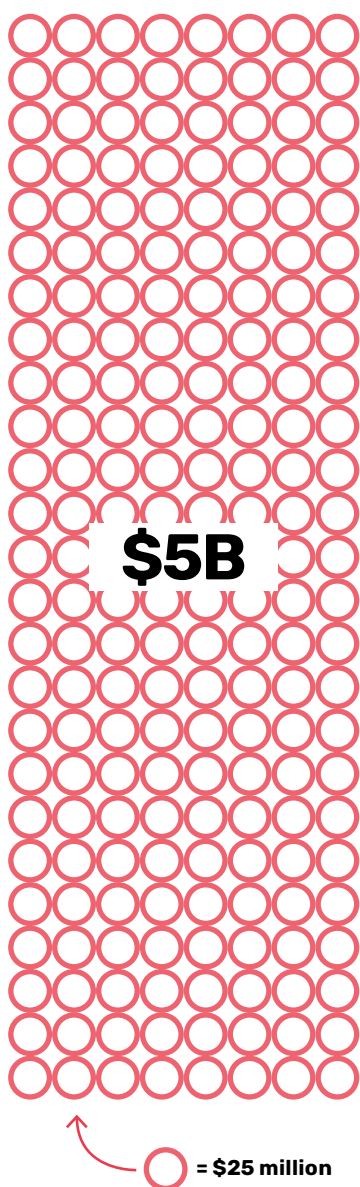
The Deep Impact of ODA Cuts on Human Rights Funding: 2023 vs 2026 Projections

Overall ODA cuts are projected to lead to an annual decrease of between \$1.4 billion and \$1.9 billion in human rights ODA by 2026. This range reflects two distinct estimates: a lower one that assumes donor countries will maintain consistent percentage allocations to human rights causes across years, and an expanded one that factors in policy statements by the US and the Netherlands related to specific cuts to human rights funding.



The Role of Human Rights Philanthropy

Foundations contribute nearly **\$5 billion** annually to social justice and human rights initiatives.



The Ripple Effects of ODA Cuts on Philanthropy

Cuts to ODA directly and indirectly impact another major source of movement resourcing: philanthropic grants. Foundations contribute nearly \$5 billion annually to social justice and human rights initiatives around the world, a figure that has steadily grown over the last decade.

Amidst foreign assistance withdrawals, foundations that previously received and administered ODA funding now face direct reductions in their operational budgets and program capabilities. This is evident in particular with an end to Dutch funding for feminist groups in 2024 and the shuttering of USAID in 2025. Beyond these direct cuts, foundations supporting human rights have been inundated with emergency funding requests.

Foundations are also contending with the same shifting political landscapes that are reconfiguring ODA, including a global proliferation of restrictive foreign agent laws,^(X) proposed increases in endowment tax rates,^(Y) and emerging threats to the legal status of non-profit organizations in the US^(Z) and Europe.^(AA) Some individual foundations in the US have also been targeted for direct Congressional scrutiny for supporting issues such as migrant rights, Palestinian rights, or initiatives related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.^(AB) Adding to this complex picture, as we noted in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, several leading private foundations have recently reduced or discontinued direct support for human rights, further exacerbating an already concerning funding landscape.^(AC)

The capacity of foundations to address both this heightened demand and the constricting operating environment varies. Public foundations such as women's funds, activist funds, and intermediary funders rely on external support and are facing extreme budget cuts. Private foundations, which provide over 80% of all human rights funding from philanthropic institutions and constitute eight of the top 10 human rights funders globally,⁹ range significantly in their response. At HRFN, we see a spectrum of philanthropic leadership, from those activating crisis funding models (as happened with COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine) and increasing allocations from their endowments to those waiting, holding steady budgets, or even pulling back from issues deemed high-risk.

9. This finding is drawn from our annual *Advancing Human Rights* research. We collect data from a range of funder types; however, data from our research partner Candid, a primary source, focuses on private and community foundations. Additionally, our analysis disproportionately includes data from Global North funders due to greater data accessibility. These factors mean our findings may reflect biases towards these funder types and geographies in the overall landscape. Despite these acknowledged limitations, our comprehensive analysis provides strong evidence that private philanthropy is by far the largest funder among philanthropic institutions. For an extensive breakdown of funding by funder types, see our [report](#) on philanthropy's "trust gap."

Human Rights Organizations Grappling with Funding Cuts

Across the board, the contraction of foreign aid is no longer a future concern but a reality stifling human rights movements worldwide. Evidence from multiple sources paints a concerning picture of widespread financial strain. A recent global survey by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reveals that a staggering 73% of the 305 organizations that responded have already been affected by funding cuts.^(AD) Among those impacted, approximately half anticipate a potentially catastrophic loss of over 40% of their budgets, threatening their ability to operate and very existence. The impact on gender equality efforts is similarly severe: a UN Women survey found that 90% of 411 women-led and women's rights organizations across 44 crisis-affected countries reported being affected by foreign aid reductions, threatening their survival.^(AE)

These dire findings are echoed by the Prospera Network of Women's Funds, whose members actively support feminist movements around the world. A recent survey of 45 of its members revealed that 78% had already lost a combined total of \$65 million over the last two years.^(AF) Prospera forecasts that its members will see their budgets shrink by an average of 30% by 2026. The anticipated repercussions are grave: 66% of these funds expect program cuts and 73% foresee staffing and compensation constraints, leading to nearly half fearing the closure of some of their grantees.

The funding crisis is further corroborated by a member survey from Human Rights Funders Network, the world's largest network of foundations supporting human rights. The survey, which included funders from 35 countries representing 63% of HRFN's member institutions, found that funders overwhelmingly foresee increased financial vulnerability for human rights organizations and significant shifts in the funding landscape. Specifically, 94% expressed major concern about potential funding declines for specific thematic areas, marginalized communities, and regions.

In response to these challenges, HRFN members are adjusting their grantmaking: 31% plan to reallocate funds, 35% will increase general operating support, and 51% intend to enhance donor collaboration to mitigate gaps for the most affected groups. While these measures are encouraging, they won't fully counter the widespread financial strain and anticipated loss of support for critical human rights work. This collective challenge poses a significant global threat, potentially undoing years of progress in the field.

Beyond individual organizations, the infrastructure of movements will be radically transformed over the coming two to three years as the funding cuts take hold. This is more alarming given the strong evidence that social movements play a crucial role against the closing of civic space. One recent study noted that the presence of nonviolent social movements decreased the risk of democratic backsliding by 700%.^(AG) Another found a clear positive relationship between feminist movements and measures for equality, freedom from violence, and political participation.^(AH) Without sustained and robust support for these movements, the global landscape risks an accelerating erosion of rights and democracy that could take generations to repair.

Recommendations

The human rights ecosystem is unequivocally facing a significant and rapidly escalating funding crisis. Currently, cuts to the portion of ODA specifically dedicated to human rights, conservatively estimated at a quarter to one-third of this support, are compounding shifts in philanthropic funding and the specific targeting of vital human rights initiatives. Together, these factors threaten to erode decades of painstaking progress.

We believe the following steps are not only needed but possible for foundations, governments, and other actors committed to addressing the specific human rights funding shortfall.

What is needed:

- 1 Countering the narrative of an “unfillable” ODA gap.** The full scale of foreign aid cuts may be vast, but the crucial human rights funding shortfall of \$1.4 to \$1.9 billion can be met through a combination of increased government and philanthropic contributions. Examples like the rapid mobilization of resources for Ukraine and during the COVID-19 pandemic prove such swift action is possible, demonstrating that this critical gap is surmountable and progress can be sustained.
- 2 Leadership to mobilize crisis response funding.** Immediate and long-term strategies require an infusion of capital within the next 6 to 12 months, before the full extent of the cuts takes hold. This funding has the potential to shift the trajectory of human rights responses across three key areas:
 - a. Dedicated funds for movement restructuring.** Foundations committed to shoring up human rights efforts have a distinct window of time to directly support strategic, movement-level visioning and adaptation. A portion of new funds should be specifically allocated for intersectional movement-led spaces to support the future-building and strategizing already in motion. This can also include support for building alternative forms of resourcing, ensuring human rights movements are resilient and adaptable for the challenges ahead.

- b. Direct support to counter democratic rollback.** Driving resources to the frontlines is not just a response to crisis; it is central to safeguarding civic space and strengthening democracy globally. Current support must be maintained, particularly for those most violently targeted by right-wing attacks—including LGBTQI communities, immigrants and refugees, and feminist groups. New resources should also be allocated for legal support and global accountability infrastructure, providing critical protection and vital tools for justice.
- c. Focused alignment to disrupt anti-rights organizing.** A growing body of organizing focuses on mapping and disrupting anti-rights agendas. Funding to support these efforts is immediately needed as a complementary strategy to both movement restructuring initiatives and democratic rollback responses, to counter and diminish attacks on human rights.

3 Reassessment of risk (and whose risks). Foundations, particularly private foundations, are currently divided on the level of visibility, action, and risk they are willing to take on and the urgency with which they assess this moment. However, a failure to act decisively now comes at an immense cost. Increasing evidence suggests that without urgent and concerted intervention, this precarious future for global human rights defense will translate into increased vulnerability for oppressed communities and a profound setback in the universal pursuit of dignity, justice, and equality for all.

4 Networked attacks require a networked response. The attack on human rights funding is part of a coordinated and well-resourced agenda. The strength of foundations' response will be determined by the degree to which we coordinate and strategize as a field across all areas above—narratives, resource allocation, and distribution of risk—creating a robust, coordinated defense against a complex threat.

5 Expanding the tent. Human rights are the bedrock of democratic societies, inextricably linked with the well-being of our planet, technological advancement, and global stability. Foundations, governments, and other actors focused on environmental justice, climate action, technology, and peace and security must strategically align and join efforts with long-standing human rights funders, creating powerful new synergies. A truly networked response is essential to meet the multifaceted challenges of our time.

Immediate action is a vital stopgap and a necessary catalyst to reshape the funding ecosystem and forge a path towards a more sustainable and locally-driven global human rights movement. This is not merely a financial challenge, but a fundamental test of the global commitment to human rights.

Endnotes

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About Human Rights Funders Network

Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN) is the world's largest network of funders from the Global South, East, and North dedicated to resourcing human rights action. We use research, community building, and advocacy to cultivate a funding field that drives significantly more and better grant dollars directly to human rights actors and movements leading change around the world. Learn more at hrfn.org.

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