

ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS

ANNUAL REVIEW OF GLOBAL FOUNDATION GRANTMAKING

2021 KEY FINDINGS

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Key Findings

This report offers a comprehensive look at the state of foundation human rights funding, using 2021 data as a critical high-water mark for analysis.¹ While the sector saw record-breaking totals and a surge in flexible support, the data reveal a philanthropic landscape defined by acute systemic risk and persistent inequity.

Our findings point to **three core challenges** facing the human rights funding ecosystem today:

- 1. Systemic Financial Risk:** Driven by the extreme concentration of funding in the Global North and financial contraction accelerated by external forces.
- 2. Persistent Inequity:** Characterized by inconsistent funding flows and a deep-seated "trust gap" that disadvantages local movements, especially in the Global South and East.
- 3. Limited Intersectional Funding:** Revealed by entrenched single-issue silos and inconsistent grantmaking practices that undermine cross-movement power and long-term stability.

These challenges have come to a head in more recent years, with dramatic and large-scale funding cuts in 2025 and 2026. Beyond highlighting the source of these vulnerabilities, we point to positive data trends that reveal clear, actionable pathways toward a more resilient and equitable funding ecosystem.

“ A philanthropic landscape defined by **acute systemic risk** and **persistent inequity**. ”

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.

Landmark Year in a Highly Concentrated Philanthropic Landscape



1 Record Funding and Unprecedented Flexible Support

Foundation human rights funding hit a record \$5.7 billion in 2021,² marking a surge in total grantmaking and flexible support.³ This growth was accelerated by a \$1.6 billion leap in grantmaking during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 and 2021). Crucially, almost one-third (32%) of all grant dollars in 2021 were designated as flexible support, the highest level recorded since we began tracking flexible funding in 2015.



2 Geographic Concentration Creates Systemic Risk

The concentration of philanthropic funding in the Global North presents an acute source of systemic risk.⁴ Foundations in North America and Western Europe accounted for 99% of all human rights funding in our global analysis. In terms of total funding, the top 50 foundations were all based in the Global North. This centralization makes the field highly vulnerable to increasing political attacks on foundations' ability to give, which have intensified in countries like the U.S.⁵



3 Small Donor Core Drives Majority of Funding

Ecosystem stability is heavily dependent on a small core of major donors complemented by a broad network that includes both dedicated but small-scale funders and inconsistent, occasional funders. The top 12 foundations by grant dollars provided more than half (55%) of all human rights funding. The remaining 726 funders provided the other 45% and varied widely in how many human rights grants they made. Over a quarter of funders (27%) made just one or two human rights grants. This dual dynamic suggests significant untapped potential but is also a source of instability.

2. This figure excludes 335 grants totaling \$137 million awarded by foundations to other foundations included in the 2021 dataset. Generally, these awards were made to either support regranting programs or build the capacity of recipient foundations. These grants have been removed to avoid double counting of grant dollars.

3. We use the terms "flexible" and "unrestricted" interchangeably in this report to reflect grants that give recipients discretion over how to use the funding. This includes grants that foundations describe as general support, general operating, general mission, unrestricted charitable contribution, discretionary, and similar terms.

4. 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 our terminology.

5. In this report, we use the terms "funders," "foundations," "donors," and "grantmakers" interchangeably to refer to private foundations, public foundations, and donor collaboratives.

Global South Funding Expands, but the Trust Gap Persists



4 Funding for the Global South and East Sees Record Growth

Funding is shifting toward the Global South and East, but the total dollar amounts remain disproportionately small. In 2021, growth in funding for the Global South and East significantly outpaced that of the Global North, growing by 32% in our matched subset, compared to just 2% for the Global North.⁶ This marked the first time we have documented simultaneous, significant funding growth across all regions of the Global South and East. At the same time, the fact remains that almost two-thirds (64%) of human rights grant dollars are still directed exclusively to action in North America or Western Europe, a modest 7% reduction from the previous year.



5 Persistent Trust Gap Limits Direct Regional Support

A significant and persistent "trust gap" disadvantages Global South and East-based movements. In 2021, nearly all funding for the Global North was awarded directly to organizations within the beneficiary regions, yet only 57% of funding for the Global South and East directly supported groups within the regions. This is consistent with our multi-year findings of direct funding to the Global South and East, which averaged 59% across three years.



6 Funders in the Global South and East Face Financial Vulnerability

Local, national, and regional foundations in the Global South and East account for only 1% of total human rights funding, yet they make 15% of all human rights grants. These funders possess the deep local knowledge and trust essential for maximizing frontline impact. However, many rely on Global North support, leaving this crucial part of the global funding ecosystem vulnerable to funding shifts and contractions.

6. The "matched subset" refers to the 538 foundations that shared grants data in both 2020 and 2021, allowing a direct comparison between years.

Cross-Movement Funding in a Mostly Siloed Field



7 Missed Opportunities for Cross-Issue Grantmaking

Philanthropy is missing a critical opportunity to deliver holistic, cross-issue support. Of the more than 32,000 human rights grants awarded in 2021, only a quarter (27%) addressed more than one of 11 human rights issues we analyzed. At a time when issues like civic and political participation are so interwoven with freedom from violence or reproductive rights, the 73% of grants focused on one issue alone is troubling.



8 Promising Growth in Cross-Population Grantmaking

A positive trend toward cross-population funding is emerging. Among grants with specified populations, the percentage coded for two or more populations grew from 32% in 2020 to 50% in 2021. This suggests a growing commitment among funders to support cross-movement initiatives, which serves as a vital foundation for addressing the interconnected nature of oppression and supporting truly intersectional work.



9 Uneven Progress in Cross-Population Grantmaking

A handful of populations drive cross-population grantmaking, while others remain siloed. Grants focused on women and girls consistently demonstrated the highest integration, with roughly half of the grants for Indigenous peoples (52%), LGBTQI communities (49%), and children and youth (48%) also being tagged for women and girls. Conversely, funding for persons with disabilities showed the lowest integration across the board, demonstrating a need for major funding streams to explicitly embrace disability justice as a cross-cutting human rights priority.



10 Shift Toward Infrastructure Over Direct Action

Following pandemic disruptions, funders prioritized investment in core movement infrastructure, with increased funding for coalition-building (up 16%) and capacity-building (up 10%), signaling a crucial commitment to long-term stability. However, this directional shift came at the expense of front-line work, as funding decreased for direct action, such as grassroots organizing (down 11%) and litigation and legal aid (down 16%). This creates vulnerability for movements heavily reliant on community mobilization and legal intervention.

This report provides the comprehensive data and in-depth analysis that supports these Key Findings, beginning with the overall state of global human rights funding.

The State of Global Human Rights Funding

A Decade of Progress Under Threat

Over the past decade, foundation funding for human rights has expanded by 375%. Our latest analysis tracks \$5.7 billion in grants to support human rights in 2021—an increase of \$830 million from 2020. This banner year showcases the immense potential of philanthropic giving.

However, this is not where the story ends. As we review the latest complete year of global funding data, we are confronting a rapid and unprecedented contraction in the funding landscape today, driven by significant cuts to foreign aid and increasing uncertainty within philanthropic foundations. Most crucially, human rights themselves face existential threats, with far-right governments enacting policies to limit support for transgender rights, migrant rights, climate justice, Palestinian solidarity, and so much more—and advancing efforts to undermine global human rights protections across the board.

Within this context, our analysis of 2021 grantmaking does three crucial things:

- 1. Sets a baseline** from which to track, assess, and ground the field of human rights philanthropy in a time of significant flux.
- 2. Identifies trends, gaps, and opportunities** for funders, emphasizing the urgent need for more direct funding to Global South-based movements and for intersectional organizing, which has become even more salient amid current global rollbacks.
- 3. Provides proof of concept** that philanthropic funding has the potential to expand to meet the scale of the impending \$1.4 to \$1.9 billion in estimated foreign aid cuts for human rights detailed below.

This report documents both hard-won progress and possibility and provides a reminder to the field that we can respond effectively to crisis with action.

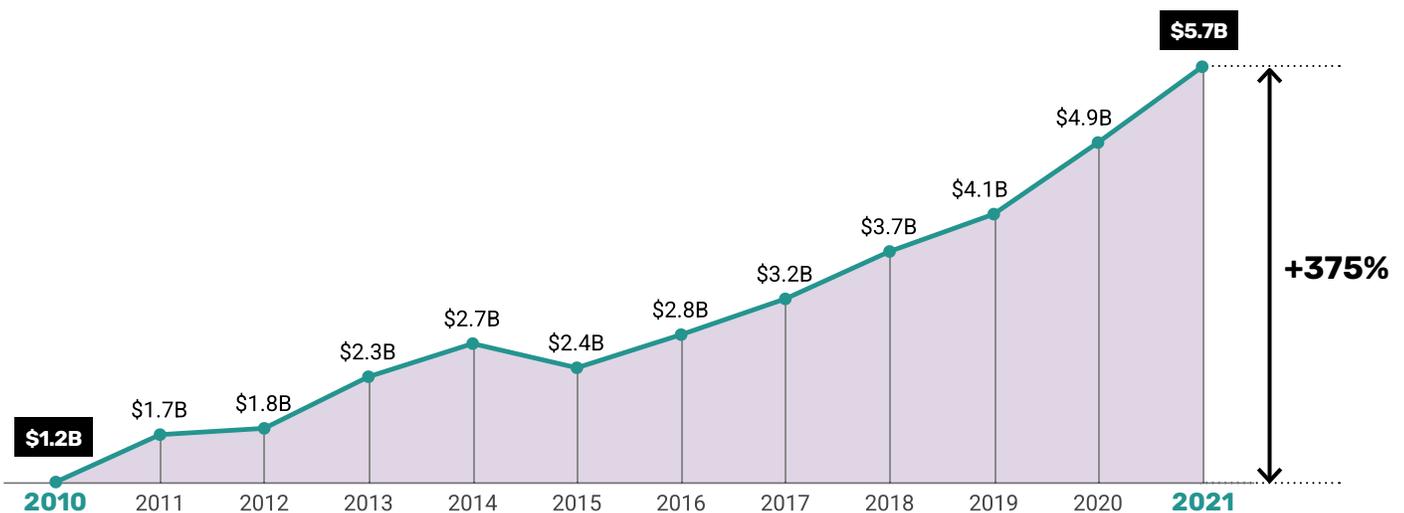
What Is Possible: The Arc of Human Rights Funding

Through our *Advancing Human Rights* research, Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN) has tracked steady and consistent growth in human rights funding. From 2010 to 2021, funding expanded nearly fivefold, from over 12,000 grants totaling \$1.2 billion to over 32,000 grants totaling \$5.7 billion. This expansion partly reflects our ability to pull in more grants data, but primarily underscores increased commitment from funders to invest in protecting and promoting human rights.⁷

This long-term growth surged in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In most years, funding typically increased by \$400 or \$500 million; however, the first two years of the pandemic saw a \$1.6 billion leap. Grantmaking increased by \$800 million from 2019 to 2020 and another \$830 million from 2020 to 2021—a 40% increase from pre-pandemic levels. This acceleration is remarkable, not only for its scale, but also for the boost in more adaptable and flexible support: In 2021, almost one-third (32%) of all human rights grant dollars gave recipients discretion in how to use them, the highest level of flexible funding we've seen since we began tracking it in 2015.

This arc is a reminder of our field's capacity to shift and expand—an ability never more crucial than now, as projected cuts to government aid and changes in philanthropic priorities threaten to reverse a decade of gains.

GROWTH IN FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OVER TIME (2010-2021)



7. For more on our methods, including the matched subset which helps unpack long-term funding trends, see page 59.

A Looming Financial Crisis

A political crisis threatens the two largest sources of financial support for human rights movements: government aid and philanthropic funding. Foreign aid alone faces an estimated annual decline of \$62 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA) by 2026, compared to 2023 levels, due to announced cuts from 12 donor countries.⁸ This massive reduction already endangers hundreds of millions of lives through the dismantling of vital global programs, such as vaccination campaigns and HIV and AIDS initiatives, which have seen dramatic cuts over the past year.^(A)

In our September 2025 briefing, [Funding at a Crossroads](#), we conservatively estimate that annual ODA specifically for human rights-focused initiatives will fall by between \$1.4 billion (22%) and \$1.9 billion (31%) by 2026, compared to 2023 levels. (See Deep Dive: Foreign Aid Cuts and Implications on page 11 for a breakdown of these projections.) This isn't just a reduction; it's a critical gap that threatens the very infrastructure of human rights defense globally. This funding is crucial for supporting the essential work that secures internationally protected rights—such as freedom from violence, access to education, and equitable treatment, especially for those most at risk of discrimination.

This decline is further compounded by the alarming rise of anti-rights agendas worldwide. These political shifts not only reduce aid but also significantly limit the ability of funders of all kinds to move money across borders, as nations increasingly limit, track, and constrict international funding for civil society organizations. These restrictive policies are actively intertwined with specific government shifts, such as the Netherlands moving away from gender equality and climate initiatives, and the U.S. targeting groups that support equal opportunity.^(B) These actions have already hit LGBTQI and feminist movements particularly hard and could lead to even greater long-term losses for human rights-related support.^(C)

These formidable headwinds are also challenging philanthropic foundations, which now face cuts to their own budgets, growing demands for support, and increasingly restrictive political conditions that limit their grantmaking ability. These challenges include foreign agents laws, proposed increases in endowment tax rates, and direct attacks, such as the Trump administration's investigation of the Open



A **political crisis** threatens the two largest sources of financial support for human rights movements: **government aid** and **philanthropic funding**.



8. The 12 countries include Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. See our [full report](#) for more details.

Society Foundations—a tactic used to stop its human rights funding.^(D) In sum, the human rights sector is not merely facing an economic downturn; it is facing a coordinated political and legal assault on its financial infrastructure, necessitating a unified and equally strategic defense by foundations.

These concerns are further compounded by a retreat by some foundations—manifested not only as a step back in grantmaking but also a pivot from transparency as funders become less willing to share grants data and scrub terms like “racial justice” and “diversity” from public discourse. While many foundations tracked in this report continue to provide essential, flexible support for human rights causes, the field-wide impacts of this shifting legal and political landscape have yet to be fully realized.

The Urgency of This Moment

The current financial crisis is a fundamental test of the global commitment to human rights. It also highlights the fragility of financial support for human rights movements, despite a decade of steady growth. The record funding levels and increase in flexible support we tracked in 2021 stand as a powerful example of what is possible when philanthropy rises to meet a moment of crisis. These trends underscore the urgent need for a renewed and robust investment in human rights to safeguard the progress made and prevent further erosion of rights and democracy worldwide. The lives, safety, and fundamental freedoms of millions depend on it.



The record funding levels and increase in flexible support stand as a **powerful example of what is possible** when philanthropy rises to meet a moment of crisis.



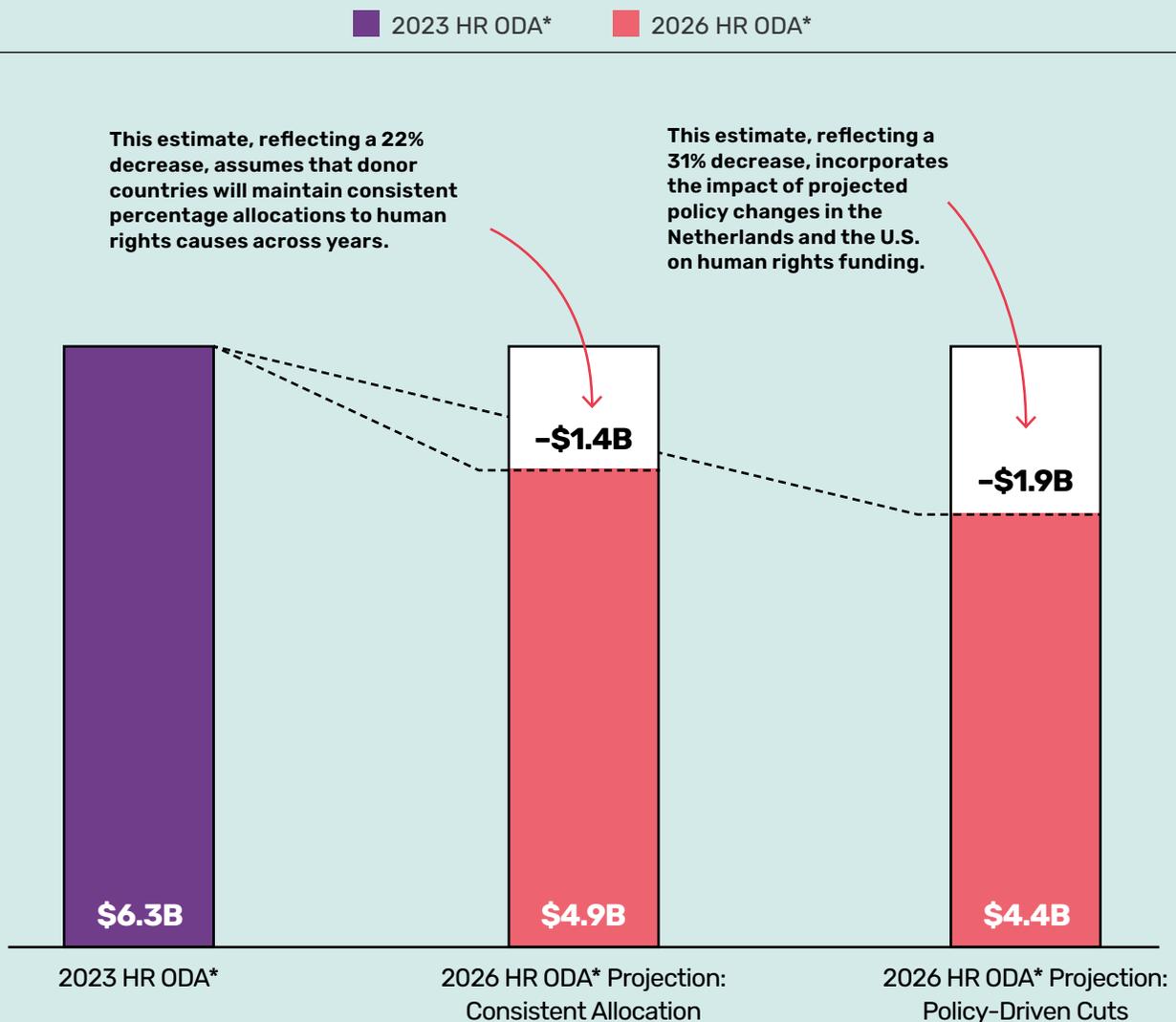
Deep Dive: Foreign Aid Cuts and Implications

HRFN's **2025 briefing** projects that overall cuts to Official Development Assistance (ODA) will result in an annual decrease in human rights-focused ODA of between \$1.4 billion and \$1.9 billion by 2026, as compared to 2023 levels. 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 U.S. and the Netherlands related to specific cuts to human rights funding.



This critical shortfall threatens essential, rights-based work. Read the **[full report](#)** for in-depth analysis and methodology.

THE CRITICAL SHORTFALL IN HUMAN RIGHTS ODA



* Human rights-focused Official Development Assistance

Human Rights Funding: Overview, Context, and Comparisons

Funding Overview

In 2021

738 funders

made

32,047 human rights grants

totaling

\$5.7B

to

17,012 recipients⁹

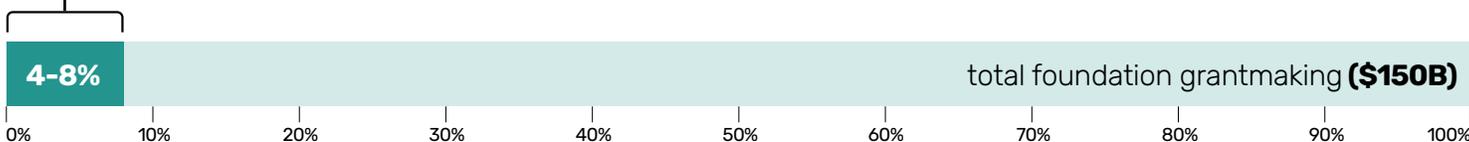
32%

flexible general support

Contextualizing the Funding

It is difficult to know exactly how much philanthropic support exists globally. We estimate that human rights funding represented between 4% and 8% of total foundation grantmaking in 2021.

The difference in these numbers comes from the scope of our data. When we base our analysis solely on a limited dataset of U.S. foundations from Candid's Foundation 1000, funding for human rights represents 8% of total grantmaking.¹⁰ When we broaden our scope to a global level, comparing the \$5.7 billion in human rights grants we identified with the estimated \$150 billion that foundations around the world spend annually, the proportion of human rights funding is a more modest 4%.¹¹



9. This figure excludes 335 grants totaling \$137 million awarded by foundations to other foundations included in the 2021 dataset. Generally, these awards were made to either support regranting programs or build the capacity of recipient foundations. These grants have been removed to avoid double counting of grant dollars.

10. Candid's Foundation 1000 is a dataset composed of grants of \$10,000 or more made by 1,000 of the largest U.S. private and community foundations in a given year. It typically represents roughly half of all U.S. private and community foundation grantmaking.

11. The estimated \$150 billion includes the costs of grants, financial support to third parties, foundation-led programming, and administrative costs. The [Global Philanthropy Report](#)'s authors, who produced this estimate, note that the actual annual philanthropic expenditure is likely much higher.

The Role of the Matched Subset

In this report we frequently mention the “matched subset”. This refers to the 538 foundations that shared grants data in both 2020 and 2021, allowing a direct comparison between years. This group alone represents 73% of the funders and 85% of the funding in our 2021 dataset.



MAPPING THE OVERLAP: FULL DATASET VS. MATCHED SUBSET



Analyzing this consistent group helps us avoid biases caused by year-to-year changes in the list of funders submitting data, ensuring we measure actual trends in human rights grantmaking, not simply fluctuations in data participation. Critically, the 13% growth demonstrated by this matched subset from 2020 to 2021 closely parallels the 17% growth in our overall dataset, confirming the reliability of trends observed across the entire mapping. This consistency holds true over the long term, as the matched subset's growth has reliably mirrored the overall growth seen in the aggregate data.

Importantly, these findings demonstrate that growth in human rights support has come largely from existing funders increasing their allocations, rather than solely on the recruitment of new funders. While this historical data reinforces the power and potential of internal growth, it remains profoundly uncertain today in the wake of global funding cuts, growing restrictions on moving money, and funders' retreat from human rights.

Who Makes Human Rights Grants?

Building a Picture of Global Philanthropy

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 2021, 177 members across the three networks contributed data.¹²
- 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 private and community foundations. While some may not explicitly identify as human rights funders, our analysis reveals that over half (57%) of these foundations awarded at least one grant in 2021 aligned with our human rights criteria.¹³

**HRFN + Ariadne
+ Prospera**

**177
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.

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

13. Eight foundations that are included in Candid's Foundation 1000 dataset are also members of HRFN or Ariadne.

Geographic Representation and Data Availability

Our analysis identified 738 funders across 49 countries that made human rights grants in 2021.

These grantmakers are overwhelmingly concentrated in the Global North,¹⁴ with 94% of funders and 99% of grant dollars coming from North America and Western Europe alone.¹⁵ This profound imbalance is consistent year after year and reflects both global wealth inequity undergirding philanthropy and methodological challenges in our research:¹⁶ we face a data gap in regions that do not have mandatory disclosure requirements, requiring focused outreach to gather data from funders around the world. While expanding our reach is crucial for a more accurate representation of the field, this analysis—the most comprehensive of its kind—still offers valuable insights into global human rights funding.

The concentration of funding stands in stark contrast to its vast reach, spanning over 17,000 recipients across 182 countries. While the Global North is home to 94% of the funders, it accounts for just over half (54%) of these grant recipients. This means 46% of recipients (approximately 7,700 organizations) are distributed across the Global South and East, with the largest concentration (17%) in Latin America and the Caribbean and the smallest (1%) in the Middle East and North Africa.

These data underscore the truly global nature of human rights work. While the bulk of capital and grantmakers are centralized in the Global North, the integrity of the human rights system is wholly dependent on the full cohort of grantmakers operating across the Global South and East to support a vast network of organizations. The resource imbalance creates a concentrated financial system vulnerable to political and economic shifts occurring in North America or Western Europe. These shifts have an outsize impact on Global South and East recipients already facing disproportionately small shares of funding and evaporating foreign aid.

14. In our analysis, North America is limited to Canada and the United States. Three Canadian funders contributed 2021 grants data: Equality Fund, FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund, and International Freedom of Expression Exchange.

15. 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.

16. A [study of global philanthropy](#) estimates that 60% of all foundations are based in Europe and 35% are based in North America.

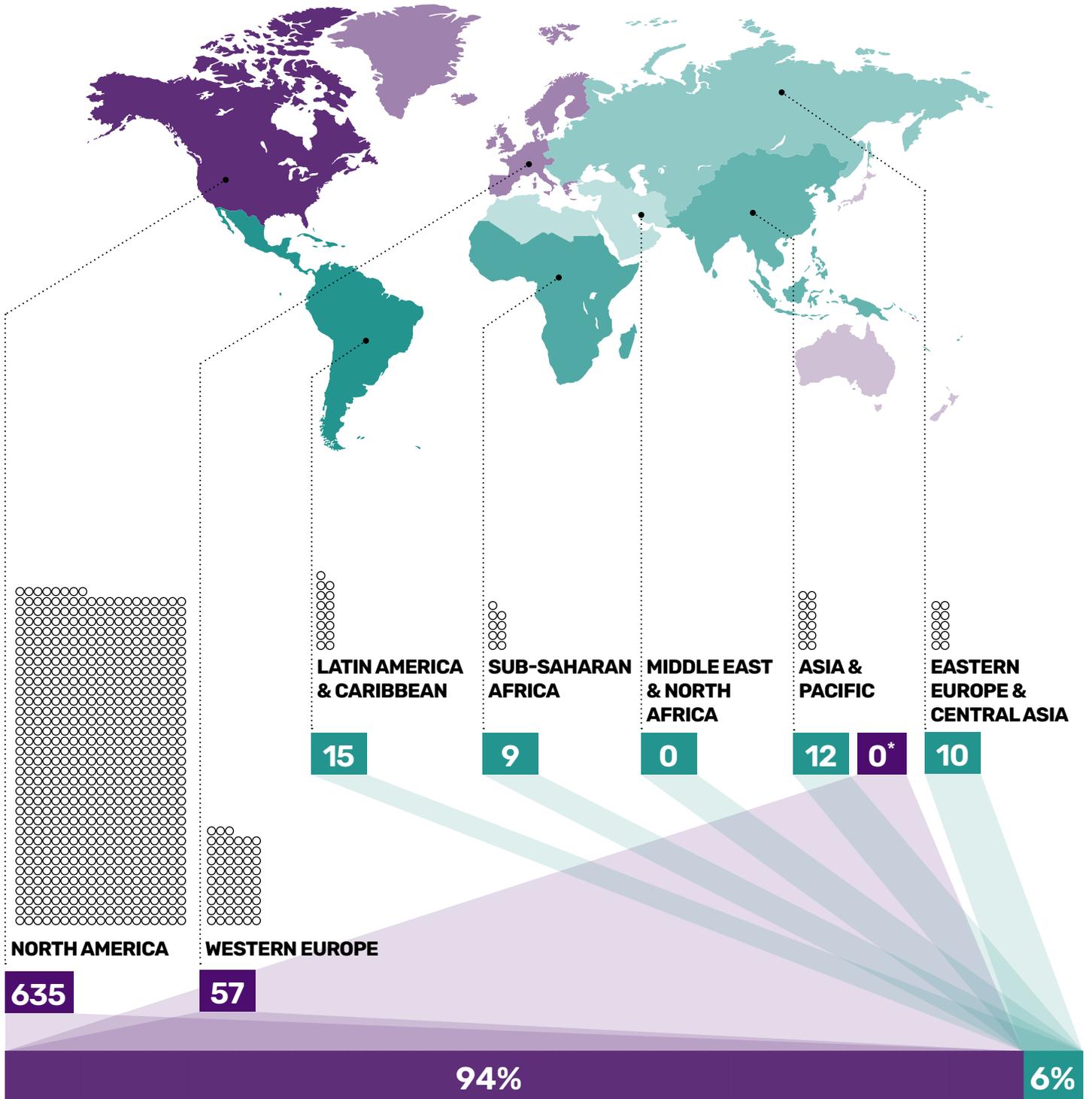
HUMAN RIGHTS FUNDERS BY REGION (2021)

○ = 1 FUNDER

■ GLOBAL NORTH

■ GLOBAL SOUTH & EAST

738 FUNDERS BASED IN → **49** COUNTRIES



*For the purposes of this analysis, foundations based in Australia, Japan, and New Zealand are categorized as Global North (purple), while the remainder of Asia and the Pacific is categorized as Global South and East (teal). Note that no foundations from these three countries were included in this analysis.

HUMAN RIGHTS RECIPIENTS BY REGION (2021)

● = 10 RECIPIENTS

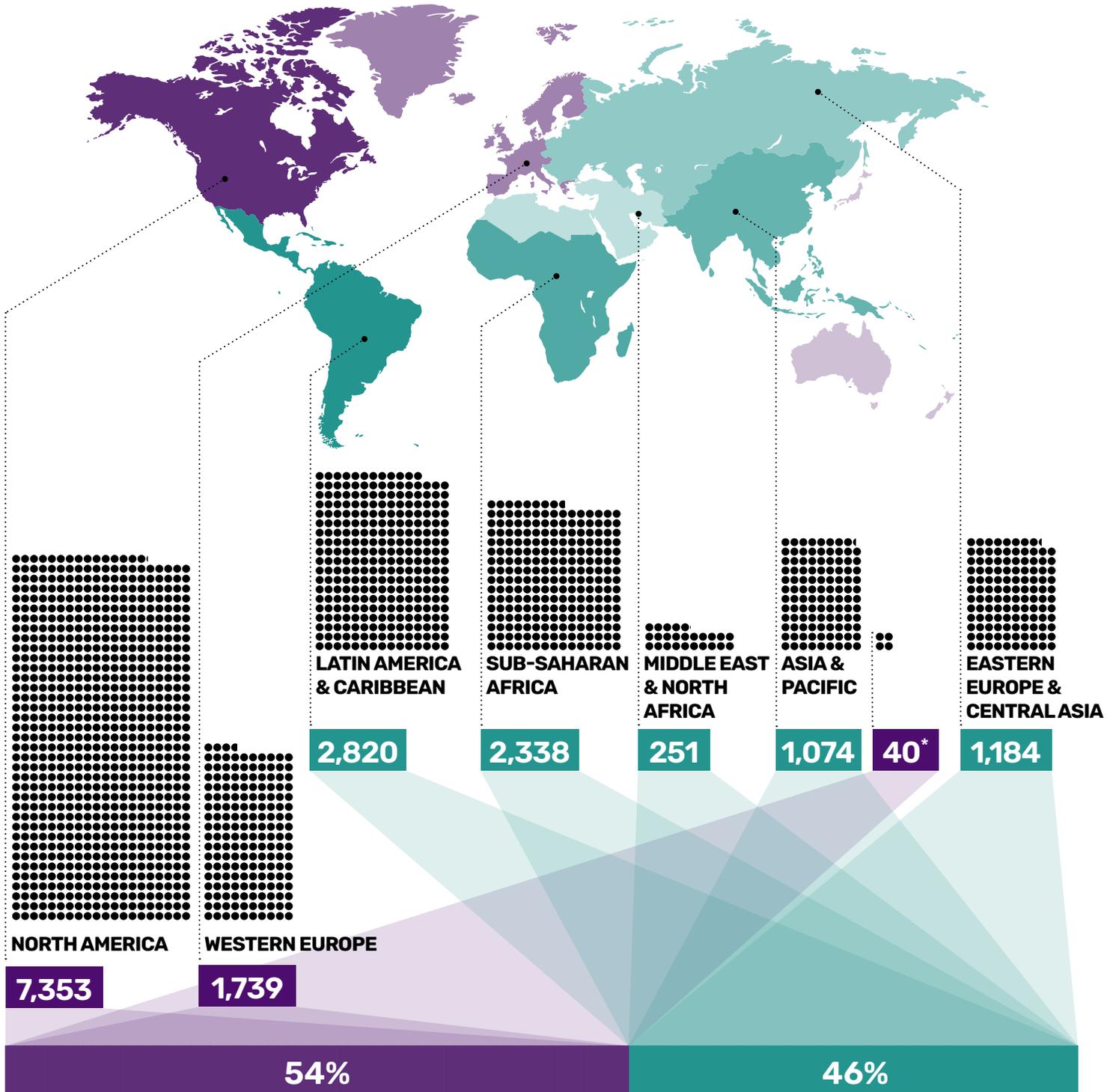
■ GLOBAL NORTH

■ GLOBAL SOUTH & EAST

17,012

RECIPIENTS
BASED IN

182 COUNTRIES



*For the purposes of this analysis, recipients based in Australia, Japan, and New Zealand are categorized as Global North (purple), while the remainder of Asia and the Pacific is categorized as Global South and East (teal). There were 40 recipients located in these three countries in this analysis.

Who are the Largest Funders by Grant Dollars?

The Power and Peril of Top Funders

The unequal distribution of philanthropic power is an essential context for understanding the 2021 findings. In 2021, the top 12 grantmakers accounted for more than half (55%) of all foundation human rights funding, a collective total of \$3.2 billion. This high concentration has been a persistent trend, ranging between 45% and 55% since 2015, when the top 12 funders contributed \$1.2 billion. Crucially, as the field has grown, this means the top funders now control nearly three times the dollar value they did in 2015. Put simply, 55% of human rights funding is controlled by fewer than 2% of human rights funders.

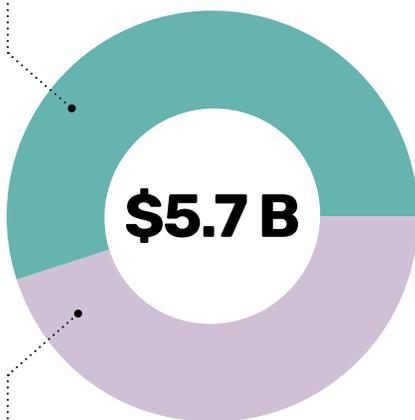
The sheer centralization of resources within this group gives them outsized influence over the entire human rights funding ecosystem, meaning their decisions directly shape which causes and movements receive vital financial support. In a landscape defined by significant financial volatility, the concentration of philanthropic power is also an acute source of concern.

The current contraction in resources is bringing the peril of these long-standing dynamics into sharp relief. Recent decisions by several of 2021's top private foundations are reducing direct support for human rights, signaling a narrowing of focus or all-out retreat.^(E) These shifts are already evident in several major foundations, including those reorienting strategies, reducing transparency, or even closing, making 2021's findings a baseline against which to measure change.

For instance, the Open Society Foundations (OSF)¹⁷—the largest funder in our analysis—has undergone a major strategic recalibration since 2023, resulting in significant staff reductions and narrowed focus. In 2025, the Trump administration singled out OSF for investigation for supporting progressive causes, placing their grantmaking under further pressure and highlighting efforts to constrict large-scale foundation giving.^(F) In 2025, the Gates Foundation (#4) ceased funding nonprofits administered by the consulting firm Arabella Advisors—a move purportedly due to political pressure surrounding support for progressive movements.^(G) Wellspring Philanthropic Fund (#12), a consistent top funder, announced its impending closure in 2024, with all grantmaking set to end in the next few years.^(H)

The **top 2% of funders** accounted for 55% (\$3.2 B) of human rights funding.

55%



45%

The **remaining 98% of funders** accounted for 45% (\$2.5 B) of human rights funding.

17. In our previous analysis of 2020 grantmaking, we adopted a consolidated approach to tracking funding from the Open Society Foundations (OSF), combining grants data from 10 OSF entities. This change, driven by OSF's significant grantmaking shifts, provides a crucial baseline for understanding the long-term impact of their restructuring.

At a time when human rights funding from government sources is already expected to decline, reliable foundation support for human rights actors is uncertain. The sheer scale and rapid pace of these changes are forcing movements and human rights organizations to struggle for survival, which will inevitably transform the global human rights infrastructure.

At the same time, the philanthropic community has a distinct window of opportunity to seize this moment, mobilizing funding, directly supporting strategic, intersectional movement restructuring, and driving resources to the frontlines of democratic defense. In a vital counterpoint to these reductions, foundations such as Freedom Together Foundation (#8), MacArthur Foundation (#15), and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (#3) have publicly increased their grantmaking, citing the crisis caused by the Trump administration's policies.⁽¹⁾ By strategically aligning with new partners and embracing a unified, networked response, the funding field can create a robust, coordinated, and ultimately resilient future for global human rights.

TOP FUNDERS BY GRANT DOLLARS (2021)

FUNDER	LOCATION	SCOPE	HUMAN RIGHTS \$	% OF ALL HR \$
1 Open Society Foundations*	various	global	\$666M	11%
2 Ford Foundation*	United States	global	\$648M	11%
3 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	United States	national	\$279M	5%
4 Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	United States	global	\$269M	5%
5 W.K. Kellogg Foundation*	United States	global	\$238M	4%
6 Silicon Valley Community Foundation	United States	global	\$223M	4%
7 Oak Foundation*	Switzerland	global	\$203M	3%
8 Freedom Together Foundation (formerly JPB Foundation)	United States	national	\$180M	3%
9 Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation	United States	global	\$155M	3%
10 William & Flora Hewlett Foundation*	United States	global	\$136M	2%
11 Chicago Community Trust	United States	national	\$131M	2%
12 Wellspring Philanthropic Fund*	United States	global	\$115M	2%

The shading compares the share of total grant dollars provided by each foundation. *Denotes membership in HRFN, Ariadne, and/or Prospera. The amounts presented here and in the other top funder lists reflect the full value of each funder's grantmaking for human rights, including grants to other foundations in the dataset. Visit our methodology for details on how we address potential double counting to arrive at the total grantmaking figures in this report.

Beyond the Dollars: The Impact of Global South and East Funders

A complete picture of the human rights funding landscape must look beyond the sheer scale of the largest foundations to reflect the essential and distinct role played by funders in the Global South and East.

The 44 Global South and East-based funders identified in our analysis accounted for just 1% of the total human rights funding we tracked. The table on page 21 highlights a vast resource disparity between these grantmakers and their Global North counterparts: the top-ranked among them—Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres—granted only \$16 million. Yet, the strategic advantage of locally-based funders goes far beyond a dollar amount. With a predominant focus on regional and national efforts across Latin America, Africa, and Asia, Global South and East funders possess the deep local knowledge and on-the-ground networks critical for supporting movements on the frontlines of human rights action, enabling them to maximize the impact of every dollar. These organizations, which are largely public foundations reliant on external funding, are indispensable partners for rapidly resourcing human rights movements precisely when anti-rights actors and authoritarian leaders are attempting to shutter civil society.

Crucially, as major funders in the Global North face external pressures, retrenchment, or strategic reconsideration of their human rights portfolios, continuing and expanding funding to local and regional grantmaking partners is a critical way to ensure resources remain accessible. This continued funding is vital for sustaining access to global rights infrastructure, particularly as individual private foundations may lose flexibility or reduce direct grantmaking. Conversely, failing to prioritize this funding directly undermines the global, interconnected nature of human rights organizing. This is because the effects of financial contractions are acutely magnified for these regional and national funders, putting a crucial, decentralized part of the funding ecosystem at risk. In short, maintaining and strengthening the partnership between Global North and Global South and East foundations must remain a priority.

It is also important to emphasize that the true scale of philanthropic wealth in the Global South and East is not fully represented in our dataset, as much of it is held by individuals or through private, often family-based, mechanisms that are not captured in our research. Engaging this latter group—mobilizing private, locally-rooted capital—represents a significant future opportunity for diversifying and ultimately strengthening the financial resilience of human rights movements globally.



Global South and East funders

possess the deep local knowledge and on-the-ground networks **critical for supporting movements** on the frontlines of human rights action.



TOP FUNDERS BASED IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH AND EAST BY GRANT DOLLARS (2021)

FUNDER	LOCATION	SCOPE	HUMAN RIGHTS \$	% OF ALL HR \$
1 Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres*	Costa Rica	regional	\$16M	0.28%
2 African Women's Development Fund*	Ghana	regional	\$10M	0.18%
3 Fundación Avina*	Panama	regional	\$7.7M	0.13%
4 Urgent Action Fund Africa*	Kenya	regional	\$3.5M	0.06%
5 Fundo Socioambiental CASA*	Brazil	regional	\$3.2M	0.05%
6 UHAI EASHRI*	Kenya	regional	\$3.2M	0.05%
7 Fondo De Mujeres Del Sur*	Argentina	regional	\$2.7M	0.05%
8 Fondo Semillas*	Mexico	national	\$2.6M	0.04%
9 International Indigenous Women's Forum*	Peru	global	\$2.2M	0.04%
10 Women's Fund Asia*	Sri Lanka	regional	\$1.8M	0.03%
11 Urgent Action Fund Asia and Pacific*	Sri Lanka	regional	\$1.8M	0.03%
12 ELAS Fundo de Investimento Social*	Brazil	national	\$1.7M	0.03%

The shading compares the share of total grant dollars provided by each foundation. *Denotes membership in HRFN, Ariadne, and/or Prospera. The amounts presented here and in the other top funder lists reflect the full value of each funder's grantmaking for human rights, including grants to other foundations in the dataset. Visit our methodology for details on how we address potential double counting to arrive at the total grantmaking figures in this report.

Who are the Largest Funders by Grant Numbers?

The Breadth of the Ecosystem

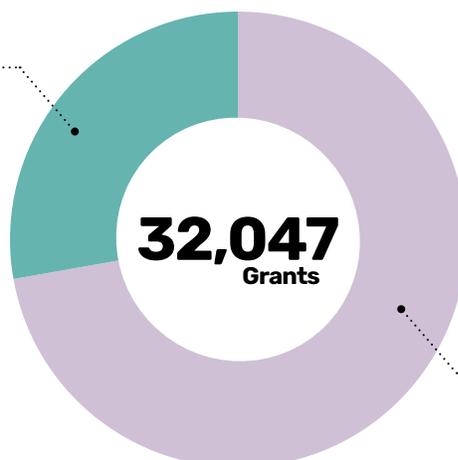
While 55% of human rights grant dollars were concentrated among a handful of major funders, shifting the lens to the number of grants reveals a broader and more resilient funding ecosystem. The top 12 grantmakers in 2021, ranked by volume, accounted for just 28% of all human rights grants. This indicates that nearly three-quarters of grants originated from a much wider set of foundations, highlighting the critical and complementary roles played by both large-scale funders and smaller institutions in reaching a vast and diverse array of human rights actors.

The Power of Locally-Based Funders

The strategic opportunity presented by locally-based funders is clear: their impact extends far beyond their dollar value. This is true around the world, but nowhere more so than in the Global South and East. While only one Global South and East-based funder (Urgent Action Fund Africa) appears on either of the overall top funder lists, these institutions dominate their regional and national landscapes and act as the lifeblood of local movements. Their numerous, often smaller grants are uniquely tailored to local needs and are essential for safeguarding human rights where the retreat of government aid and large foundations is felt most acutely. Crucially, this proximity enables them to fund intersectional efforts to address complex, interconnected human rights issues—such as racial, gender, and climate justice—showcasing the breadth of their expertise and reach. In short, these local institutions maximize impact and operational effectiveness by operating with deep trust and setting the gold standard for effective, community-led philanthropic practice.

28%

The **top 12 funders** accounted 28% of human rights grants.



32,047
Grants

The **remaining 726 funders** accounted 72% of human rights grants.

72%

TOP FUNDERS BY NUMBER OF GRANTS (2021)

FUNDER	LOCATION	SCOPE	# OF HUMAN RIGHTS GRANTS	% OF ALL HR \$
1 Open Society Foundations*	various	global	1,745	5%
2 Freedom House*	United States	global	1,633	5%
3 Ford Foundation*	United States	global	960	3%
4 Global Greengrants Fund*	United States	global	937	3%
5 EEA and Norway Grants*	Belgium	regional	589	2%
6 Silicon Valley Community Foundation	United States	global	553	2%
7 Urgent Action Fund Africa*	Kenya	regional	479	1.5%
8 Wellspring Philanthropic Fund*	United States	global	437	1.3%
9 American Jewish World Service*	United States	global	425	1.3%
10 Global Fund for Women*	United States	global	402	1.2%
11 Fund for Global Human Rights*	United States	global	397	1.2%
12 Seattle Foundation	United States	regional	393	1.2%

TOP FUNDERS BASED IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH AND EAST BY NUMBER OF GRANTS (2021)

FUNDER	LOCATION	SCOPE	# OF HUMAN RIGHTS GRANTS	% OF ALL HR \$
1 Urgent Action Fund Africa*	Kenya	regional	479	1.5%
2 Urgent Action Fund Asia & Pacific*	Sri Lanka	regional	392	1.2%
3 Fundo Socioambiental CASA*	Brazil	regional	332	1.0%
4 Fondo Lunaria Mujer*	Colombia	national	283	0.9%
5 Urgent Action Fund Latin America & the Caribbean*	Colombia	regional	266	0.8%
6 Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres*	Costa Rica	regional	224	0.7%
7 Fondo De Mujeres Del Sur*	Argentina	regional	215	0.7%
8 UHAI EASHRI*	Kenya	regional	197	0.6%
9 Women's Fund Asia*	Sri Lanka	regional	173	0.5%
10 Fondo Semillas*	Mexico	national	171	0.5%
11 ELAS Fundo de Investimento Social*	Brazil	national	169	0.5%
12 African Women's Development Fund*	Ghana	regional	158	0.5%

The shading compares the share of total grants provided by each foundation. *Denotes membership in HRFN, Ariadne, and/or Prospera. The amounts presented here and in the other top funder lists reflect the full value of each funder's grantmaking for human rights, including grants to other foundations in the dataset. Visit our methodology for details on how we address potential double counting to arrive at the total grantmaking figures in this report.

The Inconsistency of Support: Risk and Opportunity

Human rights funding faces a precarious paradox: a heavy reliance on a few core grantmakers alongside a vast, unpredictable donor bench. This creates two defining, and opposing, dynamics in the field: systemic risk and untapped potential.

The Fragile Backbone (Risk)

A quarter (24%) of funders that made human rights grants in 2021 consistently prioritize human rights with at least 40 annual grants. This consistency is vital for maintaining reach and stability, but the field's deep reliance on these institutions creates fragility. This risk is amplified because many of the top funders by dollars (e.g., Open Society Foundations and Wellspring Philanthropic Fund) are also the highest-volume grantmakers. This double concentration of power underscores the vulnerability of the funding landscape, as the sheer scale of these funders' capital and consistent grantmaking creates a devastating vacuum when they face external pressures, shift strategy, contract, or close.

The Untapped Potential (Opportunity)

At the other end of the spectrum lies significant untapped potential. Half (51%) of funders that made human rights grants in 2021 provided fewer than 10, and over a quarter (27%) made only one or two. This low-volume base is highly volatile, as evidenced by the churn among non-members in our analysis: 23% (173) made no human rights grants in 2020, and 118 funders that made human rights grants in 2020 did not make new grants in 2021.¹⁸ This broad but shallow and unpredictable engagement shows a deep bench of funders that are already supporting human rights action. Mobilizing these low-volume funders to increase both their human rights grantmaking frequency and funding represents a substantial opportunity to diversify resources and strengthen the field's financial resilience.



Human rights funding faces a **precarious paradox**: a heavy reliance on a few core grantmakers alongside a vast, unpredictable donor bench.



18. While some of this year-to-year variation is due to the inconsistent availability of grants data, the magnitude of the fluctuation strongly reinforces the pattern of volatile, low-frequency funding.

Where Do Human Rights Grants Go?

In over a decade of analysis, we have seen the total funding, number of grants, and global reach of human rights grantmaking expand, reflecting the vital, interconnected work happening in every region of the world. In 2021, funding for action in the Global South and East grew by a remarkable 32% in our matched subset, markedly increasing in every region.

To accurately track the flow of resources, we map grants to the geographic regions they are intended to benefit, not the recipient's headquarters.¹⁹ This is especially crucial for understanding funding directed toward the Global South and East, where grants for local work are frequently awarded to organizations based in other regions; for example, a grant to a Dutch organization for a project in Kenya is categorized as funding for Sub-Saharan Africa. We track two categories of resources: direct funding (to the region of benefit) and indirect funding (moved through or managed in another region). This methodology allows us to identify the intended beneficiary region alongside where the funding is held. As the data will show, the resulting disparity between these figures points to a substantial “trust gap,” which we detail later.

The Persistent Regional Imbalance

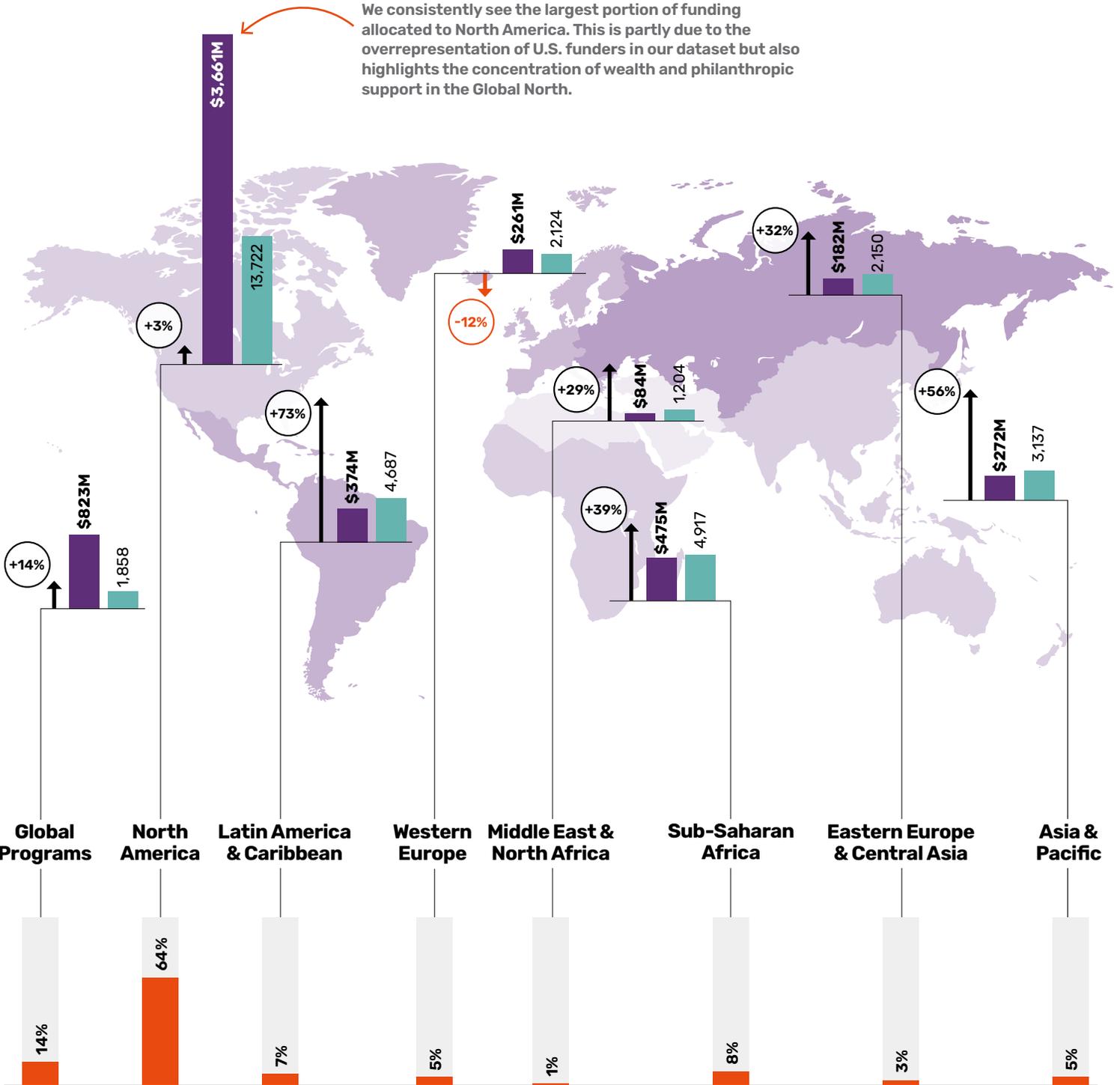
The data reveal a stark and persistent imbalance in the global funding landscape: North America captures a disproportionate share of resources for human rights protection and promotion.²⁰ The heavy representation of U.S.-based funders in our dataset contributes to this trend, but it also exposes a deeper, historical inequity. Due to the concentration of wealth and philanthropic power in the Global North, almost two-thirds (64%) of human rights grant dollars are directed exclusively to action in North America or Western Europe. This figure may even understate the imbalance, as our analysis is limited by the lack of comprehensive reporting from Western European funders.

19. The majority of human rights grants (90%) focus on a single region. The remaining 10% are either multi-regional (3.7%), global (6%), or unspecified (0.3%). For grants that specify a combination of geographies, their full value is counted in the totals for each location. In 2021, 1,736 grants totaling \$314 million named two or more of our 8 categories (7 regions + global) and were therefore counted in multiple categories.

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

FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS BY REGION (2021)

■ \$
 ■ # OF GRANTS
 ⊕ ⊖ % \$ CHANGE 2020-2021
 ■ ■ % OF ALL HR \$



Source Data: Based on 32,047 grants totaling \$5.7 billion. All calculations exclude regrants. Change is calculated based on a matched subset of foundations with data available for both years of comparison.

Regional Allocation: The majority of human rights grants (90%) focus on a single region. However, for the 10% of grants that specify multiple geographies or a global focus, their full value is counted in the totals for each designated region. In 2021, this applied to 1,736 grants totaling \$314 million that named two or more categories (7 regions + global).

A Shift in Funding Flows

A more nuanced look at regional trends reveals a notable shift in the flow of global human rights funding. While we must be cautious about year-to-year changes—which can be influenced by one or a few large foundations, multi-year grants awarded in a single year, or variations in data reporting—the 2021 findings from our matched subset are a reason for optimism. They show a phenomenon we have not seen before: simultaneous, significant growth for human rights action across the Global South and East. Specifically, funding for human rights action in the Global South and East grew by a remarkable 32% in our matched subset between 2020 and 2021, compared to a modest 2% growth for the Global North.



The findings show a phenomenon we have not seen before:

simultaneous, significant growth for human rights action across the **Global South and East.**



This Global South and East increase is particularly significant as the rate of growth for all five regions was well above the 13% rise in the matched subset seen in human rights funding overall. After years of funding decline or stagnation, Latin America and the Caribbean saw an impressive 73% increase, and Asia and the Pacific experienced 56% growth.²¹ Other Global South and East regions are on a sustained upward trajectory, with funding for Sub-Saharan Africa (up 39% since 2020), Eastern Europe and Central Asia (32%), and the Middle East and North Africa (29%) decisively increasing for a second or third consecutive year. (Note: For Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the true growth was likely even higher, as our analysis excludes approximately 350 grants that were removed from the data due to security concerns.²²)

Conversely, North America's percentage gain was a comparatively modest 3%. This is particularly telling because it represents a significant slowdown compared to North America's funding growth in the four previous years, when annual increases ranged from 16% to 34%. The divergent trends are further highlighted by the funding decline for Western Europe (-12%). When taken with North America's modest growth, it reinforces the sense of a potential shift in the currents.

Crucially, despite these impressive percentage gains, the total dollar amounts for Global South and East regions remain a fraction of the funding directed to North America. To be clear, this is not to suggest that resourcing for North America is too high; every region requires robust investment to sustain human rights action. Rather, the data reveal that funding for the Global South and East has remained disproportionately and persistently low. This persistent imbalance underscores that the 2021 growth is a promising trend, not a systemic

21. While Australia, Japan, and New Zealand are classified as Global North, the funding volume to recipients in these countries was minimal (50 grants totaling \$13M) and was often regional in scope. Therefore, to better reflect the overall funding trends, all findings for Asia and the Pacific are included in the Global South and East analysis.

22. Grants related to work in or benefiting Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, and/or Ukraine were removed from this analysis in consultation with Candid due to security concerns associated with "foreign agents" or similar laws.

victory. Whether these gains represent long-term realignment of resources or a short-term diversion remains to be seen.

The uncertainty of this shift is heightened by the increasing political and operational threats facing transnational giving, precisely when global organizing for human rights is more crucial than ever. Even with the longstanding concentration of funding in the Global North, a full third (35%) of human rights funding is either meant to benefit the Global South and East explicitly (22%) or is “global” in nature (14%). Given the current environment, we expect these figures to be under pressure. Ultimately, securing and sustaining this critical shift requires addressing the deep-seated trust gap and ensuring funding reaches local communities to lead change in their own contexts. Bridging this gap is not just a matter of equity; it is critical to the effectiveness and future of human rights grantmaking, and is the core focus of the next section.

CHANGES IN FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OVER TIME

ANALYSIS OF MATCHED SUBSET FUNDING BY BENEFICIARY REGION (2017-2021) 

 ABOVE AVERAGE GROWTH  AVERAGE GROWTH  BELOW AVERAGE GROWTH  DECLINE

BENEFICIARY REGION	% CHANGE IN \$			
	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Asia & Pacific	-21%	-4%	-1%	56%
Eastern Europe & Central Asia	7%	52%	56%	32%
Latin America & Caribbean	4%	4%	2%	73%
Middle East & North Africa	37%	-23%	48%	29%
North America	16%	19%	32%	3%
Sub-Saharan Africa	-11%	-16%	35%	39%
Western Europe	16%	8%	37%	-12%
Overall Human Rights Funding	13%	15%	21%	13%

\$88M

\$85M

Scale matters: A 56% jump for Asia & Pacific (\$88M) yielded roughly the same dollar increase as a mere 3% uptick in North America (\$85M).

Source Data: Change is calculated based on a matched subset of foundations with data available both years of comparison. All calculations exclude regrants.

The Direct Funding Trust Gap

For the past three years, we have laid out what we call a “trust gap,” defined by stark regional differences in how funding is granted when it is for work in the Global North versus the Global South and East. Specifically, we have documented consistent disparities in direct and flexible support based on where organizations are based.²³

Nearly all human rights grant dollars for the Global North are awarded directly to organizations based within the regions the grants are intended to benefit: North America at a perfect 100% across the three-year period; Western Europe consistently between 87% and 91%. In sharp contrast, only 57% of grant dollars for the Global South and East in 2021 were awarded directly to organizations in the beneficiary regions. This figure is consistent with our 2020 findings and down slightly from 64% in 2019. This striking contrast demonstrates the entrenched nature of the trust gap: the rate of direct funding is fixed at a near-maximum level for the Global North, yet remains persistently low for the Global South and East. This pattern suggests that factors beyond standard philanthropic practices—likely historical power dynamics and institutional bias—influence decisions over who receives funding for human rights initiatives.

A three-year review of the data reinforces the consistent regional differences in direct funding flows. The relatively large year-to-year swings seen in regions like the Middle East and North Africa and Eastern Europe and Central Asia are primarily due to the outsized impact any fluctuations have on small total funding amounts. The issue here is less about the individual percentages and more about the patterns: the level of direct funding for grant recipients in Global South and East regions is consistently low and more prone to volatility.



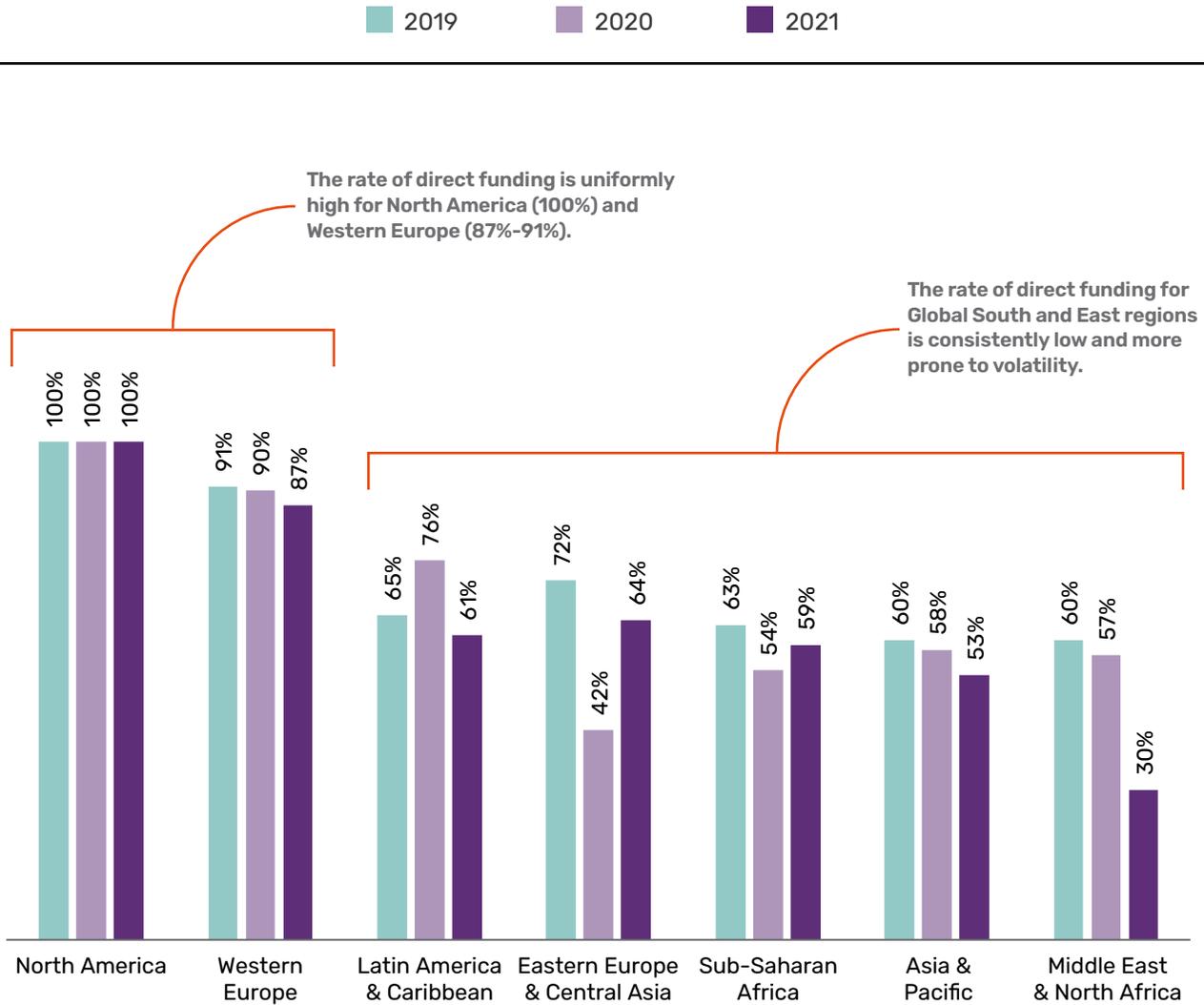
This striking contrast demonstrates the **entrenched nature of the trust gap**: the rate of direct funding is fixed at a near-maximum level for the Global North, yet remains persistently low for the Global South and East.



23. 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.

THE PERSISTENCE OF THE DIRECT FUNDING TRUST GAP²⁴

PERCENTAGE OF FOUNDATION HUMAN RIGHTS FUNDING GRANTED DIRECTLY TO IN-REGION RECIPIENTS (2019-2021)



Source Data: Based on grants that specify a region of benefit and include recipient location. All calculations include regranteeing: 2021 (28,886 grants / \$5.1B), 2020 (24,797 grants / \$4.4B), and 2019 (24,491 grants / \$3.6B).

24. The 2021 percentages shown are based on 28,886 grants totaling \$5.1B that specify a region of benefit and include recipient location (89% of all human rights grants). When we narrow our focus to grants with just one region of benefit (27,936 grants, \$4.8B, 86% of all grants), the direct funding rates for Global South and East regions notably increase to these levels: Eastern Europe and Central Asia (93%), Latin America and the Caribbean (76%), Sub-Saharan Africa (73%), Asia and Pacific (66%), and the Middle East and North Africa (51%). While encouraging on the surface, these increases indicate that a substantial portion of funding intended for the Global South and East is channeled through large, multi-regional projects—which are almost always managed by organizations in the Global North.

Compounded Trust: Direct and Flexible Funding

To more fully measure the systemic bias, we must look at the percentage of a region's total human rights funding that is simultaneously direct and flexible. This compounded metric—funding that is both granted locally and provided without restrictions—serves as the clearest indicator of the systemic trust deficit experienced by Global South and East recipients. If we only look at flexible funding, comparing funding that is flexible among grants awarded directly to local organizations, the regional percentages will be more similar. However, that approach ignores the huge volume of funding that never made it to local organizations in the first place—presenting an incomplete, misleading picture.

The data demonstrate a persistent compounded trust deficit. In 2021, one-third (33%) of all grant dollars directed toward North America met both criteria for trust: they were delivered directly and were unrestricted.²⁵ While this proportion is lower than an ideal standard, it is markedly better than the 22% rate we see for the Global South and East. Across the Global South and East, the proportion of direct, flexible funding is alarmingly low, ranging from just 17% of all funding for the Middle East and North Africa to 28% for Latin America and the Caribbean. While these proportions may seem similar to North America's 33%, the actual dollar amounts tell a different story:

- **North America** received **\$1.2 billion** in direct and flexible funding in 2021.
- The entire **Global South and East** received just **\$286 million** of this crucial support.

In other words, the total volume of flexible funding reaching the Global South and East is less than one-fourth the amount provided to North America alone.



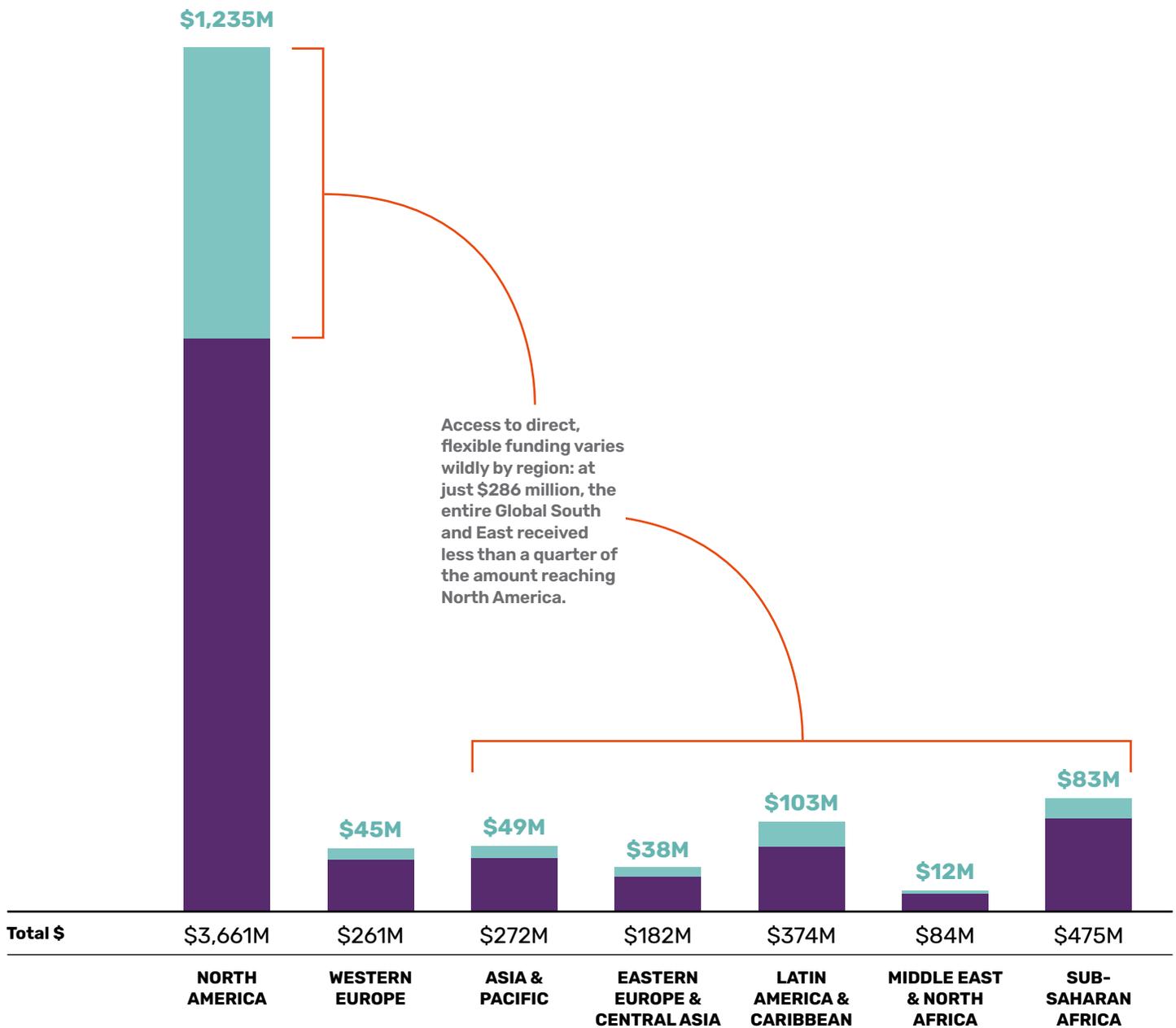
The total volume of **flexible funding** reaching the Global South and East is **less than one-fourth** the amount provided to North America alone.



25. Western Europe registered significantly lower, with only 17% of 2021 human rights funding meeting both criteria (direct and flexible). This is because a large majority (77%) of the region's human rights funding came from Western European foundations, foundations which have historically provided flexible funding at less than half the rate of North American foundations (14% vs. 30%).

REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN DIRECT AND FLEXIBLE HUMAN RIGHTS FUNDING (2021)

■ DIRECT & FLEXIBLE \$
 ■ ALL OTHER \$



Source Data: Overall funding totals are based on 32,047 grants totaling \$5.7 billion. For grants that specify multiple regions, their full value is counted in the totals for each region. Direct and flexible funding totals are based on 28,886 grants totaling \$5.1B that specify a region of benefit and include recipient location.

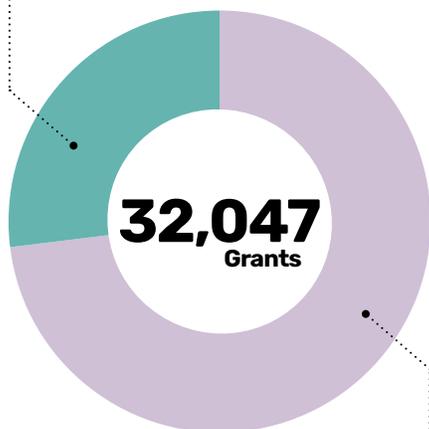
What Issues Do Human Rights Grants Address?

To assess how funding is distributed across diverse human rights needs, we categorize grants across 27 specific issues, which we then group into 13 broader categories. This foundational classification clarifies funding distribution across key areas such as freedom from violence, access to justice, and economic and labor rights.

Of over 32,000 human rights grants awarded in 2021, just over a quarter (27%) addressed more than one issue: 21% addressed two issues, and 6% supported work on three or more issues. This figure represents a slight six-percentage-point increase in multi-issue funding from our benchmark [analysis on intersectionality](#) in 2022.

27%

Just over a **quarter** of grants addressed more than one issue.



Nearly **three-quarters** of grants focused on a single issue or lacked sufficient data for categorization.

73%

Addressing Interconnected Rights: Our New Multi-Issue Methodology

In previous years, our annual analyses used a single-issue approach, assigning each grant to only one primary category based on available grant details and knowledge of funder or recipient priorities. While this method helped conceptualize how funding was divided, it limited our ability to capture cross-cutting work and the inherent complexity of human rights. For example, holistically protecting Indigenous land rights against invasive resource extraction is simultaneously a defense of the right to cultural preservation, health, and a clean and sustainable environment.

Recognizing this complexity, we first examined cross-issue grants in 2022, in our stand-alone [report on intersectional funding](#). That analysis found that of over 27,000 grants awarded in 2018, only 21% addressed more than one issue. This suggested that few issues were systematically addressed together and underscored the critical need to fully account for the interconnected nature of human rights work in our research.

Crucially, we have made a permanent shift in our annual analyses to reflect this systemic reality: instead of attributing funding to a single primary issue, we now map grants to multiple simultaneous objectives and attribute grant dollars to any and all issues addressed. While this approach means funding is counted in full for every issue named (and may inflate the total grant dollars), it provides a far more comprehensive view of multi-issue funding.

Our analysis of multi-issue funding is limited to two years (2018 and 2021), and while the current methodology differs from the previous one, the results remain indicative of a broader trend. The modest six-percentage-point increase between the two periods (from 21% in 2018 to 27% in 2021) reinforces field-wide concerns that the pace of change is far too slow to meet the current moment of crisis.

How Counting Multiple Issues Changes the Picture

The new multi-issue methodology more comprehensively reveals how funding is distributed across different needs. Because of this shift, we cannot use our standard matched-subset approach to measure growth between 2020 and 2021 as we would normally. However, we gain crucial insights into intersectional funding by comparing each issue's share of overall grant dollars across these two years, as shown on page 38. While we would expect the share of funding for all issues to increase under the new methodology—since grants are now counted fully for every issue they address—the data actually reveal mixed results.

The Persistence of Single-Issue Funding

The most critical insight is the widespread persistence of single-issue grantmaking. This is evidenced by the eight categories whose share of human rights funding remained static, increasing by four percentage points or less. This marginal change suggests that these issues are still often addressed in isolation, rarely articulated as simultaneous objectives.

A prominent example of this single-issue approach is **sexual and reproductive rights**, which accounted for \$500 million in 2021. Its proportion of overall human rights funding flatlined at 9% for both 2020 (single-issue counting) and 2021 (multi-issue counting). This zero-percentage-point change is concerning and highly revealing. For instance, despite the interconnected nature of these rights, just 2% of grants related to **migration and displacement** and 4% of grants for **civic and political participation** include sexual and reproductive rights as a simultaneous objective. This minimal overlap suggests that, in their grantmaking, funders are failing to consistently link sexual and reproductive rights work with other movements. This pattern persists even though sexual and reproductive rights remain a crucial, and often politically contested, area of human rights grantmaking, facing continuous, coordinated attacks globally.⁽⁷⁾

Major Shifts Reflecting Interconnectedness

Two issues, in particular, show a notable increase in their share of total grant funding. The most dramatic shift occurred in **equality rights and freedom from discrimination**. In 2020 (when only a single issue was captured), this category comprised just 18% of all human rights grant dollars. In 2021, with the new methodology, this figure reached \$3.4 billion—or 59% of the total—representing a 41-percentage-point jump. This shift indicates that a substantial volume of grants are now correctly attributed to equality rights as an additional objective. In practice, the majority of these newly captured grants address the human rights concerns of communities facing identity-based inequality or discrimination.

Similarly, the share of funding for **health and well-being rights**—totaling \$1.3 billion in 2021—increased 11 percentage points (from 12% to 23%). This significant rise reflects a combination of factors. First, it stems from a deliberate methodological shift in our research to include all grants related to reproductive rights as part of this broader health and well-being category. Second, it highlights philanthropy's targeted response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its social impacts, as 14% of all health and well-being grants explicitly mentioned the coronavirus.

Two other categories show important, though more modest, shifts in funding interconnectedness: **civic and political participation** (\$703 million) and **access to justice** (\$674 million) both saw their share of human rights funding double (rising from 5% to 12%, and 6% to 12%, respectively) with the new multi-issue categorization.

While our updated methodology better reflects human rights interconnectedness, our findings showing limited overlap across most issues are a critical concern. Only four categories saw growth in their share of funding, reinforcing the conclusion that single-issue grantmaking is impeding comprehensive and strategic movement building.

Recalibrating General Grants

Of all of the categories, only **human rights general** saw a true decline in its percentage of overall human rights funding, with an eight-percentage-point drop (from 14% to 6%). This decrease, however, is likely a positive sign: it indicates our new methodology is better able to categorize grants previously allocated to the broad “general” category where the primary human rights focus was difficult to determine.



While our new methodology better reflects human rights interconnectedness, our findings showing **limited overlap** across most issues are a **critical concern**.



The Mandate for Intersectional Investment

The mixed results found through the new multi-issue lens present a clear strategic challenge for human rights philanthropy. The persistence of the single-issue approach across most human rights categories shows a structural failure to consistently support interconnected movements.

Without deliberate and decisive action by funders, we would expect even small gains to erode quickly in the current moment: the same political currents fueling the global financial crisis are also making some funders wary of supporting issues like racial justice and equity. Achieving the field's necessary long-term resilience and effectiveness demands that foundations treat intersectionality not as an option, but as a core investment strategy to resist political fragmentation and ensure no essential movement is left isolated.

“ Achieving the field's necessary long-term resilience and effectiveness demands that foundations treat **intersectionality** not as an option, but as a **core investment strategy**.



FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS BY ISSUE (2021)

■ \$
 ■ # OF GRANTS
 ■ % OF ALL HR \$



Source Data: Based on 32,047 grants totaling \$5.7 billion. All calculations exclude regranting. For grants that specify multiple issues, their full value is counted in the totals for each issue.

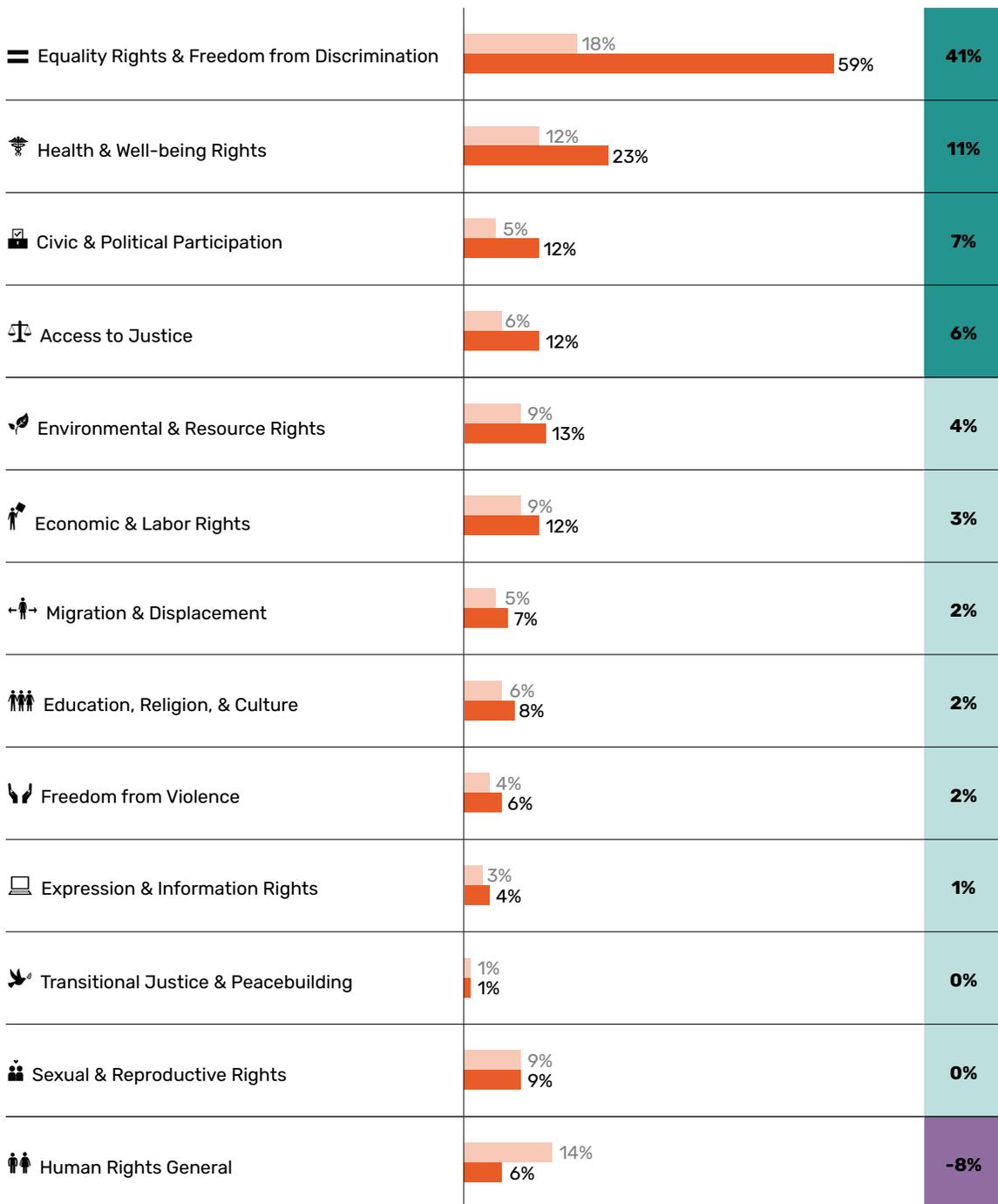
A NEW METHODOLOGY REVEALS AN OLD REALITY: THE DOMINANCE OF SINGLE-ISSUE GRANTMAKING (2020-2021)

% of All HR \$

2020 (Single-Issue) 2021 (Multi-Issue)

% Point Change (2020-2021)

INCREASE STATIC DECREASE



The 41% growth in equality-focused grants reflects our new methodology's ability to capture equality as a simultaneous objective across diverse issues.

Despite the shift to multi-issue tracking, eight categories remained largely unchanged. This suggests these issues are funded in isolation rather than as interconnected objectives.

Funding for "general" human rights decreased 8%—a result of more precise issue-tagging under the new methodology.

What Populations Do Human Rights Grants Support?

The Scope of Population-Specific Grantmaking

Human rights are universal, yet effective action to advance human rights requires focusing on specific groups disproportionately impacted by injustice and discrimination. Based on deep engagement with the field, our analysis zeros in on nine of them. While not exhaustive, these categories parallel major United Nations charters and reflect input from movements and funders: 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. We have also worked to strengthen our intersectional analysis by tracking the percentage of funding that actively supports multiple communities simultaneously—a critical proxy for truly intersectional funding. Year after year, these “population” findings provide a vital window into gaps in the field and have served to drive resources to underfunded communities, such as persons with disabilities and Black feminist movements.

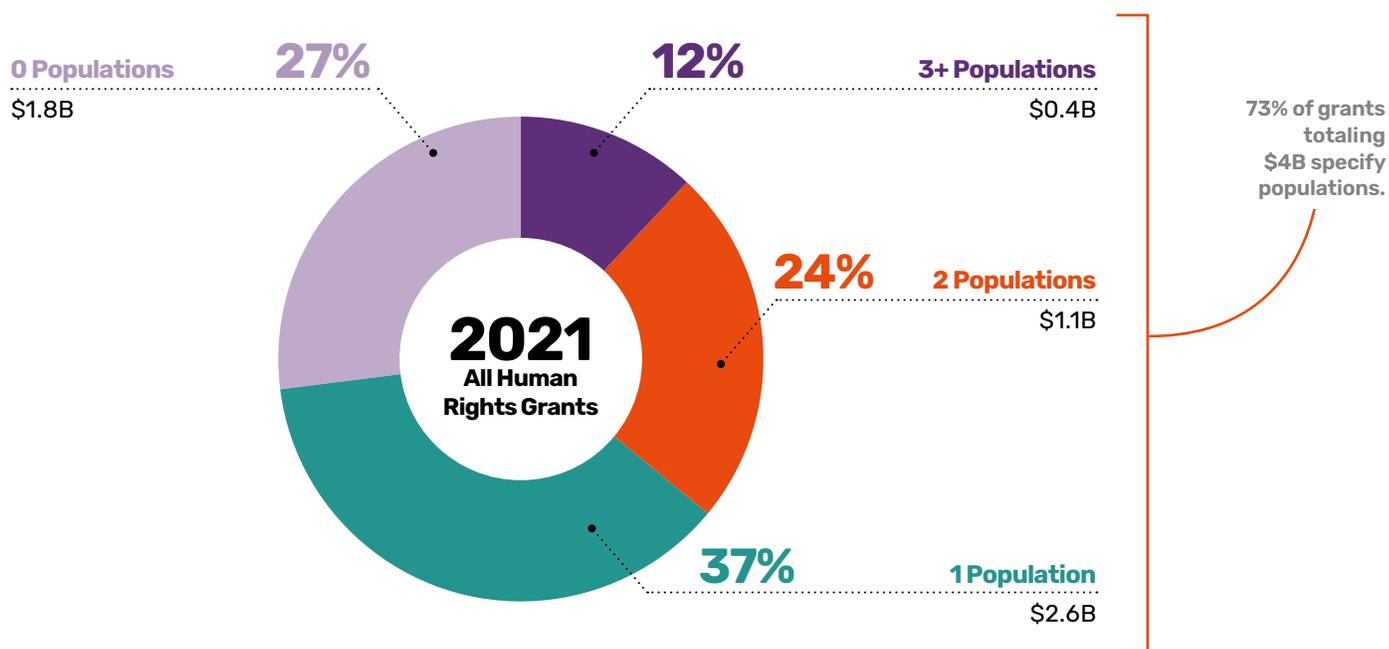
While measuring progress toward population-specific funding remains a core challenge, the 2021 data confirm this targeted grantmaking is still a work in progress. We see a major gap in population-specific reporting, where funders fail to expressly name target communities. In 2021, 27% of grants totaling \$1.8 billion did not specify any of the nine populations or lacked population data entirely (referred to as “0-population” grants).²⁶ This is a sharp increase from 14% (\$1 billion) in 2020. This significant jump is likely tied to the increase in non-specific general operating support. Although general operating support is welcome, this failure to name historically oppressed communities risks leaving the groups most at risk of human rights abuses unreached and isolated, underscoring a need for greater intentionality in grantmaking.

26. Of the 8,600 “0-population” grants, 67% did not specify any of the nine populations and 33% lacked population data entirely.

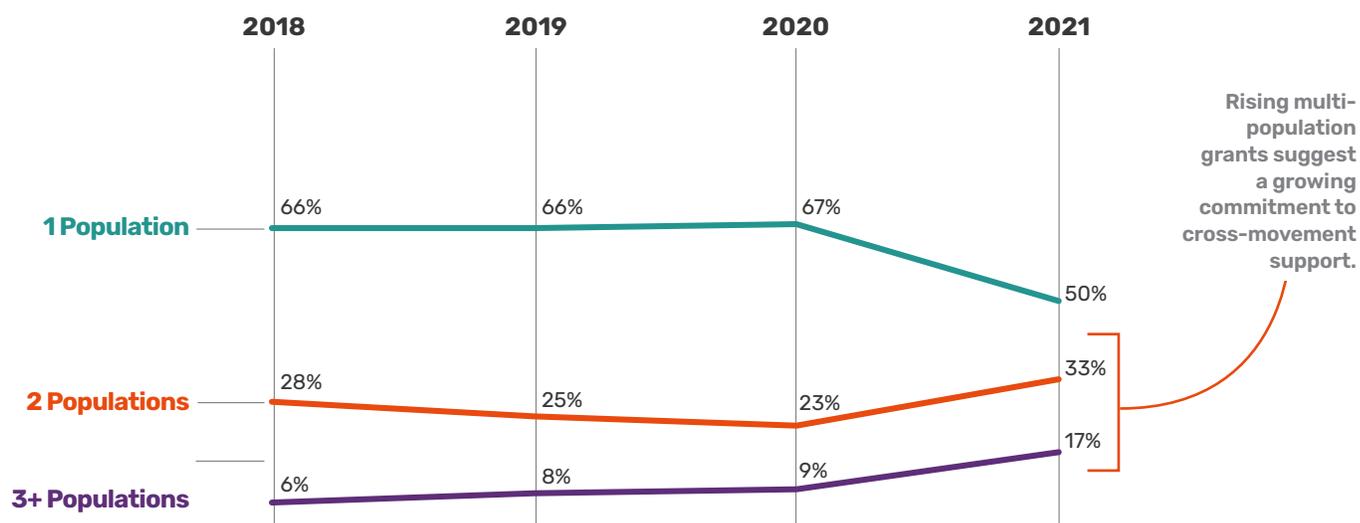
THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF POPULATION-SPECIFIC FUNDING

These charts track the prevalence of population-specific funding. We begin with a snapshot of all human rights grants in 2021 to show how frequently populations are named in grants. We then narrow our focus to those grants with named populations to track the multi-year shift toward more cross-movement support.

NUMBER OF POPULATIONS PER GRANT (ALL HUMAN RIGHTS GRANTS, 2021)



THE SHIFT TOWARD MULTI-POPULATION SUPPORT (GRANTS WITH SPECIFIED POPULATIONS, 2018-2021)



Source Data: Based on 32,382 grants totaling \$5.9 billion in 2021. The population-specific subset for 2021 includes 23,782 grants (\$4.1B). The analysis focuses specifically on the nine populations we track in our research. All calculations include regranting.

Tracking the Shift to Multi-Population Funding

To more accurately track shifts in intentionality, we narrowed our focus to grants that specified populations—the 73% subset of all human rights grants in 2021.

These data reveal a dynamic shift toward multi-population funding. From 2018 through 2020, the distribution was remarkably stable: single-population grants consistently represented two-thirds of the pool, while multi-population grants made up the remaining third. This pattern broke sharply in 2021, when the share of grants referencing two or more populations jumped to 50%—up from 32% in 2020. This growth was driven by increases across the board: grants referencing two populations rose from 23% to 33%, while those referencing three or more nearly doubled, from 9% to 17%. While some of the increase in multi-population grants may be due to our ongoing improvements in search criteria for accurately identifying populations, the sharp rise suggests a growing funder commitment to cross-movement support.

While this shift toward multi-population funding is encouraging, a closer look at the funding totals reveals a significant disparity. Single-population grants (50% of those with populations specified) accounted for \$2.6 billion in funding. In marked contrast, multi-population grants received only \$1.5 billion, despite representing an identical volume of grants (50% of the specified pool). This substantial difference indicates that while funders are supporting more cross-movement work, the average grant size is still much smaller than for single-identity grants. In short: the money isn't yet following the momentum.

Snapshot: Foundation Funding by Population

The funding trends provide an important window into which populations are the primary focus of human rights resources. Perhaps most striking is the extent to which funding for diverse **racial and ethnic groups** has grown since we began tracking it in 2018. In 2021, the year following George Floyd's murder, over a third (37%) of all human rights grants specified racial and ethnic groups as a focus, and total funding reached \$2.1 billion (the full value of grants naming this population).²⁷ Six percent of all human rights grants included the words "racial" or "ethnic" in the descriptive text or recipient name, indicating that equity and justice for racial and ethnic groups was a central priority. This marked an increase of 15% in the matched subset from 2020 to 2021, on top of massive growth



While funders are supporting **more cross-movement work**, the average grant size is still **much smaller** than for single-identity grants.



27. 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 Black feminist movements, its full amount is counted in the funding totals for both "women and girls" and "racial and ethnic groups."

between 2018-2019 (60%) and 2019-2020 (68%). While funding for the rights of racial and ethnic groups still represents a small portion of overall foundation giving (ranging from 1.5% to 3.7%),²⁸ this growth signals a significant reprioritization toward racial justice and equity. However, in the current climate, we are concerned that focused efforts to dismantle racial justice initiatives could severely reverse this trend.

The next largest shares of funding went to **women and girls**, which received \$1.4 billion (up 9% from 2020), followed by **children and youth** at \$922 million (up 24%). While these figures represent the highest dollar amounts we've ever documented for either population, their funding growth has sometimes lagged behind growth in the broader field. Critically, only **racial and ethnic groups**, **children and youth**, and **human rights defenders** (up 33%) exceeded the 13% growth seen across our matched subset.

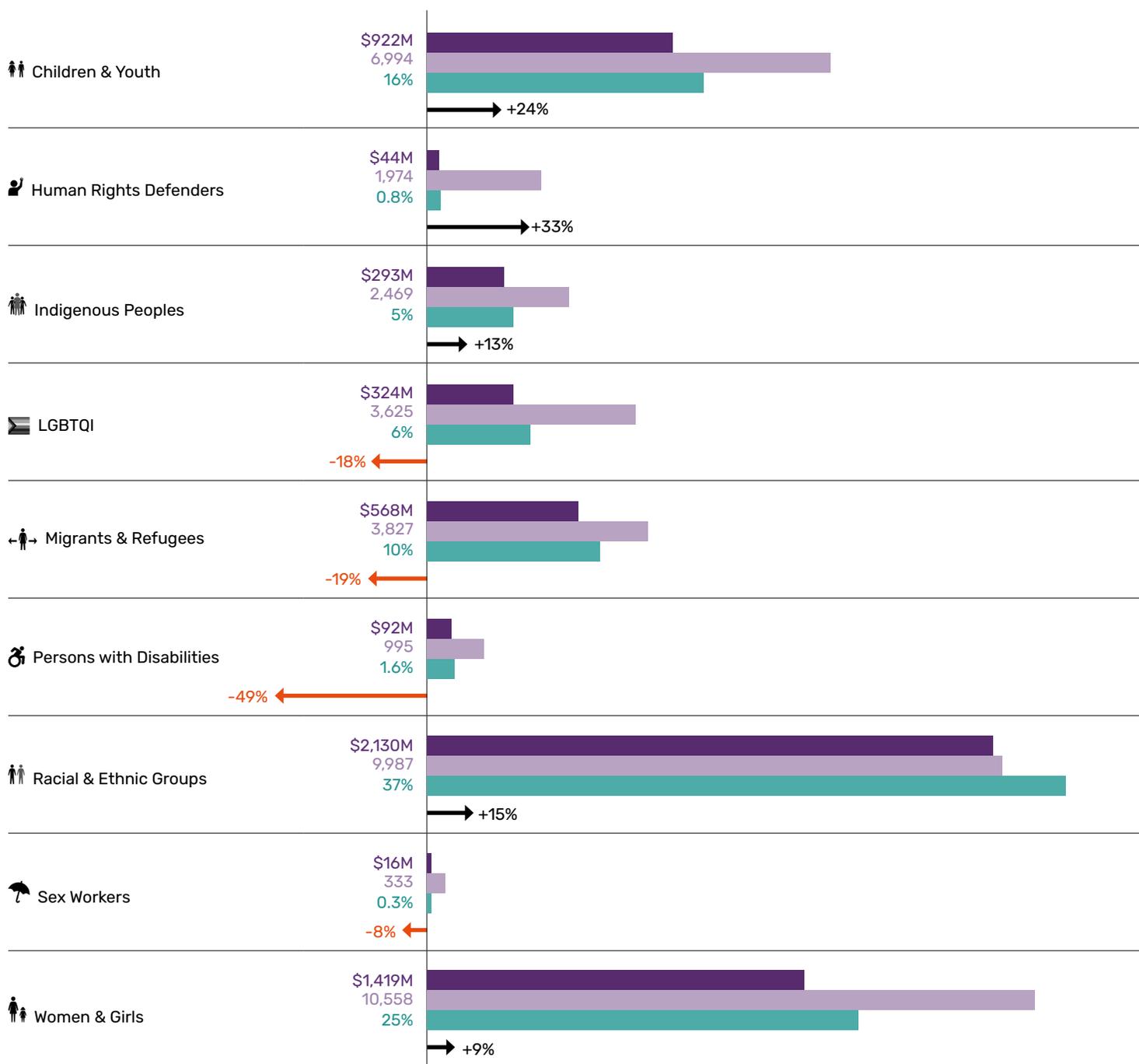
Conversely, funding for the smallest populations remained chronically low and highly volatile. For instance, while **human rights defenders** saw the largest percentage increase of any single population, this growth is rooted in an extremely low baseline of funding—a factor that magnifies any percentage shift. Grants targeting **sex workers** (\$16 million), **human rights defenders** (\$44 million), and **persons with disabilities** (\$92 million) each represented well under 2% of total human rights funding. For these groups, the consistently low dollar amounts suggest a significant, persistent gap in resources for essential areas of rights work.

Such low baselines make funding streams notoriously unstable, leading to both the sudden spike for **human rights defenders** and the steep declines seen elsewhere in 2021. This fragility is evident in the losses seen by several groups: funding for **persons with disabilities** fell by 49%, while support for **migrants and refugees** (down 19%), **LGBTQI groups** (down 18%), and **sex workers** (down 8%) also decreased. This trend warrants close monitoring rather than immediate alarm, given that growth for all of these communities outpaced the field overall in the prior year (2019-2020). Nevertheless, this post-pandemic shift is a critical development, as it appears to have resulted in reduced support for front-line population-specific work (see Strategies, page 52), particularly for historically oppressed groups that rely on consistent, targeted support.

28. We use two distinct approaches to estimate the share of philanthropic giving allocated to the rights of racial and ethnic groups. Our most conservative approach compares human rights grants for these groups within Candid's Foundation 1000 dataset to all grants in that same dataset (representing the largest U.S. foundations), resulting in an estimate of 3.7% of their total grantmaking. Alternatively, our broader estimate compares the total funding identified in this research for racial and ethnic groups (\$2.2 billion) to the estimated global annual foundation spending (\$150 billion as reported in the [Global Philanthropy Report](#)), resulting in our lower estimate of 1.5%.

FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS BY POPULATION (2021)

■ \$
 ■ # OF GRANTS
 ■ % OF ALL HR \$
 ← → % \$ CHANGE 2020-2021



Source Data: Based on 32,047 grants totaling \$5.7 billion. All calculations exclude regrants. For grants that specify multiple populations, their full value is counted in the totals for each population. Change is calculated based on a matched subset of foundations with data available both years of comparison.

CHANGES IN FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OVER TIME

ANALYSIS OF MATCHED SUBSET FUNDING BY POPULATION (2017-2021) 

■ ABOVE AVERAGE GROWTH
 ■ AVERAGE GROWTH
 ■ BELOW AVERAGE GROWTH
 ■ DECLINE

POPULATION	% CHANGE IN \$			
	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
 Children & Youth	33%	-12%	12%	24%
 Human Rights Defenders	186%	-36%	38%	33%
 Indigenous Peoples	9%	-10%	44%	13%
 LGBTQI	43%	17%	71%	-18%
 Migrants & Refugees	16%	9%	39%	-19%
 Persons with Disabilities	-14%	38%	67%	-49%
 Racial & Ethnic Groups		60%	68%	15%
 Sex Workers	4%	11%	150%	-8%
 Women & Girls	11%	17%	38%	9%
Overall Human Rights Funding	13%	15%	21%	13%

Source Data: Change is calculated based on a matched subset of foundations with data available both years of comparison. All calculations exclude regrants. Our analysis of racial and ethnic groups begins with data from 2018.

A Closer Look at Intersecting Populations

To move beyond simple counts of multi-population grants, the Cross-Population Matrix (on page 47) details the percentage of grants for one specific population that are also coded to another. This analysis shows which populations are the most consistently integrated into broader movement work and reveals critical gaps in targeted funding.

The Role of Women and Girls in Cross-Population Funding

Grants focused on **women and girls** consistently represent the most frequent overlap with other populations. For instance, well over half of all grants targeted toward human rights defenders (72%) and sex workers (60%) are also coded to women and girls. Similarly, grants for Indigenous peoples (52%), LGBTQI groups (49%), children and youth (48%), and persons with disabilities (47%) all show co-occurrence with women and girls in approximately half of all grants meant to benefit these communities. This high co-occurrence is likely due to the significant presence of women's funds in the human rights funding ecosystem, who have historically been at the forefront of working across human rights movements.

Racial and Ethnic Groups: Multiple Intersections

Grants coded for **racial and ethnic groups** also show significant overlap, particularly with migrants and refugees (41% co-occurrence) and children and youth (32%). This highlights the strong programmatic link between anti-racism work and support for people crossing borders and in educational settings. Specifically, 24% of grants for children and youth that are co-coded for racial and ethnic groups supported the right to education. The much higher overlap we see between racial and ethnic groups and Indigenous peoples in our data is due to the ongoing refinement of our search criteria, which now more effectively capture the connection between these populations.

It's also worth noting the communities that don't seem to be on the radar of funders supporting racial and ethnic groups. If we look at those nearly 10,000 grants, few also target human rights defenders (353 grants), persons with disabilities (106 grants) or sex workers (33 grants). If more grants for racial and ethnic groups explicitly considered the links between these populations, the impact on funding could be substantial. This low co-occurrence signals a major opportunity for funders to enhance the impact of their racial justice portfolios by integrating these chronically underfunded communities.



Women's funds
have historically been
at the forefront
of working across
human rights
movements.



Gaps in Integrated Funding

While some populations are consistently integrated into multi-population grants, others remain significantly isolated. Grants for **persons with disabilities** show the lowest co-occurrence across the board. This finding presents two strategic challenges to the ecosystem. First, intersectional funding within this portfolio is highly uneven: while 27% of these grants overlap with children and youth, co-occurrence drops to just 2% for migrants and refugees and a negligible 0.4% for sex workers.

Second, and more critically, it signals a lack of integration by the largest funding streams. For example, even with the notable increase in funding for racial and ethnic groups, only 1% of those grants also include persons with disabilities; for migrants and refugees, that figure is just 0.5%. This isolation suggests that the funding ecosystem has not yet fully embraced disability justice as an intersectional priority, often leading to single-population grants that fail to account for the multilayered discrimination faced by disabled individuals who belong to other communities disproportionately impacted by rights abuses.

Similarly, while **sex workers** show strong co-occurrence with women and girls and LGBTQI people, their funding overlap remains minimal with other populations, underscoring the limited integration of sex worker rights into broader human rights agendas.

How to Read the Matrix

To interpret the matrix on page 47, the data can be read both vertically and horizontally. Read **down the columns** to see the percentage of grants for the group listed at the top (the base population) that also include the population listed on the left. For example, reading down the column for children and youth shows that 4% of grants for that population are also coded for persons with disabilities, while 48% include women and girls. Conversely, reading **across the rows** shows the percentage that the population on the left is incorporated into grants for the populations listed across the top. This horizontal view highlights the degree of a group's integration across the human rights funding ecosystem.

CROSS-POPULATION GRANT MATRIX

PERCENTAGE OF FOUNDATION HUMAN RIGHTS GRANTS CODED TO TWO GROUPS (2021)

VERY LOW INTERSECTION
 LOW INTERSECTION
 MEDIUM INTERSECTION
 HIGH INTERSECTION

		POPULATION								
		 Children & Youth	 Human Rights Defenders	 Indigenous Peoples	 LGBTQI	 Migrants & Refugees	 Persons with Disabilities	 Racial & Ethnic Groups	 Sex Workers	 Women & Girls
INTERSECTING POPULATION	 Children & Youth		20%	27%	24%	21%	27%	22%	16%	32%
	 Human Rights Defenders	6%		7%	9%	5%	5%	4%	14%	13%
	 Indigenous Peoples	9%	9%		6%	5%	7%	24%	0.3%	12%
	 LGBTQI	13%	17%	9%		12%	15%	9%	48%	17%
	 Migrants & Refugees	11%	10%	7%	13%		2%	16%	10%	9%
	 Persons with Disabilities	4%	3%	3%	4%	0.5%		1%	1%	4%
	 Racial & Ethnic Groups	32%	18%	98%	25%	41%	11%		10%	26%
	 Sex Workers	0.8%	2%	0.04%	4%	0.9%	0.4%	0.3%		2%
	 Women & Girls	48%	72%	52%	49%	24%	47%	27%	60%	

Source Data: Based on 23,782 grants totaling \$4.1 billion that focus on any of the nine populations we track in our research. All calculations include regranteeing.

THE FRAGILITY OF PROGRESS: ROLLBACKS AND RESISTANCE

The 2021 data document several record highs in foundation funding for the populations in our analysis—notably the surge in multi-population grants and an all-time high of \$2.1 billion allocated to diverse racial and ethnic groups. However, the current political and economic climate underscores the deep fragility of these gains. This analysis lays critical groundwork for the anticipated impact of recent funding rollbacks on human rights movements globally.

In the United States, foundation funding is directly threatened by the Trump administration's broad measures to dismantle efforts to address systemic racism and gender inequality.^(K) Coordinated political and legal campaigns have resulted in legislative blocks and legal challenges designed to restrict funding. This pressure is having a measurable effect on funder behavior. A 2025 study by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy found widespread self-censorship, with some funders preemptively removing references to "race, diversity, equity, or inclusion" from their websites.^(L) Whether and how this plays out in how funders actually move money remains to be seen. What is clear is that this legislative and administrative pressure threatens the institutional stability and resourcing of key movements across the U.S. and beyond.

The political efforts to undermine funding are global in scope, and the resulting financial insecurity is being acutely felt by organizations dedicated to equity worldwide. Take for example Prospera International Network of Women's Funds, whose members actively support feminist movements around the world. Its survey of 45 members revealed that 78% had already lost a combined total of \$65 million as of April 2025 from various funding sources.^(M) The anticipated repercussions are grave: Prospera forecasts that its members will see their budgets shrink by an average of 30% by 2026. Within the network, 66% of these funds expect program cuts and 73% foresee staffing and compensation constraints. The most devastating impact is expected at the grassroots level, with nearly half of Prospera members fearing the closure of some of their grantees.^(N)

Resistance is real. Even recognizing that the 18% decline in LGBTQI rights funding in 2021 could be year-to-year fluctuation, funding advocates anticipated that the political climate would soon lead to deeper contraction. In advance of several consequential elections in 2024, the Global Philanthropy Project (GPP) proactively began mobilizing resources for LGBTQI communities through its "Fund our Futures" campaign, securing \$182 million in new funding for LGBTI movements from 64 foundations, donor governments, and high-net-worth individuals.^(O) This organizing serves as a beacon for movements, anticipating and responding to the escalating global wave of anti-rights attacks already underway. This proactive response is a clear indication that movements were already bracing for the contraction that our **2025 financial forecast** now confirms.

Taken together, the evidence from political rollbacks, global financial forecasts, and the documented volatility in 2021 funding for groups like persons with disabilities (down 49%) and migrants and refugees (down 19%) confirms that the momentum of the post-2020 funding surge is rapidly giving way to an anticipated period of contraction. This looming volatility risks eroding the institutional capacity, knowledge, and infrastructure of front-line human rights organizations, a threat that is particularly acute for groups where resourcing has long been marginal.

 Legislative and administrative pressure **threatens the institutional stability and resourcing** of key movements across the U.S. and beyond.



What Strategies Do Human Rights Grants Support?

The Challenge of Mapping Grantmaking Strategies

Beyond analyzing grants by regions, issues, and populations served, we also examine the specific strategies that funders support through their grantmaking. For instance, a grant to promote environmental and resource rights might prioritize strategic litigation, grassroots organizing, protection for human rights defenders, or a combination of these approaches.²⁹

Capturing the full spectrum of grantmaking strategies remains a significant challenge: only 46% of 2021 human rights grants provided sufficient detail for us to categorize them under at least one funding strategy. This represents a 20-percentage-point drop from the prior year and is the lowest level of detail captured since we began tracking funding strategies in our analysis of 2013 funding.

This decline is likely due to a combination of factors. First, the increase in general support funding—a positive trend that offers grantees greater flexibility—often leads to less explicit grant descriptions, as the exact use of the funds may not be known in advance. Additionally, naming the strategy a grant employs—the “how” of the funding—is a deeper layer of detail than simply noting the issues addressed or populations supported, making softer concepts like “advocacy” or “grassroots organizing” more difficult to classify consistently. Third, our classification may have been impacted by recent updates to our research partner Candid’s Philanthropy Classification System (PCS), which necessitated complex cross-mapping to our unique *Advancing Human Rights* research categories. Across our fund tracking, we continually work to strengthen our mapping to provide ever more precise insights into grantmaking approaches.

29. 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.”

Snapshot: Foundation Funding by Strategy

Our analysis tracks 10 distinct funding strategies, offering a window into how foundations distribute resources across the human rights ecosystem. By examining these diverse approaches we can identify shifting philanthropic priorities.

Dominance and Stability in Core Advocacy

The largest share of human rights funding is dedicated to **advocacy, systems reform, and implementation**, which accounts for a substantial 35% (\$2 billion) of all grant dollars. However, this strategy's growth lagged behind the rest of the field; while human rights funding across the matched subset grew by 13% overall, funding for this core approach saw a 2% decrease from 2020. This suggests that efforts to influence policies and transform systems—while remaining the central priority—lost relative momentum as funders shifted focus toward other strategies in 2021.

Post-Pandemic Reopening: The Impact on Movement Infrastructure

The data from the matched subset show clear signs of the world beginning to reopen following 2020's global shutdowns. In this context, **scholarships and travel** (\$14 million) saw the most dramatic growth, jumping 56% in 2021, far outpacing the 13% sector growth. This surge reflects the resumption of in-person meetings, conferences, and international exchange programs, which were severely curtailed the previous year. Similarly, **security and resilience** (\$30 million) increased by 53% across the matched subset. This substantial growth likely reflects a renewed focus on digital security, physical protection, and mental health resources for human rights defenders after a year of intense remote work and crisis management. Collectively, this spending underscores a strategic priority by funders to rapidly re-invest in the human capital and core infrastructure necessary for movements to transition back to global, in-person advocacy. Though this is a reason for optimism, it is important to remember that these are two of our smaller categories, both accounting for less than 1% of overall human rights grant dollars, which means that even small dollar increases will amplify the resulting percentage growth.



The largest share of human rights funding is dedicated to **advocacy, systems reform, and implementation.**



Shifts in Direct Action and Legal Approaches

Two major strategies focused on direct or legal intervention saw notable drops in funding across the matched subset. **Litigation and legal aid** saw a decrease of 16% (to \$89 million overall). This decline, in a year of 13% sector growth, may be linked to operational difficulties in court systems during the pandemic or a strategic shift in foundation focus toward policy advocacy. Likewise, **grassroots organizing** decreased by 11% across the matched subset (to \$183 million). This suggests that while top-tier advocacy remained relatively stable, direct community-level organizing and mobilization faced challenges in maintaining funding levels compared to the peak of pandemic response efforts in 2020, and significantly lagged behind the sector's growth trend.

These findings are highly relevant in the 2026 context, where coordinated political and legal challenges simultaneously target the justice system's capacity to protect civil rights and the grassroots organizations that mobilize in defense of them. These dual threats—one targeting the legal infrastructure and the other the people power behind it—demand a strategic mobilization of philanthropic resources.

Investing in Capacity and Collaboration

A key strategic trend among the matched subset is the strong growth in funding dedicated to strengthening the human rights ecosystem itself. **Capacity-building and technical assistance** grew by 10% across the matched subset (to \$811 million overall). This nearly matched the 13% overall sector growth, indicating a sustained commitment to organizational development, training, and strategic planning for grantee partners.

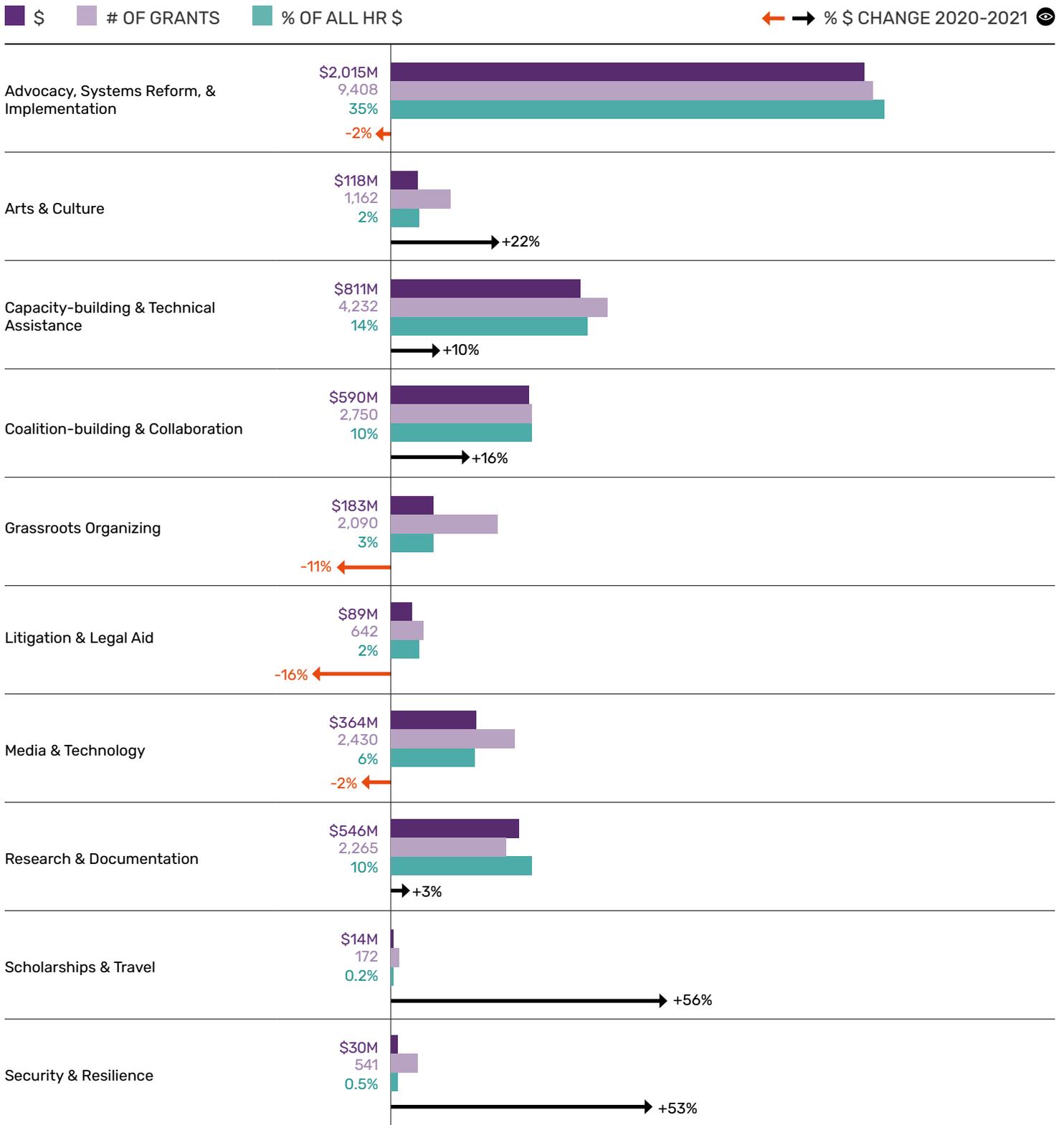
Mirroring this growth, **coalition-building and collaboration** also increased by 16% (to \$590 million). This consistent growth highlights a foundation commitment to fostering stronger networks and cross-movement alliances, recognizing that complex rights issues require collaborative solutions.



A key strategic trend is the **strong growth** in funding dedicated to **strengthening the human rights ecosystem** itself.



FOUNDATION FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS BY STRATEGY (2021)



Source Data: Based on 32,047 grants totaling \$5.7 billion. All calculations exclude regrants. For grants that specify multiple strategies, their full value is counted in the totals for each strategy. Change is calculated based on a matched subset of foundations with data available both years of comparison.

The Mandate for Sustained Strategic Investment

While year-to-year changes alone must be interpreted with caution, this analysis suggests 2021 was a year of recalibration. Funders shifted to invest more heavily in long-term infrastructure (capacity-building and coalition-building) and the resumption of essential activities (travel and security). This emphasis on strengthening core movement capacity is a welcome and necessary precondition for resilience. However, this was a trade-off that came at the cost of direct-action strategies: funding saw a relative decrease for crucial on-the-ground work, including grassroots organizing and litigation and legal aid.

This reduction in front-line support is particularly concerning for the most vulnerable movements, such as those focused on gender and LGBTQI rights, which rely heavily on direct legal and community mobilization to counter escalating political attacks. Given the severe funding contraction and political headwinds facing the human rights sector today, intentional reinvestment must become a sustained, structural priority. This must be paired with renewed support for direct-action strategies to ensure the long-term survival of vital movements.



Given the severe funding contraction and political headwinds facing the human rights sector today, **intentional reinvestment** must become a **sustained, structural priority**.



Looking Forward

Foundations gave a record \$5.7 billion to human rights work in 2021. While this surge in support was driven by global crises and social movements, it should not be mistaken for long-term stability. This report marks a baseline against which we know funding will rapidly change over the coming years. It also shows that, despite these high totals, the financial security of the human rights infrastructure is already threatened by systemic risk and deep inequity.

A major threat is the dangerous concentration of philanthropic power. Almost all the money—99% of grant dollars disbursed—comes from foundations based in the Global North. This centralizes the field's financial fate, making it highly vulnerable to the decisions of just a handful of major funders. This inherent fragility is compounded by a looming financial crisis, driven not only by the estimated loss of billions of dollars in government aid, but also by inconsistent grantmaking practices of major global foundations. This volatility is compounded by political targeting that limits funding flows under the guise of security—such as the Trump administration's direct attack on major funders and efforts to sanction Palestinian human rights organizations for their work with the International Criminal Court (ICC).^(P) The high watermark of 2021 is thus poised to be followed by a sharp and destabilizing withdrawal of funds by 2026.

The global nature of human rights organizing contrasts sharply with the persistent global trust gap in funding. Even as funding increases for the Global South and East, much of the funding is still channeled through the Global North. As our data show, only 57% of funding for the Global South and East was awarded directly, meaning local, front-line organizations receive disproportionately low levels of direct support. This funding deficit severely limits the independence and strength of movements critical to securing human rights. Furthermore, while the strategic shift toward rebuilding organizational infrastructure is encouraging, significant resource gaps remain, particularly for siloed groups such as persons with disabilities and crucial areas of work like sexual and reproductive rights.

To build a lasting and stable future, human rights philanthropy must commit to decisive action:

- 1. Sustain and Scale Funding:** Maintain and grow the \$1.6 billion in new philanthropic dollars that reached human rights initiatives between 2020 and 2021. This figure nearly perfectly matches the crucial human rights funding shortfall of \$1.4 to \$1.9 billion anticipated from donor governments by 2026.
- 2. Decentralize Power and Resources:** Prioritize funding directly to local partners, women's funds, and foundations based in the Global South and East.
- 3. Close the Trust Gap:** Make flexible, long-term, and multi-year grants the rule, not the exception, so movements have the necessary agility to respond to both political shifts and financial instability. The fundamental standard should be that human rights funding is granted directly to organizations in the region—if not the country—that is meant to benefit, and that this funding is flexible. This shift is critical to reversing the historical centralization and control of resources in the Global North.

This moment presents philanthropy with a defining mandate: to leverage its immense financial capacity and structural independence not merely as donors, but as a catalytic, supportive force needed to secure the global human rights infrastructure against coordinated political and financial attacks.

The strategic choice facing the sector is critical: continuing to fund in the same ways risks perpetuating systemic fragility and missing a critical window to respond to the needs of the moment, whereas intentionally supporting the structural transformation led by movements will drive the human rights sector's long-term resilience. The record-breaking totals of 2021 prove the financial capacity of human rights funders. The next phase of human rights philanthropy must be defined by the will to leverage that capacity to reshape the funding ecosystem and forge a path towards a sustainable, locally-driven global human rights movement.



The record-breaking totals **prove the financial capacity** of human rights funders. The next phase must be defined by the will to **leverage that capacity to reshape the funding ecosystem.**



About *Advancing Human Rights*

Within the field of philanthropy, a dedicated community of funders commits time and money to supporting human rights action 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.⁽⁹⁾ Leading examples include research by the [Association for Women in Development \(AWID\)](#), [Funders Concerned About AIDS](#), [Funders for LGBTQ Issues](#), [Global Philanthropy Project](#), 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 provides field-wide evidence for what activists know firsthand: Philanthropy has a critical role in meeting this moment—and considerable untapped potential to advance human rights globally.

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.’”

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 2021, the most current available year, we identified 738 foundations in 49 countries that gave \$5.7 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 215,000 grants, roughly 91% of which came from Candid's dataset of grants of \$10,000 or more made by 1,000 of the largest private and community foundations in the U.S.³⁰ The remaining grants were collected directly from human rights funders, including 177 members of the three global networks (HRFN, Ariadne, and Prospera).³¹ Across all four sources, 32,382 grants, 15% 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 dataset, unless otherwise noted. These accounted for 335 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, incorporate various strategies like research, litigation, and advocacy, or, importantly, address multiple human rights issues.

30. Candid's Foundation 1000 dataset represents roughly half of all U.S. private and community foundation grantmaking. Eight foundations that are included in Candid's dataset are also members of HRFN or Ariadne.

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

In prior reports, we assigned grants to only one human rights issue (the primary focus). In a change in methodology this year, we now treat Issues the same way we treat Regions, Populations, and Strategies: we count the full value of each grant in the totals reported for all relevant Issues.

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 example, we would include the full \$20,000 for a grant to address violence against migrant women in the textile industry in Cambodia and South Africa in each of the totals for migrants and refugees, women and girls, Asia and the Pacific, Sub-Saharan Africa, freedom from violence, and economic and labor rights. While this approach is instrumental in helping us understand the relative funding flows by category—and better capture cross-cutting work—the drawback is that it may inflate the actual funding for each category.

As with any research, there are limitations. We may not capture very small grants (those under \$10,000 through Candid), and we continue to strive for more comprehensive 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 today.

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.

- > Visit our [research hub](#) to explore funding over time by regions, issues, populations, and strategies.
- > Use our [grants database and mapping platform](#) to find partners and peers and see grant-level details.
- > Follow our [blog series](#) where we showcase diverse perspectives to contextualize the numbers.
- > Read our [annual reports and deep-dive analyses](#) for in-depth insights into the global human rights funding landscape.

Share Your Grants Data!

Our research relies on you. Foundations can submit their grants data using this [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.

To access more information about the human rights funding landscape, visit humanrightsfunding.org.

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.

Designed by [Vito Raimondi](#).

