

A woman with dark hair, wearing a light green polo shirt, is crouching by a stream. She is smiling warmly at the camera while holding water in her cupped hands. The background is a lush, green forest. The text 'THE FUND FOR GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS' is in the top left corner, and 'FROM THE FRONT LINES: GRANTEE PARTNER SURVEY 2023' is in large white letters at the bottom.

THE FUND
FOR GLOBAL
HUMAN
RIGHTS

FROM THE FRONT LINES: GRANTEE PARTNER SURVEY 2023



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ABOUT THE FUND FOR GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS



The Fund for Global Human Rights is an international nonprofit that identifies and invests in the world's most innovative and effective human rights activists, organizations, and movements. Created in 2002 by a group of prominent activists and donors, the Fund connects grassroots human rights defenders with flexible funding, long-term strategic support, and a global network of allies. Since its founding, the Fund has raised and invested over \$154 million into the work of more than 1,100 activists and organizations in countries around the globe. Activists supported by the Fund have overturned unjust laws, secured progressive policies, and improved millions of lives worldwide.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We extend our deepest gratitude to the Fund's grantee partners for your participation in the survey and for your work. This report is a testament to your resilience, innovation, and unwavering commitment to human rights. The survey and this report benefited from the valuable contributions of Carlos Hernández and Paul Waiswa, learning and assessment specialists at the Fund. This report was translated with support from Translators Without Borders.



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INTRODUCTION: AN INVITATION TO USE THIS REPORT

Three years ago, during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Fund circulated a survey with our global grantee partner community for the first time. Much has changed since then, including the progress and challenges facing the human rights movement. It was time for fresh perspectives and feedback from the human rights activists supported by the Fund.

From September to October 2023, the Fund invited grantee organizations to complete an online survey to document their experiences, strengths, and priorities. This report presents key findings from the 284 partner organizations that completed the survey. Most of the findings reflect grantee experiences generally, including and beyond their relationship with the Fund. The final section includes feedback specifically about the Fund.

For the 2023 survey, we sought to reduce barriers to participation by including fewer questions and more language options to complete the survey. For groups quoted in the report, we refer to a broad geographic region rather than a more specific location to respect respondent confidentiality and their safety. And this year, we are sharing this report with grantees earlier in our dissemination process. We hope this transparency supports our collective efforts to advance human rights.

The report mirrors the key themes of the survey: internal and external organizational conditions, strategies to pursue human rights, contributions to change, and feedback for the Fund. Each section in this report includes a main finding with supporting data and suggested discussion questions.

So, what next?

As one partner in the Americas suggested, “conversations instead of surveys.” We could not agree more with that sentiment. We invite Fund staff and grantee partners to have conversations, reflect on our experiences, draft articles, or populate funder reports informed by this survey. The Fund will seek opportunities to engage grantee partners in making sense of these findings together. Grantee partners can also use these questions with different audiences: among colleagues at one organization, with community members or peers, or in dialogue with other funders.

METHODOLOGY

Who did we intend to reach with the survey?

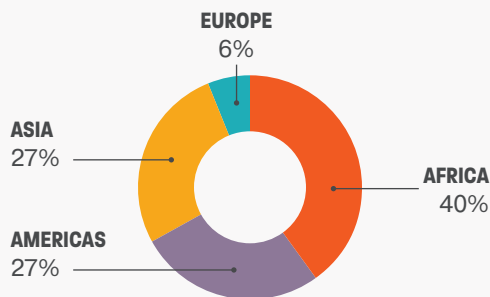
The Fund sought to survey our core grantee partner community. This included groups with a current grant with an end date in or later than November 2023 and who receive more than emergency funding. This did not include groups with a final grant from the Fund, or groups funded through a donor-advised grantmaking mechanism. Groups funded through participatory processes were invited to participate.

The Fund's survey partner, Progress Inc., distributed and managed the survey using Kobo Toolbox. Respondents could select from among eight languages to complete the survey (Arabic, Burmese, English, French, Hindi, Portuguese, Spanish, and Thai), which was translated with support from Translators without Borders. The survey was open for responses from September 25 through October 13, 2023.

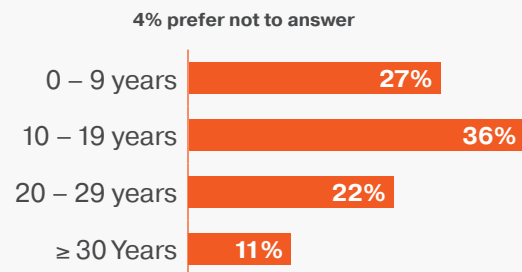
Who responded to the survey?

The survey had a participation rate of 76 percent. Out of 375 grantees organizations, 284 responded to the survey. This response rate is similar to the [2020 grantee survey](#).

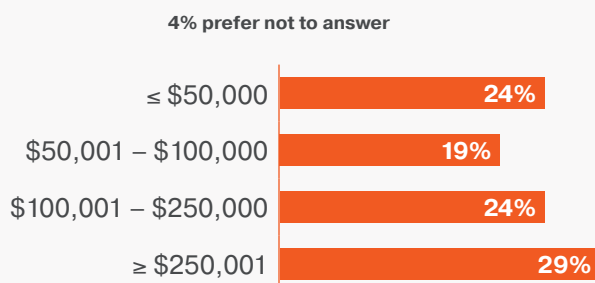
RESPONDENT'S REGION



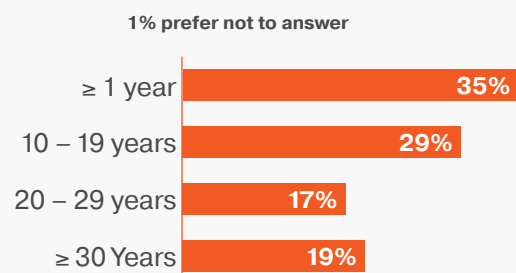
TIME SINCE ORGANIZATION ESTABLISHMENT



TOTAL BUDGET FOR 2022 (IN USD)



TIME SINCE RECEIVING FIRST FGHR GRANT



ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES AND EXPERIENCES

Many groups face funding restrictions or sustainability concerns.

Most groups (70 percent, 198 groups) estimate that more than half of their funding is restricted to use for specific projects and cannot be used for general operating expenses. This aligns with what we heard in the [2020 survey](#) and with [broader trends](#) in philanthropy. Despite these restrictions, many groups report an improved funding situation compared to year prior to the survey.

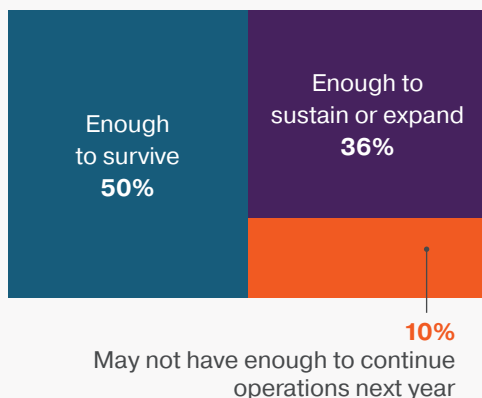
FUNDING, THOUGH RESTRICTED, IS STABLE OR IMPROVED SINCE LAST YEAR FOR MOST GROUPS

n = 284; 2% did not respond



There is **some diversity in funding sources**, with nearly 50 percent (141 groups) reporting two or three different sources of funding. Just over a third (89 groups) report one funding source. Few groups have a strong outlook on financial sustainability for the year ahead. Half of the respondents (142 groups) report that they have enough to survive but may have to make budget cuts. A smaller portion (10 percent, 29 groups) reports severe financial challenges for the year ahead.

GROUPS FACE FUNDING SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES IN THE CONTEXT OF RELATIVELY DIVERSE FUNDING SOURCES

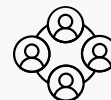


Types of funding sources identified by:



MOST

Public or institutional sources (government or multilateral agencies; foundations or charities)



SOME

Community sources (community contributions, member dues)



FEW

Private sector or revenue generation activities

Discussion questions on financial health:

- How diverse and sustainable are my organization's funding sources?
- Are there other sources of wealth beyond funding (such as volunteer labor or partner contributions of meeting materials) that sustain my organization?
- How might we make the case for flexible funding for human rights activists?

More groups report mental health challenges than other security issues

The organizations and individuals working to defend and advance human rights and justice face a variety of challenges, including mental health, digital, physical, or legal security risks and threats. While the survey asked about each security issue separately, the experience and response to these issues can be interconnected.

Nearly 60 percent (167 groups) agree strongly or somewhat that staff or volunteers faced **mental health challenges** in the past year. Of the nearly 40 percent who said otherwise, 70 groups disagree strongly or somewhat and 41 groups are neutral about whether staff or volunteers face such challenges.

MOST GROUPS HAVE INTERNAL WELL-BEING PRACTICES AVAILABLE

An average of 70% of groups have internal measures in place such as:

- Internal dialogue, peer support
- Flexible working arrangements

An average of 29% of groups have external measures in place such as:

- Access to counseling
- Health insurance



MANY REPORT PHYSICAL THREATS TO INDIVIDUALS BUT RELATIVELY FEW OTHER ISSUES

SECURITY ISSUE	TYPE OF RISK OR THREAT	PERCENT	RESPONSES
Physical	Harassment or threats to individuals	40%	113
	Stolen/compromised devices, hardware	22%	61
Digital	Online harassment or smear campaigns	31%	89
	Legal cases or other actions	19%	55
Legal	Restrictions to finances, banking services	14%	39

Discussion questions on holistic security:

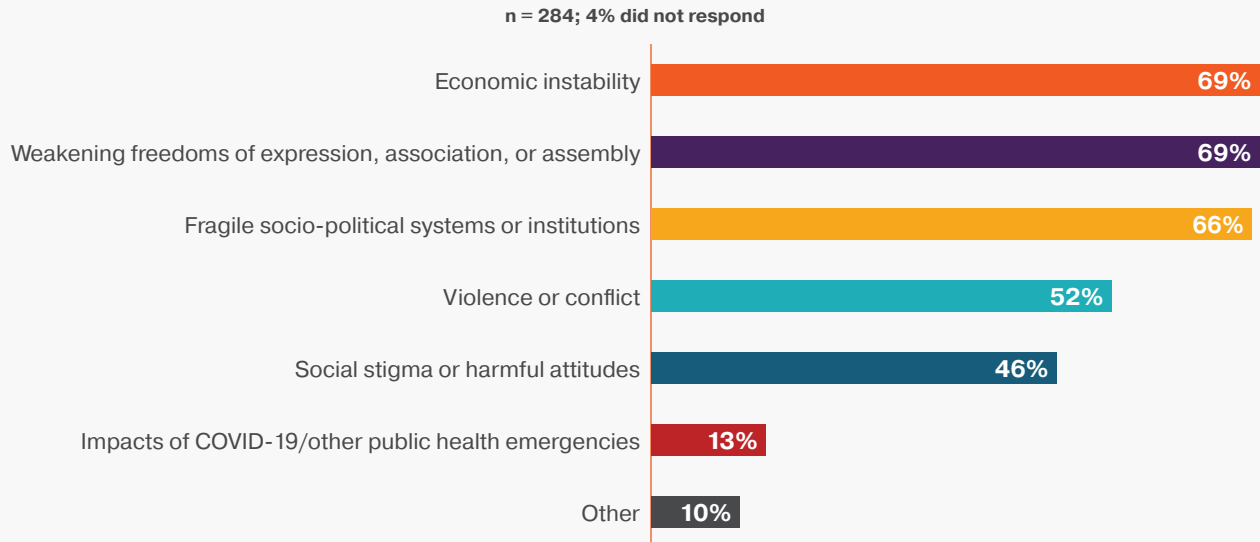
- How is my security experience similar or different to the experiences of other groups?
- How might my group support healthy and inclusive holistic well-being practices?

The external context is shifting and worsening for many partners

In the past year, nearly 70 percent of groups report experiencing direct or indirect **effects of climate change** on their strategic or operational work. Among groups that have experienced such effects, the most common issues are related to community vulnerability or needs, and staff travel and wellbeing.

Compared to last year, 70 percent of groups report worsening **political and social conditions**. Based on partner locations, this aligns with the 2022 CIVICUS Monitor civic space ratings. More than half of respondents are based in countries where civic space is significantly constrained (rated “repressed” by CIVICUS); a smaller proportion of groups face complete closure of civic space (“closed” rating). These freedoms are among the most frequent risks that groups expect to affect their work in the year ahead.

ECONOMIC, CIVIC, AND POLITICAL FRAGILITY ARE THE MOST COMMON RISKS FACING GROUPS IN THE YEAR AHEAD



Discussion questions on the external context:

- How do my organization’s concerns align, or not, with peers or the community we serve?
- What other resources (people, organizations, or data) might my organization draw on to understand and prepare for changing external conditions?

EFFORTS TO PURSUE HUMAN RIGHTS

Groups are using multiple strategies and adapting their approaches

In the last year, grantee partners most commonly report using between five and nine different **human rights strategies** from a list of 14 options. Groups could select multiple options to describe the strategies used regularly during the past year.

TYPES OF STRATEGIES



ADVOCACY

Influence legislation or policy



AWARENESS

Educate others about legal rights and services



BEHAVIOR CHANGE

Practices to shift social attitudes and behaviors



CONNECTION

Build networks or organize others for action



PROTECTION

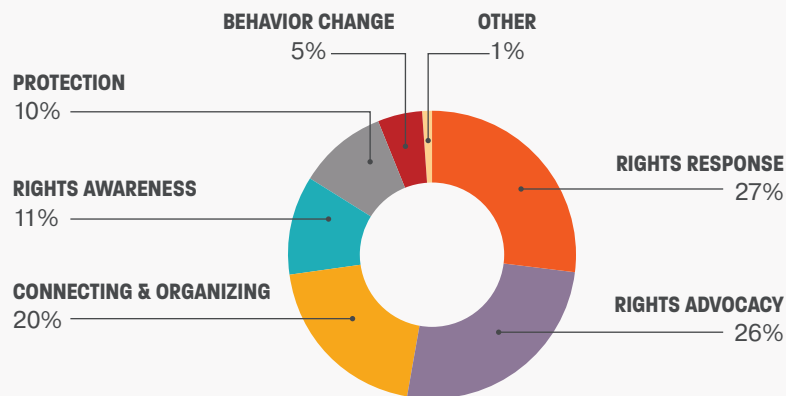
Prevent, mitigate, or respond to threats faced by specific groups of people



LEGAL SERVICES

Provide legal services or other actions to address an injustice

COLLECTIVELY, ALL RESPONSES DEMONSTRATE DIFFERENT, AND OFTEN MULTIPLE, STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE



A minority of groups selected “other” to describe their strategies. These responses remind us of the diversity of strategies used among the Fund’s community of grantee partners.

“Capacity building for both state and non-state actors.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN AFRICA

“[In addition to other strategies] the organization also contributes to the economic empowerment of women and girls, promoting their involvement in the labor market, entrepreneurship and education.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN EUROPE





In the past year, most grantee partners report **adapting their approaches** in response to external or internal changes. Adaptation, with preparation, is a healthy practice for learning and organizational strength. If a group is not prepared or must adapt to one or more crises, such changes can be challenging or even harmful.

More than 50 percent (150 groups) made two or three adjustments in the past year. The most frequently reported adjustments, mentioned by 62 percent, are strategic in nature; context analysis and priorities/goals are each mentioned by more than 170 groups. And 52 percent (148 groups) noted a change in activities or services offered.

Discussion questions on strategies and approaches

- How does the strategy (or strategies) used by my organization contribute to the changes we hope to see?
- How prepared is my organization for strategic or operational internal adaptation?

Groups most frequently face internal barriers to collaboration

	%	Groups
Internal:		
Lack of financial, human resources	64	183
Group dynamics:		
Differences in priorities	45	128
Power imbalances	36	103
External:		
Hostile state, government actors	32	92
Conflict or insecurity	22	63

n=284; could select multiple, 3% did not respond

Groups are using community-centered and collaborative practices

Most grantee partners report relatively **participatory roles for stakeholders in their organization's work**. About 70 percent of respondents indicated that the individuals, groups, or communities they support commonly share feedback, make recommendations, or take decisions with them on their work. And just over a quarter of groups most commonly inform or invite stakeholders to join their work.

Stakeholders are engaged in a variety of ways, most often in the design and delivery of activities; evaluation and learning; building staff skills or knowledge; and co-designing strategy. Less than half of respondents engage their respective communities in risk assessment or mitigation efforts.

Groups report **collaborating with other organizations** on a variety of practices in the past year and would find many of these practices beneficial in the future. Yet respondents note a variety of barriers to collaborating with others.

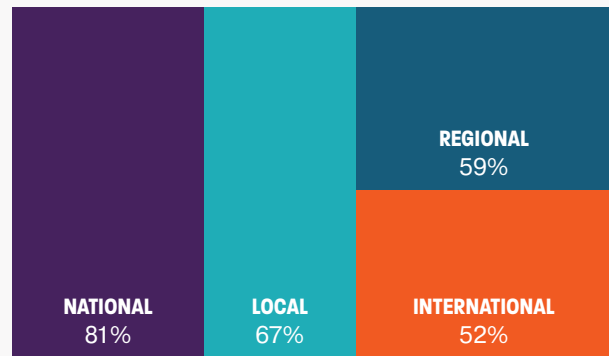
SHARING EXPERIENCES AND LEARNING ARE THE TOP PAST AND FUTURE COLLABORATION PRACTICES



An average of 52 percent of groups report their activities serve a more localized geographic scope at the national, sub-national, or local community levels. A minority of groups report serving multiple countries in the same or different geographic regions. Despite more localized work, more than half of grantee partners report participating in regional or international **networks or coalitions**. This could be a signal of efforts to connect community-based issues with global movements or agendas.

NETWORK OR COALITION PARTICIPATION

n = 284



Discussion questions on community engagement and collaboration with others

- How does my organization engage the community we serve in our work?
- How might we mitigate some of the barriers to collaboration in our work?
- What successes or setbacks has your group experienced in working to connect localized work with global agendas?

CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHANGE

Groups report diverse organizational strengths

Grantee groups most frequently report between three and five different **organizational strengths**, demonstrating a diversity of assets to advance human rights. Among the 284 respondents, these are the more and less common organizational assets selected from the list provided.

More common areas of strength:

- Knowledge and learnings: 90%
- Relationships with others: 74%
- Ability to influence messaging or framing: 50%

Less common areas of strength:

- Intersectional identities of staff or volunteers: 49%
- Storytelling or communications practices: 45%
- Ability to influence policy: 45%
- Access to external decision-making processes: 23%
- Financial resources: 18%

Discussion questions on contributions to change

- How effectively does my organization use its strengths to advance our human rights goals?
- How might my organization partner with others to build our collective power?

“The most valuable aspect of [the Fund’s] support ... is flexibility because it allows the organization to allocate resources.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN AFRICA

“The Fund’s support allows [the organization] to be independent.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN EUROPE



“The trust given to us even if we’re a small organization.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN ASIA

“Confidence in our work.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN THE AMERICAS

FEEDBACK FOR THE FUND

All 284 survey respondents offered feedback on the Fund values and strategies they appreciate most; and 239 groups (84 percent) shared recommendations to improve Fund practices.

Grantees appreciate the Fund's trust-based approach to our work

FUND VALUES

These values drive the standards and quality of the Fund's work:

Respect: We respect the knowledge and wisdom of local activists and trust that they know how best to achieve social change in their communities.

Integrity: We are honest and accountable in our relationships and practices with grantees, board members, donors, peers, and each other.

Agility: We strive to be flexible, responsive, quick, and innovative.

Sustainability: We understand that creating lasting social change is difficult work that takes time.

Inclusivity: We seek to harness the talent and energy of everyone who can contribute to our work, regardless of their background.



These values are demonstrated in what grantees appreciate most about the Fund's support.

Respect for grantee organizational independence and Fund confidence in grantee's work, which is often linked to funding flexibility.

Sustainability of grantee organizations and continuity of their work and services, including for funding that spans for more than one year.

Agility in the Fund's relationship with grantees, financially and operationally, and adaptation of support as grantee contexts shift.

Grantees encourage a long-term perspective in the work we support

Grantee feedback included recommendations related to these Fund values in our work together.

Sustainability in the duration of grants and continued support for long-term impact.

Integrity through active and more regular strategic and operational communications.

Inclusivity in expanding the rights issues and rights-holder groups supported, including targeted training for young people and support for vulnerable children.



“To support attitude change activities, long-term support is more effective.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN AFRICA

“We recommend that FGHR invests more in sustainability planning ... to help grassroots organizations develop the infrastructure needed for a sustainable project.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN EUROPE

“More fluid communication with counterparts. Create spaces for context analysis with partners.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN THE AMERICAS

Funding flexibility allows for organizational strengthening and creativity

FUND GRANTMAKER STRATEGIES

The Fund employs a range of strategies and practices to support human rights activists. We:

- Move financial and technical resources to activists working on the frontlines of human rights struggles, including diverse actors outside of formal human rights organizations.
- Connect community-based groups and promote collaboration across borders and issues.
- Bolster human rights defenders and movements in their resistance to restrictions on activism and provide solidarity and non-financial support.
- Expand constituencies for human rights and promote the legitimacy of human rights organizing.

Most respondents shared appreciation for various qualities of the Fund’s financial resources. This and other grantmaker strategies are most valued by grantee partners.

- **Financial resources** to support core costs and flexibility to meet needs and be creative.
- **Accompaniment** in programmatic design, operational issues, and contribution of ideas.
- **Technical assistance** to support organizational capacity or technical areas like digital security.

“The flexibility of the FGHR fund[s] is a very valuable ... for our association in terms of meeting the needs in the field and filling the gaps.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN EUROPE

“Very cooperative nature, always ready for help, advise and solve any type of problems.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN ASIA

“[Fund staff] have had the capacity to listen and understand the context in which we develop our work, both internally and externally and in our environment.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN THE AMERICAS

“Financial support, co-creation and involvement in strategy around funding to ensure sustainability of work undertaken.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN AFRICA

Grantees recommend mix of funding and partnership with us and peers

Grantee feedback included recommendations to bolster these Fund strategies.

- **Financial resourcing diversity** to combine a primary grant with targeted support, and support for other investments like infrastructure improvements or income generation.
- **Accompaniment** in navigating shifting contexts and threats, and grantee peer coaching.
- **Connections** with peers to share knowledge and learning and introductions to donors.
- **Technical assistance** for general capacity building and technical areas from holistic security issues to legal expertise, and strategic planning and fundraising.

“Strengthening funding ... so that human rights activists live a more decent and humane life. Many human rights activists join political parties and governments because of financial factors.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN ASIA

“[If] organisations could submit an additional application . . . we might request specific funds for infrastructure improvements.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN THE AMERICAS

“Use long standing grantees/partners with track record to mentor or build the capacity of the young or less experienced ones.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN AFRICA

“[C]onsider bringing together different grassroots organization from around the world to share experiences, create networks and work together.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN EUROPE



“Assist in strengthening of collaborations and partnerships with other organizations receiving the fund, both within and outside the human rights sector.”

GRANTEE PARTNER IN AFRICA



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