



# **CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS IMPACT REPORT 2024**

**Submitted by**

**CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

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# IMPACT REPORT 2024

How does the work of Civil Rights Defenders influence the development of civil and political rights?

A full overview of the Civil Rights Defenders' activities during 2024 can be found in the [Annual Report](#). This Impact Report provides an overview of Civil Rights Defenders strategy as well as an in-depth example of Civil Rights Defenders work under the four strategic areas of accountability, capacity, engagement and security.

Civil Rights Defenders is an international, non-profit, human rights organisation that is politically and religiously independent. For over 40 years, Civil Rights Defenders has been working to defend and promote people's civil and political rights and empower human rights defenders at risk around the world. We engage in advocacy activities and legal processes, work with security and capacity building, and provide information on and create engagement for the situations concerning human rights.

Guided by the principle of equal dignity for all, Civil Rights Defenders works toward a world of democratic societies in which we all enjoy our civil and political rights. Conflicts and human rights violations increasingly pervade our world, and a well-functioning, strong, and local civil society is becoming increasingly important. Civil Rights Defenders endeavours to bring about progress in politics, business, and civil society by working and developing together on the important issues of human rights. We believe that our engagement and expertise within our areas of knowledge help to bring about change and a better world for all.

We are a global organisation with a presence on four continents. In 2023, Civil Rights Defenders continued its efforts to support human rights defenders in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eurasia, and Europe. With a long-term perspective, Civil Rights Defenders collaborates with more than 300 human rights organisations in over 50 countries. Together with the human rights defenders in our network, we jointly champion a world of democratic societies where we all enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms.

## CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS' VISION AND MISSION

**Vision:** A world of democratic societies in which we all enjoy our civil and political rights.

**Mission:** Our mission is to defend civil and political rights together with human rights defenders and to increase their security, capacity, and access to justice. We work as a part of a global movement of human rights defenders and partner with those at risk. Through legal means and public advocacy, we hold states, individuals, and non-state actors accountable for human rights violations. We advocate for the norms and values of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other relevant human rights standards, as we encourage people to use these rights to promote democratic societies.

# STRATEGY AND THEORY OF CHANGE

The [Strategy 2023-2030](#) outlines the vision, mission, core values, and strategic goals of Civil Rights Defenders for the period 2023-2030. The strategy emphasises the importance of defending civil and political rights in collaboration with human rights defenders, increasing their security, capacity, and access to justice.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The strategy highlights the decline of democracy and human rights globally, with human rights defenders facing various challenges such as regulatory and legal pressure, discrimination, violence, imprisonment, and public ostracism. Civil Rights Defenders conducted a future trends analysis in 2022, concluding that the decline of democracy and human rights will likely continue and accelerate. The strategy aims to strengthen the global movement for democracy and human rights through collaboration with partners and innovative approaches.

## THEORY OF CHANGE

Civil Rights Defenders' Theory of Change outlines how we aim to achieve our vision of a world where everyone enjoys civil and political rights. The strategy is built on the premise that strong civil societies are essential for democratic societies, and human rights defenders play a crucial role in this process.

The Theory of Change focuses on improving the security and capacity of human rights defenders, enabling them to work effectively and safely. This involves providing tools, support, and training in areas such as human rights, security, legal matters, digitalisation, and good governance. By enhancing the capabilities of human rights defenders, Civil Rights Defenders aims to create a resilient human rights movement that can engage stakeholders and mobilise communities to advocate for human rights and hold violators accountable.

The approach includes legal advocacy through strategic litigation and court cases, as well as political and public advocacy through campaigns and media presence. The goal is to shift the power balance from autocrats to democratic actors, ensuring that decision-makers take action to improve respect for human rights and that duty bearers are held accountable.

## STRATEGIC GOALS

The strategic goals for 2023-2030 are built on Civil Rights Defenders' theory of change and include:

1. **Security:** Ensuring human rights defenders are secure and have the capacity to minimize security risks and mitigate the effects of human rights violations.
2. **Capacity:** Providing innovative, flexible, and defender-centric partner support, and ensuring Civil Rights Defenders is a resilient and sustainable organization.
3. **Engagement:** Expanding decision-makers' narratives in favour of human rights and democracy and creating clear pathways for stakeholders to get involved.

4. **Accountability:** Developing clear and efficient tools and methods to hold duty bearers accountable, ensuring those affected by human rights violations have access to justice.

### Strategic goals and objectives



### ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITIES

To effectively achieve the strategic goals, the organisation needs to develop its organisational capacity. To do this, the organisation continuously works on several focus areas, prioritised areas where the organisation want to develop. Civil Rights Defenders aims to have no more than three focus areas at any given time during the strategic period and develops an action plan for each focus area, detailing the current state to the desired state. Progress within the focus areas is monitored and evaluated quarterly. When the goals within a focus area are completed, it is concluded, and if necessary, new focus areas are developed in accordance with the strategy.

2024 was the second year of the organisation's strategy covering the years 2023–2030. The focus was on continuing to implement and deliver according to the strategy and completing the work that remained within the focus area Organisational Capacity, which began in 2023. No new focus areas were initiated in 2024, but new focus areas will be initiated in 2025.

## CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND OUR RESOURCES

### ORGANISATION

Civil Rights Defenders has an independent, non-profit board of recognised human rights experts. The members of the board are elected during the Annual Meeting, which is the organisation's supreme decision-making body.



The organisation has a secretariat led by the Executive Director, whose task it is to implement the decisions of the board and to handle the day-to-day operation of the organisation. The work of Civil Rights Defenders is primarily carried out by staff based at the organisation's head office in Stockholm, at regional offices, or stationed to locations in Asia, Africa, Belgrade, Bogotá, Istanbul, Juba, Pristina, Sarajevo, Tbilisi, and Tirana. At the end of 2024, the organisation employed 90 people across its 11 offices, compared to 102 at the end of 2023.

Country programmes are managed and coordinated by five regional departments: Africa and MENA, Asia, Eurasia, Europe, and Latin America. The organisation has two thematic departments: the Legal Department, and the Security and Innovation Department in addition to departments for Communications, Fundraising and Partnerships, and Finance and HR.

## **PARTNERS**

We cooperate with more than 350 human rights organisations across East and Horn of Africa, Europe, Eurasia, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Sweden. We believe that local forces are best placed to be driving human rights work due to their permanent presence and closeness to those who face human rights violations. Civil Rights Defenders works with different partners, which can be organisations or individuals with whom we engage in activity-based or contractual collaborations. This may refer to grant partners or collaborative partners within a legally binding or otherwise established project. These partners are referred to as our Activity Partners. Civil Rights Defenders also engages on regular basis with organisations and individuals for the purpose of sharing information, insights, analysis, cooperation, to strengthen our activities and advocacy. These may include similar non-governmental organisations, networks, umbrella organisations, or other trusted contacts within formal bodies institutions. These partners are referred to as our Strategic Partners. In the regions where Civil Rights Defenders works to increase the security and capacity of human rights defenders, we primarily engage with Activity and Strategic Partners that:

- Are human rights defenders or part of human rights-based organisations and communities.
- Are affected by and/or at risk due to policies and practices, which affect their civil and political rights.
- Have limited capacity to perform human rights work and/or formal structures – or partners that represent such actors.
- Have, or that have the potential to, impact on the human rights situation in the local or regional context

## **RESOURCES AND FUNDING**

Civil Rights Defenders is a registered Swedish non-profit organisation with no religious and political affiliation. Our work is financed by governmental organisations and private funders, including foundations, corporate partnerships, and contributions from the general public. The support is essential to ensure our flexibility and ability to act quickly and to target actions where the need is greatest.

The changing security situation in Europe and the changes we see in funding for civil society from public bodies in Sweden and other countries, not least the USA, create uncertainty about how funding of our work from public bodies will develop in the coming years. The global situation presents challenges but also new opportunities for funding from new revenue sources. The organisation's activities will develop and adapt according to the organisation's financial development during the year and to meet the challenges we see in the world.

### **Public Grants**

In 2024, Civil Rights Defenders' revenue from grants from public bodies amounted to a total of 108,115 thousand SEK, which is at the same level as the previous year (108,166 thousand SEK). The largest donors are Sida, followed by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society and the Swedish Institute. Grants from public bodies are important for long-term work both globally and in Sweden

### **Foundations and Organisations**

Foundations and organisations are important donors for Civil Rights Defenders, with 31,501 thousand SEK in revenue in 2024, an increase of just over 1,000 thousand SEK from 2023 (30,418 thousand SEK). The largest donors in 2024 were Open Society Foundation, International Federation for Human Rights, the Gerald and Monica Nagler Foundation, and Defend Defenders.

### **Funds Raised from the General Public**

During the year, Civil Rights Defenders raised 11,578 thousand SEK from private individuals compared to 9,130 thousand SEK in 2023, an increase of 27%. At the same time, revenue from legacies decreased from 866 thousand SEK in 2023 to 249 thousand SEK in 2024, leading to a total increase from the segment of about 18%.

During the year, the focus has been on increasing the number of new donors and monthly donors. This provides a good foundation for follow-up engagement and loyalty work for continuously increasing fundraising from private individuals in the long term. Monthly giving remains important as it enables long-term planning and stability and reduces administrative costs. Growing the donor base through new donors along with continued upgrade activities remains a priority in the coming year.

### **Companies**

During the year, companies contributed 24,081 thousand SEK to Civil Rights Defenders through either long-term collaborations or by giving a one-time donation. In 2023, corresponding revenue from companies was 26,910 thousand SEK, which corresponds to a decrease of 11%. Donations and grants from companies are of great importance to meet challenges going forward, and the organisation continues to focus on strengthening collaborations with companies and organisations.

Civil Rights Defenders has been a beneficiary of the Swedish Postcode Lottery since 2013 and received 10,000 thousand SEK in 2024, as well as additional contributions via the Dream Project. Other important collaborations that contributed to the organisation included Meta.

## **WHY IS CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS' WORK NEEDED?**

Based on the principle of equal rights and dignity for all, Civil Rights Defenders works toward a world of democratic societies in which we can all enjoy civil and political rights. Conflicts and human rights violations increasingly pervade our world, and we believe that a well-functioning, strong, and local civil society is more important than ever.

Civil Rights Defenders aims to contribute towards the expansion the space for human rights defenders by improving their security and capacity, and by increasing stakeholders' engagement for and accountability in relation to civil and political rights. This report will take an in-depth look at particular actions – highlights - supported under the four strategic goals - capacity, accountability, engagement, and security.

### **CAPACITY**

Civil Rights Defenders believes that it is only through a powerful and resilient global human rights movement based on strong civil societies that we can build a democratic world. We are committed to helping human rights defenders manage their work effectively and increase their organisational capacity so that they can make long-term positive change in their countries. We provide human rights defenders in more than 50 countries with innovative, flexible, and defender-centric partner support. Capacity support can take many forms: expert advice, security training, skill, and organisational development, as well as long-term financial support. As support is always based on organisations' specific needs, it can look different in different regions.

Capacity-building work takes many forms. For Civil Rights Defenders it is key to make use of both local and our own expertise to adapt efforts to the local context. In some countries, open training sessions can be held, gathering hundreds of individuals, while in other cases, a three-day training can make a difference for an organisation's work in a challenging context. In Asia, Civil Rights Defenders organised training for a partner organisation in the difficult context they work in, focusing on risk prevention and risk minimisation. In Kyrgyzstan, the democratic space has significantly decreased, and a "foreign agents law" has been introduced. Human rights defenders have been subjected to increasing pressure and attacks. Civil Rights Defenders therefore organised a training for human rights defenders and local organisations to better handle reprisals and threats. The training was conducted by local lawyers.

Through our sub-granting support to partners in Latin America, Civil Rights Defenders has reached 400 human rights defenders from Nicaragua, Colombia, Venezuela, and Honduras. The efforts have in several cases led to human rights defenders being able to collaborate between countries and create regional networks.

### **Highlight: Defenders Days**

In the fall, Civil Rights Defenders organised "Defenders' Days," a three-day conference in Stockholm for our partner organisations and external guests. Defenders' Days Conference, which began in 2013, takes place biannually in Stockholm. It is one of the foremost conferences worldwide for human rights defenders. It offers a secure environment where



these advocates can meet, share, and learn from each other. It's a chance to recharge and take a break from the threats and dangers many of them face in their home countries.

The conference was attended by approximately 120 human rights defenders from around the world with the goal of strengthening the capacity, networks, and security among the participants. The conference included workshops, lectures, and discussions on topics such as digital security, psychosocial health, and advocacy strategies. Participants also had the opportunity to share their experiences and best practices, which contributed to strengthening collaboration between human rights defenders globally.

During the week, journalists, lawyers, environmentalists, Indigenous rights advocates, and LGBTI+ activists from all over the world came together. They participated in trainings on topics ranging from digital security to mental health, joined workshops and discussions, and met with policymakers and civil society representatives in Sweden. Many were also interviewed and featured in Swedish media. And most importantly, they connected, shared experiences, and built their networks.

## **SECURITY**

Being a human rights defender has always been a dangerous job, and it has only gotten more dangerous in recent years. From persecution and harassment to arbitrary arrests and disappearances, defenders on the frontlines face daily threats to their lives and safety. Civil Rights Defenders is dedicated to ensuring that human rights defenders can manage their security effectively and that they always know that we have their back. We have built up a range of tools to help improve the security of human rights defenders no matter what they face. We provide protection, physical equipment, digital security tools, emergency support, and a comprehensive programme of preventive security training opportunities to ensure our partners have the knowledge and tools they need to improve their physical and digital security.

Civil Rights Defenders conducts a range of security trainings for human rights defenders in various formats every year. The Champions of Change programme was a one-year programme organised by Civil Rights Defenders and the East African organisation Zengwe Hub. It aimed at strengthening the security capacity of human rights defenders in the East African region via regional networking, peer learning and tailored workshops and was funded by the Swedish Institute. The programme included elements of psychosocial, digital, and physical security. In 2024, 23 human rights defenders completed the Champions of Change programme.

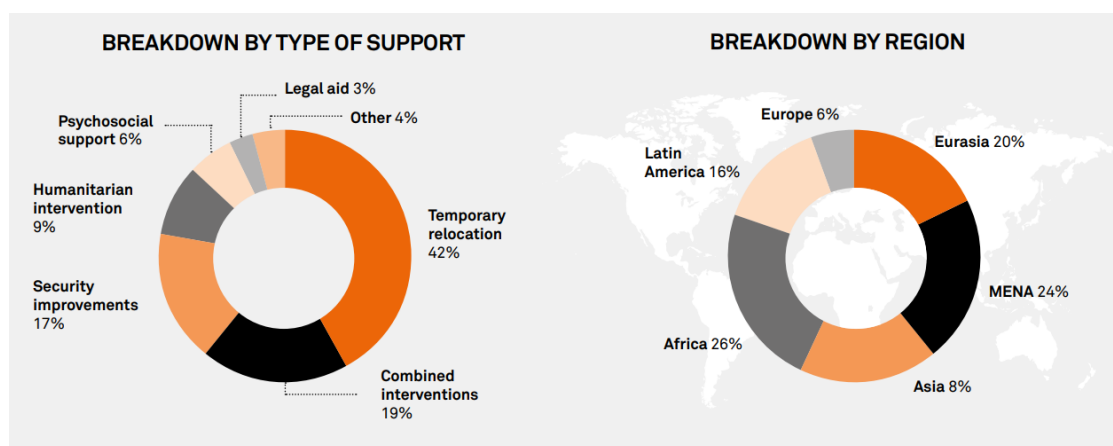
Another example of the importance of security trainings is from when Civil Rights Defenders organised trainings for 66 human rights defenders from Venezuela and Colombia. They were trained in digital, physical, and psychosocial security. Civil Rights Defenders supported with psychological first aid and security advice. During 2024, Civil Rights Defenders focused on working to improve human rights defenders' capacity to handle psychological pressure and physical risks.

### **Highlight: Rapid Support**

Defending human rights in many parts of the world means constantly facing risks and threats. When a human rights defender is confronted with a threatening situation, Civil Rights

Defenders' Emergency Fund provides rapid support to strengthen defenders' security as quickly as possible. For instance, we provide legal aid, temporary relocation of people affected by persecution, and preventive measures such as security trainings and digital security solutions. The aim is to improve human rights defenders' security, so they feel safe enough to continue their work.

In 2024, we provided support to 1,459 human rights defenders, including members of their families, across 34 countries. This marked an 8% increase in total beneficiaries compared to 2023, despite funding cuts. This was possible thanks to our flexibility and adaptability, and our agile approach to change. Yet, despite shrinking funding, the demand for help has not decreased – on the contrary, it has grown. While some regions saw a decline in beneficiaries compared to 2023, others, such as Eurasia and the Middle East & North Africa, saw a 143.5% increase, driven by emerging crises and growing needs.



## ACCOUNTABILITY:

In the work on accountability for grave human rights violations and international crimes during the year, Civil Rights Defenders has spread knowledge and increased engagement around accountability for international crimes. Governments and those in power must be held accountable when human rights are violated. Civil Rights Defenders works – both independently and with human rights defenders in our networks – to influence laws, policies, and legal decisions in Sweden and globally, ensuring they uphold and expand civil and political rights. We also make sure that individuals have access to justice and redress by initiating legal proceedings against those in power when human rights are violated.

As part of the accountability work, Civil Rights Defenders has monitored and reported from the trial against representatives of the former company Lundin Oil, who are charged with complicity in international crimes committed in Sudan (now South Sudan). The trial is unique in the world, and there is great interest both in Sweden and internationally, among lawyers and others. It is particularly important for the organisation to reach out with knowledge to victims and to highlight their perspectives. The trial began in 2023 and is expected to conclude in 2026.

In Asia, Civil Rights Defenders continued to support the work carried out by local civil society organisations that monitor and document human rights violations and cooperate with international mechanisms for accountability.

During 2024, Civil Rights Defenders contributed to several international reviews of compliance with human rights commitments. Together with partner organisations, the organisation participated in the Organisation of American States (OAS) General Assembly meeting in Paraguay and contributed to the discussion on human rights in the region. The organisation also contributed to the UN's review of how Sweden has lived up to commitments in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, focusing on issues related to psychiatric compulsory care and rule of law. In connection with this, Civil Rights Defenders had several meetings with the Minister for Social Services. We also had dialogue with the Parliamentary Ombudsman (Justitieombudsmannen) linked to their mission as the National Preventive Mechanism to prevent inhuman treatment under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (Opcat), as well as with the National Board of Health and Welfare, which has a government mandate to reduce coercion and improve rule of law in compulsory care and forensic psychiatric care. Ahead of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review of Sweden's human rights commitments, we submitted a shadow report during the year, highlighting hate crimes and discrimination, the rights of the Sami as indigenous people, and restrictions on the right to privacy and freedom of assembly. Ahead of the review in May 2025, Civil Rights Defenders will present our views to the council's member states in Geneva.

### **Highlight: End to Impunity**

When perpetrators avoid accountability for their actions, it erodes trust in institutions and fuels cycles of violence and inequality. To tackle this, Civil Rights Defenders, along with eight other civil society organisations and two associate partners, has launched a four-year project: The Global Initiative Against Impunity for International Crimes and Serious Human Rights Violations: Making Justice Work.

Co-funded by the European Union, this initiative spans 27 countries across Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, while also focusing on strengthening global accountability frameworks. The project, formally launched during an event in June 2024, addresses serious human rights violations and international crimes such as genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and torture. It aims to support survivors by making sure their voices are heard in justice processes and to improve accountability by fostering better cooperation between survivors, justice providers, and policymakers. It also advocates for justice systems that are sensitive to trauma and gender issues. In the summer, Civil Rights Defenders invited civil society organisations across the world to apply for grants to support efforts to combat impunity. By the end of fall, 16 out of more than 700 applications had been selected for funding. The project also includes an Emergency Fund component that provides security support and small grants to those facing threats for seeking justice for serious human rights abuses. In 2024, we supported 252 individuals via this mechanism across six countries

## **ENGAGEMENT**

An important part of Civil Rights Defenders' work to create engagement is to provide human rights defenders with a platform where their voices can be heard. In this way, knowledge about the abuses activists is subjected to and the crimes committed is spread. In Latin

America, Civil Rights Defenders supported a film festival where directors from Venezuela, Colombia, and Nicaragua showed films about the human rights violations occurring in these countries. University students attended and interacted with the films directors to learn about the human rights situation. In Ukraine, Civil Rights Defenders worked with the NGO Public Television to raise awareness and engagement around the challenges human rights face in the ongoing war, specifically regarding freedom of expression. By highlighting and reporting on this, broad engagement was created, leading to changes in behaviours, policies, and practices within institutions.

Every year the Civil Rights Defenders of the Year Award is held. In 2024, it was awarded to Mariia Sulialina, who leads the Ukrainian human rights organisation Almenda. She received the award for her work in giving a voice to Ukrainian children in the occupied territories who are subjected to both indoctrination and the risk of being deported to Russia.

### **Highlight: The “Snitch Law”**

In 2024, Civil Rights Defenders launched a broad campaign to highlight the controversial government preparation of a proposal for a law forcing public sector workers to report undocumented people to authorities (commonly known as the “snitch law”).

The campaign quickly spread and gathered 45 civil society organisations that supported a joint statement in three of Sweden’s largest daily newspapers, reaching 1.25 million readers. The campaign contributed to the government’s proposed legislation being less extensive than feared.

## **THE COSTS OF CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS’ OPERATIONS**

Civil Rights Defenders’ operating revenue in 2024 amounted to a total of 175,766 thousand SEK, which is at the same level as 2023 (175,590 thousand SEK). The revenue comes from both governmental and private sources and includes both donations and grants

Fundraising revenue for 2024 amounted to 22,336 thousand SEK, which is a slight decrease of 3.4% compared to the previous year (23,113 thousand SEK). To ensure continued financial strength and long-term stability, the organisation, in accordance with its strategy 2023–2030, has continued to work to diversify the donor portfolio, where increased fundraising from private financiers remains a priority. The intention is also to continue developing collaborations with companies, foundations, and philanthropists to have more diversified funding for the organisation and thereby reduce the risk of being too heavily tied to one donor.

# LESSONS LEARNED AND HOW CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS MEASURE ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

Civil Rights Defenders various programmes have different built-in reporting and evaluation systems. Overall, Civil Rights Defenders employs a comprehensive approach to measure results and outcomes, primarily using a Results-Based Management (RBM) framework. In 2024 Civil Rights Defenders developed guiding principles to further ground the work in to being a defender-centric organisation. The RBM approach involves several key elements:]:

1. **Identifying Clear and Measurable Objectives:** Civil Rights Defenders sets specific goals that they aim to achieve through their activities. These objectives are clearly defined and measurable to ensure that progress can be tracked effectively
2. **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Civil Rights Defenders outlines how monitoring and evaluation activities will be carried out and the types of indicators that will be used to measure performance. This includes both internal and external evaluations, which are systematic studies using research methods to address specific questions about the program's performance
3. **Outcome Mapping:** This is a key part of our strategy, where we map out the expected outcomes and track progress towards these goals
4. **Custom Indicators:** In addition to standard indicators, Civil Rights Defenders encourages the use of custom output and outcome indicators tailored to the program logic and measures progress toward program objectives

## Example: The Emergency Fund

To measure results within the Emergency Fund, Civil Rights Defenders employs a systematic approach that includes several key components:

1. **Verification and Due Diligence:** Each application for emergency support undergoes a thorough verification and due diligence process to ensure the legitimacy and urgency of the request
2. **Tailor-Made Risk Assessment:** Civil Rights Defenders conducts a risk assessment for each case to tailor the support based on the specific needs and threats faced by the human rights defenders
3. **Outcome Reporting:** Beneficiaries of the Emergency Fund are required to submit a narrative report and a financial report detailing the outcomes of the support received. This includes information on how the support improved their security situation and enabled them to continue their work
4. **Impact Indicators:** Civil Rights Defenders tracks the number of human rights defenders (HRDs), and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) supported through the Emergency Fund within the calendar year. This helps in assessing the reach and effectiveness of the fund

5. **Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:** Civil Rights Defenders continuously monitors and evaluates the impact of the Emergency Fund through various tools and methods, including feedback from beneficiaries and regular reviews of the support provided

These measures ensure that the Emergency Fund is effectively supporting human rights defenders in need and that the results are systematically documented and analysed for continuous improvement.