



20 25

ANNUAL REPORT





CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS

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Graphic design: Petra Handin/Poppi Design

Cover photo: Drone footage by Hristifor Marković captures hundreds of thousands of people gathered in Belgrade in March 2025 – the largest protest in Serbia's recent history, and a year in the making.

CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS is a politically and religiously independent human rights organisation. For more than 40 years, we have supported and worked with human rights defenders in some of the world's most repressive countries. We operate on four continents, with our headquarters in Stockholm. Through advocacy, litigation, and campaigns, we defend people's civil and political rights.

50

Civil Rights Defenders supports human rights defenders in more than 50 countries and has a local presence in nine countries.

250

Since its launch in 2013, more than 250 human rights defenders have participated in the Natalia Project – the world's first GPS-based alarm system for human rights defenders at risk.

2,302

In 2025, we provided emergency support to 2,302 human rights defenders, including members of their families, across 50 countries.

88%

In 2025, 88 per cent of Civil Rights Defenders' total income went to programme expenses.

300

Civil Rights Defenders works with more than 300 human rights organisations across the world.

64,136

In 2025, the number of private individual donations reached 64,136. This is the highest number we have reached so far, thanks to supporters of democracy and human rights.

LATIN AMERICA

In Latin America, more human rights defenders are killed than anywhere else in the world. Severe human rights violations and declining democracy are forcing many human rights defenders into exile, or they face daily risks to them and their families. We provide long-term capacity building, holistic security, and digital solutions to support defenders to achieve greater impact while exercising their right to defend rights. We also support human rights organisations through international advocacy at the EU, UN, OAS, and IACHR. Civil Rights Defenders regional office is located in Bogotá, Colombia.

EUROPE

Across the Western Balkans and Turkey, democratic backsliding is structural, not episodic. Independent media and human rights defenders face smear campaigns, digital attacks, lawsuits, and arrests, while institutions fail to ensure accountability. We provide core support, protection, and capacity building, strengthening investigative journalism, legal aid, and grassroots movements, with a focus on youth and local actors. We connect national and regional struggles to EU advocacy, pushing for rule of law and freedom of expression to turn commitments into change in practice.

AFRICA

Africa's human rights landscape is characterised by a youthful population, evolving economic opportunities, ongoing conflicts, and persistent patterns of authoritarian governance. Civil Rights Defenders supports human rights defenders who strive to promote and defend human rights values at both grassroots and national levels. Women and young human rights defenders and their networks are at the forefront of our collaboration with local stakeholders. Our work on the continent focuses on enhancing organisational resilience and ensuring the individual safety of human rights defenders.

SWEDEN

While Sweden has made significant progress in the field of human rights, serious shortcomings remain. The country is often regarded as a vocal advocate for human rights globally, yet in recent years the protection of these rights and the principles of the rule of law have increasingly been weakened. Civil Rights Defenders works, among other things, to combat discrimination and hate crime, and to strengthen the rights of migrants and the rights of minorities. Through strategic litigation, advocacy, and raising issues at the political level, we hold those in power to account.

MENA

Throughout the Middle East and North Africa region, civil and political rights are severely repressed. Human rights defenders are subjected to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, discrimination, and other human rights violations. We partner with human rights defenders to monitor and report on human rights conditions in the countries where we operate. We support regional networks, initiatives, and projects working on three major themes: justice and the rule of law, discrimination, and freedom of expression.

EURASIA

A lack of respect for human rights is pervasive throughout Eurasia. Critics and activists are imprisoned and persecuted on political grounds, and freedom of expression is highly restricted. Repressive laws are regularly adopted, making it difficult for human rights defenders to work safely. Ukrainian civil society faces increasing challenges and risks due to the ongoing war. Civil Rights Defenders supported more than 40 partner organisations in advocacy, capacity, security and accountability.

ASIA

Democracy and human rights are deteriorating in much of Asia, where repressive laws silence critics and restrict civil society. Conflict in Burma following the 2021 coup has further restricted activists. We support human rights defenders facing risks so they can continue their work despite threats, while also strengthening their capacity to document human rights violations for use in transitional justice processes and advocacy. In the region, Gen Z-led protests have sparked cautious hope for more democratic governance and respect for human rights.

DEMOCRATISATION IN ACTION – RESISTING AND COUNTERING AUTOCRATISATION



Sofia Walan, Executive Director and Hanna Gerdes, Chair of the Board.

In 2025, the global struggle for democracy and human rights reached a defining moment. For more than a quarter of a century, democratic norms, accountability mechanisms, and fundamental freedoms have steadily eroded, to the point where over 70% of the world’s population now live under autocratic rule.¹⁾

Civic space continues to shrink, independent media are under attack, disinformation is increasingly normalised, and laws and institutions are weaponised to silence critics. Authoritarian actors are more coordinated and confident than ever, while international norms designed to safeguard rights are contested, selectively applied, or being ignored altogether.

Yet even in this challenging landscape, powerful signs of hope persist. Under the harshest conditions marked by conflict, repression, or both, individuals and communities continue to defend their rights, demand accountability, and uphold human dignity. These pockets of resistance remind us why Civil Rights Defenders exists, and why our

mission remains indispensable. Courageous human rights defenders, youth movements, lawyers, and independent journalists show every day that the desire for democracy is stronger than the forces trying to extinguish it.

Across the world, citizens and civil society actors are pushing back in ways that inspire us. In Venezuela, they continue to demand a democratic transition after the removal of Nicolás Maduro by the United States. In Georgia, despite the government’s escalating repression through legislation aimed at discrediting NGOs and media, and coordinated efforts to dismantle civil society, human rights defenders and independent journalists continue to resist with remarkable courage.

1) V-DEM Democracy Report 2026

Since the canopy collapse at the Novi Sad train station in late 2024, Serbia has experienced one of the most sustained waves of civic mobilisation in decades with unrelenting young activists demanding accountability. Gen Z-led movements across several African countries have mobilised tens of thousands in calls for democratic reform and an end to corruption, skilfully using social media to challenge entrenched elites. Their efforts demonstrate that autocratisation can be confronted and that democratisation becomes possible when we stand united.

Our history equips us for this moment. Civil Rights Defenders was born out of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, which affirmed the centrality of civil and political rights and recognised the profound connection between peace, security,

and human rights. Created to hold governments accountable and support human rights defenders behind the Iron Curtain, we continue this mission five decades later. As the principles of the post-war international order face unprecedented strain, our purpose remains unchanged: to stand with those who defend the rights of others and to help build societies rooted in democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. We believe in a world of democratic societies in which we all enjoy our civil and political rights, because we understand that we are all better off when we can live our lives freely and with dignity.

We are deeply concerned by a rapidly tightening funding landscape for civil society worldwide. Geopolitical crises and shifting donor priorities are leaving many organisations

without the resources needed to safeguard fundamental freedoms and forcing countless others to close at the very moment when sustained, flexible funding is essential to halt and reverse the tide of autocratisation.

The challenges of 2025 demand clarity of purpose and unwavering commitment going forward. Civil Rights Defenders will continue to amplify frontline voices, protect human rights defenders at risk, and strengthen the global human rights movement in a time of extraordinary pressure. The struggle for democracy and human rights is far from over, but it is one we meet together.

Hanna Gerdes, Chair of the Board

Sofia Walan, Executive Director

“ Courageous human rights defenders, youth movements, lawyers, and independent journalists show every day that the desire for democracy is stronger than the forces trying to extinguish it.”



HOPE IS LOUDER THAN FEAR: THE LARGEST PROTEST MOVEMENT IN SERBIA'S HISTORY

In 2025, Serbia saw the largest protest movement in its recent history. Sparked by the tragic collapse of the Novi Sad train station canopy, an incident that killed 16 people, the student-led vigils quickly grew into a nationwide call for justice and accountability. Over the course of a year, peaceful actions spread from major cities to small communities, drawing hundreds of thousands into marches, blockades, and moments of silence.

The movement introduced new forms of civic activism, from long-distance protest runs to international advocacy efforts, all aimed at exposing corruption and systemic failures. Despite repression, surveillance, and attempts to silence dissent, the protests remained a powerful display of unity and a reminder that hope can be louder than fear.

The events also served as inspiration to one of Civil Rights Defenders' most impactful moments on social media ever, highlighting *the largest protest movement in Serbia's history*. The post was seen by over 1.2 million people.

PHOTO: STEVAN FILIPOVIC



OUR VISION

**A WORLD OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES
IN WHICH WE ALL ENJOY OUR CIVIL
AND POLITICAL RIGHTS**

OUR STRATEGY 2023–2030



PHOTO: AJ COLORES, UNSPLASH.COM

Democracy and human rights are in decline, and human rights defenders in all parts of the world face an abundance of challenges.

Based on our future trends analysis, our strategy factors in that the current decline of democracy and human rights will continue and will likely accelerate. Civil society and human rights defenders around the world will be under increasing pressure: increasing regulatory and legal pressure; increasing discrimination based on the intersection of

gender and other identities; increasing violence, imprisonment, and public ostracism; and increasingly innovative methods for repression. Human rights defenders will also contend with changing funding opportunities and a rapidly evolving digital environment.

Stopping and reversing the decline of human rights and democracy globally is possible. But doing so requires that Civil Rights Defenders and our partners around the world become stronger and even more innovative in the years to come. Authoritarianism is contagious, and authoritarian regimes listen and learn from each other, sharing information and tactics.

Human rights defenders and democratic forces must do the same by working together to build a global human rights movement that is powerful and resilient.

Our strategy for 2023–2030 aims to meet these challenges. It is based on input from our global network of partners and builds on our vision, mission, core values, and theory of change. It describes our contribution to strengthening the global movement for democracy and human rights through delivering on our four strategic goals: security, capacity, accountability, and engagement.

CORE VALUES



STRATEGIC GOALS



SECURITY

Human rights defenders are secure.



CAPACITY

Human rights defenders have the capacity to defend human rights and democracy.



ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholders in society take action for human rights and democracy.



ACCOUNTABILITY

Duty bearers are held accountable.



NEW RISKS – INNOVATIVE SECURITY SOLUTIONS

Being a human rights defender remains one of the most courageous and most dangerous roles in the world today. Across regions, defenders continue to speak out against injustice, document violations, and stand up for democratic freedoms, often in environments where intimidation, surveillance, digital attacks, and arbitrary detention are part of daily life. The risks are high, and they continue to grow.

Civil Rights Defenders are committed to ensuring that human rights defenders can manage these risks effectively and that they never face emergencies alone. When threats escalate suddenly, rapid and reliable support can make the difference between safety and severe harm.

To meet these needs, we provide a broad range of tools designed to strengthen security before, during, and after crises. This includes protection measures, physical equipment, digital security tools, emergency financial support, and a comprehensive programme of preventive security training. Together, these measures help defenders reinforce their security practices, respond to urgent threats, and continue their work as safely as possible. Their courage should never come at the expense of their safety.

“ *Through the Emergency Fund, we help ensure that human rights defenders are safe enough to keep going, in their work, in their communities, and in their efforts to advance human rights.”*

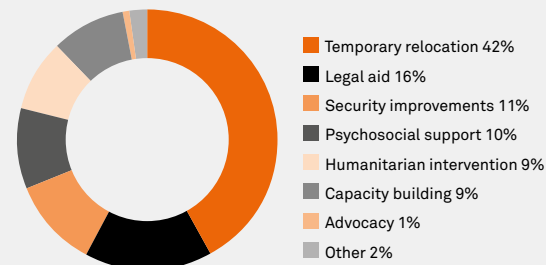
Ana Maria Mendoza, Emergency Fund Programme Lead

EMERGENCY FUND SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

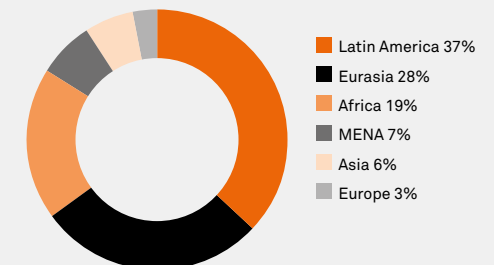
Defending human rights in many parts of the world means facing persistent risks, pressure, and escalating threats. When a human rights defender encounters a dangerous situation, Civil Rights Defenders’ Emergency Fund provides rapid and targeted support to strengthen their safety as quickly as possible. This assistance ranges from legal aid and temporary relocation for those experiencing persecution, to preventive measures such as security training and enhanced digital protection. Each intervention aims to ensure that defenders feel secure enough to continue their essential work.

In 2025, the Emergency Fund supported 2,302 human rights defenders, including family members, across 29 countries, a 57% increase from 2024. This development was made possible by our flexible, adaptive methods and our ability to respond swiftly to evolving risks. However, while resources have decreased, the demand for emergency assistance has continued to rise. We saw a decline in applications for emergency funds from some regions compared to 2024, others, particularly Eurasia and Latin America and the Caribbean, experienced an increase, reflecting sustained crackdowns on civic space, growing criminalisation of dissent, and deepening political repression.

BREAKDOWN BY TYPE OF SUPPORT



BREAKDOWN BY REGION



NATALIA PROJECT

THEY TRIED TO SILENCE HIM. INSTEAD – HE BECAME THEIR VOICE

Environmental defender Peter Komora is one of many human rights defenders supported through Civil Rights Defenders’ Natalia Project. Working along Kenya’s coast, he challenges powerful companies whose operations displace communities and pollute local water sources. It is work that has exposed him to serious threats.

One evening, he was surrounded by six workers sent to kill him. Though he survived, the threats continued, forcing him to relocate his family and hide while local mediation restored a fragile peace.

Months later, the situation took an unexpected turn: some of the same men involved in the attack sought Peter’s help to address poor working conditions at the company. By facilitating dialogue between workers and management, Peter helped achieve meaningful improvements, building trust even with former attackers.

Peter has been part of the Natalia Project since 2016. Although he did not activate the alarm during this incident, knowing that support is only a button-press away remains crucial for his safety.

“The Natalia Project is an incredibly important resource for human rights defenders,” says Peter Komora.

Through the Natalia Project, Civil Rights Defenders strengthen security for those who risk the most to protect others.



BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND STRENGTHENING SECURITY THROUGH SOLIDARITY



Discussions about personal security taking place in Chisinau.



Human rights defender Anna from the Ukrainian organisation Almenda.

In 2025, Civil Rights Defenders continued advancing our commitment to strengthening the security capacities and resilience of human rights defenders worldwide. A powerful and sustainable human rights movement depends not only on professional skills and resources, but also on collective strength, psychosocial wellbeing, and the security of those who lead the fight for democratic freedoms.

As part of this work, during November 2025, we brought together 24 human rights defenders from across the EU Eastern Partnership countries for a six-day programme in Chisinau, Moldova, under our new initiative *Resilience Agenda: Solidarity Community for Secure Activism*. The gathering created a vital space where activists could learn from one another, build trust, and explore how community-based approaches enhance security in increasingly repressive environments.

Throughout the week, participants shared experiences from their diverse fields, from supporting LGBTI+ communities, documenting war crimes, and advocating for political prisoners. Many face daily risks: surveillance, disinformation campaigns, and the emotional strain of working with highly vulnerable groups. By identifying common challenges

and exchanging practical strategies, the group worked collectively to strengthen psychosocial resilience and develop tools to protect their wellbeing.

The workshops underscored a crucial message: effective security is holistic. It extends beyond protocols and technology to relationships, networks, and solidarity that enable defenders to continue their work despite immense pressure. For many, the most valuable outcome of the programme was the recognition that they do not stand alone. Across borders and backgrounds, they form part of a larger community committed to protecting human rights.

The Resilience Agenda now continues, with another planned gathering during the fall of 2026, as well as online where participants will keep developing shared methods, tools, and

long-term support structures. Together, they are shaping a strong informal regional network capable of sustaining activism through both crisis and change.

Through initiatives like this, Civil Rights Defenders remains steadfast in our mission: to equip human rights defenders with the skills, strategies, and support systems they need to thrive, and to ensure that those who work for democratic rights never have to do so in isolation.

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN ACTION – AMPLIFYING SURVIVOR-LED MOVEMENTS

In 2025, Civil Rights Defenders continued our engagement in the Global Initiative Against Impunity (GIAI) for International Crimes and Serious Human Rights Violations: *Making Justice Work*. Following the initiative's launch in 2024, this year saw the release of *Transitional Justice in Action*, a visual booklet developed with Impunity Watch that highlights grassroots movements resisting impunity.

Through stories from diverse contexts, the publication shows how communities, survivors,

and civil society organisations continue to pursue justice despite worsening crises and shrinking civic space. Their work demonstrates the importance of transitional justice initiatives that are grounded in local realities and driven by those most affected.

The booklet is part of our broader commitment through the GIAI to strengthen accountability, centre survivors' voices, and support organisations confronting serious human rights violations.



PHOTO: TINGEY INJURY LAW FIRM, UNFLASH.COM

ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST IMPUNITY

The Global Initiative Against Impunity for International Crimes and Serious Human Rights Violations (GIAI) is a consortium of nine international non-profit organisations, including Civil Rights Defenders. The initiative is co-funded by the European Union and aims to contribute to the fight against impunity. MakingJusticeWork.org is one of the key programmes carried out within the framework of the initiative.

The other members of GIAI are the Coalition for the International

Criminal Court (CICC), the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), Impunity Watch, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA), Redress, TRIAL International and Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice.



Plaintiffs from the Lundin Oil trial.

DRIVING AWARENESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE LUNDIN OIL TRIAL

During 2025, Civil Rights Defenders continued to closely monitor the Lundin Oil trial and drew sustained engagement from lawyers, journalists, and international media.

Our weekly reporting from the Stockholm District Court helped shape public and professional understanding of the case and its broader implications for accountability for grave international crimes and the importance of survivor-centred justice processes. Outlets such as the *New York Times*, Swedish TV4, Global Idé podcast and several independent journalists sought out our analysis and produced coverage grounded in our reports.

To deepen awareness and broaden the conversation, Civil Rights Defenders also

organised a seminar focused on key issues raised by the trial, including the OECD National Contact Point for Norway finding on inadequate human rights due diligence, the role of journalism in war crimes cases, and the experiences of plaintiffs testifying abroad. Four plaintiffs participated, sharing insights on seeking justice while coping with trauma, threats, and loss. The seminar strengthened understanding of the systemic barriers victims face and amplified survivor centred perspectives at a crucial moment in the trial.

ENGAGEMENT DRIVES CHANGE

In 2025, Civil Rights Defenders intensified efforts to strengthen accountability and access to justice for children in Sweden, as new political proposals risked weakening existing protections for children's rights. These included proposals for youth detention centres, restrictions on family reunification, and lowering the age of criminal responsibility.



Dejan Bojanic, Rädna Barnens Ungdomsförbund, Trond Scholtens Pennanen and Sofia Walan, Civil Rights Defenders when presenting the 10,600 signatures to Camilla Waltersson Grönvall, Minister for Social Services.

Despite the Convention on the Rights of the Child being law in Sweden, children still lack effective access to justice, as Sweden has not ratified the Third Optional Protocol, which would allow them to bring complaints to the UN if their rights are violated and national systems fail. During the UN's Universal Periodic Review in May 2025, Sweden again faced criticism for failing to ratify, despite repeated recommendations and a 2023 Swedish government inquiry finding ratification necessary.



THERE IS A BETTER WAY TO PROTECT CHILDREN

Through the campaign *There Is a Better Way to Protect Children*, Civil Rights Defenders mobilised public support to close this critical gap. In November 2025, 12-year-old Trond from Solna joined Civil Rights Defenders in handing over 10,600 signatures to the Minister for Social Services, Camilla Waltersson Grönvall, calling on the government to ratify the protocol. The campaign highlighted that a law is only as strong as the mechanisms available to enforce it, and that children deserve the same rights as adults to seek justice and hold the state accountable.

A DIFFERENT REALITY: CHALLENGING THE NARRATIVE ON MIGRATION

In late 2025, Civil Rights Defenders launched *A Different Reality*, a campaign aimed at shifting Sweden’s migration debate by highlighting the lived experiences of people forced to flee. Through personal stories, the campaign underscores that the right to asylum is a matter of life and death and challenges the increasingly harsh public rhetoric.

To expand its reach, the campaign partners with artists, influencers, and public figures who lend their social media channels to amplify the voices of displaced people. The shared message, “*Together, we stand up for the right to asylum*”, is paired with a digital pledge that has gathered several thousand signatures.

Since the launch, the campaign has featured the stories of Silvi (from Syria), Dieu-Merci (from the Democratic Republic of the Congo), and Ali (from Afghanistan), each having rebuilt their lives in Sweden after years of uncertainty. Collaborations include comedian Hermanoerkano, gaming streamer Alix Ablaze, food content creator Khadijas Kitchen, and music artist Cherrie.



KNOWLEDGE, ACTION, AND DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

In 2025, Backa Demokratin¹⁾ brought people together to defend democratic rights as new laws and proposals threatened key freedoms. We reviewed proposals linked to the Tidö Agreement, a policy framework for Sweden’s right-wing parties and the Sweden Democrats, shaping major reforms in areas such as crime and migration, showing how fast legislative changes can weaken vital protections.

Our expanding online community of 40,000 subscribers helped spread knowledge and mobilise action. We also made Backa Demokratin’s extensive database of rights-based analyses more accessible to anyone wanting to understand not just the proposals themselves, but the real-world consequences they have for people’s rights and for Sweden’s democratic foundations.

Throughout the year, Backa Demokratin also hosted meet-ups, discussions, and breakfast seminars, creating spaces where people could learn more, ask questions, and engage directly with experts on democracy and human rights.

¹⁾ Backa Demokratin – Defend Democracy, is Civil Rights Defenders’ public mobilisation community that helps people understand, monitor, and resist political proposals that threaten Sweden’s democratic rights. As part of the project, Backa Demokratin acts as a watchdog in close collaboration with civil society to defend democratic space and accountability.



KÄFTEN! – THE FREE SPEECH BATTLE

Democracy is declining, freedom of expression is under attack, and the space for democratic discourse is shrinking worldwide. To illustrate what is at stake, Civil Rights Defenders created KÄFTEN! – the Free Speech Battle. A fast-paced game where freedom of expression is at the centre. To win, you must limit others' ability to express themselves.

The game uses humour to illustrate how freedom of expression can slowly erode through small restrictions. By turning a serious democratic threat into an accessible, conversation-starting format, the game keeps on bringing discussions about free speech into homes, schools, workplaces, and gaming groups across the country.

KÄFTEN! was launched in November. The campaign exceeded expectations: Over 3,000 copies were sold, and the game received a lot of positive public attention, including a 4/5 rating in Bonnier's (Sweden's largest media group) game review.

With KÄFTEN! Civil Rights Defenders demonstrated how creative and courageous approaches can strengthen the democratic conversation, making the defence of free expression both engaging and informative. The initiative, once again, highlighted that play can be a powerful tool for understanding real risks to democracy.





CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS ON STAGE AT ALMEDALEN 2025

Civil Rights Defenders' Chair of the Board, Hanna Gerdes, was invited to hold an inaugural speech at the official opening of Almedalen Week 2025, sharing the stage with Björn Ulvaeus and Jan Scherman in a programme dedicated to democracy, freedom of expression, and hope for the future.

In her address, Hanna highlighted the global democratic backslide and the responsibility each of us carries to protect human rights, drawing on stories of courage from activists around the world. Her message echoed through her speech:

That defending democracy requires engagement, integrity, and the refusal to stay silent.

This marked an important moment for Civil Rights Defenders, underscoring our role in safeguarding democratic values in Sweden and beyond.

The Almedalen Week is an annual democratic forum held in Visby, Gotland where politicians, businesses, civil society and the public gather for discussions, speeches and debates. It is considered one of Sweden's most important political arenas. The week-long event is known for its informal atmosphere, where anyone can join conversations and meet decision-makers, creating an open and inclusive setting for political dialogue.

ENGAGING IN GLOBAL GENDER EQUALITY EFFORTS AT THE UN

In 2025, Civil Rights Defenders joined Sweden's official delegation to the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Represented by Chair of the Board Hanna Gerdes, we contributed to high-level discussions marking the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. Our participation underscored a core message: attacks on women's and LGBTI+ rights are warning signs of democratic backsliding, and gender equality is essential to safeguarding democracy and human rights worldwide. We highlighted the growing global anti-gender movement as part of a broader authoritarian push, underscoring the need for renewed political commitment to protect gender equality, democracy, and human rights.



Chair of the Board, Hanna Gerdes, attends the CSW69 Townhall in the United Nations General Assembly Hall.

“ We can never step away from responsibility for our times by expecting a hero to solve everything. That responsibility is ours to take, ourselves and together.”



PHOTO: FILM&TELL



SYRIAN CENTER FOR MEDIA AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDER OF THE YEAR AWARD 2025

From documenting violations inside Syria to triggering landmark legal action in European courts, the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) has reshaped the international pursuit of accountability. Their impact was recognised with the Civil Rights Defender of the Year Award 2025.

The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) has long been a lifeline for truth in a country where reporting facts can cost one's freedom, or one's life. Now, they're internationally acknowledged for transforming documentation of mass atrocities into legal action with global reach. As stated in the Board of Civil Rights Defenders motivation, "For over twenty years, they have been relentless advocates against oppression ...

exposing war crimes and holding perpetrators accountable, even from exile."

A JOURNEY FROM REPRESSION TO EXILE, AND STRATEGIC REINVENTION

Founded in 2004 by Mazen Darwish, SCM began with a small team tracking abuses against journalists. Over time, their work would evolve into one of the world's most robust civil society efforts to document war crimes.

"In Syria, no journalist writes freely... We used to joke that the news lied about everything, even the weather," says Programme Manager Yara Bader.

The turning point came during the 2011 uprising, which marked a decisive shift.

As violence escalated, SCM created the Violations Documentation Center (VDC), building a structured, evidence-based archive of thousands of cases. “We realised our small documentation unit couldn’t keep up... We believe this is why we were arrested,” Darwish recalls. After raids, arrests, torture, and nearly four years of imprisonment for Darwish, SCM re-established itself in exile in 2016, this time with a strategic goal, legal accountability.

LEGAL BREAKTHROUGHS CHALLENGE IMPUNITY

This shift yielded unprecedented results. SCM’s meticulous evidence has fuelled universal jurisdiction cases in Germany, Austria, France, and Sweden, enabling prosecutors to pursue high level perpetrators regardless of borders. Their work contributed to the historic French arrest warrant issued in 2023 for Bashar al-Assad, the first time a sitting president has faced such charges in another country.

“We keep fighting because it’s important for victims everywhere... No immunity for war crimes,” Darwish insists.

SUSTAINING THE FIGHT FOR SYRIA’S FUTURE

Beyond litigation, SCM’s impact extends to survivors seeking recognition and redress, international bodies relying on their expertise, and a broader legal landscape now more willing to challenge firmly rooted impunity. As Mazen and Yara note, the award “arrived at a pivotal moment... restoring our hope that we are on the right path.”

Despite displacement, threats, and the loss of colleagues, SCM continues to document chemical attacks, disappearances, and mass atrocities, ensuring that evidence cannot be erased. Yara reflects: “I don’t think Syrians are asking for much. Freedom to read a book without asking is this book allowed?”

For SCM, justice remains fundamental to Syria’s future. “It’s not a luxury... If we succeed in a respectful transitional justice process, then there’s hope,” says Darwish.

SCM received the award during a ceremony in Stockholm on 13 May 2025.



Yara Bader
Syrian journalist,
human rights defender, and
Programmes Manager at SCM



Mazen Darwish
Syrian lawyer and
General Director at SCM

ABOUT THE CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Since 2013, each year Civil Rights Defenders presents the Civil Rights Defender of the Year Award to a human rights defender, organisation, or project that, despite the risk to their own safety, continues the fight for civil and political rights. The recipient of the award must carry out their work through peaceful means and as part of an independent human rights organisation.

ALES BIALIATSKI RELEASED AFTER YEARS OF POLITICAL IMPRISONMENT

Human rights defender and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski was among 123 political prisoners released from Belarusian prison in December 2025, after four years behind bars.

Bialiatski has been arrested and imprisoned several times because of his peaceful human rights work. In March 2023, he was sentenced to ten years in prison on politically motivated charges, widely seen as retaliation for his role as founder and head of the Viasna Human Rights Centre.

In 2014, Ales Bialiatski received the Civil Rights Defender of the Year Award for his decades-long commitment to advancing democracy and human rights in Belarus, despite persecution by the authorities and at grave personal risk.



A MOMENT OF GLOBAL ATTENTION ON VENEZUELA

When the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado, it brought renewed international attention to the human rights situation in Venezuela. For Civil Rights Defenders, the announcement created an important opportunity to highlight the decades-long repression faced by Venezuelans under Nicolás Maduro's rule and to amplify the voices of the many human rights defenders, organisations, and election observers working for democratic change.

The prize also broadened the Swedish public interest in the region, resulting in several radio interviews in Swedish Radio, and the

opportunity to comment live during Swedish Television's broadcast of the Nobel Peace Prize Banquet. The increased media attention in Latin America on the human rights situation in Venezuela positioned Civil Rights Defenders as a key actor in providing analysis and expert insight on this issue. These platforms allowed us to provide context, explain the human rights implications of the situation in Venezuela, and underscore the resilience of those continuing the struggle for justice and democracy.

“ This recognition also belongs to the many human rights organisations, activists, and electoral observers who risk their freedom and their lives to stand up to state oppression.”

Maria Pia Alvira, Director of the Latin America Department





ANNUAL REPORT

ORGANISATION ID NO. 802011-1442

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS
HEREBY PRESENT THE ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE 2025 FINANCIAL YEAR

MANAGEMENT REPORT

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE ORGANISATION'S ACTIVITIES

Civil Rights Defenders is a politically and religiously independent human rights organisation. The organisation defends people's civil and political rights and supports human rights defenders at risk in Sweden and in the countries around the world where respect for human rights is at its weakest. Civil Rights Defenders maintains a head office in Stockholm and engages in advocacy activities as well as legal processes and provides information on the human rights situation globally.

Registered office: Stockholm, Sweden

VISION AND MISSION

Civil Rights Defenders' vision

A world of democratic societies where we all enjoy our civil and political rights.

Civil Rights Defenders' 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.

WHY IS THE WORK OF CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS IMPORTANT?

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.



On the International Day of Democracy, 15 September, Civil Rights Defenders together with Oxfam Sverige, LSU, Fremia, LO and TCO held a democracy conference in Stockholm. In the photo: Annie Lööf, former party leader of Centerpartiet.

GOALS

Civil Rights Defender's strategic goals outline our ambitions for the strategy period 2023 to 2030. The four strategic goals are reflected in the organisation's theory of change – security, capacity, engagement, and accountability. Each overarching objective has its own objectives that describe in more detail what the organisation is to have achieved by the end of the strategy period.

Security: Human rights defenders are secure

- Civil Rights Defenders has the capacity and resources to minimise security risks and mitigate the effects of human rights violations.
- Partners have the capacity and resources to minimise security risks and mitigate the effects of human rights violations.

Capacity: Human rights defenders have the capacity to defend human rights and democracy

- Civil Rights Defenders provides innovative, flexible, and defender centric partner support.
- Civil Rights Defenders is a resilient and sustainable organisation fit for purpose.
- Civil Rights Defenders is focused on using tools, methods, and technologies that are innovative, cutting edge, or data driven.

Engagement: Stakeholders in society take action for human rights and democracy

- Civil Rights Defenders and partners expand decision makers' narrative in favour of human rights and democracy.
- Civil Rights Defenders has engagement driven working methods and creates clear pathways to action for stakeholders to get involved.
- Civil Rights Defenders is highly respected as a defender centric human rights organisation, specifically for our work in the areas of security, capacity, and accountability.

Accountability: Duty bearers are held accountable

- Civil Rights Defenders develops clear and efficient tools and methods to hold duty bearers to account.
- Duty bearers responsible for human rights are held accountable by Civil Rights Defenders or our partners.
- There is a strong international/regional framework for the advancement of human rights.
- Those affected by human rights violations have access to justice.

DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY

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 needs 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.



One year after the Novi Sad train station canopy collapse, people gathered across Serbia. What began in silence grew into marches from city to city.

ORGANISATION

Civil Rights Defenders is a non-profit human rights organisation. The Annual Meeting is the organisation's highest decision-making body. Civil Rights Defenders is a membership organisation with individual members. To become a member, one must support the organisation's purpose and fundamental values (as expressed in international human rights agreements) and be willing to work towards these goals. The organisation's activities are not primarily funded by membership fees but through fundraising and received contributions.

The membership fee for 2025 was 300 kronor. The Annual Meeting elects a board, which at the end of 2025 consisted of eight members, six women and two men. During the year, six board meetings were held, four of which since the Annual Meeting in May 2025. No remuneration is provided for the work performed by the Chair of the Board and board members.

BOARD OF CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS

At the 2025 Annual Meeting on 27 May, Camilla Nagler was elected to the Board. Christian Åhlund stepped down at the 2025 Annual Meeting.

Board

	Meetings attended
Hanna Gerdes, Chair	6/6
Ulla Andrén, Board Member	5/6
Noura Berrouba, Board Member	6/6
Théo Jaekel, Board Member	5/6
Mårten Lundberg, Board Member	4/6
Camilla Nagler, Board Member	4/4
Lena Svensson, Board Member	4/6
Caroline Thunved, Board Member	5/6
Christian Åhlund, Board Member	2/2

NOMINATION COMMITTEE

Since the 2025 Annual Meeting, the Nomination Committee has consisted of Marcela Mieres Eneroth, Catharina Mannerfelt, Carin Norberg, and Seher Yilmaz.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Sofia Walan (from 8 May 2025)

ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

John Stauffer (until 8 May 2025)

DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Karin Ancker (until 10 July 2025)
John Stauffer (from 10 July 2025)

MEMBERS

As of the end of 2025, Civil Rights Defenders had 34 members (2024: 32).

CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS' STAFF

The work of Civil Rights Defenders is primarily carried out by staff based at the organisation's head office in Stockholm, at regional offices in Bogotá and Belgrade, or stationed to locations in Asia, Africa, Turkey, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo. At the end of 2025, the organisation employed 77 people, compared to 90 at the end of 2024.

Distribution by office

Stockholm	55
Asia	1
Africa	4
Belgrade	4
Bogotá	8
Istanbul	1
Pristina	1
Sarajevo	2
Tirana	1
Total	77



On 15 June, the Hungarian parliament passed a law criminalising public depictions of and discussions about LGBTI+ issues. The day before, large crowds protested outside parliament.



In the spring, our chairman of the board Hanna Gerdes, and our Legal Director John Stauffer met with Social Democratic Party leader Magdalena Andersson to discuss how to strengthen democracy and protect human rights in Sweden and beyond.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS DURING THE FINANCIAL YEAR

In 2025, Civil Rights Defenders' operations were marked by a deteriorating global situation for democracy and human rights, with increasing repression, restrictions on space for civil society, and growing threats against human rights defenders in all regions where the organisation works. At the same time, the global funding landscape for democracy and human rights efforts is undergoing significant changes, including reduced and reprioritised support from several donors.

During the spring of 2025, the recruitment of a new Executive Director was completed, and in May 2025 Sofia Walan assumed the role with a mandate from the Board to lead a strategic transformation process. The process aims to reduce complexity and build a more sustainable, efficient, and adaptable organisation characterised by innovation, collaboration, and a clear focus on learning and results. Efficiency, continued support to human rights defenders, and staff well being have been central guiding principles in this process.

After consultations with all staff, with the support of the Board and in negotiations with the union, an organisational change was decided in the autumn of 2025. The reorgani-

sation involved simplifying the organisational structure, with fewer departments and management layers, as well as a clearer cross functional way of working to break down silos and strengthen collaboration and coherence within the organisation. The reorganisation was carried out without the need for a formal advance notice of layoffs (Swe: Varsel), but it did result in the discontinuation of two positions. The new organisation entered into force on 1 January 2026.

In a global context where funding for democracy and human rights work is decreasing, Civil Rights Defenders has worked actively and strategically to secure long term financing. Among others, a new multi year agreement with Sida within the Civsam strategy, as well as new bilateral agreements, contribute to a more predictable financial situation for the organisation in the coming years, even though significant challenges remain and global uncertainty around funding for democracy and human rights work continues to be substantial.

Throughout the year, Civil Rights Defenders has worked strategically and purposefully to strengthen its visibility in Sweden and internationally through coordinated communications, campaigns, and advocacy efforts. This work has included, among other things, the Civil Rights

Defender of the Year Award and related media outreach for the thirteenth time, meetings with decision makers, campaigns, and opinion pieces. Active efforts to develop media relations have yielded results in the form of strong media presence during the year, for example in connection with the Nobel Peace Prize. Taken together, these initiatives have contributed to sustained visibility for the organisation's work and strengthened relationships with partners, donors, and other key stakeholders.

USE OF FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

All assets of Civil Rights Defenders are held in bank accounts. No other financial instruments are used.

SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

Work environment

The Head of Human Resources, together with the Executive Director, has maintained regular cooperation with the work environment ombudsman and the local union to systematically follow up on the organisation's work environment efforts. In 2025, a cooperation agreement between the local union and the employer was signed to streamline dialogue between the employer and employee associations. The focus has been on implementing and monitoring the

new cooperation agreement, which has resulted in a strengthened structure for documentation and follow up within the systematic work environment management (SAM).

Furthermore, the organisation has worked to increase employee participation and improve communications with employees to further strengthen the organisational and social work environment. Throughout the year, we have continued to develop our health and well being initiatives through health promoting activities such as “We+”, a digital health platform that encourages increased physical activity and social interaction across the organisation. This has contributed to greater engagement and a more inclusive approach to health within the organisation.

The Leadership Forum – a forum for managers with staff responsibility, established in 2022 as part of strengthening the organisation’s leadership function – met three times during the year, where relevant topics were discussed in line with the HR year and Civil Rights Defenders’ strategic goals. The purpose of these meetings is to provide a safe platform for sharing information, reflecting on one’s own leadership, accessing colleagues’ expertise, and enabling capacity development. In the spring of 2025, all managers were offered the opportunity

to participate in an internal two day leadership conference focused on further developing effective leadership and strengthening organisational culture in a fast changing world.

Staff survey

In September 2025, Civil Rights Defenders conducted its annual staff survey. Team effectiveness, engagement, and the organisational and social work environment have strengthened since 2024. To maintain this positive trend, we will continue to place a strong emphasis on leadership development going forward.

Diversity and equality

Civil Rights Defenders is an international organisation with employees from countries across the globe. More than 20 languages are spoken within the organisation. As part of the structural work environment efforts, the systematic follow up of the policy against discrimination and harassment was integrated into the performance review process in 2025. The aim is to strengthen an inclusive work environment, assess how the policy functions in practice, and identify early any need for support within teams.

Skills Development Initiatives: PICK

Through participation in PICK – the Project for Competence Development in Non Profit Welfare and Civil Society, initiated by Fremia and Famna in collaboration with Unionen, Civil Rights Defenders was able to offer its employees a range of courses tailored to individual development needs. Over the past year, around 20 employees have strengthened their skills in strategically important areas such as AI, project management, and leadership.

Collective agreements

Civil Rights Defenders has collective agreements for employees through Fremia, Unionen, and Akademikerförbunden, which apply to employees based in Sweden. For employees working at regional offices outside Sweden, local legislation and agreements apply.

Travel and procurement

In accordance with the organisation’s environmental policy, economic, social, and environmental considerations must be considered when purchasing services, equipment, and materials for the offices, as well as in all other procurement. For travel and transport, the most environmentally friendly options should be chosen whenever possible. Civil Rights Defenders

takes responsibility for waste through recycling and reusing materials and uses electricity from renewable energy sources.

RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Civil Rights Defenders works systematically with risk assessment and risk management by identifying, analysing, and acting to ensure that unforeseen events or circumstances do not negatively affect operations or expected outcomes. By carefully and systematically analysing, documenting, and monitoring risks, the organisation aims to avoid or mitigate negative impacts.

In its risk management work, the organisation distinguishes between internal and external risks. Internal risks include, for example, insufficient human resources, inadequate capacity or leadership, challenges in reporting results, financial control issues, and corruption. External risks may involve unforeseen political, institutional, economic, environmental, social, or technological factors.

Civil Rights Defenders applies an integrated risk management approach, which entails a continuous, proactive, and systematic process for understanding, managing, and communicating risks from a broad perspective. This also involves making strategic decisions

that contribute to achieving the organisation’s overall goals.

The organisation operates in countries with high levels of corruption risk, where human rights work is often prohibited. Preventative work is therefore crucial. Civil Rights Defenders enforces a zero-tolerance policy on corruption and has established an anti-corruption working group consisting of members from both management and the Board. This group handles reported suspicions of corruption and maintains strong compliance routines. All new employees are introduced to the organisation’s anti-corruption efforts.

FINANCIAL RESULT AND POSITION

The organisation had a positive operating result of 3,609 thousand SEK for the year, compared to -2,411 thousand SEK in 2024. The main reason for this improvement is the strategic decisions made during the year, which have brought operating expenses to a more reasonable level in relation to the organisation’s income.

The financial result for 2025 amounted to -1,799 thousand SEK, an outcome driven by negative exchange rate effects of -2,410 thousand SEK. The reason for this year’s negative currency impact is the weakening of the US dollar against the Swedish krona during 2025.

Thanksto last year’s active use of an interest bearing investment account, which continued in 2025, the organisation received 630 thousand SEK in interest income, partially offsetting the negative effects of the dollar’s development.

The organisation’s overall result for the year is therefore positive, amounting to 1,810 thousand SEK, which is in line with last year’s result of 1,804 thousand SEK.

The organisation’s equity, which has strengthened in recent years, apart from 2023, continues to grow and will remain a focus going forward to ensure sustainable growth with maintained, and preferably increased, equity ratio. The result of 1,810 thousand SEK is carried forward. Retained earnings thus amount to 14,061 thousand SEK, an increase of 14.8% from 12,251 thousand SEK.

GOAL FULFILMENT

2025 was the third year of the organisation’s strategy covering the years 2023–2030. During the year, the organisation began the work of operationalising the strategy with results monitoring, which will be applied across the entire organisation.

For more information about the organisation’s strategy, see www.crd.org/strategy.

Civil Rights Defenders’ strategic goals

Security – Human rights defenders are secure

Civil Rights Defenders continues its ongoing work to strengthen the ability of human rights defenders to manage psychological pressure and physical risks. In 2025, the organisation’s emergency support reached 2,302 human rights defenders and their families who were in vulnerable situations. Support was provided to human rights defenders in 50 countries.

Each year, Civil Rights Defenders organises security trainings for human rights defenders around the world. In 2025, a total of 45 human rights defenders received training in digital, physical, and psychosocial security, as well as

in storytelling and public speaking. One of the security trainings conducted during the year, for example, gave participants the opportunity to practise how to plan and reason about safety and protection in their work both through practical planning and risk analysis exercises, and through joint discussions about situations the participants themselves had encountered in their daily lives.

In 2025, Civil Rights Defenders continued its commitment to strengthening the security capacity and resilience of human rights defenders worldwide. A strong and sustainable human rights movement is built not only on professional skills and resources, but also on



SECURITY

Human rights defenders are secure.



CAPACITY

Human rights defenders have the capacity to defend human rights and democracy.



ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholders in society take action for human rights and democracy.



ACCOUNTABILITY

Duty bearers are held accountable.

collective strength, psychosocial well being, and the safety of those leading the struggle for democratic freedoms. As part of this work, the organisation, for example, brought together twenty-four human rights defenders from countries within the EU's Eastern Partnership for a six day programme in Chisinau, Moldova, in November 2025, within the framework of the new initiative *Resilience Agenda: Solidarity Community for Secure Activism*. The gathering created an important space where activists could learn from one another, build trust, and explore how community based approaches can strengthen safety in increasingly repressive environments.

Capacity – Human rights defenders have the capacity to defend human rights and democracy

Capacity building takes many forms. For Civil Rights Defenders, it is essential to draw on both local and internal expertise to tailor interventions to the local context. In some countries, open trainings can be conducted and gather hundreds of participants, while in other contexts a three day training can make a decisive difference for an organisation working under difficult conditions.

In Latin America, Civil Rights Defenders' support, for example, enabled indigenous women

who were survivors of conflict related sexual violence to testify in a legal process against the perpetrators. Ahead of the hearings, their participation was at risk due to fear, shame, and reactivated trauma. Civil Rights Defenders therefore quickly mobilised specialised psychosocial support. The women received individualised preparation and support during 13 public hearings, including home based interventions to strengthen their psychological well being throughout the process. As a result, all participants were able to testify in court in a safe and coherent manner, contributing to an important breakthrough in transitional justice efforts and strengthening accountability for sexual violence in conflict.

Throughout 2025, Civil Rights Defenders, together with its partner organisations, continued to be active within the Organization of American States (OAS). The 2025 General Assembly was cancelled, but the organisation participated in the civil society consultations that preceded it. Civil Rights Defenders also supported civil society organisations in their requests for thematic hearings before the Inter American Commission on Human Rights. These efforts strengthened international advocacy and amplified the voices of human rights defenders in Latin America.

Engagement – Stakeholders in society take action for human rights and democracy

While Sweden has made significant progress around human rights, serious shortcomings remain. The country is often regarded as a strong global voice for human rights, but in recent years protections for these rights and the principles of the rule of law have gradually weakened. Civil Rights Defenders works, among

other things, to combat discrimination and hate crimes, and to strengthen the rights of migrants and minorities. Through strategic litigation, advocacy, and by raising issues at the political level, we hold those in power to account.

In Sweden, Civil Rights Defenders launched the campaign *Det finns bättre sätt att skydda barn* (Eng: *There Are Better Ways to Protect Children*) as part of its efforts to strengthen



In November, we brought civil society together for a game night to mark the launch of our board game *Käften!* – the free speech battle.

accountability and children's access to justice, following new political proposals that threatened the protection of children's rights. The campaign highlighted the fact that Sweden has still not ratified the third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which would allow children to submit complaints to the UN when their rights are violated and national systems fail. A petition with 10,600 signatures was handed over in November 2025 to the Minister for Social Services, Camilla Waltersson Grönvall, calling on Sweden to ratify the protocol.

At the end of the year, the game *Käftan! – kampen om det fria ordet* (Eng: *Shut Up! – the Battle for Free Speech*) was launched as part of a winter campaign. The game gained wide reach and attention. To challenge the increasingly harsh public rhetoric in Sweden's migration debate, the campaign *En annan verklighet* (Eng: *A Different Reality*) was launched in late 2025. Its purpose was to shift the narrative by sharing personal stories from people who have been forced to flee.

An important part of Civil Rights Defenders' work to foster engagement is providing human rights defenders with a platform where their voices can be heard. In Ukraine, for example, Civil Rights Defenders supported mobilisation

and engagement through its partner organisation Ukrainian Archive, which brought together several Ukrainian and international civil society organisations and media actors to strengthen their work documenting war crimes. This enables evidence to be collected in line with international standards and used in the pursuit of justice in Ukraine.

In the spring, Civil Rights Defenders held its annual award ceremony at Maxim in Stockholm. *The Civil Rights Defender of the Year Award 2025* was presented to the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression for its more than twenty years of work exposing war crimes and holding perpetrators accountable, even in exile, by transforming documentation of mass atrocities into legal action with global reach.

During Almedalen Week, Civil Rights Defenders took an active role in the political discourse and highlighted key human rights issues. The organisation's game night featuring *Dictator of Sweden* generated strong engagement and brought together many participants in lively discussions on democracy and human rights. Through seminars, panel discussions, and meetings with decision makers, Civil Rights Defenders contributed to increased awareness of current human rights challenges and the risks faced by human rights defenders. The

organisation also hosted two seminars of its own, one of them in collaboration with European partners. In addition, the Civil Rights Defenders' Chair of the Board was one of the opening speakers during Almedalen Week, focusing on the importance of democracy.

Accountability – duty bearers are held accountable

In its work to promote accountability for serious human rights violations and international crimes, Civil Rights Defenders has continued during the year to raise awareness and increase engagement around accountability for violations of international law. This work is carried out as part of a coalition of civil society organisations within the framework of a four year programme, partly funded by the EU, which began at the end of 2023 and runs until the end of 2027. The programme spans 27 countries and addresses international crimes such as genocide and torture. Its aim is to strengthen opportunities for accountability by improving cooperation between survivors, human rights lawyers, and decision makers.

As part of this work, Civil Rights Defenders has continued to monitor and report on the trial against representatives of the former company Lundin Oil, who have been charged with aiding

and abetting international crimes committed in Sudan (now South Sudan). The trial is unique globally and has attracted significant interest, both in Sweden and internationally, among legal experts and other stakeholders. To increase awareness, a seminar focusing on key issues raised in the trial was organised in 2025, with four of the plaintiffs participating. The trial began in 2023 and is expected to conclude in 2026.

During the reporting period, Civil Rights Defenders, through a partner organisation, strengthened the ability of LGBTI+ individuals who have been subjected to violations, survivors, human rights defenders, and civil society organisations in Turkey to seek protection, document abuses, and pursue accountability in a highly restrictive context. Access to legal advice and support enabled those affected to better navigate both formal and informal accountability mechanisms.

Civil Rights Defenders submitted a third party intervention on the limits of the freedom of assembly in a case before the Swedish Supreme Court, in which the Court examined whether environmental defenders should be convicted of the serious offence of sabotage due to their participation in peaceful protests. The Supreme Court acquitted the defendants

and held that the criminal provision, when applied in the context of constitutionally protected freedoms of assembly and expression, must be interpreted with the restraint, caution, and proportionality required by the Swedish Constitution's rules on limiting these freedoms.

In December, Civil Rights Defenders organised the Nordic Rule of Law Forum for the fifth consecutive year, this time in cooperation with the University of Gothenburg. The forum aims to strengthen respect for human rights and the rule of law, and to increase interest in and



The Nordic Rule of Law Forum in December brought lawyers, judges, researchers, and civil society together to discuss changes in migration law in Sweden.

dialogue on these issues. In early December, around 100 participants gathered to discuss current topics under the theme *Rights on the Move – Rule of Law in an Era of Restrictive Migration Policies*.

In 2025, the Emergency Fund enabled, among other things, 100 individuals to continue participating in justice and accountability processes in six high risk contexts. The support reached 51 directly affected individuals, including witnesses and human rights defenders, as well as 49 family members who were exposed to risk due to their involvement in these processes. In most cases, participation in formal or informal justice processes was at risk of being interrupted due to threats, forced displacement, financial hardship, or psychological exhaustion. Through rapid and needs based support, these obstacles could be removed, allowing individuals to continue their participation in ongoing processes.

REVENUE

Civil Rights Defenders' operating income in 2025 amounted to a total of 159,936 thousand SEK, which is a decrease compared with 2024 (175,766 thousand SEK). The income comes from both public and private sources and includes both donations and grants.

Fundraising

Fundraising income for 2025 amounted to 22,347 thousand SEK, which is at the same level as 2024 (22,336 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 donors 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.

Civil Rights Defenders is a member of Giva Sverige, which advocates for ethical and professional fundraising and works to increase giving in Sweden and improve the conditions for fundraising.

The organisation has the Tryggt Givande label, a quality mark that means we meet Giva Sverige's quality code for ethical and economic fundraising as well as internal control and governance. Civil Rights Defenders has a so called "90-account" and works in accordance with the guidelines set by Svensk Insamlingskontroll.

Public grants

In 2025, Civil Rights Defenders' revenue from grants from public bodies amounted to a total of 102,927 thousand SEK, which is SEK 5,188 thousand (4.8%) lower than the previous year. 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 27,224 thousand SEK in revenue in 2025, a decrease of approximately 4,277 thousand SEK compared with 2024 (31,501 thousand SEK). The largest donors this year were, International Federation for Human Rights, Open Society Foundation, National Endowment for Democracy, and the Gerald and Monica Nagler Foundation. The decrease in income compared with the previous year is due to several project periods coming to an end.

The general public

During the year, Civil Rights Defenders raised 10,325 thousand SEK from private individuals compared to 11,578 thousand SEK in 2024,

a decrease of 11%. At the same time, revenue from legacies increased from 249 thousand SEK to 866 thousand SEK, resulting in an overall decrease of 6% for the segment as a whole. During the year, the focus has been on increasing the number of new donors to build a strong foundation for long term engagement and loyalty efforts, with the aim of steadily increasing private fundraising over time. This work has been highly successful, particularly given that the department operated with reduced staffing. 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 18,456 thousand SEK to Civil Rights Defenders through either long-term collaborations or by giving a one-time donation. In 2024, corresponding revenue from companies was 24,081 thousand SEK, which corresponds to a decrease of 5,625 thousand SEK (23.4%). The reason for the decrease was a reduction in donations from Meta. 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 10,500 thousand SEK in 2025, as well as additional contributions via the Dream Project.

EXPECTED FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS AND SIGNIFICANT RISKS AND UNCERTAINTIES

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 that we are actively working on. 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.



In 2025, we received SEK 10 million from Svenska Postkodlotteriet. The partnership was highlighted in a full-page ad in a major Swedish daily newspaper. In the photo: Sofia Walan, Executive Director.



REVENUE

Total operating income 2025: 159,936 thousand SEK (2024: 175,766 thousand SEK).

The revenue is distributed as follows:

- Grants from public bodies – 64% (62%)
- Foundations and organisations – 17% (18%)
- The general public – 7% (7%)
- Companies – 12% (14%)

The chart illustrates the share of each revenue category in the organisation's total operating income for the year. The outer circle shows the distribution for 2025, the inner circle for 2023, and the middle circle shows 2024. Public funding constitutes a larger share of the organisation's total income in 2025, even though the absolute amount of these grants has decreased. The same applies to income from foundations and organisations. Income from companies, however, has declined to such an extent that its share of total operating income has also decreased.

MULTI-YEAR COMPARISON

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Total revenue incl. interest income and similar items	160,566	180,051	175,775	189,793	126,198
Operating income	159,936	175,766	175,590	181,878	124,871
Result after financial items	1,810	1,804	-4,803	3,836	5,626
Programme expenses / total income	88%	91%	91%	95%	88%
Fundraising expenses / total income	7%	6%	5%	4%	6%
Administrative expenses / total income	3%	4%	5%	4%	3%
Equity ratio	17%	17%	11%	20%	11%



PROGRAMME EXPENSES

Programme expenses for 2025 were 141,234 thousand SEK, which is a decrease of 12% compared to 2024 when they amounted to 160,731 thousand SEK. The reduction in costs is a direct result of lower income.

- Africa – 10% (13%)
- Asia – 5% (5%)
- Eurasia – 28% (27%)
- Europe – 7% (8%)
- Latin America – 14% (9%)
- Security and innovation – 10% (14%)
- Sweden – 10% (10%)
- Global – 17% (13%)
- Other – 0% (1%)

The outer circle shows the distribution of programme expenses for 2025, and the inner circle for 2024.

REPORTING ACCORDING TO GIVA SVERIGES QUALITY CODE

Civil Rights Defenders follows to Giva Sverige's Quality Code – see www.givasverige.se/in-english/

INCOME STATEMENT

Amounts in SEK thousand

	Note	2025	2024
Operating income	3		
Membership fees		7,500	8,100
Donations		22,346,875	22,335,576
Grants		137,327,370	153,188,231
Net revenue		159,681,745	175,531,908
Other income		254,210	233,995
Total operating income		159,935,955	175,765,902
Operating expenses	4, 5		
Programme expenses	6	-141,234,134	-160,731,261
Fundraising expenses		-10,671,485	-10,564,024
Administrative expenses	7	-4,421,526	-6,882,028
Total operating expenses		-156,327,145	-178,177,314
Operating result		3 608,810	-2,411,412
Financial items	8	629,630	4,284,908
Interest income and similar items	8	-2,428,614	-69,906
Result after financial items		1,809,826	1,803,590
Net result for the year		1,809,826	1,803,590

BALANCE SHEET

Amounts in SEK thousand

	Note	2025-12-31	2024-12-31
ASSETS			
Fixed assets			
<i>Tangible fixed assets</i>			
Equipment, tools and installations	9	534,290	854,864
Total tangible fixed assets		534,290	854,864
Current assets			
<i>Inventories, etc.</i>			
Inventories – game Dictator of Sweden		423,416	276,420
Current receivables			
Accounts receivable		30,358	0
Approved, not yet received grants	10	15,032	1,011,819
Other receivables		1,084,718	6,914,738
Prepaid expenses and accrued income	11	3,832,382	2,884,680
Total receivables		4,962,490	10,811,237
Cash and bank balances		77,569,129	60,036,012
Total current assets		82,955,036	71,123,669
Total assets		83,489,326	71,978,533

	Note	2025-12-31	2024-12-31
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
Equity			
Donor-designated project funds		0	0
Closing equity		14,061,136	12,251,310
Total equity		14,061,136	12,251,310
Current liabilities			
Accounts payable		3,440,550	5,854,204
Liability for received but unused grants	12	55,300,265	39,869,390
Other liabilities		1,568,396	2,203,019
Accrued expenses and deferred income	13	9,118,979	11,800,610
Total current liabilities		69,428,190	59,727,223
Total equity and liabilities		83,489,326	71,978,533

CHANGE IN EQUITY

	<i>Amounts in SEK</i>		
	Restricted funds (Emergency Fund)	Retained earnings	Total equity
Opening balance 2025-01-01	0	12,251,310	12,251,310
Restricted by doner	0	0	0
Use of restricted funds from previous years	0	0	0
Result of the year	0	1,809,826	1,809,826
Closing balance 2025-12-31	0	14,061,136	14,061,136

CASH FLOW STATEMENT – INDIRECT METHOD

	<i>Amounts in SEK</i>	
	2025-01-01 –2025-12-31	2024-01-01 –2024-12-31
Operating activities		
Operating result	3,608,810	-2,411,412
<i>Adjustments for items not included in cash flow</i>		
Depreciation	320,574	320,574
Interest received	629,630	1,962,532
Interest paid	-19,085	-18,587
Income tax paid	0	0
Cash flow from operating activities before changes in working capital	4,539,929	-146,893
Cash flow from changes in working capital		
Change in inventories	-146,996	47,393
Change in accounts receivable	966,429	4,349,837
Change in other current receivables	4,882,317	604,354
Change in accounts payable	-2,413,654	1,452,798
Change in other current liabilities	12,114,621	-27,519,264
Cash flow from operating activities	19,942,646	-21,211,774
Investment activities		
Investments in tangible fixed assets	0	0
Cash flow from investment activities	0	0
Cashflow of the year	19,942,646	-21,211,774
Opening cash and cash equivalents	60,036,012	78,976,730
Exchange difference for cash and cash equivalents	-2,409,529	2,271,057
Closing cash and cash equivalents	77,569,129	60,036,012

NOTES

NOTE 1 ACCOUNTING AND VALUATION PRINCIPLES

The organisation's accounting and valuation principles comply with the Annual Accounts Act, BFAR 2012:1 (K3), and Giva Sverige's Governing Guidelines for Annual Reports.

INCOME STATEMENT

Operating income

Only the inflow of economic benefits that Civil Rights Defenders has received or will receive for its own account is recognised as revenue. Revenue is valued, unless otherwise stated below, at the fair value of what has been received or will be received. Membership fees include payments for membership in Civil Rights Defenders. The membership fee is recognised as revenue upon receipt of payment from the member. A transaction where Civil Rights Defenders receives an asset or service that has value, without giving back equivalent value in exchange, is a gift or a received grant. If the asset or service is received because Civil Rights Defenders has fulfilled or will fulfil certain conditions and Civil Rights Defenders has an obligation to repay the counterparty if the conditions are not met, it is a received grant. If it is not a grant, it is a gift. Gifts mainly refer to collected funds from individuals, companies, and organisations. Gifts are recognised on a cash basis, but if a gift pertains to a specific period, it is accrued over that period through allocation to programme funds in equity. To the extent that there are agreed but not received gifts from companies and organisations on the balance sheet date, these are recognised as revenue after individual assessment. Grants are recognised as revenue when the conditions for receiving the grant have been met. Received grants are recognised as liabilities until the conditions for receiving the grant are met. This means that revenue recognition only occurs when it is highly probable that the grant will not be reclaimed. Revenue recognition also occurs for grants that are forwarded to partner organisations where Civil Rights Defenders is responsible to the grantor. Grants are mostly liquid funds from public law bodies and include grantors such as Sida, the Swedish Institute, MUCF, National Endowment for Democracy, and the Postcode Lottery. Revenue not related to Civil Rights Defenders' primary activities is recognised as Other Revenue in the relevant period.

Operating expenses

Operating expenses include programme, fundraising, and administrative expenses. Common expenses such as IT, accounting, operational management, and communication expenses are allocated according to a distribution key between programme, fundraising, and administrative expenses. Programme expenses are classified as expenses directly related to fulfilling Civil Rights Defenders' purposes according to the statutes. This includes, among other things, the expenses of personnel employed to enable the implementation of activities, within and outside Sweden, as determined by the board, as well as administrative expenses that are a direct consequence of the commitments Civil Rights Defenders has undertaken to fulfil the purposes. Programme expenses also include expenses for advocacy and information activities regarding Civil Rights Defenders' mission. Follow-up, reporting, and auditing of projects are also programme expenses. Programme expenses also include allocated operational support expenses. Operational support expenses are allocated to each activity using distribution keys. Fundraising expenses are expenses aimed at generating external revenue in the form of gifts and grants from all donors, i.e., both individuals and companies.

This includes both existing donors and efforts to seek new donors through campaigns, mailings, and maintenance of donor registers. This includes expenses for printed materials, postage, and salaries. Fundraising expenses also include allocated common support expenses. Administrative expenses are those needed to run and administer the organisation. Administration constitutes a quality guarantee for the programme and for the donor. Examples of such expenses are board- and annual meetings, accounting and annual reports, handling of salaries and social security contributions, VAT and tax declarations, auditing of the organisation itself, as well as Giva Sverige's quality code and administrative systems such as accounting systems, accounts payable, and asset registers. If an expense is related to neither programme nor fundraising, it is classified as administrative expenses. Administrative expenses also include the part of the common support expenses that are not allocated to programme, fundraising, or membership expenses. All leasing agreements are recognised as operational, i.e., the leasing fee is recognised linearly over the leasing period. Employee compensation in the form of salaries, social security contributions, and similar expenses is recognised as the employees perform services. Pension obligations are classified as defined contribution and recognised as expenses in the year the pension is earned. Civil Rights Defenders is a non-profit association and therefore not subject to tax.

BALANCE SHEET

Assets and liabilities are valued at acquisition expense unless otherwise stated below. Receivables and liabilities in foreign currency are valued at the exchange rate on the balance sheet date. Accounts receivables are individually valued at the amount expected to be received. The inventory consists of unsold copies of the game "Dictator of Sweden" and is measured at acquisition expense. The acquisition expense refers to the printed games during the financial year and includes direct expenses for printing and production. Civil Rights Defenders is a non-profit association – without profit motive and external owners – which means that concepts such as result and equity have a different meaning than in other legal forms, such as limited companies. Equity consists of the funds provided to the organisation to fulfil its purposes, such as gifts, and which on the balance sheet date have not been paid out and where there is no legally binding obligation classified as liability or provision. Since there are restrictions on the use of different funds, the following division is made:

- **Donor-designated project funds:** The equity can be used but only for purposes specified by the donor. These funds are normally used in the following financial year. This includes gifts from collections where a specific purpose has been specified, and which have not yet been used.
- **Closing equity:** The equity mainly consists of unused funds provided to the organisation without restrictions and the organisation's result. Unused funds provided to the organisation without restrictions can be disposed of by the Board, to be used in accordance with the organisation's statutes and to fulfil the organisation's purposes. The annual result, according to the income statement (before allocation), constitutes the difference between operating revenue, operating costs, and the result from financial activities.

NOTE 2 ESTIMATES AND JUDGEMENTS

There are no significant items in the association's income statement and balance sheet that are based on estimates and judgements.

All amounts in SEK

NOTE 3 THE ORGANISATIONS INCOME

Donations recognised in the income statement

Donations raised, SEK	2025	2024
General public	10,325,496	11,577,808
Bequests and legacies	741,209	249,198
Companies		
The Swedish Postcode Lottery	10,545,000	10,000,000
Other companies	525,878	403,163
Other organisations	159,292	52,870
Other foundations	50,000	52,537
Total collected funds (a)	22,346,875	22,335,576

Pro-bono services received have not been recognised in the income statement and in 2025 mainly related to services within data communication, advertising, and law (b).

Grants recognised as income

Private grants, SEK	2025	2024
Foundations and organisations		
Open Society Foundations	2,249,312	12,140,220
International Federation for Human Rights	15,386,627	9,502,204
Defend Defenders	0	2,055,292
National Endowment for Democracy	3,522,633	1,138,750
Gerald & Monica Nagler Foundation	2,983,433	2,126,898
Natur & Kultur Foundation	34,882	1,655,441
Hugo Stenbeck Foundation	702,424	447,246
Asociación Minga	639,852	0
Barbro Osher	536,949	500,000
AIRE Centre	0	199,365
The Foundation for Democracy & Pluralism	500,000	1,000,000
Other	458,606	630,143
Companies		
The Swedish Postcode Lottery	6,584,823	8,318,193
META	759,789	5,250,091
Other companies	40,786	109,489
Total collected funds (c)	34,400,116	45,073,331

Public grants, SEK	2025	2024
Sida - Strategic Partner Organisation	45,741,822	52,704,260
Sida	53,753,648	50,789,447
Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society	1,555,555	1,557,205
Swedish institute	690,515	1,406,545
Centre for Local and Regional Authorities (CLRA)	415,438	0
Swedish Consulate Istanbul	372,950	290,377
Dutch Embassy	10,328	729,829
Other	386,997	637,237
Total public grants (d)	102,927,254	108,114,901

Summary of total fundraising income, SEK

	2025	2024
Donations recognised in the income statement (a)	22,346,875	22,335,576
Donations not recognised in the income statement (b)	150,000	100,000
Private grants recognised as income (c)	34,400,116	45,073,331
Total fundraising income	56,896,991	67,508,907

**NOTE 4 SALARIES, OTHER REMUNERATIONS, AND SOCIAL COSTS**

Salaries, SEK	2025	2024
Board of Directors	–	–
Executive Director	1,024,115	1,462,191
Other employees	40,548,687	45,736,432
Social costs	12,567,751	14,474,234
Pension costs	4,108,962	4,416,315
Total salaries and benefits	58,249,514	66,089,172

The Executive Director's pension expenses accounted for SEK 293,818 (SEK 378,446) of total pension expenses. Remuneration below half a price base amount amounted to SEK 20,079 (SEK 34,807) and refers to the expert group in a project.

Salaries and other benefits by country, SEK	2025	2024
Sweden	27,274,003	31,463,121
Abroad	6,277,485	6,745,382
Total	33,551,488	38,208,503

Only monthly salaries are included in the above figures. Compensation for holidays, sick pay, and other forms of remuneration (e.g. consultants and similar) are not included.

Number of employees – Sweden	2025	2024
Men	17	23
Women	41	46
Total	58	69

Number of employees – Abroad	2025	2024
Men	7	7
Women	13	14
Total	20	21

Board members	2025	2024
Men	6	3
Women	2	5
Total	8	8

Management	2025	2024
Men	5	2
Women	3	3
Total	8	5

NOTE 5 LEASING

Civil Rights Defenders mainly rents office premises in Sweden and in other parts of the world. Expensed leasing charges during the year amounted to SEK 6 157,619. Future leasing charges are due as follows:

Period, SEK	2025	2024
Within 1 year	5,543,395	5,254,433
2–5 years	3,558,532	7,686,396
Later than 5 years	0	0

Civil Rights Defenders signed a seven-year agreement with a landlord for offices in Stockholm starting from 1st September 2020. The notice period for the contract is 12 months, with an extension period of 3 years. From December 2020. The costs for “2–5 years” and “later than 5 years” are not index-adjusted.

NOTE 6 PROGRAMME EXPENSES

SEK	2025	2024
Africa	14,131,320	20,575,339
Asia	6,922,365	7,578,825
Eurasia	38,887,662	43,313,700
Europe	9,522,717	13,123,339
Latin America	19,288,654	15,195,309
Security and innovation	13,967,380	22,481,963
Sweden	14,119,658	16,543,945
Global	23,815,823	20,484,541
Other	578,554	1,434,302
Total	141,234,134	160,731,261

NOTE 7 ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES

SEK	2025	2024
Accounting and general administration	2,250,990	1,224,290
Personnel costs	905,629	4,311,633
Project management and financial systems	334,157	420,454
Office costs	827,084	849,264
Board and membership costs	103,667	76,388
Total	4,421,526	6,882,028

NOTE 8 OTHER INTEREST INCOME AND SIMILAR EXPENSES

SEK	2025	2024
Interest income	629,630	1,962,532
Interest expenses	-19,085	-18,587
Exchange rate differences on liquid assets	-2,409,529	2,271,057
Total	-1,798,984	4,215,001

NOTE 9 EQUIPMENT, TOOLS AND INSTALLATIONS

SEK	2025-12-31	2024-12-31
Opening acquisition value	2,048,271	2,048,271
Purchases during the year	0	0
Closing accumulated acquisition values	2,048,271	2,048,271
Opening accumulated depreciation	-1,193,407	-872,833
Depreciation for the year	-320,574	-320,574
Closing accumulated depreciation	-1,513,981	-1,193,407
Closing reported value	534,290	854,864

Depreciation according to plan is calculated over a useful life of 7 years.

NOTE 10 APPROVED, NOT YET RECEIVED GRANTS

SEK	2025-12-31	2024-12-31
Swedish Institute	0	748,752
The Swedish Postcode Lottery	0	74,776
Erasmus+	0	67,432
Other	15,032	120,859
Total	15,032	1,011,819

NOTE 11 PREPAID EXPENSES AND ACCRUED INCOME

SEK	2025-12-31	2024-12-31
Rent	1,064,008	974,090
Rent deposits	1,264,414	1,273,745
Other items	1,503,960	636,845
Total	3,832,382	2,884,680

NOTE 12 LIABILITY, RECEIVED BUT NOT UTILISED GRANTS

SEK	2025-12-31	2024-12-31
Sida	8,200,675	12,894,047
Sida Strategic Partner Organisation	28,708,035	147,755
Open Society Foundation	1,537,238	4,259,046
The Swedish Postcode Lottery	5,638,534	12,298,133
Other	11,215,783	10,270,409
Total	55,300,265	39,869,390

NOTE 13 ACCRUED EXPENSES AND DEFERRED INCOME

SEK	2025-12-31	2024-12-31
Accrued social security contributions	1,661,700	1,795,325
Holiday pay liability	5,224,677	5,925,511
Other items	2,232,602	4,079,774
Total	9,118,979	11,800,610

NOTE 14 PLEDGED ASSETS AND CONTINGENT LIABILITIES

There are no pledged assets or contingent liabilities.

NOTE 15 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AFTER THE END OF THE FINANCIAL YEAR

No significant events have occurred after the end of the financial year.



The Annual Report was approved in Stockholm on 6 May 2026.
The Annual Report has been signed on the date indicated by our electronic signature.

Hanna Gerdes
Chair of the Board

Ulla Andrén
Board Member

Noura Berrouba
Board Member

Théo Jaekel
Board Member

Mårten Lundberg
Board Member

Lena Svensson
Board Member

Caroline Thunved
Board Member

Camilla Nagler
Board Member

Sofia Walan
Executive Director

Our audit report has been issued on the date indicated by our electronic signature.

Ernst & Young AB

Rebecca Ersryd
Authorised PublicAccountant

AUDITOR'S REPORT

TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS, CORPORATE IDENTITY NUMBER 802011-1442

REPORT ON THE ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

Opinions

We have audited the annual accounts of Civil Rights Defenders for the year 2025.

In our opinion, the annual accounts have been prepared in accordance with the Annual Accounts Act and present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Civil Rights Defenders as of 31 December 2025 and its financial performance and cash flow for the year then ended in accordance with the Annual Accounts Act. The statutory administration report is consistent with the other parts of the annual accounts.

Basis for Opinions

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (ISA) and generally accepted auditing standards in Sweden. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's Responsibilities* section. We are independent of Civil Rights Defenders in accordance with professional ethics for accountants in Sweden and have otherwise

fulfilled our ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinions.

Responsibilities of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director

The Board of Directors and the Executive Director are responsible for the preparation of the annual accounts and that they give a fair presentation in accordance with the Annual Accounts Act. The Board of Directors and the Executive Director are also responsible for such internal control as they determine is necessary to enable the preparation of annual accounts that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the annual accounts, The Board of Directors and the Executive Director are responsible for the assessment of the association's ability to continue as a going concern. They disclose, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting. The going concern basis of accounting is however not applied if the Board

of Directors and the Executive Director intend to liquidate the association, to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's responsibility

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the annual accounts as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinions. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs and generally accepted auditing standards in Sweden will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these annual accounts.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs, We exercise professional judgment and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the annual accounts, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinions. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of the association's internal control relevant to our audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the association's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the Board of Directors and the Executive Director.

- Conclude on the appropriateness of the Board of Directors' and the Executive Director's use of the going concern basis of accounting in preparing the annual accounts. We also draw a conclusion, based on the audit evidence obtained, as to whether any material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the association's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the annual accounts or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion about the annual accounts. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the association to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the annual accounts, including the disclosures, and whether the annual accounts represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

We must inform the Board of Directors of, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit. We must also inform of

significant audit findings during our audit, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identified.

REPORT ON OTHER LEGAL AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

Opinions

In addition to our audit of the annual accounts, we have also audited the administration of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director of Civil Rights Defenders for the year 2025.

We recommend to the general meeting of members that the members of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director be discharged from liability for the financial year.

Basis for Opinions

We conducted the audit in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards in Sweden. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities section. We are independent of Civil Rights Defenders in accordance with professional ethics for accountants in Sweden and have otherwise fulfilled our ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinions.

Responsibilities of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director

The Board of Directors and the Executive Director are responsible for the association's organization and the administration of the association's affairs.

Auditor's responsibility

Our objective concerning the audit of the administration, and thereby our opinion about discharge from liability, is to obtain audit evidence to assess with a reasonable degree of assurance whether any member of the Board of Directors or the Executive director in any material respect has undertaken any action or been guilty of any omission which can give rise to liability to the association.

Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards in Sweden will always detect actions or omissions that can give rise to liability to the association.

As part of an audit in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards in Sweden, We

we exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit. The examination of the administration is based primarily on the audit of the accounts. Additional audit procedures performed are based on our professional judgment with starting point in risk and materiality. This means that we focus the examination on such actions, areas and relationships that are material for the operations and where deviations and violations would have particular importance for the association's situation. We examine and test decisions undertaken, support for decisions, actions taken and other circumstances that are relevant to our opinion concerning discharge from liability.

Stockholm as evidenced by
our electronic signature

Ernst & Young AB

Rebecca Ersryd
Authorised Public Accountant

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Hanna Gerdes

Lawyer (Chair of the Board)

Hanna Gerdes has worked nationally and internationally for 20 years to strengthen the protection of human rights and influence the development of society. Hanna is a lawyer in international law and has previously worked in strategic management and development roles at the Swedish Armed Forces, the Human Rights Fund, the Prime Minister's Office and the Equality Ombudsman. Hanna has extensive experience in board work, in organisations such as RFSU and Forum Syd. She has also been a member of the Swedish Committee on Constitutional Damages and has authored several books and publications on human rights. Hanna was awarded the Diversity Index Award in 2018.



Ulla Andrén

(Board Member)

Ulla Andrén has worked with development cooperation and diplomacy for over 40 years, primarily within Sida and the Foreign Ministry, with a focus on Africa and Eastern Europe. Ulla has been Head of Department at Sida and the Swedish Ambassador to Mozambique. For the past five years, she has been Head of the Regional Development Cooperation Section at the embassy of Sweden in Addis Abeba. Ulla has also worked as a consultant specialised on development cooperation, as well as with efficiency audits at the Swedish National Audit Office. In total, she has lived and worked for almost 20 years in Africa.



Noura Berrouba

*Chief of Staff, Daniel Sachs Foundation
(Board Member)*

Noura Berrouba is the Chief of Staff at the Daniel Sachs Foundation. For over a decade, Noura has been active in national and international contexts, focusing on issues related to democracy, human rights, peace, and security. Previously, Noura served as the chairperson of LSU – The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations. Noura has worked at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, including at the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa, as well as at Sweden's Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels.



Théo Jaekel

*Independent advisor on business and human rights
(Board Member)*

Théo Jaekel is a lawyer, specialising in business and human rights and international law. His previous experiences include leading the global legal human rights team at Ericsson, establishing and leading the human rights work at the law firm Vinge, and conducting investigations on corporate responsibility at Swedwatch. Théo has extensive experience in board work within organisations such as Transparency International Sweden, UN Global Compact Sweden, and the Global Network Initiative. Théo now works as an independent advisor on business and human rights.

**Mårten Lundberg**

CHRO/CMO Loomis AB (Board Member)

Mårten Lundberg has a background in various international CHRO positions, has been responsible for sales and marketing for 10 years and has served as interim CEO. He is employed at Loomis AB since 2014 and is a member of the group management as CHRO / CMO. Mårten works with international business development and its effects on organisation, leadership, and relevant HR areas. He is also the founder and CEO of ML Consult AB whose area of service is consulting within the above.

**Lena Svensson**

Economist, senior advisor focusing on the nonprofit sector (Board Member)

Lena Svensson is a former certified public accountant and partner at PwC. She has several years of experience as an accountant and advisor in the non-profit sector and has, among other things, worked with organisations within the fundraising and international development sectors. Beyond leading numerous audit teams, Lena has held several leadership roles within PwC, namely as group manager and business area manager, and has been responsible for developing PwC's non-profit sector department. Today, Lena holds several board positions and works as a consultant, specialising in associations and foundations.

**Caroline Thunved**

Independent advisor in communication (Board Member)

Caroline Thunved has over 25 years of experience working in communication, marketing and business development in both civil society and private industry. She has extensive experience as a leader and has previously worked at Save the Children Sweden, the Guides and Scouts of Sweden, the Employers' Organisation IDEA and the Swedish Communication Association. She ranked high on Resumé's top list of Business Super Communicators, and she won the award Stora Kommunikatörspriset 2016.

**Camilla Nagler**

(Board Member)

Camilla Nagler has a solid background in law, human rights, and the publishing industry. She holds a law degree and began her career as a trainee at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in New York, where she worked with the Women's Rights Project under Ruth Bader Ginsburg. For more than three decades as a publisher, Camilla has consistently defended freedom of expression and published authors with powerful voices for human rights, such as Amos Oz and Herta Müller. In 2006, she and *Tidningen Vi* founded the Teskedsorden foundation, dedicated to combating discrimination and racism and promoting equal value for all. She was also one of the initiators of *Läskvarten*, a democracy and literacy promoting project for schoolchildren.



DEPARTMENTS AND REGIONAL OFFICES AT THE END OF 2025

HEAD OFFICE STOCKHOLM (SWEDEN)

Sofia Walan, Executive Director

Östgötagatan 90, 116 64 Stockholm, Sweden
Phone: +46(0)8-545 277 30, Email: info@crd.org

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Gabrielle Gunneberg, *Director Global Department*

Africa and Middle East Department

Mesfin Bekele, *Director Africa and Middle East Department*

Asia Department

Rosanna Ocampo, *Director Asia Department*

Eurasia Department

Zinaida Muradova, *Director Eurasia Department*

Europe Department

Ivana Randjelovic, *Director Europe Department*

Latin America Department

Pia Alvira, *Director Latin America Department*

Legal Department (incl. activities in Sweden)

John Stauffer, *Legal Director and Deputy Executive Director*

Security and Innovation Department

Erik Jennische, *Interim Director of Security and Innovation*

Communications and Fundraising Department

Catrin Söderberg, *Communications Director*
Anna Magnard, *Fundraising Director*

Finance and Operations

Jenny Epel Insulander, *Chief Financial Officer*

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SUPPORT THE WORLD'S BRAVEST PEOPLE

Civil Rights Defenders is a human rights organisation founded in Sweden in 1982. We work for and together with thousands of human rights defenders who fight for democracy and respect for people's civil and political rights across the world. Our task is to make sure that they can be safer, smarter, and faster in their work. We engage in advocacy activities and legal processes and provide information on the situation with regards to human rights globally. With your support, we can accomplish more.

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



FACEBOOK

Civil Rights Defenders



INSTAGRAM

@crdefenders

@crdefenderssverige

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