

In line with the request of 1 September 2020 of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders on contributions for the upcoming report on the issue of killings of human rights defenders, the European External Action Service (EEAS) is pleased to circulate a contribution on steps taken to protect human rights defenders at risk around the world.

1) Does your Institution/Organization accept the legitimate right to defend human rights and if a defender is killed in the course of their work, do you publicly condemn it?

The EU continues to relentlessly support human rights defenders around the world, to denounce the shrinking space for civil society, and to use political and financial action to support those fighting for human rights, in particular when they are at risk. The situation across the world remains extremely difficult with increasing reprisals such as harassment, arrests and attacks, including cyber-attacks, and killings of human rights defenders (HRDs). The EU condemns regularly HRDs killings through public statements, during political dialogues (including human rights dialogues) with partner countries, as well as through private diplomacy. EU internal guidance to its Delegations, recommends to issue strong condemnation in statements in a human rights defender is killed or if systemic killings happen.

Besides condemnation, key messages delivered include the need to carry an independent investigation and to bring the perpetrators to justice, as well as to ensure a protection to the rest of human rights defenders in a given country. In several occasion, the European Union commemorates through public statements the anniversaries of the killings of human rights defenders, to ensure that the quest for justice is not forgotten (e.g. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/29912/statement-spokesperson-commemoration-killing-natalia-estemirova_en) or during the trial of the perpetrators (e.g. case of Berta Caceres: https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/united-states-america/54301/statement-spokesperson-trial-those-accused-murder-honduran-human-rights-defender-bertha-caceres_nn)

Have there been any cases of human rights defenders killed in your country since 1 January 2019 up to 30 June 2020? How many convictions of perpetrators of killings of human rights defenders were there in your country since 1 January 2019 up to 30 June 2020?

In line with reports from NGOs working on human rights defenders protection, such as Front Line Defenders, no human rights defenders were killed within the European Union between January 2019 and June 2020.

Does your Institution/Organization have a procedure to respond to death threats to human rights defenders?

The European Union supports Human Rights Defenders at risk outside of the EU, including those suffering death threats, through political and financial support.

In line with the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and in internal guidance provided to EU Delegations, the EU has a wide toolbox that it can use to protect defenders that are receiving death threats. They include: passing clear messages to the authorities (ambassadors in Brussels, or to Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, or Justice) of a given country when a human rights defender is threatened; receiving human rights defenders at risks in EU Delegation premises for meetings; visiting human rights defenders at risk in detention; raising their cases in human rights dialogues, or in the multilateral fora (in particular during dialogues and statement at the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly Third Committee).

The EIDHR Regulation foresees the possibility for the Commission to provide small grants up to 10,000 Euro, on an ad hoc basis to HRDs in need of urgent support. Between 1 January 2019 and 30 June 2020, the EU Emergency Fund for Human Rights Defenders at Risk allocated 45 small grants, supporting 136 human rights defenders and their family members, as well as five human rights organisations.

The grants have been used to pay for legal fees, medical care, installation of security equipment, emergency relocation, and support to families and a variety of other practical measures, which were often vital for HRDs to get away from danger and continue their work. In some cases, assistance provided by the EU Emergency Fund proved to be lifesaving.

For example, in one case, emergency funding was used to pay medical care costs of a pregnant HRD who gave birth prematurely because of beatings by police, while her and the baby's lives were at risk. In another case, EU direct support assisted family members of a murdered journalist HRD in covering legal costs to pursue the court case against perpetrators. A small grant was recently used to assist 21 family members of four murdered indigenous and land rights defenders, so that they could be sustained during their relocation, as well as continue seeking accountability of perpetrators and defend their land rights in front of national courts.

Could you please share good practices (evidence-based) that have proofed effective to respond to death threats? And to prevent them from escalating into the killing(s) of human rights defenders?

Even if it is hard to prove that public and private diplomacy actions have been effective to respond to death threats, the European Union believes that often, the risks of certain human rights defenders have diminished significantly when the EU has raised the issues at stake.

The existence of mechanisms for the coordination and mobilisation of material support, capacity-building and advocacy for human rights defenders and organisations at risk, such as ProtectDefenders.eu – the flagship instrument funded by the EU and implemented by a consortium of 12 independent international NGOs – contributes at most fundamental level to save human rights defenders' lives and prevent killings, as reported by their direct beneficiaries.

As a result, human rights defenders have felt better equipped to navigate their work in the face of repression and threats and to pursue their activities for the respect and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the local level. Over the last year, ProtectDefenders.eu has provided a comprehensive response to life-threatening situations of more than 1,500 human rights defenders and organisations, through individual grants, grants to organisations and training and capacity-building initiatives – thus contributing to protect their lives.

Emergency and temporary relocation grants reportedly saved the lives of human rights defenders facing numerous direct security threats to themselves, their families, and their staff. They helped improve HRDs overall security or ability to manage their own security, contributed to successfully addressing emergencies, and responding to pressing needs for increased security measures for HRDs, their families and colleagues. The grants benefited a wide variety of thematic categories of HRDs, with a big emphasis on the most vulnerable groups such as HRDs living in remote or less connected areas. ProtectDefenders.eu has provided targeted emergency responses to certain crises affecting human rights defenders.

Provision of emergency grants has allowed the defenders to take immediate action to increase their safety on the ground, enabling them to continue their work while feeling safer. In several cases and in view of the threats faced, if no emergency support had been provided, the defenders would have had to leave the area to save their life and the lives of their families. Emergency grants have also responded accordingly to the backlash reported against defenders of land and environmental rights or defenders advocating for the freedom of expression - including journalists and bloggers - or LGBTI rights defenders.

The emergency relocation allows defenders to quickly leave the area when their security and integrity is most at risk. This measure is carried out only when there are no viable options to mitigate imminent threats at home. During the recent period, more than 400 grantees have received an emergency grant to relocate, including urgent cases where the relocation must

occur within a 24-48 hour period. Relocations under the emergency grants programme amount to 41% of the grants allocated. Therefore, relocation ranks as the most frequently requested types of support when it comes to emergency measures provided.

The emergency grant programme and particularly the temporary relocation programme are able to respond to the security threats faced by the family members of killed HRDs. Under the latter, ProtectDefenders.eu has a capacity to fund a relocation up to 12 months, which enables setting up a comprehensive response to the needs of relocated family in terms of their time for rest and respite, as well as come up with a safe return plan and necessary measures to ensure their safety upon return. If a human rights defender is murdered, their colleagues or fellow activists can apply to both programmes as well and receive funding for psychosocial support, temporary relocation and other relevant measures to overcome trauma and enable continuation of the human rights work. In some cases, this type of relocation might end with asylum process if

impossible to guarantee a safe return of the family members or fellow- colleagues to the country of origin.

During the mentioned period, ProtectDefenders.eu has successfully developed the training and capacity-building component, which aims at reinforcing the protection skills and capacities of HRDs and human rights communities.

Out of the total number of training initiatives, more than 60 of them - benefiting 1,035 HRDs - had a clear focus on security and protection, and have allowed HRDs to improve their skills in the field of physical security, protection networks, risk assessment, or protection mechanism in remote areas, among others. As a result of the training, the defenders could draft security plans, implement new security measures (physical, digital) and approaches (on campaigning, advocacy or psychosocial accompaniment) in their organisations. Some of the initiatives included follow-up sessions and visits to reinforce the implementation of the knowledge gained during the training.