

HUMAN RIGHTS AT STAKE: IMPORTANCE OF PROVIDING FUNDING TO HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS

Karina Baciú, Stella Liantzi, Fanni Lovas, Pauliina Majasaari, Valentina Palcovicova, Marco Resconi, Klaus Schmidt

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Riviermarkt 5, 2513 AM The Hague, Netherlands



+ 31 62 72 41006



info@ghrd.org



<https://www.ghrd.org>

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
1. INTRODUCTION	5
1.1. OVERVIEW OF HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES IN 2025	5
1.2. SIGNIFICANCE OF FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS NGOS	6
2. IMPORTANCE OF AID IN HUMAN RIGHTS EFFORTS	7
2.1. THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL AID IN PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS	7
2.2. CHALLENGES FACED BY HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS WITHOUT FUNDING	7
2.3. THE IMPACT OF AID ON ADVOCACY, LEGAL SUPPORT, AND RELIEF EFFORTS	8
3. HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES MOST AFFECTED BY LACK OF AID AND THOSE REQUIRING THE MOST AID	9
3.1. REFUGEE AND MIGRANT RIGHTS: PROTECTION AND BASIC NEEDS	9
3.2. WOMEN'S RIGHTS: VIOLENCE, TRAFFICKING, AND HEALTH CARE	10
3.3. LABOUR RIGHTS: FORCED LABOUR, EXPLOITATION, AND UNSAFE CONDITIONS	11
3.4. CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DUE PROCESS	12
3.5. HEALTH AND EDUCATION ACCESS: IMPACT ON VULNERABLE POPULATIONS	13
3.6. ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITY RIGHTS: PERSECUTION AND DISCRIMINATION	14
3.7. HUMANITARIAN CRISES: DISPLACEMENT, FOOD SECURITY, AND HEALTHCARE IN CONFLICT ZONES	14
4. THE ROLE OF U.S. AID ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN ASIA	15
4.1. U.S. HISTORICAL ROLE IN SUPPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS NGOS	15
4.2. FUNDING MECHANISMS: DIRECT AID AND MULTILATERAL CONTRIBUTIONS	16
4.3. THE IMPACT OF U.S. AID CUTS ON NGOS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY IN ASIA	16
5. CASE STUDIES FROM 2025	17
5.1. MYANMAR	17
5.2. AFGHANISTAN	19
5.3. UKRAINE	20
6. ALTERNATIVE FUNDING AND SOLUTIONS FOR NGOS	21
6.1. REGIONAL AND LOCAL FUNDING SOURCES	21
6.2. PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL DONORS	22
6.3. LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY AND CROWDFUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECTS	23
6.4. ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE OF NGOS IN THE ABSENCE OF U.S. FUNDING	24
7. CONCLUSION	25
7.1. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS	25
7.2. THE LONG-TERM OUTLOOK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS NGOS IN ASIA	25
7.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS FUNDING MECHANISMS	26

TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICRMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Family Members
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
EU	European Union
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the importance of funding to human rights organisations, whilst addressing the consequences of the lack of funding on human rights realisation worldwide. In order to support, promote, and enhance human rights, organisations' actions are highly reliant on funding from states, multilateral organisations, and private funding.

Pertinent human rights issues surfacing in 2025 concern the decline of democracy and the rule of law within authoritarian regimes, human rights concerns within environmental aspects, conflicts, and crises creating severe human rights abuses, as well as migration policies and practices undermining the human rights of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Certain human rights, such as refugees' and migrants' rights, women's rights, labour rights, civil and political participation, health and educational access, ethnic and religious minority rights, and humanitarian crises are most affected by the lack of funding, whilst holding the highest necessity of aid.

The high relevance of international aid in protecting human rights is addressed, enabling civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and independent media outlets to act as watchdogs and ensure accountability for human rights abuses. Thus, emphasising the proper allocation of funding allows advocacy, legal support, and relief efforts to be provided to those in need.

The impact of United States (US) aid in Asia is explored by showcasing the importance of US aid on human rights efforts performed within the Asia region, as well as the negative consequences of withdrawn aid on human rights progression.

Case studies are presented, focusing on Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, and how the lack of funding and the presence of human rights and humanitarian organisations in conflict and crisis zones are being realised in practice. Severe human rights violations are increasing, and humanitarian efforts are on the decline, leaving affected populations in distress.

Alternative funding and solutions are explored to enable the crucial efforts of human rights organisations to those in need. In the disparity of funding, organisations' resilience to adapt to changing landscapes of funding sources by leveraging technology, crowdfunding, and local as well as regional funding, while creating partnerships with international donors to expand networks, expertise, and receive alternative funds has been crucial.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OVERVIEW OF HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES IN 2025

2025 has, and will be facing, severe implications on human rights globally, from the decline of democracy under authoritarian regimes to suffering caused by conflict, discrimination, migration, and the climate crisis.¹ These issues pose a grave threat to human rights worldwide and require grave efforts on the international front to be improved.

01

Democracy, the rule of law, and human rights²

Democracy is highly called for worldwide. However, authoritarian leaders have been claiming democracy as a threat to their nations, such as in Myanmar, with the ongoing coup starting in 2021. Additionally, conflicts, flawed elections, digital repression, and the misuse of technology have been contributing to the downfall of democracy. Internet shutdowns have been utilised as tools to prevent the free flow of information to the population, hide human rights abuses, allow governments to avoid pressure from the media, and attempts to impact elections. Furthermore, authoritarians are learning from the actions of others and creating more room to support repressive governments, such as North Korean troops and Chinese technology playing a part in Russia's attack on Ukraine. In conjunction, nations such as Russia have been gravely undermining rules within international law and thereby creating great instability within the world order.

02

Environment and human rights³

The triple planetary crisis, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, is severely impacting lives, from lost livelihoods due to climate change to the decline in health caused by pollution. According to the International Service for Human Rights, states are not taking adequate steps to improve the triple planetary crisis, seen in setting less ambitious targets when it comes to climate change negotiations, deficiency in concrete measures to move away from the use of fossil fuels, and the wide disregard and will to promote the right to clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

¹ Andrew Friedman and Michelle Strucke, 'Human Rights Priorities for 2025: the Global Landscape' (*Just Security*, 13 January 2025) <<https://www.justsecurity.org/106056/human-rights-priorities-2025/>> accessed 27 April 2025.

² *ibid.*

³ International Service for Human Rights, 'HRC58: Key issues on the agenda of the March 2025 session' (13 February 2025) <<https://ishr.ch/latest-updates/hrc58-key-issues-on-the-agenda-of-the-march-2025-session/>> accessed 2 May 2025.

03

Conflicts and human rights⁴

Conflicts keep creating instability at the international level and leading to grave human rights abuses being targeted at innocent civilians. The means of warfare have changed, where blatant disregard for international humanitarian law (IHL) has been shown. The use of explosive weapons within populated areas has increased, which automatically raises the risk of civilians being injured or killed. Additionally, sexual and gender-based violence and starvation have been applied in warfare, leading to violations of the prohibition of inhumane treatment and rules set under IHL. Forced displacement is on the rise due to conflicts, creating further insecurity for the lives of the affected.

04

Migration and human rights⁵

Migration policies and practices pose a threat to human rights within all regions, leading to death, torture, and other serious human rights violations at sea and international borders of nations. The practices and policies present have led to excessive use of force, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, unlawful deportation, and discriminatory treatment for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Both states and criminal actors participate in such acts, and most instances are left without investigation, leading to a culture of impunity.

1.2. SIGNIFICANCE OF FUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS NGOS

Human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are one of the key actors in the protection of human rights globally, such as providing medical care, knowledge-based assistance to affected nations, addressing food, water, and sanitation shortages, promoting equality and fairness within legal systems, assisting with economic development, and standing for the rights of the marginalised amongst others. However, the capacity and efficiency of human rights NGOs to support, promote, and enhance human rights protection depend strongly on the funding provided to them. Therefore, funding is of utmost importance when it comes to the work and progress made by human rights NGOs. In the absence or shortage of funding provided to human rights NGOs, the results have been visible: human rights protection is on the decline.⁶

⁴ Andrew Friedman and Michelle Strucke (n 1).

⁵ HRC58 (n 3).

⁶ HRC58 (n 3).

Common examples can be taken, in the inadequate provision of humanitarian aid to conflict zones due to a lack of funding, such as to Ukraine and Myanmar, where basic human rights, including the right to survival, food, health, and shelter, have been deprived of the populations affected. These create short and long-term repercussions for the affected nations. In conjunction, human rights defenders lack the capacity to keep fighting for human rights globally and serve as watchdogs, in cases of funding falling short, as human rights NGOs do not hold the capacity to support them.⁷

2. IMPORTANCE OF AID IN HUMAN RIGHTS EFFORTS

2.1. THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL AID IN PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS

International aid is pivotal in promoting human rights, especially in regions where governments lack the capacity or political will to protect their citizens. International aid provides crucial support for human rights defenders, civil society organisations, and independent media outlets, which serve as watchdogs and advocates for accountability. International aid provides resources for education and awareness-raising campaigns, empowering individuals to understand their rights and demand their protection. International aid can also be used to support legal reforms and strengthen judicial systems, ensuring that human rights violations are effectively investigated and prosecuted. Aid can be channelled through bilateral agreements with recipient governments or through multilateral organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

There is increasing acknowledgement within donor countries of the importance of funding human rights initiatives, particularly those led by civil society, as they play a crucial role in advancing these rights. International cooperation serves as a key mechanism to address human rights violations, particularly in instances where states are unwilling or unable to fulfil their obligations. While substantial resources are allocated to address human rights concerns, the efficacy and efficiency of these funds in achieving significant human rights advancements vary considerably, indicating disparities in how aid is implemented and utilised across different regions and contexts.

2.2. CHALLENGES FACED BY HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS WITHOUT FUNDING

⁷ HRC58 (n 3).

Amid inconsistent funding, human rights organisations face serious operational and strategic risks as their capacity to carry out in-depth investigations, provide emergency aid, and provide legal counsel is hindered by financial limitations.⁸ These financial limitations further hinder humanitarian efforts as organisations are unable to maintain a physical presence within affected regions, restricting their ability to retain long-term projects and qualified staff.

The implication of these financial limitations can be most perceived within high-risk areas, such as conflict zones or under authoritarian regimes, as the vital assistance international oversight provides is deprived.⁹ As has been portrayed, the financial instability of human rights organisations is directly intertwined with the level of vulnerability for depletion, disarray, and reliance on short-term campaigns to provide humanitarian aid.¹⁰

2.3. THE IMPACT OF AID ON ADVOCACY, LEGAL SUPPORT, AND RELIEF EFFORTS

When international aid is distributed appropriately, the reach and efficiency of advocacy, humanitarian, and legal assistance initiatives are significantly increased. Instances in which public perception is changed by effective advocacy, awareness is raised, and international and national policymakers are incentivised to implement human rights standards serve as further indications of properly allocated funding.¹¹ Additionally, a strong advocacy case can be made for appropriate fund allocation as it incentivises research, strategic litigation, and active media engagement, allowing for the implementation of international and national accountability and legal assistance measures.¹² Funding additionally facilitates the provision of emergency assistance to victims of displacement, abuse, and violence.¹³

Finally, the effect of international aid extends further than monetary support; it encompasses the enabling of justice, voice amplification, and the fundamental protection of dignity. In its absence, the most pressing human rights challenges would potentially remain invisible, unaddressed, and unresolved.

⁸ Amnesty International, 'Finances and Pay' (2024) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/about-us/finances-and-pay/>> accessed 14 April 2025.

⁹ Front Line Defenders, 'Annual Report on Human Rights Defenders at Risk in 2022' (2022).

¹⁰ International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, 'Legislative Overview for Financial Sustainable for Civil Society in Central Asia' (2024) <<https://www.icnl.org/post/analysis/legislative-overview-for-financial-sustainability-for-civil-society-in-central-asia>> accessed 14 April 2025.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2021: Human Rights Trends in Focus' (2021) <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021>> accessed 14 April 2025.

¹² United Nations Development Programme, 'Strengthening the Rule of Law in Crisis-Affected and Fragile Situations' (2014) <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNDP_CPR_ROLGlobalProgrammePhase2August2014.pdf> accessed 14 April 2025.

¹³ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Global Humanitarian Overview 2021' (2021) <<https://humanitarianaction.info/document/global-humanitarian-overview-2021>> accessed 14 April 2025.

3. HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES MOST AFFECTED BY LACK OF AID AND THOSE REQUIRING THE MOST AID

3.1. REFUGEE AND MIGRANT RIGHTS: PROTECTION AND BASIC NEEDS

Human rights issues concerning refugees and migrants have recently become sensitive, and they have been suffering from a lack of respect and aid. Both “refugees” and “migrants” identify as those who leave their home country, either voluntarily – in the case of migrants – or involuntarily – in the case of refugees. The latter are often forced to leave due to armed conflicts or persecution, and they are generally referred to as people “in need of protection”.¹⁴

The first and most fundamental right of international refugee law is the right of all refugees and migrants to seek asylum in other countries. Thus, national governments have legal obligations to respect and protect the rights of refugees and migrants.¹⁵

On the international level, ensuring legal protection for the human rights of migrants has been a concern for the United Nations (UN) since 1951, when the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created and the UN Refugee Convention was ratified. The latter was then implemented with the 1967 Protocol. Later, in the 1990s, the UN’s International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW) was signed. Furthermore, the “Principles and Guidelines on the Protection of Migrants in Vulnerable Situations” was produced to clarify specific issues regarding migration and human rights.

The 1951 Refugee Convention is a remarkable example of the position of the UN regarding human rights. Within the Convention, signed by 149 States, the State parties promised to keep migrants’ and refugees’ rights in high regard and never to ignore their requests. Additionally, in the drafting of the Convention, signatories established some core principles, including the *nonrefoulement* principle which establishes that no refugee should be returned to a country where they could face serious threats to their life and the “basic minimum standards for the treatment of refugees” principle, establishing the right to housing, work, and education for migrants and refugees.¹⁶ Overall, the Convention outlines 11 fundamental rights to be protected for refugees, including the right not to be expelled, to decent work, to housing, and to freedom of movement.¹⁷

¹⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, ‘Human Rights and Humanitarian Action’ (2016).

¹⁵ International Service for Human Rights, ‘Migrant and Refugee Rights’ (2024) <<https://ishr.ch/about-human-rights/what-are-human-rights/migrant-and-refugee-rights/>> accessed 11 April 2025.

¹⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘The 1951 Refugee Convention’ (2025) <<https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/1951-refugee-convention>> accessed 10 April 2025.

¹⁷ 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 25 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954) 189 UNTS 137 (Refugee Convention).

Migrants' and refugees' rights and needs are listed clearly by the UN, and their protection is shared between the UN and national governments. Nonetheless, daily news from around the world is a constant reminder of how international organisations and states fail to respect the protection of the human rights of refugees and migrants.¹⁸

3.2. WOMEN'S RIGHTS: VIOLENCE, TRAFFICKING, AND HEALTH CARE

Women's rights remain among the most violated and underfunded areas of human rights worldwide. In many regions, women continue to endure systemic gender-based violence, including domestic abuse, rape, honour killings, and sexual harassment. Human trafficking for sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and labour also disproportionately affects women and girls, particularly in areas marked by conflict, displacement, or weak legal institutions.¹⁹ These issues are often compounded by a lack of access to basic healthcare, including reproductive and maternal services, which further marginalises women and hinders their capacity to seek justice or rebuild their lives.

In contexts where state mechanisms are either non-existent or complicit in rights violations, women rely heavily on NGOs and grassroots groups for critical support. These groups provide safe shelters, legal aid, psychosocial services, public awareness campaigns, and even clandestine reproductive health care in regions where it is otherwise restricted.²⁰ However, these efforts are heavily dependent on external funding. When financial support diminishes or becomes unpredictable, the consequences are immediate and severe: shelters shut down, outreach and support services are suspended, and advocacy efforts are silenced.

Furthermore, healthcare access, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas, is often facilitated by aid-funded programmes. Without such aid, women face increased maternal mortality, untreated sexually transmitted infections, and the inability to make informed choices about their reproductive health.²¹ This is particularly critical for marginalised women, including refugees, Indigenous women, and those living in poverty, who often fall outside the scope of formal healthcare systems. Aid is not only a matter of supporting short-term services; it is also essential for long-term structural change, including challenging discriminatory laws, empowering survivors, and educating communities. Investment in women's rights yields widespread societal benefits, yet it remains one of the most neglected areas of humanitarian and development aid.²²

¹⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Humanitarian Crises' (2025) <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/humanitarian-crises>> accessed 12 April 2025.

¹⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022' (2023).

²⁰ Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2023' (2023) <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023>> accessed 14 April 2025.

²¹ World Health Organisation, 'Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Factsheet' (2023) <<https://www.afro.who.int/publications/sexual-and-reproductive-health-fact-sheet>> accessed 14 April 2025.

²² OECD (2022), *Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls: DAC Guidance for Development Partners*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <<https://doi.org/10.1787/0bddfa8f-en>> accessed 13 April 2025.

Increased, consistent, and flexible funding is thus indispensable to protecting and promoting the rights and well-being of women globally. In the presence of adequate funding, human rights NGOs, such as Amnesty International, have been able to effectively lobby, campaign and advocate for change within women's rights. The decriminalisation of abortion in Ireland and South Korea and easing of strict abortion laws in Argentina have been major achievements in protecting women's sexual and reproductive rights.²³ With the support of NGOs and years of advocating for change, Poland adopted a consent-based definition of rape, rather than a definition of rape that requires the use of force or violence, paving the way to increased justice for victims of rape.²⁴

3.3. LABOUR RIGHTS: FORCED LABOUR, EXPLOITATION, AND UNSAFE CONDITIONS

Labour rights violations are a persistent and deeply embedded issue affecting millions of workers globally, particularly in developing countries where labour protections are weak or poorly enforced. Exploitation manifests in numerous forms, including forced labour, unpaid wages, excessive working hours, child labour, physical abuse, and unsafe working environments. Migrant workers, women, and informal workers are especially vulnerable, often working in sectors such as agriculture, construction, domestic labour, and manufacturing, where oversight is minimal, and corporate accountability is scarce.²⁵

The absence of adequate international aid severely hampers the ability of human rights organisations to intervene in such cases. NGOs play a critical role in monitoring labour conditions, documenting abuses, providing legal representation, and advocating for stronger regulations at both national and international levels.²⁶ These organisations also engage in capacity-building among workers, facilitating access to justice, and supporting unionisation efforts. However, such initiatives require consistent funding, long-term project planning, and operational security, all threatened by unstable aid flows.

In many cases, exploitative labour practices occur within supply chains linked to powerful multinational corporations. Without well-funded watchdog organisations and transnational labour rights networks, abuses remain hidden and unchallenged.²⁷ Furthermore, local civil society actors who dare to expose violations frequently face threats, harassment, or

²³ Amnesty International, 'Women's Rights' <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/discrimination/womens-rights/>> accessed 13 April 2025.

²⁴ Amnesty International, 'The human right wins of 2024' (11 December 2024) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/impact/2024/12/the-human-rights-wins-of-2024/>> accessed 5 June 2025.

²⁵ International Labour Organisation, 'Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage' (12 September 2022) <<https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/global-estimates-modern-slavery-forced-labour-and-forced-marriage>> accessed 13 April 2025.

²⁶ Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 'Annual Briefing on Corporate Legal Accountability' (2023) <<https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/big-issues/corporate-legal-accountability/our-publications/>> accessed 14 April 2025.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, 'Human Rights in Supply Chains: A Call for Binding Global Standard on due Diligence - Human Rights Violations in Context of Global Supply Chains (May 2016).

even violence. Aid not only ensures the survival of these defenders but also supports the creation of safe reporting mechanisms, awareness campaigns, and corporate due diligence initiatives.

The protection of labour rights is essential to breaking cycles of poverty, inequality, and abuse. It is also crucial for building sustainable economies and promoting social justice. Yet, without adequate aid, efforts to address labour exploitation falter, and millions remain trapped in conditions that deny them basic human dignity. Strategic investment in labour rights programmes, including those that empower workers and hold corporations accountable, is a key priority for any serious human rights agenda.²⁸

3.4. CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DUE PROCESS

The UN has addressed the topics of freedom of expression, political participation, and due process through the OHCHR. In fact, the OHCHR developed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted in 1966. The Covenant addresses the right to freedom of expression in Article 19(2), which states that everyone should be entitled to the freedom of expression.

The UN also supports political participation through one division of the OHCHR, namely the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Equal Participation in Political and Public Affairs. As a powerful tool to promote democratic governance and to advance human rights, the OHCHR has also been working on equal participation in political and public affairs. To this end, in 2018, it released new guidelines on participation. These guidelines aim to guide states in improving the political participation of their population by defining the basic principles of the right to participate in public affairs and by including practical recommendations that cover participation in electoral and non-electoral contexts, nationally and internationally.²⁹

Finally, due process refers to the legal principle that ensures fair treatment through the legal system. It protects individuals from arbitrary actions by the government. While the UN has never directly addressed the idea of due process, the importance of this concept can be found in different UN documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which promotes respect for a fair trial in Articles 10 and 11, and the ICCPR that addresses due process in Article 14.³⁰ Although the protection of the rights to freedom of

²⁸ Clean Clothes Campaign, 'CCC introduction to funders' (2025) .

²⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Equal Participation in Political and Public Affairs' (2025) <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/equal-participation>> accessed 10 April 2025.

³⁰ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1967) 999 UNTS 171 (ICCPR), article 14; Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted 10 December 1948 UNGA Res 217 A(III) (UDHR), articles 10 and 11.

expression, political participation, and due process is enshrined in the UN and its agencies, these rights are often disregarded, as shown in certain Asian countries, like Myanmar, ruled by military governments, forbidding dissent.³¹

3.5. HEALTH AND EDUCATION ACCESS: IMPACT ON VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Access to healthcare and education lies at the heart of human dignity and development. However, for millions across the globe, especially in low-income countries, conflict-affected regions, and informal settlements, these fundamental rights remain out of reach. Vulnerable populations such as children, ethnic and religious minorities, persons with disabilities, Indigenous communities, and refugees face disproportionate barriers in accessing adequate healthcare and quality education.³² These barriers are often exacerbated by structural inequalities, displacement, discrimination, and a chronic lack of investment in public infrastructure.

In many such contexts, international aid is not supplementary but foundational. Health-focused NGOs operate mobile clinics, distribute essential medicines, and provide maternal, child, and mental health services, often in areas where government services are non-existent or severely under-resourced.³³ Similarly, education initiatives funded by international donors and humanitarian actors enable access to safe learning spaces, teacher training, school materials, and accelerated education programmes in refugee camps, conflict zones, and remote communities.³⁴

When aid is reduced or withdrawn, the repercussions are both immediate and far-reaching. Medical services are halted, disease outbreaks spread unchecked, maternal and infant mortality rates rise, and the burden on already strained public health systems becomes unmanageable.³⁵ Simultaneously, education programmes close, leaving children at risk of child labour, early marriage, and recruitment by armed groups. For displaced populations and those living in poverty, education becomes an unattainable luxury, and health a privilege rather than a right.

Moreover, both health and education are critical tools for long-term empowerment. Access to education fosters literacy, civic participation, and economic mobility. Health interventions enhance community resilience and prevent intergenerational cycles of poverty

³¹ ICCPR (n 30).

³² Global Education Monitoring Report Team, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education – All Means All* (3rd edn UNESCO 2020).

³³ Médecins Sans Frontières, ‘We are Médecins Sans Frontières’ <<https://www.msf.org/who-we-are>> accessed 14 April 2025.

³⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘Education Report: Stepping Up Refugee Education’ (2019) <<https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/>> accessed 14 April 2025.

³⁵ World Health Organisation, ‘Maintaining Essential Health Services During Emergencies’ (2025) <<https://www.who.int/teams/primary-health-care/health-systems-resilience/essential-services-during-emergencies>> accessed 14 April 2025.

and disease. Aid in these sectors is not merely about crisis response, it is about sustaining social progress, promoting equality, and building peace. Without targeted and sustained funding, progress achieved over decades risks being undone, and the most marginalised are pushed further to the margins.³⁶

3.6. ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITY RIGHTS: PERSECUTION AND DISCRIMINATION

The UN has been promoting the rights of ethnic and religious minorities through the work of ad hoc offices and agencies.³⁷ Article 27 of the ICCPR stresses the importance of respecting the right to enjoy culture, profess their religion, and use their language for people belonging to an ethnic, religious or linguistic minority.³⁸ On this topic, the UDHR in Article 2 also ensures the protection of rights and freedoms for everyone without distinction on race, religion, or ethnicity.³⁹

Another important document in this regard is the 1992 Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. This UN document presents nine articles, and each of them addresses fundamental rights to be enjoyed by minorities, efforts to be made by states to ensure the respect of such rights, and possible collaborations between states and UN specialised agencies to achieve these objectives.⁴⁰ Persecution and discrimination are still widespread in certain countries governed by religious groups, as demonstrated, for instance, in Afghanistan, after the Taliban took over the country in 2021.⁴¹

3.7. HUMANITARIAN CRISES: DISPLACEMENT, FOOD SECURITY, AND HEALTHCARE IN CONFLICT ZONES

One of the fields where UN intervention is required is in the context of humanitarian crises. Recently, the OHCHR has been busy protecting human rights in humanitarian crises, and within this context, it has published two key documents: the UN Human Rights Office in Humanitarian Action (2016) and the UN Human Rights Office Management Plan 2018-2021. Through these documents, the UN aims to enhance its support for humanitarian action while

³⁶ UNICEF, 'UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children 2023: Overview' (2023) <<https://www.unicef.org/reports/humanitarian-action-children-2023-overview>> accessed 14 April 2025.

³⁷ International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (adopted 18 December 1990, entered into force 1 July 2003) 2220 UNTS 3.

³⁸ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1967) 999 UNTS 171, article 27.

³⁹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted 10 December 1948 UNGA Res 217 A(III)), article 2.

⁴⁰ ICCPR (n 30).

⁴¹ UDHR (n 30).

ensuring the participation of the affected population. For this reason, the UN operates in the field and ensures that the voices of the affected communities are heard.⁴²

It is undeniable that UN intervention in humanitarian crises is essential. We have witnessed countless examples recently: both the war between Russia and Ukraine and the fight between Israel and Hamas have required the UN to intervene to assist the civilian population in the area. The UN has been active in providing protection, security, and medicines that could assist civilian populations living in conflict areas.⁴³

4. THE ROLE OF US AID ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN ASIA

4.1. US HISTORICAL ROLE IN SUPPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS NGOS

The US engagement with human rights in Asia is a multifaceted endeavour, deeply rooted in its foreign policy objectives and historical context. The US has historically played a crucial role in bolstering human rights through various avenues, including direct intervention, financial backing, and diplomatic pressure, especially following the end of the Cold War.⁴⁴ US foreign policy has increasingly integrated human rights considerations, wielding influence in international relations, especially in regions grappling with human rights violations. This approach involves navigating a complex web of cultural nuances, political landscapes, and economic considerations within the diverse Asian continent. The US has actively supported human rights NGOs in Asia, recognising their vital role in advocating for marginalised communities, monitoring human rights abuses, and promoting democratic governance.⁴⁵

US assistance for human rights in Asia increased dramatically in the 1990s and early 2000s, propelled by the country's larger foreign policy objectives of regional stability and democracy. US-backed NGOs played a critical role in promoting transitional justice procedures, such as truth-seeking and legislative changes, in countries like Indonesia.

Furthermore, US financing frequently supports independent media outlets or human rights organisations operating in exile in authoritarian countries like China and North Korea, creating external pressure on oppressive regimes. These initiatives seek to maintain human

⁴² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights at International Borders' (2014).

⁴³ UDHR (n 30).

⁴⁴ Seth D Kaplan, 'Will Human Rights Survive in a Multipolar World' (2019) 42 (1) The Washington Quarterly <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2019.1593768>> accessed 12 April 2025.

⁴⁵ Ali Mohsin Qazilbash, 'NGOs Efforts Towards The Creation Of A Regional Human Rights Arrangement In The Asia-Pacific Region' (1998) 4 (2) ILSA Journal Of International & Comparative Law <<https://nsuworks.nova.edu/ilsajournal/vol4/iss2/27/>> accessed 14 April 2025.

rights on the global agenda while bolstering the tenacity of dissident voices, despite the difficulties of direct involvement.

4.2. FUNDING MECHANISMS: DIRECT AID AND MULTILATERAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The US employs a diverse array of funding mechanisms to channel aid, encompassing direct aid and contributions to multilateral organisations, each possessing unique advantages and challenges. Direct aid allows the US to exert greater control over how funds are allocated and utilised, ensuring alignment with its strategic priorities and human rights objectives.⁴⁶ Direct aid can take various forms, including grants, technical assistance, and training programs, tailored to meet the specific needs of recipient countries. Multilateral contributions, on the other hand, enable the US to pool resources and share the burden of addressing global challenges with other nations. These contributions often flow through international organisations such as the UN, the World Bank, and regional development banks, which possess extensive expertise and established networks in Asia.

The US can foster positive perceptions abroad, serving strategic goals by channelling aid effectively to foreign countries.⁴⁷ The US champions multilateralism, aiming to utilise multilateral institutions as instruments for policy implementation.⁴⁸ The complex nature of funding from diverse sources, including governmental and multilateral aid, alongside the growing importance of private foundations, has led numerous NGOs to seek diverse funding sources to broaden their operational capabilities and achieve their goals.⁴⁹ However, the expansion of multilateral entities has led to a more fragmented system with overlapping responsibilities, even as new aid methods emerge through private NGOs and South-South cooperation, often bypassing traditional multilateral channels.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Sofia Gruskin, Dina Bogecho and Laura Ferguson, 'Rights-based approaches' to health policies and programs; Articulations, ambiguities, and assessment' (2010) 31 Journal of Public Health Policy <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/jphp.2010.7>> accessed 13 April 2025.

⁴⁷ Benjamin E Goldsmith, Yasaku Horiuchi and Terence Wood, 'Doing Well by Doing Good: The Impact of Foreign Aid on Foreign Public Opinion' (2014) 9 (1) Quarterly Journal of Political Science <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1561/100.00013036>> accessed 13 March 2025.

⁴⁸ Michael W Reisman, 'The United States and International Institutions' (2010) 41 (4) Survival: Global Politics and Strategy <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1093/survival/41.4.62>> accessed 13 April 2025.

⁴⁹ Charles B Holmes, Izukanji Sikazwe, Roselyne L Raelly et al., 'Managing Multiple Funding Streams and Agendas to Achieve Local and Global Health and Research Objectives: Lessons From the Field' (2014) 65 Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes 32 <https://journals.lww.com/jaids/fulltext/2014/01011/managing_multiple_funding_streams_and_agendas_to.9.aspx> accessed 13 April 2025.

⁵⁰ Homi Kharas and Michael Blomfield, 'Rethinking the Role of Multilateral Institutions in an Ever-Changing Aid Architecture' in Hanya Besada and Shannon Kindornay (eds), *Multilateral Development Cooperation in a Changing Global Order* (Palgrave Macmillan London 2013).

4.3. THE IMPACT OF US AID CUTS ON NGOS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY IN ASIA

Recent reductions in US foreign aid have severely impacted NGO and human rights advocacy initiatives within Asia, particularly in countries where civil societies currently face financial and political hurdles. In a majority of the instances, the US provides support through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of State, representing a vital source for grassroots projects focused on legal reform, minority protection, and access to justice.⁵¹

Under the Trump administration, numerous NGO-led programs were shut down entirely or scaled down as a result of proposed aid cuts and alongside the withdrawal from multilateral organisations like the UN Human Rights Council.⁵² An example is mid-cycle funding for legal aid initiatives assisting victims of gender-based crimes and military violence, jeopardised protections being cut in Myanmar, placing marginalised populations in danger.⁵³

These disturbances went beyond budgetary limitations. A restriction was placed on NGO participation in international human rights advocacy forums, whilst an abrupt loss of funding weakened international organisational capacity. As donor trust in US-backed projects, the uncertainty of the US policy brought on by the changes in administration created a hindrance to NGO participation in long-term strategic planning.⁵⁴

Additionally, the withdrawal of US funding has allowed competing nations, particularly China, to increase their political influence by offering free aid packages, demonstrating the geopolitical shifts this situation has created. The precedence that this situation could materialise would further marginalise local human rights advocates whilst legitimising a potential authoritarian rule.⁵⁵

Despite reflecting differential strategic interests, US aid has weakened human rights initiatives within the Asian region, demonstrating how funding must be consistent and ethical to provide efficient support for civil society, whilst incentivising accountable governmental practices.

⁵¹ Center for American Progress, 'How to Support Democracy and Human Rights in Asia' (6 November 2019) <<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/support-democracy-human-rights-asia/>> accessed 13 April 2025.

⁵² Amnesty International, 'Myanmar: Recklessly abrupt US aid stoppage poses existential threat to human rights' (13 February 2025) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/02/myanmar-recklessly-abrupt-us-aid-stoppage-poses-existential-threat-to-human-rights/>> accessed 13 April 2025.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ AP News, 'UN humanitarian agency to cut staff by 20% due to 'brutal cuts' in funding' (11 April 2025) <<https://apnews.com/article/un-humanitarian-agency-staff-aid-cuts-trump-0896ba30d57a990fe441d5e74eefb81b>> accessed 13 April 2025.

⁵⁵ Center for American Progress, 'How to Support Democracy and Human Rights in Asia' (6 November 2019) <<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/support-democracy-human-rights-asia/>> accessed 13 April 2025.

5. CASE STUDIES FROM 2025

5.1. MYANMAR

In early 2025, Myanmar faced an accelerating humanitarian and human rights crisis that deteriorated rapidly, following the abrupt suspension of US foreign aid on January 20th, 2025.⁵⁶ Amnesty International described the move as “recklessly abrupt”, warning that it posed an existential threat to NGOs supporting displaced communities and survivors of persecution and conflict, particularly those fleeing Myanmar’s protracted internal violence.⁵⁷ The aid freeze occurred at a time when 18.6 million people in Myanmar were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including 2.7 million internally displaced persons, due to ongoing military conflict and widespread instability.⁵⁸ US funding supported a wide range of essential services, including healthcare, food assistance, reproductive health, and legal aid.⁵⁹ Following the termination of the funding, many of these services were immediately suspended or significantly reduced, impacting both the operational capacity of NGOs and the well-being of at-risk communities.⁶⁰

According to the United Nations Population Fund's April 2025 Situation Report, crucial sexual and reproductive health services, including emergency obstetric care, contraception access, and support for survivors of gender-based violence, were suspended in multiple regions due to funding gaps.⁶¹ The report noted that millions of women and girls were left without essential care and protection, further exposing them to risk in conflict-affected areas.⁶² At the same time, nearly one-third of Myanmar’s population faced acute food insecurity, as emphasised by UN human rights experts, with rural communities and displaced populations among the most affected.⁶³ These conditions were worsened by a combination of ongoing military offensives, administrative obstruction, and natural disasters, which hindered the movement of humanitarian workers and the delivery of aid.

The situation was further compounded by floods and storms that struck areas such as the Chin and Rakhine States during the first quarter of the year. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, these disasters resulted in massive displacement and infrastructure damage, including the destruction of clinics, roads,

⁵⁶ Myanmar: Recklessly abrupt US aid stoppage poses existential threat to human rights (n 52).

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ OCHA, ‘Myanmar Humanitarian Update No. 45/28 March 2025’ (28 March 2025) <<https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-update-no-45-28-march-2025>> accessed 16 April 2025.

⁵⁹ Thin Lei Win, ‘Myanmar in “polycrisis” as US aid freeze compounds long-term donor neglect’ (*The New Humanitarian*, 18 February 2025) <<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2025/02/18/myanmar-polycrisis-us-aid-freeze-compounds-long-term-donor-neglect>> accessed 16 April 2025.

⁶⁰ UNFPA, ‘Myanmar Earthquake Situation Report No.3 - April 2025’ (12 April 2025).

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ OHCHR, ‘A third of Myanmar’s population faces food insecurity: UN human rights experts’ (13 March 2025) <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/third-myanmars-population-faces-food-insecurity-un-human-rights-expert-s>> accessed 16 April 2025.

and water systems.⁶⁴ Aid agencies, struggling with funding shortages, were forced to reduce field operations, leaving thousands without shelter, safe drinking water, and medical services.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, cross-border assistance along the Thai-Myanmar border also faced major disruptions. Radio Free Asia reported in January 2025 that operational restrictions and the loss of US support further constrained access to vulnerable populations near the border, particularly those evading military offensives or living in informal camps.⁶⁶

The combination of these factors created a catastrophic humanitarian and human rights landscape. The OHCHR stated that the convergence of conflict, food scarcity, displacement, and international aid withdrawal had reached a critical level, with minimal accountability for ongoing abuses.⁶⁷ Amnesty International also emphasised that restrictions on movement, coupled with the collapse of NGO funding, effectively dismantled civil society's ability to document and report human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, attacks on civilians, and the persecution of minority groups such as the Rohingya.⁶⁸

5.2. AFGHANISTAN

In the years following the Taliban's return to power, international aid to Afghanistan dramatically declined, driven by donor fatigue and concern about legitimising the regime.⁶⁹ While some humanitarian aid continued through UN channels, most foreign governments suspended development funding.⁷⁰ This decision devastated the capacity of Afghan civil society organisations, especially those focused on women's rights and legal aid.⁷¹ Legal service providers that once offered free counsel, advocacy, and protection to survivors of domestic violence and forced marriage were compelled to cease operation, dismantling essential avenues for women's access to justice and legal redress.⁷²

The collapse of international funding meant that many remaining local NGOs could no longer pay staff, maintain safehouses, or operate legal clinics. Women human rights defenders, once supported through international networks, now face threats, arrest, or exile, with no financial or legal lifeline to continue their work.⁷³ As a result, systemic gender-based violence, including child marriage, honour killings, and physical abuse, has increased

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ RFA, 'Myanmar aid groups struggle with freeze as UN warns of 'staggering' hunger' (30 January 2025) <<https://www.rfa.org/english/myanmar/2025/01/30/aid-freeze-myanmar-thai-border/>> accessed 16 April 2025.

⁶⁷ A third of Myanmar's population faces food insecurity: UN human rights experts (n 63).

⁶⁸ Myanmar: Recklessly abrupt US aid stoppage poses existential threat to human rights (n 52).

⁶⁹ Afghan Studies Center, '2025 Holds Myriad of Crisis for Afghanistan: What Needs To Be Done?' (2025) <<https://www.afghanstudiescenter.org/2025-holds-myrriad-of-crises-for-afghanistan-what-needs-to-be-done/>> accessed 16 April 2025.

⁷⁰ Global Crisis Response Platform, 'Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries Crisis Response Plan 2025' (14 March 2025) <<https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/afghanistan-and-neighbouring-countries-crisis-response-plan-2025>> accessed 16 April 2025.

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch, 'Afghanistan events of 2024' (2024) <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/afghanistan>> accessed 16 April 2025.

⁷² Global Issues, 'Afghanistan's Humanitarian Crisis Expected to Worsen in 2025' (4 February 2025) <<https://www.globalissues.org/news/2025/02/04/38985>> accessed 16 April 2025.

⁷³ Afghanistan events of 2024 (n 71).

dramatically, with no institutional resources or public accountability.⁷⁴ The Taliban's 2023 ban on women working with NGOs not only curtailed service delivery but also discouraged international donors from supporting Afghan-led initiatives, further decreasing the humanitarian space.⁷⁵ According to the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) 2025 Crisis Response Plan, the loss of female staff has critically undermined program effectiveness in sectors such as maternal health, psychological support, and protection services for displaced women and girls.⁷⁶ Aid groups report that in many provinces, it is now nearly impossible to reach female beneficiaries, either due to Taliban-imposed restrictions or a lack of female workforce.⁷⁷

The absence of funding has also eroded long-term advocacy efforts. Prior to 2021, Afghan civil society had developed a strong foundation for human rights education, gender-sensitive legal reform, and survivor-centred services.⁷⁸ In 2025, these gains have been almost entirely reversed. As the Afghan Studies Centre reported, communities once engaged in rights-based programs now face a return to fear, silence, and legal invisibility.⁷⁹ With no civil society oversight and no operational justice mechanism, the rule of law has collapsed entirely for women and girls.⁸⁰ This deterioration is not only a gendered crisis but a social one: communities lose access to basic protections, local knowledge is erased, and marginalised voices are excluded from all decision-making spaces.⁸¹ The loss of legal aid, advocacy, and psychological support reverberates across society, further embedding cycles of poverty, trauma, and impunity.

5.3. UKRAINE

In 2025, Ukraine's civil rights landscape worsened significantly due to the ongoing war and a severe lack of humanitarian aid.⁸² As continued hostilities and targeted attacks on civil infrastructure disrupted essential services across the country, international agencies raised alarm over diminishing resources, which critically hindered the efforts of NGOs and UN bodies to reach vulnerable communities in frontline regions.⁸³ The crisis unfolded at a time when 12.7 million people in Ukraine were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance,

⁷⁴ Afghanistan's Humanitarian Crisis Expected to Worsen in 2025 (n 72).

⁷⁵ 2025 Holds Myriad of Crisis for Afghanistan: What Needs To Be Done? (n 69).

⁷⁶ Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries Crisis Response Plan 2025 (n 70).

⁷⁷ OCHA, 'Afghanistan: humanitarian Update, January 2025' (7 April 2025) <<https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-update-january-2025>> accessed 17 April 2025.

⁷⁸ Afghanistan events of 2024 (n 73).

⁷⁹ 2025 Holds Myriad of Crisis for Afghanistan: What Needs To Be Done? (n 69).

⁸⁰ Afghanistan's Humanitarian Crisis Expected to Worsen in 2025 (n 72).

⁸¹ 2025 Holds Myriad of Crisis for Afghanistan: What Needs To Be Done? (n 69).

⁸² Human Rights Watch, 'Ukraine Events of 2024' (2024) <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/ukraine>> accessed 17 April 2025.

⁸³ UN News, 'March proves deadly month for civilians in Ukraine' (9 April 2025) <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/04/1162051>> accessed 17 April 2025.

including 3.5 million internally displaced persons and more than one million residing in frontline regions, according to the IOM.⁸⁴

For civil society actors and humanitarian agencies, the collapse in aid delivery had profound consequences. International funding had previously supported legal protection services, civil documentation access, emergency shelter, and psychological care for conflict-affected populations.⁸⁵ However, in 2025, growing global attention and underfunded appeals left many of these critical programs suspended or operating at minimal capacity. Displaced families, war survivors, and civilians in occupied territories found themselves without legal assistance, protection as minorities, or safe pathways to relocation. According to a Human Rights Watch 2025 report, the war's toll on civilians extended far beyond displacement and poverty.⁸⁶ At least 459 attacks on health infrastructure were recorded from January to December 2024, impacting 349 facilities and injuring or killing over 160 healthcare staff and patients.⁸⁷ These violations have not only endangered lives but also severely disrupted humanitarian access and eroded trust in public services, including those necessary for civil rights protections.

At the same time, access to justice and human rights monitoring has been extremely limited in the frontline and occupied areas. The lack of sustained funding has made it increasingly difficult for NGOs to document abuses, provide legal aid, or assist victims of forced displacement, arbitrary detention, and civil targeting. The UN reported in April 2025 that civilians continued to face life-threatening conditions, especially in regions where aid could not be delivered due to insecurity and insufficient resources.⁸⁸ Conditions were further aggravated by the destruction of power and water systems, particularly during Ukraine's hard winter.

Reports from the UN and humanitarian agencies highlighted widespread blackouts, food shortages, and water system collapses, which pushed already vulnerable communities deeper into crisis.⁸⁹ Local authorities and aid workers reported being overwhelmed, while women, children, and the elderly faced the highest risks amid shortages of heat, healthcare, and safe housing.⁹⁰ According to the Norwegian Refugee Council, civil infrastructure and protection systems in Ukraine are “at breaking point”.⁹¹ Despite appeals from UNHCR, humanitarian response plans remain underfunded, leaving millions at risk of further harm without access to basic services or legal protection.⁹²

⁸⁴ Global Crisis Response Platform, ‘Ukraine Crisis Response Plan 2025’ (5 February 2025) <<https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/ukraine-crisis-response-plan-2025>> accessed 17 April 2025.

⁸⁵ UNHCR, ‘The world must stay the course with the people of Ukraine’ (16 January 2025) <<https://www.unhcr.org/news/press-releases/world-must-stay-course-people-ukraine>> accessed 17 April 2025.

⁸⁶ UN News, ‘Resilience of Ukrainians remains high, as UN maps aid and reconstruction needs for 2025’ (9 January 2025) <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/01/1158871>> accessed 17 April 2025.

⁸⁷ Norwegian Refugee Council, ‘10 things you should know about the humanitarian situation in Ukraine’ (21 February 2025) <<https://www.nrc.no/perspectives/2025/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-humanitarian-situation-in-ukraine>> accessed 17 April 2025.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ Resilience of Ukrainians remains high, as UN maps aid and reconstruction needs for 2025 (n 86).

⁹⁰ The world must stay the course with the people of Ukraine (n 85).

⁹¹ 10 things you should know about the humanitarian situation in Ukraine (n 87).

⁹² Ukraine Crisis Response Plan 2025 (n 84).

6. ALTERNATIVE FUNDING AND SOLUTIONS FOR NGOS

6.1. REGIONAL AND LOCAL FUNDING SOURCES

Regional funding, often facilitated by neighbouring governments or regional organisations such as the African Union, Association of the Southeast Asian Nations, or the European Union (EU), can offer more context-specific support for NGOs working on human rights issues within a particular region. These funding bodies tend to have a better understanding of local challenges and can be more agile in responding to urgent needs.⁹³ Additionally, local funding sources, such as private businesses, philanthropic foundations, and grassroots donations, can provide NGOs with more autonomy and flexibility compared to traditional international aid.⁹⁴ Local communities, too, can play a vital role in sustaining human rights initiatives by directly investing in organisations that address their own social and cultural contexts.⁹⁵ By diversifying funding streams and building relationships with regional and local partners, NGOs can ensure greater resilience and sustainability in their efforts, even when faced with the unpredictability of foreign aid.

6.2. PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL DONORS

As NGOs face increasingly complex challenges and diminishing traditional funding streams, strategic partnerships with international donors such as the EU, the UN, and the private sector can provide critical support. These collaborations enable NGOs to tap into a broader pool of resources, expertise, and networks, enhancing their operational capacity and impact on human rights advocacy. The EU, for instance, has been a significant donor of development aid, with a strong focus on human rights and democratic governance.⁹⁶ EU-funded initiatives often target areas such as the rule of law, civil society development, and institutional reform, providing NGOs with the necessary resources to promote human rights in challenging environments.

Similarly, the UN's diverse agencies, such as the UNHCR and UNDP, offer specialised funding and technical support to NGOs working in conflict zones and crisis

⁹³ European External Action Service, 'The European Union and the African Union - Democratic Governance, Human Rights, Gender and Youth' (2020) <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/african-union/european-union-and-african-union-human-rights-gender-and-youth_en> accessed 16 April 2025.

⁹⁴ Reuters, 'Brand Watch: Patagonia pioneers new grassroots approach to corporate giving' (4 June 2024) <<https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/boards-policy-regulation/brand-watch-patagonia-pioneers-new-grassroots-approach-corporate-giving-2024-06-04/>> accessed 16 April 2025.

⁹⁵ OpenGlobalRights, 'Local funding is not just an option anymore—it's an imperative' (6 October 2021) <<https://www.openglobalrights.org/local-funding-is-not-just-option-anymore-it-s-imperative/>> accessed 16 April 2025.

⁹⁶ European Commission, 'EU support to human rights defenders and civil society' (2023) <<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2023/human-rights-defenders>> 16 April 2025.

situations.⁹⁷ These partnerships are not limited to humanitarian aid but extend to long-term development goals, including capacity building and policy advocacy. Furthermore, the private sector, with its increasing interest in corporate social responsibility, offers new opportunities for NGOs to secure funding through grants, investments, or in-kind support. Private sector partnerships can also contribute to social innovation, as businesses bring forward technical solutions, expertise, and a fresh perspective to human rights challenges.

However, partnerships with international donors must be carefully managed to ensure alignment with the NGO's mission and values, especially when private sector actors may have competing commercial interests. By cultivating diverse partnerships with international donors, NGOs can strengthen their resilience, improve accountability, and increase the sustainability of their human rights efforts.

6.3. LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY AND CROWDFUNDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECTS

In an era of widespread digital connectivity, leveraging technology and crowdfunding has become an innovative and vital solution for securing funding and amplifying human rights initiatives. Technology enables NGOs to overcome geographical and financial barriers by reaching global audiences and donors, thus expanding their support base and increasing visibility for their causes. Digital platforms like social media, websites, and mobile apps serve as powerful tools for advocacy, awareness, and real-time information sharing, allowing NGOs to engage a wider demographic and galvanise grassroots movements.⁹⁸ Moreover, technology facilitates the dissemination of urgent human rights issues, enabling real-time responses and mobilisation for crises such as humanitarian disasters, political repression, and refugee emergencies.⁹⁹

Crowdfunding, in particular, has gained significant traction as a flexible funding model for NGOs in the human rights sector. Websites like GoFundMe, Kickstarter, and Indiegogo allow individuals and organisations to raise funds directly from supporters, bypassing traditional donor channels and increasing the independence of human rights campaigns.¹⁰⁰ Crowdfunding campaigns can target small, micro-donations from a large number of people, making it possible for initiatives with limited resources to gather substantial financial support. These platforms also offer NGOs the ability to showcase their

⁹⁷ United Nations Development Programme, 'Our partners' <<https://www.undp.org/partners>> accessed 16 April 2025; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Working with NGOs' <<https://www.undp.org/our-partners>> accessed 16 April 2025.

⁹⁸ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'New technologies and human rights' (2022) <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/new-technologies-and-human-rights>> accessed 16 April 2025.

⁹⁹ Access Now, 'Digital rights in times of crisis' (2023) <<https://www.accessnow.org/from-crisis-to-conflict-we-must-defend-digital-rights-when-people-need-them-most/>> accessed 16 April 2025.

¹⁰⁰ Nicky Woolf, 'Crowdfunding for human rights: A growing trend' *The Guardian* (22 October 2021) <<https://www2.fundsfornbos.org/articles-searching-grants-and-donors/crowdfunding-for-human-rights-how-to-make-your-ca-use-stand-out/>> accessed 16 April 2025.

work, communicate their mission effectively, and connect with potential donors who are motivated by a shared commitment to human rights causes.¹⁰¹

Technology-driven approaches also help increase transparency, with blockchain and similar technologies enabling real-time tracking of donations and project outcomes, ensuring accountability to donors. In regions where traditional funding streams may be slow or unreliable, leveraging technology and crowdfunding allows human rights organisations to operate more flexibly and responsively. However, the success of crowdfunding relies heavily on the ability to engage a wide audience and maintain ongoing relationships with donors, which necessitates robust digital marketing strategies and transparent communication about how funds are being used.

6.4. ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE OF NGOS IN THE ABSENCE OF US FUNDING

In the absence of US funding, many NGOs have demonstrated remarkable adaptation and resilience by diversifying their funding sources, strengthening local partnerships, and innovating in their operational strategies. A critical step for many organisations has been to shift towards regional and local funding sources, including government grants, private sector sponsorships, and partnerships with international donors such as the EU and the UN.¹⁰² As such, the UN primarily provides financing through its agencies, such as the United Nations Children’s Fund, World Health Organisation, and the UNDP, aligning with the needs of various types of NGOs and their specific projects. When a partnership is created between the UN and a NGO, the relevant UN Agency provides the funding, while the NGO delivers the humanitarian aid and protection to those in need. These various sources not only provide financial stability but also encourage collaboration across borders, ensuring that human rights work continues even when traditional US aid is no longer available.¹⁰³

NGOs have also focused on building strong relationships with local communities to mobilise grassroots support, fostering sustainable and community-driven initiatives. In many cases, this has led to an increased reliance on local knowledge and expertise, which enhances the cultural relevance and effectiveness of their work.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, NGOs have increasingly adopted technology to reach donors directly, enabling them to tap into global crowdfunding platforms and online fundraising tools.¹⁰⁵ These platforms have democratised the flow of financial resources, allowing NGOs to maintain their activities even without traditional large-scale donors.

¹⁰¹ Amnesty International, ‘Digital advocacy and crowdfunding in action’ (2023) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/technology/>> accessed 16 April 2025.

¹⁰² European Commission, ‘Global Europe: NDICI – Global Europe Instrument’ (2023) <https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/global-europe-neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument_en> accessed 16 April 2025.

¹⁰³ Devex, ‘How NGOs are surviving without US government funding’ (2023) <<https://www.devex.com/news/how-ngos-are-surviving-without-us-government-funding-105120>> accessed 16 April 2025.

¹⁰⁴ OpenGlobalRights, ‘When local communities lead: Rethinking donor relationships’ (2022) <<https://www.openglobalrights.org/strategies/funding/>> accessed 16 April 2025.

¹⁰⁵ TechSoup, ‘Digital Fundraising Tools for NGOs’ (2024) <<https://www.techsoupeurope.org/ngo/#:~:text=Our%20donation%20program>> accessed 16 April 2025.

Furthermore, NGOs have sought to bolster their advocacy efforts and visibility by forging new alliances with like-minded civil society organisations, social enterprises, and academic institutions.¹⁰⁶ These partnerships help NGOs pool resources, share best practices, and enhance their collective capacity to address human rights violations. In situations where financial support from US-based organisations has been constrained, these collaborations have become pivotal in ensuring that human rights work is not abandoned or compromised.

In sum, while the absence of US funding has been a challenge, it has also prompted NGOs to become more innovative and self-reliant, creating new avenues for collaboration, fundraising, and community-driven initiatives. These efforts have ultimately strengthened the resilience of human rights organisations in the face of shifting political and financial landscapes.¹⁰⁷

7. CONCLUSION

7.1. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The effective and efficient functioning of human rights NGOs depends heavily on the consistency of funding provided to them, to serve as watchdogs for society, advocate for change and provide material and long-term support for those in need. International aid plays an important role in funding, especially with US aid having been a significant part of the human rights funding effort within Asia. The withdrawal and suspension of crucial funds, such as US aid, due to political and foreign strategic interests, heavily affect the functioning of human rights NGOs. The lack of funding has led to the withdrawal of grassroots projects, the presence of human rights defenders and aid workers in crisis and conflict zones, and a decrease in advocacy for legislative change, ultimately leading to a decline in the level of protection provided for human rights. Especially vulnerable to a lack of funding are specific human rights issues, such as refugees' and migrants' rights, women's rights, ethnic and religious minorities' rights, humanitarian crises, accessibility for health and education, civil and political rights, as well as labour rights.

Practical examples from Myanmar, Afghanistan and Ukraine bring to the fore the challenges faced by populations living within conflict and crisis zones, where the lack of funding for human rights and humanitarian organisations has deteriorated the status of human rights protections. However, the resilience to adapt to changing situations in funding by human rights NGOs has paved the way for the upkeep of human rights efforts, such as through the use of different avenues of international, regional, and local funding, as well as

¹⁰⁶ CIVICUS, 'Strengthening civil society through collaboration' (2023) <<https://publications.civicus.org/publications/civicus-annual-report-2023-2024/work-towards-our-strategic-objectives/strengthen-the-civil-society-ecosystem/>> accessed 16 April 2025.

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch, 'Responding to funding threats: Innovation in advocacy' (2022) <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/18/responding-funding-threats-innovation-advocacy>> accessed 16 April 2025.

through the use of technology, including crowdfunding. The fact that NGOs are adaptable and willing to find new ways to receive funding and support keeps an optimistic outlook for the promotion of human rights worldwide.

7.2. THE LONG-TERM OUTLOOK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS NGOS IN ASIA

The long-term outlooks are complex in nature for Asia, due to challenges within nations. Even though challenges remain, positive aspects with respect to progression in the protection of human rights are present.

While conflicts persist and nations continue to exert influence over their people, they are deprived of the possibility for civic participation within the society, and the possibilities for civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and aid organisations to thrive remain low. Repressive tactics on the free flow of information and internet blockages prevent information from being spread to the people and undermine awareness campaigns of human rights NGOs. Furthermore, restricting access for aid organisations to conflict zones by state authorities deprives people of their right to survival and long-term recovery.

However, the cooperation of states with multilateral organisations, such as the UN, provides for possibilities to enhance human rights protections, as funding and detailed expertise can be provided to NGOs. Additionally, cooperation with local and community-based programs provides for a deeper understanding of the issues taking place at the national and community levels, allowing human rights NGOs to gain valuable knowledge on how to support communities with issues they are facing.

7.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS FUNDING MECHANISMS

01

Finding new avenues of funding.

While the political and financial landscapes keep changing, it is crucial for human rights NGOs to keep discovering effective and consistent avenues of funding. By partnering with international donors, NGOs gain expertise, knowledge and funding for their efforts. Additionally, regional and local funding sources are crucial when international aid is withdrawn or suspended. Local and community actors provide advantages for NGOs to receive a detailed understanding of where funds should be allocated effectively.

02

Utilising the advantages of the digital era.

The digital era and evolving technology have opened a multitude of possibilities to reinvent how funding is provided to human rights NGOs. With the use of digital technology, funding is much more accessible, and donors can be reached worldwide. The advantages of social media, websites, and applications are profound for NGOs to spread their mission and reach supporters globally. Additionally, NGOs have been utilising crowdfunding as a tool to receive crucial funds, as it allows organisations to reach donors all over the world.

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