



**Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to
Human Rights Defenders**

Activity Report

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1. Summary

Over the course of 2019, the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders (EMHRF) continued to play a significant role in strengthening the protection, resilience and innovation capacity of 129 human rights defenders and civil society actors in the Arab region, while adapting to new transformation processes evolving on the societal level, notably in Algeria and Lebanon. Its interventions totalled 1,8 million Euros, with Syria and Egypt standing out due to the harsh conditions for human rights work.¹

Seventy-eight percent of ***the Foundation's interventions aimed at protecting defenders from danger, documenting violations and assisting victims in countries in situations of armed conflict or in hostile environments*** (Syria, Libya, Egypt, Algeria, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory). Although the Foundation's interventions in these countries were mostly made in emergency contexts, it has also developed a pilot tailored coaching initiative aimed at strengthening the sustainability of the actions of these threatened actors, notably when they are forced to relocate part of their operations abroad.

Over a hundred defenders and NGOs from these countries received support. Three quarters of the urgent protection grants have helped defenders regain a sense of normalcy in their lives and consider means to pursue their activism. Hundreds of documented reports, videos and documentaries on violations have also been produced, and subsequently communicated to the media and international mechanisms as well as campaigns launched to uncover the truth, seek justice and remedies for the victims, three thousands of whom were assisted and empowered to claim their rights through administrative, legal, psychosocial support and rehabilitation.

The results of these interventions are encouraging, as illustrated in the following examples.

Thanks to an urgent grant, a Syrian women rights' activist who was facing threats by members of the Syrian Democratic Forces in Raqqa countryside, northern Syria, was able to avoid arbitrary arrest by relocating to different cities before reaching safety in southern Turkey early November 2019. Such support allowed her to overcome an extremely stressful period, and she is now resuming her activities with a local group of feminists she helped forming to raise awareness on the rights of women and their contribution to public life in Raqqa.

A unique blog recorded arrests within the Algeria protest movement since February 2019 and documented the profile and situation of detainees. Building on this documentation, international solidarity actions were launched, among which a petition co-signed by hundreds relayed by the international media and an appeal to MEPs calling for an immediate end to the repression and the release of all prisoners of conscience. As a result of these actions, among others, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on "The situation of freedoms in Algeria" on 28 November 2019 that "strongly condemned the arbitrary and illegal arrest, detention, intimidation and attacks on journalists, trade unionists, lawyers, students, human rights and civil society activists and all peaceful demonstrators taking part in the peaceful Hirak demonstrations."

¹ In total, the EMHRF received and assessed 498 applications (cf. appendix 1), 30% of which came from Syria, 20% from Egypt, 15% from Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, 10% from Morocco, 8% from Tunisia, 6% from Jordan, 5% from Lebanon, 4% from Algeria, and 2% from Libya. Although the Foundation has recorded a decrease in applications received from the Maghreb region, notably Tunisia, it has continued to witness and respond to a significant increase in requests from Syrian human rights defenders and organisations that can be explained by large scale population movements and recent shifts in conflict dynamics as well as donors' reshuffling priorities towards reconciliation and reconstruction in the country.

Legal defense was provided to 62 human rights defenders, political activists, journalists, and bloggers who were rounded up following the 20 September 2019 wave of protest actions, which spanned into nine key Egyptian cities to denounce corrupt practices within the Presidency and military institutions. These activists were arbitrarily charged with a range of accusations including unlawful protest, spreading false news, and joining a terrorist organisation.

Nearly twenty percent of ***the Foundation's interventions were aimed at strengthening the core operations of innovative and emerging civil society initiatives*** to address inequalities and to empower disadvantaged populations, notably women, the youths and migrants, to be actors of sustainable democratic and human rights change.

These initiatives notably contributed to raise the voice and empower over a thousand of marginalised persons in remote regions, often through educational means making use of film narratives, media platforms and the arts, to play a greater role in matters relating to respect for human rights, sustainable development and good governance at the local level. Their actions also contributed to inform on and promote the implementation of recent legislative reforms, notably to access public information and combat violence against women, in partnership with local and central authorities when possible.

The results of these interventions are particularly compelling, as illustrated by the examples below.

A hundred of people in southern Tunisia, 76% of whom are women and 53% young people as well as local associations and state institutions representatives, such as the Regional Director of Social Affairs of the Kébili governorate, were informed of the Law no. 58 on combating violence against women, thanks to trainings and cultural events organised by a local women rights organisation in the Douz delegation, known as the Sahara gate.

In partnership with the Regional Human Rights Commission, a migrants' association mobilised 140 migrants, public social service managers, association leaders in the cities of Agadir, Tiznit and Inezgane, where a large migrant population is concentrated, to discuss recommendations to improve the access to basic social services (health, education and civil registration of children) for migrant women and children in Morocco.

Since the start of the October 2019's protests in Lebanon, a unique independent media platform, launched by young pro-democracy activists, journalists, researchers and designers, who are invested in critical and fact-based journalism, was supported to provide a space for the many voices and demands relayed by the protest movement, and to promote inclusive, just and democratic narratives that can unite Lebanon's highly divided society.

The Foundation made it a priority to cover ***operating costs, i.e. rental and human resources costs***, that are rarely supported by other donors, so that civil society actors might sustain their activities. Operating costs made up 79% of all costs covered by the Foundation.²

² The protection needs, including health care, basic resources for families and urgent/temporary relocation, represented 14% of the costs covered. The remaining 7% supported projects, notably timely or innovative ones, that didn't require support for operating costs.

The Foundation also maintained its focus to support **youth and women**, who respectively made up 40% and 31% of its beneficiaries,³ and **actors working in remote areas**, who made up 64% of all beneficiaries.

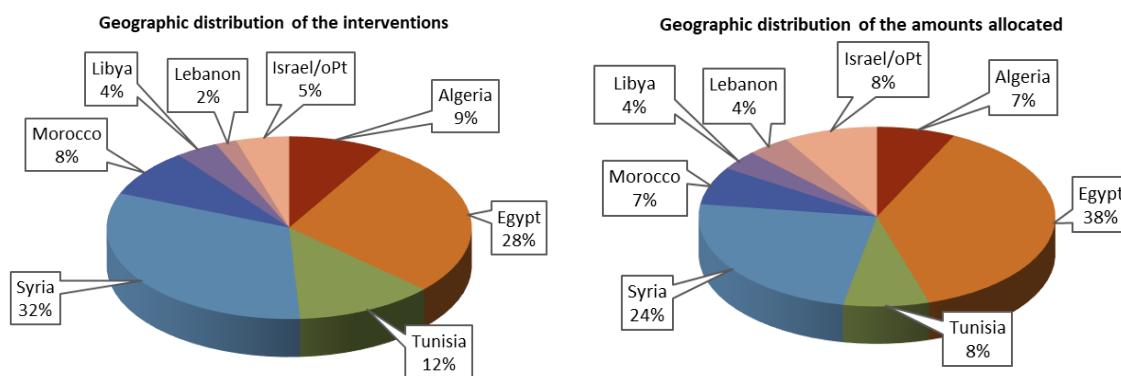
Beyond this direct support, and in view of threats to civil society actors, financial difficulties and obstacles to creating alliances in the region, the Foundation helped its partners contact other donors, with **49% of them securing additional funding at the time of writing**. It was also instrumental in leading coordination efforts between public and private donors to **promote an enabling environment for civil society** in order to uphold its resilience and sustainability prospects.

The main areas of the Foundation's interventions, financial and non-financial, in support of NGOs, groups and individual defenders in the region, are outlined in more detail below.

2. Financial Support Actions

The Foundation allocated direct support to 129 defenders (65 civil society initiatives and 64 individual defenders).⁴ 42% of the Foundation's direct interventions were made in an emergency context to protect the lives and well-being of defenders, while 58% were aimed at strengthening the functioning of groups or associations that do not have access to traditional sources of funding.

As illustrated by the breakdown of grants by country provided below, Syria and Egypt represent a significant share of the Foundation's interventions due to the harsh conditions for human rights work:



Support is distributed in two main categories: urgent interventions to protect individual defenders, and flexible interventions to support threatened, innovative or emerging initiatives in the regional context.⁵

³ These beneficiaries comprise female and young defenders (below the age of 35) as well as civil society groups led by and working toward youth and women in particular. The Foundation closely collaborates with other feminist grant makers, including Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights, EuroMed Feminist Initiative and Global Fund for Women, among others, with whom several referrals took place during the year to strengthen convergences and avoid duplication of interventions.

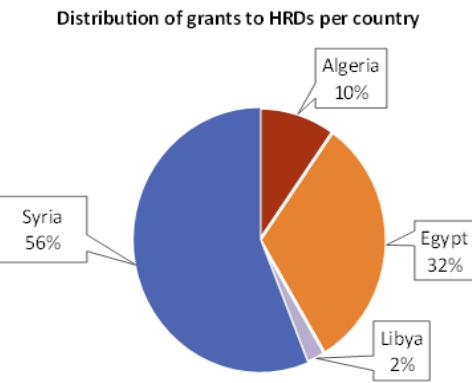
⁴ Based on thorough due diligence reviews performed by the Secretariat according to [selection criteria](#), the Board decided to allocate direct support to 21% of the requests received. 3% of the Foundation's beneficiaries are members of its founder, EuroMed Rights.

⁵ The Foundation set up two mechanisms to respond as flexibly as possible to the needs expressed by defenders: an emergency response mechanism, through which the Board can decide to allocate grants of €5,000 (with a maximum of 20% of overhead costs, i.e. €6,000 in total) in less than ten days, and a mechanism based on regular consultations of Board members at their annual meetings, through which requests of up to €60,000 are considered (the ceiling has been increased from € 40,000 to € 60,000 by the Board in 2018 given the increasing needs expressed by local actors in Egypt).

2.1. Urgent Interventions to Protect Individual Defenders

In 2019, the Foundation granted urgent support to protect the safety of **64 individual defenders (30% of them women and LGBTQ defenders, and 58% below the age of 35) and their families**, at risk because of their work in Syria, Egypt, Libya and Algeria.

As shown in the pie chart below, the majority of the Foundation's urgent grants was awarded to Syrian defenders who continue to experience violence and forced displacement as well as arbitrary measures of harassment, deprivation of freedom, torture and ill-treatment.



In particular, 58% of the grants were provided to cover the **immediate and temporary relocation of defenders abroad**, 22% covered **medical costs and psychosocial support** and 20% covered **internal relocation, legal aid and/or basic needs** of defenders and their families. These grants were mainly allocated in response to threats and in view of their precarious situations, and they aimed at allowing these defenders and their families to regain a sense of normalcy in their lives and consider means to pursue their activism in the future. Furthermore, the Foundation followed up closely on the situation of 71% of these defenders with a view to securing additional forms of support. In particular, it coordinated its urgent interventions in support of 21% of recipients with partners implementing solidarity actions (urgent appeals, letters to support asylum and resettlement requests, trial observation missions, meetings with officials, etc.); it assisted 46% of defenders in accessing rehabilitation services, training or scholarship opportunities, and secured complementary or longer term financial support for 4% of these defenders, notably from the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), the Committee to Protect Journalists, the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights (UAF), the EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI), Freedom House, Amnesty International, Scholars at Risk and the EU HRDs Mechanism *ProtectDefenders.eu*.

Overall, the **results of these protection grants** are encouraging:

- In **80% of the cases**, the grants and the follow-up undertaken **likely saved lives and helped secure long-term protection**. For example, a Syrian women rights defender, victim of threats by the extremist group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, was able to relocate to several areas in the northern Aleppo and Idlib governorates before reaching safety with her children in southern Turkey in August 2019 following military advances by the Syrian government and its allies. Relieved from security threats and benefiting from a temporary protection document enabling her to enroll her children at school, she resumed her human rights activities, leading workshops on life skills and women rights, and she became a member of the [Syrian Women's Political Movement](#). At the time of writing, 45% of the defenders supported, notably Syrians and Egyptians, will likely not return to their home country in the near future due to the persistence of threats and have thus lodged asylum claims.

- In 33% of cases, the ***support allocated also helped to develop the defenders' linguistic, advocacy and managerial skills and employability prospects, notably when relocated abroad.*** For example, an Egyptian lawyer who fled to Turkey to escape the prospect of arrest due to his inclusion in the Judicial Case 173/2011, also known as the foreign funding case against civil society actors, used part of the grant to enroll in Turkish language courses to improve his employability in the future. This enabled him to explore ways to relaunch and register his organisation in exile, while engaging with the media to discuss various issues pertaining to the human rights situation in Egypt, such as condemning the September 2019 wave of arrests against peaceful protesters, and demanding the release of Coptic Minority Rights activist Ramy Kamel, who was arrested in November 2019, a few days before his scheduled departure to participate in the 12th session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues. At the time of writing, 40% of the defenders supported have secured a stable source of income.
- Last but not least, the grants were instrumental in helping ***75% of them to resume their work in defence of human rights whether in their countries or abroad.*** For example, an Egyptian human rights lawyer and women's human rights defender, who was facing high risks of arrest amid the Egyptian government crackdown in September 2019, relocated to Tunis where she started exploring possibilities of registering a branch of an Egyptian civil society organisation, working simultaneously with the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH) and volunteering with Amnesty International, covering criminal justice issues such as pre-trial detention, torture and ill-treatment, and death penalty, among others.

However, eight defenders and their families reported being unable to reach safety at the time of writing, two of whom are arbitrarily detained in Algeria and Egypt.

2.2. Interventions in Support of Threatened, Innovative and Emerging Human Rights Initiatives

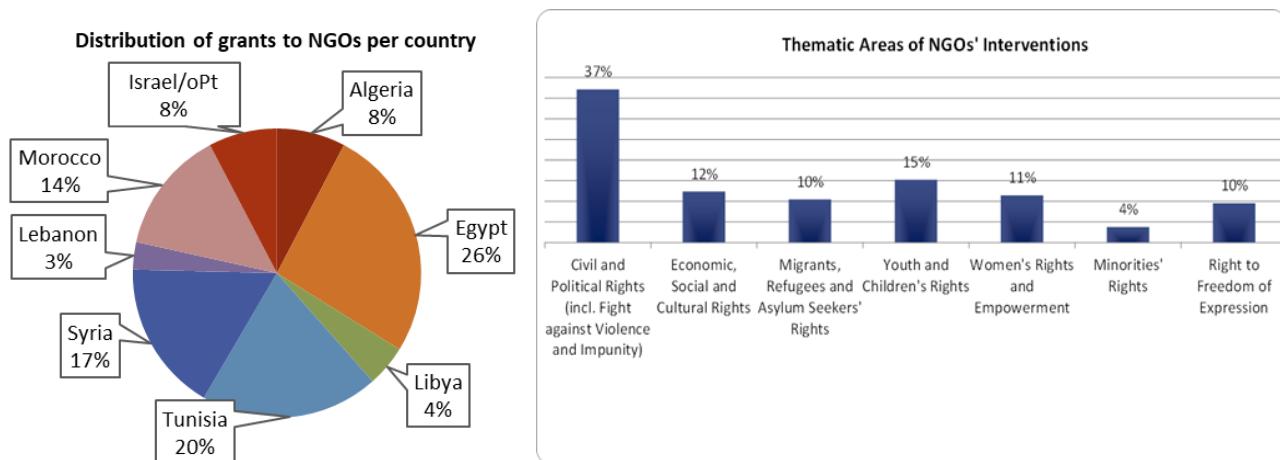
With a view to adapting interventions to different national dynamics, the Foundation provided flexible support, *both on an urgent and regular basis*,⁶ to ***65 civil society initiatives, including unregistered groups, 69% of whom are based in remote and hard-to-reach areas.***

These grants were mainly awarded to small or recently established innovative initiatives to support the development of activities, and to well-established and reputable organisations that faced sudden financial shortfalls in order to fill unexpected funding gaps.⁷

The thematic areas and location of the activities implemented by these partners are illustrated in the pie charts below.

⁶ 5 of the 65 civil society groups supported received urgent bridge grants to cover unexpected legal and financial deadlocks in 2019.

⁷ Well-established associations facing difficulties made up 55% of the recipients of the Foundation's flexible support interventions, which has increased since 2017, while 45% were new or recently established initiatives (less than 5 years ago).



In particular, the Foundation sought to respond to tangible needs expressed by civil society actors acting in the contexts outlined below.⁸

2.2.1. Upholding the Resilience of the Independent Civil Society in Egypt

The Foundation continued to focus its interventions on ***upholding the resilience of the independent civil society movement in Egypt*** by helping human rights organisations to ***protect their very existence and influence, at home and abroad,⁹ to enable them to continue documenting violations, assisting victims of the repression and advocating for respect of fundamental rights.***

The Foundation notably supported 16 initiatives seeking:

- To challenge the legality of claims arbitrarily brought against them related to tax evasion or receipt of foreign funding.
- To provide pro bono legal assistance and representation before various judicial branches to victims of human rights violations, notably human rights defenders and their organisations, pro-democracy activists, university students, bloggers and journalists, workers, victims of torture, arbitrary detention, and capital punishment as well as women survivors of violence.
- To document human rights violations and arbitrary legal practices to preserve the memory and raise awareness of the State's human rights record within the public and the international community.
- To develop advocacy arguments and media campaigns to trigger interest from and debate within the Egyptian population on government-aligned narratives about civil society actors and to harmonise the legislation and practices with the constitution and international obligations.

⁸ This section does not provide details about interventions in Libya and Lebanon because of their small number (3 and 2 respectively). Furthermore, no grant was allocated to Jordanian civil society initiatives, mainly due to other sources of funding available for civil society actors in the country.

⁹ 44% or 7 out of 16 Egyptian recipients of financial support have registered and relocated part of their operations abroad for safety reasons, which enabled them to develop new opportunities in terms of outreach, networking and advocacy.

2.2.2. Sustaining Syrian Civil Society' Activity towards Victims and Vulnerable Populations

The Foundation supported 11 Syrian civil society initiatives¹⁰ that aim at ***documenting human rights violations by all parties to the conflict, providing assistance and empowering vulnerable populations and victims of violations to secure their rights and maintain social cohesion in Syria and neighbouring countries.***

The specific focus of the grants was:

- To register their structures in neighbouring countries and in Europe to preserve and sustain the Syrian civil society's activity in the field of human rights.
- To provide legal assistance and counselling services to secure the release of prisoners of conscience, to reduce the vulnerabilities and protect the rights of internally displaced populations (IDPs) in the Damascus and Rif Damascus, Aleppo and Idlib governorates, and to help secure economic, social and property rights of Syrian populations in Lebanon, Turkey and in the occupied Golan Heights.
- To report on events and document human rights violations, with a particular focus on detention of women and gender-based violence, and on property rights' violations, in order to boost visibility and advocacy efforts to promote respect for truth and justice.
- To strengthen human rights knowledge of young IDPs and refugees, through community, cultural and artistic activities, in order to build and maintain social cohesion in northern Aleppo, Lebanon, and Turkey.

2.2.3. Protecting Civil Society Action and Concerted Efforts in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The Foundation focused its interventions on providing ***seed or bridge funding to enable civil society organisations to jointly address the implications of the closing space, and to document human rights violations*** in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

The mission of the five supported NGOs was the following:

- To strengthen collective advocacy efforts to push against the restrictive policies and mobilise local and international stakeholders to protect the space for civil society and fundamental freedoms.
- To document human rights violations in the West Bank, including freedom of movement's violations, arrests of activists, storming of houses, land levelling and house demolitions, among others, and provide legal assistance to the victims.
- To promote and secure respect for Palestinian workers' rights in Israel and in the occupied territories.
- To maintain independent media coverage of human rights issues in the Gaza Strip.

2.2.4. Enabling Civil Society's to Address New Transformations in Algeria

The Foundation supported five Algerian civil society initiatives, including among the diaspora, to ***raise awareness about the Hirak's demands for democratic change, and to support marginalised populations and victims of the repression.***

The specific focus of the grants was:

¹⁰ In particular, 31% of the grants supported initiatives implementing support actions towards the Syrian refugee populations in Turkey and Lebanon, and 69% of the support actions targeted Syrian IDPs and victims of violations across the country (22%), in the Damascus and Rif Damascus governorates (22%), in the southern governorates (22%), in the northeastern governorates (11%) and in the northwestern governorates (22%).

- To develop joint civil society actions to raise awareness on the demands of the peaceful protest movement, and to document the judicial repression as well as the change in scope, the nature of the movement and the ongoing political construction of its demands.
- To implement long-term cultural and artistic activities aimed at empowering marginalised women, children and young people and strengthening their knowledge of human rights, citizenship and diversity in northeastern and northwestern Algeria.
- To defend those whose rights have been violated, including prisoners of conscience and families of the disappeared.

2.2.5. Strengthening Associations to Address Inequalities in Remote Regions of Tunisia and Morocco

Beyond the differences and complexity of the democratic transition processes taking place in each of the two countries, the Foundation continued to give priority to strengthening the core operations of 22 **local associations to address inequalities and to empower disadvantaged populations, notably women, youth and migrants, to be actors of sustainable democratic and human rights change.**

In particular, the Foundation supported 13 Tunisian and 9 Moroccan initiatives that pursued the following specific objectives:

- To empower and educate young people on human rights and citizenship within youth centres, cultural spaces, films complex and citizenship clubs.
- To develop civil society coalitions composed of migrants and local associations to develop joint campaigns and support actions to contribute to the protection and integration of migrants.
- To monitor the implementation and educate about laws to access information and to combat violence against women in remote regions, and to deepen civil society exchanges on the promotion of equality in inheritance across the Maghreb region.
- To mobilise and strengthen the capacities of women and young people in the fight against violent extremism in the governorates of Ben Arous, Tunis, Ariana, Manouba, Medenine and Tataouine (Tunisia), and in the Beni Mellal-Khenifra region (Morocco).

Although it is too early to report on all results since several grants are still on-going, some of the main impact of the Foundation's local partners actions, reportedly reaching over a million end-beneficiaries, can be highlighted:

Three hundred reports, videos and documentaries were produced, and subsequently communicated to the media and international mechanisms to uncover the truth, seek justice and remedies for the victims.

- These include individual and joint reports produced by civil society actors in Egypt on 1) the human rights situation, 2) the death penalty, 3) the right to be free from torture and ill-treatments, 4) the September 2019 wave of arrests, 5) the conditions in Egyptian prisons, 6) youth caught between the violence of the jihadist group Islamic State and Egypt's counter-terrorism measures, 7) the conditions of female prisoners at Al-Qanater Prison, and 8) deaths resulting from torture in detention centres. The latter notably found that 958 detainees, including 9 minors, died during the period 2013-2019, because of torture, ill-treatment, denial of medical care, among others. Thanks to subsequent communications to the UN special procedures, independent human rights experts declared that there was "credible evidence" that inadequate prison conditions have led "directly" to death, and thousands of other detainees may be at "severe risk." Several of these reports were also submitted ahead of the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Egypt in November 2019.

As a result of these submissions, 133 states provided 372 recommendations to the Egyptian government, which was unprecedented for a MENA country at UPR reviews, and seven UN experts urged Egypt to “immediately cease its campaign of persecution against protesters, human rights defenders, journalists and anyone else with divergent opinions” in October 2019.

- Short videos were published to highlight the stories of victims of detention and enforced disappearance in **Syria** and advocate for the victims’ right to know the fate of their loved ones. Moreover, a book entirely produced inside Syria was launched in March 2020 recounting stories from five cities, Al Bab (northern Aleppo countryside), Bou Kamal (eastern Deir Ezzor countryside), Homs, Palmyra (at the heart of Badia desert), Al-Qadam (southern Damascus, west of Yarmouk camp), to preserve the memory of the Syrian revolution until the end of 2019.
- A joint NGO parallel report was submitted to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which led it to [condemn](#) for the first time, in October 2019, **Israel’s** human rights violations in the occupied Golan, especially its illegal settlements and development of natural resources at the expense of the local population. Although such action is lawful and legitimate, this didn’t prevent an Israeli company from lodging a court case, seeking just over the NGO’s yearly budget in compensation, for violating Israel’s Anti-Defamation and Anti-Boycott Laws.
- 186 videos were produced by an emerging human rights association, documenting human rights violations in and around Hebron city in the **West Bank**. One of these videos, for example, showcased the targeting of a journalist by Israeli soldiers with rubber bullets while filming a protest.
- Thanks to support provided to victims across **Morocco**, a joint civil society report on gender-based violence was published and relayed at a press conference on 22 November 2019. The report notably documents 12,233 cases of gender-based violence in 2018, against 10,959 in 2017, which triggered interest in local and international news, and acknowledgment by public officials after the adoption in 2018 of the Law 103-13 on combating violence against women.
- A documentary on an Algerian writer, thinker and human rights defender, is currently being produced to emphasise a diverse and civic **Algeria** and document the civic initiative of 300 Algerians who are drafting a new constitution through citizens’ consultations.

Legal assistance, representation and awareness as well as psychosocial and rehabilitation services were provided to more than 3,000 victims of violations and discriminations in the region, notably human rights and pro-democracy activists, displaced and refugee populations.

- More precisely, vital pro-bono legal advice and representation services were brought to 1,037 victims of violations in **Egypt**, notably civil society organisations, independent unions and human rights defenders, pro-democracy activists, lawyers, journalists, artists, writers and bloggers, women, LGBTQ persons, workers and unionists, university professors and students, that faced fabricated criminal charges before various judicial branches - criminal, administrative, labour, Supreme State Security courts and Public Prosecution offices - in seven governorates (mainly Port-Said and Cairo, but also Sharqeya, Daqahliya, Qalioubya, Giza and Alexandria). Thanks to such legal representation services, several victims were either acquitted or released (107 decisions although these are not always applied), and they benefited from relaxed police observation procedures upon release (3 decisions). A few of them could also receive family visits or have had their prison terms reduced and received compensations. Moreover, more than 2,330 people, who were arrested in several judicial cases related to the [September 2019 protests](#) to denounce the military’s corruption and austerity measures, have been released although hundreds remain in pre-trial detention or forcibly disappeared today. Last but not least, a strategic litigation case that challenged the legality of articles governing the establishment of a key professional syndicate was won before the Supreme Constitutional Court.

- Legal support was also provided to 42 prisoners of conscience and their families in **Syria**, including before the Damascus' Anti-Terrorism Court, that led to the release of eight detainees, and the reduction of sentences for seven others. Complaints and lawsuits were also lodged before civil and Islamic courts in relation with the civil and personal status of the relatives of missing or forcibly disappeared persons to settle cases of weddings, births, deaths, divorces and inheritance.
- Individual and collective legal consultancies were held to protect the rights and settle civil status and registration cases, penal cases or real-estate disputes of 1,035 IDPs, 45% of whom are women, in the northern Aleppo governorate, **Syria**.
- Legal awareness sessions were held in the Beqaa governorate, **Lebanon**, to support 147 Syrian refugees, 81% of whom are women and relatives of detained and disappeared persons in Syria, to register deaths, births, weddings, and issue or renew legal documentation.
- Six hundred and eighty five Palestinian workers were able to choose their union and reach a collective agreement in an attempt to secure respect for their economic and social rights in eight Israeli companies operating in the **occupied Palestinian territories** (Area C of the West Bank, Atarot Industrial Zone north of Jerusalem, and Nitzanei Shalom Industrial Zone near Tulkarem). Moreover, 350 legal consultations were provided in person or on the phone to defend workers' rights and help students from the **occupied Golan** to keep their residence.

One hundred and seventy nine educational events, often making use of film narratives and the arts, were held to create debate on citizenship and human rights, to promote the implementation of reforms and to empower over a thousand of marginalised persons in remote regions, notably the youths and women, to claim their rights and play a greater role in matters relating to development, social cohesion and good governance at the local level.

- Training sessions benefiting 139 participants, including 79 women, were held to educate them about the [Right to Access Information Law No. 2016-22](#) in the governorates of Sfax and Nabeul, eastern **Tunisia**. As a result, 22 citizens have drafted and submitted access to information requests to publicly funded institutions in these governorates.
- Thirty seven young people, 68% of whom are women, were trained in December 2019 to understand [Law 31-13 on the Right to Access Information](#) of 2018 to give them the understanding and tools to participate actively in economic, social and political decisions in Meknes and surrounding municipalities, northern central **Morocco**.
- Two hundred and two children aged from 8 to 12 years' old, of whom 46% were girls, were introduced to basic concepts of tolerance, torture prevention and human rights thanks to cultural and artistic activities held at 14 citizenship clubs within schools in remote areas of the Jendouba, Nabeul and Tunis governorates. 81 facilitors of youth centers, responsible for providing human rights education workshops, were also trained on human rights standards, instruments and animation techniques in order to develop and maintain these educational workshops for the youth in 18 governorates of **Tunisia** on a sustainable basis.
- Film music, acting and documentary filmmaking workshops were attended by 37 **Algerian** young people, half of whom were women, from Oran, Algiers, Bedna, Bejaïa, Sidi Bel Abbes and the Sahara to prepare for the second edition of the International Cinema Encounters.
- In northern **Syria**, where a significant deterioration of the security situation occurred after the offensive led by the government and its allies, 775 local and IDPs -of whom 29% are women- benefited from social cohesion and awareness activities on various topics, such as access to rights, education, job market, targeting the youth in particular.

Various civil society coalitions were formed; campaigns and advocacy arguments were moved forward to raise the voice of vulnerable populations and call for harmonising the legislations and practices with the constitutional provisions and the international conventions ratified by the countries of the region.

- Relayed by the local media, a new coalition of over twenty migrants' associations active in the defence and support of their rights in the Tunis, Sfax and Medenine governorates is currently being formed in **Tunisia**. This unique initiative aims at making the voice of migrants heard, influencing reforms in the field of migrations and preventing rights' violations.
- A new platform of six local human rights organisations opened an office in Tripoli and organised four capacity-building trainings, in collaboration with the United Nations Support Mission in **Libya** (UNSMIL), to strengthen the knowledge of a hundred of Libyan activists in the field of documentation, report writing and assistance to migrants in the cities of Tripoli, Misrata, Kofra and Benghazi, before preparing visits to detention centres in 2020.
- Through tailored regional meetings and trainings convened by local civil society actors aimed at building civil society's knowledge and tools on migration and asylum, an informal network of 10 local associations is being formed and a report was produced on the situation of migrants with the objective of promoting respect for the economic, social and cultural rights of migrants and their integration in the regions of Casablanca-Settat and Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima, **Morocco**.
- Advocacy arguments were successfully put forward by local NGOs in **Egypt** to address the right to form unions. More precisely, several civil society statements and advocacy actions were undertaken towards the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Ministry of Manpower that led to [amending specific articles in August 2019 of the 2017 Law on Trade Unions](#), which not only legalised the status of one general confederation of syndicates, the official Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), but also made it difficult to reach the criteria to establish independent trade unions and imposed jail time on unionists who contravene that law. Although independent unions have still not been officially recognised, the new law provides for a few improvements: it reduces membership requirements for independent trade unions to 50 members, instead of 150 in the former version; it allows trade unions to determine their own structure and by-laws; it removes control by the ETUF on the elections of the trade unions and it replaces imprisonment with fines.
- A unique manual on gender equality among the youth in **Egypt** was also released and distributed to NGOs, media and government officials. This manual is intended to be used by teachers, educators and facilitators in schools or any youth organisations to address issues of inequality from an early age.
- Lastly, innovative social media campaigns were launched to trigger interest from and debate over key rights' issues within the population and debunk fake news on government-aligned narratives about civil society actors in **Egypt**, while independent media are stifled. For example, didactic videos allowed viewers to question the rationality of the "Hope Coalition" arrests, composed of secular political activists that intended to run in the next year's parliamentary election, and Judicial case 173, known as the foreign funding case against civil society actors. The number of followers on these social media accounts reached 300 thousand views. Opportunities for further mobilisation through social media platforms have emerged in the past years, which are unique to enlarge the base of support for the civil society and to provide a few free spaces for citizens to express their views in Egypt. Although several of these initiatives remain at a developing stage, they have demonstrated a capacity to push for accountability and could possibly deter violations from occurring in the future.

It is worth noting that ***28% of the civil society organisations developed collaborations and partnerships with the local and central authorities***, notably in ***Tunisia and Morocco where this percentage reached 55%***. These included the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP) in Tunisia and the Parliament of Morocco, the ministries of Human Rights, Women, the Family and Children, Culture, Education, Youth and Sports, their regional commissions, regional councils as well as the national institutions – notably the National Institution to Access Information (INAI) and the High Instance for Human Rights in Tunisia, and the National Human Rights Council and its regional commissions in Morocco.

Lastly ***49% of them secured additional funding*** at the time of writing to ensure -at least in part- the sustainability of their activity.

However, these above-mentioned results should not conceal the ***significant threats, managerial and financial difficulties facing the civil societies in the region:***

- ***Threats:*** As indicated above, two individual defenders supported by the Foundation are imprisoned in Algeria and Egypt, and three others have reportedly faced increasing scrutiny, intimidation and assaults because of their pro-democracy and human rights work in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Israel. Defenders' lawyers have also been arrested in Egypt and reported significant state security intimidations at courts and at home, and at least two family members of exiled NGO workers were harassed by agents of the National Security Agency. Lastly, the office of an NGO suffered significant damage because of a car bomb blast in al-Bab city, northern Aleppo governorate, in November.
- ***Managerial difficulties:*** While following up on a partnership with an emerging Syrian NGO registered in Belgium, the Foundation was informed that a dispute within the Board of the association took place and the dissolution of the association was requested in February 2019. A registered mail asking for proper documentation on the use of the funds or to reimburse the latter was subsequently sent by the Foundation, which decided to contact a bailiff and cancel the provisioned second instalment to the NGO.
- ***Foreign transfers' restrictions:*** A transfer to an Egyptian NGO has been frozen on the association's bank account and two transfers to Palestinian NGOs didn't reach the recipients' accounts. Although all these funds were eventually returned to the Foundation, and additional means implemented to channel the grants, this proves the persistent need to devise appropriate means to continue supporting the independent civil society movement in the region at present and in the future.

3. Tailored Follow-Up Actions and Coordination

The Foundation's goals are to adapt to new and continuous transformation processes evolving on the societal level, and to contribute to disseminating and sustaining the activities of its local partners in the long term.

It did so by providing them with tailored advice and referrals, undertaking field visits and initiating a pilot initiative to provide tailored coaching to enable threatened actors to develop contingencies. Moreover, it led exchanges among civil society actors, academics, donors and private foundations in order to inform how strategies and interventions in support of civil society actors may need to adapt in the future.

3.1. Specific Follow-Up Actions to Strengthen Civil Society Collaborations and Funding

With a view to adapt to the needs of its local partners, the Foundation took part in regular exchanges and meetings with civil society actors,¹¹ in addition to carrying out a field visit to Algeria in July 2019.

This visit aimed at observing civil society dynamics within the national protest movement since 22 February 2019, and getting a better understanding of the potential, capacities and action of emerging initiatives, particularly amongst students, artists and feminists.

Moreover, the Foundation undertook specific follow-up actions to contribute to disseminating and sustaining its local partners' activities, including:

- Encouraged and helped 29 newly formed groups, representing 45% of the NGO benefiting from the Foundation's support, to draft action plans and proposals to enable the Foundation, in conjunction with other partners, to strategically respond to their needs.
- Coached 13 new partners, in particular those working in Tunisia's remote regions, by providing them with strategic advice on the democratic management of associations, potential collaborations to exchange good practices, project implementation and sustainability prospects in cooperation with EuroMed Right's regional office for the Maghreb.
- Encouraged 26% of its beneficiaries to build and maintain ties with other groups and institutions working on similar themes at the local, national and regional levels. Contacts between organisations aimed at fostering information exchange and experience sharing, identifying synergies and joint actions.
- Facilitated the exchange of contacts, acted as an intermediary, forwarded a list of potential donors and/or assisted in drafting funding applications for 28% of its beneficiaries, that is, 18 NGOs in total. In addition, the Foundation directly referred several applicants whose activities fell outside the scope of its mandate, but which could be of interest to and may be supported by other donors.
- Coordinated its interventions in support of Syrian civil society initiatives with private foundations, including members of the Syria Working Group (SWG),¹² the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), the EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI), Adopt a Revolution and Baytna Syria to avoid duplication and strengthen convergences.
- Coordinated its interventions in support of Libyan civil society initiatives with several stakeholders and funders, notably the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), the Defender Center for Human Rights (DCHR), the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), We are not Weapons Of War (WWOW) and the Democratic Transition and Human Rights Support Centre (DAAM). The Foundation also participated in two meetings organised by CIHRS in February and July between international organisations and the Libyan Platform, a coalition of Libyan human rights organisations, to discuss directions in the fields of assistance to victims, protection of IDPs and refugees, and freedom of expression and association.

¹¹ The Foundation's regional mission for the Maghreb, based in Tunisia, organised a field visit in the south-western governorates to review challenges and needs of emerging associations in the fields of development and assistance in March 2019. Moreover, the Foundation maintained regular exchanges with Libyan and Egyptian civil society throughout the year. It also took part in biannual meetings, coordinated by EuroMed Rights, with international organisations to develop a coordinated approach on solidarity and advocacy actions to respond to the repression.

¹² In 2018, the EMHRF became a member of the steering committee of the SWG (along with the Asfari Foundation, the Sigrid Rausing Trust and the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights Defenders), which aims to inform and enable greater philanthropic support for Syrian-led civil society in Syria and neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Jordan).

- Co-organised consultations held by EuroMed Rights to develop a joint approach to support and advocate for upholding the resilience of the Egyptian civil society movement in the current repressive context in May and November 2019 and attended monthly coordination calls to address urgent and temporary relocation requests.
- Compiled, jointly with EuroMed Rights and Dignity, a list of experts on well-being, psycho-social support and organisational management that could be used by human rights defenders and human rights organisations based in Egypt and abroad.
- Met with key Algerian and French academics covering Algeria, and Algerian civil society organisations in the diaspora to deepen knowledge and understanding of the various dynamics at play at the local and international level and to strengthen coordination efforts.

3.2. Tailored Coaching Retreats to Develop Contingency Plans

In view of the relocation of many Egyptian civil society actors abroad and their spread over many countries,¹³ three Egyptian NGOs were assisted to hold retreats among their members to update their strategic plans based on actual capacities and agree on common values, priorities and practices (communication, management, etc.) to maintain a democratic life within these organisations and keep the teams working smoothly, both inside Egypt and in the diaspora.

Overall, these tailored retreats - facilitated by external coaches - were received with interest. The mere fact that seven to ten members of each NGO could meet face to face for consecutive days, while they haven't been able to do so for several years, proved useful. It allowed them to communicate without fear of security breach, and to develop contingency plans while attempting to solve internal tensions and misunderstandings resulting from a lack of communication.¹⁴

In addition, the Foundation decided to invest in training a new generation of civil society leaders through granting two of them traineeships and fellowships abroad, and twenty graduate lawyers are receiving comprehensive trainings inside Egypt in order to strengthen the representation of prisoners of conscience and victims at court, thus widening the human rights community circle and protection possibilities.

3.3. Enlarged Exchanges to Foster Adaptation in Civil Society Support' Strategies

To complement regular exchanges with local and international NGOs,¹⁵ the Foundation organised a discussion seminar on 2 November 2019 with 70 human rights activists, academics, funders and donors in order to strengthen collective analysis on how events are unfolding and what are the possible pathways in the future.

¹³ Based on a brief survey on the opportunities and the challenges facing Egyptian organisations in relation to their partial relocation outside the country, the Foundation identified a significant number of organisations that have established minimum (33%), medium (28%) or significant (37%) presence (either through individual members and/or through an institutional -intermediary- registration) in Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, the Czech Republic, the United States, Switzerland, Estonia, Belgium, Germany, Denmark and Luxemburg.

¹⁴ In particular, two sessions proved particularly useful, i.e. 1) brainstorming on the history of the associations helped older and newer members think about the identity of their organisations, and 2) performing a visualization game allowed them to prioritize their perceptions of the activities their organisations should carry out against realistic short, midterm and final goals.

¹⁵ The EMHRF is a co-founder of the Egypt Solidarity Group, together with EuroMed Rights and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), which is a unique platform formed by EuroMed Rights for Egyptian human rights organisations to plan coordinated advocacy and solidarity strategies with international organisations to prevent and respond to the repression. Composed of over 40 representatives, the Egypt Solidarity Group meets twice a year.

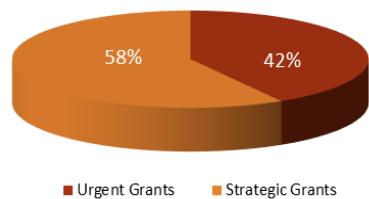
Supported by academic research papers and participation, the seminar aimed at reflecting on “Where is Egypt going?” 1) to better understand and grasp political, social and cultural dynamics at play at the local level, and 2) to inform how strategies and interventions in support of Egyptian actors may need to adapt in a context where most foreign actors, including international NGOs, researchers and governments, do not have access to, have limited their presence in or their support to the civil society inside the country. Overall, the seminar was well received by the participants, and further exchanges among funders and donors are scheduled in 2020.

4. Quantified Review of Interventions

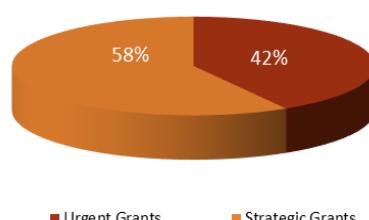
The following pie charts and graphs provide a quantified summary of the grants allocated by the Foundation to defenders and NGOs in 2019.

4.1. Type of Interventions

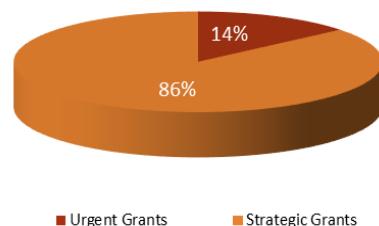
Type of interventions (# grants)



Type of interventions (# beneficiaries)



Type of interventions (amounts)

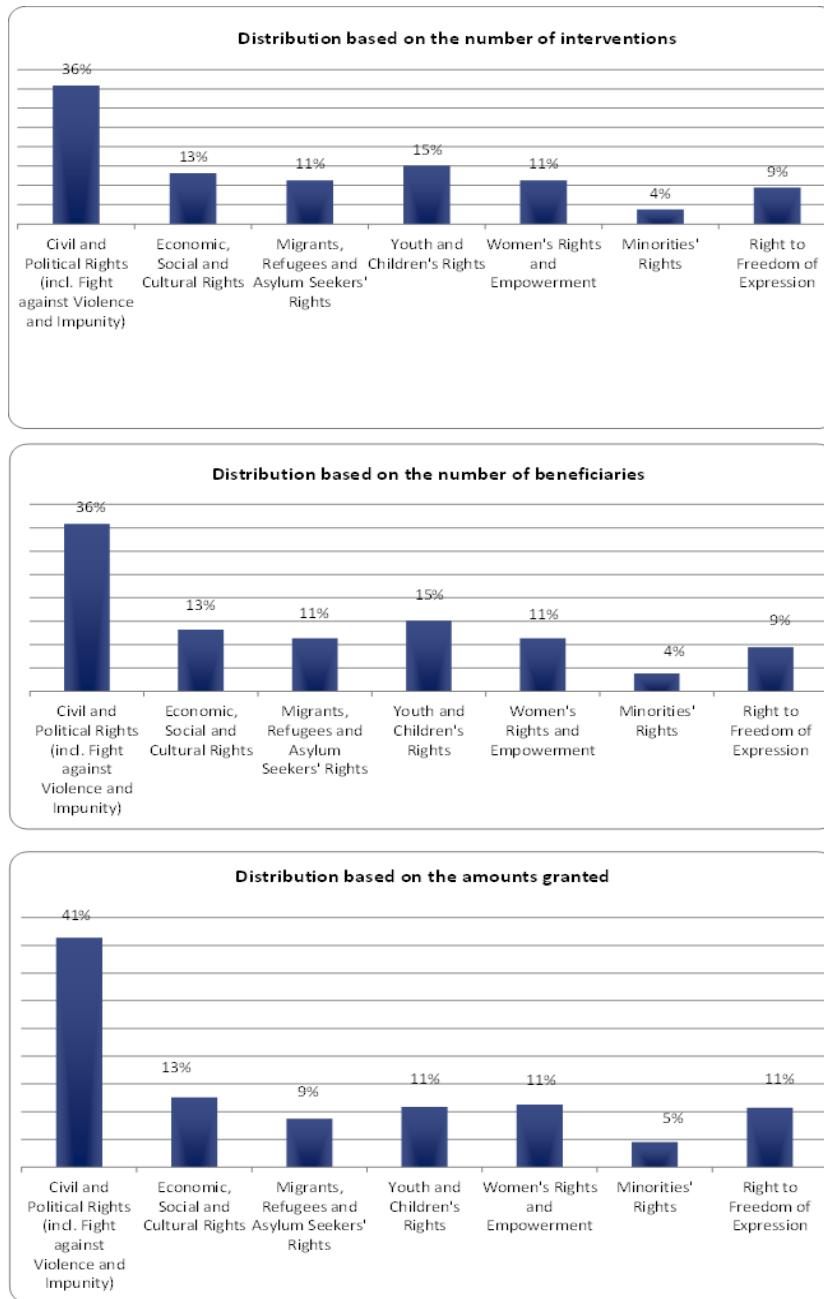


Although they represent much smaller sums of money than standard/strategic grants, the Foundation’s urgent interventions to protect the lives and security of defenders working in hostile environments remain significant in number, in particular in Syria and Egypt. They are slightly lesser than in 2018, mainly due to limited internal capacities during the year.

42% of the Foundation’s grants were provided in an emergency situation, whereas 58% were allocated in the framework of biannual calls for proposals and meetings of the Board. Through these two support mechanisms, available [online](#), the Foundation is able to address in a flexible way both life-threatening situations and incubation and innovation.

The average amount of the grants allocated (both urgent and standard) was €17,081, which represents a 25% increase compared to 2018. This figure emphasises the growing needs for support from the region’s civil societies.

4.2. Thematic Areas

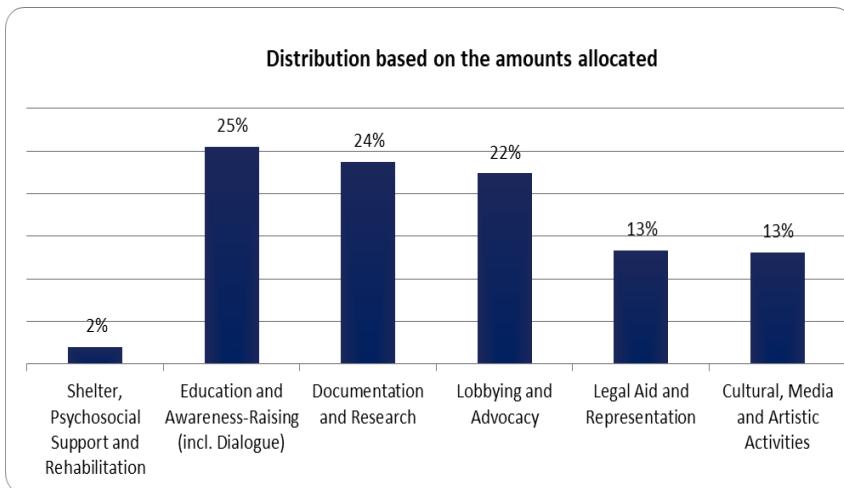
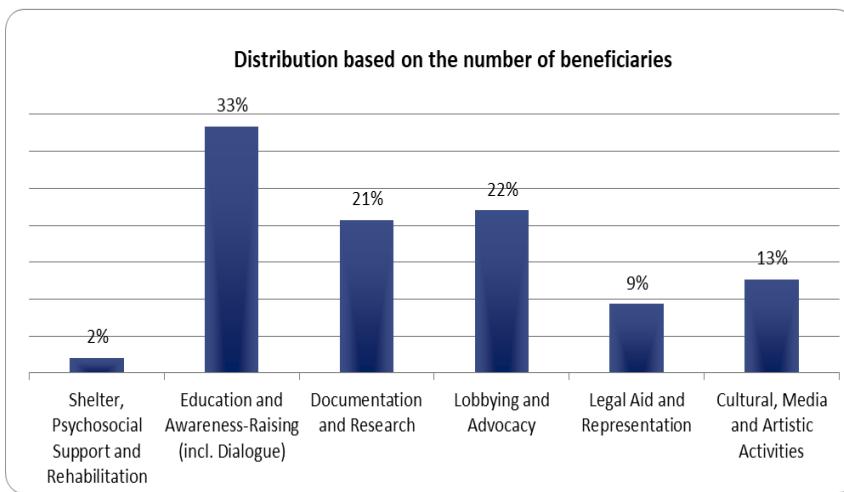
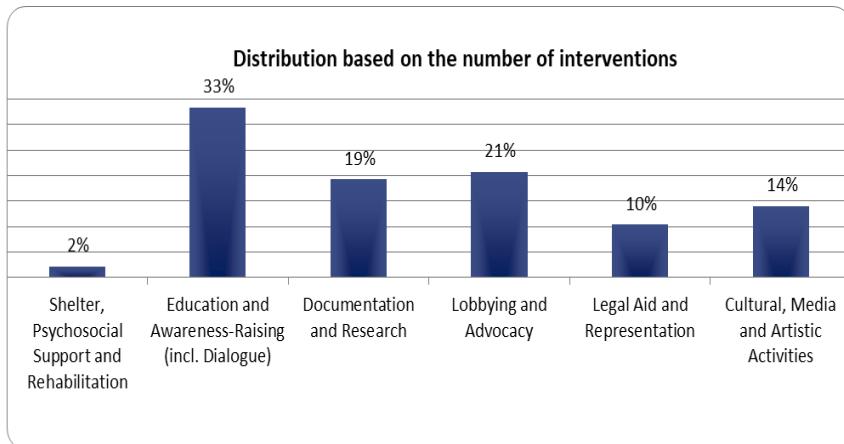


The main thematic focus of the Foundation's beneficiaries remains civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, which are priority issues for the region. As a result, 49% of interventions were related to these issues.

Furthermore, in view of the significant challenges facing marginalised and vulnerable populations in the region, notably the youths, women and migrants, the Foundation made it a priority to strengthen their protection and empowerment, which represented 37% of its interventions in 2019.

Note: Some interventions may have been allocated to more than one category, as appropriate, in order to generate a comprehensive and relevant overview of all the thematic areas covered by the NGOs' beneficiaries.

4.3. Activities

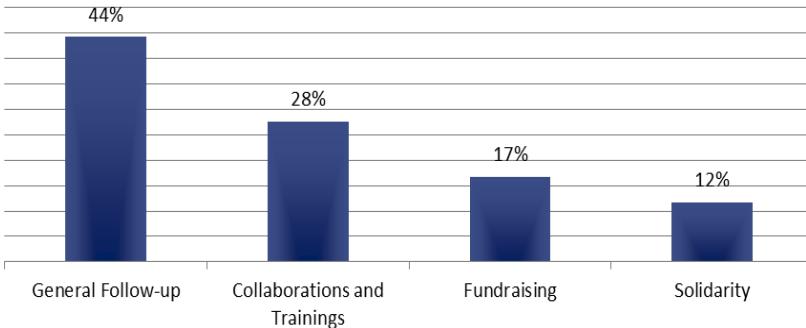


Complementary activities in the field of education, dialogue and advocacy, that are key to giving impetus to human rights reforms and transformation, represent the most significant share of activities (54%) implemented by the Foundation's grantees. These are also encouraged by media, cultural and artistic activities, as alternatives to conventional tools, to reach a broader audience, notably the youth. Film festival, theatre, music and popular arts are examples of innovative ways adopted by 14% of the beneficiaries to disseminate the values of democracy, citizenship, justice and respect for human rights.

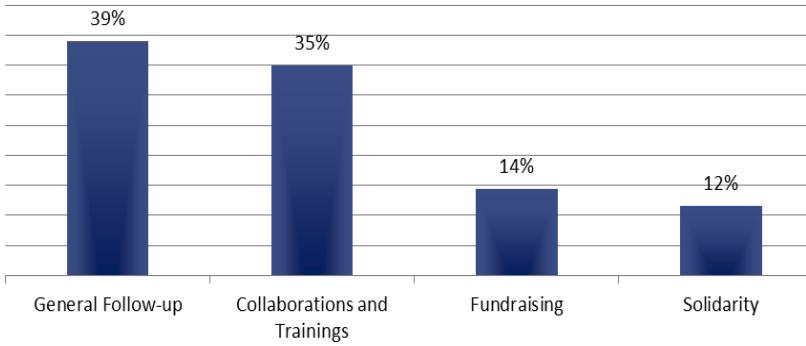
In a region with different national dynamics, a significant part of the activities carried out by the Foundation's partners also aimed at documenting violations, providing assistance, and pursuing justice and redress for the victims. These activities, which are taking place in particularly hostile environments, made up 31% of all activities carried out by the Foundation's partners.

4.4. Follow-Up

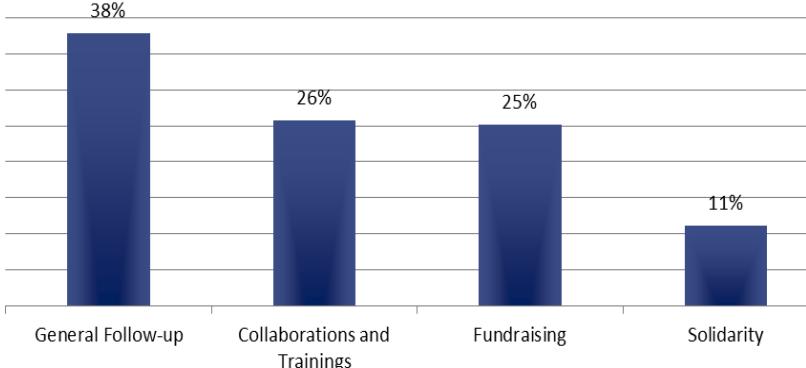
Distribution based on the number of interventions



Distribution based on the number of beneficiaries



Distribution based on the amount granted



In addition to providing funds, one of the Foundation's main objectives is to help vulnerable defenders and NGOs to pursue their mission in the long term. In pursuit of this, the Foundation specifically followed up on 56% of its financial interventions. In particular, it acted as an intermediary for its partners to strengthen their collaborations, and to access trainings, tailored coaching and funding.

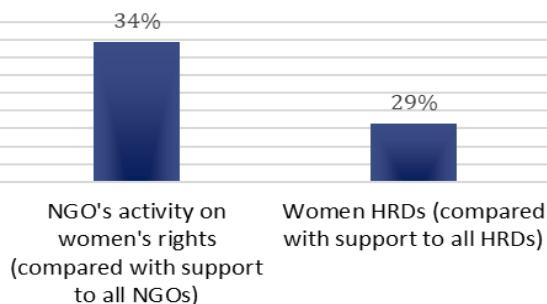
This type of follow-up is especially important for endangered and emerging initiatives as it enables them to share information, learn from other experiences, and build new synergies and movements that reduce their isolation and enlarge their base of support.

49% of the groups and NGOs supported have secured funds from other institutions.

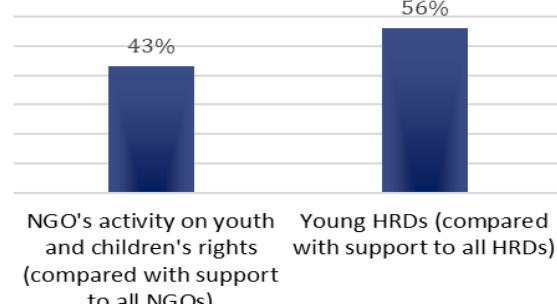
4.5. Women and Youth

Women and young people are key beneficiaries of the Foundation's interventions because of their central roles in societies and democratisation processes. Protecting their rights and strengthening their leadership are of vital importance in a regional environment where they are underrepresented in both political and associative decision-making processes. Women and young people thus respectively made up 31% and 40% of the beneficiaries, and the Foundation allocated funding to groups and NGOs based on sufficient representation of women in their leadership.

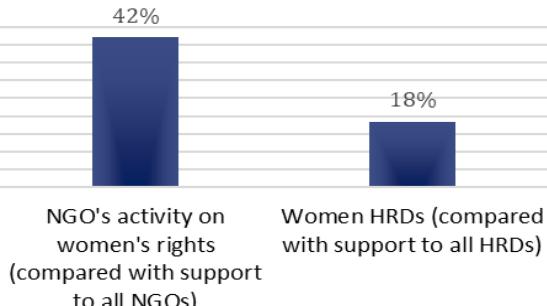
Distribution based on the number of interventions



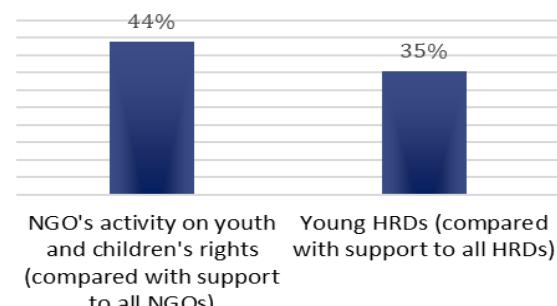
Distribution based on the number of interventions



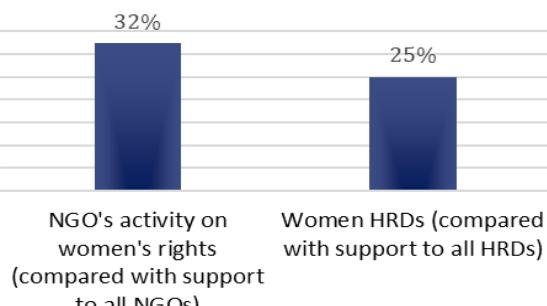
Distribution based on the number of beneficiaries



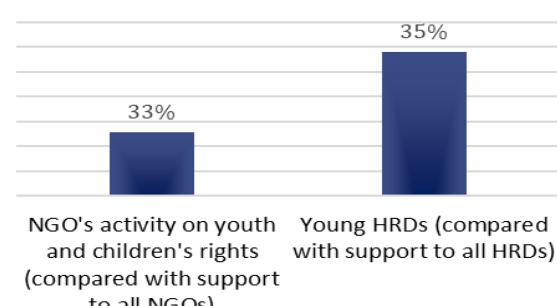
Distribution based on the number of beneficiaries



Distribution based on the amounts allocated

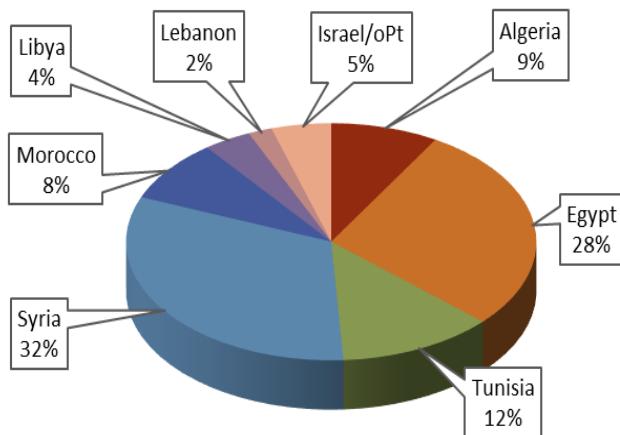


Distribution based on the amounts allocated

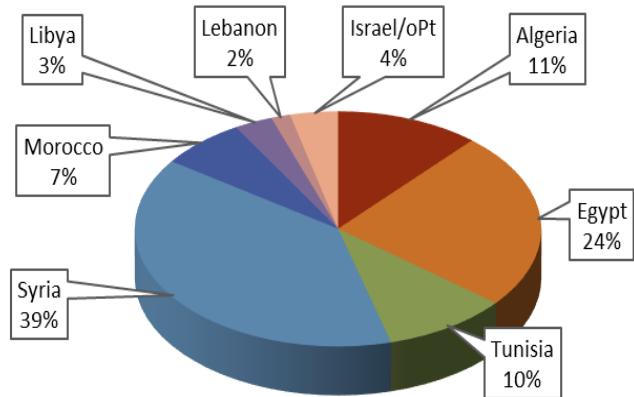


4.6. Countries

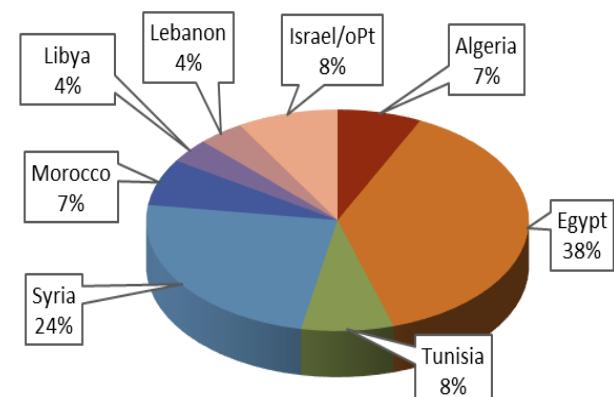
Geographic distribution of the interventions



Geographic distribution of the beneficiaries



Geographic distribution of the amounts allocated



As in the past six years, the protracted war in Syria and the gradual suppression of the independent civil society in Egypt were a significant focus in 2019. Against a background of impunity, the Foundation's interventions focused on protecting defenders, helping them to document violations and assist victims, principally defenders themselves.

In addition, the Foundation did not overlook the protection needs of defenders in other hostile environments including Libya, Algeria, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, which made up 18% of the Foundation's interventions in 2019.

Lastly, the decentralization, legislative and institutional reform processes underway in Tunisia and Morocco call for increased commitment and funding for local associations in order to address inequalities and prevent democratic backsliding. 20% of the Foundation's interventions consequently focused on strengthening the operational capacities of civil society actors, notably those who are acting in remote areas in these countries.

5. Organisational Issues

5.1. Financial Partnerships

Eight donors and private foundations have entrusted the Foundation and contributed to its activity with almost EUR 2,7 million in 2019.¹⁶ The Foundation notably signed a new partnership agreement with the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs in November 2019.

- Core support amounting to EUR 1,2 million (45%) was notably granted by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA),¹⁷ the Sigrid Rausing Trust (SRT) and the Open Society Foundations (OSF).
- Project support amounting to EUR 1,5 million (55%) was granted by the Swiss Development Cooperation Agency (SDC), the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DAPP-HRDC), the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

5.2. Information and Communication

The Foundation continued to apply the principle of confidentiality regarding most of the information pertaining to its beneficiaries. This policy was adopted and has been implemented in view of the threats faced by the NGOs and individuals applying for funding, beneficiaries and other defenders in contact with the Foundation. However, the Foundation remains transparent through reporting on its activities in this public activity report and to its main financial partners, provided that the confidentiality of information is ensured.

5.3. Internal governance

Composed of 12 members working on a voluntary basis, the [Board](#) remained unchanged in 2019. The members met twice, in May and November, to discuss the Foundation's strategy, programmatic and financial directions, and to consider applications from NGOs in the region. Between its meetings, the Board was also consulted regularly and approved all urgent grants awarded.

The Board was assisted by a Secretariat, composed of 9 full-time employees, one part-time consultant and an intern. In the course of the year, a number of changes occurred in the administration and finances department and several measures were adopted to maintain and improve financial management and efficiency. Beyond strengthening the capacity of the Mashreq programme team by recruiting an additional Regional Coordinator at the end of April, the Board recruited a Grants Administrator to assist in administering grants to local actors and complying with reporting requirements in March and a new Finance Director was hired in October after commissioning additional external accounting services. The EMHRF also renewed its partnership with EuroMed Rights that includes, amongst other things, the sharing of offices and related costs as well as IT services.¹⁸

The Foundation's interventions were audited by Deloitte, Mazars, Ernst and Young, and 2S Consulting SARL. The Foundation's 2019 financial statement was audited by Deloitte in Copenhagen and is available on the Foundation's [website](#).

¹⁶ Compared to 2018, the operating budget of the Foundation increased by 6%.

¹⁷ Within this core support, SIDA covers grants related to all the countries in which EMHRF is active, unless these fall outside of the OECD-DAC rules for development assistance.

¹⁸ This arrangement was put in place as of 2005 to minimise the two organisations' administrative costs.

Appendix: Synopsis of Grant Applications

1. Overview of the Number of Grant Applications

In 2019, the Foundation received and reviewed **498** grants applications and inquiries.

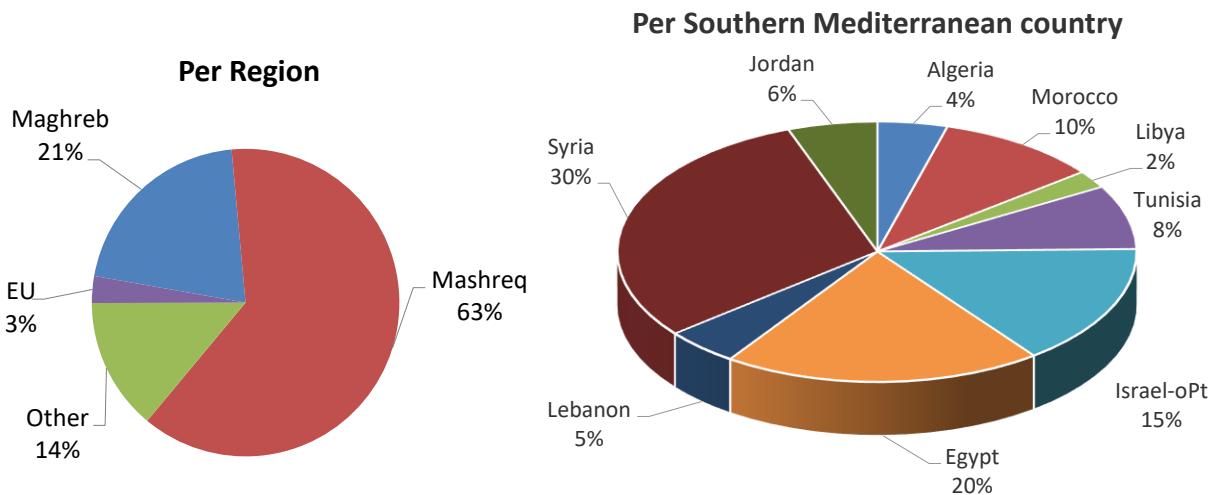
Per status: Applications received		
<i>Granted</i>	98	22%
<i>Under Assessment</i>	78	18%
<i>Rejected</i>	268	60%

Per type: Applications and inquiries received		
<i>Urgent</i>	158	32%
<i>Standard</i>	289	58%
<i>Inquiry</i>	51	10%

The total amount granted was of **€ 1,810,565**, excluding tailored coaching missions to exiled NGOs.

2. Geographic Distribution

The Foundation received and assessed a total of **413** applications and inquiries originating from the Southern Mediterranean region (representing **82.9%** of all requests received).



3. Reasons for Rejection

Below is a list of the main reasons which have justified the ineligibility of the applications received:

- The activities suggested fell outside the geographical mandate of the Foundation, i.e. Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel. These applications accounted for **21%** of all proposals rejected.
- Applications were rejected due to a general lack of information and/or inherent problems with the applicant (including vague project descriptions, negative feedback received from other partners and donors). These applications accounted for **7%** of all rejected proposals.
- The proposals didn't meet the Foundation's main [criteria](#) (i.e. identity as a defender, nature of the proposal, necessity of the request and approach of the applicant). These applications accounted for **17%** of all proposals rejected.
- Applications otherwise fulfilled all the requirements but were rejected because the applicant had already been funded by either the Foundation or another organisation, were not facing immediate threats, were not deemed as a priority in relation to other requests (for example, they were journalists who could receive support from other institutions), and the projects proposed for standard interventions were not innovative. These applications accounted for **39%** of all rejected proposals.
- Applications were rejected for other various reasons. These applications accounted for **16%** of all rejected proposals.

In cases where applications fell outside the Foundation's mandate, the Secretariat advised and directed a few applicants to alternative donors. This service has, in particular, been provided for cases where individual defenders are facing threatening situations in other regions. Rejected applications redirected to other potential partners and donors accounted for **1%** of all the rejected applications.

4. Average response time

As a rule, the Foundation aims to make sound and swift decisions regarding the applications received. The interval between the reception of the application and the Foundation's response is illustrated in the chart below:

Total Average Response time	13 days
<i>Inquiry average</i>	8 days
<i>Urgent average</i>	15 days
<i>Standard average</i>	15 days