Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders

ACTIVITY REPORT

2024

We asked our 2024 local partners to describe EMHRF in three words.
The above Word Cloud shows their responses.

The implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders' (EMHRF's) activities and the publication of this report have been made possible thanks to the partnerships with and contributions received from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (the Danish-Arab Partnership Programme DAPP), the European Commission, the Ford Foundation, the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Open Society Foundations, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the UN Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund.

The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of EMHRF and does not reflect in any way the positions of the above-mentioned partners.

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1. Introduction

"EMHRF support was invaluable. Rather than being tied to fixed themes, flexible funding enabled us to adapt to emerging needs."
A Syrian human rights organisation

2024 witnessed grave escalation of conflicts in the Southern Mediterranean region, unprecedented in their scale of death and destruction, while the trend towards ever more restricted civic space continued and anti-rights and anti-gender narratives and movements gained visibility and traction on a regional and global scale. And yet, in this context of multiple conflicts, the year was marked by a historic turning point: the fall of the Assad regime in Syria. For the first time in more than five decades, Syrians were able to envisage a future free from authoritarianism. Moreover, fundamental progress has been made on reforms in Morocco, moving towards greater equality between men and women.

In these changing contexts, **civil society in the southern Mediterranean has played a key role in the progress** achieved. **Civil society demonstrated, once again, its resilience, ability and creativity to seize opportunities in order to defend and promote human rights.**

In Morocco, for example, civil society was central to the progress achieved with the reform of the Family Code and is core to pushing for and implementing further reforms. In Syria, due to the years of activism on the part of the Syrian human rights movement and victims' associations, the defence of victims' rights to truth and justice cannot be ignored by the new caretaker authorities.

As this year attests, **EMHRF embraces the reality that contexts are both complex and fluid and changes can occur at any time.** EMHRF, which is led by civil society representatives and experts in the affairs of the Middle East and North Africa and acts to support local defenders in the region, maintained its strategic direction to invest in the protection, innovation and sustainability of local human rights ecosystems. **EMHRF provided over €3m in flexible financial support and strengthened its tailored accompaniment to individual defenders, movements and organisations,** notably those facing significant risks, those emerging and addressing sensitive issues, and those working in isolated regions.

EMHRF Support in 2024

Grants:

→ 186 urgent and operational grants

Amount:

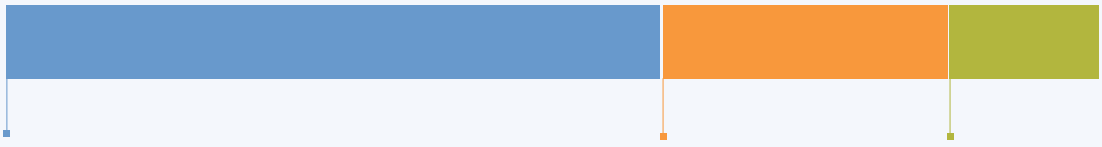
→ €3.4m

Recipients:

→ 407 human rights defenders and organisations

"The level of engagement, flexibility, and genuine concern for the challenges faced by the organisation and its staff has been remarkable."
A Palestinian human rights organisation

The main areas of EMHRF support reflect the demands and priorities of local defenders in 2024:



60% of EMHRF's grants focussed on **protecting at-risk defenders and initiatives.**

26% focussed on **advancing justice and accountability.**

14% focussed on **promoting participatory democracy.**

EMHRF's support helped individual defenders, grassroots movements and associations to adapt, pioneer ideas, and continue fighting for human rights. **This report demonstrates their lasting impact, despite extremely challenging circumstances.**

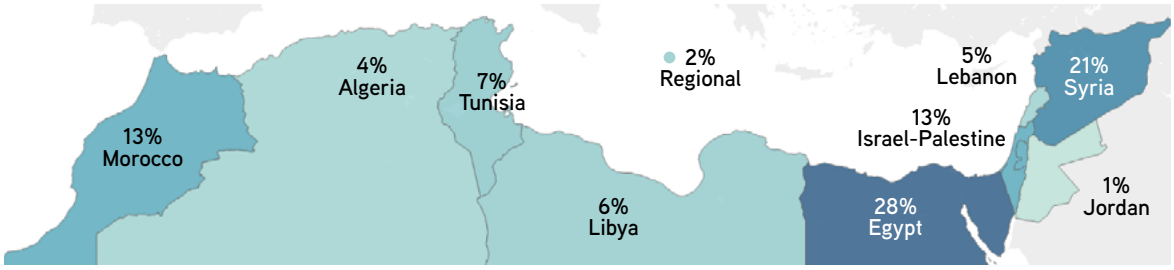
In these deteriorating conditions, **EMHRF took steps to consolidate as an institution to protect its action and those of its grantee partners while maintaining quality and efficiency.** As part of its gradual transition to a new leadership reflecting the emergence of a new generation of activists in its region of focus, the Board adopted internal rules of procedure and invited three new members to join the twelve-member Board, adding to the three new members who joined late 2023. It further established a new advisory body that can be called upon to strengthen the Board's expertise and networks in support of EMHRF's mission.

2. Financial Support to Human Rights Defenders and Organisations

EMHRF anticipates and responds as flexibly as possible to the needs expressed by defenders and associations. To this end, it used its two open grant-making mechanisms – one for emergency response and the other for seed/core support. Beyond these two mechanisms, EMHRF acted in exceptional and holistic ways to react to sudden major challenges and developments that threatened human rights ecosystems.

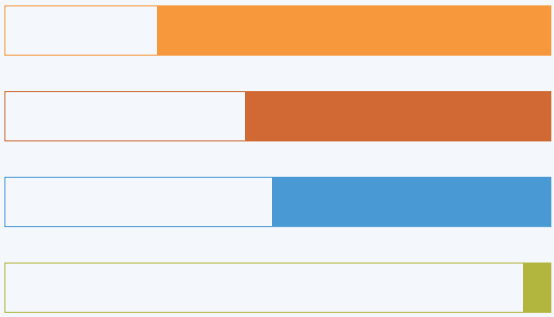
In 2024, EMHRF received and assessed 1,224 applications, predominantly from Egypt, Israel-Palestine, Morocco and Syria. In response, the EMHRF Board allocated grants in support of 313 individual human rights defenders and 94 human rights initiatives, amounting to €3.4m in total. Highlighting the scale of crises and emergencies that defenders faced in the region, 60% of EMHRF's interventions were through its emergency and exceptional response mechanisms.

In terms of geographical focus, Egyptian and Syrian human rights actors were the main recipients of EMHRF support, accounting for nearly half of the financial support allocated while support increased to Algerian (+78%), Moroccan (+30%), and Palestinian and Israeli (+14%) defenders compared to 2023.



Percentage of financial support allocated in 2024 per country

Moreover, EMHRF continued to follow through on its commitment to **support those most often marginalised**.



72% of supported defenders and organisations are from, based or active in remote areas.

56% are women defenders or women's rights initiatives.

51% are young (under 35) defenders or youth rights initiatives.

5% are LGBTIQA+ defenders or rights initiatives.

2.1. Emergency Support

"The partnership has been essential in transforming challenges into opportunities and maintaining hope within our community."
A Tunisian human rights organisation

As in 2023, protection needs were at historic highs in 2024 and demonstrate, once again, the need to fight for and safeguard an enabling environment for civil society and human rights activism in the region.

Emergency Support in Figures

→ 112 urgent grants (€0.7m)

Recipients:

→ 313 individual defenders

→ 23 organisations

To protect human rights ecosystems in contexts that swiftly change, and in which needs evolve and can drastically increase, EMHRF demonstrated its adaptability and its agility to get support rapidly to where it is needed. It provided **emergency protection support** to 313 individual defenders and 23 non-profit organisations at risk of death, arrest or collapse or facing direct challenges to their agency.

Urgent grants helped defenders, associations and movements from across the region to **protect themselves from threats, feel respite** and **regain some sense of stability.** With EMHRF support, the overwhelming majority of the recipient defenders took steps that helped them to pursue their activism.

The urgent grants sought to help defenders and initiatives that faced threats as a result of physical, verbal and judicial harassment and attacks (45%), heightened violence due to wars such as the conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon (39%), or periods of arbitrary detention and torture due to their human rights work (16%).

"The support ensured the well-being and resilience of our staff during tough times."
An Egyptian human rights organisation

Specifically, defenders used urgent grants to cover basic needs including (mental) healthcare, to relocate to safer locations, to access legal assistance, or to further, such as through participating in training courses, their security and their personal and professional development.

Here below are some **illustrative examples** of the threats defenders faced and how EMHRF urgent support helped them.

*With EMHRF's urgent protection support, **persecuted Libyan defenders**, including members of youth community groups and feminist spaces in western Libya, **improved their safety through relocation to another country in the region.** These mixed youth groups had promoted women's rights, education, and economic empowerment, as well as community revitalisation in their towns and villages. Following allegations of conducting non-Islamic activities, security forces subjected members of the groups to detention, torture, and forced confessions of apostasy, leading to high levels of community stigmatization of their entire families. Although the defenders found temporary stability and psychological support, ongoing repression in Libya and cooperation between authorities of both countries have left them feeling unsafe and seeking opportunities to escape further harm.*

The Tunisian authorities pursued their harsh crackdown on opponents *as it further dismantles the foundations of Tunisian democracy. 2024 was marked with an unprecedented intensification of the targeting of civil society actors, journalists and bloggers, lawyers and human rights defenders. With timely EMHRF support, ten threatened and at-risk defenders, pursued on arbitrary charges such as plotting against state security, disseminating false information, offending the Head of State and the provision of support to migrants, relocated to safer locations and accessed legal aid. Given the climate of fear and defiance within Tunisian civil society, EMHRF furthered its tailored accompaniment and referrals to strengthen the digital security and access to assistance to the wider human rights ecosystem in the country.*

In response to developments in ***Lebanon and Syria****, EMHRF instigated* ***holistic and exceptional emergency response mechanisms to protect human rights ecosystems*** *and enable them to adapt their activities to meet the needs of the populations they serve.*

In Lebanon the massive escalation of conflict between Hezbollah and Israel in autumn 2024 killed thousands, displaced over a million persons and caused mass destruction in the south of the country, the Bekaa and whole areas of Beirut. Defenders and organisations were heavily affected; being forced to relocate and to completely pivot activities, in the absence of the state's ability to sufficiently respond, to provide support to those in greatest need. One organisation, for example, a family-led association that fights for justice for persons kidnapped and disappeared in Lebanon, provided assistance to 50 displaced families, all relatives of disappeared persons, in different areas of the country as well as aiding a staff member to relocate from a war-affected area. Another organisation, that seeks truth and justice for the victims of the 2020 Beirut port explosion, provided support to some 50 families of victims of the explosion and survivors with disabilities to help them meet essential needs including medication and relocation amid the war.

In Syria, following the fall of the Assad regime, thousands of detainees were released from prison and faced enormous challenges, including having no identification papers, no homes to return to, no access to formal rehabilitation programme and suffering from deep trauma while tens of thousands remain missing. Civil society mobilised to rehabilitate these former prisoners of conscience, to preserve evidence, and to scale up their advocacy to address the fate of the missing persons and support relatives. One victim-led organisation, for example, is providing psychological support to over 150 former prisoners of conscience who were released from Sednaya prison and Syrian regime detention centres to assist with their rehabilitation. Another victim-led organisation formed by families of persons killed in detention is organising public gatherings in different Syrian cities. The stands, manned by victims, highlight their plight, rallying public support for justice and accountability and calling for the authorities to take immediate and serious measures to clarify the fate of tens of thousands of missing persons, protect mass graves and sites of detention, and bring those responsible for abuses to justice.

2.2. Operational Support

"The flexibility shown in helping us overcome obstacles has been remarkable."
A Tunisian human rights organisation

Operational grants enabled **movements and organisations to enhance their capacities and consolidate their sustainability**. Specifically, initiatives used operational grants – which may be in the form of seed/core funds – to initiate and lead actions that address inequalities and injustices.

Operational Support in Figures

→ 74 operational grants (€2.7m)

Recipients:

→ 74 organisations

EMHRF provided **flexible operational support** to 74 local human rights organisations, many of whom are active in remote or conflict areas. These organisations advanced justice and accountability for human rights violations locally and internationally as well as fighting for gender justice and equipping marginalised populations to enable them to advocate for their rights.

As a result, supported civil society activities have assisted over 3,000 people from left behind groups to claim their rights and reduce their exclusion. For example, individuals arbitrarily detained accessed legal aid and were released and hundreds more were supported in their rehabilitation after their release. Research and advocacy by nascent Egyptian human rights initiatives put pressure on the authorities and their international partners to end violations in the country against children, for example, and also in relation to the use of small arms in repression. Feminist initiatives in Morocco, at a time of historic reform of women's and girls' rights in the country, leveraged culture, theatre and founded a new academy for women's activists to support and encourage the participation of young women from isolated regions in public life. Emerging initiatives working on sensitive issues in the region such as LGBTIQA+ rights and refugees and migrants' rights have also expanded their activities and secured support from others.

"The partnership with EMHRF is unique because of the nature of the communication, the responsiveness to changing needs, and the dedication to justice in the region."
A Jordanian human rights organisation

Here below are **illustrative examples** of EMHRF's seed and core support to human rights organisations. The examples give an insight into how local civil society actors operate, the challenges they face and the results they have achieved.

*In the pursuit of justice and accountability, **Egyptian human rights organisations**, with EMHRF support, **provided legal aid and advice to hundreds of victims of violations in different areas across the country, and pursued human rights documentation, research and advocacy.** For example, the research, reports and advocacy of a nascent initiative, founded in 2020 and which focusses on the human rights situation in Sinai, led to the endorsement in May 2024 of concerns by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child into the severe effect of the armed conflict on the access to education in North Sinai. These included concerns regarding the demolition of schools, the use of schools as military bases and the recruitment of children into the armed forces. The report and the advocacy activities were widely covered by regional and international media outlets and contributed to the Egyptian authorities' decision to evacuate their forces stationed in 21 schools in North Sinai and their return to being used for education. Furthermore, the initiative's sustained advocacy contributed to the release of 54 displaced Sinai residents, pardoned by the President, who had been sentenced to between three- and ten-years imprisonment by a military court after they had peacefully demanded their right to return to their lands.*

At a time when Tunisian authorities took further measures that entrench authoritarianism and stoke a climate of fear in civil society, ***Tunisian organisations demonstrated their resilience to defend fundamental rights and democracy****. With EMHRF operational support, Tunisian organisations documented and raised awareness of violations, provided independent and credible information to the population, preserved and defended civic space, and fought for the defence of rights of migrants, women and youth. For example, a new alternative media outlet has, with EMHRF seed support, become one of the leading sources of independent information that gives voice to defenders and to government opponents. It reported on events not covered by other media such as press conferences of relatives and lawyers of political prisoners, civil society demonstrations and protest actions, as well as broadcasting interviews with leading critical figures. In less than a year, the new media outlet more than doubled its number of subscribers, mainly reaching young people under the age of 30, and achieved a record number of 5 million views for its various publications in a single day in February 2025. An organisation also built the skills of some 300 young persons from different areas of the country on accountability and facilitated them to write a report on their perceptions of the performance of regional administrations. The same organisation, in collaboration with another organisation grantee partner, also used a comic book to highlight how decree-law 54 on cybercrime gravely restricts freedom of expression and documented cases - arbitrary arrests and prosecutions - of such violations.*

Decades of civil society action contributed to significant progress in favour of gender equality, with steps announced towards the ***revision of the Family Code in Morocco*** *in December 2024. The Minister of Justice announced the main proposals put forward as part of the reform, after a two-year-long consultation process. The proposals, which come to more than 100 amendments, concern particularly underage marriage, polygyny, child custody, and divorce.[1] Moroccan feminists and women rights organisations, many of whom are former or current EMHRF grantee partners, have been active for decades in advocating for such reform through actions such as drafting collective proposals, engaging in the consultation process as well as organising campaigns. The proposed amendments, have been welcomed by the feminist movement while at the same time being criticised for not going far enough: notably the unequal philosophy governing the Code, that the man is the head of the household and the main financial provider, remains in place; equal inheritance is by no means guaranteed; the lack of recognition of DNA testing to establish paternity remains in place; and polygyny and underage marriage remain permissible. The proposals are still to be reviewed and approved by the government and parliament. Local partners are monitoring this process carefully and engaging parliamentarians and officials, civil society, the media and the wider public to influence the reform's implementation.*

1 The proposed amendments include reinforcing the formalisation and documentation of marriages, placing stricter conditionality on polygyny and stricter restrictions on underage marriage, recognising domestic work as a contribution to the development of assets acquired during marriage, simplifying procedures for amicable divorce, establishing the shared right to child custody in case of separation and allowing individuals to gift any of their assets to female heirs.

Civil society plays a major role in advancing the implementation of reforms already on the books, especially in isolated areas. *Moroccan feminist organisations undertook actions with women agricultural workers to raise their consciousness of their rights and the entities whose missions is to enhance their protection. For example, one association active in the Lixus basin in the north of Morocco held awareness-raising workshops and meetings that further the implementation of the National Integrated Programme for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls. In July 2024, an MP, with whom the association engaged and who participated in one of the workshops, highlighted the conditions of women agricultural workers and the lack of rights protection during a parliamentary session of oral questions addressed to the Minister of Family and Solidarity. The association also plans to engage directly with farm owners to reach higher numbers of women agricultural workers.*

Seeking to take advantage of the exception of unconstitutionality, applicable since 2019 in Algeria, a group of defenders held a training on the exception of unconstitutionality, the exception of unconventionality and on strategic litigation to ***challenge unequal provisions present in the Algerian Family Code promulgated 40 years ago.*** *This exception was raised for the first time before the Supreme Court, and others may follow, paving the way for potential reform of the Family Code and greater equality between men and women in the future.*

A human rights organisation maintained its ***provision of pro bono legal aid and psychological support to 150 women victims of gender-based violence in Libya.*** *Through its Women's Political Academy Initiative, 17 women candidates were also assisted legally and administratively to navigate intimidation and bureaucratic hurdles to their participation in the elections. As a result, four secured seats on councils in central and eastern Libya. Lastly, it presented its in-depth analysis of the personal status law and propositions for reforms to high-level political figures such as the eastern government's Minister of Women's Affairs and the chair of the House of Representatives Women and Children Affairs Committee.*

An environmental association received and assessed over 150 complaints and referred cases to relevant national authorities to ***prevent environmental violations in Lebanon****. For example, the Ministry of Public Works revoked a permit on sand mining operation at the tourist beach of El Heri in North Lebanon after the organisation's intervention and mobilisation of other public bodies. Furthermore, the association held its first three-day Climate Youth Academy in September 2024 where 20 young persons from all over the country took part in sessions and workshops on advocacy, environmental legislation, and the importance of the green policing platform.*

Migrants and refugees are among the most vulnerable and targeted communities in the region. Egyptian civil society thus continues to mobilise national and international opinion to ***promote the right to seek asylum, prohibit refoulement and guarantee due process*** *in the implementation of the country's regulations and to strengthen access to services for asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants. Two Egyptian initiatives, for example, provided pro-bono legal assistance to over 1,800 refugees from over 20 different nationalities and referred over 1,400 requests for support to other service providers in the country. Both published reports and legal analysis on legislation regarding migration and one of the initiatives was consulted in October 2024 by members of the Egyptian Ministerial cabinet's drafting committee and members of Parliament on the draft asylum law. Although the final ratified text severely undermines international law in a context of continued repression against people seeking protection and security in the country, it includes two recommendations from the initiative: the use of the definition of a refugee and asylum seeker in line with the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol, and the provision of a non-binding, legal venue for consultative mechanisms between the government-appointed Permanent Committee for Refugee Affairs, the new national regulatory body that will regulate the legal residency status of asylum seekers and refugees in the country and coordinate the provision of services and support, and international refugee organisations, and the room for including "independent experts" in the deliberations of the Committee.*

3. Tailored Accompaniment of Human Rights Defenders and Organisations

Defenders and associations who seek support from EMHRF have needs that cannot be met through financial support alone. Over the years, EMHRF has built up knowledge, skills, and networks that can help defenders and their associations meet some of their needs. Thus, EMHRF accompanies grant recipients with care as part of its support to strengthen their safety, their operational capacity and their human rights activism in the long term.

The ways in which this accompaniment takes shape differ dependent on individual circumstances and EMHRF adapts its methods to the changing needs of the defenders and the contexts in which they operate. In 2024, the ways this accompaniment took shape included:

3.1. Referrals in Support of Long-term Protection

"The assistance provided has been much more than just financial support. It has been a source of comfort, security and motivation."
A Tunisian WHRD

To strengthen the safety of at-risk human rights defenders and help them obtain long-term protection, including through international protection mechanisms, EMHRF provides support to substantiate their claims, situation and the threats they face. Consistent with its collaborative approach, EMHRF coordinates closely with other organisations whose mandate is to provide assistance in their international protection claims, rehabilitation services or to undertake advocacy and solidarity actions.

EMHRF provided attestations in support of asylum claims and helped defenders to gain refugee status with UNHCR in third states. It also introduced exiled defenders to local and national organisations in third states to gain access to their advice and services as well as to explore possibilities of collaborations. Leveraging its position in the consortium that leads ProtectDefenders.eu, EMHRF applied on behalf of half a dozen exiled and at-risk defenders to Canada's global human rights defenders' stream.

Furthermore, EMHRF collaborates with ProtectDefenders.eu providing support and guidance on advocacy for more enabling EU visa procedures for defenders and on addressing the situation of defenders from the MENA region. The revision of the EU Visa Code Handbook in June 2024 marks a breakthrough for defenders, as it incorporates explicit provisions designed to meet their unique needs.

3.2. Practical Advice on Funding Opportunities

EMHRF provides advice on fundraising, makes recommendations, and facilitates contact between supported defenders and initiatives and other organisations that can contribute to supporting their work in the long-term. Over the years, EMHRF has built up a strong network and close working relationships with other organisations, foundations and donors. In 2024, EMHRF assisted defenders and initiatives to obtain additional resources from dozens of these funders in Europe and North America.

For example, a nascent Algerian human rights association and a Tunisian women's rights association, both supported by EMHRF in 2024 with urgent bridge support, secured complementary financial support from a European grant-making organisation after EMHRF referred their situations and accompanied the organisations through the application process.

To help it hold a second edition of the Moroccan Feminist Assembly in 2025, EMHRF supported the fundraising efforts of a nascent Moroccan feminist association. The first edition, held with EMHRF support in December 2023 during the consultative period on the reform of the Family Code, brought together over 200 activists and experts in December 2023 and the ensuing recommendations were shared with the government consultative committee. EMHRF referred the association to numerous prospective funders. As of spring 2025, it has secured commitments of funding from a government and a multilateral body and discussions with others are on-going.

3.3. Connecting Defenders and Enhancing Access to Capacity-Building and Advocacy Opportunities

With a view to enhancing knowledge, experience, and visibility particularly for a younger generation of civil society actors, EMHRF assists and provides support to defenders to access training, peer mentoring, fellowship and advocacy opportunities, and thus expand their support network with actors in line with their missions.

"Thanks to the support, we began a restructuring process and laid the foundations for a more effective organisation."
A Moroccan human rights organisation

To strengthen the protection of the wider human rights ecosystem in Tunisia, EMHRF collaborated, for example, with a partner INGO focused on digital rights to develop and widely distribute practical digital security guides to EMHRF's Tunisian local partners and more broadly to INGOs active in Tunisia for their use and for distribution to their partners. EMHRF also referred and applied for funds on behalf of five organisations with limited capacity to benefit from a tailored cybersecurity audit and free cybersecurity support from another partner digital security association.

Through the facilitation of EMHRF, defenders and representatives from organisations accessed different international forums and expanded their reach and networks. For example, after being referred by EMHRF, defenders from North Africa participated in a meeting in April 2024 in Uganda with the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders. In January 2025, two Syrian defenders recommended by EMHRF also spoke at a special session on the situation in Syria and specifically regarding truth, justice and accountability, of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights, alongside officials from Syria-focussed UN mechanisms.

3.4. Fostering Concerted Approaches to Support Civil Society

A further function of EMHRF's tailored accompaniment is to support concerted approaches to assist civil society actors who face significant constraints in sustaining their activity. EMHRF is a member of various networks and groupings such as, among others, the Human Rights Funders Network, Ariadne, the EU's Human Rights Defenders Mechanism, the Civil Society Facility for the Mediterranean, the Journalists in Distress and the Building Responses Together Networks. EMHRF also coordinated closely and acted in concert with regional partners, notably EuroMed Rights and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, particularly in relation to mobilising solidarity and sustainable support for Algerian, Libyan and Egyptian defenders.

EMHRF is a regional framework partner of the European Commission and supports the structured regional dialogue between the EU and local civil society in the Southern Mediterranean in the framework of the Civil Society Facility for the Mediterranean (CSFM). In 2024, for instance, EMHRF led a webinar to further exchange of information between the EU and civil society on the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum with speakers from DG HOME, DG NEAR and EuroMed Rights and with the participation of around 50 representatives from Southern Mediterranean civil society. On 26 June, DG NEAR and the civil society framework partners framework partners of the CSFM also held under the auspices of the Belgian EU Presidency a roundtable in Brussels "Post-October 7th Perceptions of the Civil Society in the MENA region, constraints and ways forward for cooperation". The President of EMHRF spoke at the opening of the event alongside the Belgian Minister of Development Cooperation and Urban Policy and the Director for Southern Neighbourhood at DG NEAR. Representatives from organisations including current and former grantee partners of EMHRF from Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Palestine and Tunisia were invited to share their views with the EU and EU Member States on panels.

As a member of the CIVICUS Global Resource Hub on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly, EMHRF facilitated exiled MENA activists to share knowledge and experiences and to build connections with activists from around the world. As a result of these exchanges and the new connections, for example, a young Egyptian partner organisation is at present collaborating with an Argentinian organisation to explore the possibility of pursuing justice and accountability through universal jurisdiction in Latin America for violations committed in Egypt. Moreover, a three-day forum co-organised by International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR), Forum Asia and EMHRF was held in October 2024, during which 21 exiled activists from MENA, Central Asia, the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, Central America, East Africa, South and South-East Asia exchanged information and experiences, opening up opportunities to expand their support networks and consider concerted risk mitigation measures and future collaboration. A guide of good practice is due to be published early 2025, based on the participants' contributions, together with a database of resources for exiled activists.

4. Organisational Matters

4.1. Internal Governance

The gradual transition to renew the EMHRF Board with the integration of members from younger generations of defenders advanced in 2024. Three new members joined the twelve-member Board in May 2024, adding to the three who joined in December 2023.

Furthermore, the Board adopted internal rules of procedure in May 2024 that further define the criteria of selection for new Board members, ensure gender parity in its membership and established a Strategic Advisory Council. The latter, composed of former Board members and other resource persons, can be called upon to strengthen the Board's expertise and networks in support of the EMHRF's main mission.

In October 2024, the renewed Board was presented to EMHRF's Council of Representatives, which brings together more than 80 human rights organisations from the region, during the EuroMed Rights General Assembly. As stipulated by EMHRF's statutes, the Council of Representatives in its advisory role meets once every three years to review the EMHRF's past activities and to discuss its future directions with EMHRF's Board.

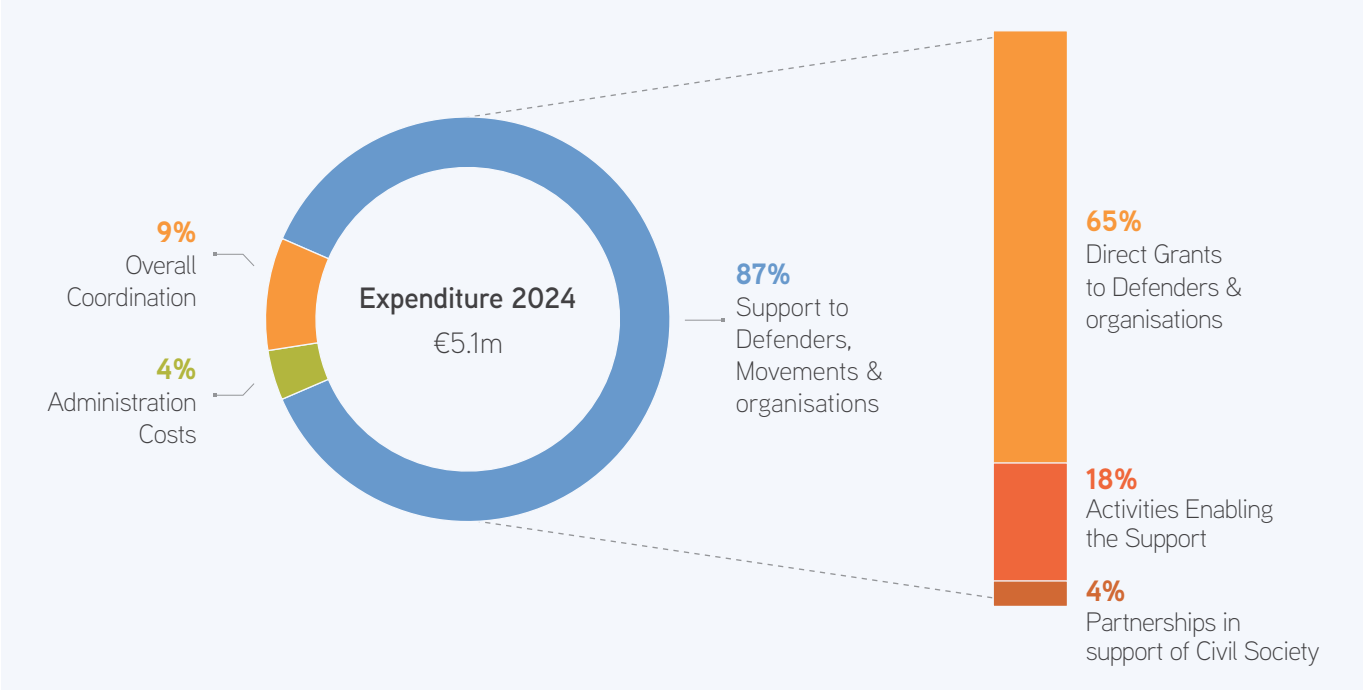
At the meeting, several members praised EMHRF's crucial actions and attested that the lives of defenders had been saved in particularly difficult conditions thanks to the support and the tailored accompaniment provided to them. Council members raised questions related to the procedures for granting support and the, at times, lengthy time it takes to receive support in highly volatile contexts, the thematic issues addressed, and the types of defenders supported, and whether EMHRF could share its good practice in channelling funds with other INGOs.

In carrying out its mission, the Board was assisted by a Secretariat made up of fourteen staff members or consultants. As part of institutional consolidation, the EMHRF secretariat was trained on rules and procedures of financial support to third parties.

Internal policies aimed at creating and maintaining optimal safety and ethics in EMHRF's operations are accessible on the website.

4.2. Financial Results and Partnerships

In line with the decision taken by the Board in this context of major global upheaval, the Foundation's growth stabilised in 2024. Overall EMHRF spent 5.1 million euros in 2024, 1% more than in 2023. In accordance with its mission and policy objectives, 87% of its expenditure was used in support of local human rights defenders and organisations.[2]



The results have been possible thanks to the trust of ten partners who contributed to EMHRF's budget with €5.2m:

- Core support amounting to €1.6m was granted by CIVICUS, Ford Foundation, the Open Society Foundations and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.
- Project support amounting to €3.6m was granted by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union, the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the UN Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund.

2 EMHRF's 2024 financial statement, audited by BDO Denmark, will be available on EMHRF's website.

Appendix: Overview of Grant Applications

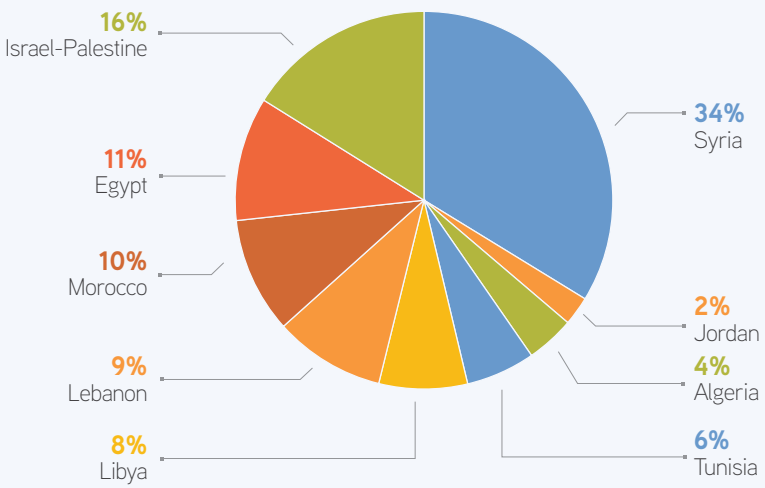
1. Number of Applications

EMHRF received and reviewed **1,224** applications and inquiries (a 19% increase compared to 2023)

Applications per Type	2024
Urgent	407
Standard	389
Inquiry	428

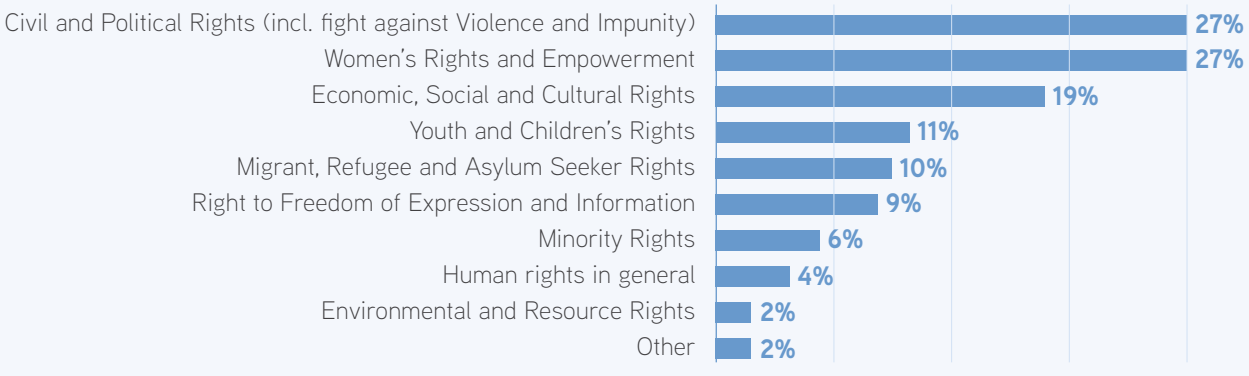
2. Geographic Distribution

The applications and inquiries mainly came, as reflected in the chart below, from, in descending order, Syria, Israel-Palestine, Egypt, and Morocco.



3. Rights and Population Focus

Human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent. In 2024, the applications received focused primarily on the promotion and defence of civil, political and women's rights, as reflected in the chart below. It is important to note that most applications touch on different rights areas and serve different populations. This chart is only intended to illustrate the main issues and priorities of their actions.



4. Reasons for Rejection

The main reasons which have justified the ineligibility of the applications are:

- **72%** of the rejected applications did not meet the EMHRF's criteria for support (i.e. identity as a defender, nature of the proposal, necessity of the request and approach of the applicant) or received negative external recommendations.
- **23%** proposed actions covered areas outside the EMHRF's mandate.
- **5%** involved applicants for urgent support who were not facing threats or could access other support mechanisms (for example, journalists with access to support from specific institutions).

In cases where applications fell outside its mandate, EMHRF advised and directed **85%** of the concerned applicants to alternative partners and donors. EMHRF provided this service, in particular, to individual defenders facing urgent risks in regions outside its geographic mandate.