



#4421 Call for proposals to civil society actors to protect and support human rights defenders

Call details

Last submission date 18.11.2025 13:00

Call text

Deadline: 18.11.2025, 13:00 (CET)



General Information about the call for proposals

This call for proposals is issued under the grant scheme “Human Rights”. The grant scheme is financed over the Norwegian national budget chapter 152, item 70 Human Rights.

The purpose of this call is to support civil society initiatives that protect human rights defenders and strengthen their work, which will contribute to *the overall objectives of Chapter 152.70 Human Rights*, including 1) strengthened international human rights systems, 2) improved compliance with human rights obligations, and 3) strengthened democracies in developing countries, cutting across the following *thematic priorities*:

Women's rights and gender equality; non-discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity; freedom of expression, media freedom, and cultural rights; freedom of religion and belief; workers' rights; rights of persons with disabilities; promotion of democratic development and rule of law principles.

Human rights defenders play a critical role in promoting and protecting human rights, cutting across all *thematic priorities* mentioned above. However, they are increasingly targeted with threats, violence, and restrictions, particularly in contexts of democratic backsliding and shrinking civic space.

The objective of this call is to **protect human rights defenders and strengthen their work within the aforementioned thematic priorities**. The call focuses on *three outcome areas*, each addressing challenges faced by human rights defenders:

- A: Ensured protection and emergency support
- B: Strengthened systems and institutions
- C: Increased mobilisation, visibility and advocacy

The grant scheme is application-based. Applications are processed and approved or rejected based on the guidelines and criteria set out in this call for proposals. The call for proposals is competitive, and applications will undergo a comparative assessment.

Please note that the assessment of applications is discretionary, meaning no applicant is entitled to a grant, even if the application meets all the formal and material conditions.

Norad aims to enter into up to 20 grant agreements based on this call for proposals. Overall indicative amount of funding available is currently estimated to be NOK 600 million for the four-year period. Funding is subject to Norwegian Parliamentary appropriations and the letter of allocation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Norad.

Organisations may apply for either a) project / programme support or b) core support. Please see the section “Supported activities and project criteria” for more specific information about application requirements.

When relevant, applicants must be able to document and report on the percentage of the funds that is transferred to recipients in ODA-eligible countries.

All proposals must comply with the OECD/DAC criteria for Official Development Assistance (ODA).



Prioritised Objectives, Target Groups and Countries

The overall objectives of Chapter 152.70 Human Rights are:

1. International systems for promoting and protecting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law are relevant, representative, and effective.
2. Compliance with international human rights obligations is documented and improved in developing countries.
3. Democracies in developing countries are strengthened through independent courts, free media, human rights defenders, and trade unions that can operate safely.

Human rights defenders constitute an entry point into the broader human rights landscape. They provide a focus for human rights efforts, while also allowing flexibility to support thematic areas where needs persist.

Applicants must demonstrate how their initiatives will protect human rights defenders and strengthen their work. Please see *outcome areas* for this call for proposals under "Supported activities and project criteria".

Target Group(s)/Countries:

The target group for the grant scheme on human rights is the population in ODA-eligible countries, with a focus on individuals and groups particularly vulnerable to human rights violations and lack of protection.

The target group for this call is human rights defenders. A human rights defender is a person who, individually or with others, acts to promote or protect human rights in a peaceful manner, in line with the [Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#). Reference is also made to the [Norwegian Guidelines for Support to Human Rights Defenders](#). This includes defenders addressing the whole range of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. Human rights defenders working in the following *thematic areas* will be prioritised:

Women's rights and gender equality; non-discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity; freedom of expression, media freedom, and cultural rights; freedom of religion and belief; workers' rights; rights of persons with disabilities; promotion of democratic development and rule of law principles.

Grassroots organisations, networks and family members of human rights defenders who directly support human rights defenders through protection, legal aid, psychosocial support, and advocacy are also relevant target groups of the call.

Applicants must demonstrate how the target group(s) will be reached directly and/or indirectly.



Who Can Apply for Grants?

Potential grant recipients are:

International, regional and Norwegian civil society organisations (non-profit, non-governmental)

The applicant must be an independent legal entity. Accurate and complete information about the organisation must be provided. If applying as part of a consortium, all members must be eligible grant recipients (i.e. legal entities as international, regional and Norwegian civil society organisations).

Preference will be given to organisations that contribute to the objective of Norad's portfolio on human rights defenders. Furthermore, organisations that demonstrate fulfilling one or more of the following criteria will be assessed positively:

- Have strong local presence or collaboration with local actors in countries and regions where human rights defenders face significant risks.
- Have documented experience and results with measures that directly protect and/or strengthen human rights defenders.
- Work to strengthen the rule of law and promote sustainable, long-term solutions for human rights defenders' activities.
- Have a gender responsive / transformative and inclusive approach, addressing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and vulnerabilities, also specific to women, Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQI+ people, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups.
- Have successfully worked with and influenced other relevant stakeholders, including national authorities, multilateral organisations, or private-sector actors.
- Are aligned with [Norad's Civil Society Principles](#) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions), SDG 5 (gender equality), and SDG 17 (partnerships for sustainable development).

With this call, Norad seeks to maintain a balanced distribution across the *thematic priorities* relevant to the portfolio. Norad seeks to ensure a diversity of partners funded by Chapter post 152.70. Norad will also consider the totality of Norad/MFA-funded human rights initiatives.

Applicants must, in their application, document that they meet the following criteria:

1. Necessary technical and administrative competence and capacity to implement the initiative, including effective routines for strategic knowledge management, relevant knowledge plans, and a system for monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning. The applicant must have prior experience in implementing projects of a similar scale and budget. The results of previous efforts within the scope of the grant scheme are relevant.
2. Strong contextual understanding and insight into the issues concerned. The applicant must implement the activities in, or target, a minimum of five ODA eligible countries. Minimum five years of experience within the thematic and geographical areas is required.
3. Applicants working through partners must have operational guidelines for the selection, monitoring, and control of implementing partners. Information about known partners must be provided.
4. Good systems and routines for risk management and internal control, including systems for preventing, detecting, and managing suspicions of corruption and mismanagement of funds.
5. A Code of Conduct or similar ethical guidelines. At a minimum, these guidelines must include principles for preventing and addressing sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH).



Norad will assess the applicant's competence as well as their professional and administrative capacity. Applicants are encouraged to share information about accreditations or certifications awarded by other donors as it will contribute to documenting capacity and competence. For applicants who have previously received a grant from either the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Norad, performance and results from these partnerships will be included in the assessment.

Supported activities and project criteria

Types of Projects Eligible for Funding

Under this call, grants may be awarded for the following types of projects:

- a) Project or programme support (refers to a specific intervention that aims to achieve a specific objective relevant to this call, within a defined period and at a specific budget).
- b) Core support (requires that the applicant must have established governance structures, systems, and processes required for receiving core support, i.e. an overall strategy or strategic plan with a results framework, overall budget and financing model with annual reporting, and the goals of the strategy/strategic plan must align with the objectives of this call). Core support will be limited to activities that can be reported as ODA. Compliance must be demonstrable and independently verifiable.

The grants awarded under this call for proposals will be aimed at supporting civil society organisations that contribute to the protection and strengthening of human rights defenders in alignment with the following three *outcome areas* of Norad's portfolio on human rights defenders:

Outcome area A: Ensured protection and emergency support

Grants in this area will support actions ensuring immediate safety and resilience for human rights defenders and their families, enabling them to continue their work in the face of threats and risks. Relevant activities may include, inter alia:

- **Emergency response and safety measures:** Providing urgent assistance, such as temporary relocation, financial support, medical care and access to safe accommodation for human rights defenders and their families. Measures to increase safety and security, such as security equipment, including digital security, as well as other equipment and measures that contribute to increase the security and safety of human rights defenders.
- **Psychosocial and legal support:** Offering psychological support to address stress, trauma and burnout, as well as legal aid to navigate threats, harassment or persecution.
- **Capacity building:** Training in physical and digital security, risk assessment and countering mis/disinformation to strengthen human rights defenders' ability to protect themselves and sustain their work under challenging conditions.

Outcome area B: Strengthened systems and institutions

Grants in this area will focus on initiatives that seek to achieve long-term structural and institutional changes, relevant for human rights defenders, to strengthen compliance with international human rights obligations at country level. Relevant activities may include, inter alia:



- **Legal and policy frameworks:** Promoting institutional, legislative and regulatory measures to strengthen human rights; providing meaningful opportunities for engagement and dialogue for human rights defenders, in legislative and other relevant processes; and mobilising stakeholder support for rights-based policies.
- **Monitoring and accountability:** Researching, monitoring and documenting human rights violations and abuses and reporting these to national and international bodies to hold duty-bearers accountable and reinforce principles of the rule of law.
- **Outreach and cooperation:** Engaging and working systematically with relevant stakeholders to enhance the understanding and implementation of human rights at various levels of society, i.e. relevant institutions, professional groups, local communities, etc.

Outcome area C: Increased mobilisation, visibility and advocacy

Grants in this area will support efforts to enhance the visibility and influence of human rights defenders and their work, ensuring they can mobilise support and drive change. Relevant activities may include, inter alia:

- **Documentation and raising awareness:** Increasing knowledge and raising awareness about human rights violations and abuses, providing visibility to the work of human rights defenders and amplify their stories.
- **Alliances and solidarity:** Supporting networks and coalitions that provide human rights defenders with information, knowledge, support, protection, and increased impact through collective action.
- **Dialogue and advocacy in normative processes at national, regional and/or international levels:** Facilitating dialogue between stakeholders, including authorities and other key actors, while ensuring human rights defenders have a voice in processes that shape norms and policies, thereby influencing attitudes and practices over time.

All applications must demonstrate how the proposed initiative will contribute to the achievement of at least one of these three *outcome areas*. The activities suggested under each outcome area are examples only and do not constitute exhaustive lists. In the selection of initiatives, Norad will seek a balance across the three outcome areas.

Furthermore, applicants must demonstrate how their proposed initiative contributes to the *overall objectives* of Chapter 152.70.

In assessing the applications, Norad will also consider complementarity between different proposals.

All projects must meet the following criteria:



1. Align with the objective of the call for proposals and address a concretely defined challenge based on the current situation.
2. Have clearly defined, realistic, and measurable goals, as well as evidence-based justifications for why the proposal will contribute to goal achievement. This includes a clearly defined, knowledge-based Theory of Change, which should be included in the project description. Baselines and indicators to enable monitoring and evaluation and ensure results reporting with disaggregated data should be included.
3. Comply with the OECD/DAC criteria for ODA. Please see [ODA eligibility and conditions](#) for more information on ODA eligibility.
4. Be cost-effective. Support to strengthen human rights, including support for human rights defenders, should use resources efficiently — balancing cost-effectiveness, relevance, and priorities to maximise results. Efforts should be guided by clear goals and focus on long-term, sustainable, and inclusive outcomes, even when results take time to achieve.
5. The grant can only cover costs; grant recipients cannot include profit margins.
6. For project or programme support, administrative costs (indirect project costs) must be limited to a maximum of 7 % of the actual project costs (direct project costs). Amounts beyond this must be specifically justified.
7. Organisations may apply for an agreement period of up to four years starting on 1 January 2026, at the earliest, and ending 31 December 2029, at the latest. Partners who currently have an agreement with Norad under Chapter 152.70 are kindly requested to only apply for support for projects that commence after the conclusion of their existing agreement.

Cross-Cutting Issues

The following four cross-cutting issues must be considered in all initiatives:

- **Human Rights:** The initiative must be rooted in human rights and based on the principles of participation, accountability, and non-discrimination. A human rights-based approach to development (HRBA) must be applied, and the application must describe how this approach is applied in a systematic manner and followed up in practice.
- **Women's Rights and Gender Equality:** A gender analysis that informs all stages of the initiative should be conducted. Gender equality should be integrated as an objective, with at least one indicator to measure progress. Where relevant, gender-disaggregated data on result indicators must be collected.
- **Climate Change and the Environment:** The risk of negative effects on climate change and biodiversity loss must be assessed and mitigating measures put in place.
- **Anti-Corruption:** Zero tolerance for economic misconduct such as fraud, bribery, nepotism, illegal allowances, or other types of misuse of the grant must be upheld. Where corruption risks negatively affect the achievement of project or programme objectives, risk-mitigating and preventive measures shall be incorporated into the initiative and followed up.

The grant recipient must identify significant risk factors within the effort that may negatively impact the cross-cutting considerations and demonstrate how these will be analysed and managed throughout the entire initiative cycle. Norad will assess whether the applicant's risk assessment and risk management provide sufficient assurance to avoid unintended negative effects.

Assessment of proposals

The proposals will be assessed against, such as but not limited to the following criteria:



- Relevance to the objectives of the call for proposals and grant scheme.
- The overall human rights defenders' portfolio composition.
- The extent to which the four cross-cutting issues are given adequate consideration.
- Relevance to Norway's strategies and policy documents for the area concerned, including the Norwegian guidelines for support to human rights defenders.
- Risk analysis and risk management.
- Strategic use of knowledge and research. The assessment will focus on how applicants systematically use knowledge and research to plan, justify, adapt, and improve their interventions for greater effectiveness and impact.
- Any general guidelines for Norwegian development aid, including a human rights-based approach.
- The initiative's local ownership, sustainability, and exit strategy.
- Relevance to the recipient country.

Requirements Relating to the Grant Application

- All proposals must be submitted through the Grants Portal, proposals and mandatory documentation may be submitted in English only.
- All requested documents must be uploaded. Norad's Strategic Civil Society Partners (Plusspartner) are not required to re-submit previously submitted documentation.
 - For organisations applying for **project or programme support**, the project / programme description, project / programme budget, results framework and risk analysis, as well as the organisational financial and audit reports must be uploaded. Norad's budget template must be used.
 - For organisations applying for **core support**, the organisation's strategy, budget, financial and audit reports, results framework and risk analysis must be uploaded instead of project-specific documents.
- Applicants may only submit, or be part of, one application.
- We recommend all previous results and accreditations or certifications by other donors be disclosed and submitted, as this may contribute to strengthening documentation of capacity and competence.
- Only those applicants who have documented that they meet the criteria of the grant scheme rules and include the required documentation will have their application processed. Applications that do not meet the criteria will be rejected. All other applications will be assessed.



Please see the section “How to fill in the application form” for further guidance.

Additional Information

Applicants will be notified about the outcome of the appraisal process in writing. Successful applicants may be requested to adapt or downsize their proposals prior to a funding agreement based on an assessment of the application's strategic relevance, the portfolio composition or funding limitations. Grant recipients may be invited to scale up their projects during the support period if the budget situation changes. If additional funding should become available, more applicants may be considered.

Awards will be formalised through a written agreement between Norad and the grant recipient. Standard templates are available at www.norad.no. The agreement will determine follow-up and control measures to ensure the grant recipient uses the grant funds as agreed. The agreement will also include reporting requirements. Grant recipients must always document and report on results.

How to fill in the application form

The application form in the Grants Portal is a standard form for *project* applications. Organisations that are applying for a) project / programme support should follow the guidance provided in the form, whereas organisations that are applying for b) core support, should upload their organisational documents instead of project documents, under the following sections:

- Detailed budget: Please upload the organisation's budget here
- Project description: Please upload the organisation's strategic plan here
- Results framework: Please upload the organisation's results framework or similar
- Implementation plan/activity plan: Please upload the organisation's implementation plan or similar, if such document exists.
- For the risk analysis, the organisation's risk analysis – instead of a project-specific risk analysis – should be included in the fields specified.

Please consult Norad's Grants Handbook for an overview of the main expectations as well as legal and financial rules applicable to project/programme grants from Norad: [Grants Handbook for Civil Society and Other Private Actors | Norad.no](#).

Contact Information for the Responsible Unit

Please consult the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for answers to questions already received by Norad concerning the call for proposals, which will be available on Norad's website. Questions about the call for proposals can be sent to Norad's Section for Human Rights and Civil Society,

hr-defenders@norad.no. All new questions of common interest will be anonymised and added to the FAQs page.

Specific information for applicants regarding this call for proposals

Questions about the call for proposals can be sent to hr-defenders@norad.no

Technical questions regarding the application form in the Grants portal can be sent to: support.grants.portal@norad.no.

Grant scheme rules

Menneskerettigheter

Responsible unit

Section for Human Rights and Civil Society