



Annual Report 2020



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COVID-19 and the Challenges to Human Rights

A year and a half ago, no one knew at first what would happen when COVID-19 struck. It soon became clear that all countries would come under various restrictions, limiting movement and assembly the most. Soon we were all sitting inside our homes and learning how to conduct online meetings through Zoom, Teams, and other platforms. One of the few good things about the pandemic is that we are now used to doing remote meetings and communicating online.

From the human rights perspective, the biggest disadvantages have been the excesses in enforcing restrictions in many countries, the increased persecution of minorities and the use of the crisis as an excuse to restrict the activities of citizens and organizations to suppress the voice of political opponents. In some countries such as Sri Lanka, law enforcement agencies have even declared that they will arrest those who criticize the government's COVID-19 policy.

In 2020, KIOS-funded human rights defenders showed creativity and flexibility when they had to partially re-think their activities to do the work and get results without travelling and physical gatherings of people. This was not always possible, but human rights activists came up remarkably well with new ways and means to achieve the goals. In addition, a large number of our grantees also carried out emergency relief work in their communities.

It has become clear to everyone over the past year that human rights cannot be taken for granted. We must raise our voices and fight for the rights again and again. Even in traditional democracies, it is clear that there are no permanent gains in human rights. They need to be constantly discussed and struggled for. External pressure amplifies authoritative features in a government and dictatorships may be strengthened. It is easy to justify actions in the guise of national security.



Kim Remitz
Executive Director, KIOS

Foreword



Rohingya child in a refugee camp in Bangladesh.

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–Kim Remitz
Executive Director, KIOS

During the pandemic, the reliability of information provided by the media has suffered greatly from the fact that trolls in different countries have deliberately disseminated false information and conspiracy theories. The risks toward journalists reporting on human rights issues have heightened.

The year 2020 also held a few glimpses of light. Our grantee CJGEA in Kenya managed to win a lawsuit against a polluting lead factory and the authorities and significant compensation was promised to the people affected. The biggest payer, the National Environment Manage-

ment Authority (NEMA), has appealed the verdict, but Kenya has a judicial system where victory for human rights defenders in the Supreme Court is possible. So we hope for the best!

Human rights defenders can change the world – our grantee ALRC conducted interviews from the Rohingya refugee camp for a report and discussed it with the UN Special Rapporteurs and the UN Independent Fact-finding Mission on Myanmar. The organization submitted Written Statements and Oral Interventions to the UN Human Rights Council Sessions, and made interventions in the International Criminal Court

(ICC). Many UN bodies have declared the actions towards Rohingya as genocide. On 23 January 2020, the International Court of Justice ordered Myanmar to prevent genocidal violence against its Rohingya minority and preserve evidence of past attacks.

If we want us and our children to be able to live in a world where the fundamental rights of citizens are not wrongly restricted, minorities also have rights and we have the power to choose our future leaders ourselves, no one can stay on the sidelines. Now is the time to stand up for human rights!

What is the KIOS Foundation

KIOS is an independent, non-political, non-religious and non-governmental foundation. We fund the work of human rights defenders in South Asia and East Africa. Together with local civil society organisations, we are building a world where human rights belong to everyone.

At the heart of our work is realizing the rights of marginalised and excluded groups and persons in vulnerable positions.

KIOS was founded in 1998 by 11 Finnish NGOs working for human rights, peace and development. KIOS receives financial support for its activities from the development cooperation funds of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland.

Our grantees work in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Nepal and Sri Lanka. We also support Tibetan civil society in exile, as well as regional initiatives in East Africa and South Asia. In 2020 our funding for the last long-term partners in Pakistan ended.

We identify our grantees by open calls for proposals and by field trips. The starting point for our funding is local need and local expertise. The

support is given to human rights work planned and implemented by local civil society organisations.

During our 23 years of existence, we have funded around 500 projects in almost 60 countries. Many activists we support work at the grass-roots level in local communities, but some of our grantees also play a role at the pinnacle of human rights politics, such as at the UN Human Rights Council. Our grantees have gathered information about severe human rights violations and brought them to the attention of the international community. They have helped marginalised groups to defend their rights and provided legal aid for thousands of people whose rights have been trampled on. Some of our grantees have increased the human rights awareness of the authorities through training. Many have succeeded in changing the legislation in their countries to take better account of human rights.

Together with our grantees, we work for a world where dignity and human rights are recognized for all human beings, and states are committed to ensure them.





How We Work

We identify: We identify and select reliable and relevant human rights organisations and movements in South Asia and East Africa.

We fund: We give direct financial support to human rights activist groups at local, national and regional level.

We strengthen: We strengthen our grantees and their networks, including giving financial support to trainings, networking and improving safety.

We guide and mentor: We give guidance and mentoring to our grantees on project planning, management and reporting.

We communicate: We share news of our grantees' work and the human rights situation in their countries, participate in campaigns and organize human rights seminars and trainings in Helsinki and online.

We advocate: We discuss human rights issues with decision-makers, officials and other relevant actors in Finland and abroad.

The Year 2020 in Numbers

40

KIOS grants
were ongoing

18

in East Africa

22

in South Asia

Some results from 13 grants, which ended in 2020

13 457 PEOPLE BENEFITED DIRECTLY FROM
KIOS-FUNDED HUMAN RIGHTS WORK

5 866

people learned about their
rights and how to defend them

1 094

authorities learned about
human rights and their duties

2007

people received legal
aid or counselling

22

strategic litigation cases

34

human rights reports
were published

What are strategic litigation cases?

Strategic litigation involves selecting and bringing a case to the courtroom with the goal of creating broader changes in society. This means that strategic litigation cases are as much concerned with the effects that they will have on larger populations and governments as they are with the end result of the cases themselves. When it is successfully used, strategic litigation can bring groundbreaking results. It can spring a government into action to provide basic care for its citizens, guarantee the equal rights of minorities, or halt an environmentally damaging activity.

KIOS Funding in 2020

KIOS grants in total: 732 326 €

**Funding in
South Asia:
293 887 €**

**Pakistan
2489€**

**Nepal
149 881€**

**Uganda
129 950€**

**Rwanda
24 150€**

**Burundi
16 040€**

**Kenya
213 339€**

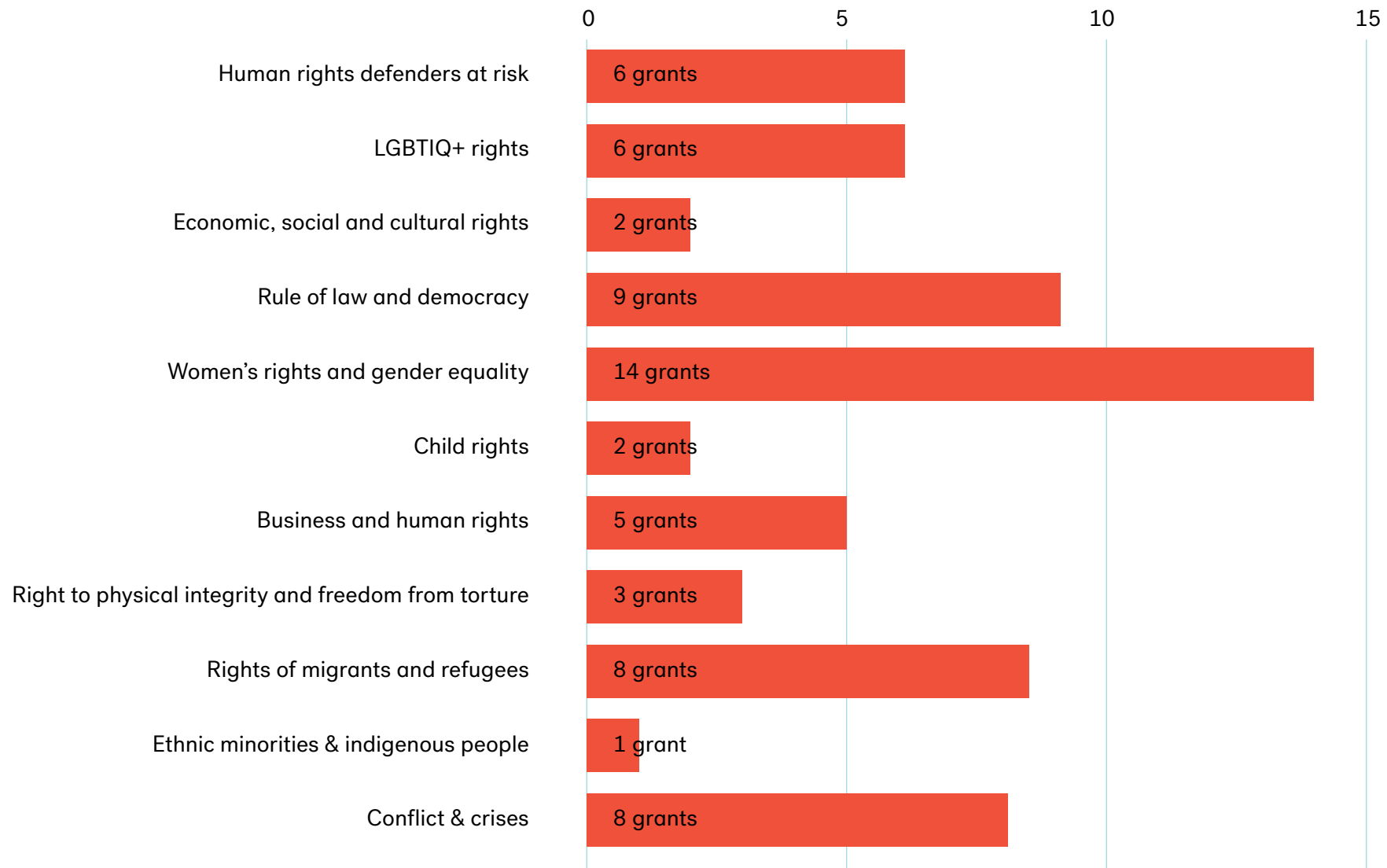
**Sri Lanka
80 052€**

**Regional and
NGOs in exile
116 425€**

**Funding in
East Africa:
438 439 €**

*The distribution of funds in 2020 does not directly relate to the scope of operations in a specific country.

The Main Themes of KIOS Grants



*There were 40 KIOS grants on-going in 2020. Some grants may have several themes.

Main Activities of KIOS Grantees



The effect of Covid-19 on KIOS' program by number of projects affected

Had activities or audit delayed:

14

Had to cancel planned activities:

11

Work plan was changed to include Covid-19 relief and/or awareness activities:

7

Planned projects were fully re-designed:

6

LGBTIQ activists in Kenya
doing radio advocacy on
inclusion and human rights.

Examples of
Our Grantees' Work

East Africa



A Dangerous Industry to be Brought Under Control

A Kenyan slum community won a long battle in court when the authorities and a polluting metal smelter were ordered to pay € 10.2 million in compensation to the slum residents.

In July 2020, slum dwellers on the coast of Kenya received a long-awaited court decision. A Kenyan court ordered compensation of € 10.2 million for residents of the Owino Uhuru community who had become ill due to lead emissions from the metal smelter.

The Indian-owned metal smelter polluted the area for eight years in total, causing serious illnesses, miscarriages and even deaths. When the small son of Phyllis Omido became ill, she founded the organisation Centre for Justice, Governance and Environmental Action (CJGEA). The organisation helped residents to campaign against the factory and urge the authorities to intervene. The case attracted a lot of media attention in Kenya, and in 2014, the factory was

closed. Other factories were also closed later.

The organisation helped the residents to take the case to court. The court decision, obtained after a long legal battle, means that residents can finally receive help for the treatment of illnesses and medicines. The area surrounding the smelter was also ordered to be cleaned. The compensation will be paid by, among others, the Kenyan state and the owners of the metal smelter.

No compensation has been paid so far, because the National Environment Management Authority has appealed against the court decision. Nevertheless, the case is an important precedent, forcing the Kenyan authorities to better control the factories. In the future, companies will also have a higher threshold for



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Owino Uhuru's battle for a clean environment is about the life, existence and continuity of our community. The adversities we faced only drove us forward, because losing would have meant death for so many.

- Phyllis Omido

breaching environmental regulations because they know they may be held liable.

KIOS has been supporting the work of CJGEA since 2015.

Countering Prejudices Against LGBTIQ Persons in Kenya

LGBTIQ activists in Kenya are fighting against homophobic prejudice by training health workers, police officers, journalists and religious leaders. Attitudes have changed when these people meet LGBTIQ persons and get first-hand information from them.

PEMA Kenya was founded by a group of gay men who decided to take care of a funeral of a deceased young person who had been abandoned by his own community. Now the organization is promoting access to services and inclusion in decision-making for sexual and gender minorities in five provinces in the coastal region.

The activists work to educate groups that are causing discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ persons. They train the police, religious leaders, journalists, health workers and lawyers on LGBTIQ issues and what human rights violations these minorities face.

Prejudices have been countered with facts and this has made a sizeable impact. In Mombasa, health workers said they shared the information

they learned in the project about gender diversity and LGBTIQ rights with their colleagues who work in health centers. LGBTIQ persons told PEMA Kenya that it has become easier for them to seek help from health centers.

There has also been a change in the attitudes of the police. Before, the city police street patrol aimed to arrest gay people every Friday. Thanks to the training, the police will no longer identify gays as targets. Lawyers also say they are more willing to serve sexual and gender minorities as clients.

The attitudes of religious leaders were also influenced and the eviction of LGBTIQ persons from churches and mosques has decreased, according to LGBTIQ persons. The amount of hate speech has also decreased.



Photo: PEMA Kenya

62 police officers, health workers, lawyers, journalists and religious leaders were trained on sexual orientation and gender identity issues and rights

114 LGBTIQ persons were trained on access to health care, human rights, communications and management skills

Rohingya child in
a refugee camp
in Bangladesh.

Examples of
Our Grantees' Work

South Asia

Information about the Genocide Reported to the World

Two Asian NGOs gathered witness statements in refugee camps in Bangladesh about human rights violations against the Rohingya people in Myanmar. The information was delivered to the International Criminal Court, which decided to continue investigating the crimes.

Rohingya living in the Rakhine state of Myanmar are an ethnic and religious minority who are discriminated against and persecuted. From August 2017, violence by Myanmar security forces against the Rohingya intensified. Rohingya villages were destroyed, women were gang-raped and children and family members were burned to death in their houses or shot in Myanmar army camps. More than 700,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar to Bangladesh, where they currently live in over-populated refugee camps.

KIOS supported a joint project of two Asian NGOs to bring the genocide of the Rohingya minority in Myanmar to the attention and agenda of the international community. The main part of the activities were conducted in 2017-18, but the project was concluded in 2020.

In the project supported by KIOS, the Hong Kong-based Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC) collaborated with the Bangladeshi human rights organisation Odhikar. The organisations gathered information on the situation and obtained testimonies from one hundred Rohingya refugees in Bangladeshi refugee camps about human rights violations committed against them.

This information was delivered to both the UN and the International Criminal Court (ICC). The ALRC issued statements to the United Nations Human Rights Council and met both the UN team investigating Myanmar and the Prosecutor of the ICC. The information provided to the ICC in 2018 also received attention in the international press. In November 2019, the ICC decided to continue to investigate the crimes against the Rohingya people in Myanmar.



Rohingya woman and child in a refugee camp in Bangladesh.

Photo: Odhikar

100 testimonies about human rights violations were gathered from Rohingya refugees

42 human rights defenders were trained to work in the Rohingya refugee camps

100 Rohingya refugees were trained on their rights

The organisations also trained human rights defenders to do human rights work in the Rohingya refugee camps. The trained defenders are actively working to raise awareness on human rights and collect evidence on the crimes against the Rohingya.

New Beginnings for Single Women in Nepal

In Nepal, widows, divorced and other women living without a spouse face many forms of stigma and discrimination. Through KIOS grantee's work, they have been informed about their rights and are better able to organize and run their own cause.

In Nepal, many traditions and beliefs contribute to discrimination against women living without a spouse. KIOS' Nepalese grantee Women for Human Rights - Single Women Group (WHR) has gathered information on the challenges and human rights violations experienced by single women. The most common problem is violence against women. Polygamy and inheritance problems also exist, even though polygamy is prohibited by law and widows have the right to inherit.

During the year-long project, the organization documented 1117 cases of violence against women in the southern Terai region, and women were further assisted by providing the necessary services and legal assistance.

Only 11 percent of Nepali widows are literate, making their lives even more difficult. Without literacy, it is difficult to support oneself and one's children and gain knowledge of one's rights.

With the support of KIOS, WHR organized trainings and workshops for single women. The training provided women with information about their rights, such as access to support from the Single Women Protection Fund.

Women were also offered workshops on how they can participate in society and influence decision-makers. The organization has helped women set up groups of single women in municipalities to work together to improve the situation of women. Women are now better organized and dare to demand the rights and services that

belong to them.

The authorities also received training on the situation and rights of single women. Local authorities are now more willing to work with and support women's groups.

189 women received legal counseling

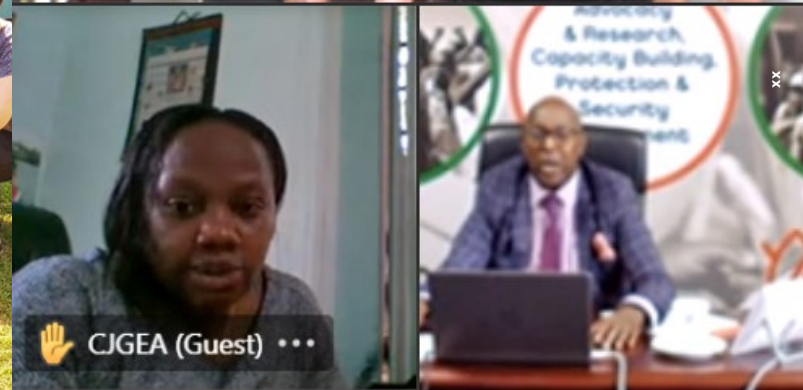
1117 cases of violence towards women documented

400 women reported violence to local authorities



Photo: WHR

Snapshots from KIOS Activities



Snapshots from KIOS Activities



KIOS webinar discussed the effects of the pandemic to human rights

KIOS partners shared their knowledge and experiences on the effects of the pandemic on human rights. The webinar was organized by KIOS and the Finnish Parliament Network on Human Rights in November. The partners explained how those in power use the pandemic to tighten control over citizens and NGOs.

Activists in Lockdown vlog series

KIOS produced a vlog series “Activists in Lockdown”, where our grantees talk about their everyday life and their work during the pandemic. Four KIOS grantees, two from Uganda, one from Kenya and one from Sri Lanka, filmed videos for this vlog series, which KIOS edited and published.

KIOS started human rights assessment

In 2020, KIOS branched out to human rights assessment work for companies planning to operate in developing countries. Through Finn-partnership, KIOS experts identify key human rights risks in a particular country or region and make recommendations based on them. Business and Human Rights issues is one of KIOS’ thematic focus areas.

Strategy and Administration

Number of employees

8

Total program

1 314 562 €

KIOS evaluation was completed

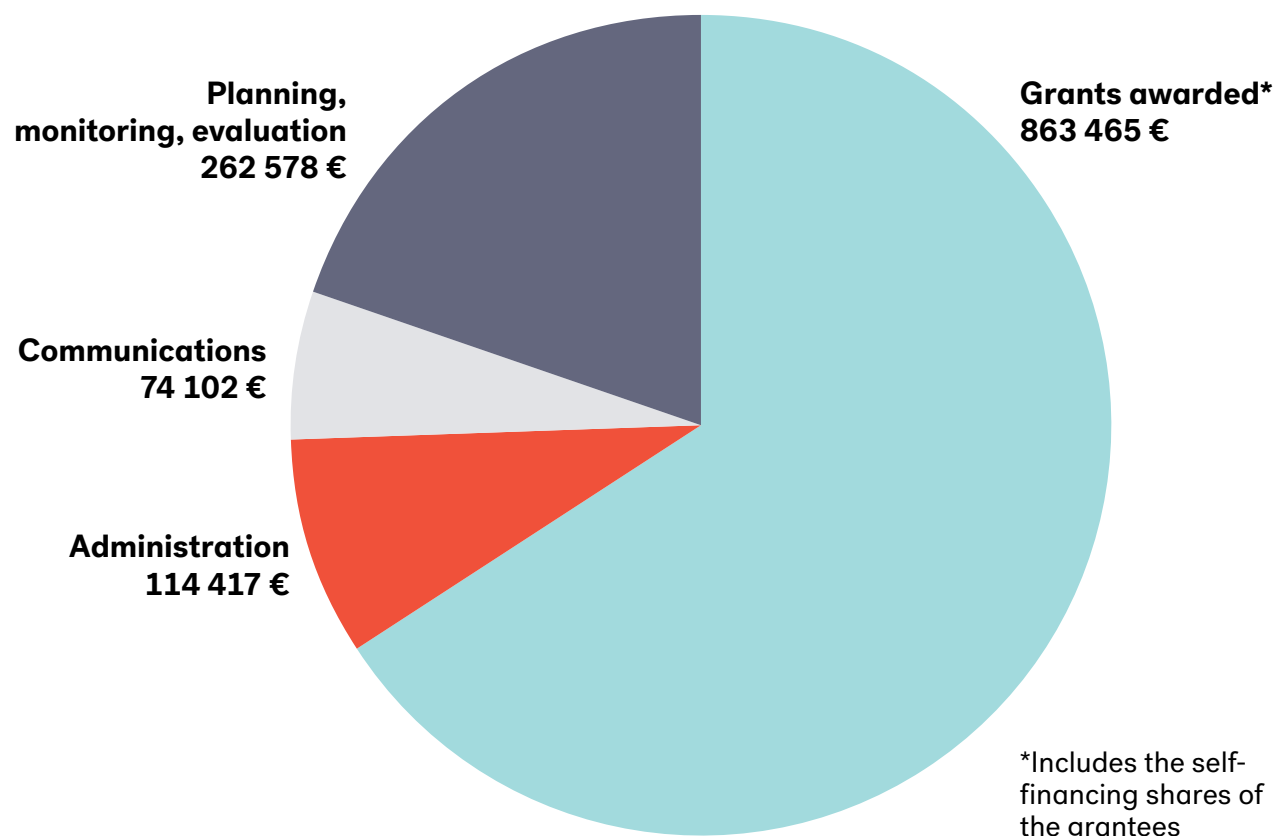
During the spring, KIOS, Abilis and Siemenpuu foundations commissioned a joint evaluation by Cowan Coventry and Miia Toikka. According to the evaluation, the foundations make a distinctive and significant contribution to Finland's development cooperation. The grantees called for longer-term funding.

KIOS' strategy for 2021-2024 puts emphasis on co-operation

The KIOS Foundation's strategy for 2021-2024 was published in 2020. KIOS will continue to support the human rights work of civil society actors on the basis of local initiatives, and will put more emphasis on advocacy work and communications.

KIOS aims to bring together human rights defenders by strengthening networking. In the new strategic period, funding will focus on three main themes: Democracy and Rule of Law, Non-Discrimination and Gender Equality, and Business and Human Rights.

Financial Year Breakdown





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