



**ANNUAL
REPORT
2023**



Photo: Holger Priedemuth

Table of contents

Foreword

What is the KIOS Foundation?

How We Work

The Year 2023 in Numbers

KIOS Grant Funding in 2023

Main Themes of KIOS Grants in 2023

Examples of our Grantees' Work: Working for Dignity and Equality

Defending Civil Liberties and the Space of Civil Society in Kenya

Advancing Participation Opportunities for Women from
Marginalised Groups in Decision-Making in Sri Lanka

Promoting the Rights of Migrant Workers in Nepal

Snapshots from KIOS Activities

Finance and Administration

Celebrating 25 Years of KIOS – A Commitment to the Ongoing Defence of Human Rights

2023 marked a significant milestone for KIOS, celebrating 25 years of supporting human rights and civil society. This anniversary was an opportunity to reflect on past achievements and future challenges. Over the years, KIOS has become a key supporter of human rights organisations in the Global South, helping small organisations grow into significant and influential local, national and even regional human rights organisations.

The year also marked the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 25th anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. These documents have served as fundamental guidelines for global human rights work, reminding us of the need to defend and promote human rights. The work of KIOS has always been rooted in this tradition and KIOS remains dedicated to this mission, securing human rights for all, particularly focusing on the most vulnerable groups in our target countries.

In 2023, growing restrictions on civil society highlighted the shrinking space for NGOs and

activists. This alarming trend strengthens our resolve to support human rights defenders. Only by working together can we resist the threats of authoritarianism and defend democratic values, which promote the well-being of people and equitable economic development.

Women's rights and LGBTIQ+ rights have recently been at the forefront of discussions as these groups face growing threats amid rising anti-gender ideologies and a broader anti-rights discourse. It is increasingly important to raise our voices and support those who advocate for equality and justice. KIOS remains committed to ensuring that future generations can live without fear and discrimination.

Environmental protection and land rights are also central to our work. Environmental defenders play a crucial role as environmental crises disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations. As economic interests and collaboration with corporations gain prominence in development cooperation policies, the significance of this theme will become more pronounced worldwide.



Kim Remitz
Executive Director, KIOS

Looking ahead, KIOS envisions a world where human rights are truly universal. While challenges remain significant, we are ready to face them. Our mission is clear: to work with our partners in creating a fairer, more just future where everyone can live free from fear and discrimination.



Photo Sakari Piippo

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 East Africa and South Asia. Together with local civil society organisations, we are building a world where human rights belong to everyone.

At the heart of our work is the realisation of 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

and the European Union delegation in Kenya.

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.

We identify our grantees through open calls for proposals and field trips. Local needs and expertise are always the starting point for our funding. Our support is channelled to human rights work planned and implemented by local civil society organisations.

During our 26 years of existence, we have provided close to 540 grants to CSOs in almost 60 countries. Many activists we support work at the grassroots 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 gather information about severe human rights violations and bring them to the attention of the international community. They help marginalised groups to actively participate in society and defend their rights and provide legal aid to thousands of people whose rights have been trampled upon. Some of our grantees have succeeded in changing 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 recognised for all human beings, and states are committed to ensuring them.



How we work

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

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

We strengthen: We strengthen our grantees and their networks, e.g. by financing their capacity building, networking and improving their safety.

We guide and mentor: We provide 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 organise 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 2023 in Numbers

34

grants were ongoing

17

in East Africa

17

in South Asia

Some results from 6 grants that ended in 2023

14 919 PEOPLE BENEFITTED DIRECTLY FROM KIOS-FUNDED HUMAN RIGHTS WORK.

1 630

human rights defenders and right-holders raised their awareness about human rights through grantee events.

158

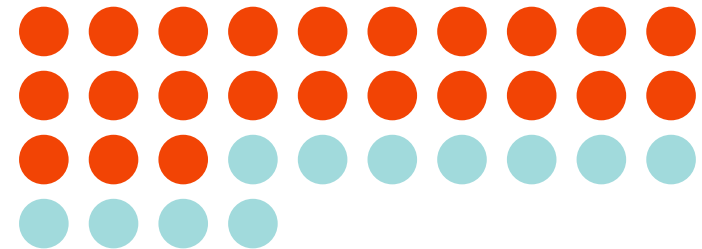
people learnt about their rights and how to defend them.

95

people received legal aid or counselling.

Number of women-led organisations supported by KIOS in 2023

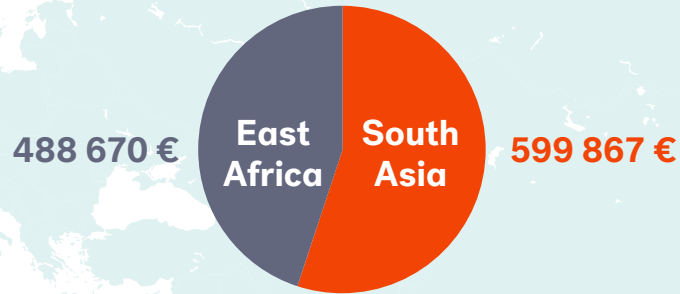
Out of 34 different grantees supported during the year 2023, 23 had women in leadership positions.*



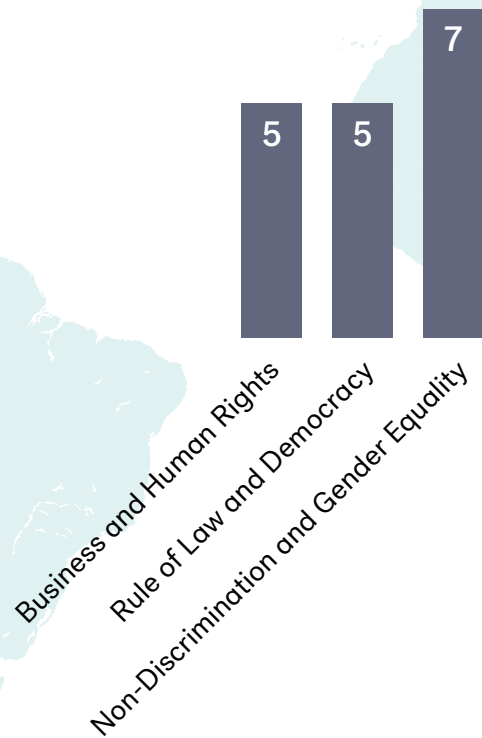
*this also counts for transgender women.

KIOS Grant Funding in 2023

KIOS Grant Funding
in total: 1 088 537



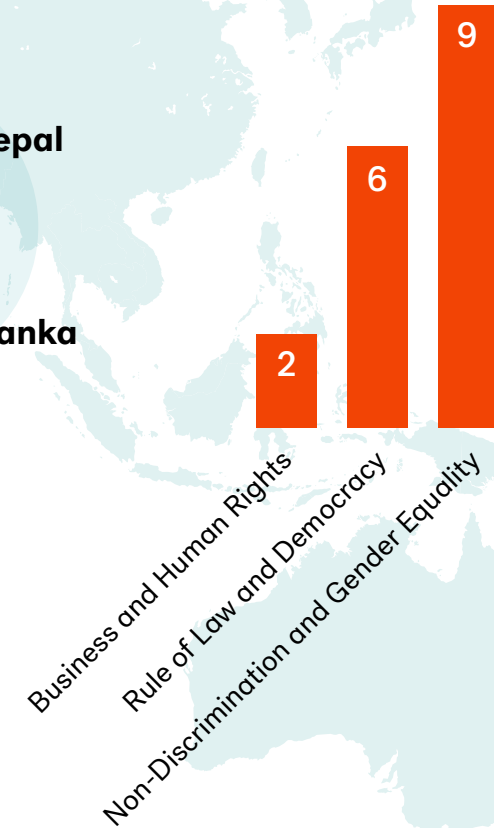
KIOS themes
East Africa



Uganda
Kenya

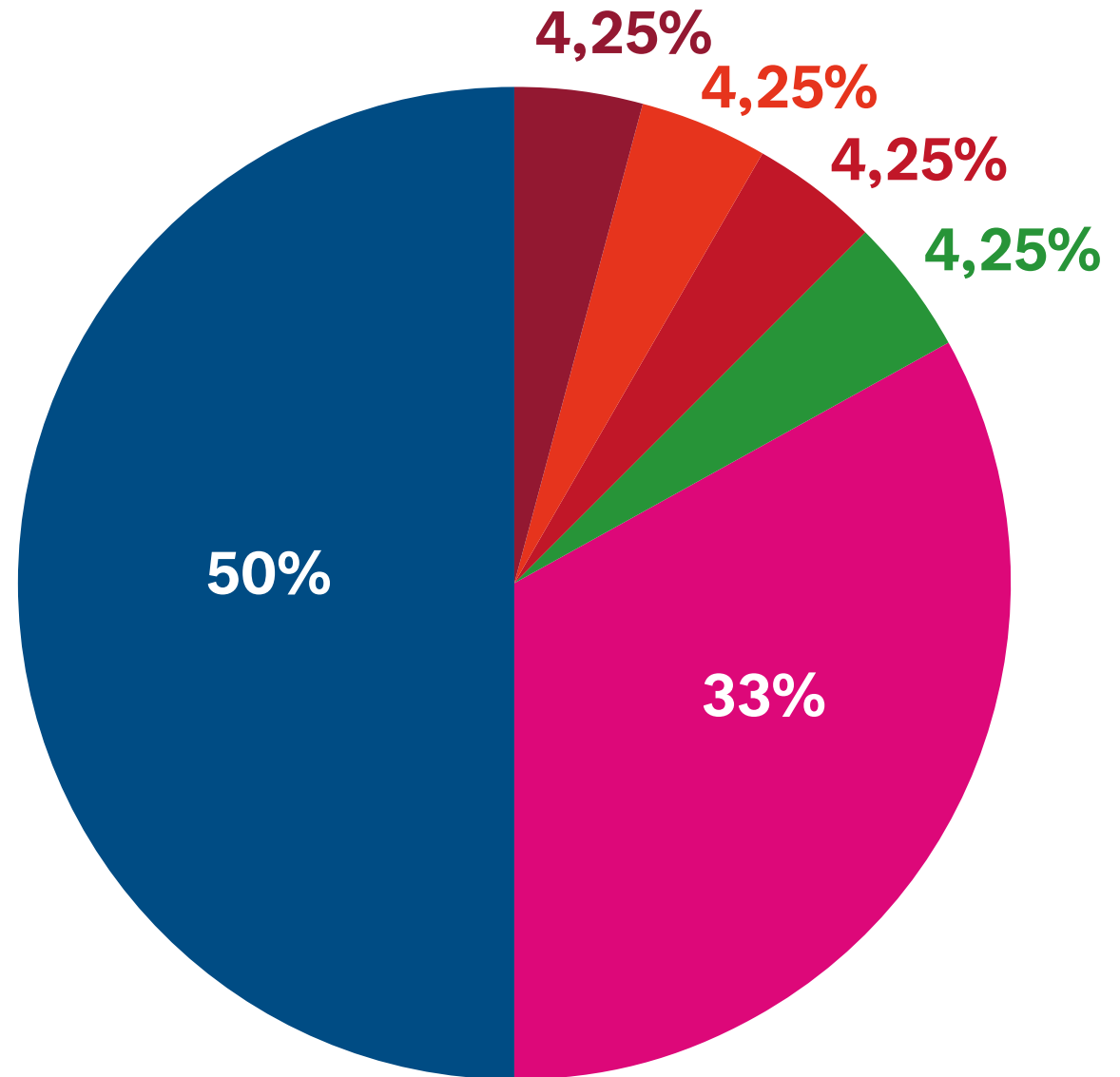
Nepal
Sri Lanka

KIOS themes
South Asia

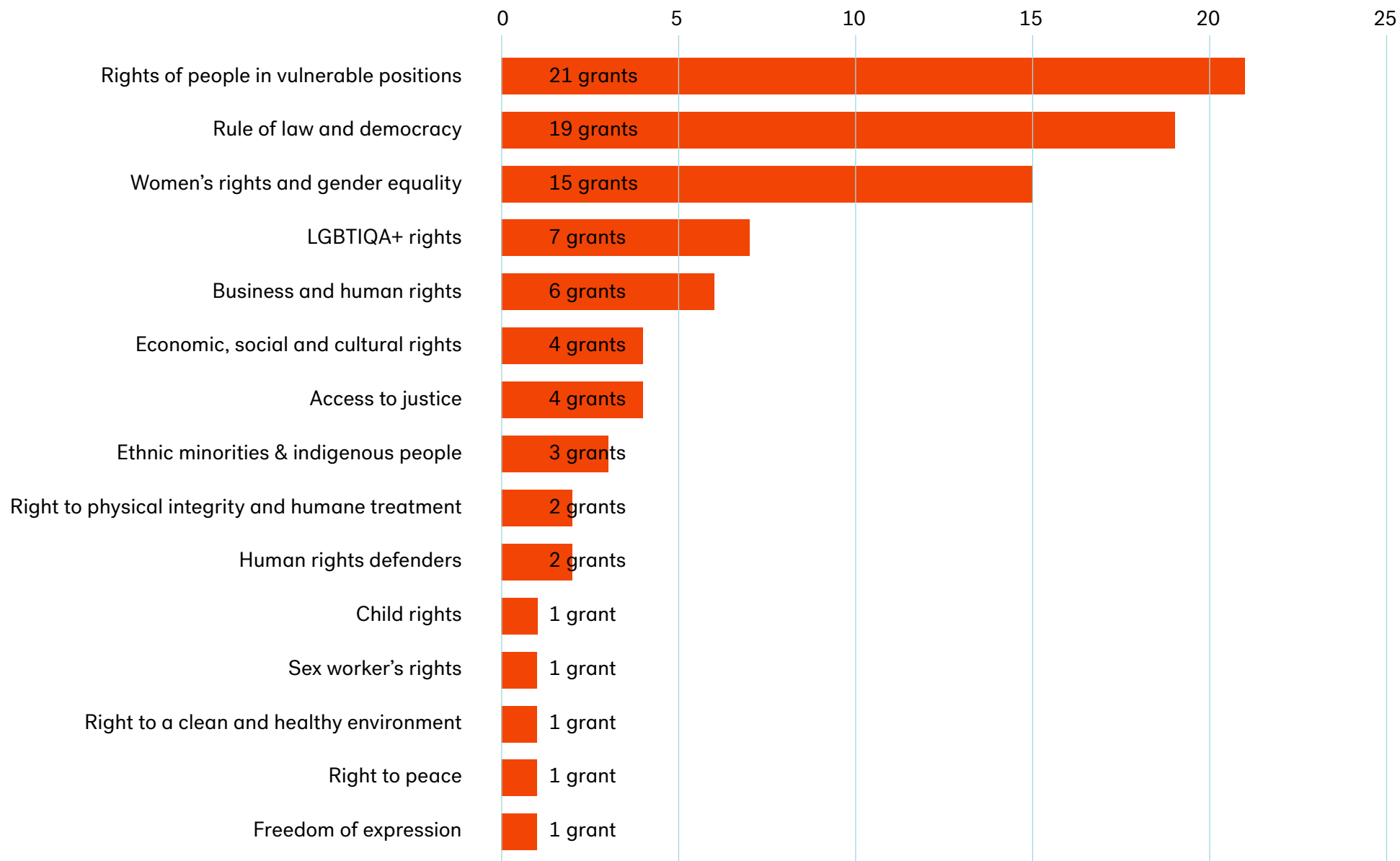


*The distribution of funds in 2023 does not directly relate to the scope of operations in a specific region.

Sustainable Development Goals in KIOS grants that ended in 2023



Themes of all grants in 2023



*There were 9 new grants in 2023. 6 grants closed during 2023. 34 grants were ongoing over year 2023. Some grants may have several themes.

Examples of our Grantees' Work

Working for Dignity and Equality





Photo: People Forum for Human Rights

Promoting the Rights of Migrant Workers in Nepal

KIOS grantee People Forum for Human Rights (People Forum) works to protect and promote human rights especially for vulnerable groups in Nepal. People Forum has unique experience in the field of legal aid, legal empowerment and policy advocacy, particularly on the issue of migration and migrant workers.

People Forum is a non-governmental organisation established in 2003 for the protection of human rights and the promotion of the rule of law in Nepal. Its work concentrates on different vulnerable groups, and migrant workers have been one of the main groups supported in previous projects. People Forum has six major working strategies: free legal services to migrant workers, advocacy for law reformation and policy implementation, public interest litigation, capacity development of migrant workers, governmental and non-

governmental service providers, coordination and networking among the actors, and research on legal issues of labour migration.

With KIOS support, People Forum has protected the rights of people who migrate to other countries for work. Migrant workers are often in a vulnerable position, and human rights violations against migrant workers have been on the news in many countries, even in Finland.

Additionally, People Forum gave legal assistance to victims of foreign employment in dedicated shelters, which enhanced migrant workers' knowledge on the redress process of foreign employment, gender-based violence and human trafficking.

Because of the advocacy conducted by People Forum, some municipalities have also allocated budget for programs related to foreign employment. Advocacy efforts have also contributed to establishing employment service centres in municipalities and some municipalities have started collecting data on people who have left for foreign employment from their municipalities.

KIOS supported People Forum between 2018 and 2023.



Photo People Forum for Human Rights

“

Migrant workers contribute to the development of both their country of origin and destination. However, migrant workers have been facing exploitation, and their rights are violated during the migration journey. With KIOS support we have been able to strengthen our efforts to protect the human rights of Nepali migrant workers.

-Shom Luitel, Advisor,
People Forum for Human Rights
(People Forum)

 **Nepal**

KIOS strategy main area:

Business and Human Rights

KIOS strategy subcategory:

Non-Discrimination and Gender Equality





Defending Civil Liberties and the Space of Civil Society in Kenya

KIOS grantee Civic Freedoms Forum (CFF) is a coalition of Kenyan organisations established in 2021 that defends and promotes civil liberties as well as the space and operating conditions of civil society in Kenya.

The founding members of the coalition consist of ten long-standing Kenyan human rights, democracy, and rule of law organisations, each bringing its own expertise to CFF's activities. With KIOS funding, CFF engaged in advocacy work to eliminate laws and practices that hinder civic activities in Kenya. Additionally, the funding supported the strengthening of CFF's own capacity to establish itself as a prominent defender of human rights and a credible network for advancing civil society space in Kenya.

The space for civil society in Kenya has narrowed since the 2022 elections, and tensions

between political decision-makers and civil society actors are high. In the months leading up to the Kenyan elections in August 2023, many Twitter accounts belonging to accounts for human rights defenders and governance institutions (especially civil society and human rights organisations, including CFF) were suspended. As such, CFF is a unique actor in Kenya, defending the importance of an active civil society during challenging times. With the support of KIOS, CFF has played a role in shaping the role of civil society in Kenya and, in collaboration with other human rights actors, has contributed to advocacy efforts, such as protecting human rights defenders.

This support has enabled human rights defenders to take a more active role in national-level advocacy through various human rights centres and groups. Training on topics such as digital security has also been provided. In a short amount of time, CFF has successfully reshaped the role of civil society and promoted the inclusion of actors in national decision-making processes. For instance, a joint advocacy session on the recommendations on the developed policy brief on the Compendium of Civic Space Laws allowed 22 social justice centres and HRDs, one umbrella body for persons with disability (The United Disabled Persons of Kenya UPDK), and one umbrella body for sex workers (Kenya Sex Workers Association KESWA) to take an active role as participants.

With KIOS support, CFF has been able to overcome this challenge and play an active role in not only promoting the safety of human rights



Photo Derrick Wesley Otieno

“

Noting the increasing contestation of civic space in Kenya, we need to continuously consolidate our efforts to yield maximum push-back efforts against the oppressive regime.

–John Owegi, Executive Director, Civic Freedoms Forum (CFF)

defenders but also advocacy for increasing the space for civil society. More importantly, it serves as an important platform for the different civil society actors to come together.

KIOS has supported CFF from its first operational year 2022.

Kenya

KIOS strategy main area:

Rule of Law and Democracy

KIOS strategy subcategory:

Non-Discrimination and Gender Equality





Photo: Women's Political Academy

Advancing Participation Opportunities for Women from Marginalised Groups in Decision-Making in Sri Lanka

KIOS grantee Women's Political Academy (WPA) is a Sri Lankan organisation focused on women's political empowerment. WPA aims to promote women's opportunities to participate in democratic decision-making at all levels of governance and in peacebuilding in Sri Lanka.

With the support of KIOS, WPA enhanced expertise in leadership and democratic decision-making, particularly by encouraging women from minority groups to engage in decision-making and peacebuilding. The goal is to improve the rights of minorities and women in Sri Lanka. WPA is an expert organisation initiated by the IMADR-Asia Committee, with all board members being women. The organisation has a small, paid secretariat in Colombo. Their work is supported by over 300 volunteer-based female activists who are involved in grassroots organisations across the country, representing all major ethnic and religious minorities in Sri Lanka.

With funding from KIOS, the participation of civil society representatives in political decision-making was increased – especially at a local level. This included the participation of women from vulnerable and marginalised groups. The project provided evidence-based information on issues related to minorities and women to local and national decision-makers. It also enhanced networking with female politicians at the provincial and national levels. Additionally, the funding strengthened WPA's own capacities. The support of KIOS enabled strong collaboration with both decision-makers and rights holders, bringing them together.

The operating environment for WPA was challenging as Sri Lanka's political leadership has pushed the interests of the country's majority population, withdrawn from the UN peace process initiated in 2015, and used the



Photo: Women's Political Academy

COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to harass and persecute human rights activists, journalists, lawyers, and minority groups. Women's rights and status have also deteriorated due to nationalist politics and pandemic-related political decisions, which have largely failed to take into account their impact on women and vulnerable populations.

Despite the difficult working environment, WPA was able to create a network of 300 women from all nine Sri Lankan provinces. They trained 25 resource people who travelled to different parts of the country to train more people about gender justice, gender budgeting and pro-poor policies, strengthening WPA's human rights work, advocacy, and leadership.

WPA has been a KIOS grantee since 2021.

“

With the invaluable support of KIOS, we have strengthened our capacity to advocate for gender justice and empower women from minority and marginalised communities in Sri Lanka. This partnership has enabled us to train local women leaders, increase our reach into every province and foster meaningful participation in decision-making processes at all levels.

–Nimalka Fernando, Executive Director, Women's Political Academy (WPA)

 **Sri Lanka**

KIOS strategy main area:

Rule of Law and Democracy

KIOS strategy subcategory:

Non-Discrimination and Gender Equality



Snapshots from KIOS Activities



Year of international guests

During 2023, KIOS hosted multiple human rights defenders from our grantee organisations.

KIOS took part in the World Village Festival, organising an interview with human rights defender Winnie Masai from Kenyan KIOS grantee InformAction. Winnie Masai was interviewed by journalist Liselott Lindström about how people in marginalised communities can learn about their rights and start pushing for change.

During Helsinki Pride Week, KIOS welcomed LGBTIQ+ activist Ishmael Bahati from PEMA Kenya. Ishmael participated in an event co-organised with different NGOs from Finland and the Helsinki Pride march with KIOS.

In December, KIOS took part in the UNDHR 75th Anniversary celebrations. KIOS invited human rights defender Phyllis Omido to speak at a seminar organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland in collaboration with KIOS, the City of Helsinki, European Parliament Office in Finland, Amnesty International, UNA Finland, the Human Rights Centre, UN Youth of Finland and The Finnish League for Human Rights. Ms. Omido was part of a panel discussion together with LGBTIQ+ and Sápmi activist Janne Hirvasvuopio and women's rights activist Fatema Jafari from Afghanistan, discussing the role of the human rights declaration in tackling today's global challenges.



Phyllis Omido interviewed by Sean Ricks at the UNDHR 75th Anniversary seminar in Helsinki.

Campaigning for human rights

KIOS took part in the **Toimi koska voit** online campaign organised around the Miina Sillanpää Day and Day of Civic Participation on October 1st. The campaign was coordinated by Fingo and designed and implemented by eight Finnish NGOs and foundations working on civic space. This year, KIOS interviewed Winnie Masai from KIOS Kenyan partner organisation InformAction for the campaign.

Before the parliamentary elections, KIOS took part in the campaign **Suomi ei käännä selkänsä maailmalle** organised by Fingo and several other development organisations. The campaign focused on the importance of development cooperation, humanitarian aid and peace work for building a stable and safe world. It aimed at broadening the discussion around foreign and security policy before the elections and during the formation of government.

KIOS also took part in the **Just Transition Now!** campaign, which wants to raise the fairness of ecological transition in public discussion, and continued to participate in the **Justice is Everybody's Business** Campaign, which calls for corporate responsibility and drives the EU Directive for Due Diligence.

In November, KIOS joined more than 600 other organisations calling for an immediate ceasefire at the Gaza Strip and Israel to prevent



Winnie Masai from KIOS's partner organisation InformAction interviewed by Liselott Lindström at the World Village Festival in Helsinki.

a humanitarian catastrophe and further loss of lives.

In November and December, KIOS also took part in a social media campaign around the **75th Anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights**. The campaign was organised by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland together with several Finnish NGOs and featured human rights defenders, among them Phyllis Omido from KIOS grantee CJGEA.

Highlighting the LGBTIQ+ rights

During Helsinki Pride Week Väestöliitto, Seta Finland, the Martha Association and KIOS organised a documentary evening and discussion called **LGBTIQ+ Activists in the Spotlight - What is the situation in different parts of Africa?** at Kino Korjaamo in Helsinki. The event included the screening of **Under the Kenyan Rainbow** (2022), an YLE documentary



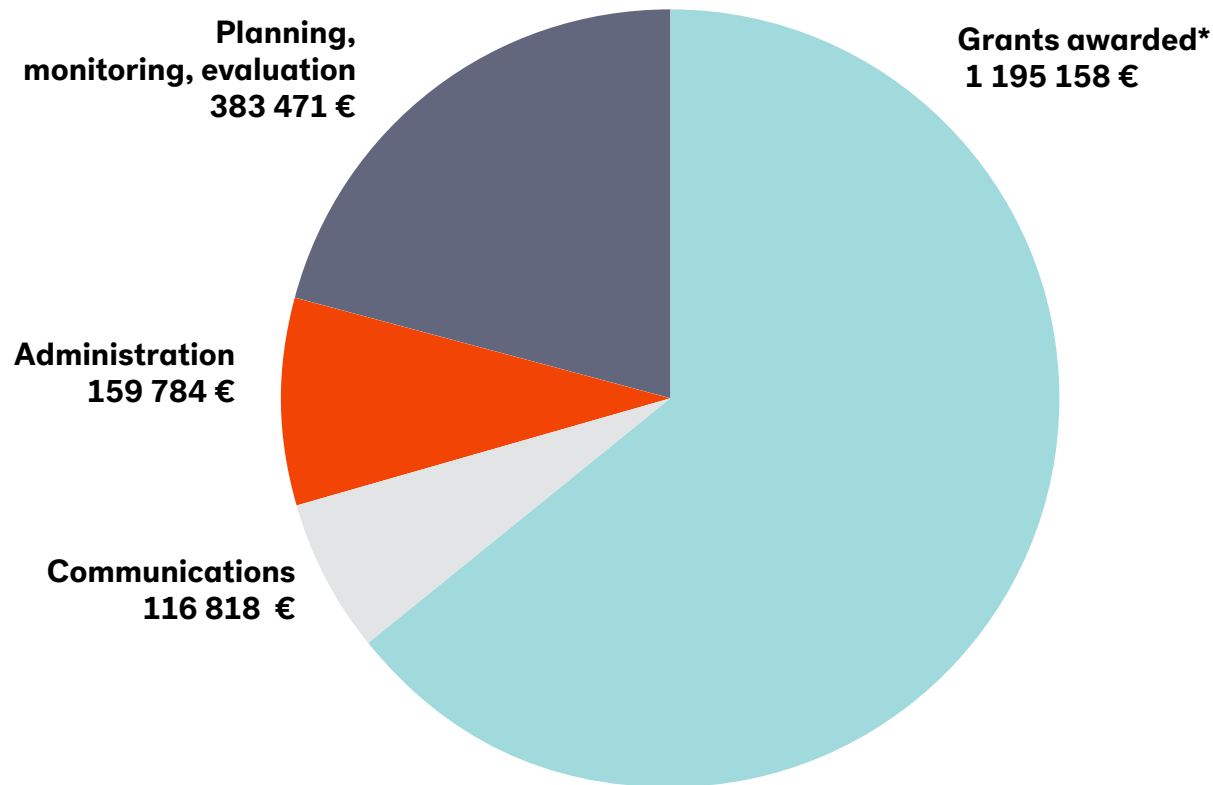
Ishmael Bahati (left) from KIOS grantee PEMA Kenya participating to the Helsinki Pride March in June together with LGBTIQ+ activists from Africa and Västöliitto

following Kenyan LGBTIQ+ people living in a religious community, most of them activists in KIOS grantee organisation PEMA Kenya. After the documentary, activists, including Ishmael Bahati from PEMA Kenya, gave their own perspectives on the situation. KIOS Senior Advisor Elina Vuola took part in the panel, discussing how Finnish politicians, organisations and activists can act as allies to LGBTIQ+ activists in Africa. KIOS also participated in the Helsinki Pride March alongside Ismael, other LGBTIQ+ activists from Africa and Västöliitto.

The new anti-homosexuality laws in East Africa caught the attention of media in 2023. In April, *Yle News* interviewed Anette Atieno from KIOS grantee in Kenya National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC) about the surge of laws and policies targeting homosexuality. Furthermore, the *Maailma.net* portal published an interview with NGLHRC lawyer Imani Kimiri in April and an interview with Ishmael Bahati from PEMA Kenya in June. Elina Vuola was interviewed for an article on Finland's role in supporting homophobic movements in Uganda. During Pride Month in June, *Kehitys-lehti* contacted KIOS for a series of Instagram posts about the situation in Africa, including posts about Uganda, Kenya and KIOS grantee NGLHRC. In December, the *Ulkopolitiikka* web magazine published an article about the anti-gender movement, with an interview with Anette Atieno.

Finances and Administration

Financial Year Breakdown



* The grants awarded include the self-financing shares of the grantees.

Organisational Changes

In 2023, KIOS grew significantly, which meant changes to the organisational structure as KIOS recruited new employees. KIOS shifted to a team structure and two new team leaders were introduced. Tasks have now been defined more clearly. The goal has been to create unanimity and set certain standards, also to ensure equal treatment of all KIOS partners. Future objectives include improving the orientation of new employees, ensuring smooth transitions and streamlining funding processes.

Focus on Workplace Wellbeing

KIOS went through a workplace wellbeing project with the help of an external consultant, forming a shared understanding of challenges and next steps. KIOS has also made a stronger effort to ensure that there are sufficient communications channels and spaces to share information between teams. KIOS identified a need for routines and checks to predict and prepare for busy periods and possible disruptions.

Updating Financial Administration

KIOS developed financial administration by updating different guidelines and forms that guide KIOS funding. Risk management and regular monitoring were also developed. Different processes regarding KIOS funding were thought out and developed.



KIOS
Foundation

Lintulahdenkatu 10
00500, Helsinki, Finland
kios@kios.fi
kios.fi



@kiosfoundation