



KIOS Strategy 2025-2028



KIOS Foundation

KIOS Foundation strengthens the realization of human rights by supporting the human rights work of civil society groups in developing countries. The Foundation's work currently focuses on South Asia and East Africa.

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Cover: Sofi Lundin 2021, photo of Silvia Anica working in rice field at Paten South, Pakwach District in Uganda.



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Mission

KIOS is a funder for human rights defenders in the Global South, supporting civil society organisations' local human rights initiatives. We focus on advocating for the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalised people, and promoting human rights as defined by UN treaties and regional treaties. KIOS upholds the universality and inalienability of human rights and aligns its efforts with the principles of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Vision

KIOS envisions a world that recognises the equal dignity and human rights of all people. In this vision, states uphold human rights in their laws and practices, governance is transparent and democratic, and civil society operates independently without restrictions. Media freedom is ensured, and the rights of women, children, marginalised individuals, and those facing multiple forms of discrimination are protected and promoted.

Values

In addition to its vision, KIOS activities are guided by:

Equality

The core of KIOS' work is the equal dignity and human rights of all people.

Commitment

With a focus on long-term partnerships, KIOS pursues systemic change responsibly to foster lasting cultural transformation in the human rights contexts it operates in.

Quality

KIOS works professionally and invests in context-aware decision making. The principles of the Human Rights-Based Approach guide our work.

Civil Society Ownership

KIOS supports human rights efforts by fostering mutual learning and enabling local human rights movements to take strong ownership of their work.



Global Trends and KIOS

Defending human rights, democracy, and the rule of law is facing increasing opposition globally. The influence of authoritarianism and the shrinking space of civil society underscore the critical need for human rights work. KIOS promotes human rights, democracy and the development of the rule of law. Supporting and safeguarding the work and security of human rights defenders is central to KIOS activities. KIOS is committed to supporting organisations' own initiatives in a flexible manner. KIOS brings together human rights defenders and strengthens regional networking. By actively communicating about the work of human rights defenders and the challenges they face, KIOS raises their voices.

Gender equality and sexual rights have become increasingly disputed topics as part of democratic backsliding and the shrinking of civil society space. Movements against gender equality, sexual rights and the rights of sexual and gender minorities — often referred to as the “anti-gender movement” — bring together conservative, nationalist and populist groups. KIOS focuses on advancing the rights of marginalised groups, such as women, youth and those in vulnerable positions.

To ensure sustainable development, the private sector's contribution is crucial. However, the pursuit of economic growth has at times resulted in human rights violations and environmental destruction. Businesses and investors have lacked the capacity, and sometimes also the will, to consider the rights of the most marginalised communities and the environment in local contexts. The poorest countries and the most marginalised people are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. While pursuing solutions for a low-carbon economy, we must be mindful of a just transition. KIOS works to ensure that the transition is fair and inclusive.

Geopolitical and social divides have accelerated, and democracy is weakening aggressively. Wars, conflicts, and coups are on the rise, and governments are increasingly hesitant to uphold human rights treaties and institutions. KIOS supports democracy and the development of the rule of law in post-conflict and fragile societies.

Strategic Priorities

During the 2025–2028 strategy period, funding will be primarily directed towards three main themes, which will also be highlighted in communication and advocacy. These themes have emerged based on the expertise, policies, and needs of KIOS, its partners, and stakeholders. Grants often encompass components of multiple themes.

Non-Discrimination and Gender Equality

KIOS aims to strengthen the position of women, youth and marginalised groups. KIOS seeks to enable marginalised groups themselves to mobilise and lead the struggle for their rights. Marginalised groups frequently face multiple forms of discrimination, with factors including ethnicity or descent, sexual orientation, gender, work and income level.

Democratic Rights and the Rule of Law

KIOS aims to foster political and civil rights, resilient democratic culture and the participation of women and those belonging to marginalised groups. Legal empowerment and advancing equitable and accountable justice are important elements of this work. KIOS acknowledges the importance of respect for international law and states' responsibility and accountability to protect their population during peace, conflict and post-conflict situations.

Responsible Business, Environment and Human Rights

KIOS acknowledges the need for private sector contributions in sustainable development efforts but seeks to ensure that human rights are respected and protected in all business activities. This includes caring for the natural surroundings and ensuring the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. KIOS aims to strengthen corporate accountability and to make sure that the voices of the most marginalised people are heard regarding business activities that impact their lives and environment. Ensuring the safety of environmental human rights defenders is a priority.

Geographic Focus

During the 2025–2028 strategy period, KIOS will focus its funding primarily on East Africa and South Asia, with further emphasis on its communication and advocacy efforts. KIOS has strong expertise in human rights issues and the landscape of human rights work in these regions. Where feasible, KIOS may pilot new areas of operation, such as supporting human rights organisations operating in Europe.

Core Functions

Identifying and funding relevant local human rights actors in the Global South (i.e. grant-making programme). KIOS supports the vision, creativity, and agency of local human rights actors in carrying out the actions they believe best fit their local context. KIOS values a diverse portfolio of small and medium-sized human rights actors and takes strategic risks to support emerging human rights actors.

Capacity-building, supporting networking and mentoring when needed. KIOS aims to ensure that supported human rights defenders and their organisations are able to continue with their human rights work in a safe, sustainable and effective manner. Special attention is given to the security of human rights defenders. Networks are built from the local to the global level.

Advocacy, communications and developing strategic alliances. As a human rights funder, it is important for KIOS to use the knowledge and position it has to advocate for and communicate on the work of human rights defenders and their organisations and movements. This is done with grantees and other strategic partners whenever possible. KIOS seeks to ensure that the voices of human rights defenders and movements are heard in public discussions in Finland and beyond.

Knowledge-building and learning. KIOS is committed to learning from our grantees and other partners and developing our understanding on the operational environment and human rights context of our grantees. This is important in order to build supporting strategies that respond better to the changing realities of human rights actors on ground.

Internal priorities

Staff Expertise

Staff skills, well-being and job satisfaction are developed collaboratively and inclusively.

Developing Governance

The foundation's internal structure, division of labour and communication are developed to meet the needs of a changing operational environment, digitalisation and emerging development requirements.

Expanding Funding Base

KIOS will expand its funding base according to strategic goals, primarily by seeking new institutional funders, such as national development cooperation organisations in Europe, the European Union, and other foundations working in human rights.

Partnerships and Cooperation

KIOS networks with relevant actors, remains open to collaboration and supports other organisations in assessing human rights risks.