Defending Latin American Human Rights and Democracy Activists
DEFENDING LATIN AMERICAN HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS

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RESEARCH AND EDITORIAL TEAM

The Freedom House Team members included experts and specialists Jonathan Eoloff, Ana Cristina Nuñez, Juan Navarrete Monasterio, and Ana Quiros Víquez; Gerardo Berthin, Freedom House Director for Latin America and Caribbean Programs; Alessandra Pinna, Freedom House Deputy Director for Latin America and Caribbean Programs; and Olivia Magnanini, Freedom House Research/Program Associate provided editorial assistance for the report. The complete report and the two individual case studies on Nicaragua and Venezuela, can be found on our website at www.freedomhouse.org.

ON THE COVER

Relatives of government opponents who remain detained in different prisons hold signs with their portraits and names during a protest led by the human rights NGO Foro Penal as part of the campaign “Christmas without Political Prisoners” in Caracas on December 10, 2020. The protest occurred in 14 Venezuelan states simultaneously, according to spokesmen of Foro Penal. (Image Credit: Yuri CORTEZ / AFP via Getty Images)
Defending Latin American Human Rights and Democracy Activists

Executive Summary

Purpose of Assessment
This assessment builds on existing bodies of literature, interviews with key informants and stakeholders, two case studies, and Freedom House experiences to better understand the nature of the defense and protection of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and pro-democracy Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Latin America.

The study undertakes an institutional and organizational landscape analysis to: determine which entities, organizations and individuals are involved in the protection and defense of HRDs and CSOs (with a particular focus on relocation); identify strategies and approaches to support the defense and protection of HRDs and CSOs within their countries and in exile; analyze the gaps and challenges of existing approaches; and develop recommendations to strengthen the protection and defense of HRDs in Latin America.

Given time and resource limitations, the assessment was relatively narrow in its scope. As such, it is not intended to be an impact or capacity assessment; much less, an evaluation of specific programs and/or initiatives. Rather, it describes HRD protection systems in Latin America, highlights opportunities for future HRD activities and major areas that merit further regional and national attention, and HRD protection systems in Latin America. The assessment also highlights opportunities and offers strategic recommendations.

Findings in Brief
HRDs and pro-democracy CSOs face increasingly hostile environments throughout Latin America, including legislation that criminalizes their work, intimidation, harassment, and physical attacks among other human rights violations. According to human rights organizations, in 2020, Latin America was the most dangerous continent in the world for human rights defenders, accounting for more than three-quarters of all murders of HRDs worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, as governments deployed authoritarian measures under the guise of enforcing COVID-19 restrictions, to inhibit movement, curtail freedoms of expression and assembly, and implement militarized security policies.

Worsening human rights conditions have also spurred unprecedented levels of migration and displacement—including of HRDs—across the region, according to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Growing migrant and refugee populations in Latin America have been especially vulnerable in the context of COVID-19, as border closures and lockdowns made living conditions even more precarious and curtailed mobility and access to information and services.

In recent years, HRDs and challenges they face in Latin America and globally have garnered increasing attention.
Yet, the definition of what makes someone a HRD remains elusive and varies from country to country. According to practitioners, researchers and academics interviewed and engaged for the assessment, the United Nations definition offers a solid foundation for defining who can be considered an HRD. While it is difficult to generalize, several findings from the assessment point to some emerging and evolving parameters to help further understand who is considered an HRD in Latin America. These include:

- HRDs can include social justice leaders and artists;
- HRDs are perceived as agents of change in their communities;
- HRD can be perceived as an individual and as part of a community seeking to advance human rights, with collective needs; and
- HRDs in Latin America undertake a tremendous amount of work, often with little or no monetary compensation.

Refining this definition will become increasingly important as a growing field of actors and stakeholders contribute diverse initiatives to protect HRDs. Some of those include:

- International protection organizations
- Temporary relocation providers and shelters
- CSOs
- Bilateral and multilateral donor organizations
- HRDs themselves

Gaps in knowledge, understanding and support remain, yet this assessment found that HRDs themselves are driving efforts to close those gaps and expand knowledge. HRDs’ burgeoning agency in shaping their own protection has prompted a shift from perceiving HRDs under threat as victims, to viewing them as agents of change, and sources to understand how human rights movements organize and strategize in restricted and undemocratic environments. Thanks to HRDs’ increasing involvement in protection strategies, temporary relocation providers, national protection organizations, HRDs are more frequently raising the notion of holistic protection or integral security, which go beyond physical or traditional security to include initiatives such as medical, psychosocial, and psycho-emotional support. National protection organizations and CSOs are also increasing their advocacy efforts to call on State protection mechanisms to incorporate holistic approaches.

However, these nascent efforts to design more comprehensive approaches to HRD protection have only begun to fill gaps and leverage opportunities available to protect and defend HRDs more effectively. As HRD work in Latin America is increasingly being criminalized and restricted, this assessment sought to offer systematic analysis of security and protection dynamics in Latin America that might inform efforts to improve HRD protections. In so doing, the assessment revealed some initial findings about the current landscape of security for and protection of HRDs:

**Security**

- The most traditional definition of security, physical, remains dominant, although HRDs are beginning to learn other aspects and dimensions.
- HRDs sometimes lack knowledge about integrated security strategies and tools.
- The pressure that accompanies HRDs work can push them beyond limits of physical and psychosocial safety.
- HRDs, especially women and indigenous people, have sought to rethink “security,” moving away from a military and policing view, toward a more comprehensive and gender-balanced notion.
- Job stability should be included as a key component of security.
- CSOs interviewed for the assessment highlighted the pattern of defining security as only the absence of threats and risks.

**Protection**

- State-run protection mechanisms are often prescriptive, offering a predetermined menu of protections from which HRDs can choose that do not necessarily respond to the specific needs of HRDs or the risks present in their differentiated contexts.
- International protection organizations have implemented good practices around protection and security in general, aided by the expansion of internet accessibility. This has facilitated more effective communication with CSOs on the ground, allowing consistent and more systematic meetings that can inform more appropriate assistance.

Few approaches to defend HRDs in Latin America have been evaluated systematically. Such analysis could be used to develop future program and strategic plans. These evaluations could also help donors, governments, and CSOs to refine HRD support objectives and performance measures.
This assessment's findings identified different levels of commitment by the State to the protection of HRDs in Latin America, including cases where commitment is not existent to cases where the State has begun to respond and construct a national protection regime to respond to both internal and external dynamics.

This assessment revealed some trends emerging in protecting and providing support to HRDs in Latin America. For example:

- The increased need to support and strengthen national measures, including expanding shelters for HRDs to seek a safe haven once an immediate risk occurs.
- The focus of some protection systems has shifted from addressing individual protection, to understanding and supporting more community-oriented protection measures. This includes expanding protection mechanisms to include indigenous communities’ perspectives.
- Most initiatives are being driven with support from external actors, rather than national or local authorities.
- HRDs in Latin America are not receiving the necessary protection from the State entities authorized to provide the requisite protection and, in some instances, State officials have been involved in the threats and attacks against HRDs.
- State protection mechanisms are often limited due to a focus solely on physical security.
- In many countries, demand for legal services by CSOs and HRDs exceeds supply.
- Internal, temporary relocation, rather than external relocation, is the best option for HRDs at risk, when feasible.
- Regional shelters for HRDs exist in Latin America and operate at full capacity.

A demonstrator holds the Venezuelan flag in front of a line of police officers during a protest in Caracas against the government of Nicolás Maduro in March 2020. (Image credit: Jonathan Lanza/NurPhoto via Getty Images)
This assessment also sought to offer an initial analysis of the adequacy and effectiveness of existing assistance for HRDs at risk in Latin America. Findings include:

- **Short-term assistance is most effective**: Temporary relocation initiatives are more effective in the short term than in the long term because they respond to an immediate urgent threat with a limited investment to resources. Relocation initiatives and support are difficult to sustain in the long term, as the number of cases of threats and attacks against HRDs continues to rise sharply, taxing existing services, which must prioritize immediate, short-term responses. Most internal and external relocation initiatives last three to six months. While some include reassessment after 6 months, and some HRDs get protection measures for more than two years, most do not include long-term plans.

- **Locally-driven relocation initiatives** or those where local CSOs coordinate closely with other temporary relocation initiatives, are the most effective in providing HRDs with emergency funds, resources and relocation support.

- Pre-relocation **contextual analyses** contribute to more appropriate protection measures that address actual risks, and are viable in each specific context.

- **Civil society participation** in assistance: In countries that have a State-run protection mechanism, CSOs report that some governments have failed to include or incorporate the participation of civil society or lack adequate conditions for CSO participation. This has resulted in lack of communication between CSOs and State authorities.

- **Legal assistance and representation** to help HRDs counter the State’s criminalization of their work is crucial to allowing them to continue their work either in their home country or from abroad. These legal processes can often take years. Legal support is needed for the HRD who faces false charges or imprisonment.

- **CSO capacity building**: Larger, more prominent organizations working on protection, often need the support of local organizations that can refer cases or connect smaller, nascent CSOs to assistance. When local CSOs have stronger tools and mechanisms to share information and accompany at-risk HRDs, assistance, including relocation can be more successful.

### Strategic and Policy Options for Programming

Based on the regional trends identified in this desk assessment, the following strategic options are recommended for consideration. In Part A, the Freedom Houses assessment team proposes a set of Non-Project Activities at the regional level, or sub regional level that would help to further progress in raising awareness about HRDs, their needs, challenges, and approaches to support them, and their work.

In addition, Freedom House proposes eight strategic recommendations in Part B, along with illustrative activities.

- Strategic Recommendation 1: Protection of HRDs
- Strategic Recommendation 2: Emergency Funds
- Strategic Recommendation 3: Temporary Relocation of HRDs
- Strategic Recommendation 4: Expand Temporary Relocation Initiatives
- Strategic Recommendation 5: Return and Reintegration of HRD Back Home
- Strategic Recommendation 6: Permanent Resettlement
- Strategic Recommendation 7: Provision of Long-Term Support to HRDs
- Strategic Recommendation 8: Funding Ideas for Donors

Temporary relocation initiatives are more effective in the short term than in the long term because they respond to an immediate urgent threat with a limited investment to resources.
Overview

Introduction

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) promoting fundamental freedoms, rights and democracy continue to face enormous challenges across Latin America today. Activists have experienced legislation criminalizing their work, increasing intimidation, human rights violations, and forced displacement by both State and non-State authorities in authoritarian and hybrid regimes. According to human rights organizations, in 2020, Latin America was the most dangerous continent in the world for human rights defenders, accounting for more than three-quarters of all murders of HRDs worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, as governments deployed authoritarian measures under the guise of enforcing COVID-19 restrictions, to inhibit movement, curtail freedoms of expression and assembly, and implement militarized security policies. In 2020, restrictions on free speech, and arbitrary or violent enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions by police and non-State actors were common throughout the region. Indeed, civil society in general, and HRDs specifically, faced extraordinary challenges to mobilize during the pandemic and to transition their work under lockdown, facing both physical and virtual security hurdles. With the increasing use of digital technology by HRDs, governments have found it easier to surveil targets, including those in exile.

Worsening human rights conditions have also spurred unprecedented levels of migration and displacement—including of HRDs—across the region, according to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Growing migrant and refugee populations in Latin America have been especially vulnerable in the context of COVID-19, as border closures and lockdowns made living conditions even more precarious and curtailed mobility and access to information and services. The region is home to 20 percent of the 82.4 million people forcibly displaced globally, including the second-largest external displacement crisis in the world after the Syrian crisis—5.6 million Venezuelan migrants fleeing economic crisis and repression. Neighboring Colombia houses 31 percent of Venezuelan migrants and refugees, placing a heavy burden on a country already struggling with human rights abuses—especially of HRDs. In addition, according to the UNHCR, human rights violations have forced over 100,000 Nicaraguans to flee their homeland. Nicaraguans also continue to flee their country for Costa Rica, Mexico, and Panama, as the government cracks down on opposition groups in anticipation of the presidential elections in November 2021.

The democratic outlook for some countries in the region is discouraging. According to Freedom House’s 2021 Freedom in the World report, nine countries in Latin America were classified as Free, 11 countries as Partially Free, and three countries as Not Free. In 2021, while five of the 23 countries in Latin America saw improvements in their scores, showed declines, with El Salvador leading that group with a net decrease of 3 points, followed by Venezuela with a net decrease of 2 points, and with Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Peru all decreasing by 1 point respectively. According to Freedom House, since 2006 Venezuela and Nicaragua have both shown the greatest declines in freedoms in the Western Hemisphere, -40 and -33 respectively. Transnational repression appears relatively rare in Latin America compared to other regions, although it is possible that the phenomenon is less visible due to the region’s enormous humanitarian crises, including the international displacement of millions of people due to political repression, organized crime, and natural disasters. Several extreme cases emerged from the brutal political crackdowns in Nicaragua and Venezuela, but there is still no systematic analysis or evidence of transnational repression practices.

Purpose of Assessment

The assessment provides a baseline overview of regional trends in shelter and relocation programs to defend and protect HRDs and pro-democracy CSOs in Latin America. Based on a current literature review and interviews with key informants and stakeholders, the analysis of two case studies, and Freedom House’s experience over the past two decades, the assessment provides recommendations for an effective, realistic and comprehensive regional approach...
to defend human rights and democracy activists in Latin America. Although not exhaustive, it serves as a starting point to document recent trends, assess current programming approaches and identify potential entry points for new support opportunities. The results provide answers to the increasingly pressing question in many contexts of what to do when HRDs are seeking or require relocation or shelter, whether within their countries or abroad.

Given limited time and resources, the assessment is relatively narrow in scope. As such, it is not intended to evaluate impact or capacity of HRD protection initiatives, much less to assess specific programs and/or initiatives. Rather, it describes (based on secondary information available in compliance with the Statement of Work and time constraints) gaps in support and protection for vulnerable activists and HRDs in Latin America and highlights major areas that merit regional and national attention. In addition, it maps out priorities and strategic recommendations.

The report is divided into five parts:

Section II provides an overview of HRDs in Latin America, including the working definition of an HRD, as well as dynamics of security and protection.

Section III describes trends in and current approaches to defending and protecting HRDs and pro-democracy CSOs in Latin America, including who provides assistance and how, what the assistance consists of, how long it lasts, the adequacy and impact of the assistance, and how exile effects the work of HRDs forced to flee their home countries.

Section IV looks at the specific cases of Venezuelan and Nicaraguan HRDs in Colombia and Costa Rica, respectively, to illustrate their needs, challenges, and opportunities.

Section V focuses on emerging issues and lessons in the protection of HRDs and challenges for the future.

Section VI provides strategic programming options to strengthen shelter and relocation programs to defend and protect HRDs.

Methodology

The assessment developed by Freedom House, with funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), was carried out in four phases. First, an initial desk study and literature review to synthesize information available in written documents; Second, thirty (30) semi-structured interviews with key informants and stakeholders in Spanish and/or English for a non-representative sample; Third, two case studies. Based on the information collected, Freedom House produced the assessment report.

A key methodological feature of this assessment was its consultative process. From January to April 2021, the team reviewed more than 60 documents (See Bibliography Annex 2) and conducted more than 30 interviews with key informants and stakeholders. All of the interviews were conducted virtually with encrypted videoconferencing technology. The average duration of each interview was one to two hours and many of the interviews were transcribed. Five interview guides were designed and tailored to the specific background or experience of the respondents. Freedom House supported the selection process for the interviews with informants and stakeholders, which included individuals with a vast array of experiences and expertise (HRDs, researchers, academics, representatives from international protections organizations, temporary relocation providers and shelters, legal services providers, donors, and CSO representatives). Interviewees also represented geographic diversity, spanning the Caribbean, Mexico, Central America, South America, Europe, Canada and the U.S. (See List of Interviews Annex 1). In addition, the assessment incorporated findings from two case studies, produced by local consultants in Colombia and Costa Rica. Each case study was the product of a literature review and a consultative process consisting of interviews with key informants, including HRDs, a specific survey applied to Venezuelan and Nicaraguan HRDs exiled in Colombia and Costa Rica, and focus groups of Nicaraguan HRDs in Costa Rica.14

Prior to identifying and selecting informants and stakeholders to interview, the Freedom House Team mapped potential stakeholders, key informants and organizations proposed for interviews (Annex 3). The mapping, while non-exhaustive, helped the team to ensure geographical and thematic representation, as well as to capture a diversity of services and programs. The mapping also helped to categorize organizations that either provide shelter to HRDs at risk in Latin America or assist organizations that operate shelters in the region. They are included as illustrative models for Freedom House to consider as it explores supporting shelters in Latin America (Annex 4).
Throughout the process, the team met consistently to outline themes, review and discuss information and finalize the report. Based on the literature review and the interviews with key informants and stakeholders, the team identified gaps in support and protection for vulnerable activists and HRDs, assess expected benefits and risks of new initiatives to fill those gaps, and identify potential sources of financial and technical support for protection mechanisms that need improvement or expansion in Latin America.

The Freedom House Team members included experts and specialists Jonathan Eoloff, Ana Cristina Nuñez, Juan Navarrete Monasterio, and Ana Quiros Viquez; Gerardo Berthin, Freedom House Director for Latin America and Caribbean Programs; Alessandra Pinna, Freedom House Deputy Director for Latin America and Caribbean Programs; and Olivia Magnanini, Freedom House Research/Program Associate.

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Human Rights Defenders in Latin America

Who exactly is a Human Rights Defender (HRD)?

Despite the growing attention towards HRDs in Latin America and globally, the concept of an HRD remains elusive. In 1998, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the “Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protection Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms” (commonly known as the “Declaration on Human Rights Defenders”). The definition of the term derives from Article 1, which states that: “Everyone has the right, individual and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels.” In attempts to provide guidance on the interpretation of the definition, the United Nations further suggests that, while there is no specific definition of who is or can be an HRD, the Declaration on human rights defenders refers to “individuals, groups and associations ... contributing to ... the effective elimination of all violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of peoples and individuals.” It is a broad categorization, and accordingly, the most obvious HRDs are those whose daily work specifically involves the promotion and protection of human rights, for example human rights monitors working with national human rights...
organizations, human rights ombudsmen or human rights lawyers. However, what is most important in characterizing a person as an HRD is not the person’s title or the name of the organization he or she works for, but rather the human rights character of the work undertaken.6

According to some practitioners, researchers and academics, the United Nations definition offers a solid foundation for defining who can be considered an HRD. While it is difficult to generalize, several findings from the assessment point to some emerging and evolving parameters to help further understand who is considered an HRD in Latin America. Meanwhile, field research highlighted a set of additional common characteristics often considered when thinking about human rights defenders and their work. Although there is considerable variation from country to country, a number of findings from the assessment point to some parameters to understand HRDs and their work in Latin America. These include:

- HRDs can include social justice leaders and artists;
- HRDs are perceived as agents of change in their communities;
- HRD can be perceived as an individual and as part of a community seeking to advance human rights, with collective needs; and
- HRDs in Latin America undertake a tremendous amount of work, often with little or no monetary compensation.

What are security and protection dynamics in Latin America for HRDs and how are they understood and practiced by all actors who seek to support HRDs?

Deteriorating conditions for human rights defenders around the globe have garnered increasing attention to the protection and security of HRDs. It is now considered its own field, including various actors, such as international protection organizations, temporary relocation providers and shelters, CSOs, multilateral bodies, donors, and HRDs themselves who contribute to strengthening protections for HRDs. Greater engagement on this issue has spurred new thinking on how best to provide protection and security. For instance, some organizations have begun to address security at the individual and collective level, and new aspects of security, such as psycho-emotional security and the security of family members, are being considered important elements of a protection system.

Gaps in knowledge, understanding and support remain, yet this assessment found that HRDs themselves are driving efforts to close those gaps and expand knowledge. HRDs’ burgeoning agency in shaping their own protection has prompted a shift from perceiving HRDs under threat as victims, to viewing them as agents of change, and sources to understand how human rights movements organize and strategize in restricted and undemocratic environments. Thanks to HRDs’ increasing

**THE SCOPE OF WORK OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

- Gather and disseminate information, advocate and mobilize public opinion.
- Provide information to empower or train others.
- Actively participate in the provision of the material means necessary to make human rights a reality—building shelter, providing food, strengthening development.
- Work at democratic transformation in order to increase the participation of people in the decision-making process that shapes their lives and to strengthen democratic governance.
- Contribute to the improvement of social, political and economic conditions, the reduction of social and political tensions, the building of peace, domestically and internationally, and the nurturing of national and international awareness of human rights.

involved in protection strategies, temporary relocation providers, national protection organizations, and HRDs are more frequently raising the notion of holistic protection or integral security, which go beyond physical or traditional security to include initiatives such as medical, psychosocial and psycho-emotional support. National protection organizations and CSOs are also increasing their advocacy efforts to call on State protection mechanisms to incorporate holistic approaches.

However, these nascent efforts to design more comprehensive approaches to HRD protection have only begun to fill gaps and leverage opportunities available to protect and defend HRDs more effectively. As HRD work in Latin America is increasingly being criminalized and restricted, this assessment sought to offer systematic analysis of security and protection dynamics in Latin America that might inform efforts to improve HRD protections. In so doing, the assessment revealed some initial findings about the current landscape of security for and protection of HRDs:

**Security**
- The most traditional definition of security, physical, remains dominant, although HRDs are beginning to learn other aspects and dimensions.
- HRDs sometimes lack knowledge about integrated security strategies and tools.
- The pressure that accompanies HRDs work can push them beyond limits of physical and psychosocial safety.
- HRDs, especially women and indigenous people, have sought to rethink “security,” moving away from a military and policing view, toward a more comprehensive and gender-balanced notion.
- Job stability should be included as a key component of security.
- CSOs interviewed for the assessment highlighted the pattern of defining security as only the absence of threats and risks.

**Protection**
Protection is the treatment for insecurity, and this assessment revealed that, like the definition of an HRD, the definition of “protection” is evolving. The term is increasingly viewed as a ‘bundle’ of protections, informed by the specific context in which it is being applied, rather than as a “one size fits all” solution. Moreover, protection mechanisms have begun to consider both collective and individual protections. The emphasis, where possible, should be on prevention strategies, including mitigating measures, rather than on protection. Other key findings on protection worth highlighting are:

- State-run protection mechanisms are often prescriptive, offering a predetermined menu of protections from which HRDs can choose that do not necessarily respond to the specific needs of HRDs or the risks present in their differentiated contexts.

**WHAT DOES SECURITY MEAN FOR HRDS IN LATIN AMERICA?**

“Protection is a right, and security is a strategy.” (HRD from Guatemala)

“Within international protection organizations, security is understood as a parameter to determine to what extent they should intervene in a given situation. It is a parameter to define the action of the organization.” (Member of a research institution in Latin America)

“Women HRDs from Mesoamerica are incorporating the body, self-care and self-awareness, when defining security. Women HRDs are examining how these elements can affect other types of security, including the security of the family. For them, security is not just reacting to a threat; it is about having economic security, food security, mental or psychological security and physical health security.” (Researcher)
WHAT DOES PROTECTION MEAN FOR HRDS IN LATIN AMERICA?

“The problem with protection and how it is understood by international protection organizations is that the organization tends to position itself in a hierarchical relationship with the defenders on the ground. As a result, some HRDs work according to a paradigm that is not necessarily responsive to the needs of the HRDs.” (Member of research institution)

“Indigenous people have very advanced ways of protection. And when we are talking about security, we are talking about what type of security as individuals, as a collective, but also as a people who have inhabited that particular territory for so long. We need to protect the territory, because for them the territory is not just the piece of land that we very wrongly misunderstand many times. On the contrary, the territory includes the human and social aspects of it, the natural aspect of it and also the spiritual part of it. Spirituality plays a critical role in terms of protection for these communities and for many others who are not indigenous.” (Researcher)

“We are very used to understanding protection in those terms when the focus is pure and simple security: ‘He got a death threat, he has to leave!’ But it is not the same when it’s, ‘Be careful! They filed a complaint against him on terrorism charges, for sedition!’” (National Protection Organization staff member)

- International protection organizations have implemented good practices around protection and security in general, aided by the expansion of internet accessibility. This has facilitated more effective communication with CSOs on the ground, allowing consistent and more systematic meetings that can inform more appropriate assistance. Yet, the development and expansion of the internet has also made HRDs and protection systems more vulnerable to digital attacks and surveillance by state or non-state actors, necessitating stronger digital security protections.

- Some HRDs in Latin America are engaging in new practices, including “elective protection.” An example is the San José de Apartadó peace community—located in Colombia’s northern region of Urabá in the Department of Antioquia, which built a physical enclosure around the community and declared themselves neutral. This example also illustrates the importance of understanding HRDs not only as individuals but as organizations and communities as well. Many communities in Latin America are expressing the need to think of protection as a communal, in-community or collective way.
Defending the Defenders: Trends, Models, and Patterns

This assessment’s findings point to different levels of commitment by countries to the protection of defenders in Latin America. First, there are countries with no government commitment to protection, such as Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, all classified as “Not Free” by Freedom House in its Freedom in the World report. Second, there are countries that have begun to respond to risks HRDs face by constructing national protection mechanisms, such as Costa Rica and Colombia (see section IV below). These countries have been classified as Free and Partially Free, respectively, by Freedom House.

The results of the assessment also confirmed that the defense and protection of HRDs and pro-democracy CSOs in Latin America is a relatively new area of study, research, and practice, emerging in Latin America only a decade ago. This assessment found that the expectation emerging from the Latin America region as it faces new challenges is that the defense and protection of HRDs at home or abroad has to be multi-level and multi-actor. While the national and local actors are expected to play a key role, regional and international actors are expected to complement and support protection programs. This aspiration provides the basis to move towards...
AN IDEAL SYSTEM OF PROTECTION FOR HRDS IN LATIN AMERICA

To support and protect HRDs at the local, national, regional, and international levels, a protection system must include the following important elements. This is not an exhaustive list but provides a basis on which more specific activities and strategies can be developed according to the needs of each country:

- The national and local legislative and normative frameworks for the work of HRDs and their protection, including the rights to freedom of expression and association.
- Protection mechanisms in place to be enforced by the law and justice systems.
- Access to training, capacity building and information.
- Collaborative work by national and local authorities with international and regional entities (United Nations, Organization of American States).
- Role of the private sector and other national stakeholders.
- Monitoring and dissemination of information on the situation of HRDs by media, CSOs, research institutions.
- Protection and support for HRDs in exile.
- HRD work and networking.

Who provides assistance and what does it consists of?

This assessment found that there are new and growing efforts to protect and support HRDs in Latin America. For example, the region is seeing rising numbers of new initiatives to strengthen national measures and expand shelters for HRDs to seek a safe haven in the face of immediate risk. In addition, findings reveal growing efforts include the perspective of indigenous communities in designing protection mechanisms. This has begun to shift the focus of some protection mechanisms from a focus on protecting the individual toward a more community-based model that accounts for the collective nature of human rights defense within indigenous and other HRD communities. While some examples of collective protection experiences exist in places like Honduras and Mexico, many of these processes are not being led by civil society or local authorities, but rather by external actors. The assessment revealed an opportunity to leverage this budding shift in protection strategies to pilot new collective protection initiatives, born more organically from the way the human rights movements, communities, collectives and networks organize themselves.

In spite of these emerging opportunities, evidence collected for the assessment suggests that HRDs in Latin America do not receive key HRD support services such as, emergency funds, physical security support, psychosocial and psycho-emotional support, medical assistance, digital security installation, support and training, legal advice and assistance for criminalization, from the State. Moreover, in some instances, State officials have even been involved in perpetrating the threats and attacks against HRDs. Lack of support and instances of complicity have sown frustration and anger among HRDs in Latin America and distrust in State-run systems. Additionally, formal State mechanisms will not work in the face of rampant corruption and impunity. The efficacy of any State mechanism of protection is fully undermined in authoritarian and closed environments, where access to justice in nonexistent, crimes are not investigated, identification and arrest of perpetrators are delayed, and those convicted escape. Ineffective justice systems fly in the face of formal protection mechanisms offered by the State.

Source: Based on, United Nations Human Rights Defenders: Protecting the Right to Defend Human Rights Fact Sheet No. 29.
In the arena of international legal protection, the discussion centers around the question of how effective precautionary measures issued by the Inter-American System are. Often, the efficacy of this measure is determined by the national context, the government involved, and how much impact or relevance they will have on the protection of the HRD.

When the State collaborates with precautionary measures, which is the exception in Latin America, protection is still limited unless the State extends other complementary protection measures. The Inter-American system lends a status to the HRDs as they are recognized in a situation of vulnerability, but ultimately how HRDs are protected is left entirely up to each State. The assessment found that where offered and available, formal State mechanisms of protection have not necessarily worked because they focus solely on physical integrity, and they have failed to address the other impacts of working under threat of attack or death threats.

Certain HRDs and CSOs are inclining to build protection systems within the community, in order to take advantage of existing tools for protection and avoid options that lead into internal relocation or relocation to another country. CSOs in countries like Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador and Colombia, are playing an instrumental role in proposing alternative initiatives around protection and security (including private initiatives), especially in the face of ineffective and under-resourced formal State mechanisms which tend to focus solely on physical safety.

While some key HRD services can also be provided through NGOs, the tradeoff for many HRDs and CSOs interviewed for the assessment is that the State’s obligations and responsibilities under the law are lifted and substituted. In some cases, CSOs have noted that HRDs have protection schemes provided by the international community and where the State in no way participated or had knowledge of the risks that the HRD had been facing. For CSOs, this can be problematic when seeking to attribute State responsibility in an international arena where the underlying measures provided by civil society were inadequate or ineffective. CSOs contend that if a State alleges lack of knowledge of the situation or about the specific case, it will likely impede assigning responsibility to the State under the law and the State will remain unaccountable. In exceptional cases where CSOs operate in countries where the State has a national protection mechanism, the assessment found that the protection mechanism has worked for HRDs mainly as a result of their advocacy, intervention and pressure before the State.

There is an increasing demand by HRDs and CSOs for legal and psychosocial services. Unfortunately, the assessment found that in many countries the demand for legal services exceeds the supply. There are very few attorneys (and psychologists) with expertise in accompanying or representing HRDs. There is a need to expand legal assistance and services to HRDs at the community level as well. There is a push to open smaller, discrete shelters in countries throughout Latin America for HRDs at risk, but the pandemic and the lockdown have slowed down the initiatives.

Despite opposition from some sectors, there is a trend toward including self-care as a form of protection. Opposition to incorporating self-care as a protection practice comes from those who argue that it can deflect responsibility from the perpetrator to the actual victim for not having taking care of him or herself.

**How was the assistance provided?**

**Temporary Relocation Initiatives**

Temporary relocation initiatives support HRDs to move to a safer location—either within or outside of their countries of work—in response to imminent threats. In general, temporary internal or external relocation initiatives can involve emergency funds, physical security support, psychosocial and psycho-emotional support, medical assistance, digital security installation, and legal advice and assistance with immigration status and criminalization cases back home. Some organizations that support internal and external relocation of HRDs also help secure safe transportation and food assistance.

While international organizations fund some relocation initiatives, this assessment revealed that those efforts are often little known to and relatively infrequently engaged by HRDs. Instead, HRDs themselves take on much of the frontline work (collecting information, finding resources, establishing communication with potential relocation partners) to relocate themselves or their peers. HRDs interviewed for the assessment mentioned that they often learn about relocation services and support through their own research or network contacts, rather than through international organizations. Meanwhile, many smaller grassroots human rights organizations were not familiar with internal and external relocation support and assistance services for HRDs at all. Relocation almost always occurs in response to an urgent or imminent situation and, therefore,
must occur swiftly. Yet, with limited access to information about available services and budgetary constraints, funding, many organizations do not have time to relocate themselves or seek outside help in the moment. While the assessment found that some of these smaller organizations request the assistance of larger CSOs in these cases, this was not a common practice.

HRDs in rural, indigenous areas expressed particular lack of knowledge or access to internal or external relocations support. Some of these HRDs are familiar with only the more well-known cases, including the environmental defender who was present when Berta Cáceres was killed in Honduras. Some HRDs have had to pursue relocation on their own, often traversing the precarious and dangerous path through Central America and Mexico to seek protection in the U.S. When relocation is warranted in some circumstances with indigenous human rights defenders, it is often a collective decision. HRDs living in remote, rural areas have found that some assistance provided by international protection organizations has been too centralized, where HRDs need to travel to the capital to obtain services or assistance. HRDs in these rural areas recommend that initiatives strengthen local associations and organizations, and that initiatives are conducted in rural areas that are most affected by widespread abuse, corruption and extractive industrial activities.

The assessment revealed that relocation initiatives that tend to be most successful are those that are tied to local in-country partners who can verify information, recommend specific actions appropriate to the context, maintain consistent communication with affected HRDs. These locally-grounded efforts are better able to account for HRDs’ specific needs and decisions throughout the process as well as issues around family, community, gender, identity, culture and socioeconomics. In some cases, internal or external relocation support includes the full participation of HRDs in assisting with security and protection, as well as family members who are or would also be affected. This includes participation in the entire process of protection and security, including identifying and assessing the risk as well participating in the decision-making regarding how to avert the risk. If relocation is warranted, it is a decision taken together with the HRD. This strategy and approach were hailed by many interviewed for the assessment as ideal and as a practice worthy of strengthening and multiplying throughout Latin America. As a staff member of an organization that supports temporary relocation put it, “Any temporary relocation initiative must put the defenders at the center, give them contextualized, close, personal, and humane attention, and they must be able to listen.”

Only a handful organizations monitor and provide follow-up after temporary relocation to analyze the context, risks, threats and in-person visits to places in the country, including to the HRD’s home, workplace, and usual routes. Similarly, only some relocation initiatives will have periodic meetings with authorities, or issue reports, fact sheets and alerts. If an HRD with a pending case of assault or attack before the Attorney General or Public Ministry’s Office has to relocate outside the country, not all organizations providing relocation services will continue to accompany those cases, and as a consequence, cases get dropped and impunity ensues. It remains a challenge to provide monitoring and follow up of cases to HRD’s family members or keep pro bono attorneys or legal services organizations informed in the host country. If an HRD is returning to her or his home country after temporary relocation, only a handful of national protection organizations have systems in place to evaluate the current context at home to help ensure a safe return. For example, if an HRD seeks to return to a specific area, not all organizations or institutions have processes that would offer the HRD temporary shelter elsewhere, while conditions in the place of return are assessed or processes to accompany or follow up on that HRD’s safe return.

While often the best solution to mitigate risk to an HRD, temporary relocation poses significant challenges. Prior to fleeing their homes within or outside the country, amidst an environment of threats to their lives and attacks to their physical integrity, HRDs often have to hastily put personal and professional aspects of their lives in order, include leaving behind their careers, gainful employment, their homes and family members.
Internal Relocation as the Best Option for HRDs

Through interviews with international and local organizations, as well as HRDs, this assessment found that internal relocation, when feasible, should be the preferred method to assist HRDs at risk for several reasons. First, HRDs themselves prefer internal relocation. Most HRDs do not want to leave their home countries and seek to avoid abandoning their work or their families completely. This is especially true for indigenous HRDs and land rights defenders, who share communal and spiritual traditions connected to their lands. Internal relocation allows HRDs to remain in their environment, connected to their work and their communities. In addition, internal relocation is consistent with the notion of “collective protection,” highlighted by HRDs as a key component of effective protection strategies. The notion of collective protection focuses on the HRD and his or her work as grounded in a community that offers psychosocial support and infrastructure, including temporary shelter and physical security support. This option also allows for easier relocation of the family unit if needed and allows for more fluid communication between HRDs and their families. Perhaps most importantly for HRDs, internal relocation makes it more feasible for HRDs to continue their human rights work. Internal relocation is usually supported by national or local organizations, leveraging informal networks of support, including the HRD’s own community, which they can quickly activate to protect the HRD, offering psychosocial and psycho-emotional support, medical assistance, digital security installation, support and training, legal assistance, are generally not provided under these circumstances. In addition, local organizations familiar with the HRD and his or her work can closely monitor the relocated HRDs.

In contrast, according to HRDs and CSOs, external relocation can disrupt the social fabric of their communities and families, while weaken leadership within organizations or HRD communities. Moreover, external relocation demands more extensive capacity and resources, which are often unavailable or time-consuming to come by in urgent situations.

Nevertheless, internal relocation of an HRD still requires accompaniment from a CSO or other protection body, significant resources, and a thorough assessment of each HRD’s particular context and the conditions elsewhere in the country. Sometimes these elements are absent of indicate that internal relocation is not feasible. For instance, in some cases, the risk to the HRD is so severe and imminent or is so pervasive throughout the country (see Section IV examples of Venezuela and Nicaragua), that external relocation presents the better option. In other cases, national and local organizations are fully engaged with other pressing commitments or lack sufficient funding to assist with relocation or to ensure the HRD’s internal safety. In those cases, HRDs must turn to resources in other countries to help the relocate externally. HRDs overwhelmingly hope that relocation abroad will be temporary and aspire to return to their home countries when possible.

HRD Shelters

While not extensive in number, there are a few regional shelters for HRDs in Latin America, and all operate at full capacity. Below is a brief description of three examples, please refer to Annex 4 for more detailed information.

Shelter City, Costa Rica: Fundación Acceso coordinates the Shelter City Initiative in Costa Rica. Shelter City provides international relocation to HRDs at risk in any country in Central America. Once an HRD enters a shelter, the program provides integral security (legal, physical, digital and psycho-emotional) trainings for the HRDs to build on their existing capacities so they can continue their work in their respective countries when they return. In some cases, the support includes the HRDs’ dependents. The majority of HRDs that Shelter City supports and accompanies come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Shelter City does not coordinate relocation with the HRD’s organization, but with the HRD directly; the HRD decides what course of action she or he wants to take. A multidisciplinary team assists and accompanies the HRD throughout their stay. Generally,
the HRDs stay at Shelter City for 3 months. Shelter City's in-country analysts assist HRDs with plans for return to their home country. After the HRD has returned to their home country, Shelter City accompanies the HRD back home for an additional 3 months. On average, Shelter City shelters around 200 HRDs annually, and assists 80 organizations that support HRDs. See section IV (B) information related to Nicaraguans in Costa Rica being supported by Shelter City.

ICORN's Casa México Citlaltépetl: Casa Mexico Citlaltépetl started as part of the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN). ICORN is an independent organization of cities and regions offering shelter to writers and artists at risk, advancing freedom of expression, defending democratic values and promoting international solidarity. ICORN member cities offer long term, but temporary, shelter to those at risk as a direct consequence of their creative activities. ICORN has emergency funds for travel and lodging for writers and authors who are forced to flee. For at least two years, individuals received an apartment, a monthly stipend, health insurance and language classes. In 1999, Mexico City joined ICORN through the Casa Refugio Citlaltépetl, which, between 1999 and 2016 hosted 13 writers and artists, five of whom have permanently resided in Mexico. Initially, Casa Refugio Citlaltépetl received funding from Mexico City, and subsequently from the State of Mexico as well. Casa Refugio also generated its own revenue through projects like a restaurant and a bookstore, which allow Casa Refugio to pay staff salaries. Since 2016, Casa Refugio has had no direct relationship with ICORN, nor has it hosted a writer in exile. In 2017, Mexico City took over operations of the Casa Refugio (Mexico City was always the house owner) and convert the house for Mexican cultural activities.

Protect Defenders.eu: Protect Defenders.eu is a consortium of 12 organizations that protect HRDs around the world, and is based in Brussels, Belgium. The Secretariat of this consortium the actions of the 12 member organizations. The Secretariat provides temporary relocation grants, which provides emergency funds for HRDs to relocate. The HRD can apply for the emergency funds directly. One of the requirements of this program is that a host organization receive the HRDs in the host country. The Secretariat also implements the Shelter Initiatives Program, which provides economic support and trainings to organizations that are implementing or seek to implement a temporary relocation program for HRDs at risk on a local or regional level. Protect Defenders.eu assists solely with temporary relocation, not permanent...
Legal assistance and representation to help HRDs counter the State’s criminalization of their work is crucial to allowing them to continue their work.

Adequacy and impact of assistance

Protecting and defending HRDs in Latin America is a new enterprise for all actors and stakeholders involved. There has not been a systematic evaluation of programs, assistance and impact, and information on assistance is limited. Nonetheless, this assessment has revealed some initial factors that affected the adequacy and impact of assistance for HRDs in Latin America:

- **Short-term assistance is most effective**: Temporary relocation initiatives are more effective in the short term than in the long term because they respond to an immediate urgent threat with a limited investment to resources. Relocation initiatives and support are difficult to sustain in the long term, as the number of cases of threats and attacks against HRDs continues to rise sharply, taxing existing services, which must prioritize immediate, short-term responses. Most internal and external relocation initiatives last three to six months. While some include reassessment after 6 months, and some HRDs get protection measures for more than two years, most do not include long-term plans.

- **Locally-driven relocation initiatives** or those where local CSOs coordinate closely with other temporary relocation initiatives, are the most effective in providing HRDs with emergency funds, resources and relocation support.

- **Pre-relocation contextual analyses** contribute to more appropriate protection measures that address actual risks, and are viable in each specific context.

- **Lack of knowledge among organizations supporting HRDs of State structures** (legal system, framework and apparatus), channels and mechanisms for addressing issues facing an HRD at risk can blur or weaken official petitions or complaints filed by or on behalf of HRDs. This has bred a distrust of organizations and their protection systems.

- **Civil society participation** in assistance: In countries that have a State-run protection mechanism, CSOs report that some governments have failed to include or incorporate the participation of civil society, or lack adequate conditions for CSO participation. This has resulted in lack of communication between CSOs and State authorities.

- **Legal assistance and representation** to help HRDs counter the State’s criminalization of their work is crucial to allowing them to continue their work either in their home country or from abroad. These legal processes can often take years. Legal support is needed for the HRD who faces false charges or imprisonment.

- **CSO capacity building**: Larger, more prominent organizations working on protection, often need the support of local organizations that can refer cases or connect smaller, nascent CSOs to assistance. When local CSOs have stronger tools and mechanisms to share information and accompany at-risk HRDs, assistance, including relocation can be more successful.

**Did exiled HRDs continue their work, if yes how, if not, why?**

Once an HRD is living in exile, whether temporarily or permanently, their ability to continue working in human rights generally wanes due to multiple factors, such as personal stress, lack of resources, and legalization or regularization obstacles. HRDs often find themselves isolated and bored during this period, which can lead to depression when coupled with the stress of having had to flee. These HRDs recommend that support for this element should be incorporated in any temporary relocation initiative. Some HRDs may also need to step away and decompress.

Our assessment found that some HRDs are able to work with host organizations as spokespersons for their home organizations and conditions in their home countries. In other cases, HRDs focus on a key activity such as follow-up and monitor the human rights cases he or she handled in their home country while in exile. Some HRDs interviewed...
expressed a desire to continue their human rights work from their host country, even in cases of temporary relocation. HRDs who work with CSOs that have already established relationships or partnerships with similar organizations in the host country or internationally are better able to continue their work from exile. However, in some cases, CSOs cannot continue to employ an exiled HRD, due to funding restrictions by donors that limit aid to a specific country or location. When a CSO can continue to employ an exiled HRD, it can often only provide the same salary or wage provided at home. Depending on where the HRD is relocated, those salaries are often inadequate to new costs of living and other additional expenses exile can entail. Some donors are beginning to open to the idea of supporting CSO personnel living abroad, but this is currently the exception.

In lieu of offering direct support to beneficiaries, some exiled HRDs have deployed technology and social media to continue their work from abroad. For example, some HRDs have continued to support their communities by providing advice and accompaniment via WhatsApp, phone calls and email. For HRDs relocated in host countries or under temporary relocation initiatives that do provide additional support in relocation beyond emergency funds, HRDs have provided that support to their home communities at their own expense and of their own volition. Isolation from their home countries has prevented HRDs in relocation from working directly on issues back at home, but relocation has allowed them to present petitions and complaints before international and regional bodies, either on behalf of themselves or their colleagues back home.

SUPPORT FOR LATIN AMERICAN HRDS IN EXILE

“I think there should be some accompaniment to get the person involved in an area of work related to what they do, because it is complicated to be in that situation and being isolated.” (Human Rights Defender)

“No one is supporting me back home. I am all alone in exile. In addition, my organization does not count on the support of smaller organizations because the organization that supports us is the indigenous organization at the regional and international levels, but they are just as overwhelmed as we are. More efforts are being delegated toward the most urgent or the most serious cases at home.” (Human Rights Defender)

“I'm not sure if it's recommended because how do you handle burnout if they're still working on the same issues from afar? It should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Some defenders cope and some defenders have more difficulty actually integrating in a new environment if they cannot maintain a relationship with their own country and civil society there.” (Researcher)
Within the broader Latin America HRD landscape, a new dynamic is emerging at border locations, as HRDs and CSOs have been forced to flee their home countries. Taking a closer look at the border dynamics between Venezuela and Colombia, and Nicaragua and Costa Rica, specifically help inform protection approaches for activists elsewhere in the region that have been forced to flee their home countries. These two country pairs were selected for several reasons. First, there is a critical mass of activity and cases to draw lessons from. Given the hardening of authoritarian rule in Venezuela and Nicaragua, a large number of HRDs and democracy activists have been forced to flee to Colombia and Costa Rica, and many have set operations to continue their work in exile. Second, in Colombia and Costa Rica there is already some scattered and anecdotal evidence of the challenges HRDs face, and approaches being implemented to support and protect them in exile.

These two cases help to understand the role of key actors and how they interact with each other to support and protect HRDs in exile. The actors are: 1) National and local government institutions in the host countries (Costa Rica and Colombia); 2) Venezuelan and Nicaraguan HRD communities in the host countries; 3) the Colombian and Costa Rican HRDs and CSOs in host countries; and 4) the international governmental and non-governmental organizations in the host country. Moreover, the two cases have helped to identify existing approaches to shelter HRDs and democracy activists, the services they receive, and gaps in services. The analysis and systematization of these two cases will help offer initial inputs to develop and implement effective, sustainable, and comprehensive approaches to respond to HRDs’ needs and help host governments more effectively use resources to meet the needs of HRDs in their host communities. At the same time, the focus on these two cases from the perspective of the HRDs will highlight their needs related to health, livelihoods, psychological, education, security, family links, and advocacy opportunities.
Venezuela’s deteriorating political and humanitarian crisis has forced more than 5.6 million people to flee the country, generating the largest migration crisis in Latin America’s recent history. Of the Venezuelans who left, nearly 2 million have resettled in Colombia. About half of these newcomers lack legal status, having crossed into Colombia through irregular channels because they lacked passports and other documents required for legal entry. In response to this influx, in February 2021, Colombia’s President Iván Duque unveiled a program that will allow undocumented Venezuelan migrants to seek temporary protective status (TPS), so that they can legally live and work in Colombia for up to 10 years.

Venezuelans now living in Colombia include Venezuelan HRDs, forced into exile as a result of their human rights work. While no public data available about the number of Venezuelan HRDs in Colombia, nor their profiles, interviews with 20 Venezuelan HRDs and a survey of 18 more, conducted through our assessment, revealed a diversity of gender, age, and vocation—respondents identified as journalists, independent media, members and leaders of civil society organizations, academics, and human rights advocates. HRDs also arrived in Colombia by different means—some through formal channels by tapping into human rights networks in Colombia for assistance, and others by irregular channels. While most expressed no intention of returning to Venezuela until there is a significant shift in the political and human rights situation there, many noted that they had originally intended Colombia as a temporary stopover before moving elsewhere in the region. However, the passage of Colombia’s TPS has made remaining in Colombia longer-term more desirable.
Most interviewees and survey respondents had experienced direct threats, including harassment, intimidation, surveillance, and family threats (see Graph 1 below).

Going into exile is often a decision made swiftly, which makes it difficult to carry out a detailed plan of departure, and leaving Venezuela as a victim of persecution presents serious logistical and security challenges. Most HRDs said that they did not have time to decide carefully about to which country they would go. As a result, due to its extensive shared border with Venezuela, Colombia is often the country with the easiest and immediate access. Other countries with relatively easy access include Brazil, the Dutch Antilles, and Trinidad & Tobago (by boat). Many of the HRDs left the country by land to the border, and were forced to cross through “las trochas” (irregular border crossings) to reach Colombia.

How do HRDs settle in Colombia?

Once in Colombia, the first priority for HRDs is to regularize their status in the country, so they can work and integrate themselves into the host community. However, even with the help of international organizations like the UNHCR, this process can be cumbersome and lengthy. HRDs hope that the temporary protection program announced by the Government of Colombia will improve the process. HRDs highlighted that although there has been a boom in social and humanitarian organizations that work with Venezuelans in Colombia, these initiatives tend to focus on all Venezuelan migrants, with very few programs specifically dedicated to supporting exiled HRDs.

Migrants confront a range of bureaucratic hurdles when trying to settle in Colombia. In other instances, migrants either intentionally or inadvertently receive an unofficial passport stamp, which can be considered a crime in Colombia and can further complicate the process for legalization.

In 2017, the Government of Colombia created the Permiso Especial de Permanencia (PEP), a temporary and ad hoc special permit granting Venezuelans two years of regular status, work authorization, and access to public services, and could be renewed once. The PEP favored both mass migrants and HRDs, as they can work legally and contribute to the Colombian health system. The PEP facilitated not only the legalization of HRDs in Colombia, but also allowed the space for economic and social entrepreneurship. The new temporary protection statute announced in February 2021, will make Venezuelan migrants who are in Colombia illegally eligible for 10-year 

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**GRAPH 1: REASONS FOR VENEZUELAN HRDS EXILE IN COLOMBIA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other threats</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General context of violence</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrassment and/or Surveillance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House/Office Search</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats to Family Members</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrest Warrant or Arrest</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Attack</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
residence permits, and allow migrants currently on temporary residence to extend their stay. If they do not register under the new status migrants will eventually be subject to deportation. Migrants who arrived in Colombia before January 31, 2021, are eligible, as are those who will enter legally during the first two years that the policy is in effect. This will provide migrants and Venezuelan HRDs in Colombia an opportunity to regulate their status. This measure will eventually replace the PEP.

WHO OFFERS SUPPORT SERVICES FOR VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS AND HRDS IN COLOMBIA?

The Center for Migration Studies (CEM) / Legal Clinic for Migrants: Operates out of the University of the Andes, and provides research, education and advocacy strategies to the challenges posed by the governance of the migratory phenomenon that is occurring today in Colombia and in the Latin American region. Currently they increasingly serve migrants and HRDs with very low resources. At the beginning, the target audience had a profile more focused on exiled civil society leaders, but more and more cases come from very humble people with unsatisfied needs, a high level of vulnerability, and have crossed into Colombia on foot. The CEM collaborates closely with UNHCR.

Dejusticia is an organization located in Bogotá, dedicated to strengthening the rule of law and promoting human rights in Colombia and the Global South. As an action-research center, they promote social change by conducting rigorous studies and solid proposals for public policies, carrying out advocacy campaigns in high-impact forums, public interest litigation, and designing and delivering educational and training programs. They have an initiative, Enlaza Venezuela, that focuses on connecting Venezuelan civil society organizations - that have a project, idea, or initiative of social transformation that needs a boost - with foundations, cooperation agencies, companies, universities and other agents of change interested in supporting their proposals to make them come true.

Juntos se Puede: is an NGO created to support Venezuelans in a condition of forced displacement and guarantee respect for their fundamental rights and effective integration into society. They offer comprehensive services to the Venezuelan migrant population and host communities in Colombia, such as healthcare, education, and legal assistance for documentation.

Program to Strengthen Venezuelan Youth: In 2020, the Ávila Monserrate Civil Association, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the KAS (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung) and the Universidad del Rosario, through the Venezuela Observatory, created a program to promote the empowerment of young Venezuelan leaders and activists of social and political organizations in Colombia who migrated or were exiled. Based on their leadership and activism experience of the youth back in Venezuela and in Colombia, the program provides them with training, tools and spaces for interaction so that they can build synergies, strengthen their networks and support activities in areas such as, culture, politics, migration, humanitarian management, social work, communication, defense of women’s rights and the LGBTIQ+

“In Colombia I applied for refugee status, but they informed me that the procedures were very expensive and long and the second option, which was the one that I took, was a courtesy visa that is a complementary measure to the refugee status.”

(Venezuelan HRD in Colombia)
Are the HRDs able to find sustainable employment as a means to continue their human rights work throughout the time they are unable to return to their home countries?

Another priority for Venezuelan HRDs when arriving in Colombia is to find a way to generate income. Before the TPS was announced in February 2021, some Venezuelan HRDs reported missing out on the PEP due to prohibitive requirements, such as narrow windows of time to apply. Without the PEP migrants are unable to access work permits. Moreover, if a migrant arrived irregularly, as many HRDs do, they are not eligible for the PEP. Even with the PEP and the new TPS, like all Venezuelan migrants, HRDs face barriers to finding formal and sustainable employment—more so in the human rights field. Without formal work authorization, many HRDs are pushed into the informal sector, and are forced to accept lower salaries in spite of the fact that they may have high professional and academic credentials. In some cases, HRDs interviewed mentioned the role of churches and international cooperation organizations or humanitarian aid, in supporting HRDs with funds for basic needs and to start modest ventures.

Despite barriers to finding formal and sustainable employment, more than 80 percent of HRDs who responded to our non-representative survey, said they have been able to continue to work in Colombia as HRDs. However, while 80% of those Venezuelan HRDs who responded to the survey said they were able to work and found enabling supporting factors, the broader interviews with HRDs point out to other challenges. For example, voluntary as opposed to paid work, not having access to support or information about employment opportunities upon arriving to Colombia and differentiated labor and support context outside the Bogotá the capital. The HRDs interviewed mentioned that when they arrived, they choose to “make themselves invisible” due to fear and potential transnational persecution that may experience while in Colombia. This low-profile status stymies engagement with support networks that might help them find work. Interviewees also noted the absence of an integrated support platform (for institutional, legal, economic, and social issues); the urgency of finding work and livelihood in other areas. Several of the HRDs interviewed for the assessment intend to stay in Colombia indefinitely, or at least until there is a political change in Venezuela, which they do not anticipate in the short-term. Below are some of the factors that contributed positively to interviewed HRDs’ exile experience.

In our survey of 18 Venezuelans HRDs, we asked them to rank by priority the actors who offer support and resources to them while in Colombia. As we can see on Graph 2 on the following page, international multilateral/governmental or intergovernmental organizations were ranked as primary providers, followed by CSOs and NGOs, Church and faith-based organizations, and last, government institutions. As we

“IA currently live in Cúcuta, and thanks to the PEP I am able to work on a platform that I created for training for entrepreneurs and business growth. I also worked in an NGO on the issue of formulating social projects and I have done some collaborations for the media in Venezuela.”

(Venezuelan HRD in Colombia)
can see in Figure 1, Venezuelan HRDs in Colombia identified multiple urgent and immediate needs, such as: financial support; humanitarian assistance; medical and psychological services; networking; physical and digital protection; professional development and human rights resources. Yet, interviews and the survey with HRDs as part of this assessment confirmed that demand for these services far outstrips supply.

**FIGURE 1: WHAT ARE THE MOST URGENT AND/OR IMMEDIATE NEEDS FOR VENEZUELAN HRDS IN COLOMBIA?**

Source: Freedom House Survey of Venezuelan HRDs in Colombia, 2021.

“My life project is to stay in Colombia, make a family, put down roots. I have always said that I will return to Venezuela to contribute, perhaps as a tourist, and thereby help Venezuela to get ahead when the situation allows it. But for now, I see myself here in Colombia as a resident and I hope to do so for many years.”

(Venezuelan HRD in Colombia)
Do the HRDs receive medical and psychosocial attention?

According to the survey results, only 28% of the HRD respondents said they received both medical and psychosocial attention, while 33% said they did not receive either medical or psychosocial attention. Similarly, 22% of the HRD respondents said they received only medical services, while 17% said they received psychological services only. Moreover, the providers of these services are diverse, including private doctors, affiliated social services (e.g., EPS compensar), local NGOs (e.g., Fundación Malteser en Riohacha), international NGOs (e.g., Heartland Alliance International), and international organizations (e.g., IOM, UNHCR).

How do HRDs support their families left behind?

When they were forced out of Venezuela, many HRDs confronted the harsh reality of leaving their families behind. Many HRDs were the breadwinners of their families before they were forced into exile. While some were able to bring their families with them, others could not afford the relocation costs for their families to join. According to interviews and the survey results, those who are able to reunite with their families eventually, then faced the added challenges of supporting them with food, housing, health care, and school fees, on minimal wages. Support for HRDs who are relocated abroad, rarely includes support for family members. When Venezuelan HRDs in Colombia were asked in the survey, the needs of the family members that were left behind, their responses included:

- Financial support to cover basic needs and psychosocial care;
- Assistance to get out of the country, as they can be targets of retaliation;
- Security and protection;
- Guidance on their legal rights and who they can ask for help in the country;
- Humanitarian assistance; and
- Family reunification
As the government of Nicaragua scaled up repression and continued to close the space for human rights work, the number of Nicaraguans leaving the country grew in parallel. Costa Rica has housed a population of around 400,000 Nicaraguans in recent decades, but the number has grown significantly after the persecution unleashed by the 2018 protests against the Ortega regime, and the crackdown that ensued on opposition leaders and activists ahead of November 2021 elections. This led tens of thousands of Nicaraguans to seek refuge in Costa Rica. According to official figures, as of July 2021, more than 13,500 Nicaraguans requested asylum in the offices of the General Directorate of Migration and Foreigners of Costa Rica. Between January and May 2021, there were an average of 1,300 applications per month, in June the number jumped to 4,378. In November 2020, the Costa Rican government announced a new migration category that allowed asylum seekers from Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela whose request was rejected to remain in the country. The new category provides permanence in Costa Rica for a period of two years, with the right to carry out work activities.

Like in the case of Venezuelan HRDs, it is difficult to estimate how many of those fleeing Nicaragua can be considered HRDs. Our case study found that most of those Nicaraguans who were forced to leave for Costa Rica considered themselves HRDs. Most have been forced to leave after the April 2018 incidents, fearing repression and retaliation by the government. There is no recent public data available about the profiles of Nicaraguans HRDs in Costa Rica, but through analysis, interviews, focus groups and a survey of HRDs our case study found these to be the most common characteristics:
Students who participated in the protests in 2018;
People associated with civil society work;
Members of the Movimiento Campesino;
People who participated in protests since 2018;
People who helped with the provision of food, supplies, safe houses and medicines for protesters and other activists;
Doctors and other health personnel;
People who made public complaints about the behavior of the regime;
Journalists; and
Former soldiers and police officers who refused to participate in the repressive acts ordered by the government.

Our case study also found that Nicaraguan HRDs in Costa Rica arrived during two key moments. First, prior to April 2018, where Nicaraguan HRD flows into Costa Rica were much slower and the composition was broadly diverse, made up mainly of women defenders, leaders of social movements, and environmental activists who opposed the construction of a canal. Second, after April 2018, when Nicaraguan HRD flows into Costa Rica intensified, and were comprised of HRDs linked with the Indio Maiz protests and protests against the closing of civic spaces and criminalization of HRDs. As such, most recent HRDs are mostly students, youth from barrios and urban neighborhoods, doctors and health personnel, ex-military and police, and journalists.

According to the interviews and focus groups, Nicaraguan HRDs in Costa Rica came from all over the country, but especially from three municipalities (Masaya, Carazo, and Managua). Although there were also some HRDs from the so-called canal zone (area where the interoceanic canal would supposedly be), like Rivas, Lago of Nicaragua, Rio San Juan, Chontales, and Zelaya Central.

An initial comparative hypothesis in terms of HRD profiles that the two cases produced based on the interviews, focus groups and survey results, is that Venezuelan HRDs in Colombia have left for several reasons (humanitarian crisis, violence and direct threats), while most of the Nicaraguan HRDs in Costa Rica have left as a result of directly being targets by the government for their opposition, protesting, reporting information new and simply for being vocal on social media. This means that while the Venezuela migration is broad and the majority of them are looking for economic improvement, the Nicaragua migration is mostly made by civil/political society and activists civically involved. Future inquiries of the two phenomena, can corroborate this hypothesis and further investigate the impact in the lives of the HRDs in exile. The interviews with over 20 HRDs, focus groups with 24 HRDs, and the survey conducted

“I consider myself a human rights defender for my work defending citizens who have been criminalized for political reasons and for pointing out the acts of repression exercised by the government against its opponents.”
(Nicaraguan HRD in Costa Rica.)
with 20 Nicaraguan HRDs in Costa Rica revealed that the vast majority reported they experienced direct threats. The most common type of threats was harassment, potential of violence, and warnings (see Graph 4 below).

**How do HRDs settle in Costa Rica?**

Most of the HRDs who cross into Costa Rica immediately regularize their immigration status by choosing to request refugee status under the new instructions and category announced in November 2020 by the government. Others apply for other categories such as the student, professional, technical or visiting researcher visas, as well as resident category when there are ties to Costa Rican ancestry or relatives. The process to obtain legal status in the country is cumbersome and takes a long time, more so with constraints brought by the pandemic. Since being legal also means able to work and stay in the country, the length of time needed for the process is an obstacle to HRDs continuing to work. In interviews and focus groups, Nicaraguan HRDs reported that between the phone call and the first date, it could be anywhere from a few months to more than two years in extreme cases. As can be seen in Graph 5 (next page), eight out of ten Nicaraguan HRDs plan to return home one day, and see the refugee status as the best option to remain in Costa Rica temporarily.

**GRAPH 4: REASONS FOR NICARAGUAN HRDS EXILE TO COSTA RICA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harrassment and/or Surveillance</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General context of violence</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other threats</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats to Family Members</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home/Office Search</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrest Warrant or Arrest</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Attack</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Are the HRDs able to find sustainable employment as a means to continue their human rights work throughout the time they are unable to return to their home countries?

Despite Costa Rica’s welcoming policy, Nicaraguan refugees and HRDs face integration challenges. Not only are services for HRDs scarce, but support mechanisms are operating at full capacity and are unable to be responsive to increased demand. Many Nicaraguan HRDs leave everything behind and exhaust their savings to survive in the initial period of exile. With time, and after regularizing, some exiled HRDs have managed to be employed by continuing to work for their respective CSOs, continuing their profession (e.g., journalists), or doing small temporary jobs. In most cases, the HRDs interviewed and those that participated in focus groups judged their economic situation as being very difficult. Indeed, in exile, most HRDs have experienced a significant drop in their standard of living, often going from being breadwinners of their families to being dependent on the financial support of family members, friends, and organizations.

Some women with young children interviewed and that participated in the focus groups highlighted having specific challenges as they do not have family members to support them in the caretaking of children, nor the resources to pay for domestic help, thus remaining excluded from professional opportunities and human rights activities.

Costa Rica has not been spared by COVID-19, and the economy was hit hard. While the government’s prompt response helped avoid a deeper health crisis, the fiscal impact has been significant. In 2020-2021, the economy shrank by 4.5%, partly thanks to the reduction in tourism, while the fiscal deficit rose to 8.1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), up from 6.7% in 2019. Public debt reached 68% of GDP, and unemployment rose to 18%, from 12% last year. This situation has affected opportunities for Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica.

Over 90% of HRDs who responded to our non-representative survey, said they have been able to continue work in Costa Rica as HRDs. Below are some of the factors they mentioned to be key when living in exile:

Although the majority of the Nicaraguan HRDs in Costa Rica, who were interviewed and participated in focus groups, did not consider an early return to Nicaragua, at least 1 in 10 stated that a member of their family had returned to Nicaragua and 1 in 5 indicated that they were considering doing so motivated by lack of employment in the host country (90%) and because they did not have anything to eat (40%). See Graph 6 (next page).

In our focus groups of 24 Nicaraguan HRDs, we asked them if they had received support and to specify the actors who offered support and resources to them in Costa Rica. The United Nations agencies, NGOs, and the host government (specially as related to food), and friends, families were mentioned. Fifty percent of Nicaraguan HRDs received food and other essential items, 37% funds and 16% both.

“I have not been able to find work since I do not have the document that makes me legal in the country.”

(Nicaraguan HRD in Costa Rica)
In our survey to 20 Nicaraguan HRDs, we asked them to rank by priority the actors who offer support and resources to them while in Costa Rica. As can be seen in Graph 7 (next page), international multilateral/governmental or intergovernmental organizations were ranked as primary providers, followed by CSOs and NGOs, Church and faith-based organizations, and last government institutions.

While 95% of those Nicaraguan HRDs who responded to the survey said they were able to continue to work and found enabling supporting factors, the broader interviews and focus groups point out other challenges, as was the case of Venezuelan HRDs in Colombia. For example, voluntary as opposed to paid work, economic hardship while waiting for regularization of migration or refugee status, and facing a xenophobic environment. Upon arrival, Nicaraguan HRDs encounter a dense network of informal and formal resources that provide the necessary immediate information and some resources. The challenge for many HRDs is once they have resettled and are awaiting regularization. The case study also found disparities in terms of services and support between the border territories in the north (Upala and San Carlos) and the greater San José metropolitan area. In general, the needs for HRDs in the north are more basic, such as food, shelter, and health services, while in the capital the needs are more long-term, such as employment opportunities, education and training, housing and medical attention. The security issue for Nicaraguan HRDs is paramount. The HRDs interviewed and surveyed mentioned security as a main fear.

**WHAT FACTORS HAVE CONTRIBUTED POSITIVELY TO YOUR WORK IN COSTA RICA AS A HRD IN EXILE**

- “Technology (computer, cell phone) allows me to be in contact with my colleagues.”
- “Support from cooperation agencies and commitment to defending human rights.”
- “The solid alliances and networks we have been building.”
- “The fact that human rights activities can be carried out safely without fear or persecution and the ties that have been forged with victims’ organizations, communicators and other human rights organizations.”

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**GRAPH 6: WHAT ARE THE MAIN REASONS FOR YOU TO CONSIDER RETURNING TO NICARAGUA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I cannot find a job</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not have money to eat</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HRDs recognized that while rights in Costa Rica are violated, the intensity and intent is unlike what they experience in Nicaragua. Nicaraguan HRDs mentioned that they often experience xenophobia, particularly when they try to integrate into communities. Some have mentioned that when they speak with a distinguishable different accent than the locals, they have experienced verbal attacks or derogatory comments. Also, Nicaraguans HRDs in Costa Rica mentioned that when they are looking for a house or temporary shelter, only because they are Nicaraguans the requirements and conditions are often difficult to fulfill (rigid contracts, restrictions on the number of people that can be in the house, and higher than normal prices). Similarly, Nicaraguan HRDs mentioned that they are often asked to leave their homes without giving them much time to find another place, in violation of Costa Rican laws.

According to interviews and focus group results, the housing and shelter situation is one of the most difficult ones for Nicaraguan HRDs in terms of psychological stress. Moreover, there are not many institutions or organizations in Costa Rica that can support this type of cases with an integrated approach to deal both with legal and psychological support specifically for HRDs.

As we can see in Figure 2 (next page), Nicaraguan HRDs in Costa Rica have multiple urgent and immediate needs, such as: financial support for subsistence; humanitarian assistance (shelter, housing, and food); professional development; resources to do their HRD work; support

“I never thought I was going to experience this situation. I never considered exile either. But I soon realized that my only option was to live in another country to survive and sleep without fear of the police arriving at my house. I feel emotionally and physically drained.”

(Nicaraguan HRD in Costa Rica)
services (medical attention, psychological support, legal assistance; protection and physical security; and networking and alliances. As in the case of Colombia, in Costa Rica the supply for HRD services is also heavily outweighed by the growing demand.

**Do the HRDs receive medical and psychosocial attention?**

As can be seen in Graph 8, Nicaraguan HRDs in Costa Rica received a diverse set of services. According to the survey results, only 16% of the HRD respondents said they received both medical and psychosocial attention, while 21% said they did not receive either medical or psychosocial attention. Similarly, nearly two-thirds of the HRD respondents said they received only psychological services, while 5% said they received medical only. Moreover, the providers of these services are diverse. For example: private doctors and psychologists, NGOs (e.g., CENDEROS, SOS Nicaragua, People in Need, IM Defensoras, RET, Fundación Mujer, CEJIL), faith-based organizations (e.g., Lutheran Church, Jesuit Service for Migrants), universities (e.g., University of Costa Rica-UCR), international NGOs (e.g., World Organization Against Torture), and international organizations (e.g., UNHCR).

In Costa Rica, psychological support for Nicaraguan HRDs is provided by CSOs that support migrants in general (e.g., CENDEROS, Fundación Acceso, Doctors without
Borders while they were in Costa Rica, Peace Brigades International, SOS Nicaragua, among others). Some HRDs received individual attention, but the majority mentioned therapeutic and self-help groups, as well as ludo therapy. Sometimes, psychosocial teams from the UCR and Association of Psychologists lend a hand.

When the large number of Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica permanently saw the seriousness of the situation emerge after 2018 with their compatriots, they decided to organize themselves to provide support and humanitarian assistance. Three well know examples are SOS Nicaragua, the Union of Nicaraguans in Exile (Unión de Nicaragüenses en el Exilio- UNE-CR) and the Coalition of Nicaraguans Abroad (Coalición de Nicaragüenses en el Exterior). These organizations are responsible for providing humanitarian aid such as food, clothing, medical care, school supplies, among others. While their support is welcomed, these services target the larger migrant and refugee populations, and as such it is not enough for the growing needs of Nicaraguan exile HRD population in Costa Rica.

SOS Nicaragua, in particular, has a lot of credibility among exile groups. They identify themselves as a self-managed organization that facilitates the channeling of aid and donations from private companies, organizations, churches, among others. Its actions focus on the larger migrant and refugee Nicaraguan population in Costa Rica, which includes HRDs. They coordinate humanitarian assistance, such as: food, clothing, medical and psychological assistance, guidance in immigration and refugee procedures and other humanitarian needs. They maintain close communication with different groups of Nicaraguans, whether they are organized or not, in San José and other cities in the country, in order to distribute...
humanitarian assistance, a task that they generally carry out on weekends. They have a fairly extensive database of exiles, which is constantly updated. Everyone who works in this organization is a volunteer.

UNE-CR is made up mainly of Nicaraguan doctors, a good part of them living in Costa Rica for a long time, but other exile organizations collaborate. One of its most important actions has been to provide medical assistance and provide medicines to the exiles. To do this, they established an assistance center, however, due to lack of resources and increased demand, they were unable to sustain it over time. Another of its tasks is to help facilitate medical assistance for priority cases before public health institutions.

WHO OFFERS SUPPORT SERVICES FOR NICARAGUAN MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND HRDS IN COSTA RICA?

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): A very relevant service is the Medical Insurance Program-UNHCR – CCSS. The program targets refugees and asylum seekers with serious health conditions. Funded until December 31, 2021, 10,000 people will have access to this health insurance. Until February 2021, it was reported that 60% of the insurance had been assigned and it was projected to reach its limit before December 31. There are no actual numbers reported, but while Cubans and Venezuelans also seek asylum and refugee status in Costa Rica, Nicaraguans are by far the largest group and presumably would be the majority of beneficiaries. UNHCR also works with a network of partner organizations and groups in Costa Rica to provide other services and assistance such as: social and economic, legal, employment and integration.

Refugee Education Trust (RET) International: Provides humanitarian aid to families in vulnerable situations, works with young people in violence prevention and promotes their integration into the educational system. Manages the UNCHR-CCSS Insurance program. They are also responsible for managing economic support from government institutions (e.g., IMAS, PANI, INAMU, CONAPDIS, CONAPAM, CEN-CINAI, all acronyms in Spanish), as well as NGOs.

CENDEROS: Operates two shelters, one in San José for women and another one in Upala for both men and women. It provides psychosocial care to migrants, humanitarian aid, training on a variety of topics relevant to the target populations, such as how to request refugee status, rights for Nicaraguans while in Costa Rica, and health care for women. CENDEROS works mainly with HRDs, especially women and LGTBIQ people.

Jesuit Service for Migrants: Provides free legal advice and support in the process of changing immigration status, identity documents and naturalization, as well as information services and outreach programs, including a radio program to share relevant information and news.

Fundación Mujer: While their original work targeted only women and still prioritizes women in all their activities, today the Foundation works with both men and women between 18 and 65 years of age, primarily migrants. They assist with training for economic self-sufficiency. It supports the integration of refugees into Costa Rican society through economic and productive initiatives that allow their self-sufficiency in the country.

HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society): Provides free legal assistance and has offices in San José and Liberia, as well as staff in La Cruz, Los Chiles, Paso Canoas, Peñas Blancas and Upala.

La Salle Legal Clinic: Provides legal advice to refugees and applicants for refugee status in the necessary steps to effectively access their rights.
There are a number of other relevant organizations, many of them run by Nicaraguans that had been forced to flee their country and seek refuge in Costa Rica. These organizations often provide some support to Nicaraguan HRDs in exile, including psychosocial and medical services. For example, the human rights organizations Nicaragua Nunca Más, Del Rio Foundation, Hagamos Democracia, CISAS, and the Asociación Nicaragüense Pro Derechos Humanos (ANPDH). Other international and Costa Rican organizations that can be highlighted for supporting Nicaraguan HRDs in Costa Rica are People in Need (PIN), Center for Justice and International Rights (CEJL its acronym in Spanish), the Arias Foundation for Peace and Development, and Shelter City.

How do HRDs support their families left behind?

Like the Venezuelan HRDs, when Nicaraguan HRDs are forced to leave their home country, they do it without their families. Many HRDs were the breadwinners of their families before they were forced into exile. In the particular case of Nicaraguans HRDs, there is a long history and presence in Costa Rica. Many

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**FUNDACIÓN ACCESO’S SHELTER CITY PROGRAM IN COSTA RICA**

**Fundación Acceso** coordinates the Shelter City Initiative in Costa Rica. Its work has evolved over the years, but currently their main focus is on digital security and comprehensive protection for organizations and individuals working to defend human rights in Central America.

The **Shelter City Program** was created specifically to support HRDs from Central America. It emerged with the support of the Government of the Netherlands in 2017. It was conceived as a program for the temporary relocation of HRDs who were at risk in their home country due to their human rights work. The program hosts a shelter equipped to accommodate HRDs. Beneficiaries must go through a selection and preparation process in their country of origin. To facilitate the process, the program has points of contact in each Central American country.

The shelter program has a comprehensive and integrated care program for displaced people that includes psychosocial support, capacity building initiatives, communication training, development of security plans, participation in social and cultural activities, internships in sister organizations, among others. In some cases, the HRDs may travel with a family member or dependent. The program provides support for leaving the country of origin with the payment of passport and visa costs, if necessary, transportation to Costa Rica, accommodation and meals during the stay in the country and full coverage of medical insurance.

Upon establishment, Shelter City developed a series of agreements with the Government of Costa Rica to facilitate the stay and recognition of the program by national authorities, the entry and protection of HRDs.

The Program is designed to “give a breadth of fresh air” to HRDs who are at risk, but this is temporary, generally for three months and in special cases, six months. At the end of the period, most HRDs return to their country or travel to a third country. According to **Fundación Acceso** very few of the beneficiaries opt not to return to their respective countries, and those few are mainly Nicaraguan HRDs.

One limitation of the Shelter City program is that it can only host a small number of HRDs at a time. On the other hand, the pandemic - with the closure of borders - has paused the program due to the impossibility of mobilizing people across borders.
of the HRDs are binational or have relatives in Costa Rica. Several families have members of both nationalities and move frequently between the two countries; they live in one place, work in the other, they study and receive health care in Costa Rica, and do business in Nicaragua. The borders are extremely porous and, in some places, almost non-existent. This aspect facilitates family reunification in Costa Rica (often temporary), although the costs of relocation for families is still high.

According to interviews and the focus groups results, those who are able to reunite with their families or are relocated with their families, still face challenges in exile such as supporting them and providing for basic costs, such as food and housing. Support for Nicaraguan HRDs who are relocated in Costa Rica, generally does not include support for family members. Nonetheless, the government economic support programs cover families of refugees and in situations of poverty.

When Nicaraguan HRDs in Costa Rica were asked in the survey, the needs of the family members that were left behind, their responses could be categorized in three areas:

### Security
- Advice for risk analysis and physical and digital assistance.
- Emergency plan that allows family reunification in case of emergency.
- Security training, strategies, precautionary measures, security plan.
- Moving them to safe places.

### Economic
- Financial Assistance.
- Financial help to move internally to somewhat safe places in the country.
- Training on entrepreneurial initiatives.

### Psychosocial
- Psychological and monetary support.
- Online psychological support.
Emerging Issues and Lessons in the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Challenges for the Future

The focus on HRDs in Latin America is still an evolving area of inquiry. The increasingly pressing question of whether to locate HRDs seeking relocation or shelter within their countries or abroad is key. The findings of the assessment corroborate the need for a more systematic effort to understand their needs, challenges, and expectations, and to design effective support strategies. Whether HRDs decide to stay and relocate within their home country or relocate to a third country, their work exposes them, their home communities, their families, and their organizations to threats, trauma, and stress. Whether they are relocated or protected in the short or long-term, the assessment found a number of key issues and lessons.

Support to Family: Is Family a Consideration in Temporary Relocation Initiatives?

Relocation assistance should consider an HRD’s family.

Assistance for HRDs who need to be relocated, especially abroad, very rarely cover costs for family members. As such, HRDs’ families are often left behind without any support in the face of threats, harassment and intimidation by government officials and other perpetrators. This is especially challenging in the case of women with children or dependents. In addition to problems associated with separating the family unit, the separation of the HRD brings with it feelings of isolation which can lead to depression. Not only do HRDs need to juggle their own work obligations and attempt to secure their own safety and protection often while under threat or attack, often they have to also ensure the safety, security and protection of their families, colleagues and those they are defending. The assessment found consensus among those interviewed, that, whenever possible, internal or external temporary relocation initiatives should take an HRD’s family into account. Unfortunately, the assessment found that in practice rarely occurs.

Emergency Funds and Economic Support for Internal and External Relocation

Temporary relocation initiatives could be improved by reducing the waiting period or time needed to provide the assistance to HRDs.

With certain international organizations that provide temporary relocation support and services, the process can be long, and exhausting on a HRD or a CSO before a decision to provide the assistance is made. Under some temporary relocation initiatives, HRDs receive lump-sum emergency funds and are asked to allocate them in a way that provides for their own protection and security. Some organizations provide HRDs solely with emergency funding to assist with their exodus and initial relocation in the host country, with no medium-term economic support. In other cases, the temporary relocation assistance offers one-time emergency financial assistance. While clearly benefitting from the provision of emergency funds, HRDs still have to fend for themselves to secure their trip out of their home countries using emergency funds. This includes determining what country they will flee to, how

Whether HRDs decide to stay and relocate within their home country or relocate to a third country, their work exposes them, their home communities, their families, and their organizations to threats, trauma, and stress.
they will get there and with what documentation and how to properly allocate the funds to ensure their safe and adequate departure and relocation to a new place.

While expressly appreciative of and grateful for the emergency funds which invariably saved their lives, some HRDs, under some temporary relocation initiatives, do not receive complementary support. This includes basic information about the country where they would relocate, introductions to other organizations that provide support, legal orientation or assistance, technical assistance or information about obtaining immigration status or even work authorization. Some HRDs recognize that international protection organizations are overwhelmed with requests for assistance, just as they were in their attempts to obtain protection for those threatened or persecuted for their human rights work in their home countries. Despite this acknowledgement, HRDs contend that they should receive additional guidance and assistance during the different stages of the relocation process, even, at a bare minimum, an informational email or brochure with links to supporting organizations in the host country.

One of the many challenges for HRDs at risk is the amount of time it takes organizations providing relocation support to respond timely to an application for emergency funds or economic support, or the delay that arises in receiving the funds or support. Many of the emergency funds are administered by organizations abroad and outside the Latin American region. Often staff administering the emergency funds lack understanding of local context and realities of HRDs and do not have the contacts and/or networks required to confirm information about the HRD. HRDs are tasked with supplying a financial report, a requirement that may be extremely challenging in some contexts (e.g., Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela) for the HRD, especially in situations of distress such as relocation abroad.

Some of the delays in processing requests for emergency support and sending emergency funds are due to time differences between the organizations providing support and HRDs, as well as language barriers where staff helping do not speak Spanish or Portuguese or Spanish is not the HRD’s primary language. Often the very same temporary relocation mechanisms setup for emergency requests do not allow for or have the ability to respond in a matter of hours as an emergency situation demands. HRDs need support to finance the trip and as well as pay for their living expenses (rent, food, transportation, communications) once in the host country. Some programs provide economic support for a shorter period of 3-6 months, others provide assistance up to a year. HRDs also fear losing their gainful employment and/or pension if they seek temporary or permanent relocation. The exodus from their home country also impacts family members who are financially supported by the HRDs, and who will also economically benefit from the HRD’s future salary and/or employee benefits package, including their pension. Some HRDs contend that the amount of financial support provided does not match the actual costs of living in the host country or the risk situation of the HRD. At times, support is not enough, and defenders are forced to work as volunteers or in temporary, usually unrelated to their previous work. Sometimes, HRDs are forced to return to their home countries once the funding runs out, even if risk persists and they face persecution or even being detained and imprisoned.

In Central America, there are cases where local or regional organizations administer emergency funds as they tend to be

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HRDS AND THEIR FAMILIES

“There were difficult moments. The fact of being far away from family. That was hard.” (Human Rights Defender)

“A person is most vulnerable when family is not factored into it.” (Human Rights Defender)

“Because our focus is that the family or relatives of the victim or of the person at risk must be in better conditions than the protected defender herself. Why? Because they are the central pillar that gives the defender the strength so that they can continue to develop their work. At some point, for example, we had to relocate a defender and we relocated them with their closest family nucleus. We were not able to relocate the entire family because the extended family was very big, but we were able to relocate the family nucleus”. (National Protection Organization)
better equipped to respond to the local context. Historically, these organizations have established relations and developed a trust with communities on the ground and have the ability to reach HRDs who are in very remote locations or isolated situations. They are not necessarily connected to the large donors or attend international conferences, but they are able to administer the emergency funds more quickly and effectively. These organizations could be targets of strategic support to help HRDs.

Integration to Host Country as a Component of Temporary Relocation Initiatives and the Needs of Exiled HRDs

Some temporary relocation initiatives include an integrated stay plan for HRDs, which involves more services than just temporary lodging. The general plans are tailored to case-by-case needs and provide ad hoc guidance to the HRDs once they arrive to a new country. An ideal relocation program would be staffed with a multidisciplinary team, including an attorney, a psychologist, and a security expert (encompassing digital, physical and other security areas) who would work together in accompanying the HRD while in relocation. The assessment found some barriers to an HRD’s integration to the host country, such as:

- Lack of services to welcome and support HRDs;
- Temporary immigration status;
- Lack of work authorization;
- Language barriers; and
- Lack of recognition of the HRD’s contribution to the defense and promotion of human rights in their home country.

Some HRDs who relocated explained finding themselves in a completely new place without having anyone to help them navigate the new culture and basic processes, including how to open a bank account, where to take public transportation, how to ask for a medical appointment, where to register their organization. These HRDs received no support to adapt to their new reality, further exacerbating their culture shock and feelings of despair. HRDs who have been provided psychological support have remarked that the therapists treating them lacked specific training to address their specific
situations. Some indigenous HRDs maintain that their beliefs, unique treatments and traditional customs, including the cosmovision (a particular way of viewing the world or of understanding the universe), are not taken into account. Another challenge for them is their language is often not incorporated into initiatives or responses. HRDs often lack legal support or assistance to obtain legal status in the host country. They may arrive on a tourist visa, which authorizes only a short stay. If HRDs enter the host country on a tourist visa, they are generally not authorized to work while in relocation. To support themselves, they are forced to join the informal sector, where they can be exposed to abuse and exploitation, including labor and sexual exploitation. Such conditions and need to financially support themselves can impede their ability to continue their human rights work. HRDs are often unable to work while in relocation. Even if the HRD decides to pursue asylum or refugee status, many host countries limit an applicant’s ability to lawfully work.

**Wellbeing as a Relocation Initiative**

The assessment confirmed that there are more at-risk HRDs in Latin America that require additional support or deeper interventions than physical security or temporary relocation. In addition, relocation programs need to take care those individuals who are not at any physical risk but suffer from immense emotional stress. While HRDs in clear closed contexts like Cuba, Nicaragua and Cuba, fall under this group, the assessment found that HRDs in other more hybrid contexts like El Salvador, Guatemala, Bolivia, and Colombia are also vulnerable and need more services and support in relocation. In addition, the relocation itself can trigger other
adverse effects on emotional wellbeing, due to feelings of isolation, displacement and the stress related to adapting to a new environment.

The assessment found that all HRDs at risk experience some level of trauma. As a result of the constant attacks and threats perpetrated against them, without finding any recourse from the State (either through protection mechanisms, institutions, or agencies), HRDs often experience severe psychological symptoms of anxiety, isolation, depression, and suicidal ideation. These symptoms have also manifested in physiological conditions, including high blood pressure and diabetes. These conditions are the result of not only threats and attacks directed at them, but for their work accompanying and supporting the needs of their HRD colleagues or beleaguered members of their HRD community.

In relocation, HRDs often continue to experience these same symptoms, sometimes further exacerbated by their having fled the human rights movement, their work, their families and their homeland. Depending on the relocation initiative, HRDs may obtain medical and health care services that address their wellbeing. Where an initiative does not provide services for wellbeing, or health care for HRDs under relocation, they are forced to obtain their own sources of support. This includes relying virtually on the medical care from their home country or through self-care, including practicing meditation and/or engaging in their own spirituality.

HRDs living in exile recommend that relocation initiatives should incorporate holistic approaches that include support for their wellbeing. Because of the concomitant effects that relocation can have on an HRD’s mental health, some HRDs are interested in assisting with relocation programs for incoming HRDs, even on a volunteer basis. The assessment found that psychology or social psychology departments at universities in Latin America have yet to identify HRDs as a population with significant psychosocial or psycho-emotional impacts, and

WELLBEING OF LATIN AMERICAN HDRS

“I experienced a very strong depression with an attempted suicide. The forced migration and having to adapt to a new culture, I was not prepared. I suffered sexual harassment in two of my jobs, that made things worse. The boss not only sexually harassed me but also threatened me, and I went into a very deep crisis of depression.” (Human Rights Defender)

“I wanted to kill myself. I was reliving everything. I could not live with that. I spent weeks like that. Though in exile, I would see the prison cell I was kept in.” (Human Rights Defender)

“Human rights defenders in Latin America live and work in very stressful situations. They are close to burn out or already burned out because of the work they have been doing. They simply do not have the time or the resources to care about themselves. Protection mechanisms need to take this into account.” (Researcher)

“More investment or efforts are needed not only for psychosocial support, but psychosocial approaches to the diverse work of defenders and the threats that they face. A psychosocial focus should include addressing the emotional impacts of a death threat, criminalization, incarceration, of a human rights violation. These impacts have consequences not only on the individual HRD who was attacked, but also their family, their community and their organization. Psychosocial approaches should not just focus on the impacts of one or two individuals in the organization, but the entire organization as a collective whole.” (Researcher)

“We need to understand all of the identities of a defender. When you want to send an indigenous leader to do therapy with a psychologist, that does not work. It is not something within her comprehension. You cannot fit everyone into a box.” (Regional Protection Organization)
they have little collaboration and engagement with relocation efforts. Organizations that offer relocation support and have expertise in psycho-emotional approaches are more prevalent in South America and Mexico, while those from Central America could especially benefit in strengthening local and regional capacities for psycho-emotional support and accompaniment. Venezuelan and Nicaraguan HRDs in Colombia and Costa Rica, as shown in Section IV, received mixed and inconsistent support, and corroborates the need for a more integrated approach. Relocation programs should incorporate the HRD’s specific vulnerabilities and needs that come with temporary relocation. HRDs in exile who lack legal status are more likely to suffer abuse and harassment from prospective employers, renters, etc. In the case of women defenders, the abuse can also be sexual.

Not all national protection organization in Latin America engage in crisis intervention and incorporate wellbeing into their initiatives. This includes having a psychologist on staff to address any psychological or crisis needs. An important need identified in the assessment is for national and international protection organizations to have short, medium and long-term strategies and tools. For example, the goal for national protection organizations in the initial stage of HRD exile should be to provide effective initial psychological support to ensure that the HRD is capable of making decisions, evaluate the severity of the assault or attack, launch petitions, or submit complaints. In the mid-term, the national protection organizations should have the capacity to refer HRDs to therapy or counseling to psychologists in public or private practice who work closely with human rights organizations. In the long-term, national protection organizations should be able to partner with local community-based initiatives that provide psychosocial support to strengthen the capacities of local leaders to contribute to reducing trauma and violence by providing training in community mental health and human rights. The Barcelona Guidelines on Wellbeing and Temporary International Relocation of HRDs at Risk offers minimum standards and can be a reference to guide implementation of their national relocation programs.

The issue of self-care has gained attention and fostered debate among Latin American HRDs. While some CSOs have ascribed to self-care as a feminist proposal, others have taken issue with the approach as abdicating organizational responsibility for the wellbeing of their HRDs. Indigenous communities have established their own methods for organizing and their own procedures for making decisions. For psychological accompaniment, they have their own processes for practicing their spirituality, which has helped them tremendously in their work as human rights defenders. In the experience of some indigenous HRDs, they relay that international protection organizations have taken these processes into account and respected them in their initiatives.

### Personal Security as a Relocation Initiative

HRDs interviewed for the assessment relayed that in general they felt more safe and secure in their host country that at home, although they undertake similar measures of self-protection as if they were at home. Once relocated, HRDs indicated that they: are not public or part of social networks; change their phone number and their contacts in their cell phones; and undertake safety precautions at their place of residence in their host country. Some HRDs also expressed concerns about their personal security as a result of xenophobia in the host country.

HRDs who relocate, especially those who lack legal status in the host country, are exposed to abuse by individuals who exploit their vulnerabilities. They highlighted that generally the abuse comes from prospective employers and landlords, and in the case of women as mentioned above, the abuse can be sexual in nature. HRDs expressed the need to receive training to identify and respond to sexual abuse and other types of exploitation. Local CSOs also need to measure and assess their own security risks when providing accompaniment of or relocation to a HRD at risk. An emerging personal security issue for HRDs interviewed is transnational repression, or the fear that their home government will reach across national borders to silence them or in some way harm their physical integrity. While the assessment did not specifically look into cases of transnational repression among HRDs, many of those interviewed feared and/or experienced digital or phone threats, spyware and threats to their families back home. Greater knowledge and documentation of the issue will encourage more research and responses.

### Digital Security and Capacity Building as Relocation Initiatives

There is a consensus among informants interviewed for the assessment that the provision of isolated capacity trainings for HRDs generally does not result in any significant or long-term benefits. At the same time, HRDs and researchers highlighted that a significant gap exists with the provision of security as part of relocation programs. Findings from the assessment confirmed that digital security training is a key area that needs
to be further developed and or strengthen. This includes discussion about basic information about ensuring protection of HRDs, such as: how to encrypt an email; how to create a password-protected server; assessment of equipment needs; malware detection; how to lock a phone; and how to present and protect yourself on social media.

Organizations interviewed for the assessment agreed that providing digital security training for 2-3 days to HRDs and CSOs, does not help them overcome the challenges they face with respect to lack of equipment, access to the internet and wireless and technological expertise. At the same time organizations interviewed for the assessment highlighted that more relocation initiatives are implementing good practices around protection and security in general, particularly with the expansion of internet accessibility. This has enabled connection and communication with CSOs on the ground, including having continual and more systematic meetings and planning. While assistance on digital security is more feasible and available, it is a dynamic area that responds to internet's constant change of vulnerabilities. As such, the provision and implementation of digital security continues to be a key and necessary need. For some HRDs, digital security is a priority once they relocate. An important task in any protection strategy is evaluating the digital literacy of the HRD. The assessment found that this often does not occur and is a key need.

Women HRDs with expertise in digital security have done an excellent job in transferring their knowledge and skills to other women HRDs. In particular in Mexico and Central America, women HRD initiatives have included cyber-feminism, cyber-stalking and harassment, networking activism, and women's rights, and have incorporated these elements into their digital security training. Work has also been done with indigenous communities and environmental defenders involving the protection of information and communication. Some indigenous communities and groups do not follow any protocol of digital security whatsoever, which is particularly distressing for their members. Digital security is especially critical for the most visible indigenous activists who have a presence in the press, conduct their work publicly and make formal public complaints against the government and extractive industries.

HRDs who continued their work in exile are concerned with digital security and have implemented processes and safeguards to safely communicate with their home countries. HRDs expressed concern that their social networks can be attacked or infiltrated while in relocation. Moreover, HRDs recognized that such virtual attacks have implications not only for themselves but for their family members back home. Some HRDs interviewed indicated that their relocation program did not include a digital security component or that they were not aware that in relocation this support could be provided.

**Incorporating Intersectionality into Relocation Initiatives**

HRDs interviewed for the assessment felt that national and international organizations providing protection and relocation services are not meeting the needs of those with intersectional identities, including women, LGBTIQ+ and indigenous communities. For example, indigenous HRDs are not being placed in regions in the host country where indigenous communities live, nor are they being introduced to indigenous organizations in the host country. Interviewed HRDs with intersectional identities maintained that relocation initiatives should be meeting their specific needs as a means of further support their internal or internationally relocations (including integration into the host country). Here some findings coming from the assessment in relations to intersectionality:

- Not all organizations providing relocation include intersectionality in their programming or support.
- Of those who do, the coverage is uneven across groups.
- Women and LGBTIQ+ populations are more frequently incorporated than Afro-descendant or indigenous communities.
- Afro-descendant and indigenous communities are at a disadvantage in that sometimes their autonomy or communication or language is not accounted for in relocation initiatives.
- Protection organizations have to confront issues of patriarchy, sexism, racism, homophobia, masculinity and classism among HRDs and local CSOs, as well as to incorporate themes around diverse religious beliefs, sexual diversity and gender identity.
- Rural, indigenous communities, because they are more isolated, face additional difficulties and work with fewer resources.
- Special attention should be devoted toward the situation of women HRDs. Women may be harassed or threatened because they have children, who may also suffer repercussions from the perpetrator’s acts or threats.
Networking and Communication with Home Country while in External Relocation

A common theme emerging from the assessment is that at a bare minimum, external temporary relocation programs should introduce the newly arrived HRD to other defenders, activists and organizations to facilitate the transition to the host country and for the HRD to continue making contacts and expanding their networks.

Several HRDs interviewed relayed that they were not introduced to local HRDs or human rights organizations, and that people in relocation were not familiar with their human rights work. Moreover, they indicated that some organizations supporting relocation did not provide any resources or contacts to HRDs for coordinating assistance with any local, national or international groups or entities. In this situation, HRDs have taken the initiative and resorted to conducting their own research, primarily on the internet, to identify potential sources of support. Some HRDs attempt to make contact with several organizations in relocation, by phone or email, and in most cases did not receive a response or assistance.

Networking for some exiled HRDs has proven challenging, particularly those who live in remote, rural areas. Not only do they not have digital security, they also do not have basic equipment including computers, wireless routers or means for internet connection. In the limited circumstances where they have some equipment, they often confront technical difficulties, including losing a signal, interference with their connection or inability to access their accounts. On an organizational level, many of these groups do not have digital security.

INTERSECTIONALITY AND HRDS

“Look, I would tell you that there are efforts, but they are very complex in reality. For example, when you have an HRD from a rural community, the obvious alternative is to relocate her or him in a city or urban environment. Oh! It has happened to us; it is terrible. And it will most likely happen in cases of temporary international resettlement or for a political refugee. It could be Amsterdam and a beautiful city full of trees, but at the end of the day, the HRD has to go to a small urban apartment.” (National Protection Organization staff)

“I think it is an area where we need to improve without a doubt. Look, I’m going to give you an example from my organization. What happens when we face the case of a blind person, a person with hearing and language disabilities? In other words, we have yet to face the case, but without a doubt we are going to face it. Or a trans woman with a physical disability. We have not developed the capacity to face the cases that, without a doubt, exist.” (National Protection Organization staff)

“This has been one of our most frequent reflections. For example, protecting an HRD who is a forensic doctor is not the same as protecting an HRD who are community leaders. It is not the same; these are defense actions in different fields. Therefore, a more local, more contextualized and informed vision is required, and, above all, you need the vision of the proposed beneficiary. If we do not have the vision of the proposed beneficiary, we cannot move forward.” (Human Rights Defender and CSO staff)

“Women are more vulnerable. Mothers are always pressured with her kids, her family. She comes already with psychological damage. I am talking from personal experience. I had to reinvent myself after 50. The most I could aspire here is to take care of elderly people. There was resilience in me to try to reinvent myself and continue with my project. And I was able to do it.” (Human Rights Defender)

“We need to understand all of the identities of a defender. When you want to send an indigenous leader to do therapy with a psychologist, that does not work. It is not something within her comprehension. You cannot fit everyone in a box.” (Regional Protection Organization staff)
With regards to staying in touch with contacts and organizations back home, exiled HRDs interviewed for the assessment provided a mixed response. On the one hand, some HRDs maintain contact with their organizations back home, but on the other hand HRDs prefer to completely disconnect to improve their health and wellbeing as they argue work as HRD can cause serious problems to their health. The decision to disengage from work while in relocation is generally the HRD’s, which is very much respected by their network of organization back home.

The Need for Temporary Relocation Programs to Understand the Context in Home Countries

A key finding of the assessment if that protection practices are often not appropriate to the socio-political and legal contexts in which HRDs operate. There is a need for organizations providing relocation and protection support to HRDs to better understand the context in which the attacks, threats and violations occur. Understanding the local context can help reduce vulnerabilities for HRDs. For example, important to know when to make their names public or not names of HRDs. In some instances, this could imply more danger and risks for HRDs and their families, in others like for indigenous communities placing prominence of an individual over a collective community is atypical, even disrespectful.

According to the assessment findings, analysis and information of the local context, particularly local laws, is critical and of utmost importance for HRDs. For example, legislation and laws in some countries in Central America and South America regarding money laundering and terrorism financing are quite distinct from those in countries where international protectional organizations are based. These laws are enacted to harm CSOs, interfere with their mission and activities and to foment greater control over the civilian population. Many CSOs are not aware that reforms have recently been made to the law on non-governmental organizations, including the requirement that they must submit information relating to the law on money laundering and terrorism financing. Knowledge and understanding of these local laws will further assist organizations in carrying out their protection and relocation support.

The assessment also found that organizations providing relocation support often generalize the patterns of criminalization faced by HRDs, and sometimes fail to understand that international legal protection can be distinct from local legal protection. Certain legal aspects of criminalization are connected to antiquated laws or sectors that require knowledge of local laws to best stave off allegations of criminalization. International support and collaboration are important even when those actors are not directly involved in the situation or risk at hand. Often, HRDs and CSOs are so mired in the crisis at hand that they are unable to see other paths of protection that they can take. Local and regional organizations involved in supporting HRDs need to expand their local, national, international and multidisciplinary sources of support. They need attorneys, psychologists, technical advisers, spiritual guides, and many others who can assist in developing more holistic approaches to protection.

“I did not get any support from feminist organizations here, even though I am a feminist activist. It is not the same thing for me to introduce myself than to come with a referral or recommendation from a prestigious organization. I felt powerless.”
(Human Rights Defender)

“After returning, I have the same trauma of persecution. I fall asleep from being tired. I carry the drama, the trauma, I have no peace. I am worried that they will recognize me, hear me.”
(Human Rights Defender)
Obstacles to an HRD’s Return Home after Temporary Relocation

The situation of risk often still remains at the time of an HRD’s return to their home country after temporary relocation. This includes threats made to the family, incessant questioning about and HRD’s whereabouts, and attacks to their organization they may have link to. In many Latin American countries, the absence of the State can lead to the presence of armed actors, creating a more vulnerable and volatile situation. Indigenous communities who seek to resist the exploitative and extractive activities of foreign industries in their communities often experience the complete absence of the State in their region. Impunity is another key obstacle to reintegration. For example, communities that are resisting the development of hydroelectric plants, which have failed to consult with them, have experienced violence, killings and other criminal acts perpetrated against them, causing HRDs to flee.

Sometimes in relocation HRDs do not continue their work or remain in contact with their local CSO back home. Returning to their community can feel strange for them, and members of their community can feel abandoned. The goal of temporary relocation programs is to have the HRD return home under the same conditions (e.g., return to position at work and continuance of health care if received while in relocation).

HRDs’ Permanent Resettlement in Exile

The assessment found that there are insufficient sources of support for an HRD who has to permanently flee her or his home country. There is a lack of coordinated support and assistance, including basic orientation and information, for individuals fleeing and making the stark and difficult transition to a new homeland. Some HRDs, out of fear for their lives if they return to their home countries, seek to permanently resettle in their host countries. If denied asylum in the host country, some will seek refugee protections in a third country rather than return to their home country where they would face further persecution or even death threats.

Some HRDs interviewed for the assessment sought to continue their human rights work and put their skills and expertise to defending human rights in their host country. However, in some cases, language barriers or lack of employment authorization hindered their ability to continue their work during temporarily relocation or while in pursuit of asylum or refugee protections. In addition, some HRDs interviewed for the assessment felt their work was not being acknowledged or recognized in their host countries, nor were organizations systematically examining the ways HRDs could contribute to the host country or host country’s social or human rights movements.

“When I think about collective protection, I definitely see how they relate to the sociopolitical environment because obviously the way the human rights movement is in Latin America is very cooperative. There are lots of lawyer collectives or human rights groups, very grassroots organizations. So, it’s only logical that they start to think of protection as a communal, a community way.”
(Researcher)

“It is imperative that organizations providing protection and relocation support understand local contexts. Security practices are very diverse, and they incorporate cultural and psychosocial perceptions about what security should look like. Some HRDs maintain that economic security and food security are even more critical than other forms of security.”
(Researcher)
Many indigenous HRDs interviewed for the assessment maintained they generally seek temporary relocation over permanent resettlement. While they recognize that return to their home country can be delayed and could be challenging, particularly where threats and criminal proceedings continue, and where political participation and the rule of law are limited, indigenous HRDs noted that family and their commitments to their work and their organizations at home fueled a desire to return some day.

HRDs’ immigration status can remain in limbo for some time if they seek asylum in their host country. This uncertainty can have economic, security, protection and mental health consequences for the HRD. Fears of denial of asylum or refugee status and deportation to their home country, where they fear further persecution or even death, can have profound effects on an HRD’s wellbeing. HRDs can also potentially pursue asylum, but this avenue for protection is very difficult. Some countries are either wholly eroding their asylum and refugee protections or reforming them by applying more stringent standards for meeting the requirements of asylum.

"Exile is a one-way trip; it is never a return trip. Why? Because if you are exiled for a time and you return to your country, you return to another country. You are going to return to a place that has changed, where people have changed, where everyone has changed. If exile lasts a long time, the truth is that this return is very painful and very difficult to overcome at times. One might think that it is a kind of liberation, that it is a kind of happy ending. But no, in exile there is no happy ending.”

(Temporary Relocation Program staff member)
CSOs interviewed for the assessment described permanent resettlement as especially complicated and burdensome for an HRD, particularly as it requires the HRDs to financially support themselves. In one instance where a CSO was evaluating whether an HRD should flee to another country, the HRD responded, “I cannot go and leave everything behind here. Over there I will have nothing.” Some larger CSOs with longer trajectories indicate that, in their experience, some programs that assist HRDs with permanent resettlement abroad have integration services that encompass language, education, work training and employment services. These CSOs also acknowledge, however, that many HRDs who are forced to permanently settle abroad must seek out services independently.

“I think that the role of temporary relocation organizations should be to accompany the defender in that decision, so that is an informed decision, and that the defenders is aware that their life conditions in that country will not be the same as they were during relocation. Because they are no longer going to be living in that house; they are not going to receive the financial support from the specific program; and their status is going to be that of a refugee, and how this will legally affect certain things. Thus, I think it is the responsibility of the host organization to accompany that decision with providing information, psychosocial support, and legal support so that the person who makes a completely and absolutely informed decision.”

(International Protection Organization staff member)

THE EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON HRDS AT HOME AND IN RELOCATION

- Some countries in Latin America where HRDs live and work (e.g., Nicaragua and Venezuela), utilized the COVID-19 pandemic as a means for further repressing the population and restricting their movement and rights, while also instilling more fear.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has provoked more disinformation campaigns, including campaigns attacking HRDs and human rights in general. The restrictions associated with the pandemic prevented them from conducting their work, including the prohibition on large gatherings or regular planning meetings. This was especially problematic for indigenous communities, where it is common for decision-making to be via assembly or large conventions.

- Indigenous HRDs have created their own mechanisms for encouraging participation and raising the spirits of communities affected by the financial costs and restricted movement due to COVID-19. Such mechanisms include creating virtual programs to help spread information to the community. One such program in Guatemala, for example, called “La Mirada de los Pueblos,” has allowed indigenous human rights organizations to transfer information, as well as announce their positions and stances on issues, complaints made before authorities and create the space for dialogue.

- COVID-19 has also affected HRDs decisions whether to return to their home country. Some view the spread, prevention, government measures and vaccination as more complex in their home country. HRDs do not see their own governments taking the necessary measure or implementing appropriate policies or actions to prevent the spread of the virus in their home countries.

- COVID-19 has caused delays in processing asylum applications.
Strategic Options for Programming

One of the major roles of any strategy to support HRDs is to prompt action from government, civil society, and donors. In prioritizing strategic options for programming, protecting, and supporting HRDs in Latin America should be the clear objective. Strategic options for future action and efforts cannot be a blueprint, but rather a set of evolving recommendations which recognize that the challenges HRDs in Latin America face are complex and dynamic, changing in intensity and scope over time. As such, any strategy must be responsive to contextual shifts and to new opportunities.

As this assessment confirmed, Latin America has become increasingly more violent and dangerous for HRDs, with authoritarianism on the rise, democratic principles deteriorating and governments seeking to exert more control over their populations. As a result, current strategies may need to be modified and reevaluated, and current trends and circumstances call for new strategies of protection and support for HRDs. An instrument for measuring and evaluating the efficacy of protection initiatives, practices and tools does not currently exist in Latin America. One of the most important activities or options is the need to identify appropriate methodologies to assess and measure quantitatively and qualitatively the nature and extent of HRDs vulnerabilities and needs in the region and in specific locations, as well as the impact of programs and activities.
The menu of strategic recommendations presented in this section seeks to help donors and stakeholders to establish programmatic and funding priorities; identify coordination mechanisms; and find appropriate entry points for supporting HRDs. Based on the regional trends identified in this desk assessment, the following strategic recommendations are put forward. In Part A, Freedom House proposes a set of Non-Project Activities at the regional level, or sub regional level that would help to further understand the dynamics of HRDs in the regions and help to strengthen protection. These interventions are meant to compliment bilateral or multilateral funded initiatives. In addition, Freedom House’s Assessment Team proposes eight interrelated strategic recommendations in Part B, along with illustrative activities. Each strategic option suggests possible stakeholders for implementation of the illustrative activities. They are meant to be a menu of strictly regional activities. They are both a call to action and a roadmap for a practical and feasible path forward.

**NON-PROJECT ACTIVITIES**

1. **Regional dialogue** on HRDs and their needs. The assessment report and the case studies can drive and guide the dialogue. Ideally, participants in the dialogue could be drawn from the mapping exercise (see Annex 3) and should include government actors, civil society organizations, HRDs and bilateral and multilateral donors, as well as representatives from the Interamerican organizational system. There are already increasingly levels of public discourse on the challenges of human rights in the region, continuing discussions on immigration and refugees, as well as the upcoming Summit of the Americas in 2021 are all excellent platforms to introduce the importance of focusing on HRDs and strengthen support and protection mechanisms.

Freedom House is continually expanding the dialogue throughout the region on HRDs. The recommendation is to develop an agenda that can be conducted on a regional level in regional forums, and meetings of regional organizations or coalitions. Freedom House believes that a regional dialogue would help reinforce and sustain understanding of needs and solutions. Key organizations and institutions identified in the Mapping exercise (Annex 3) in the United States and in Latin America could be natural partners to be engaged.

2. **Strengthening coordinating mechanisms for programs supporting HRDs in the United States and Latin America.** It is imperative that this coordination process succeed to avoid duplication of programs, provide synergies across programs, and to reduce costs. Supporting HRDs is an important shared objective among USG agencies, regional and international organizations implementing refugee and migration programming in Latin America.

3. **Improved Donor Coordination of HRDs programs.** For the same reasons as coordinating program support, bilateral and multilateral donors must coordinate their assistance to support HRDs. In as much as the challenges in Latin America for HRDs is systemic and is more a symptom of a larger crisis, donors working in the region do not often respond to the problem systemically. Donors’ engagement is on a piecemeal basis, such as working attending refugee or migratory crisis or supporting the provision of temporary assistance to internally displaced and or exiles or strengthening civil society groups capacity in monitoring and documenting human rights violations. Regular, periodic donor meetings to focus on HRD related issues and programs would benefit the host countries and the donors alike. Too few of these meetings are actually held on the bilateral level and virtually none at the regional level for Latin America. At the regional level, coordination could be promoted and enhanced by sub-regional groupings of countries (Central America and Mexico, Andean, and Southern Cone countries) where borders are shared, and problems may be similar.

**STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES**

**Strategic Recommendation 1: Protection of HRDs**

Protection should be responsive and narrowly tailored to the individual needs of HRDs. Protection organizations should value the agency of HRDs and incorporate their inputs in the definition of protection. Temporary relocation programs should strive to put in place a system to design protection arrangements with HRDs and CSOs on the ground, including creating alliances with local organizations who have a better understanding of the local context and the particular needs of the case. Relocation providers need to also think about HRDs who are not at physical risk but who are suffering from emotional stress, especially
those working under hostile circumstances. For example, temporary relocation providers would be in a good position to support those individuals in the field by equipping themselves with the professional psychological staff to do that.

Access to information has bearing on the protection of HRDs. The Escazú Agreement, which entered into force on April 22, 2021, provides a regional framework for access to information and public participation, which are essential components of the work that HRDs do. The Escazú Agreement is a groundbreaking legal instrument for environmental protection, but it is also a human rights treaty. Its main beneficiaries are people, particularly the most vulnerable groups and communities. It aims to ensure the right of all persons to have access to information in a timely and appropriate manner, to participate significantly in making the decisions that affect their lives and their environment, and to access justice when those rights have been infringed. Article 9 specifically focuses on HRDs in environmental matters for strengthening democracy, access rights and sustainable development and their fundamental contributions in this regard. While environmental HRDs are a key group, the treaty also recognizes public and HRDs in general and their rights, provides measures to facilitate their exercise and, most importantly, establishes mechanisms to render them effective. International and national organizations that support HRDs should monitor the Agreement and observe whether it is being implemented by the ratifying countries, and monitor the impact in the protection of HRDs.

Illustrative Activities:

- Promote and fund additional research to highlight the work of HRDs. Research should go deep into subregional systems (Central America and Mexico, South America, Caribbean) and their particular dynamics and needs. Increasing the visibility of HRDs is in itself a way of protecting them, as it may it more costly for whoever wants to obstruct their work.

- Raise awareness about the closing spaces for HRDs and the support needed to defend against criminalization and stigmatization of HRDs. HRDs need the support of donors and international protection organizations to respond to or counter these allegations in litigation, particularly where the State is the party alleging these crimes against HRDs, and where States have the resources to bring forth the litigation. Assistance, accompaniment and representation of the HRD would also be applicable where the State is not assisting the HRD in countering these phenomena.

- Support the design of practical early warning systems to anticipate the signs of an imminent attack against HRDs more readily and prepare to mobilize and respond more effectively.

Strategic Recommendation 2: Emergency Funds

For HRDs facing imminent threats or that are being targeted, emergency funds are a lifeline. HRDs expressed profound gratitude for the emergency funds that they received, which they consider to be life-saving and critical to their ability to flee their home countries. However, our assessment found that there is often a delay in the issuance of emergency funds. In some cases, the process of accessing these funds is cumbersome and bureaucratic. The organizations that administer these funds are short-staffed and have insufficient resources to provide assistance in a timely manner. Regional CSOs have expressed concerns that the emergency funds are not going immediately to the HRD in need, but rather through the referring or host organization or the HRD’s local CSO. Organizations and donors should consider implementing flexibility in their funding to support HRDs at risk in the region, allowing local CSOs who have the expertise to determine how the funds are distributed depending on the needs and priorities at the time.

Illustrative Activities:

- Explore ways to implement flexibility in bureaucratic processes so the emergency or imminent risks can be addressed with utmost precision and efficiency.

- Develop strategies to ensure emergency funds address the general welfare of the HRD who is at risk, independently of their situation resulting from a physical attack or assault, incorporating, medical assistance, health care or even assessing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Strategic Recommendation 3: Temporary Relocation of HRDs

Researchers, CSOs and HRDs interviewed for the assessment generally agreed that international relocation of an HRD should be approached as the last resort, and
only after all other options have been exhausted. As much as possible, HRDs should stay where they are and continue their work, with holistic support (physical, digital and psycho-emotional security) and security training with a Training of Trainers (TOT) approach with help organizations and donors. This is key to strengthen HRDs and HRD networks and the effectiveness of their work across Latin America. Late application and provision of support can lead to an increase in risks for HRDs and a more volatile and explosive situation on the ground. Understanding the local context is crucial to ensuring that any temporary relocation support is not delayed, potentially exacerbating the crisis or provoking more violence. The application process should be streamlined as much as possible, including by proxy. When relocation is eminent, there should be a guarantee that an HRD who requires relocation to another country is able to find a social context in which they can easily integrate and adapt with little difficulty.

Illustrative Activities:

- Regional training of international, regional and national protection and temporary relocation organizations in how to strengthen current protection and relocation practices, including language, holistic support, psychosocial support, and family support.

- Support national and regional level efforts to strengthen accompaniment (acompañamiento) in the place where the HRD is relocated, including, how to navigate the unique culture and processes of the new location, introduction to local groups and networks, referrals to legal services, and other relevant organizations and stakeholders.

**Strategic Recommendation 4: Expand Temporary Relocation Initiatives**

All the temporary relocation initiatives in Latin America should be expanded. Digital security remains a huge gap among CSOs and HRDs. The building and strengthening of in-country or in-regional networks is a documented need, particularly to assist HRDs work in collaboration and not isolation or, in the worst-case scenario, in competition. This weakens the human rights movement and human rights organizations. If an organization faces a particular issue, such as criminalization, they may be able to rely on the other organizations’ resources, for example, legal counsel.

**Illustrative Activities:**

- Support organizations that provide temporary relocation assistance to develop strategic digital security training, including encryption of emails; a password-protected server; possession of adequate equipment; detection of malware; locking a phone; linking different devices without information-spill; how to present and protect yourself on social media. The digital security training, however, needs to be accompanied by the provision of technological equipment and infrastructure.

- Provide assistance to strengthen the density and the system of organizations in Latin America to facilitate networking, exchange tools, and lessons learned.

- Expand initiatives to support HRDs with an intersectionality approach and for minority groups and which take into account their specific needs, including support for women defenders, defenders with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ and indigenous defenders.

- Fund implementation of assessments and evaluations of the risk back home for HRDs, ideally in collaboration with local contacts and CSOs in the home country, and recommendations to support HRDs ideally for 3 months after return home.

- Design and implement initiatives that highlight the work of HRDs and increase the political costs for perpetrators who inflict violence against them.

- Support local CSOs in the design and implementation of a communication and advocacy campaign that portray HRDs in a positive light among communities and the public at large.

**Strategic Recommendation 5: Return and Reintegration of HRDs Back Home**

Many HRDs have to resign from jobs when seeking temporary relocation. In order for HRDs to be able to sustain themselves upon return, temporary relocation providers should consider designing and implementing temporary support plans for when HRDs return to their home country. Sometimes, the source of the risk to the HRD remains.

Digital security remains a huge gap among CSOs and HRDs.
Illustrative Activities:

- Support temporary relocation organization to incorporate a monitoring system, from 3 months to a year, where they can monitor the situation of the HRD back in their home country, and to assess and evaluate how it will make well-being practices sustainable when the HRD returns to her or his country.

- Analyze stigmatization dynamics coming from the community associated with the HRD’s fleeing, as in some cases fleeing and temporary relocation may be viewed as a betrayal of the human rights cause which might evoke some hostility toward the defender upon return.

Strategic Recommendation 6: Permanent Resettlement

Temporary relocation organizations should be involved in supporting HRDs who are forced to stay or resettle in exile, as they have the expertise and the knowledge of the case to assist with the HRD’s asylum or legal status proceedings. HRDs can also be supported when they permanently resettle in exile with continued wellbeing support. Temporary relocation programs can also be catalyst to facilitate linkages and engagement with HRD’s family and community back home.

Illustrative Activities:

- Advocate protection and relocation support for HRDs in permanent resettlement with referrals to the relevant organizations in the country of exile to facilitate the HRD in joining human rights initiatives and to provide advice and training to local organizations on how to work transnationally.

- Support international protection organizations playing a monitoring role for HRDs in permanent resettlement because there is risk of them being targeted by their home country even in exile.

Strategic Recommendation 7: Provision of Long-Term Support to HRDs

Criminalization is not only a corrupt use of a State’s criminal laws meant to obstruct the work of HRDs, as in the cases of Venezuela and Nicaragua highlighted in this assessment, it is also used as means of defamation, hate speech and stigmatization of HRDs. Criminalization has significant implications for those seeking refugee status or applying for asylum in another country. It also limits a person from obtaining a passport in order to flee. Protection and relocation organizations need to fully understand and incorporate the mechanisms to strengthen and support
those HRDs who have been criminally charged in their home countries. HRDs maintain that solidarity networks with local, national and international human rights movements and coalitions have played a fundamental role in providing protection and strengthening processes.

Most states in Latin America support and have ratified human rights standards and treaties, but implementation and enforcement are weak. Only a handful of countries (e.g., Brazil, Colombia, Honduras and Mexico) have specific protection mechanisms for HRDs, but their implementation is also generally weak. At the same time, however, there is a serious climate of impunity where grave human rights violations are on the rise in Latin America, including against HRDs. What is needed are policies and laws that support an environment for HRDs to operate freely and without reprisals. Twenty-four countries in the hemisphere have signed the Escazú Agreement and twelve have ratified it and is yet another tool to provide long-term support for HRDs. CSOs and HRDs believe in the role that foreign governments and regional and international organizations can play in pressuring other governments when grave situations arise with the killing and attacks of HRDs.

**Illustrative Activities:**
- Support long-term efforts to assist HRDs in legal representation and accompaniment, as well as economic support to family member of incarcerated HRDs. This would allow them to confront unanticipated incidences like the economic fallout and government repression during and post COVID-19, while at the same time allowing them to pursue and advance their work as HRDs.
- Investment in preventative and permanent measures are warranted instead of continually acting reactively to threats and other issues in their work in human rights.
- Explore ways for their programming to foster long-term support in countering situations of impunity against HRDs.
- Expand physical and digital security, as well as legal orientation or support for indigenous HRDs in remote rural areas.
- Escalate awareness and call for actions at the United Nations and Inter-American system level, including the newly Escazú Agreement.

**Strategic Recommendation 8: Funding ideas for Donors**

In order to make the human rights movement more sustainable in the long run, an increase in funding is needed to strengthen protection of HRDs, including unique initiatives that incorporate holistic approaches with a particular focus on intersectionality. Here are some potential funding areas for donor support.

**Measuring Efficacy of Protection Practices and Tools**

Given the increasing trend in Latin America of violence against HRDs, and the rise of authoritarianism, protection practices need to be strengthened. Old strategies may need to be modified, current strategies may need reevaluation and new strategies of protection should be explored. An instrument for measuring and evaluating the efficacy of protection initiatives, practices and tools does not currently exist. Protection is also often perceived as being very subjective. Some thought should be given on how to support regional and local CSOs in assessing the appropriateness of a measuring instrument, including using monitoring and evaluation approaches for assessing the efficacy and impact of these initiatives.

**Illustrative Activities:**
- Support regional and local CSOs with grants to assess the appropriateness of a measuring instrument, including using monitoring and evaluation approaches for assessing the efficacy and impact of these initiatives.

**Promoting Local Alliances and Partners in the Region**

Protection and relocation require establishing and fostering local alliances with HRDs and CSOs on the ground. By having local contacts, international protection organizations can also empower them to implement actions on the ground. Regional organizations have entered into agreements and memoranda of understanding with local alliances. Even if informal, this helps maintain consistent contact with referring organizations and local CSOs. HRDs recommend a permanent line of communication with all actors working on protection and relocation that would allow for an exchange of ideas and coordination of actions and responses.
Illustrative Activities:

- Support some form of “Solidarity Committees” to organize in host countries (e.g., Colombia and Costa Rica). There is some precedent in Central America, where these were established during these countries’ armed conflicts and served its purposes as means to building people-to-people ties, providing much-needed material support and accompaniment, raising awareness and shared strategies to defend against attacks. Establishing these types of committees once again can be a way for HRDs who seek asylum or protection in the host country to become involved with the host society, assist with their transition, make connections, and support an HRD’s desire to continue their human rights work in exile.

- In relation to HRDs from Central America, a special focus on Mexico, where the human rights situation has gravely deteriorated and the number of HRDs crossing the country continues to increase. Where the government of Mexico has failed to act, civil society has implemented initiatives to support HRDs who want to stay in Mexico or settle elsewhere. In Mexico City, many CSOs focusing on human rights exist, including with extensive support from international organizations and donors like the Ford Foundation. The case of Mexico could be a place to closely monitor the many alliances and initiatives of CSOs and attempt to replicate their work in neighboring Central America. The relative successful cases of Costa Rica and Uruguay, where systems of social protection tend to be more generous and encompassing, could also be the focus of research to identify networks and alliances.

- Support exchange missions to learn from other CSOs who support HRDs in other countries, and create a space to discuss experiences, ideas and information, especially around local contexts and associated risks, and the application and implementation of certain protection measures.

Collaboration with and Coordination among Protection Actors

As we have seen, the needs of an HRD at risk are numerous and varied, and no single organization in Latin America has the resources or expertise to provide all the assistance needed. Coordination and collaboration is needed, not only to guarantee that the HRD’s urgent and long-term needs are being met, but also to avoid duplicative efforts or initiatives.

Illustrative Activities:

- Explore the experience of the Journalists in Distress Network’s (JID) as a model for coordinating efforts among key organizations in Latin America.

- Encourage, establish and support alliances/partnerships with local organizations (triangulation) to highlight HRD work, as well as facilitate and expedite the process of granting emergency funds. Local CSOs have first-hand knowledge of the HRD and the local context, and they can be sources of information.

Expanding and Strengthening HRD Shelter Models in Latin America

Actors interviewed for the assessment highlighted the need for initiatives like a Shelter City that offer temporary shelter with extensive psychosocial support and that offer programs of a safe return. While not extensive in number, some regional shelters for HRDs exist in Latin America (see section III, B and Annex 5). Providing hands-on support with local staff is a critical piece that is often missing in temporary relocation approaches. Establishing, strengthening and expanding shelter models in the region could ensure critical local capacity. This would facilitate communication, access to programming, a better understanding of the local context and allow HRDs in relocation or exile to remain closer to their families. It would also serve to guarantee a much smoother transition for HRDs forced to flee their countries, a traumatic and taxing experience. The assessment found that some basic conditions exist that would serve as basis to expand and strengthen shelter models for HRDs.

Illustrative Activities:

- Establish additional and more in-depth contact and communication with potential partners in Latin America to better understand feasibility, gaps, and explore ways of potential collaboration and sources of funding. Freedom House can take the lead in Costa Rica and Colombia, and include Mexico, Guatemala and potentially Brazil.

- Foster relationships with the individuals interviewed in this assessment, who gave their time and contributed their keen, informative and helpful insights, can be a way to establish further contacts in the region and further assess the feasibility and appropriateness for expanding and strengthening shelters in Latin America.

Further Research Topics for HRDs in Exile

Because there is little or no monitoring of the general security situation of an HRD once they relocate in exile or permanently
abroad, there is insufficient data about the potential security risks they may face in exile. In addition to providing funding for relocation, initiatives to establish monitoring mechanisms that evaluate the risk for certain HRDs abroad could also be of value. Researchers who work on issues and programming relating to the protection of HRDs have remarked that Latin America is a laboratory for new collective protection initiatives. Researchers also indicate that there is a cultural shift in Latin America to not see HRDs only as people who conduct human rights work. Rather, as the recent Colombia court decision recognizes, there is a right to defend human rights. Finally, this desk assessment, while encompassing in terms of the themes explored, did not explore the specific protection issues facing LGBTIQ+ activists and HRDs in Latin America. An initial research agenda to follow-up on the desk assessment can include the following research topics.

- Beyond the anecdotal data about the phenomenon of transnational repression in the region, a more careful and thorough analysis is needed to ascertain the risks associated for an HRD in exile. Some initial inconclusive data was collected for Venezuelans in Colombia and Nicaraguans in Costa Rica, but more in-depth research would yield more robust findings, as well as expand the geographic scope into Mexico and Central America.

- Brazil was identified as a country largely underrepresented in temporary relocation and in protection assistance provided to HRDs. Brazil is the largest country in the region with an expansive geography, a significant size in population, and diversity in race, ethnicity and languages. It is also a country with extensive foreign investment, including extractive industries in the Amazon region. The current local context indicates that severe repression of HRDs and those opposed to the Bolsonaro regime is occurring at an exponential rate, compounded by Brazil having a severe COVID-19 crisis and deaths. Collaboration with local CSOs and the Ford Foundation in Brazil should be further explored.

- Further research is needed to explore initiatives that support how HRDs organize themselves, namely through communities, collectives and networks, and extract some lessons and best practices.

- Further research is needed to explore the ways in which temporary relocation and international protection organizations can support programmatic initiatives from a rights perspective rather than an individual one.

- Several LGBTIQ+ organizations exist in the region, and some receive international support. To what extent funders and international organizations are working with LGBTIQ+ activists and HRDs in Latin America is unknown and merits further research attention.

- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a continuous consultation and research process should be established with HRDs about what areas of research are most currently needed. As the assessment results showed, they are, indeed, the ones who know the best.
Annex 1: List of Interviews

Civil Society Organizations

Interview conducted: February 8, 6:00 pm EST
Institution: Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los DDHH
Country of Representation: Mexico
Country of Residence: Mexico
Contact name, title: Graciela Rodríguez Manzo, Executive Director
Contact email: direccion@cmdpdh.org

Interview conducted: February 11, 10:00 am EST
Institution: Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras (COFADEH)
Country of Representation: Honduras
Country of Residence: Honduras
Contact name, title: Bertha Oliva Nativí, Founder & Coordinator
Contact email: berthacofadeh@yahoo.com

Interview conducted: February 11, 3:00 pm EST
Institution: Centro de Investigación y Promoción de los DDHH (CIPRODEH)
Country of Representation: Honduras
Country of Residence: Honduras
Contact name, title: Ariel Díaz, Human Rights Official
Contact email: ariel.diaz@ciprodeh.org

Interview conducted: February 11, 4:15 pm EST
Institution: ASOPODEHU
Country of Representation: Honduras
Country of Residence: Honduras
Contact name, title: Dina Meza, Director
Contact email: asopodehu@gmail.com

Interview conducted: February 17, 12:00 pm EST
Institution: Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de DDHH - Guatemala (UDEFEGUA)
Country of Representation: Guatemala
Country of Residence: Guatemala
Contact name, title: Jorge Santos, General Coordinator
Contact email: jsantos@udefegua.org

Interview conducted: February 26, 3:00 pm EST
Institution: IM Defenders
Country of Representation: Mexico & Central America
Country of Residence: Nicaragua
Contact name, title: Margarita Quintanilla, Director Nicaragua Initiative
Contact email: lamardefa@protonmail.com

Interview conducted: April 9, 2021, 9:00 am EST
Institution: Asuntos del Sur
Country of Representation: Southern Cone region/LAC general
Country of Residence: Argentina
Contact name, title: Mathias Bianchi, Director
Contact email: matias.bianchi@asuntosdelsur.org

Human Rights Defender in Exile

Interview conducted: February 5, 1:30 pm EST
Institution: CubaLex
Country of Representation: Cuba
Country of Residence: USA
Contact name, title: Laritza Diversent, Executive Director
Contact email: LDiversent@Cubalex.org

Interview conducted: February 5, 3:00 pm EST
Institution: Municipal Ombudswoman
Country of Representation: Colombia
Country of Residence: U.S.
Contact name, title: Marlen Ortiz, Lawyer
Contact email: daikurisia@yahoo.com

Interview conducted: February 10, 2:30 pm EST
Institution: Alas Tensas
Country of Representation: Cuba
Country of Residence: Spain
Contact name, title: Ileana de la Concepción Álvarez González, Director
Contact email: alastensas@gmail.com
Interview conducted: February 11, 1:00 pm EST
Institution: Corazón Valiente
Country of Representation: Venezuela
Country of Residence: Argentina
Contact name, title: Victor Navarro, Founder
Contact email: vicnavarro15@gmail.com

Interview conducted: February 11, 3:00 pm EST
Institution: Tendencia Digital (News Program)
Country of Representation: Ecuador
Country of Residence: Peru
Contact name, title: Juan Sarmiento, Journalist
Contact email: juan.noticia@gmail.com

Interview conducted: February 17, 2:00 pm EST
Institution: Movimiento Estudiantil y CEPAZ (Red de Activistas Ciudadanos) + STEMujeres (Venezuelan Women in Argentina)
Country of Representation: Venezuela
Country of Residence: Argentina
Contact name, title: Adriana Flores, Principle Chief Executive Officer STEMujeres
Contact email: adrianarru@gmail.com

Interview conducted: February 18, 1:30 pm EST
Institution: Un Mundo Sin Mordaza
Country of Representation: Venezuela
Country of Residence: Spain
Contact name, title: Rodrigo Diamanti, Founder & President
Contact email: jrdiamantiv@gmail.com

Human Rights Defenders (returned/or in country)

Interview conducted: February 23, 9:00 am EST
Institution: Radio mi Voz
Country of Representation: Nicaragua
Country of Residence: Nicaragua (exiled in Costa Rica)
Contact name, title: Alvaro Montalvan,
Contact email: amontalvan20058@yahoo.com

Interview conducted: February 10, 1:00 pm EST
Institution: Consejo de Pueblos Wuxhtaj
Country of Representation: Guatemala
Country of Residence: Guatemala
Contact name, title: Francisco Rocael (Francisco Mateo Morales), Indigenous/land rights leader
Contact email: consejohuista@gmail.com

Shelters:

Interview conducted: February 4, 3:30 pm EST / February 9, 3:00 pm EST
Institution: Shelter City - Fundación Acceso
Country of Representation: Latin America/Caribbean
Country of Residence: Costa Rica
Contact name, title: Tanya Lockwood, Coordinator
Contact email: tanya@acceso.or.cr

Interview conducted: February 5, 6:00 pm EST
Institution: ICORN’s Casa Refugio Citlapetl
Country of Representation: Latin America/Caribbean
Country of Residence: Mexico
Contact name, title: Philippe Ollé-Laprun, Director
Contact email: oloo1@me.com

Emergency Assistance Programs:

Interview conducted: February 12, 12:00 pm EST
Institution: EU Human Rights Defenders Relocation Platform (EUTRP)
Country of Representation: Latin America/Caribbean
Country of Residence: Europe
Contact name, title: Luciana Peri, Coordinator of EUTRP & Shelter Initiatives
Contact email: lperi@protectdefenders.eu

Interview conducted: February 24, 8:30 am EST
Institution: Internews
Country of Representation: Latin America/Caribbean
Country of Residence: USA
Contact name, title: Pablo Arcuri
Contact email: parcuri@internews.org

Donors:

Interview conducted: February 24, 1:00 pm EST
Institution: National Endowment for Democracy (NED)
Country of Representation: Latin America/Caribbean
Country of Residence: USA
Contact name, title: Fabiola Cordova (Associate Director, Latin America and Caribbean) Aimeil Rios Wong (Senior Manager, Latin America and the Caribbean), Marlena Papaviritis (Program Officer, Latin America and Caribbean)
Contact email: fabiolac@ned.org; AimeleW@ned.org; MarlenaP@ned.org
Interview conducted: March 3, 9:30 am EST  
Institution: Organization of American States (OAS)  
Country of Representation: Latin America/Caribbean  
Country of Residence: USA  
Contact name, title: Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian, Director of Department of Social Inclusion  
Contact email: bmunoz@oas.org

Interview conducted: March 5, 10:00 am EST  
Institution: Ford Foundation-Brazil  
Country of Representation: Brazil  
Country of Residence: Brazil  
Contact name, title: Maira Junqueira, Program Officer  
Contact email: m.junqueira@fordfoundation.org

Interview conducted: Ford Foundation-Mexico/ Central America  
Institution: March 9, 1:00 pm EST  
Country of Representation: Mexico/Central America  
Country of Residence: Mexico  
Contact name, title: Ximena Andion, Program Officer  
Contact email: x.andion@fordfoundation.org

Interview conducted: March 11, 9:00 am EST  
Institution: Ford Foundation  
Country of Representation: LAC + Africa  
Country of Residence: Mexico; South Africa  
Contact name, title: Otto Saki (Global Program Officer, Civic Engagement and Government), Sophia Hernandez (Program Associate, Civic Engagement and Government, International Program)  
Contact email: o.saki@fordfoundation.org; s.hernandez@fordfoundation.org

Interview conducted: March 17, 3:00 pm EST  
Institution: Ford Foundation  
Country of Representation: Andean region  
Country of Residence: Colombia  
Contact name, title: Sindis Meza, Program Officer  
Contact email: s.meza@fordfoundation.org

Research Institutions/Universities:  
Interview conducted: February 8, 8:00 am EST  
Institution: Martin Roth Initiative  
Country of Representation: Latin America/Caribbean  
Country of Residence: Germany  
Contact name, title: Maik Müller, Director  
Contact email: mm@martin-roth-initiative.de

Legal Services and Advocacy Organizations:  
Interview conducted: February 10, 11:00 am EST  
Institution: Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)  
Country of Representation: Argentina  
Country of Residence: Argentina  
Contact name, title: Camila Maia, Coordinadora de Trabajo internacional  
Contact email: consultas@cels.org.ar; cmaia@cels.org.ar

Interview conducted: February 16, 11:30 am EST  
Institution: Centro De Direitos Humanos E Cidadania Do Imigrante/CDHIC (Brazil)  
Country of Representation: Brazil  
Country of Residence: Brazil  
Contact name, title: Thais La Rosa (Executive Director); Renata Rossi (Project Consultant); Alexandre Branco Pereira (Project Consultant)  
Contact email: contato@cdhic.org; thais.larosa@cdhic.org; renata.rossi@cdhic.org; alexandre.branco@cdhic.org;


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Annex 3: Initial Organizational Mapping by Category

RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS / UNIVERSITIES

- Dejusticia (Lucía Ramírez Bolívar, Research Coordinator for Migration and LA, Colombia)
- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Felix Braunsdorf, Policy Officer on Migration & Development, Berlin)
- Martin Roth Initiative (Maik Muller, Berlin)
- Migration Policy Institute (Diego Chaves-González)
- University of York’s Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR), which hosts the Human Rights Defender Hub (United Kingdom)

FUNDERS / DONORS

- American Jewish World Service (AJWS, Emily Rugama, Senior Program Officer - Nicaragua)
- Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration
- HIVOS
- Ford Foundation (US; Mexico/Central America, Brazil, Andean region)
- Fundo Elas (Brazil)
- Fundo Brasil de Direitos Humanos (Brazil)
- USAID

INSTITUTIONAL ADVOCACY and PROTECTION (International and Regional)

- Amnesty International
- CEJIL DC
- CEJIL Mesoamérica
- CEJIL Brazil
- Centro de los Derechos del Migrante (Rachel Micah-Jones, ED)
- Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS Argentina, Raisa Ortiz Cetra, Camilla Maia)
- GAJOP (Brazil)
- Human Rights Watch
- International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
- Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)
- OAS (Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian, Director of Department of Social Inclusion)
- OAS, Rapporteur on the Rights of Human Rights Defenders and Justice Operators (Commissioner Joel Hernández García)
- OHCHR, Venezuela (Natalia Kuzmina)
- OHCHR, Colombia (Miguel Angel Sanchez)
- OHCHR’s Special Rapporteur on the Situation of HR Defenders
- UNHCR for the Americas (Renata Dubini)
- Women’s Link
- WOLA (Gimena Sánchez, Director of the Andes, and Stephanie Brewer, Director for Mexico and Migrant Rights)

IMPLEMENTERS

- American Bar Association ROLI (DC)
- ABA’s Center for Human Rights’ Justice Defenders Program (DC)
- Centro de Direitos Humanos e Ciudadanía do Imigrante (CDHIC, Thais La Rosa, Executive Coordinator)
- CENIDH Nicaragua
- Civil Rights Defenders (Ana María Mendoza, LAC Program Officer, and María Pia Alvira, Sweden)
• EU Human Rights Defenders Relocation Platform (EUTRP)
• EU-LAT Advocacy Network
• FIDH (Paris, NY)
• Frontline Defenders (Sandra Patargo, Protection Coordinator de las Américas)
• Jesuit Refugee and Migrant Service
• Free Press Unlimited (Mira Chowdhury, Central America Program Manager)
• IM Defensoras (México y Centroamérica; en Nicaragua, Margarita Quintanilla)
• International Rescue Committee
• Internews (DC)
• International Organization for Migration (Michele Klein-Solomon, Director of IOM LAC)
• International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
• HIAS Latin America
• Human Rights Resilience Project
• Norwegian Refugee Council
• Pan American Development Foundation (DC)
• PBI Colombia (Nathalie Bienfait and Petra Langheinric)
• Protection International (Belgium)
• ProtectDefenders.eu
• World Organization Against Torture (OMCT)
• People in Need (Czechoslovakia)
• RET Américas
• Sociedade Maranhense de Direitos Humanos (Brazil)
• Sociedade Paraense de Direitos Humanos (Brazil)
• Terra de Direitos and Justiça Global (Brazil)
• WITNESS (NY)

SAFE HOUSES
• ICORN's Casa Refugio Citaltépetl (Mexico City)
• Shelter City and Fundación Acceso (Karina Sánchez Prado, Coordinadora en Costa Rica)

NATIONAL/LOCAL
• Amnistía Internacional - México
• Asociación por la Democracia y los Derechos Humanos (ASOPODEHU, Honduras)
• Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos Perú (APRODEH, Perú)
• CALDH (Guatemala)
• Centro de Derechos Humanos - Universidad Católica Andres Bello (Venezuela)
• Centro para los Defensores y la Democracia (Marian Romero) (Venezuela)
• Centro de Documentación e Información Bolivia (CEDIB, Bolivia)
• Centro de Derechos Humanos y Asesoría a Pueblos Indígenas (Oaxaca)
• Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña Tlachinollan (Guerrero)
• Centro de Derechos Humanos de la PUCE (Ecuador)
• Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Matías de Córdova (Chiapas)
• Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Francisco de Vitoria (México)
• Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas (Chiapas)
• Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez (México)
• Centro de Derechos Sociales del Migrante (CENDEROS, started by Nicaraguan women in Costa Rica)
• Centro de Estudios y Acción Social Permanente (CEASPA, Panamá)
• Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social (CEJIS, Bolivia)
• Centro de Investigación para la Comunicación (CINCO, Nicaragua)
• Centro de Investigación y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (CIPRODEH, Honduras)
• Centro de Justicia para la Paz y el Desarrollo (Jalisco)
• CIVILIS (Venezuela)
Colectivo de DDHH Nicaragua Nunca + (Costa Rica)

Comisión Permanente de Derechos Humanos (CPDH, Nicaragua)

Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional (Cuba)

Comisión Ecuuménica de Derechos Humanos (CEDHU, Ecuador)

Comisión de Derechos Humanos de El Salvador (CDHES)

Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (México)

Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Noroeste (Baja California)

Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras (COFADEH, Honduras)

Comité Brasileiro de Defensores e Defensoras de Direitos Humanos (Brazil)

Conectas (Brazil)

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Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de DDHH (UDEFEGUA, Guatemala)

Unión Venezolana en Perú (Perú)

Working Group on Venezuelan Mobility (several org members, Colombia)

HRDs in exile

Adriana Flores (Movimiento Estudiantil y CEPAZ (Red de Activistas Ciudadanos) + STEMujeres (Venezuelan Women in Argentina; Venezuela)

Ileana de la Concepción Álvarez González (Alas Tensas, Cuba)

Juan Sarmiento (Tendencia Digital, Ecuador)

Laritza Diversent (CubaLex, Cuba) --- Relocated CSO in the US

Marlen Ortiz (municipal ombudswoman, lawyer, Colombia)

Rodrigo Diamanti (Un Mundo Sin Mordaza, Venezuela) --- Relocated HRD in the US in 2014, he is in Europe at the moment, organization is still operating in Venezuela

Victor Navarro (Corazón Valiente, Venezuela) --- Former political prisoner, currently in Argentina.

HRDs returned/or in country

Alvaro Montalvan (Radio mi voz, Nicaragua)

Francisco Rocael (Consejo de Pueblos Wuxhtaj, Guatemala)
Annex 4: Brief Summary of Three Shelters (Shelter City, ICORN’s Casa México Citlaltépetl and Protect Defenders)

Shelter City, Costa Rica

*Fundación Acceso* coordinates the Shelter City Initiative in Costa Rica. Shelter City provides international relocation to Costa Rica to HRDs at risk in any country in Central America. The majority of HRDs that Shelter City supports and accompanies come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Shelter City does not coordinate relocation with the HRD’s organization, but with the HRD directly; the HRD decides what course of action she or he wants to take. Shelter City highly respects the HRD’s autonomy and own decision-making throughout the accompaniment and relocation processes. Shelter City previously included digital security as one of their principal focuses of their programming, but has now shifted their focus to provide a more sustainable accompaniment to CSOs and human rights organizations.

Shelter City has analysts in each country in the region that conduct situational interviews with HRDs at risk who want to participate in Shelter City’s programs. Upon approval of the HRD’s application, Shelter City supports their travel and logistics from their home country to Costa Rica. In Costa Rica, Shelter City provides their residence, daily living expenses, medical assistance, and accompanies the HRD with a multidisciplinary, integral protection team. Together, they create a plan for their stay, in which the HRD is trained in diverse protection themes: legal, digital, psychosocial psycho-emotional, and physical security. This multidisciplinary team assists and accompanies the HRD throughout their stay in Costa Rica. Generally, the HRDs stay at Shelter City are for a period of 3 months. Shelter City’s in-country analysts assist HRDs with plans for return to their home country. After the HRD has returned to their home country, Shelter City provides accompaniment to the HRD back home for another 3 months.

Shelter City also supports efforts of organizational protection. It has working groups in each country that accompany processes of organizational strengthening with various HRD collectives. It also has multidisciplinary teams called “grupos de respuesta en protección integral” that consist of professionals who support organizations in processes of reflection on individual and collective protection. Shelter City also provides accompaniment in the area of digital security, which includes education and provision of infrastructure and equipment to these organizations.

Assistance to these organizations last for 6 months.

On average annually, Shelter City shelters around 200 HRDs, and supports around 80 organizations from throughout the region.

ICORN’s Casa México Citlaltépetl

The International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN)’s Casa México Citlaltépetl began in 1999 and lasted until 2016. ICORN’s mission is to ask cities or regions to offer a long-term temporary refuge (2 years) to persecuted artists, intellectuals and writers. ICORN has emergency funds for travel and lodging for writers and authors who are forced to flee. During the two years, these individuals received an apartment, a monthly stipend, health insurance and language classes.

ICORN provided accompaniment and supported the individual’s intellectual activities, and it organized readings, conferences, publications of books and other written works and provided the individuals with local contacts. These individuals were invited to speak at universities, cultural programs and events, festivals, book fairs and at book releases in Mexico. The idea was to have these writers’ works
translated and have Mexican society read and learn about them. Casa Refugio hosted 13 writers and artists, 5 of whom have permanently resided in Mexico.

Currently, ICORN has a network of 80 cities throughout the world, and has hosted more than 200 writers throughout the world. Phillipe Olle Laprune was a founding member of ICORN, and a founding board member for five cities, including Mexico City, Barcelona, Frankfurt, Brussels and Stavanger, a small city in Norway.

Initially, Casa Refugio Citzaltépetl was a CSO that received funding from Mexico City, and subsequently from the State of Mexico as well. Casa Refugio also generated its own revenue by having a restaurant and a bookstore, as well as income-generating projects or initiatives, including payment for its publication of books, which also the Casa to pay staff salaries. Later, Mexico City decided to take over operations of the Casa Refugio (Mexico City was always the house owner) and convert the use of the house for more Mexican cultural activities. Since 2016, the house has had no direct relationship with ICORN, nor has it hosted a writer in exile.

Although Phillipe is now working with the University UAM Cuajimalpa in Mexico City, ICORN Norway (where ICORN was founded) has asked him to lead ICORN Latin America to develop its network of cities in LA that can host persecuted or threatened writers and artists. In 2020, just before the onset of the COVi-19 pandemic, Mexico City was the first city to sign an agreement with ICORN. Once the pandemic subsides, Casa Refugio Citzaltépetl will resume hosting persecuted writers and artists.

ICORN Latin America recognizes and seeks to develop and expand a network in Latin America, not only for cities and regions to host authors or artists, but to form bridges of support among Latin American cities. ICORN seeks to open 6-8 cities of refuge in Latin America with the hopes of partnering with universities, publishing companies, TV stations, media outlets, newspapers or magazines. The idea is to find gainful employment for these threatened artists and writers so that they have some economic security. ICORN LA is currently working with a network of universities, and ideally seeks to have universities in each city of refuge commit to offering employment to writers or artists in exile who need economic security. ICORN Latin America also hopes to employ psychologists on staff to provide wellbeing support.

**Protect Defenders.eu**

Protect Defenders.eu is a consortium of 12 organizations that work on the protection of HRDs around the world, and is based in Brussels, Belgium. The Secretariat of this consortium implements the actions of the 12 member organizations. The Secretariat implements its own actions, while some of the actions are taken directly by the member organizations. The 12 member organizations engage in advocacy, research, trainings and support on the ground. The Secretariat provides temporary relocation grants, which provides emergency funds for HRDs to relocate. The HRD can apply and request the emergency funds directly. One of the requirements of this program is that a host organization receives the HRDs in the host country.

The Secretariat also implements the Shelter Initiatives Program, which provides economic support and trainings to organizations that are implementing or seek to implement a temporary relocation program for HRDs at risk on a local or regional level. The Shelter Initiatives Program works to strengthen organizational capacity, which includes ensuring that the HRD is central to any organizational planning around security and protection for HRDs. Under the Shelter Initiatives Program, HRDs are relocated internally or in the same region without the need to relocate to Europe, the U.S. or other places distant from their home country. Protect Defenders.eu assists solely with temporary relocation and not permanent resettlement.

Protect Defenders.eu also coordinates the European Union Temporary Relocation Platform (EUTRP). The Platform gathers 60 organizations that work with the temporary relocation of HRDs across the globe. Freedom House is a member of EUTRP.
Endnotes


2 The term “human rights defender” has been used increasingly since the adoption of the Declaration on human rights defenders in 1998. Until then, terms such as human rights “activist”, “professional”, “worker” or “monitor” had been most common. The term “human rights defender” is seen as a more relevant and useful term. For more information on the United Nations’ definition see https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/srhrdefenders/pages/defender.aspx

3 For the purposes of this report, we are using as basis the definitions provided by the Economist Intelligence Unit. In an authoritarian regime state political pluralism is absent or heavily circumscribed. Many countries in this category are outright dictatorships. Some formal institutions of democracy may exist, but these have little substance. Elections, if they do occur, are not free and fair. There is disregard for human rights abuses and infringements of civil liberties. Media are typically state-owned or controlled by groups connected to the ruling regime. There is repression of criticism of the government and pervasive censorship. There is no independent judiciary. In hybrid regimes, elections have substantial irregularities that often prevent them from being both free and fair. Government pressure on opposition parties and candidates may be common. Corruption tends to be widespread, and the rule of law is weak. Typically, there is harassment of and pressure on civil society and journalists, and the judiciary is not independent. See the Economist Intelligence Unit. Democracy Index 2020: In sickness and in health? London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021.


8 R4V Interagency Portal, https://r4v.info/en/situations/platform


10 Freedom House. Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy Under Siege. Washington DC: Freedom House, 2021. Countries classified as “Free” were Uruguay, Chile, Costa Rica, Belize, Argentina, Panama, Brazil, Surinam and Guyana; countries classified as “Partially Free” were: Peru, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, Paraguay, El Salvador, Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras, and Haiti; and countries classified as “Not Free” were: Nicaragua, Venezuela and Cuba. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege

11 Belize (+1), Bolivia (+3), Chile (+3), Ecuador (+2) and Surinam (+4).


13 Schenkkan and Isabel Linzer, 2021, p. 52.

14 The two full case study reports, including their methodology can be found at Freedomhouse.org.


18 A precautionary measure is a protection mechanism of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), through which it requests a State to protect one or more persons who are in a serious and urgent situation from suffering irreparable harm. Any person or organization may submit a request for precautionary measures in favor of an identified or identifiable person, or group of persons who find themselves in a situation of risk. It is important to have the consent of the person in whose favor the request is filed, or failing that, the inability to obtain this consent should be reasonably justified. The precautionary measures mechanism is provided for in Article 25 of the IACHR’s Rules of Procedure. More information, https://www.oas.org/en/IACHR/JISForm/?File=/en/iachr/decisions/inclabou-precautionary.asp

19 For the purposes of the assessment, self-care is the ability to engage in human rights work without sacrificing other important parts of one life. The ability to maintain a positive attitude towards the work despite challenges. Self-care can also be understood as a practitioner’s right to be well, safe, and fulfilled. More information here, https://www.newtactics.org/conversation/self-care-activists-sustaining-your-most-valuable-resource

20 The case study identified one potential instance of transnational aggression in Colombia against a former Venezuelan prosecutor, Zair Mundarai, who was attacked in a failed kidnap attempt in the streets of Bogota. More in-depth analysis is needed to determine the spread and depth of transnational repression practices. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxrdD7-scG

21 https://ticotimes.net/2021/01/02/nicaraguans-in-costa-rica-ask-uhchr-for-support


25 Five focus groups were conducted altogether. In addition to HRDs, participants included women, and members from the LGBTIQ+ communities. Focus groups were conducted in San José, Liberia and Upala.
The case study identified a couple of potential instances of transnational aggression in Costa Rica against HRDs. One HRD described her experience in Costa Rica while she was participating in a protest, when an unidentified person, who she claims was a paramilitary, approached her and threatened her by telling her that “we know where you are and know your family back home.” Another HRD mentioned the easiness by which Nicaraguan policy and agents can cross into Costa Rica and potentially infiltrate exiled HRD networks and organizations. More in-depth analysis is needed to determine the spread and depth of transnational repression practices.


For more specific and annotated information on the Escazú Treaty, see: [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/43853/I51800428_en.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/43853/I51800428_en.pdf)

JID has been operating for decades and provides a space for these organizations to coordinate support (relocation, wellbeing, legal, medical expenses, etc.). Communication among JID members is secure, which allows them to share sensitive information about journalists at risk and make the case known to all members of the group. JIL members have the space to coordinate their support for a journalist in a secure and organized fashion. [https://cpj.org/emergency-response/journalists-in-distress-network/](https://cpj.org/emergency-response/journalists-in-distress-network/)
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANPDH</td>
<td>Asociación Nicaragüense Pro Derechos Humanos</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEJIL</td>
<td>Center for Justice and International Rights</td>
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<td>CEM</td>
<td>The Center for Migration Studies</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organization</td>
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<td>EUTRP</td>
<td>European Union Temporary Relocation Platform</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>HIAS</td>
<td>Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society</td>
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<td>HRD</td>
<td>Human Rights Defender</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
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<tr>
<td>IACHR</td>
<td>Inter-American Commission on Human Rights</td>
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<td>JDN</td>
<td>Journalists in Distress Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTIQ+</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Questioning</td>
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<td>NED</td>
<td>National Endowment for Democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>PEP</td>
<td>Permiso Especial de Permanencia/Special Stay Permit (Colombia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCR</td>
<td>University of Costa Rica</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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The focus on Human Rights Defenders in Latin America is still an evolving area of inquiry. There is a need for a more systematic effort to understand their needs and challenges, and to design effective support strategies.
## Board of Trustees

* Denotes members of the Executive Board

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