

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO THE PROTECTION NEEDS OF CLIMATE ACTIVISTS AND MOVEMENTS: A GUIDE FOR DONORS AND SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

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Executive summary

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As climate change impacts our everyday lives, livelihoods, and ecosystems, significantly harming the world's most vulnerable populations, thousands of individuals and groups have raised their voices to call upon world leaders, the private sector, and the public to take bold action to protect the planet and its people. They have formed a heterogeneous and diverse global movement that has been growing in numbers and relevance as the urgency to tackle climate change increases.

Unfortunately, as the movement and its influence at national and international levels grows, so do the risks faced by those on the frontlines of climate defence. Adversaries of climate activism are increasingly trying to silence the voices of these brave defenders through different means, from restrictive laws to judicial harassment to physical violence.

In addition to these targeted attacks, climate activists often face a wide range of obstacles that affect their activism, integrity, security, and wellbeing, including political, cultural and economic marginalisation, insufficient resources, and inadequate access to information. In response, there have been a range of interventions to help climate activists confront these situations.

In recent years, however, activists and civil society organisations have warned of a gap preventing communication between those who identify as climate activists and the organisations working to support them and provide protection services, including as part of efforts to support human rights and environmental defenders. This gap limits efforts to strengthen the protection of fundamental freedoms and civic space, which is essential for all those working to defend a healthy planet and combat climate change.

Against this backdrop, this brief seeks to contribute to addressing the above-mentioned gap by identifying concrete ways in which civil society

organisations and donors who are dedicated to supporting human rights defenders, including those specifically oriented toward environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs), can more effectively connect, communicate, and provide support to address the particular needs of climate activists and movements.

Thus, **although some background analysis is provided, the main objective of this document is not to map or analyse the risks and challenges faced by climate activists, but rather to offer concrete, practical advice and guidance on how organisations can increase support for climate activists across the world.** The overarching objective of this report is to contribute to efforts to help climate activists secure their protection, wellbeing, and the effectiveness of their activism.

Who are climate activists and what are the specific risks and challenges that climate activists face?

A climate activist is any individual or group who takes direct and noticeable action to address climate change and/or its consequences, including global warming and extreme weather by, inter alia, advocating a safe climate, climate action, or climate justice. The 'climate activist' term is very heterogeneous; it encompasses a diverse group of actors (individuals and groups) with varied solutions to the climate crisis. Additionally, not all climate activists identify themselves as such, some prefer using terms such as 'environmental defender,' 'climate defender,' among other terms. The heterogeneity of climate activists has led experts to define the climate justice movement as a 'movement of many movements.'

During the past few years, international civil society organisations have worked to clarify the risks that climate activists face and illustrate the particular impact. Research has shown that climate activists face at least four types of threats: threats to

assembly; threats to association, expression, and the right to information; threats to public participation, and other forms of harassment which include violent attacks to the person, as well as stigmatisation, terrorist labels, hate speech, and trolling.

Notwithstanding these general trends, as the climate activism movement is diverse, so are the particular ways in which these threats and challenges affect activists. Similar to other human rights defenders, the specific risks faced by climate activists are influenced by (1) their social, economic, political, and cultural context, including their identities, and (2) the concrete strategies deployed by the individuals or groups to advocate climate action or justice. **Intersectionality plays a key role in the risks faced by climate activists, as various identities increase the likelihood that violence or other tactics might be used to limit their activism or impede their resiliency.**

Based on the more than 100 key informant interviews, surveys, and consultations that contributed to this report, the authors found that **the risks and support needs of climate activists are not fundamentally different to those of other human rights defenders, including EHRDs. This offers an entry point to break silos between organisations and movements and increase support for climate activists and climate groups** who are not yet receiving support from human rights, climate, and environmental protection organisations.

What do climate activists need from support organisations?

Most climate activists are aware of the risks they face and the specific ways in which these should be addressed. Support organisations must open spaces for the meaningful participation and discussion by climate activists, acknowledging climate activists' agency and overcoming misconceptions, in the words of two activists who participated in this project, of activists as victims that "need to be saved".

Notwithstanding, numerous climate activists find themselves unable to confront most of the risks and challenges they face alone. In many cases, this is due to insufficient resources or information, but in most situations, it is due to the disparity in power and resources they face vis-à-vis the private sector and States, and the lack of political will or capacity

on the side of States' authorities to support and protect them.

Consequently, as with other EHRDs and human rights defenders, climate activists acknowledge that different types of support would contribute to helping them secure their protection, wellbeing and the effectiveness of their activism in the light of hazards posed by State and non-State actors.

For the most part, **climate defenders agree that meeting their support needs does not require devising new types of support.** The greatest obstacles hindering climate activists' access to support are inadequate channels for communication between organisations offering these various types of assistance and activists; top-down design application procedures; and lack of capacity on the side of support organisations to meet the increasing demand of support by activists and defenders.

Thus, in order to **better assist climate activists, it is important to craft new language to describe the support, increase the capacity of intermediary organisations, create new ways and means of articulating and publicising the support, and leverage creative ways of delivering such support to reach more deeply into communities.** This is particularly relevant to reaching children, youth, and indigenous activists working on climate justice issues.

Concrete recommendations to achieve this, include:

1. **Increase accessibility of support.** Specific ways to achieve this, include making the application processes more friendly for climate activists, revising lengthy and stringent eligibility requirements and verification processes, revising minimum-age requirements and other de facto barriers, translating documents into local languages, and creating accessible content for persons with disabilities.

2. **Increase outreach and enhance communications to facilitate identification and access of potential sources of support.** Concrete steps include increasing the visibility of the of calls for proposals, available funding or training opportunities, and other types of support strategies, and proactively joining climate activists' online and offline spaces. Peer-to-peer communication is the most common and efficient way for climate activists to learn about support resources. When climate activists are not able to find resources through their networks

or acquaintances, they rely on digital tools – such as online portals and social media.

3. Tailor support to climate activists' contexts, by designing support strategies that are sensitive to particular intersectionalities; listening to activists when designing and implementing support measures; switching from a reactive to a preventative approach; and explicitly addressing psychological and psychosocial support.

4. Build bridges and coordinate action as a strategy to increase support capacity. To fill capacity gaps, identify opportunities for collaboration and strengthen alliances and networks of donors, support organisations, and local and grassroots organisations; and leverage networks and alliances to find ways of

jointly providing holistic support in specific cases. Engaging with non-traditional supporting actors is essential for contributing to an open civic space for climate activism. This requires engaging with institutions and organisations that traditionally do not work on climate change nor support human rights defenders, environmental defenders, or climate activists. Examples of stakeholders that should be involved include but are not limited to financial, conservation, digital security, multilateral, and mental health organisations.

To the greatest extent possible, **support strategies should be informed by the beneficiaries, and be context-specific, needs-based, and sensitive to gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, and other relevant aspects.**





Introduction

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As climate change impacts our everyday lives, livelihoods, and ecosystems, significantly harming the world's most vulnerable populations, thousands of individuals and groups have raised their voices to call upon world leaders, the private sector, and the public to take bold action to protect the planet and its people. They have formed a heterogeneous and diverse global movement which has been growing in numbers and relevance as the urgency to tackle climate change increases.

Across the world, these brave activists have raised awareness and catalysed responses to this urgent threat. In the words of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association Mr. [Clément Voulé](#), *'To the extent that pressure has built towards meaningful action on climate change, that pressure has been driven by the tireless commitment of these actors to raising popular awareness of environmental challenges, advocating for the realisation of the right to a healthy environment for all, including future generations, and proposing solutions.'*

Unfortunately, as the movement and its influence at national and international levels grows, so do the risks faced by those on the frontlines of climate defence. Adversaries of climate activism are increasingly trying to silence the voices of these brave defenders through different means, ranging from obstructive laws to violence.

In addition to these targeted attacks, climate activists often face a wide range of obstacles that affect their activism, integrity, security and wellbeing, including political, cultural and economic marginalisation; insufficient resources; and inadequate access to information.

As occurs with other human rights defenders, the risks and challenges faced by climate activists are

rooted in multiple intertwined structural situations and exacerbated by an imbalance in the resources and power of activists, as opposed to that enjoyed by businesses and governments. Thus, addressing these risks and challenges is no easy task. It requires upstream strategies to build strong, democratic rule of law systems through, among others, initiatives to secure States' observance of their obligations to protect, respect and fulfil all human rights, including the right to a clean, safe, healthy and sustainable environment.

Alongside such upstream strategies, it is essential to implement downstream measures to address the grave symptoms of the crisis, especially violence against climate activists. As highlighted by Special Rapporteur [Voulé](#), *'Urgent attention is needed at the local, national, regional and international levels to ensure that those fighting for climate justice receive the support they deserve, as a means of respecting their rights and ensuring that their struggles for climate action and a just transition are recognised and supported.'*

In acknowledgment, many actors, mostly civil society organisations, have deployed efforts to help activists confront the risks and challenges they face and address the multiple ways in which the civic space for climate activism is closing, as well as the consequences that such reduction has had in the enjoyment of human rights.

These efforts include strategies to raise the visibility of the crisis as well as initiatives to increase activists' capacities to respond to the risks they face, including violence. Regarding the former, [Special Rapporteur Voulé](#) and civil society organisations such as [CIVICUS](#), [ICNL](#) and [Earth Rights International](#) have produced comprehensive reports detailing the specific threats faced by climate activists, including their prevalence and scope.

Regarding the latter, these same actors and other entities have implemented strategies and presented recommendations to multiple stakeholders, including States, to devise pathways to support climate activists.

One of these efforts was organised by ICNL and 350.org, with the support of the Vuka! Secretariat. Between April and July 2020, these organisations convened a series of consultations spanning an array of countries and civil society sectors, in order to determine how increased support could be provided to climate activists. As a result, participants (over 30% of which focus exclusively on climate or environmental matters) identified as a priority the need to develop alternative and flexible approaches to providing climate activists with support to confront specific risks and challenges.

Another key conclusion of these discussions, is that there is an apparent fissure preventing communication between those who identify as climate activists and the organizations that provide protection support to human rights defenders, including those defining themselves as environmental rights defenders. This gap limits efforts to strengthen the protection of fundamental freedoms and the civic space needed

by everyone working to defend a healthy planet and combat climate change.

Building on these efforts, this brief aims to identify concrete ways to deliver support for climate activists and contribute to bridging the fissure between support organisations, on one side, and climate activists, on the other. It offers an analysis of the specific ways in which organisations, including civil society and donors, working to support human rights defenders, environmental human rights defenders, and activists, can respond to the specific needs of climate activists.

Thus, although some background analysis is provided, the main objective of this document is not to map or analyse the risks and challenges faced by climate activists, but rather to offer **practical advice and guidance on how organisations working to support climate activists across the world can help these brave individuals and groups address the risks and challenges** they face as a result of their work to secure a safe climate for all. The overarching objective of this report is to contribute to efforts to help climate activists secure their safety, security, wellbeing and the effectiveness of their activism.

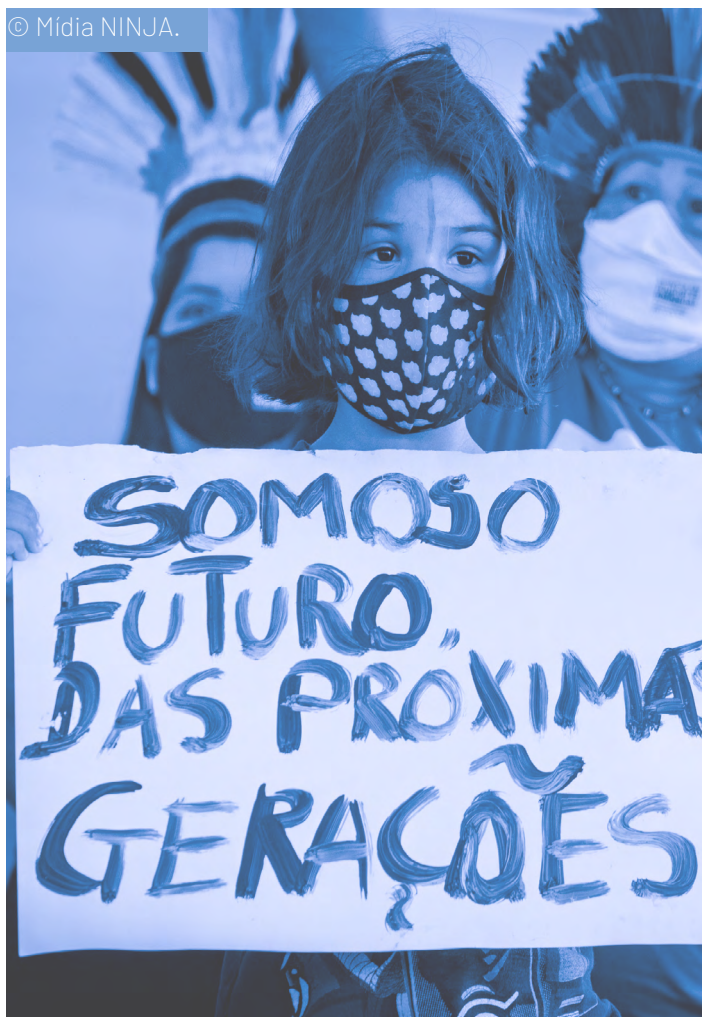
Methodology

This report has been built with direct input from 127 climate activists, EHRDs, and civil society organisations working to support them. To receive their input, the URG, with the support of Freedom House and the Lifeline Fund:

- Launched a global survey, to which 30 individuals and groups responded.
- Conducted 61 interviews with climate activists, representatives of climate action and justice movements, and support organisations;
- Organised one working session with representatives of 37 international civil society organisations, donors, EHRDs, and climate activists.

In addition to these consultations, the URG conducted extensive desk research and participated in multiple events and consultations with environmental human rights defenders, climate activists, and organisations working to support them.

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1 WHO are climate activists?



A climate activist is any individual or group (i.e., organisation, community or movement) who takes direct and noticeable action to address climate change and/or its causes and consequences, including global warming and extreme weather by advocating a safe climate, climate action, or climate justice. Most climate activists also advocate for sustainable production and consumption, as well as increased accountability of those who harm the climate.

But the 'climate activists' group is very heterogeneous: women, children, youth, formal and informal workers, coastal communities, small-scale fisherpersons, forest protectors, indigenous peoples, rural communities, scientists, journalists, lawyers, academics, conservationists, and entrepreneurs are some of the groups that constitute this large and diverse movement. As such, the climate activism movement encompasses a diverse group of people (individuals and groups) with varied opinions, concerns, strategies and solutions to the climate crisis. The heterogeneity of climate activists has led experts to define the climate justice movement as a 'movement of many movements.'

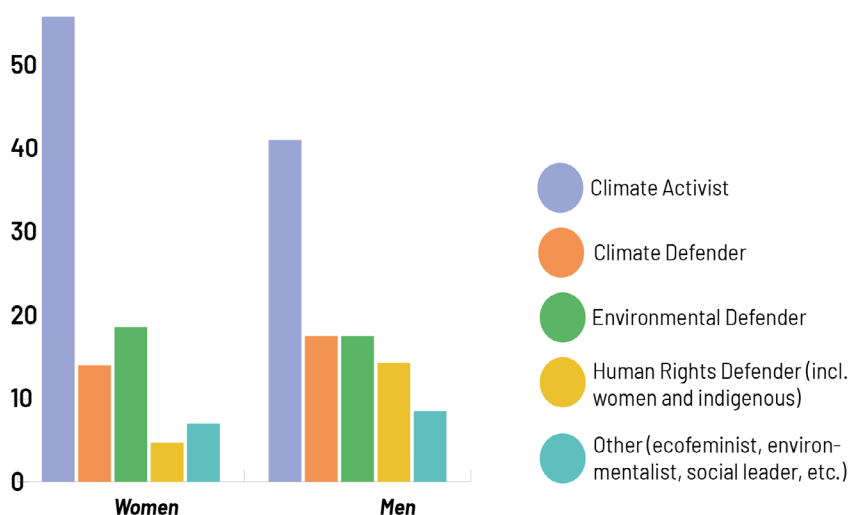
Such diversity may even lead to tensions within the climate activism movement. For example, marine conservation programmes in [Thailand](#) and [South Africa](#) have [negatively affected](#) the rights and livelihoods of local coastal and small scale fisher communities, but both protect the climate by opposing climate-harming activities, such as offshore oil and gas expansion.

Similarly, the implementation of certain climate-adaptation measures, such as wind farms, has in some cases [entered into conflict](#) with the rights of indigenous peoples, who advocate for a safe climate and oppose fossil fuel activities.

In addition to a safe climate, climate activists strive to achieve the fulfilment of multiple other human rights. For instance, most climate activists assert their rights to defend human rights, freedom of opinion, expression, and association. The majority of young, rural, indigenous, and coastal community activists actively call for the realisation of their rights to life, health, water, food and adequate housing – among many others. Numerous activists also strive to secure their right to equality and non-discrimination. Others seek to assert their right to work.

Several climate activists have issued [manifestos](#), [declarations](#), and [statements](#), making it clear that they are part of a global-scale movement to halt climate change. Others state it explicitly when describing themselves or their work. But not all climate activists explicitly identify as such. For instance, some defenders who acknowledge that they are part of the climate activism movement, like indigenous peoples, rural communities, formal and informal workers, women defenders, and many others may instead define themselves as human rights defenders, indigenous rights defenders, environmental defenders, or environmentalists, among others (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Ways that individuals taking direct action to address climate change and its effects identify themselves (percentages based on responses by climate activists who participated in the project)



Note: Self-calculated figures. For more information see the methodology section.

Consequently, climate activists and organisations working to support them agree that the key to identifying a climate activist is to understand – from the activists’ perspective – whether they advocate for a safe climate and climate justice for all.

Examples of climate activism include the 1990s efforts to address the impact of [greenhouse gases](#); the 2009 landmark [demonstrations](#) in Copenhagen; the [2019 petition](#) filed by 16 children before the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child; recent massive youth strikes coordinated by, among others, [Fridays for Future](#) and [Strike with Us](#); lawyers filing [strategic](#)

[lawsuits](#) against extractive companies; organisations working to implement projects for the [conservation](#) of terrestrial and coastal ecosystems; workers who advocate just transitions towards low-emissions economies, including through trade unions; and enduring [calls](#) by local communities and indigenous peoples to highlight the negative impact of climate change on rights, as articulated by [Zoe Craig Sparrow](#), [Sheila Watt Cloutier](#), [Patricia Gualinga](#), and [Nkosilathi Nyathi](#), among thousands more.

*Figure 2. Main strategies for climate activism
(based on responses by climate activists who participated in the project)*



Note: Self-calculated figures. For more information see the methodology section.



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IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CLIMATE ACTIVISTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS?

A human rights *defender* is *any* individual or group that takes *any* action to address *any* human right. Some of these individuals and groups defend human rights by taking *direct, noticeable action to influence decisions, policies or norms*. They are commonly known as activists. Strategies used by *activists* include protests, strikes, marches, and campaigns among others.

Environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs) are human rights defenders that strive to protect the environment and the human rights that depend upon it, including, in many cases, indigenous and land rights. EHRDs protect the environment from the three interlinked environmental crises: climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

While all EHRDs have in common the ultimate objective of a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, including its biodiversity and safe climate components, their specific objectives may be different. Some EHRDs focus exclusively on defending biodiversity or fighting pollution.

Others, namely, climate defenders, are more concerned with the changes in the world's atmosphere. Some of these EHRDs take direct noticeable action to achieve their objectives and are consequently referred to as *climate activists*.

However, these distinctions are easier to draw on the paper than in reality. For example, in Colombia, the Wayúu community of la Guajira has, for decades, been defending their territory and ecosystems from coal pollution. Among other actions, they have called on a coal company to cease activities in their territory and for a transformation in the country's economy to stop dependency on fossil fuels. They oppose the extraction and use of coal, in particular, due to its impact on their air, water and flora. Historically, Wayúu activists have identified as indigenous defenders: they demand the fulfilment of their rights, the rights of their children, and the integrity of their territory. But a safe climate and a halt to climate-harming industries have always been intrinsically embedded in their quest. Some of them, consequently, acknowledge that they work to secure climate action and climate justice.

On the other hand, not all environmental defenders and activists address human rights concerns. Some environmental activists protect biodiversity as an end in itself, without addressing its links to human rights and even in the absence of human impact. Many of these individuals advocate shifting from an anthropocentric to a biocentric perspective regarding the protection of the environment. As the [Interamerican Court of Human Rights](#) has



stressed, these efforts seek to protect the, “*Nature and the environment, not only because of the benefits they provide to humanity or the effects that their degradation may have on other human rights, such as health, life, or personal integrity, but because of their importance to the other living organisms with which we share the planet that also merit protection in their own right.*” The most common example are defenders who advocate for the protection or conservation of a particular **species**, as well as efforts to recognise the legal personality and, consequently, rights to **rivers**.

The specific objectives pursued by each defender or activist may influence the specific tactics they use to defend the environment or the climate, the networks they articulate with, and the decision-making spaces they seek to shape.

For instance, climate change is a global phenomenon and is hard to localise, while biological and geological degradation in many cases can be geographically centred. Thus, while climate activists may rely more on mass protests articulated through international movements and may have a high interest in influencing global decision-making processes, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), defenders of a specific ecosystem may rely more on community-based strategies of resistance and prioritise shaping the decisions of local authorities, like, for example, the agencies in charge of issuing environmental licenses.

But strategies are not exclusive of a particular constituency and, instead, tend to be shared by most activists or defenders. Indeed, biodiversity defenders commonly rely on **marches and civil disobedience**, climate activists frequently deploy strategies of **resistance**, EHRDs also seek to influence **international decision-making spaces**, and climate activists likewise focus on the decisions of **local authorities**.

Notwithstanding, from the input provided by individuals and groups who participated in this project emerges the conclusion that some distinct features that characterise the climate activism movement differentiate it from other human rights and environmental protection efforts. These traits are global coordination or articulation of claims across various movements and networks; increased online campaigning and the use of digital technologies (digital activism) to influence the public opinion and mobilise support; enlarged participation of youth and children; and direct opposition to specific activities and industries, including fossil fuels. The latter, shared with most environmental defenders, influences the participation of the private sector in the threats, violence and use of the law and judiciary, against climate and environmental defenders.

Notwithstanding, the tactics used to close the civic space for environmental defence (including climate activism and biocentric conservation) are very similar: violence, restrictive laws, and undue use of legal and policy frameworks. Thus, although the specific risks and challenges vary depending on their context, there is a lot of overlap in the threats faced by EHRDs, environmental or biodiversity defenders, and climate activists; consequently, overlap exists in the support needed by these individuals and groups to confront such risks.

Indeed, one of the key conclusions of this project is that the support needs articulated by climate defenders – including including better access to information, flexible funding, technical assistance, digital security, access to safe technologies, visibility, legal assistance, and psychosocial support – are essentially the same type of support needs requested by all human rights defenders.

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② WHICH are the specific risks and challenges that climate activists face?

Most activities that negatively affect the climate (and the environment in general) are backed by powerful economic and political interests. Opposing these powerful interests, climate activists (as do other EHRDs) confront a vast power imbalance and put themselves at high risk.

During the past few years, international civil society organisations have worked to clarify these risks and illustrate the particular way in which they affect climate activists. Research has shown that climate activists face at least four types of threats:¹ **threats to assembly**, including protest bans and restrictions, criminalisation of non-violent protests, and critical infrastructure laws; **threats to association, expression, and the right to information**, which include operation barriers, surveillance and infiltration, free expression and right to information restrictions; **threats to public participation**, which include Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPPs), curtailed participation in international climate conferences, limiting public input in large projects, and **other forms of harassment which include violent attacks** to the person, as well as **stigmatisation**, terrorist labels, hate speech, and trolling. In addition to these threats, increasingly common tactics to fight back climate activism include **lobbying for subsidies** and other hidden policies that disguise the true cost of fossil fuels, **pushing the costs of the projects onto local communities** – often in the form of pollution or land grabbing, and **engaging in corrupt practices** to convince government officials to approve bad deals;² among others. Although with varying degrees of intensity, depending on the particular context, these threats are faced by climate activists in the **Global North and South**.

Concerning international-level threats, CIVICUS documented in 2019, that 'Civil society participation in recent UN climate talks has been restricted through **visa denials, deportations, and limited opportunities for UN-accredited organisations** to

register representatives. Even when civil society representatives are given the opportunity to take part, their perspectives and wisdoms as the first responders to the climate crisis are often **overlooked**. Even more worryingly, by failing to condemn member States that violate the rights of people to participate in environmental activism, the UN has continued to enable these States to derail UN climate talks and unravel the Paris Agreement, without any accountability to their own public.' The same threats, as documented by CIVICUS, are not faced by the private sector.

Notwithstanding these general trends, as the climate activism movement is diverse, so are the particular ways in which these threats and challenges affect activists. Similar to other human rights defenders, **the specific risks faced by climate activists are influenced by (1) their social, economic, political, and cultural context, including their identities, and (2) the concrete strategies deployed** by the individuals or groups to advocate climate action or justice. **Intersectionality thus plays a key role in the risks faced by climate activists, including violence or other tactics to close civic space.**

As a result, many of the threats and obstacles faced by climate activists are shared with other human rights defenders who face similar intersecting forms of exclusion, violence and discrimination.

For example, of the activists who participated in this project, a greater percentage of women than men expressed concern with smear campaigns, hate speech, deterioration of mental health, climate-induced disasters and loss of livelihood as a result of the climate crisis, and trolling and hacking.

Women activists who provided their input into this report expressed that those who rely on civil disobedience and mass protests are, as are many men, concerned with police brutality, arbitrary detentions,

1. International Center for Not-for-Profit Law and European Center for Not-for-Profit Law. June 2020. Closing Civic Space for Climate Activists. Available at: <https://www.icnl.org/post/news/closing-civic-space-for-climate-activists>

2. Gobierno Territorial Autónomo de la Nación Wampis, FENAMAD, GINIW, and EarthRights International. October 2021. Available at: <https://earthrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Frontlines-of-Climate-Justice-Framing-Document.pdf>

3. International Center for Not-for-Profit Law and European Center for Not-for-Profit Law. June 2020. Op.Cit.

intimidation, harassment, and criminalisation; but in their case these unlawful acts tend to be accompanied with discriminatory and misogynist acts, including sexual violence: degrading searches, insults, verbal violence, and even rape. Online hate speech for women who participated in this project and their peers has also been accompanied by written sexual violence, including rape threats. Like them, non-binary and LGBTQI+ activists frequently see violence against them accompanied by insults based upon their gender and sexual orientation. Participants also expressed that these activists commonly face particular forms of mistreatment including the systematic denial of their gender-identity.

Furthermore, female activists who belong to minority groups, such as ethnic minorities, are particularly vulnerable to sexual assaults and are at higher risk of seeing their human rights violated in detention centres or during trials, particularly when they do not speak the same language as law enforcement agents.

Intersecting patterns of discrimination and violence also influence stigmatisation and smear campaigns. Most frequently, these tactics attack women for not complying with gender stereotypes and aim at destroying not only the support they enjoy within their communities, but also seek to weaken family

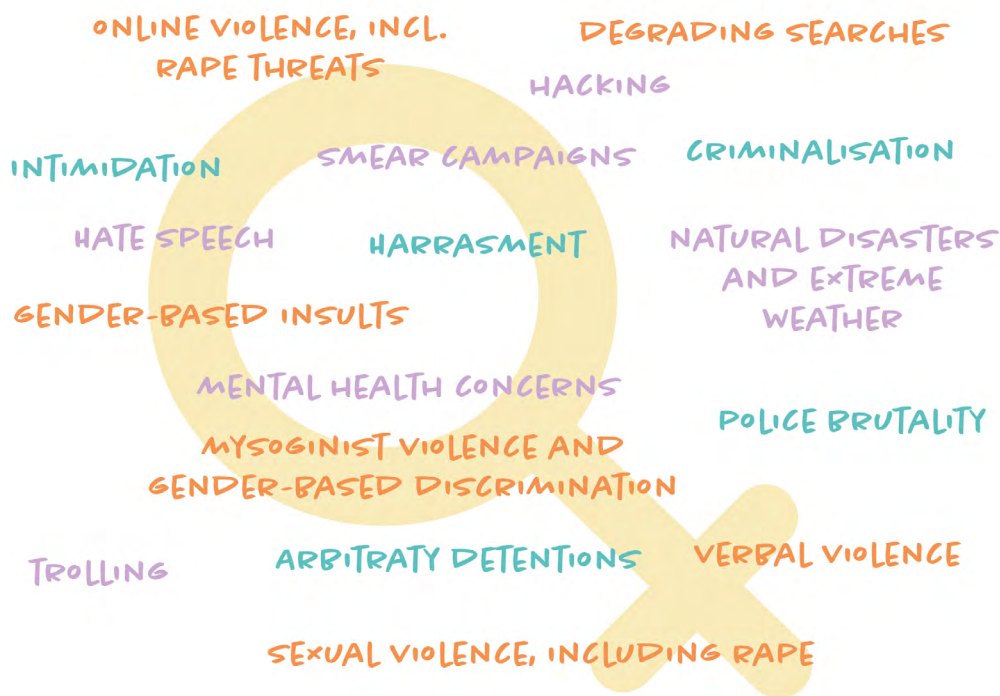
bonds (i.e., by offering family members jobs in the companies the women are opposed to) as a strategy to silence them. These gender-specific risks are common in all countries but particularly acute in States with weak rule of law systems.

Similarly, people with disabilities face particular vulnerabilities that increase risk of mistreatment. For example, persons with disabilities tend to face degrading treatment during demonstrations and when trying to join decision-making spaces. They face higher obstacles to participation because many online and offline multilateral and civil society-led spaces are simply not accessible.

But in addition to the risks shared with other human rights defenders, climate activists also express their concern with threats that appear to affect those who make part of the global climate movement, due to its specific traits. For instance, regarding persons with disabilities, these climate activists commonly face obstacles to join wider climate justice and climate action campaigns because these are not accessible or responsive to their particular needs. In multiple cases, their opinions are disregarded by various stakeholders due to their disabilities.

Such a condescending response is also commonly faced by children and youth activists. Most of

Figure 3. Risks faced by women climate activists
(based on responses by climate activists who participated in the project)



Case study

RM is a young queer activist of African descent from a Latin American country. He is part of a local chapter of Fridays for Future. RM's climate activism seeks to address intersectionalities and secure the protection of individuals in situations of marginalisation and exclusion based on gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. He opens spaces for dialogue and opportunities to design forward-thinking solutions to climate change that respond to these intersectionalities. RM has further worked with local communities in the Amazon to raise the visibility of their causes and mobilise solidarity and financial resources to help them cope with climate change impacts. RM has directly opposed companies that pollute the Amazon and his government's environmental and gender-diversity policies.

As a result of his climate activism, some of RM's colleagues have been killed and detained during protests and demonstrations. RM has further faced violence from the police and security guards in different circumstances. These attacks have not only stemmed from his safe climate actions but also from his inclusion of gender- and race-based concerns in his activism. For example, RM has been violently removed from public events by security bodies, while none of their white peers has; and has been 'requested' multiple times not to conduct peaceful demonstrations that involve LGBTIQ+ rights in public spaces. His heterosexual colleagues have not been silenced in the same way.

the young activists who participated in this project expressed concern that in decision-making fora, and, to a lesser extent, in academic institutions, they tend to be ridiculed and not taken seriously by counterparts on the basis of lacking formal training and experience to sustain their claims.

The political and economic context children live in sharply influences other risks that these activists face. For example, young activists that participated in this project from main population centres in Australia, New Zealand, Occidental Europe, and the United States acknowledge that they feel safe during strikes and marches because strong institutions and supportive communities prevent violence against them. However, in the digital sphere they feel more vulnerable to attacks, including to bullying, hate speech, and cloning. Moreover, they commonly face reprisals and discrimination from different actors, including academic institutions. As documented by Special Rapporteur [Voulé](#), these situations have been 'condoned and even supported by authorities.' Youth activists that contributed to this project mentioned as examples of these situations extra homework or suspensions for participating in youth strikes.

These risks, in many cases paired with climate anxiety and academic and activism loads, significantly affect young activists' mental health, concretely leading to anxiety and depression. In some cases, youth activists face the risk of suicide. Many young activists

expressed concern that **threats to their mental health have not yet been made equally visible as threats to their physical integrity**, including that of adult climate activists. Mental health concerns tend to be exacerbated by fear for their peers from communities in situation of exclusion or marginalisation and from countries without open civic spaces.

Such fears are, unfortunately, well-founded. **Children and youth in situations of exclusion** or marginalisation also struggle with discrimination, mental health concerns, and online threats, but their most pressing risks are to their life and physical integrity, particularly, death threats and acts of intimidation. The most commonly known case is [Francisco Vera](#), who at age 12 received a death threat for his climate activism. But Francisco is the visible face of many other young activists. A girl from a Latin American country with a repressed civic space who participated in this project has not only been intimidated but has also seen her family harassed as a consequence of their climate activism. Sexual violence – as mentioned before – is a latent threat for her and her female relatives. A girl from an Asia-Pacific country who participated in this project expressed that she lives in constant fear after one of her colleagues was killed. She, and many of her peers, have also found themselves intimidated by law enforcement authorities during peaceful protests.

Like them, adult activists from **historically excluded or marginalised communities** live in ceaseless fear

Case study

Sami Aaron is the mother of Kevin Aaron. Kevin was a young climate activist from the United States. Kevin was passionate about raising awareness of climate change and its effects and devoted his days to conducting research on climate change and implementing environmentally friendly practices that would help the society transition to sustainable practices. But, as his mother explains, the more deeply Kevin became involved in climate activism, the more severe Kevin's ecoanxiety grew. In 2003, Kevin died from suicide, age 27. Sami Aaron, his mother, who kindly supported this project, has since worked to highlight the risks that climate activism has for the mental health of young people and adults. Turning into a climate activist herself, Sami now focuses her activism on developing strategies for building **resilience** in activists, protecting the planet, and securing the personal wellbeing of those on the frontlines. Sami has raised the visibility and awareness of ecoanxiety or climate anxiety, which affects the wellbeing of activists but is yet to be consistently and broadly addressed by professionals and support organisations across the world.

of being physically attacked. Activists from these communities who participated in this project, including rural and indigenous peoples, have faced, at least once, intimidation and harassment. In remote or isolated areas, they express concern that State authorities may be easily captured by powerful interests and, instead of securing accountability for crimes and intimidation, turn against climate activists. Moreover, they may struggle to identify allies, connect with them, and receive support. In most cases, relocation is the only way to preserve their lives but even then, they struggle to survive because they often find themselves unable to secure a decent income for themselves and their families.

Historical marginalisation not only increases the vulnerabilities faced by activists and hence increases the risks of violence and discrimination, but further acts as a barrier to effective support seeking. Communities

and groups in situations of marginalisation and who have traditionally faced historical forms of discrimination, such as communities of African descent, local communities in situations of poverty, or rural and coastal communities in isolated areas, face threats to their survival and health commonly resulting from climate change itself. Struggling to secure a dignified life, these individuals and communities do not have the means or opportunity, in terms of time and resources, to articulate their struggles with human rights or climate activists' movements that may help channelise support. It is through their leaders that, in addition to humanitarian assistance, their particular needs and vulnerabilities are known and addressed by the international community.

'Challenges to indigenous peoples also stem from climate change mitigation projects that do not uphold respect for indigenous peoples' rights, including their

Case study

Rémy Zahiga is a young Congolese climate activist and the founder of **CongoEnviroVoice** and Save the Congo Rainforest. Rémy strives to save the Congo Basin rainforest by fighting against deforestation caused by mining and to protect its indigenous peoples.

Due to his opposition to massive deforestation and public claims upon the Congo basin, Rémy received multiple in-person and phone call death threats. Two of his friends were killed at the time he received these deadly messages. The threats came from non-State actors, but local authorities did not address the issue. Finding himself alone in light of the escalating threats, Rémy looked for support from climate action networks, relying mostly on social media to contact them. Climate activist peers around the world helped Rémy escape his country and get a temporary visa to relocate to a neighbouring State. Rémy had to stop studying, and leave his family, community, and work. Alone, and away from home, this brave activist continued to strive for the protection of the Congo Rainforest. However, in exile Rémy was unable to secure a decent income for himself and was, thus, forced to return to his hometown where his life is still in danger. He now lives in hiding while witnessing his colleagues being kidnapped and physically attacked by armed actors. Support organisations in the country do not have sufficient resources to support Rémy's case and have been forced to prioritise the situation of other activists who may be at higher risk.

rights to assembly, association and free, prior, and informed consent.’⁴ In addition, they constantly face the threats of forced evictions, SLAPPs and criminalisation, among many others. ‘Even when such sentences are not imposed, criminal prosecution and other forms of legal harassment impose serious financial burdens and generate significant social, economic and psychosocial impacts for the accused and their families and communities.’⁵

Risks associated with the misuse of the law and the judiciary to silence climate activists are common across the Global North and South but seem to be particularly prevalent for climate activists who oppose particular projects or actors. Examples of these laws include civil damage, trespass, critical infrastructure, vital installations, anti-terrorism, and public order laws and lawsuits which are used to criminalise, penalise, or sanction climate activism.

Moreover, across the world, activists are raising awareness on how data security and privacy laws, in combination with anti-terrorism or public interest laws, are being used by governments around the world - including in large democracies from the Global North- to the detriment of activists. Most activists rely on the services offered by ‘big-tech’ firms, but

these companies normally have to comply with data disclosure frameworks or are allowed to sell private information to governments and other actors, hence (mostly unintentionally) exposing climate activists. Individuals with training and education in technology may have more tools against these forms of surveillance, but **climate activists that do not have the knowledge or resources to use safe technologies or platforms**, including those in rural and isolated areas, are further exposed to these threats. Additionally, the platforms most commonly used by climate activists are powered by firms based in countries like the United States, in which data privacy regimes, in the words of a climate activist who contributed to this project, ‘are concerning and do not offer much protection.’ The best known case is the detention of [Disha Ravi](#), who was [arrested](#) in India for sharing via GoogleDocs a toolkit to the farmers’ protest against agricultural bills.

Even platforms that are considered [secure](#) and located in countries with strong data protection regimes have been forced to disclose information to governments, leading to the arrest of [climate activists](#).



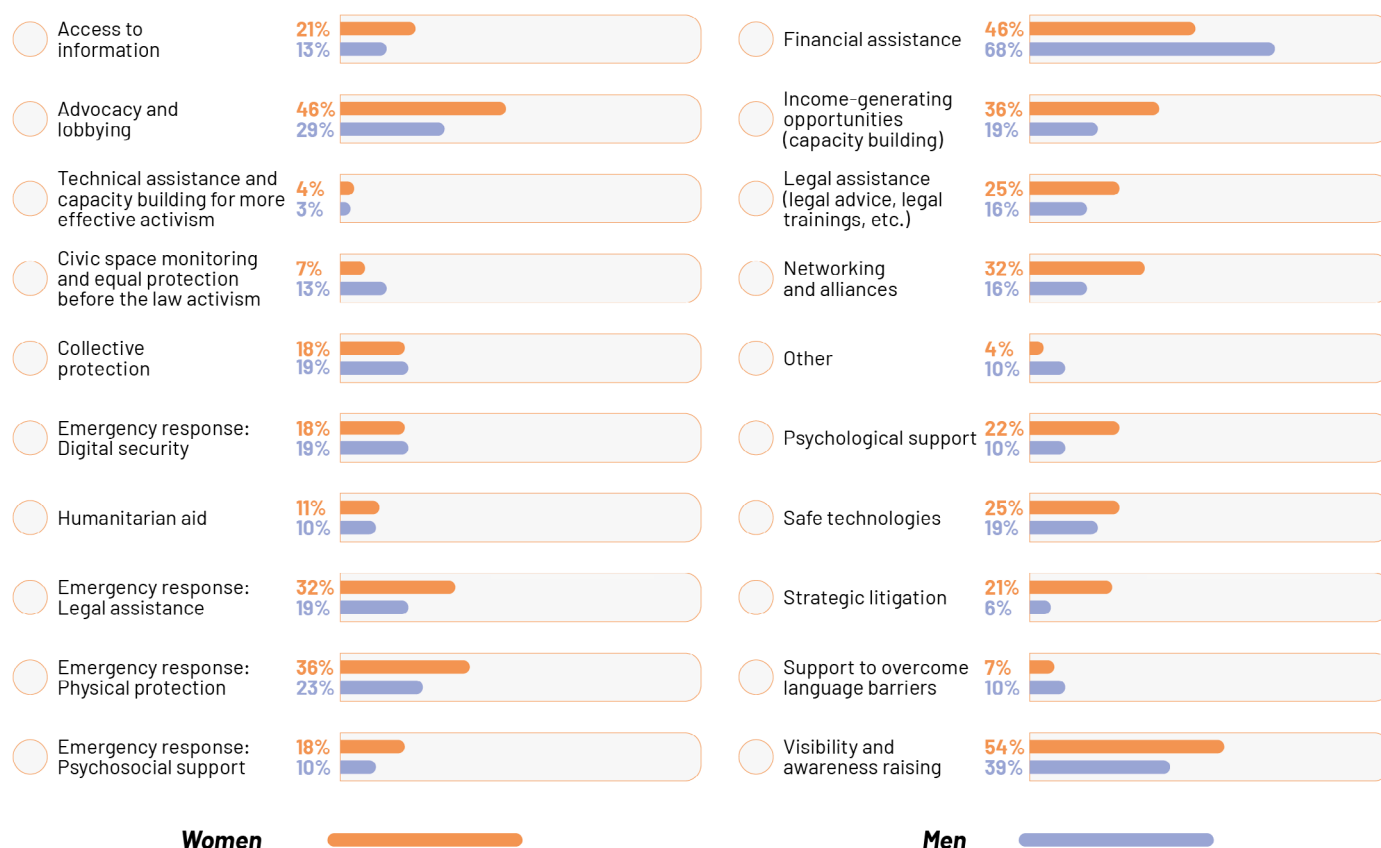
4. United Nations. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Clément Nyaletsossi Voule. Exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association as essential to advancing climate justice. UN Symbol: A/76/222

5. Ibid.

3 WHAT do climate activists need from support organisations?



Figure 4. Most pressing needs
(based on responses by climate activists who participated in the project)



Note: Self-calculated figures. For more information see the methodology section.

Most climate activists are aware of the risks they face and the specific ways in which these should be addressed. Consequently, to identify concrete opportunities for support, organisations must open spaces for the meaningful participation and discussion by climate activists, acknowledging climate activists' agency and overcoming misconceptions, in the words of two activists who participated in this project, of activists as victims that 'need to be saved.'

Notwithstanding, numerous climate activists find themselves unable to confront most of the risks and challenges they face alone. In many cases, this is due to insufficient resources or information, but in most situations, it is due to the disparity in power and resources they face *vis-à-vis* the private sector and States, and the lack of political will or capacity on the

side of States' authorities to support and protect them. Consequently, as with other EHRDs and human rights defenders, climate activists acknowledge that different types of support would contribute to *helping them secure their protection, wellbeing and the effectiveness of their activism* in the light of hazards posed by State and non-State actors.

Most commonly, climate activists tend to agree that their activism and protection could be strengthened with forms of support than can be grouped into three main categories: 1. maintaining a safe and enabling civic space for climate activism; 2. strengthening climate activists' capacities and resources for risk management and mitigation; and 3. providing support to respond to situations of emergency.

3.1 Maintaining an open civic space and solid environmental protection frameworks

Ideally, all climate activists should be able to work in a safe and enabling context for the defence of human rights and the environment. Such a context depends upon an open civic space achieved through robust and enforceable legal and policy frameworks that allow individuals and groups to assert their rights and freedoms of access to information, participation and justice, opinion, expression, assembly, association, and education, among others. It also requires institutions and a culture that respect the environment and human rights.

Relevant efforts needed by activists to protect and achieve strong civic space and environmental protection frameworks for the benefit of all climate activists include:

- **Strategic litigation** to shape environmental, climate, digital privacy, and civic space-normative, policy and institutional frameworks. Leveraging human rights and the judiciary – where the private sector does not usually have a direct influence – has proven to be an effective strategy to foster climate action by forcing States and fossil fuel companies to take steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and uphold human rights, including the right to freedom of association through trade unions. Case law can also help to strengthen the protection of activists' privacy under the law. Judicial rulings further add legal weight to climate activists' arguments, thereby augmenting their legitimacy
- **Equal protection activism**, to secure the equal recognition and fulfilment of every person's right under the law, including by adopting special measures for those in a situation of vulnerability. Examples include [SustainedAbility's](#) efforts to advocate and raise the visibility of the impact of climate change in persons with disabilities and the particular needs of climate activists with disabilities
- **Civic space monitoring and protection efforts**, to raise the visibility of and act upon norms, policies, and administrative practices that directly (i.e., critical infrastructure laws, strike-bans, or age-based restrictions to join demonstrations) or indirectly (i.e., burdensome operational requirements, registration status requirements) close the civic space for climate activism.

Efforts to oversee civic space during multilateral negotiations, and devise concrete strategies to secure the protection of climate activists in these spaces, such as during UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties (COP) are also needed. Particular assistance will be needed to secure participation and protection of activists during upcoming UNFCCC COP27 in Egypt. Examples of these efforts include the reports by ICNL, EarthRights, and Civicus referenced in the previous section of this report. Good practices to address restrictions to child activists include Amnesty International's campaigns '[child rights demand protection](#)' and '[Protect the rights of child human rights defenders](#).'

- **Visibility and awareness-raising** efforts to build solidarity among all stakeholders, including public officers and the public. Particularly:
 - **Increased mainstream media coverage** in consultation with the relevant activists to showcase their work and shift the focus of climate activism narratives from the risks they face to the positive impact of their advocacy on the lives of all. These efforts are also needed to counter smear campaigns, stigmatisation, and disinformation. An example of this is [The Guardian's](#) series showcasing how indigenous activists are addressing climate change.
 - **Increasing the public's understanding** on climate change and its effects, helping foster more responsible patterns of consumption and use of natural resources, and helping the public understand, in the words of climate activists who participated in this project, 'why climate activism needs to be taken seriously.'
- **Advocacy and lobbying** decision-makers to help influence projects, norms, and policies, at international and national levels. These efforts are needed to help counter the power imbalance that climate activists face *vis-à-vis* fossil fuel lobbyists, for instance, as [occurred during COP26](#). An example of a good practice in this regard is [The Good Lobby Climate Incubator](#).

3.2 Building resiliency for risk prevention, management, and mitigation

In addition to these general efforts to secure a safe and enabling civic space, climate activists frequently need support to strengthen their resources and capacities to prevent, manage, mitigate, and overcome specific risks that affect them as individuals or groups.

In this regard, climate activists highlight the following precise support strategies:

- **Access to information** on *existing support resources and strategies* and the type of support that could be provided by international, regional, and local entities; *human rights norms and mechanisms*; how to find and leverage *scientific information and technological resources* (i.e., how to use devices to document human rights abuses or environmental degradation, and how to leverage digital technologies for more effective campaigns and solidarity building efforts); the functioning and role of national and international *decision-making processes*; and basic recommendations and guidance to secure their protection during demonstrations.

Specific activities that climate activists consider effective to delivering this type of support include handbooks, guidelines, and online and in-person training courses. Digital tools and relevant documents that simplify the search of support are also needed. Peer-exchange spaces where climate activists can listen to and learn from other activists who had lived through similar situations are also amongst the most valued sources of information for climate activists.

Similarly, simplifying and explaining key advocacy and defence documents is an important way to increase access to information, including documents concerning human rights instruments and mechanisms, projects with environmental impact, decision-making processes, and access to support. An example of these kinds of efforts is [UNICEF's toolkit for young activists](#).

- Capacity-building to design and implement **collective protection and holistic security strategies**, through tailored training, accompaniment, and assistance developing security protocols.
- **Psychological support** to cope with ecoanxiety and mental health issues derived from the risks and threats, like, for example, depression caused by degrading treatment, discrimination, or trauma

from exposure to violence, including when activists witness first-hand violence, as occurs when a group member is killed, raped, or forcibly disappeared. Psychological support must be tailored to the specific needs and context and provided by experts who are sensitive to intersectionalities, such as gender, age, disability, and race, among others. Good practices highlighted by climate activists who participated in this project include therapy or rest spaces that involve their group or family members, secure retreats and special rest places with mental health professionals. Other related resiliency measures needed by most climate activism include raising awareness on ecoanxiety and ways in which climate activists can cope with it.

- **Financial aid** (see Box 'Flexible Funding') for expert support (including legal, psychological, and scientific), mass campaigning (including through social media and mass circulation media), income-generating activities, outsourcing administrative tasks, and safeguarding participation in international fora (which tends to be dependent on activists' capacity to assume indirect costs such as acting through legally established organisations or assuming travel expenses).

Additionally, for many climate action groups and networks insufficient financial resources are an obstacle to growing and sustaining their movements. Helping them grow and strengthen is important to contribute to amplify the message, but also because these networks and movements deliver support and act as bridges between support organisations and activists at risk. Many individuals are not able to join these groups as unpaid volunteers or the movements and organisations themselves lack the time and resources for outreach activities. Offering funding for paid positions from entry to senior levels is needed to secure the long-term sustainability and growth of the movements.

- Financial aid for sustainable income-generating projects is a particularly pressing need for women and indigenous activists who seek to develop activities that are consistent with their cultures and values and are often excluded from other financial and income-generating opportunities.
- **Legal support**, to receive redress and reparation and to respond to and prevent the misuse of the legal and judiciary systems, including criminalisation, judicial harassment, surveillance, unlawful prosecution, threats of persecution (i.e.

under critical infrastructure laws), and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). This includes long-term support that lasts throughout the entire duration of the relevant trials or judicial processes. Specific ways in which legal support can be delivered include (1) empowering communities or group members as paralegals including through training and education programmes with universities and (2) offering legal representation and advice via pro-bono programs. Increasing the number of legal civil society organisations may be needed, as climate activists and supporting entities frequently highlight their lack of capacity as a barrier to more effective and accessible legal support.

In addition, legal training on human rights and how to claim them are needed to help climate activists deal with ‘fear of authority’ that in many cases hinders activists’ capacity to effectively respond to and engage with law enforcement agents in situations of crisis. Examples of this include the Climate Defense Project and Extinction Rebellion [know your rights](#) toolkit, and similar tailored trainings.

In the particular case of indigenous peoples, legal assistance is also needed to help self-governing communities identify the cases over which they could claim jurisdiction, as well as clashes and opportunities between self-governing and national frameworks.

- **Networking and alliance-building** to increase access to information and support through different strategies including fostering peer-learning, connecting activists with donors and experts, and facilitating the referral processes on which the delivery of support depends. Inviting climate activists to join existing networks, organising meetings and events to facilitate networking, and connecting women’s and indigenous peoples’ rights associations and networks with climate activists and EHRDs support organisations are specific steps to deliver this type of support.

In some cases, activists are not part of a global network or movement due to concerns on the implications that joining such groups may have for them or their communities. These fears arise mostly from the stigmatisation of these groups and networks. Addressing these misconceptions and raising the visibility of what climate activism networks and groups do, how they work, and what they can offer to activists on the frontlines is needed to bring support closer to these isolated activists.



- **Access to safe technologies** that enable activists to amplify their messages and reach out to peers and supporters. This includes facilitating and financing connectivity services, access to devices, information on safe platforms, access to community-managed platforms (as opposed to big-tech-managed platforms), digital literacy, and security training—ideally, with a focus on prevention and tailored to their specific contexts. How ‘safe’ a specific platform or technology is depends upon the specific country (including data protection and antiterrorism laws in force) in which the activists are located; thus, trainings on safe technologies and how to use them safely would most likely need to be complemented with tailored accompaniment and legal advice on the implications that existing data protection frameworks may have for their activism.
- **Securing their meaningful participation.** To strengthen the participation of climate activists, it is necessary to address barriers such as accessibility, travel restrictions, and lack of financial means or information; securing activists’ recognition as legitimate actors in these decision-making fora, particularly in the case of children and young activists; observing and guiding processes of free, prior, and informed consent; creating and strengthening multistakeholder spaces for discussion; advocating meaningful inclusivity in different spaces, including by observing the special needs of persons with disabilities, women, sexual orientation, gender identity-diverse individuals, and racial and ethnic minorities; allowing activists to inform the design, implementation, and assessment of support strategies; and increasing

their knowledge on relevant decision-making processes and fora as well as how to influence them.

- **Tailored technical assistance and capacity-building** to:

- ▶ Engage with States, businesses, and international financial institutions (IFIs) safely and efficiently.

- ▶ Interact with law enforcement agents in cases of latent arrest or seizure of goods or information.
- ▶ Hold States accountable, demand the fulfilment of their human rights obligations, and obtain redress where relevant.
- ▶ Design, monitor and evaluate climate change-related projects and campaigns; and
- ▶ Leverage scientific evidence to support activism.

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3.3 Responding to emergency situations

Many climate activists need support to respond to imminent risks to their lives and integrity. Most activists express that the best means to deliver emergency support are *flexible grants* (See Box 'Flexible Funding'), *accompaniment*, and *24/7 online and phone assistance* (the latter being the hardest to find). Specific areas where emergency support is most needed include:

- **Digital security**, mostly in response to digital surveillance, social media account closing, hacking, cloning, trolling, and data thefts. Specific strategies needed to respond to these situations include instant tailored advice and accompaniment.
- **Legal defence**, most commonly to respond to cases of judicialisation, arbitrary detentions, criminalisation, SLAPPs, and forced evictions by rapidly assigning a lawyer that can advise and represent them. Training group members to this end is also a desirable form of assistance.
- **Physical protection** schemes accompanied by psychological-wellbeing assistance for individual climate activists upon threats to their life or physical

integrity, as well as their families or communities. This may include climate activists' relocation, which typically requires a safe house, transportation, visa procedures, a stipend or allowance; security goods, such as cameras or mobile phones; and instant, tailored advice on how to act in situations of danger, including if and where to report threats, and how to respond to these cases and prevent their escalation.

- **Psychological-wellbeing** assistance to cope with ecoanxiety, stress, burnout, trauma, anxiety, and depression resulting from excessive workload, frustration in the light of unresponsive governments or companies, social tissue disruption, hate speech, discrimination or in-person and online violence, including degrading treatment. Most activists agree that an effective way of responding to this need is offering professional instant, tailored advice at no cost that involves close family or group members. Facilitating contact with families and communities—including when the activists are relocated or in detention centres—is also important.

In most climate change affected areas, humanitarian aid. Climate activists on the frontlines are particularly at risk due to climate change-caused disasters and other threats, including, among others, the COVID-19 pandemic and other infectious diseases. To confront

these, climate activists need medical services, food, and shelter, paired with efforts to secure inclusive natural disasters and early-warning and mitigation systems among others.

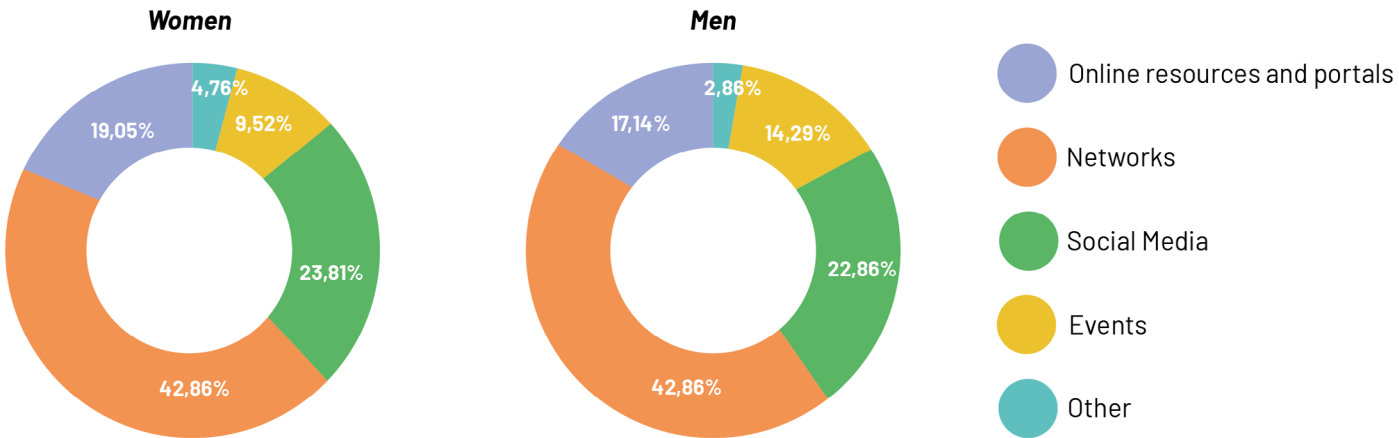
Figure 5. Most common needs by population group
(based on responses by climate activists who participated in the project)

| | | | |
|-------------------|---|--|--|
| Women and LGBTIQ+ | Emergency holistic support (funding and capacity-building) | Funding for income-generating projects | Fighting and increasing awareness on how to address gender-based violence and discrimination and mainstreaming gender-based approaches in mitigation and adaptation measures and protection strategies |
| Rural | Collective protection protocols and accompaniment | Context-sensitive activism toolkits | Funding for income-generating projects |
| Urban | Funding and capacity-building to respond to online threats | Psychological wellbeing | Visibility-raising |
| Youth | Promotion of participation in decision-making processes | Funding for developing youth-led projects and campaigns | Psychological wellbeing |
| Indigenous | Promotion of participation in decision-making processes, incl. Free, prior and informed consent | Collective protection protocols and accompaniment (sensitive to the need to protect and remain in the territory, and to recover lost or damaged natural resources) | Humanitarian assistance |

Note: Self-calculated figures. For more information see the methodology section.

Peer-to-peer communication is the most common and efficient way for climate activists to learn about support resources. **Networks and alliances** have also proven effective pathways for support. When climate activists are not able to find resources through their networks or acquaintances, they rely on **digital tools** – such as online portals and social media.

Figure 6. Where do climate activists look for support?
(based on responses by climate activists who participated in the project)



Note: Self-calculated figures. For more information see the methodology section.

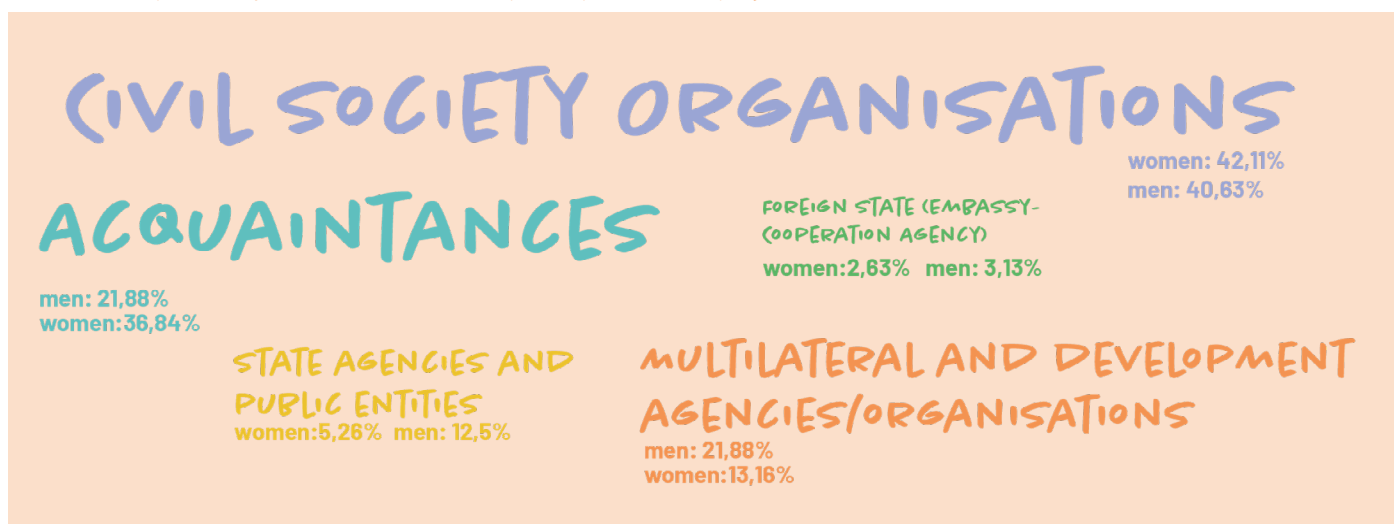
④ HOW to strengthen strategies and responses to support climate activists?

Multiple actors have put in place strategies and programs to respond to climate activists' support needs. Most climate activists receive support from civil society organisations and multilateral agencies – such as the United Nations Environment Programme and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. These strategies have notably helped climate activists to continue their activism and assert

their human rights, including the right to a clean, safe, healthy, and sustainable environment.

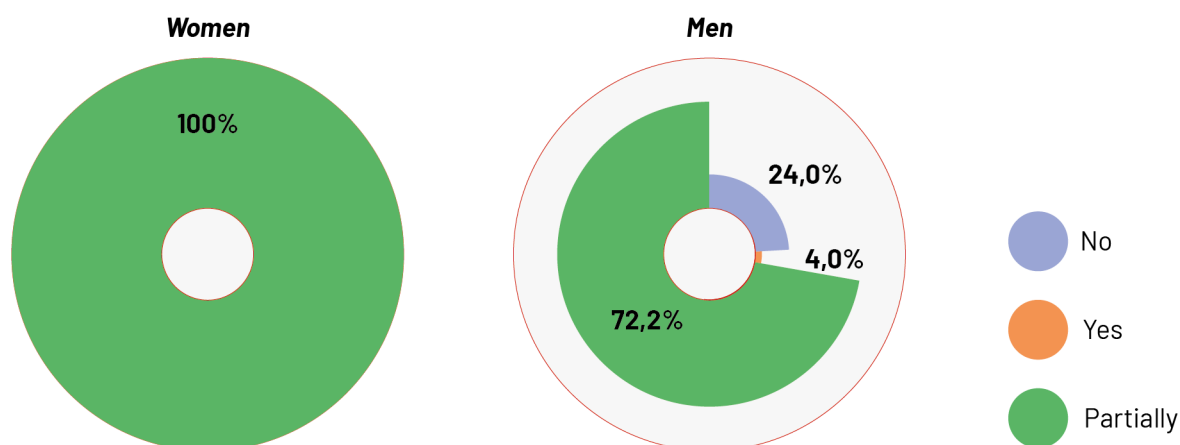
Notwithstanding how valuable this assistance has been, most climate activists (see Figure 7) still struggle to find allies and resources to meet all of their support needs.

Figure 7. Most frequent sources of support
(based on responses by climate activists who participated in the project)



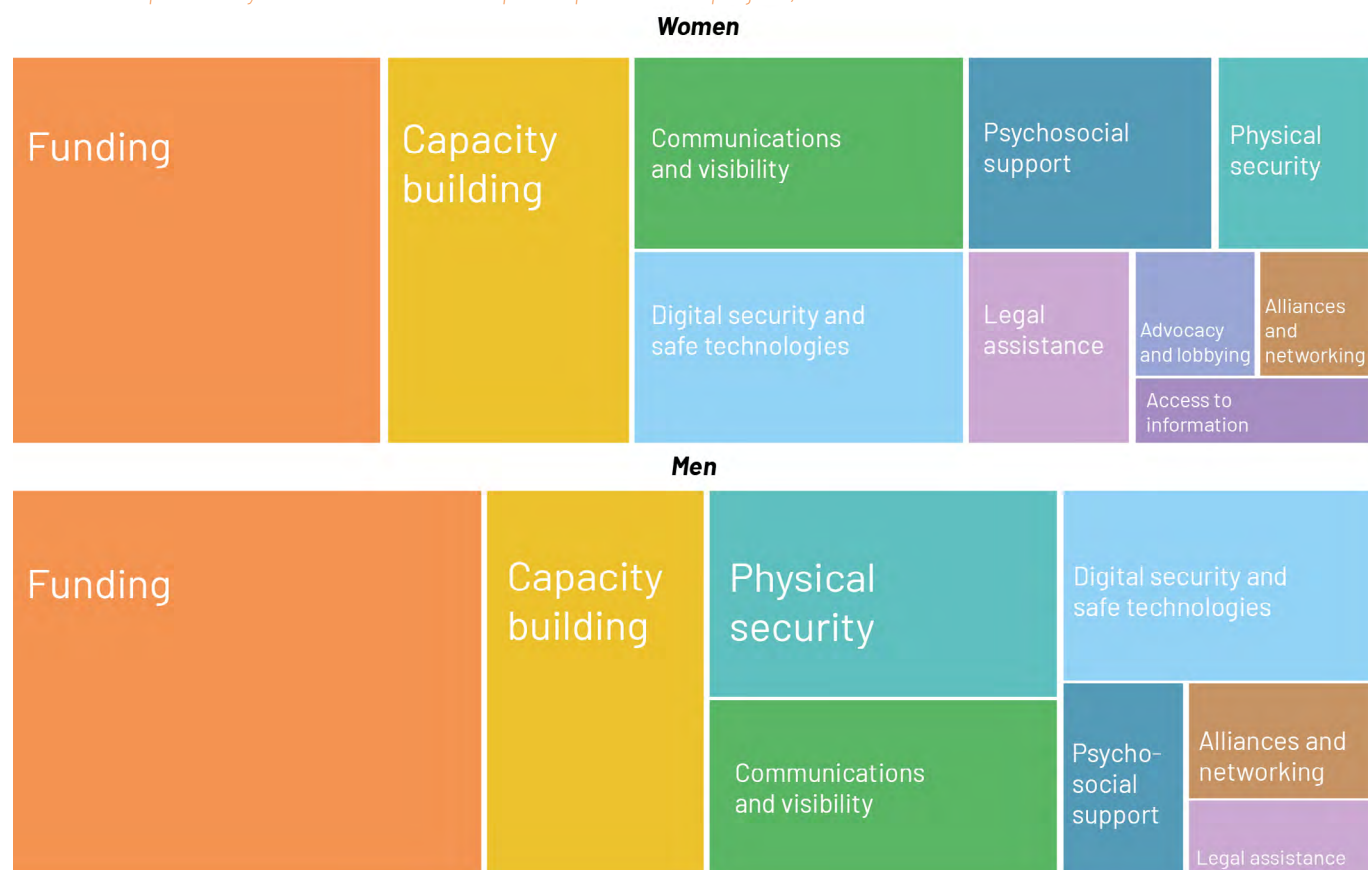
Note: Self-calculated figures. For more information see the methodology section.

Figure 8. Have you received the support you need?
(based on responses by climate activists who participated in the project)



Note: Self-calculated figures. For more information see the methodology section.

Figure 9. Most frequent unmet needs
based on responses by climate activists who participated in the project)



Note: Self-calculated figures. For more information see the methodology section.

In focus: Flexible funding

For emergency or resilience support, climate activists need flexible financial aid. **Flexibility** is needed in:

- Application and allocation processes

More speedy-allocation processes, especially in cases of emergency, and more flexible systems to wire funds.

✓ Recommendation:

Devise 'alternative background checks' to speed up the allocation of resources. For instance, create a secure database of activists that funders can consult to this end or create new effective referral pathways.

- Types of activities being financed.

Support the wide range of activities that climate activism encompasses and cover all associated costs, such as administrative, financial, and psychosocial, that this entails.

✓ Recommendation:

Consider covering 'overheads,' or administrative costs such as accounting or corporate law assistance. Likewise, offer funding for internal processes are not considered per se activism. For instance, some international groups have developed security schemes and advocacy guidelines for their members, but they require funds to adapt such guidelines to specific local and national contexts.

Specific steps to increase support for climate activists

For the most part, climate activists agree that meeting their support needs does not require devising new types of support but rather crafting new language to describe the support, increasing the capacity of intermediary organisations, creating new ways and means of articulating and publicising the support, and leveraging creative ways of delivering such support to reach more deeply into communities and tailor existing strategies to specific contexts— including to address intersectionalities and match the rapid evolution of tactics to close the civic space. This is particularly relevant to reaching children, youth, and indigenous activists working on climate justice issues.

1. Increase accessibility of support: make the application processes more friendly for climate activists

- **Facilitate application procedures** by allowing flexibility in the required documents and shortening application forms. Climate activists may struggle to understand the forms and provide all documents (mainly financial and impact-assessment files) requested to apply for support. Logical frameworks are also difficult to develop for activists without training or experience.

Most activists are unpaid and conduct activism during 'spare-time.' Women may need to develop household and care-giving activities. Children need to comply with academic workload (and most child-activists are already not enjoying leisure time). Indigenous peoples, fisherfolks, coastal, and rural communities struggle to generate a decent income for themselves and their families. Against this backdrop, the time needed to file and submit a support request must be short and the channels to receive such requests must be flexible. For instance, via social media, phone calls or instant messaging apps.

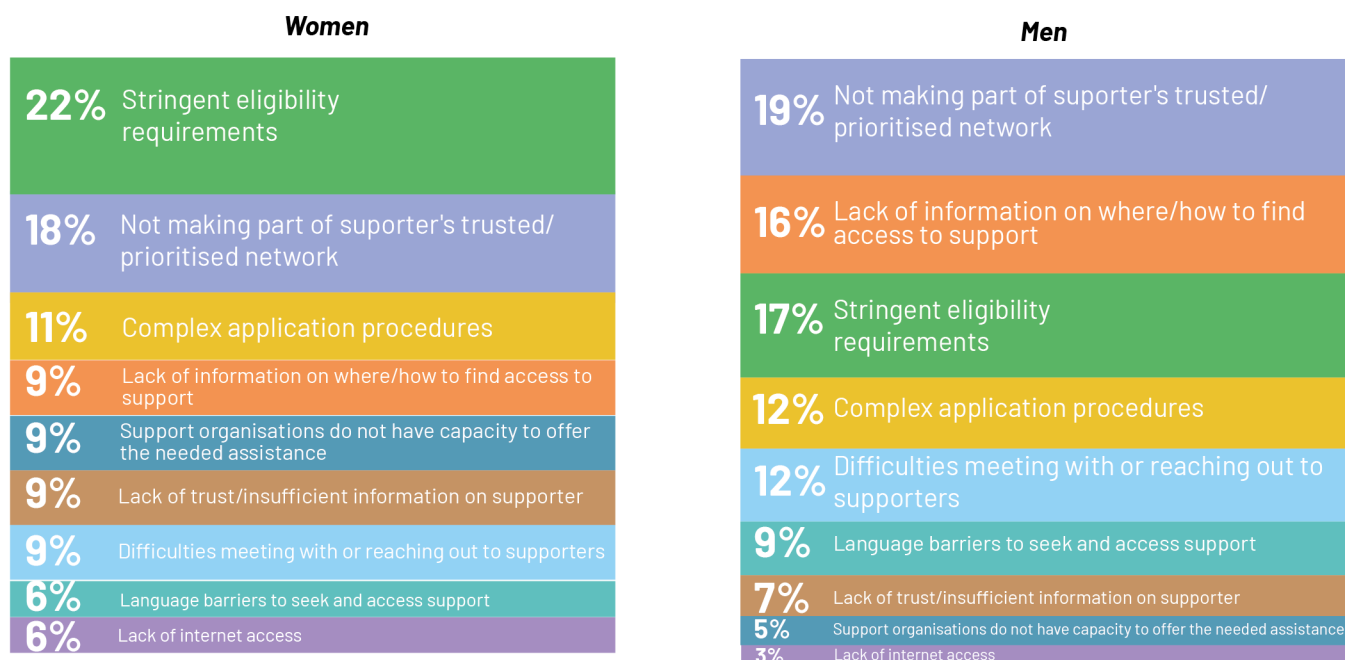
Revisiting application requirements to make them consistent with climate activists' contexts, especially children and indigenous peoples, would facilitate access to support. Being mindful of accessibility especially for activists with disabilities and making documents easy to understand by individuals and groups without formal education or training.

- **Revise lengthy and stringent eligibility requirements and verification processes** to make them consistent with the context of climate activists, especially children, youth, and indigenous peoples. Strict definitions of the beneficiaries create eligibility gaps that leave some credible and effective climate groups out entirely. For instance, individuals who are not associated with a civil society organisation but are acting through social entrepreneurship entities or academia are struggling to find support. Defenders who

do not identify themselves as climate activists may overlook support opportunities if these are advertised based on static definitions. To avoid this, adopt open and flexible criteria that do not limit the eligible beneficiaries to a specific 'definition.' Instead of static concepts, which might confuse or leave behind potential applicants, support organisations can clarify who is eligible using examples of the different activists and defenders that have benefited or could benefit from the relevant types of support—making clear that these are just illustrative and not exhaustive.

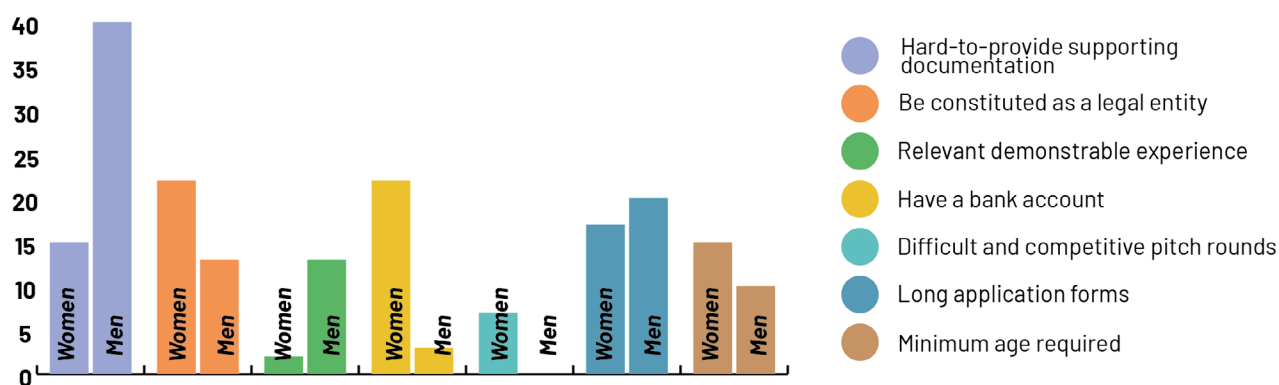
- **Revise minimum-age requirements and other de facto barriers** that directly or indirectly limit access to support. Make clear from the moment in which support is advertised whether it applies or not to people under legal age, and where possible, offer links or information on organisations that may offer alternative assistance. Even when support organisations, especially international civil society entities, do not explicitly require a minimum age to deliver support, these entities may have requirements (e.g., a bank account, operate through a legally established entity) that indirectly limit support based on age depending upon local regulations. For example, in some countries, children are not authorised to enter into binding agreements, incorporate legal entities or open bank accounts, which impedes their access to funding.
- **Translate documents into local languages**, including by creating partnerships with indigenous activists. Language is a barrier that significantly hinders Global South, grassroots, and indigenous activists' capacity to effectively participate and find support.
- Create **accessible content for persons with disabilities** and help climate activists and support organisations do the same.

Figure 10. Most common obstacles to find and access support based on responses by climate activists who participated in the project)



Note: Self-calculated figures. For more information see the methodology section.

Figure 11. In focus: a look into the stringent eligibility requirements based on responses by climate activists who participated in the project)



Note: Self-calculated figures. For more information see the methodology section.

2. Increase outreach and enhance communications

Most climate activists struggle to identify potential sources of support. Making the 'how to apply' more visible and easier to understand is an essential first step to reduce support-seeking times and reduce accompanying confusion. Increasing the visibility of the of calls for proposals, available funding or training opportunities, and other types of support strategies— including by overcoming language barriers and presenting information in indigenous, child, and adolescent, friendly channels and formats is also needed. Specific steps that may help increase visibility include:

- **Design outreach materials that are oriented to specific constituencies.**
- **Leverage online tools and existing resources**, but make these accessible by using languages, formats, and terms that are known and easy to understand by climate activists and responsive to specific needs, such as those of people with disabilities.
- Address the **digital divide**, including by developing and using offline tools for outreach.
- **Reduce support-seeking times** by offering a one-stop shop resource or mechanism for the easy identification of potential allies.
- Offer **guidance on how to apply**.
- On the relevant websites add a visible or easy to find section **clearly stating the existing support opportunities**, or that there are no open applications, as applicable.
- **Proactively join climate activists' online and offline spaces** to share information on existing available resources.
 - ▶ Where available, consult the public lists of climate activists registered to participate in climate events and reach out to them.
 - ▶ Attend meetings of climate activists to share existing support initiatives, and to listen to their protection needs.
 - ▶ Most climate activists work through networks and movements that in turn operate through different chapters. Engage with the relevant coordinators to channelise information about existing support resources.

Practical advice to design outreach materials



Use terms that are easily understood by recipients

Check for acronyms and legal and technical terms, which climate activists tend to be unfamiliar with. A good practice in this regard is the 'women empowerment strategies glossary' developed by Battered Women's Support Services in the United States.

If specific legal or policy frameworks need to be referenced, be sure to provide information about their meaning and scope. For example, if applicants need to explain how their strategies or projects contribute to advancing an existing convention, agreement, or framework such as the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda or a Multilateral Environmental Agreement, facilitate access to the relevant documents or websites. Do not assume that all climate activists are familiar with the specific content and indicators of these frameworks.

When a logical framework is required, consider clarifying what it needs to include and offer guidance on the diverse types of indicators.

Watch for words that acquire a specific meaning in specific contexts and use language that resonate with the relevant audience. For instance, children would most likely search for mental health, psychological, burnout, anxiety, or depression support instead of psychosocial wellbeing; rural defenders are more familiar with terms such as kidnapping than enforced disappearances.



Make the materials short and interesting (videos, images).



Use examples instead of static definitions to refer to audience and types of support offered.



Create different pieces of communication for different audiences and use their most frequent channels of communication to communicate with them

3. Tailor support to climate activists' contexts

- **Design support strategies that are sensitive to particular intersectionalities.** Adopt a flexible and bottom-up diversity-sensitive approach.
 - ▶ **Listen to activists** when designing and implementing support measures. Continuously inform strategies with climate activists' perspectives on their needs. This can be done through meetings, surveys, or country-specific consultations to identify concrete opportunities to strengthen support.
 - ▶ **Invite climate activists to strategic planning meetings** and allow them to shape the design and implementation of support strategies and programmes.
- **Switch from a reactive to a preventative approach,** including by conducting in-depth, country-level risk analysis through collaboration with networks, as well as investigating threats and working with governments and civil society to create better holistic protection protocols with a preventative approach.
 - ▶ Where appropriate and in consultation with climate activists, raise the visibility of specific cases before attacks.
 - ▶ Identify communities at risk and offer early resilience building.
 - ▶ Help activists develop protocols on how to identify and respond to threats in an early manner.
- Explicitly address **psychological and psychosocial support** needs as a necessary complement of all support strategies.
 - ▶ Actively engage with psychosocial and mental healthcare organisations by raising awareness about the pressing needs of climate activists, particularly those of youth and child activists, and devise platforms to offer assistance for activists.
 - ▶ Work with schools and academic institutions to raise awareness of the particular needs of student activists, including by building the capacities of teachers and trainers to identify early signs of mental health issues.
 - ▶ Work with grassroots and local organisations to analyse and address the impact of climate change, the risks faced by communities as a result of climate activism, and support strategies to strengthen the social fabric of communities.
 - ▶ Encourage the creation of platforms or groups for discussion, including of self-care practices where climate activists feel supported and know they are not alone.

Remember, climate activists include, among others:

- ▶ Students and workers
- ▶ Indigenous Peoples
- ▶ Non-profits
- ▶ Rural communities
- ▶ Women
- ▶ Internally and internationally displaced persons
- ▶ Coastal communities
- ▶ Fisherfolks
- ▶ Professionals, such as academics, journalists and scientists
- ▶ Persons with disabilities



To reach frontline and the most isolated climate activists go hyperlocal.

A common concern amongst support organisations is how to reach climate activists that are on the frontlines of climate change, including, for example, coastal communities, indigenous peoples, and rural groups. While the concrete strategies to reach out to these at-risk activists must vary according to and be informed by the specific local contexts, some practices that have allowed support organisations to reach out to isolated and at-risk defenders include:



Partner with **local and national networks of human rights defenders**, who may already be working with communities in situations of vulnerability. These networks may or may not address exclusively or explicitly climate change or environmental protection.



Identify the **grasstops** (grassroots leaders) and engage with them to identify peers, understand their needs, communities, objectives, and the support they need. Some examples of how existing networks and organisations have reached out to the **grasstops** include:

Check areas of environmental conflict or climate- or environmental degradation-induced disasters, migration, or displacement and reach out to local leaders striving to protect or raise the visibility of their communities. Journalists and human rights observatories may help identify these.

Support individuals or groups working to highlight the situation of peoples in areas most affected by climate change.

Engage with women who champion sustainable income generating projects as alternatives to extractive industries.

Reach out to traditional and religious authorities that speak on behalf of their communities during prior consultation processes. United Nations country teams or National Human Rights Institutions may shed light on these processes.

Work with legal clinics, including of universities that are offering support to rural communities affected by environmental degradation or climate change.

Work with grassroots activists who have been relocated, and from abroad continue their activism and denounce mistreatment of their fellows or communities.



Engage with local associations or organisations that advocate the protection of populations in situations of vulnerability as a consequence of, for example, extreme weather or climate induced disasters and intersecting patterns of discrimination based on factors including, *inter alia*, **gender**, **race**, **ethnicity**, or **socioeconomic status**.



Create **partnerships with local actors** that are in close contact with grassroots communities, such as journalists; National Human Rights Institutions; academic institutions that do climate research, support, or are home to climate activists; UN presence in-country; national networks of defenders; and local associations of rural communities, fisherfolks, Indigenous Peoples, women and other groups that advocate the protection of human rights at national level. Leverage these partnerships to increase outreach and enhance communications, for example by:

Helping these allies develop or access databases of supporters to speed-up support-looking processes and make existing referral pathways more efficient and far-reaching.

Working with them to develop context-appropriate (in terms of content and means of dissemination) outreach materials.

Organising meetings with the relevant groups.

4. Build bridges and coordinate action as a strategy to increase support capacity and outreach

- To **fill capacity gaps**, identify opportunities for collaboration and strengthen alliances and networks of donors, support organisations, and local and grassroots organisations. Specific steps include: 1) establishing regular and secure channels of communication, feedback, and effective **referral pathways** that can help organisations share support requests with other entities when they are not able to respond to them and 2) inviting local and grassroots networks of activists to form parts of these nets. Have key allies on the ground that can channel support requests and provide information.
- **Leverage networks and alliances to find ways of jointly providing holistic support** in specific cases. Most organisations are only able to provide a specific type of support, i.e., digital or physical security. These entities may turn to existing networks to identify allies that can complement the relevant strategies.
- **Organise regular meetings on thematic or geographic topics** of concern and invite activists to have active participation in these spaces. An example of this would be a space similar to the Human Rights Funders Network but focused on climate and environmental defenders in particular.
- **Break silos between movements** by building common ground as a strategy to increase collaboration between organisations working to support climate activists, EHRDs, and human rights defenders. Specific steps to achieve this include the following:
 - Identify shared concerns—such as common needs to develop digital security strategies, psychosocial wellbeing, or outreach to isolated defenders—and create strategies to act upon each of those shared needs.
 - Open spaces where different organisations can meet to connect directly to share resources and opportunities and leverage existing networks and coalitions that can ‘trickle-down’ information to their members.
 - Leverage strategies to address common cross-cutting matters of concern, such as gender equality, non-discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender and disability, transparency and anti-corruption, poverty eradication, violations to the right to participation, digital surveillance and data privacy, and freedom of expression, among others.
- **Strengthen local organisations** by offering funding and capacity-building to assist them in acting as intermediaries and bridging the gap between international supporters and local grassroots activists. **Create strategic alliances with them to facilitate the delivery of support.**
- **Broaden trust networks**, including the type and number of organisations that can refer activists and respond to requests for support. A concrete strategy is to create alliances with digital security and women, children, migrants and refugees, rural workers and indigenous rights organisations.
- **Build bridges** between climate activists, on the one hand, and support organisations and other EHRDs, on the other, including through meetings, social media, online resources, and other networking exercises, to foster knowledge exchange and peer-learning, as well as to increase protection capacities. Invite activists to join international networks and alliances and help them form networks that can channel support from protection and advocacy organisations that are oriented toward at-risk human rights defenders working on a range of issues.
- Create or strengthen two-way **relationships with academia** and acknowledge academics and scientists as climate activists where relevant. Help on the ground activists share information with academics and scientists to produce stronger data, including on the human rights impact of climate



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change, and help climate activists use scientific knowledge and information to support their activism, including legal claims and campaigns. Also create alliances with academic institutions to train and educate communities or offer protection, including legal support.

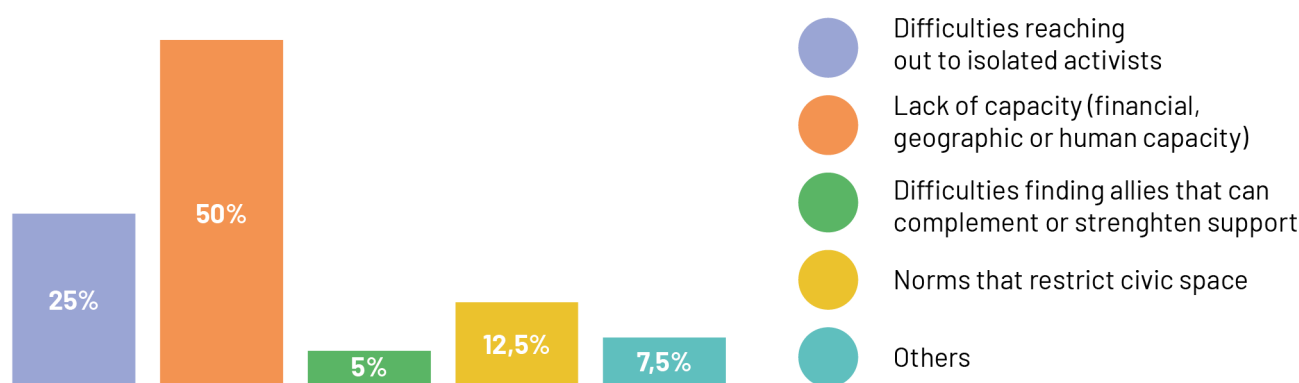
- **Reach out to other support organisations that offer particular expertise**, and are not yet supporting climate activists, to bring them on board (for example, on psychological wellbeing, digital security or collective protection). Identify potential allies and spaces that, despite not being focused upon or intended to support climate activism, can offer valuable support (i.e., digital security, funding, narratives, etc.) to climate activists.
- Reach out to organisations and individuals working to develop or **showcase positive human rights, climate action, and environmental protection**

narratives—for example, freedom of expression networks and journalists, among others—and with each of them explore opportunities for joint action, especially for raising the visibility of the support needs of climate activists.

- Build **strategic leadership coalitions and alliances to transform activism into political power** and build capacities in climate activists to achieve this at international and national levels.

To the greatest extent possible, support strategies **should be informed by the beneficiaries, and be context-specific, needs-based, and sensitive to gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, and other relevant aspects.**

Figure 12. Obstacles faced by organisations to deliver support (based on responses by climate activists who participated in the project)



Note: Self-calculated figures. For more information see the methodology section.

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