

Claim Your Space | Annual Briefer 2024

07.01.2025

Introduction

This Briefer outlines the support provided by the Danish rapid response mechanism, Claim Your Space (CYS), to human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) in countries in the Global South in 2024. CYS, which has existed since 2021, is financed by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and managed by Global Focus. Since the fund's inception, there has been a consistent demand for support from Danish CSO partners in the Global South. In 2024, the geographical scope of Claim Your Space was expanded to include all OECD DAC ODA Recipient Countries and interest for support in now-included countries is growing.

As a rapid response mechanism, Claim Your Space functions both as a reactive measure to respond when crackdowns occur and as a proactive initiative to help prevent crackdowns in the future. These activities are facilitated through the two-track model of CYS. Whereas Track 1 provides emergency assistance, Track 2 provides support for activities to proactively counter civic space restrictions, including enhancing alliance building among civil society organisations.

In the following, we provide an overview of the support provided under both tracks across countries, as well as some illustrative case examples of the thematic coverage of CYS in 2024.

Spending across countries

In 2024, Claim Your Space issued a total of 98 emergency grants to local groups and individuals under Track 1, offering direct support to 545 HRDs and civil society actors. Global Focus also issued a total of 12 coalition-building grants to local alliances of civil society organisations under Track 2 with 55 local CSOs directly involved in the implementation. The following is a breakdown of the grants issued to local partners of Danish CSOs under Track 1 and Track 2 in 2024.

Track 1 spending 2024

Emergency assistance to individuals and groups under threat.

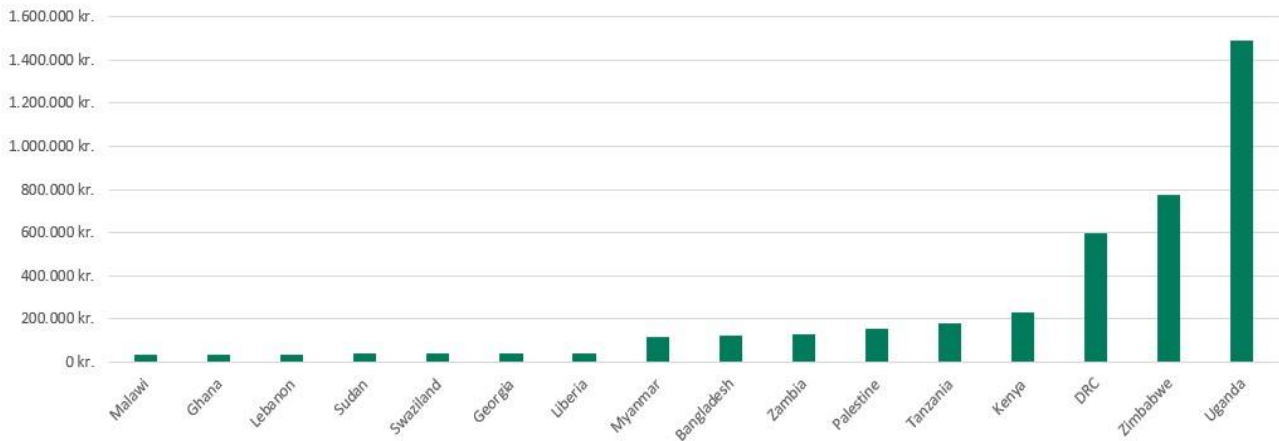
Totals	
Total number of countries	16
Total number of grants	98
Total number of beneficiaries	545

Average spending	
Spending per grant	41.653 kr.
Spending per beneficiary	7.490 kr.

Spending per country (low to high)		
Country	kr.	%
Malawi	36.895 kr.	0,9%
Ghana	37.281 kr.	0,9%
Lebanon	37.515 kr.	0,9%
Sudan	39.395 kr.	1%
Swaziland	40.775 kr.	1%
Georgia	41.012 kr.	1%
Liberia	41.030 kr.	1%
Myanmar	116.295 kr.	2,8%
Bangladesh	122.140 kr.	3%
Zambia	131.988 kr.	3,2%
Palestine	156.333 kr.	3,8%
Tanzania	183.767 kr.	4,5%
Kenya	231.375 kr.	5,7%
DRC	595.754 kr.	14,6%
Zimbabwe	778.058 kr.	19,1%
Uganda	1.492.364 kr.	36,6%
TOTAL	4.081.977 kr.	100%



CYS Track 1 spending per country

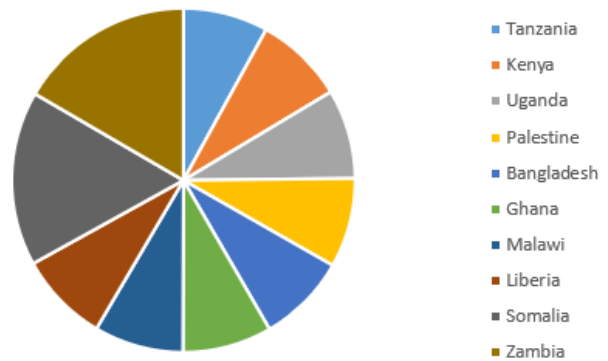


Track 2 spending 2024

Grants to local CSO alliances to collectively counter civic space restrictions.

Spending per country (low to high)		
Country	kr.	%
Tanzania	140.822 kr.	8%
Kenya	148.999 kr.	8,4%
Uganda	149.095 kr.	8,4%
Palestine	149.140 kr.	8,4%
Bangladesh	149.145 kr.	8,4%
Ghana	149.153 kr.	8,4%
Malawi	149.170 kr.	8,4%
Liberia	149.205 kr.	8,5%
Somalia	289.317 kr.	16,4%
Zambia	293.290 kr.	16,6%
TOTAL	1.767.336 kr.	100%

CYS Track 2 spending per country (in %)



Totals	
Total number of countries	10
Total number of grants	12
Total number of involved CSOs	55
Average spending per grant	147.278 kr.



To whom and for what? Examples of thematic coverage

In the following, we highlight a range of illustrative case examples of the thematic coverage of Claim Your Space in 2024. The descriptions of the different contexts and worrying developments regarding civic space and rights are based on knowledge compiled from CYS applications.

Authoritarian crackdowns

Civic space continues to be under pressure in large parts of the world and the number of countries where civic space is being restrained and limited is growing. Autocratic governments are to an increasing extent clamping down on dissent and targeting anyone among their population voicing critical viewpoints or engaging in civil society activism.

In August 2024, **Zimbabwe** hosted the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Heads of State and Government Summit in Harare. Ahead of and during the event, the regime orchestrated severe crackdowns against the country's civil society and opposition voices with scores of unlawful arrests and abductions reported, as well as beatings and torture of civil society activists during their incarceration. During this time, CYS provided funding to more than 30 civil society activists, who had been violently attacked by state agents and suffered severe injuries. Many activists were also forced to flee to neighbouring countries in fear of arrest and torture. The CYS support covered safehousing for groups of activists as well as medical assistance, including hospitalisation, medications and psychosocial support to allow them to recover and recuperate before returning home.

Similarly, in June 2024, the **Kenyan** government's new Finance Bill sparked a series of mass protests widely known by the hashtag #RejectFinanceBill2024. The largely peaceful protests, mainly orchestrated by youth groups, were met with severe police brutality and violence with scores reported hundreds injured and several killed by police gunfire. In response, CYS supported local CSOs to provide psychosocial assistance to victims of police brutality and torture, as well as medical and psychosocial support for the CSO staff on the frontline who were also targeted by the police.

Indigenous rights activists under pressure

CYS continues to receive a significant number of applications from indigenous activists working to secure the human and land rights of indigenous communities. In **Bangladesh**, indigenous groups are facing significant restrictions to their fundamental rights and are frequently victims of forced eviction and land grabbing, which constitutes an existential threat to these communities.

In 2024, CYS received an application from a prominent indigenous human rights defender from Bangladesh, where speaking out against rights abuses in these communities is frequently met with physical threats and state persecution. The applicant had on numerous occasions been followed by unknown individuals, physically assaulted, and targeted for kidnapping attempts by state agents. In 2024, the applicant narrowly escaped an abduction attempt by armed men in an unmarked car. In response to the situation, CYS provided funding to cover temporary relocation and basic living expenses until the danger had subsided.



Continuing clampdown on LGBTQI+ rights

LGBTQI+ rights was among the most frequent themes for both Track 1 and Track 2 CYS grants in 2024. In **Uganda**, attacks have been increasing and intensifying against HRDs and CSOs that work for LGBTQI+ rights and fight for equal access to healthcare since the President signed the Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2023. The law has had devastating effects as it criminalised being LGBTQI+ and made it illegal for CSOs to support LGBTQI+ communities, with rampant violence against these communities consequently. In response, CYS funded emergency medical assistance, post-violence psychosocial support, and emergency relocation for a large number of LGBTQI+ rights workers and activists in Uganda throughout 2024.

Another lingering consequence of the Anti-Homosexuality Act is the widespread disruption of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services by LGBTQI+ individuals. Patients avoid health clinics for fear of harassment and mass arrests. Health workers and CSO staff members are struggling with the dual pressure of trying to support a community that is increasingly vulnerable due to criminalisation and attacks, while themselves being criminalised because of their work. In response, CYS supported psychological first aid training to equip health staff members with skills to respond when they or their colleagues experience traumatic incidents.

In 2024, CYS also received applications reflecting similar tendencies in several other countries where anti-LGBTQI+ legislation was introduced. One example is **Ghana**, where a new anti-homosexuality act was passed by Parliament in February, criminalising LGBTQI+ people and requiring citizens to report individuals perceived as being LGBTQI+ to the authorities. Another example is **Liberia** where a similar anti-homosexuality act was proposed in July. Local CSOs are reacting to these developments and to support their work, CYS also provided Track-2 support to advocacy initiatives by coalitions of CSOs aimed at pushing back against this legislation.

Civil society struggling during protracted conflicts

In 2024, CYS continued to receive a large number of applications from civil society organisations in the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** working to document and report human rights abuses committed by the military and by armed militia groups. Many local militias have partnered up with the Congolese military at the President's request to fight Rwandan-backed rebels operating in DRC's Eastern provinces. Emboldened by their new status, the militia groups are increasingly associated with erecting roadblocks, demanding bribes from civilians, torture and murder. They are also frequently associated with cases of kidnapping, torture, and murder of staff members from the local CSOs working to document and report these cases.

A Track 1 application was received to support a staff member from a local human rights organisation, who had publicly denounced these human rights violations and was therefore targeted for assassination by the militias. He narrowly avoided abduction but had to go into hiding as a consequence. CYS support was granted to cover relocation, safehousing and medical and psychosocial assistance to help him recover.

Another similar application was received from a CSO staff member, who was returning from a field visit to monitor victims of torture. While traveling, she was ambushed by militia men who subjected her to torture and inhuman treatment. The attack left her traumatised, and she required specialised medical treatment to recover from her injuries. To respond to this situation, CYS supported her recovery and enabled her to return to work.



Legal attacks to stifle dissent

Throughout 2024, CYS provided funding for legal assistance to human rights defenders and activists unlawfully arrested and imprisoned simply as a consequence of their civil society work. For instance, CYS supported student activists in **Zambia**, who were abducted by police officers and imprisoned after organising a peaceful demonstration. They were protesting an attempt by the President to abuse a clause in the constitution that would allow him to stay in power for eight years instead of the prescribed five-year term.

During the students' incarceration, they were denied access to medical treatment of injuries sustained during their violent arrests and were also denied legal representation. CYS provided support for legal assistance and following a month-long and very costly legal process, the activists were released.

About Claim Your Space



- The purpose of CYS is to provide rapid financial support to civil society actors and human rights defenders at risk due to civic space restrictions.
- Support is available to any civil society actor (individual, movement, group of activists) who has either been collaborating with a Danish civil society organisation or been funded by a Danish embassy in any OECD DAC ODA Recipient Country.
- Claim Your Space has two tracks: Track 1 offers emergency assistance to individuals and groups under threat with up to EUR 5,000 and Track 2 supports local CSO alliances working together to address a situation of closing civic space with up to EUR 15,000 to 20,000.
- Applications for both tracks can be submitted using a secure online application at the following link: www.globaltfokus.dk/pulje/claim-your-space or by email to cys@globaltfokus.dk.