

Protection Networks

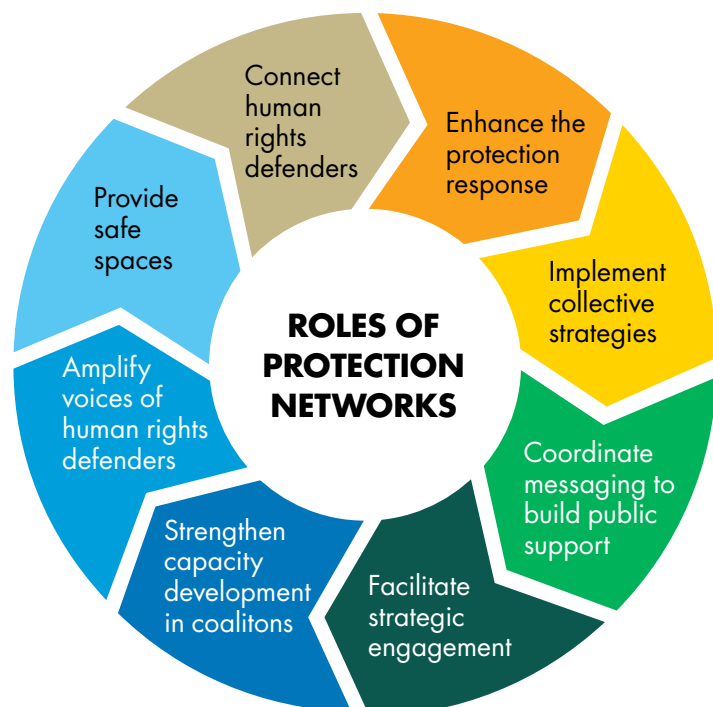
Protection Networks for human rights defenders (HRDs) are formal and informal collaborative networks at local, national, regional, or international levels, bound together by shared goals, and regular exchanges of information to pool knowledge and resources for protection and advocacy as well as to offer support, recognition, personal security, and solidarity among HRDs.

PROTECTION NETWORKS BRING TOGETHER DIVERSE ACTORS, SUCH AS:

- Local, regional or international non-governmental organizations
- Members of human rights and social justice movements
- Leaders of religious or Indigenous communities or other local communities
- Youth groups
- Journalists & media workers
- Members of various minority groups
- Trade unions
- Health or humanitarian workers
- Academics
- Donors
- Etc.

WHY DO PROTECTION NETWORKS MATTER?

- While States have the primary duty to protect HRDs, in practice, judicial systems and (sub)national protection mechanisms often are underfunded or ineffective.
- State-based protection mechanisms tend to be centralized and urban, some follow militarized models and lack a gender perspective.
- In some cases, State actors actively undermine or even attack HRDs instead of empowering or protecting them.
- When HRDs do not trust state-based protection mechanisms, they are forced to rely on communal solidarity work or protection networks, whose support is key in responding to challenges and at times life-threatening situations.
- Protection networks may be able to provide emergency grants and legal or psychosocial support to HRDs, and play other important roles, including:



WHAT MAKES PROTECTION NETWORKS EFFECTIVE?

- ✓ Flexible structures and processes
- ✓ Capable of devising holistic protection strategies
- ✓ Inclusive of diverse actors
- ✓ Attentive to HRDs' overall well-being
- ✓ Effective in communication and resource planning
- ✓ Sustainable operation
- ✓ Trustworthy, consistent, and supportive

HOW TO SUPPORT PROTECTION NETWORKS?

PROMOTE INCLUSIVITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

- Promote diversity and inclusion of different actors, including those outside the mainstream urban civil society environment and smaller or more remote and isolated grassroots HRDs or communities;
- Undertake and encourage field visits, which can be conducted jointly with other civil society organizations, international organizations, and/or diplomatic missions, to increase a network's outreach or access to rural or remote HRDs or communities;
- Advocate for impartial and non-discriminatory policies within the protection networks;
- Encourage consultations with women HRDs and specific groups, especially groups with multiple, intersecting identities to understand and tailor protection measures to their needs.

PROVIDE SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SPACES TO FOSTER TRUST

- Convene regular meetings and facilitate exchanges among known and lesser-known actors to build trust for more effective and joint strategies or actions for holistic protection;
- Provide safe "sub-" or alternative spaces (for example for women HRDs) when necessary and encourage networks of specific groups to link with broader networks;
- Support experience sharing to manage expectations from different actors and to build on good practices and lessons learned.

CONNECT NETWORKS AND SUSTAIN SUPPORT

- Connect networks, especially at grassroots level, with potential donors and international partners, to increase support to their work and their sustainability;
- Offer effective capacity development programmes in relation to UN human rights mechanisms, communication, fundraising, and resource management;
- Find ways to design your support in a manner that encourages cooperation within civil society and make support as sustainable as possible.

