



SOS-Defenders

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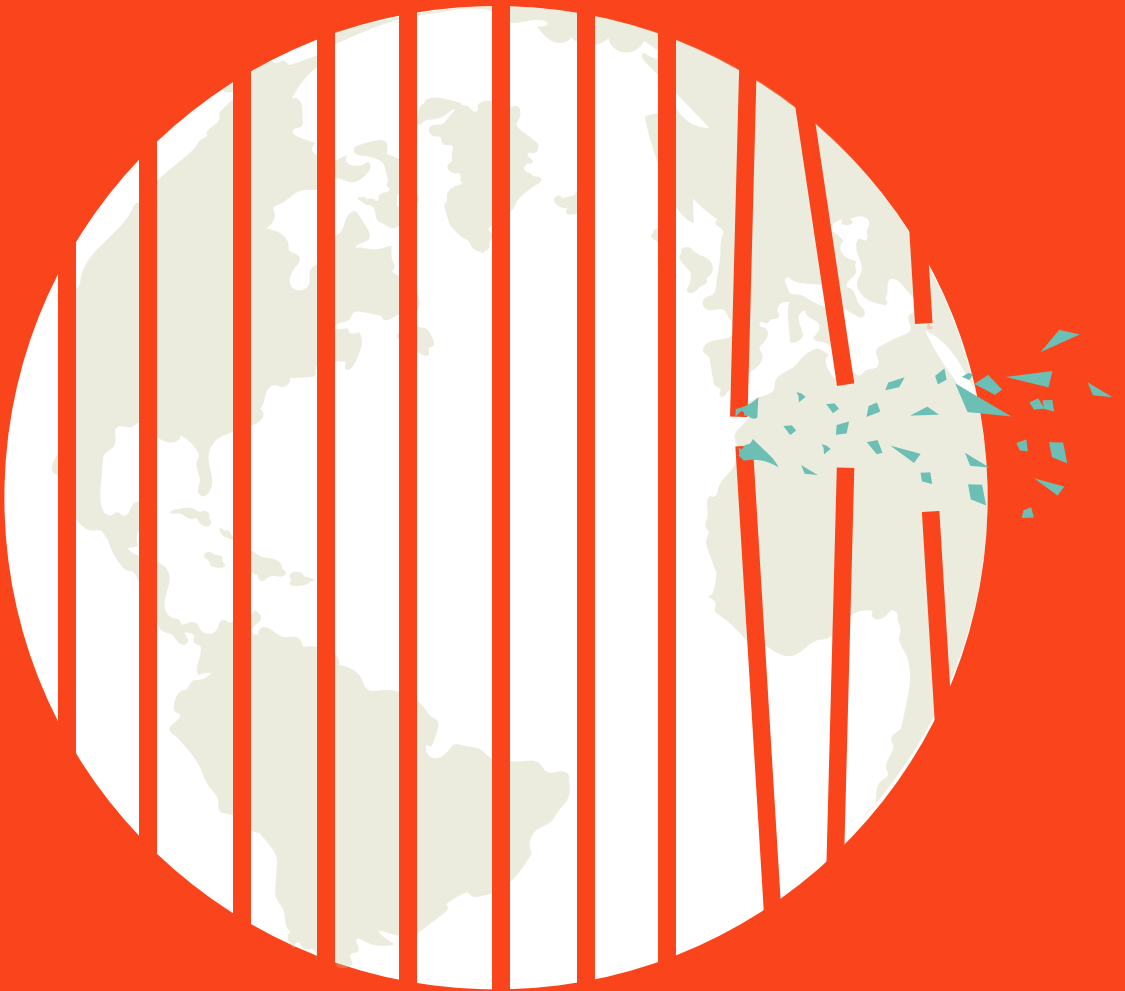
Censorship by detention

2025 report

Table of Contents

Introduction	06
Global figures	08
Detentions in 2025	08
Ill-treatment in detention	11
Releases in 2025	12
Data by country	14
Afghanistan	16
Belarus	19
Cambodia	22
Cameroon	23
Egypt	25
El Salvador	26
Ethiopia	27
Guatemala	30
Iran	33
Jordan	36
Kenya	37
Kuwait	39
Niger	40
Russian Federation	41
Saudi Arabia	42
Tunisia	44
Turkey	46
Uganda	48
Ukraine	50
United Republic of Tanzania	51
Yemen	53

Introduction



Human rights defenders (HRDs) are “people who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights in a peaceful manner”.¹

Because of their human rights engagement, HRDs face numerous risks, including prosecution, arbitrary arrest and detention.² Censorship by detention refers to the use of arbitrary detention by repressive governments as a tool to obstruct the defence of human rights, restrict civic activism and silence dissent.

Since 2024, the SOS-Defenders initiative has brought together civil society organisations (CSOs) from around the world to document cases of arbitrarily detained HRDs and advance coordinated action for their release. By consolidating data on a single global platform,³ SOS-Defenders provides a more comprehensive understanding of censorship by detention and mobilises collective action to counter it. More than 20 local, regional and international CSOs are currently engaged in the initiative, working together to protect HRDs and uphold the right to defend human rights.⁴

In 2025, SOS-Defenders continued to strengthen its role as a global repository and action platform on the arbitrary detention of HRDs. Building on the achievements of its initial pilot phase, the initiative expanded its network of partners and broadened its geographic coverage, enabling the publication of more than 500 cases of arbitrarily detained HRDs worldwide since the platform’s launch.

Throughout the year, SOS-Defenders partners worked collectively to expose patterns of repression, support advocacy efforts and engage with relevant stakeholders to secure the release of arbitrarily detained HRDs. These efforts contributed to numerous positive outcomes and reinforced the importance of coordinated and sustained collective action to counter censorship by detention.

Against a backdrop of shrinking civic space, increasing authoritarian practices and the growing criminalisation of human rights defence, SOS-Defenders also played an active role in international policy discussions aimed at reaffirming the right to defend human rights.⁵

This report presents data collected on HRDs whose arbitrary detention began or ended between 1 January and 31 December 2025. In doing so, it contributes to the monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicator 16.10.1, which measures, among other violations, the annual number of verified cases of arbitrary detention of HRDs.⁶

1. About human rights defenders, Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders. At: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-human-rights-defenders/about-human-rights-defenders>

2. The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention clarifies that “‘Arbitrariness’ is not to be equated with ‘against the law’, but must be interpreted more broadly to include elements of inappropriateness, injustice, lack of predictability and due process of law”. At: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/about-arbitrary-detention>

3. At: <https://sos-defenders.org/en/>

4. The full list of partners is available at: <https://sos-defenders.org/en/page/7hg5udz2vs9/about>

5. See, for example, the follow-up paper from the 12th Inter-Mechanisms Meeting. Securing the release of human rights defenders arbitrarily detained. At: https://www.omct.org/site-resources/legacy/12th-IMM-follow-up-paper_FINAL.pdf

6. Indicator 16.10.1 reads: “Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months”.

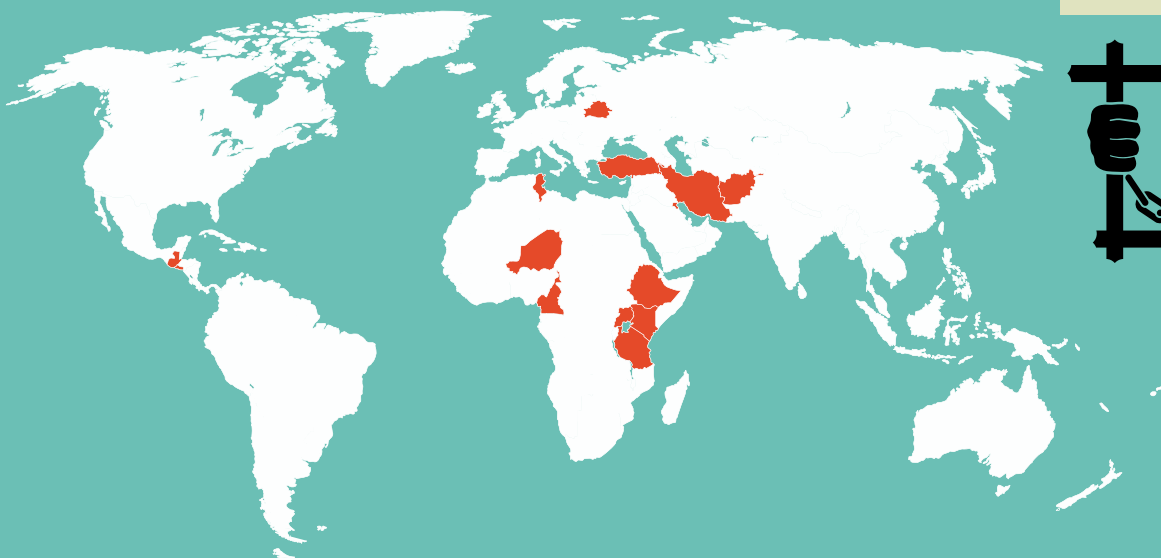
Global figures

Detentions in 2025

In 2025, SOS-Defenders documented new arbitrary detentions of HRDs in 14 countries.

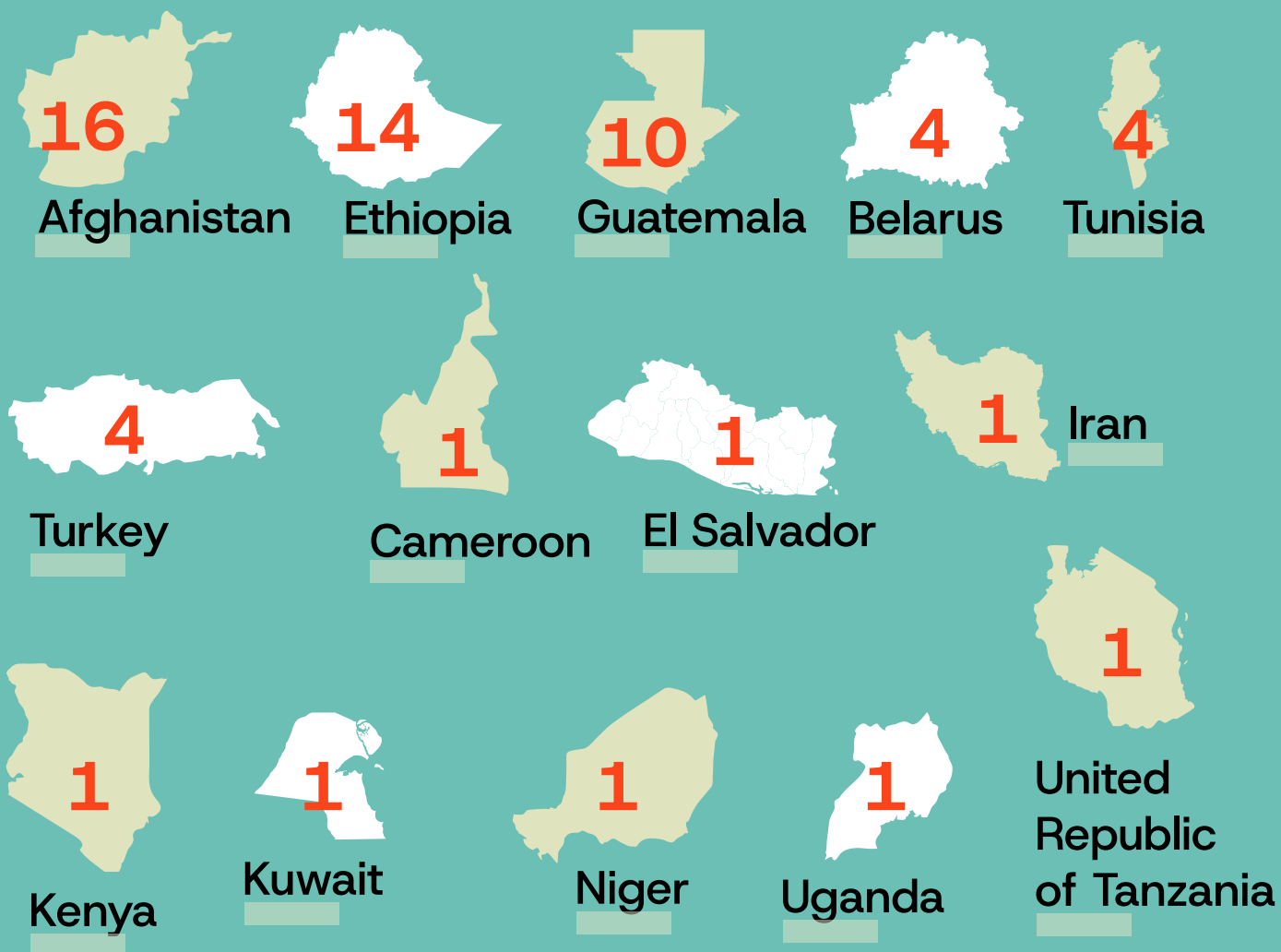
Total number of new detentions in 2025⁷

60



7. Of the 60 cases, 43 have been published and 17 are confidential.

Number of new detentions per country



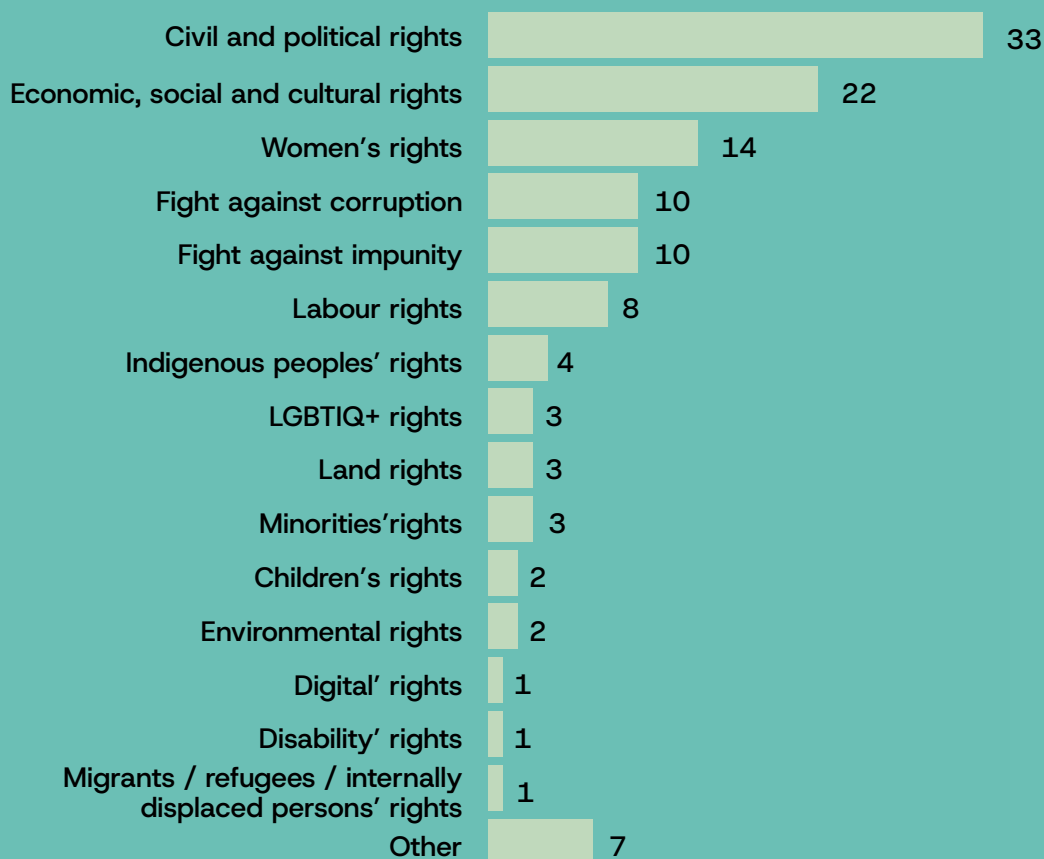
HRDs detained by gender



HRDs detained by type⁸



HRDs detained by thematic area of engagement⁹



8. Some HRDs fall into more than one category.

9. Some HRDs are engaged in more than one area.

Ill-treatment in detention

HRDs are among the groups at greatest risk of torture and ill-treatment in detention. Their efforts to document and expose human rights violations, seek accountability, and mobilise communities in the pursuit of justice frequently incur the wrath of the authorities, who retaliate by inflicting both physical and psychological suffering on them. When dealing with HRDs, repressive governments not only use detention as punishment, they also apply punishment in detention.

Data collected through OMCT's Global Torture Index in 2026 under the sub-theme *Right to Defend and Civic Space* indicates that the risk of being subjected to torture and ill-treatment is rated 'High' in 18 of the 38 countries assessed. A further nine countries are rated 'Very High' and nine 'Considerable', while only two are rated 'Moderate' and none is rated 'Low Risk'.¹⁰

SOS-Defenders data further underscores the severity of this risk. HRDs who were arbitrarily detained in 2025 were subjected to various forms of torture and ill-treatment, including:

- Physical violence (beatings, assaults and chaining);
- Psychological abuse (threats, harassment and forced confessions);
- Secret and prolonged incommunicado detention; and
- Detention in inhuman and degrading conditions (severe overcrowding, lack of medical care, starvation, substandard environmental conditions and prolonged solitary confinement).



Despite these findings, there are compelling reasons to believe that violations against HRDs in detention remain significantly underreported, owing both to fears of further reprisals and to the limited access of external monitors and CSOs to many places of detention.

10. At <https://www.omct.org/en/global-torture-index>

Releases in 2025



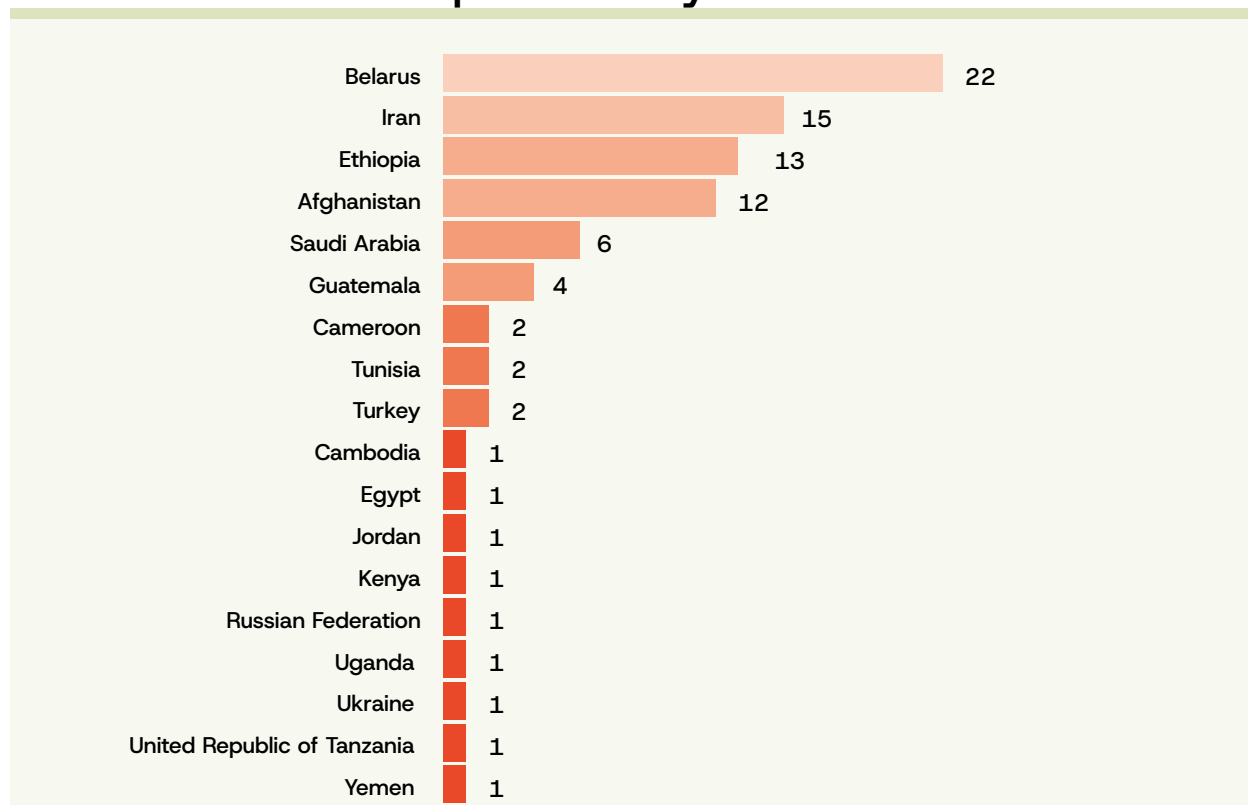
While criminalisation and arbitrary detention continue to be among the greatest risks faced by HRDs worldwide, and many are subjected to torture and ill-treatment while in detention, some eventually regain their freedom after varying periods of deprivation of liberty. Such releases are often made possible through the sustained efforts of a range of stakeholders to draw attention to the arbitrary nature of their detention and to secure their release through advocacy, legal action and diplomatic engagement. They underscore, once again, the importance of a collective strategy to counter censorship by detention.

In 2025, SOS-Defenders documented HRD releases in 18 countries.

Total number of releases in 2025¹¹

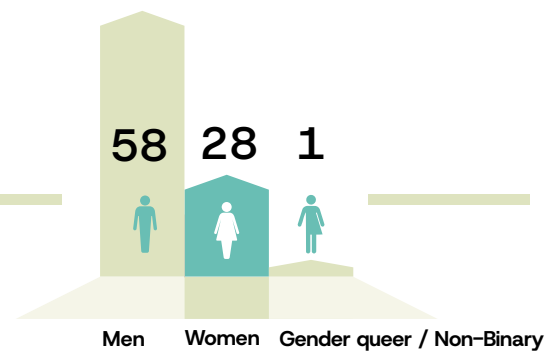
87

Number of releases per country

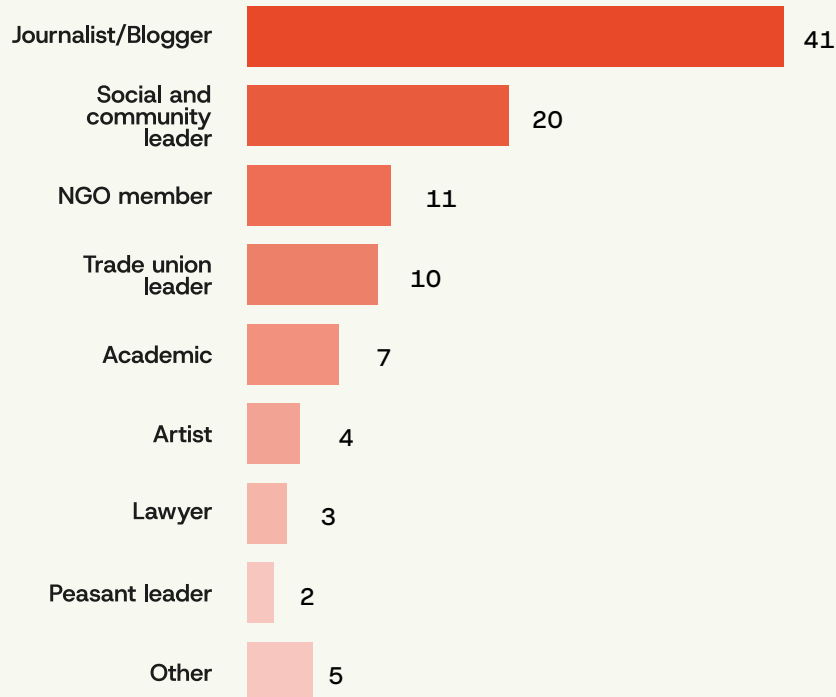


11. Of the 87 cases, 74 have been published and 13 are confidential.

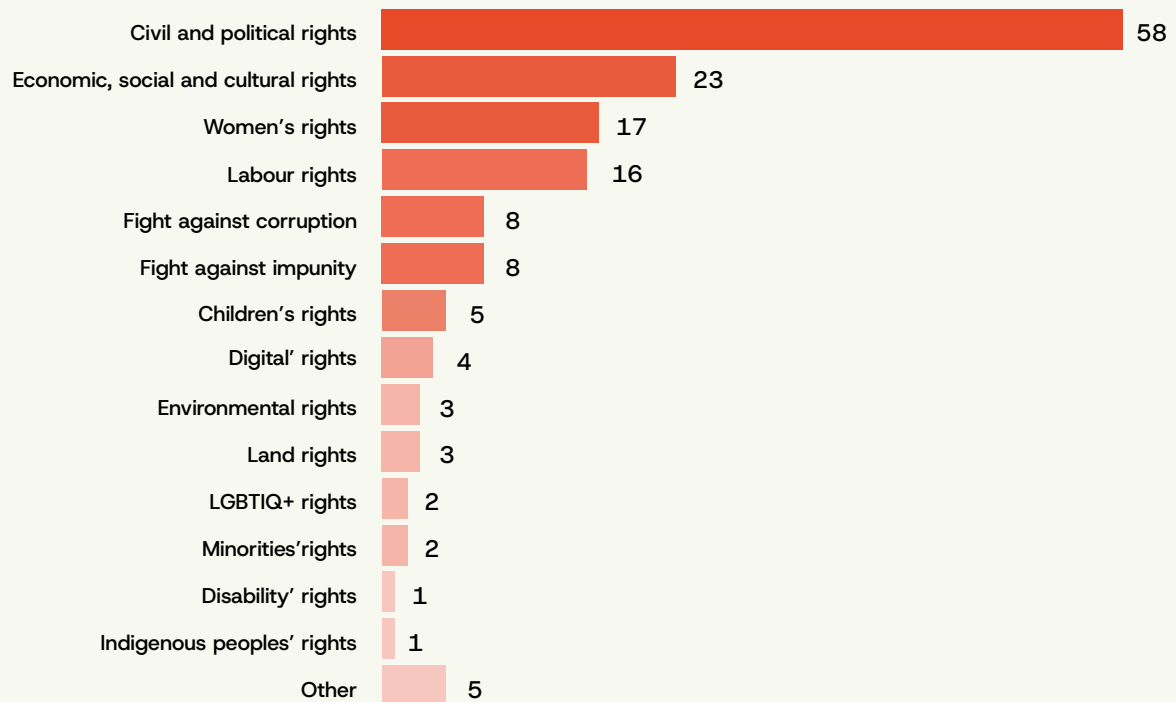
HRDs released by gender



HRDs released by type



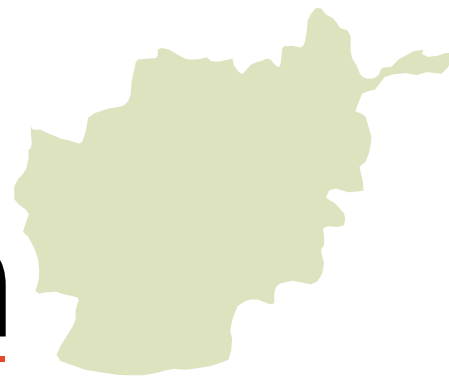
HRDs released by thematic area of engagement





Data by country

Afghanistan



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

16¹²

Releases
documented

12¹³

Detentions

SOS-Defenders profiles¹⁴

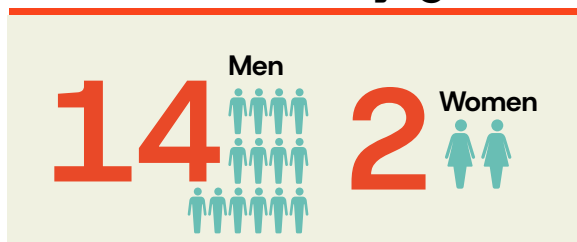
	Bashir Hatif	
	Ghulam Mohiuddin Sahebzada	
	Islam Gul Totakhil	
	Jihadmal Habibi	
	Mushtaq Ahmad Halimi	
	Nawid Asghari	
	Nazira Rashidi	
	Sayed Ahmad Rashid Kashifi	
	Sayed Sekandar Hussaini Bamdad	
	Shakib Ahmad Nazari	

12. Of the 16 cases, 10 have been published and 6 are confidential.

13. Of the 12 cases, 9 have been published and 3 are confidential.

14. Only public profiles are listed here; confidential profiles are not included.

HRDs detained by gender



HRDs detained by type



HRDs detained by thematic area of engagement



Releases

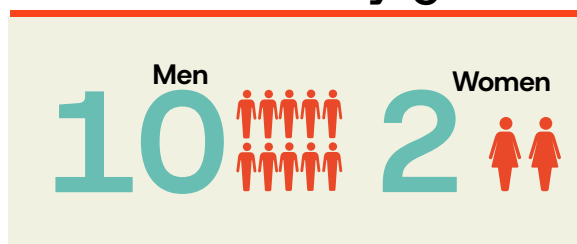
SOS-Defenders profiles

	Ghulam Mohiuddin Sahebzada	
	Islam Gul Totakhil	
	Jihadmal Habibi	
	Mushtaq Ahmad Halimi	

Afghanistan

	<u>Nadia Sadat</u>	
	<u>Nawid Asghari</u>	
	<u>Sayed Ahmad Rashid Kashifi</u>	
	<u>Sayed Rahim Saidi</u>	
	<u>Sayed Sekandar Hussaini Bamdad</u>	

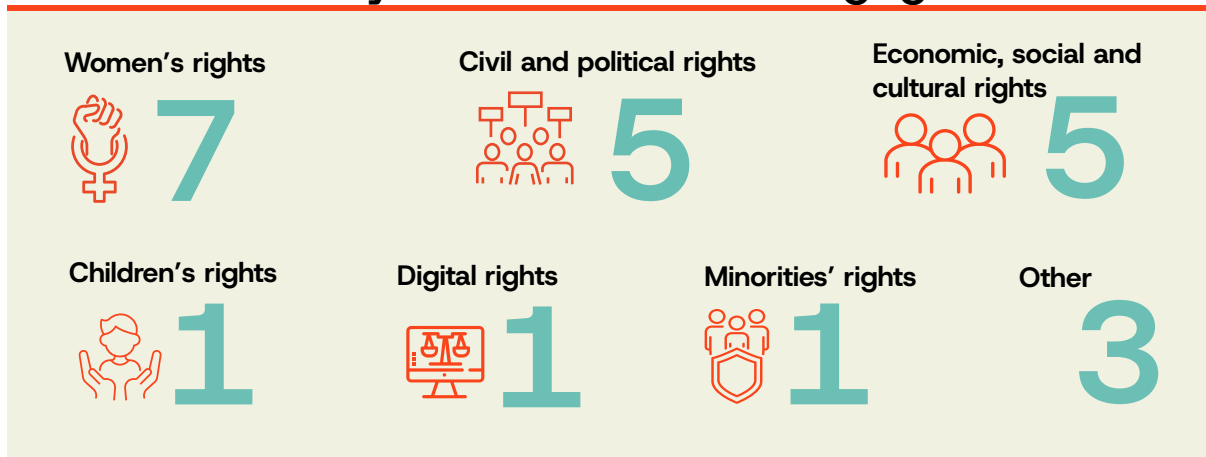
HRDs released by gender



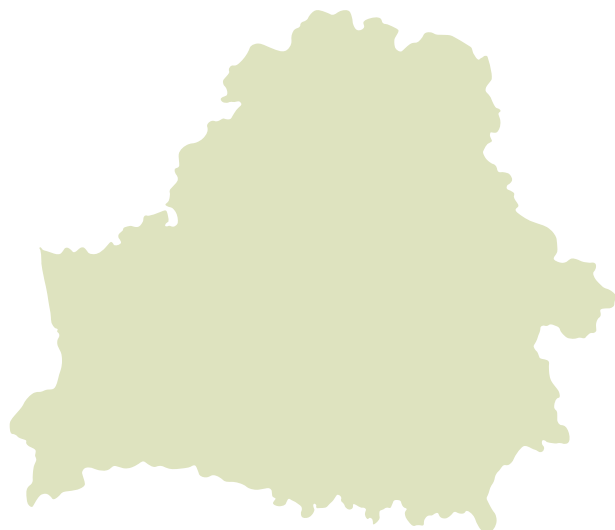
HRDs released by type



HRDs released by thematic area of engagement



Belarus



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

4

Releases
documented

22

Detentions

SOS-Defenders profiles



[Aleh Khamenka](#)



[Kiryl Pazniak](#)



[Pavel Dabravolski](#)



[Yanina Pazniak](#)



HRDs detained by gender

3 Men

1 Women

HRDs detained by type

Journalist/
Blogger



4

Artist



1

HRDs detained by thematic area of engagement

Civil and political rights



3

Economic, social and
cultural rights



1

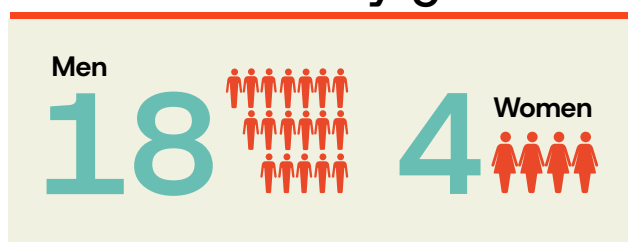
Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles

	<u>Alena Tsimashchuk</u>	
	<u>Ales Bialiatski</u>	
	<u>Aliaksandr (Ales) Liubenchuk</u>	
	<u>Aliaksandr Mantsevich</u>	
	<u>Aliaksandr Yarashuk</u>	
	<u>Aliaksandr Ziankou</u>	
	<u>Andrei Chapiuk</u>	
	<u>Andrei Kuznechyk</u>	
	<u>Artsiom Zharnak</u>	
	<u>Henadz Fiadynich</u>	
	<u>Ihar Karnei</u>	
	<u>Iryna Slaunikava</u>	
	<u>Kanstantsin Zalatykh</u>	
	<u>Larysa Shchyrakova</u>	

	<u>Maksim Znak</u>	
	<u>Maryna Zolatava</u>	
	<u>Pavel Mazheika</u>	
	<u>Pavel Padabed</u>	
	<u>Uladzimir Labkovich</u>	
	<u>Uladzimir Matskevich</u>	
	<u>Viachaslau Lazarau</u>	
	<u>Yauhen Merkis</u>	

HRDs released by gender



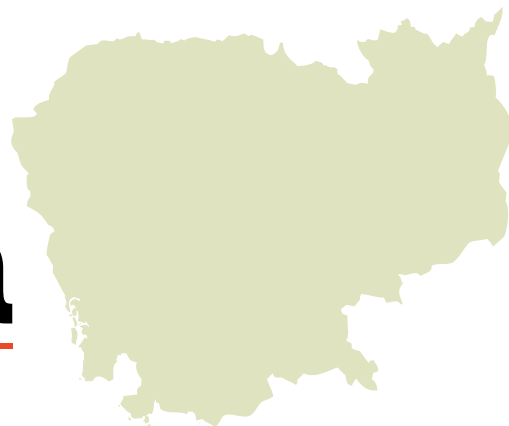
HRDs released by type



HRDs released by thematic area of engagement



Cambodia



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

0

Releases
documented

1

Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles



[Morm Rithy](#)



HRDs released by gender

1 Men



HRDs released by type

Trade union
leader



1

HRDs released by thematic area of engagement

Labour rights



1

Cameroon



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

1

Releases
documented

2

Detentions

SOS-Defenders profiles



[André Blaise Essama](#)



HRDs detained by gender

1 Men



HRDs detained by type

Social and
community
leader



1

HRDs detained by thematic area of engagement

Economic, social and
cultural rights



1

Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles

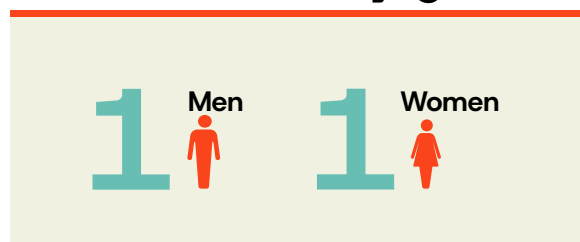


[Dorgelesse Nguessan](#) 



[Georges Mfor Tang](#) 

HRDs released by gender



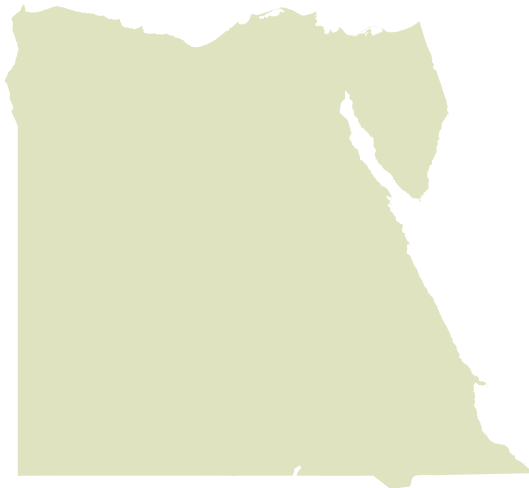
HRDs released by type



HRDs released by thematic area of engagement



Egypt



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

0

Releases
documented

1

Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles



[Alaa Abd El-Fattah](#)



HRDs released by gender

1 Men



HRDs released by type

Journalist/
Blogger



1

HRDs released by thematic area of engagement

Digital rights



1

El Salvador



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

1

Releases
documented

0

Detentions

SOS-Defenders profiles



[Ruth Eleonora López Alfaro](#)



HRDs detained by gender

1 Women

HRDs detained by type

Academic



1

Lawyer



1

NGO
member



1

HRDs detained by thematic area of engagement

Fight against corruption



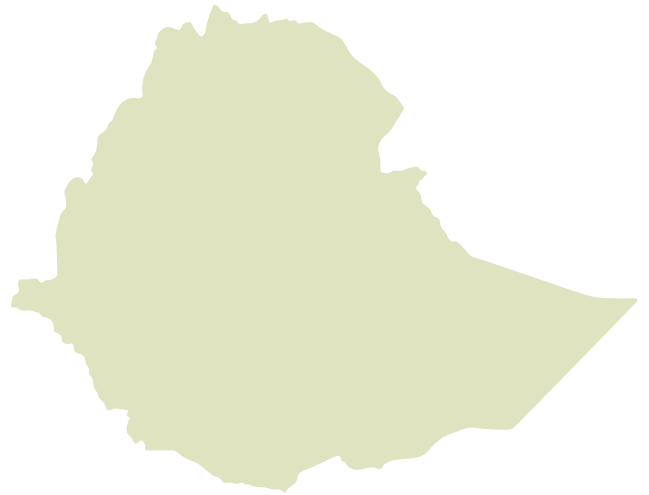
1

Fight against impunity



1

Ethiopia



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

14¹⁵

Releases
documented

13¹⁶

Detentions

SOS-Defenders profiles



[Eyob Shimelis](#)



[Khadar Mohammed Ismael](#)



[Yonas Amare](#)



HRDs detained by gender

9 Men

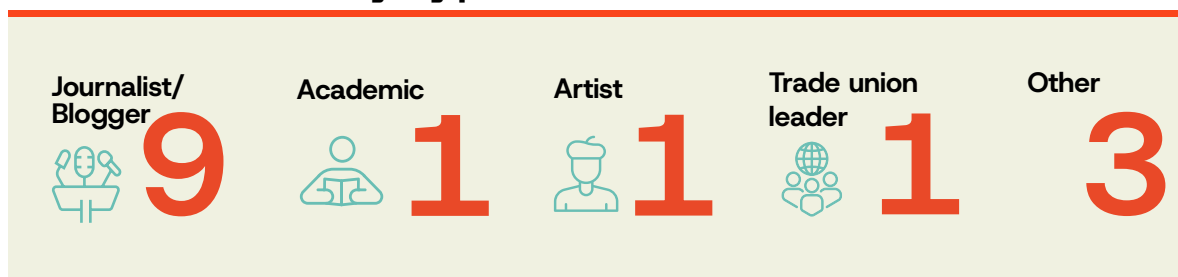
A group of nine teal male human icons arranged in two rows: five in the top row and four in the bottom row.

5 Women

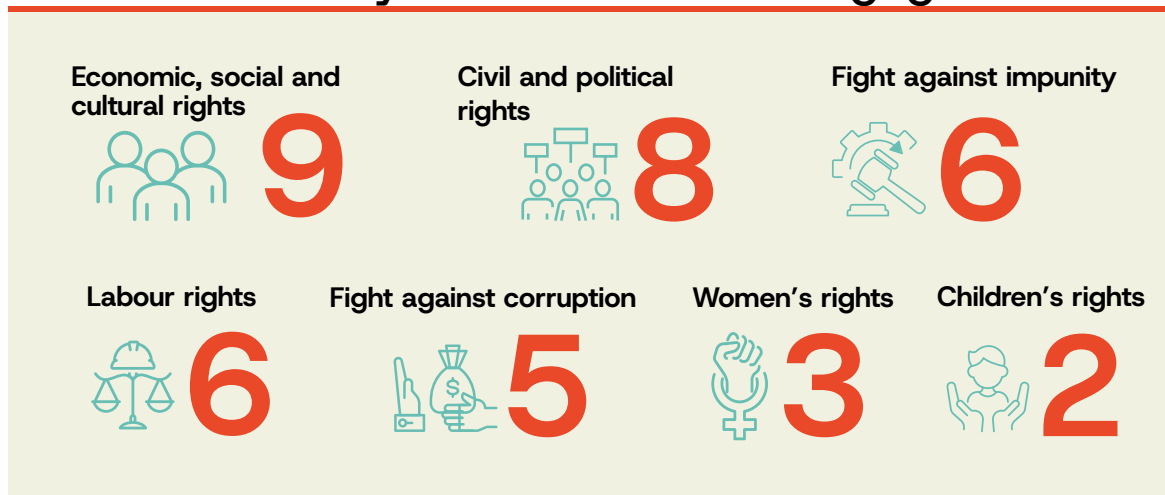
A group of five teal female human icons arranged in a single row.

15. Of the 14 cases, 3 have been published and 11 are confidential.
16. Of the 13 cases, 3 have been published and 10 are confidential.

HRDs detained by type

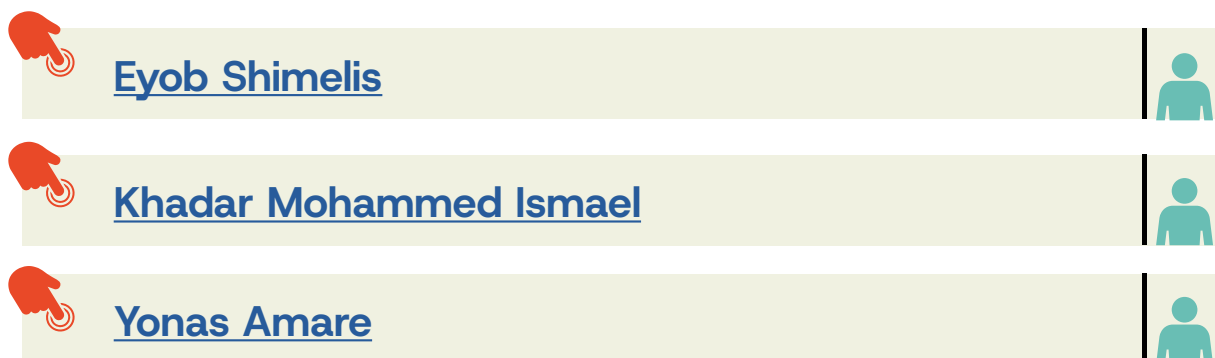


HRDs detained by thematic area of engagement



Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles



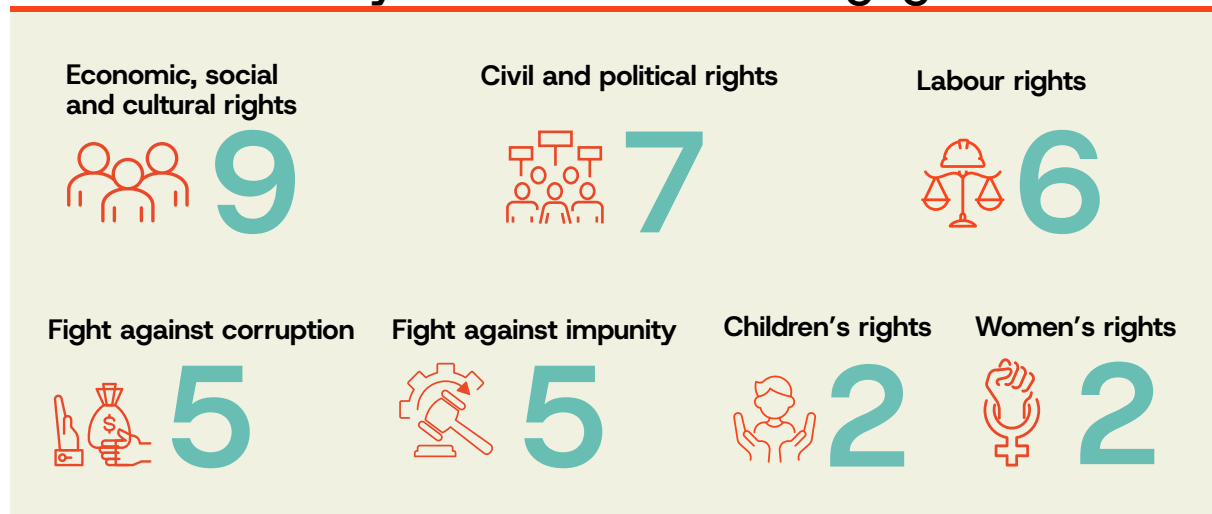
HRDs released by gender



HRDs released by type



HRDs released by thematic area of engagement



Guatemala



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

10

Releases
documented

4

Detentions

SOS-Defenders profiles



[Cristopher Alexis Genaro Morales](#)



[Edmar Eduardo Arriola Toc](#)



[Eduardo Gabriel Masaya Juárez](#)



[Esteban Toc Tsay](#)



[Héctor Manuel Chaclán Batz](#)



[Leocadio Juracán Salomé](#)



[Luis Haroldo Pacheco Gutiérrez](#)



[Luis Xol Caal](#)



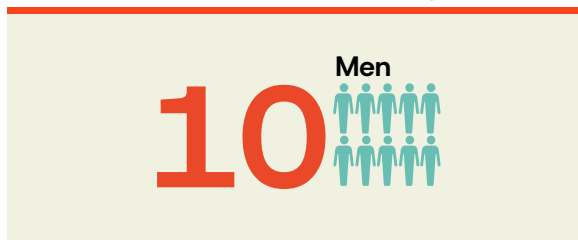
[Pedro Emanuel Ros Domingo](#)



[Ramón Cadena Ramila](#)



HRDs detained by gender



HRDs detained by type



HRDs detained by thematic area of engagement



Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles

	Edmar Eduardo Arriola Toc	
	Esteban Toc Tsay	

	Leocadio Juracán Salomé	
	Luis Xol Caal	

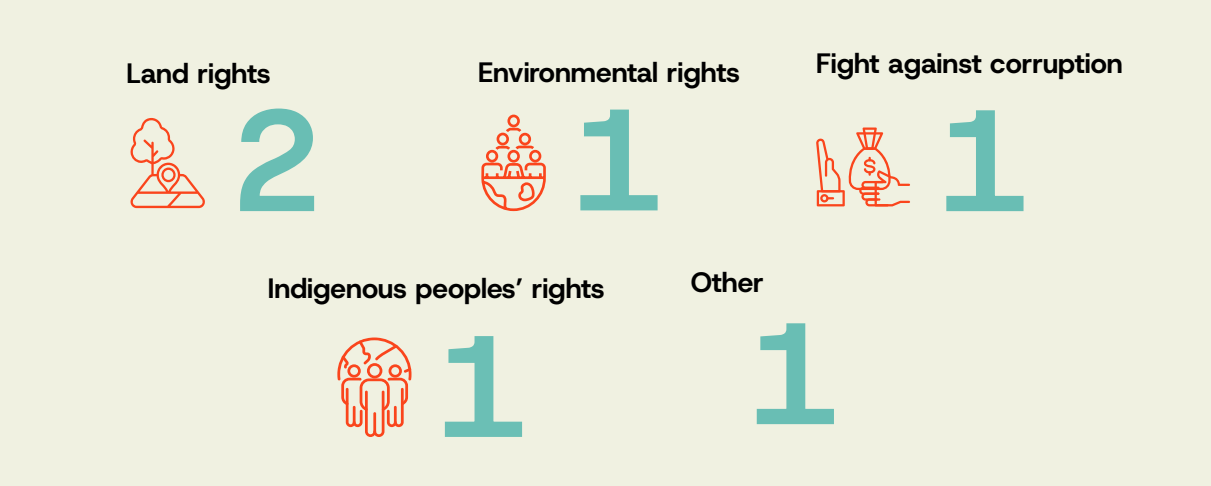
HRDs released by gender



HRDs released by type



HRDs released by thematic area of engagement



Iran



2024 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

1

Releases
documented

15

Detentions

SOS-Defenders profiles



[Sepideh Gholian](#)



HRDs detained by gender

1 Women

HRDs detained by type

Journalist/
Blogger



1

Social and
community leader



1

Trade union leader



1

Whistle blower



1

HRDs detained by thematic area of engagement

Civil and political rights



1

Fight against
impunity



1

Labour rights



1

Women's rights



1

Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles

	<u>Forough Sami'nia</u>	
	<u>Khosro Alikordi</u>	
	<u>Maryam Derisi</u>	
	<u>Masoumeh (Akram) Akbari</u>	
	<u>Maziyar Seyednejad</u>	
	<u>Mohammad Habibi</u>	
	<u>Motahareh Goneyi</u>	
	<u>Nahid Khodajoo</u>	
	<u>Nahid Shirpisheh</u>	
	<u>Nasim Soltanbeigi</u>	
	<u>Nasrin Javadi (Azam Khezri Javadi)</u>	
	<u>Rasoul Badaqi</u>	
	<u>Saeedeh Shafiei</u>	

	Saman Ostovar	
	Samaneh Asghari	

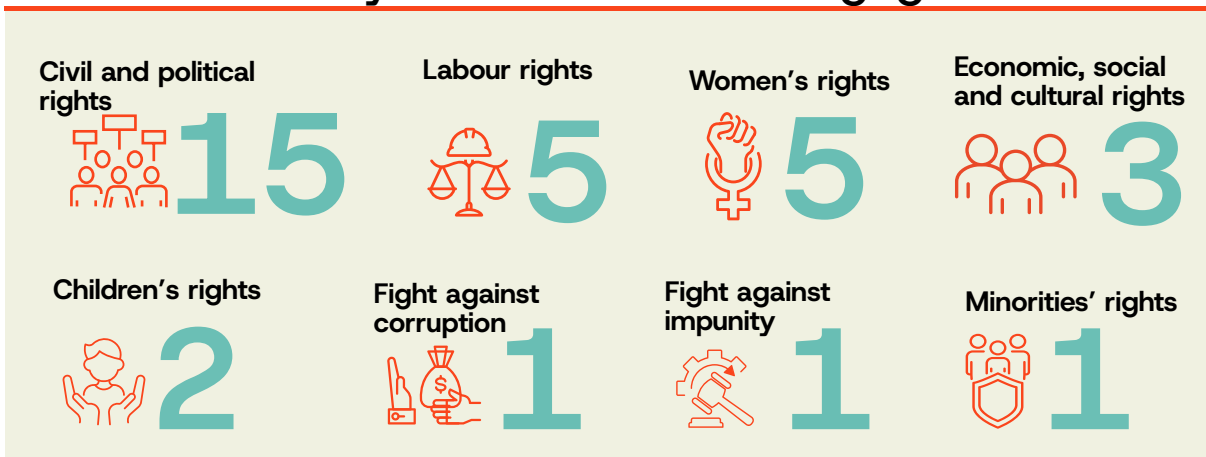
HRDs released by gender



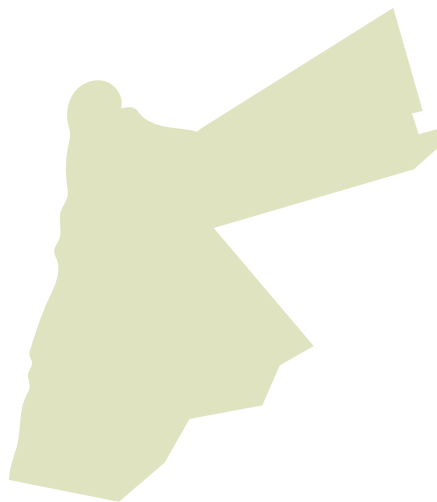
HRDs released by type



HRDs released by thematic area of engagement



Jordan



2024 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

0

Releases
documented

1

Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles



[Hiba Abu Taha¹⁷](#)



HRDs released by gender

1 Women



HRDs released by type

Journalist/
Blogger



1

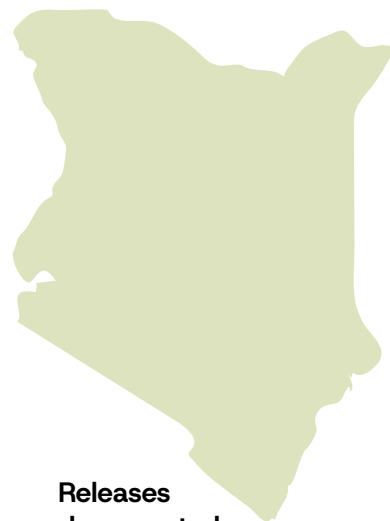
HRDs released by thematic area of engagement

Other

1

17. Hiba Abu Taha was re-arrested on 3 March 2026 and sentenced to two years in prison. As of July 2026, she remains detained.

Kenya



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

1

Releases
documented

1

Detentions

SOS-Defenders profiles



Willis Otiende



HRDs detained by gender

1 Men

HRDs detained by type

Social and
community
leader

1

HRDs detained by thematic area of engagement

Civil and political rights



1

Digital rights



1

Disability rights



1

Economic, social and
cultural rights



1

Environmental rights

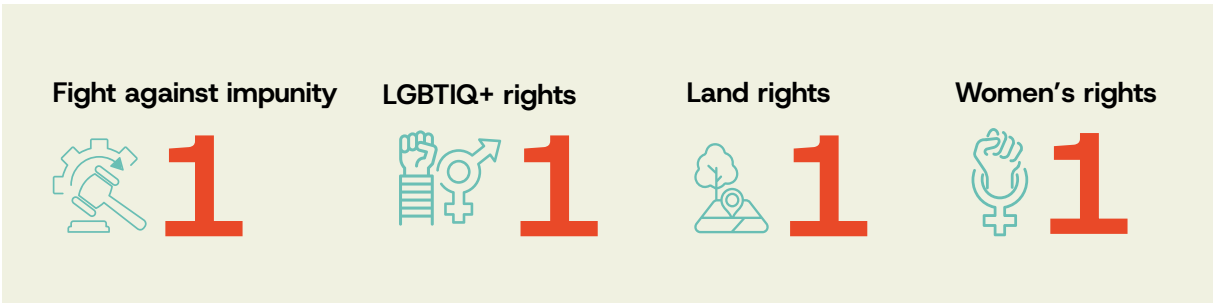


1

Fight against corruption

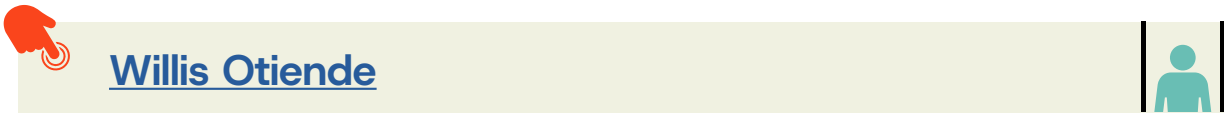


1



Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles



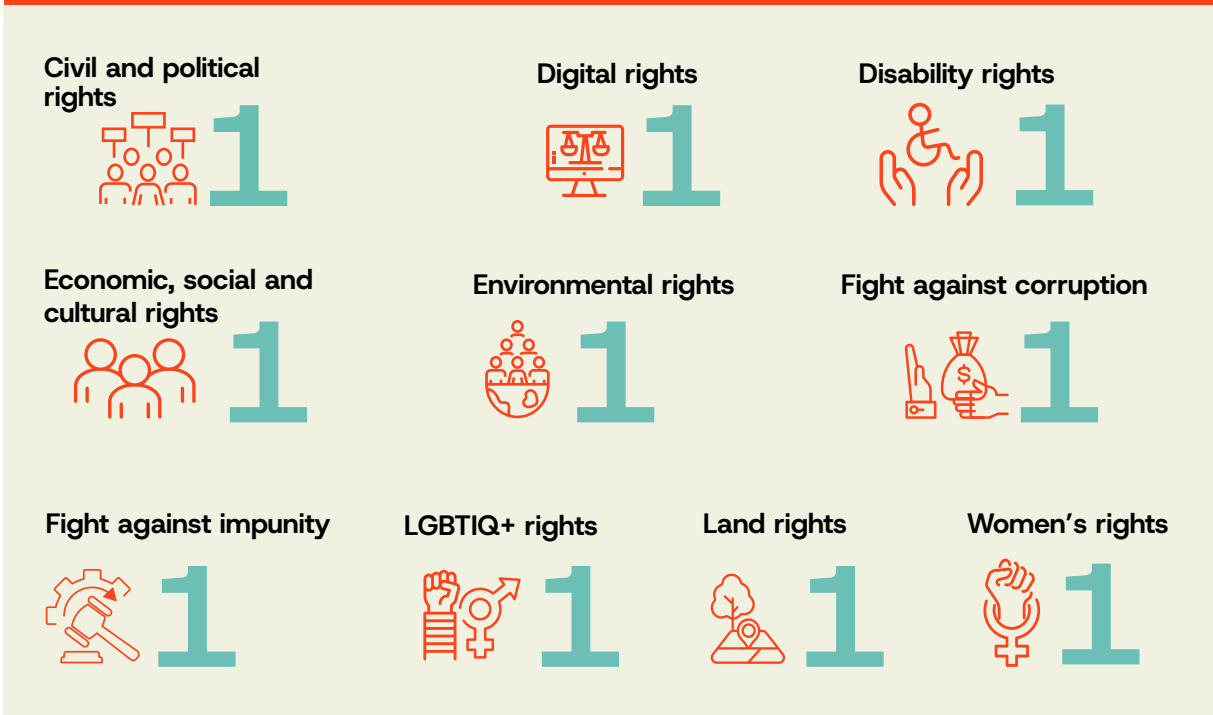
HRDs released by gender



HRDs released by type



HRDs released by thematic area of engagement



Kuwait



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

1

Releases
documented

0

Detentions

SOS-Defenders profiles



[Mohammed Al-Barghash](#)



HRDs detained by gender

1 Men



HRDs detained by type

Social and
community
leader



1

HRDs detained by thematic area of engagement

Civil and political rights



1

Economic, social
and cultural rights



1

Niger



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

1

Releases
documented

0

Detentions

SOS-Defenders profiles



[Moussa Tchangari](#)



HRDs detained by gender

1 Men

HRDs detained by type

Journalist/
Blogger



1

NGO member



1

HRDs detained by thematic area of engagement

Civil and political rights



1

Russian Federation



2025 yearly balance

New detentions documented

0

Releases documented

1

Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles



[Alexey Sokolov](#)



HRDs released by gender

1 Men



HRDs released by type

NGO member



1

HRDs released by thematic area of engagement

Civil and political rights



1

Saudi Arabia



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

0

Releases
documented

6

Releases

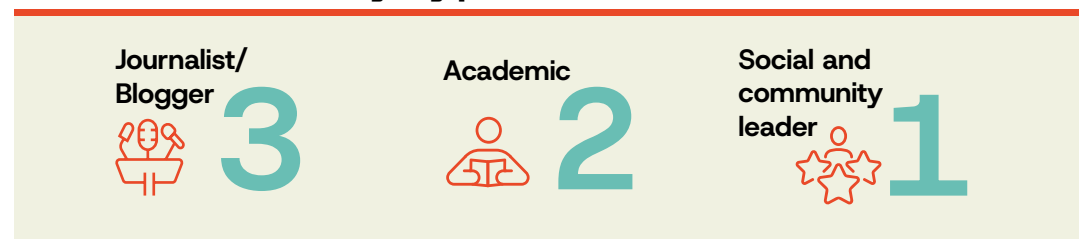
SOS-Defenders profiles

	Asaad Al-Ghamdi	
	Dr. Lina Al-Sharif	
	Dr. Mohammed Al-Qahtani	
	Issa Al-Nukhaifi	
	Salma Al-Shehab	
	Ziad Al-Sufyani	

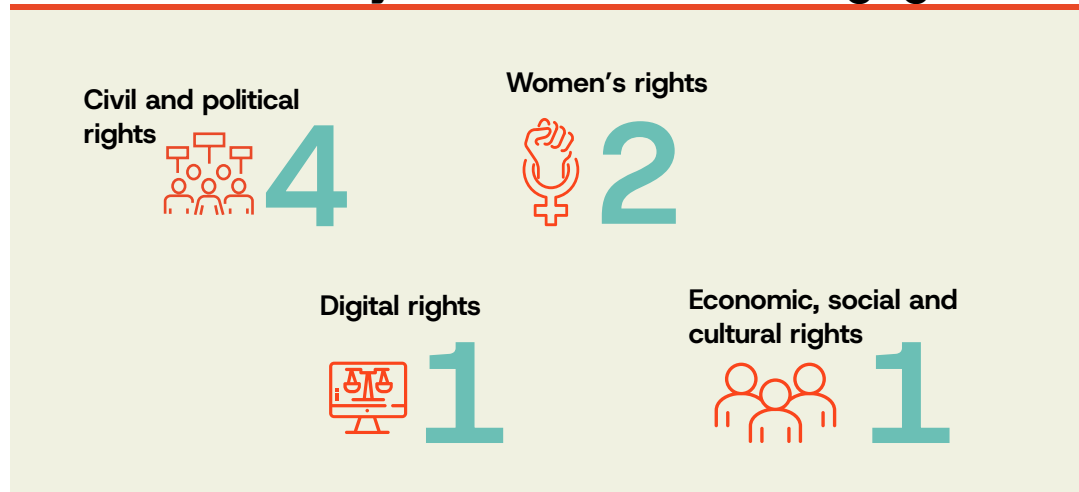
HRDs released by gender



HRDs released by type



HRDs released by thematic area of engagement



Tunisia



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

4

Releases
documented

2

Detentions

SOS-Defenders profiles



[Ahmed Néjib Chebbi](#)



[Ahmed Souab](#)



[Ayachi Hammami](#)



[Chaima Issa](#)



HRDs detained by gender

3



Men

1



Women

HRDs detained by type

Lawyer



3

Other

1

HRDs detained by thematic area of engagement

Civil and political rights



4

Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles

[Sihem Ben Sedrine](#)

[Sonia Dahmani](#)

HRDs released by gender



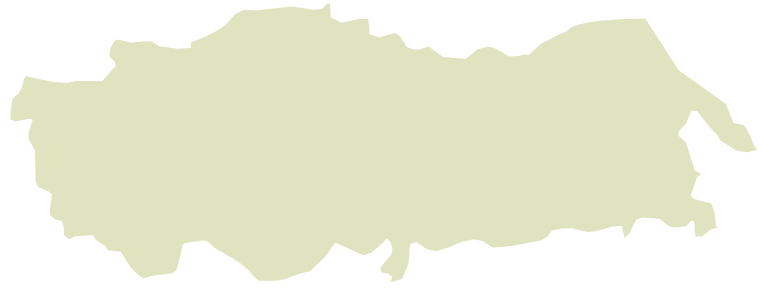
HRDs released by type



HRDs released by thematic area of engagement



Turkey



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

4

Releases
documented

2

Detentions

SOS-Defenders profiles



[Aslı Aydemir](#)



[Kemal Irmak](#)



[Suna Bilgin](#)



[Yıldız Tar](#)



HRDs detained by gender

2 Women

1 Gender queer /
Non-Binary

1 Men

HRDs detained by type

NGO member



3

Academic



1

Journalist/
Blogger



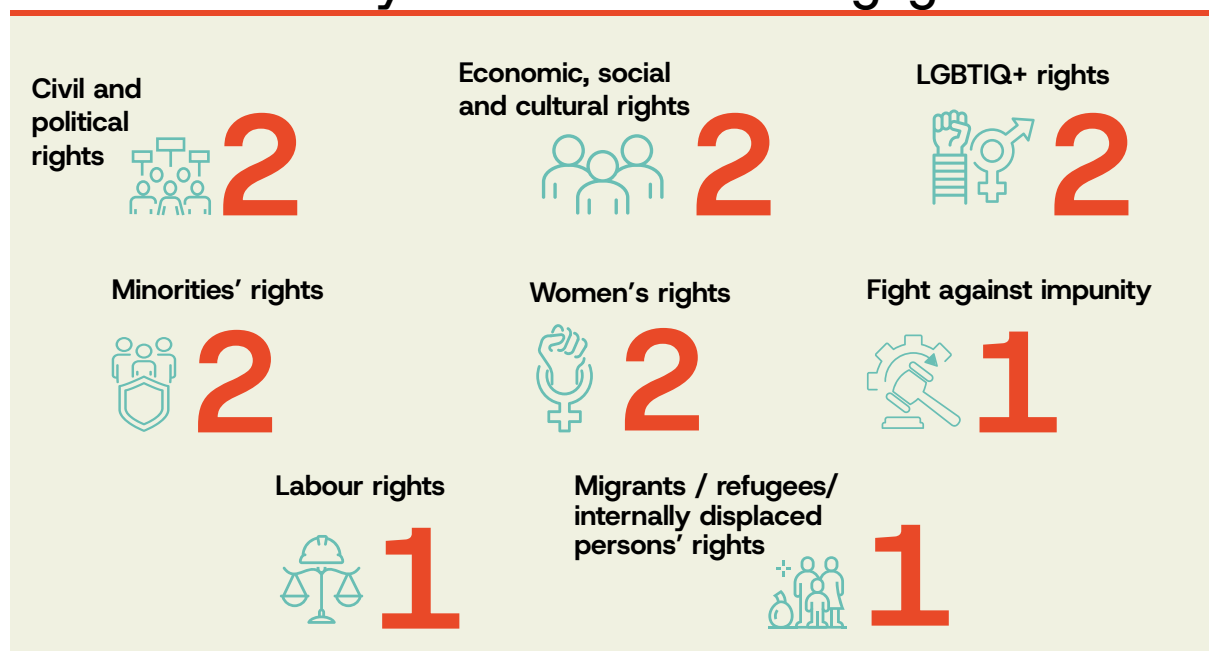
1

Trade union leader



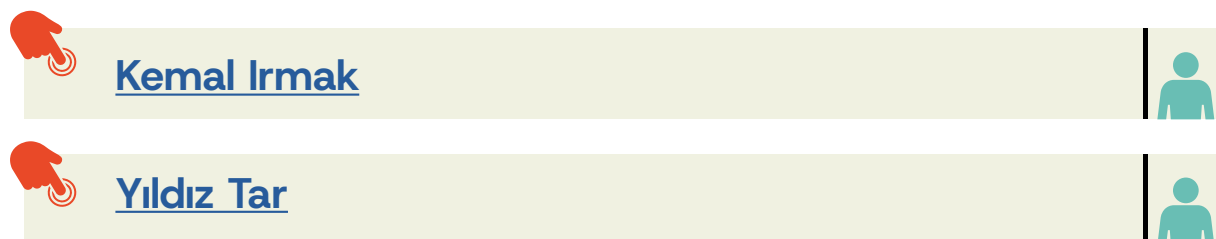
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HRDs detained by thematic area of engagement

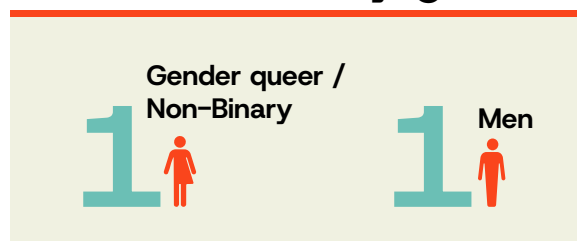


Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles



HRDs released by gender



HRDs released by type



HRDs released by thematic area of engagement



Uganda



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

1

Releases
documented

1

Detentions

SOS-Defenders profiles



[Nicholas Oyoo](#)



HRDs detained by gender

1 Men



HRDs detained by type

Social and
community
leader



1

HRDs detained by thematic area of engagement

Civil and
political
rights



1

Economic, social
and cultural rights



1

Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles



Nicholas Oyoo



HRDs released by gender

1 Men



HRDs released by type

Social and
community
leader



1

HRDs released by thematic area of engagement

Civil and
political rights



1

Economic, social
and cultural rights



1

Ukraine



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

0

Releases
documented

1¹⁸

Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles



[Vladyslav Yesypenko](#)



HRDs released by gender

1 Men

HRDs released by type

Journalist/
Blogger

1

HRDs released by thematic area of engagement

Civil and political rights

1

18. This case concerns a part of the territory of Ukraine that is currently under Russian occupation. The detention was carried out by, and is attributable to, the authorities of the Russian Federation.

United Republic of Tanzania



2025 yearly balance

New detentions documented

1

Releases documented

1

Detentions

SOS-Defenders profiles



Brockwelly Paul



HRDs detained by gender

1 Men



HRDs detained by type

Social and community leader



1

HRDs detained by thematic area of engagement

Civil and political rights



1

Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles



Brockwelly Paul



HRDs released by gender



HRDs released by type



HRDs released by thematic area of engagement



Yemen



2025 yearly balance

New detentions
documented

0

Releases
documented

1

Releases

SOS-Defenders profiles



Intisar Al-Hammadi



HRDs released by gender

1 Women



HRDs released by type

Artist



1

HRDs released by thematic area of engagement

Economic, social
and cultural rights



1

