



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

WARSAW – NHRI ACADEMY 2025

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PROTECTION FOR HRDs

- Supporting an enabling environment
- Building networks and holistic support
- Visibility for protection
- Responding to violations



Protection is just one part
of the work to support a
thriving civic space

Figure 1 - FRA (2023) How
to support civil society
under pressure



Holistic support / networks

- **Contact details** for someone within your NHRI that HRDs can contact.
- **Regular meetings** with HRDs in all parts of the country and in different sectors with particular **attention to under-represented WHRDs**.
- **Facilitate safe spaces** for example by meeting individually or with small groups of trusted WHRDs. Facilitate **access to psychosocial support** and take steps not to re-traumatise WHRDs in meetings.
- Consider and plan for ways in which the **HRDs broader network / family** may also be at risk.
- Facilitate security planning and training and carry out a **security assessment and travel plan** when supporting WHRDs to travel.

Rapid response

DO NO HARM & CHECK WITH HRDs WHAT IS BEST

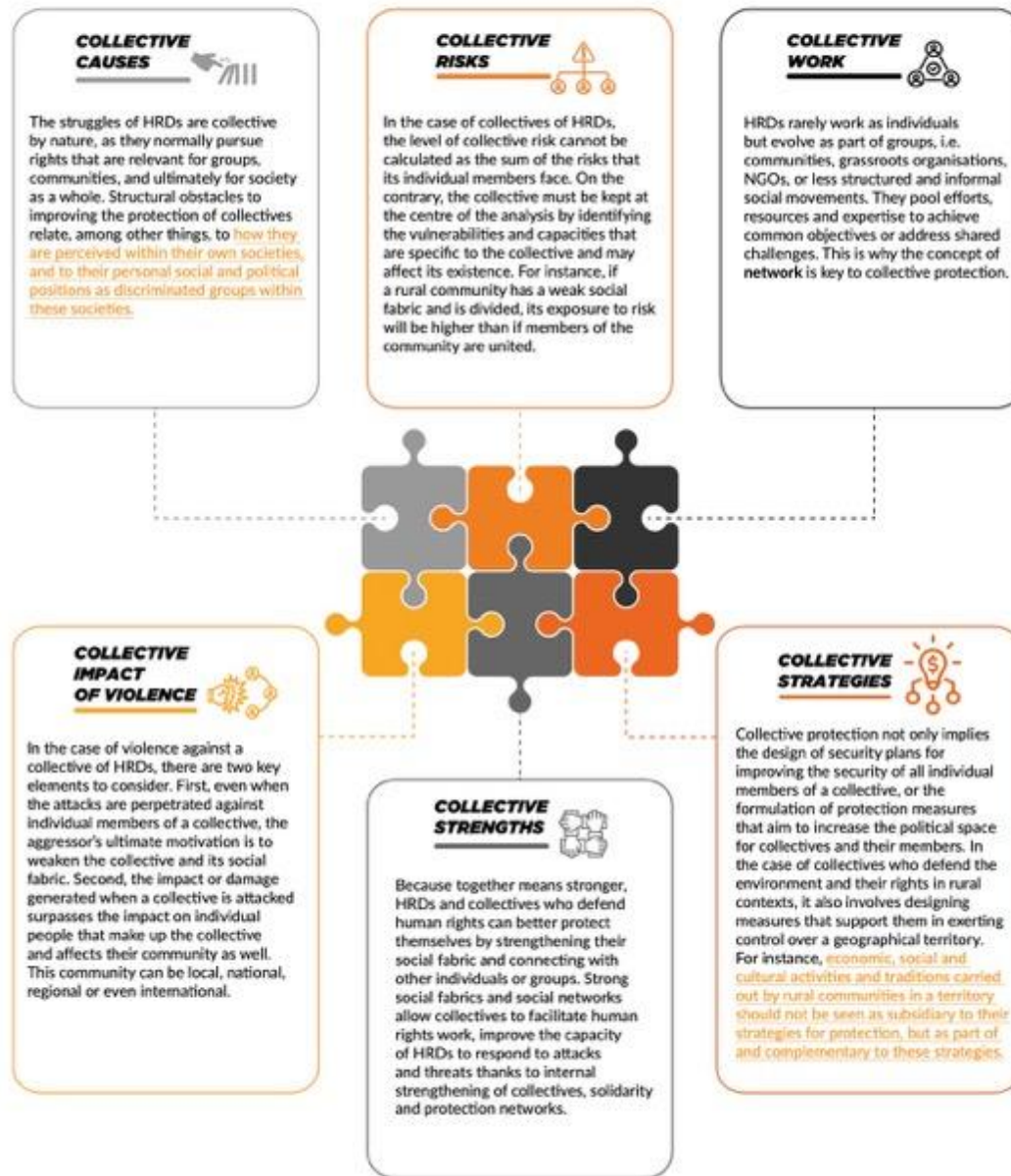
- **React quickly** and coordinate with others (CSOs, diplomats? Government officials?)
- Refer to relevant support services / those who can provide **temporary relocation** and/or additional security measures.
- Provide **safe channels for communication** with the HRD or their family.
- **Publish statements** / engage with government calling for action e.g. accountability, authorities to drop charges or investigate physical attacks) following attacks against HRDs.

Holistic Protection



2.3. Reasons for a collective protection approach

Throughout our experience of almost two decades working with communities, we have witnessed the collective nature of the defence of human rights. We identified the following six main reasons for adopting a collective protection approach.



The Risk Formula

$$\text{RISK} = \frac{\text{THREATS} \times \text{VULNERABILITIES}}{\text{CAPACITIES}}$$

The **definitions** for the terms are:

RISK – the possibility of events that result in harm

THREAT – declaration or indication of an intention to inflict damage, punish or hurt (recent or immediate)

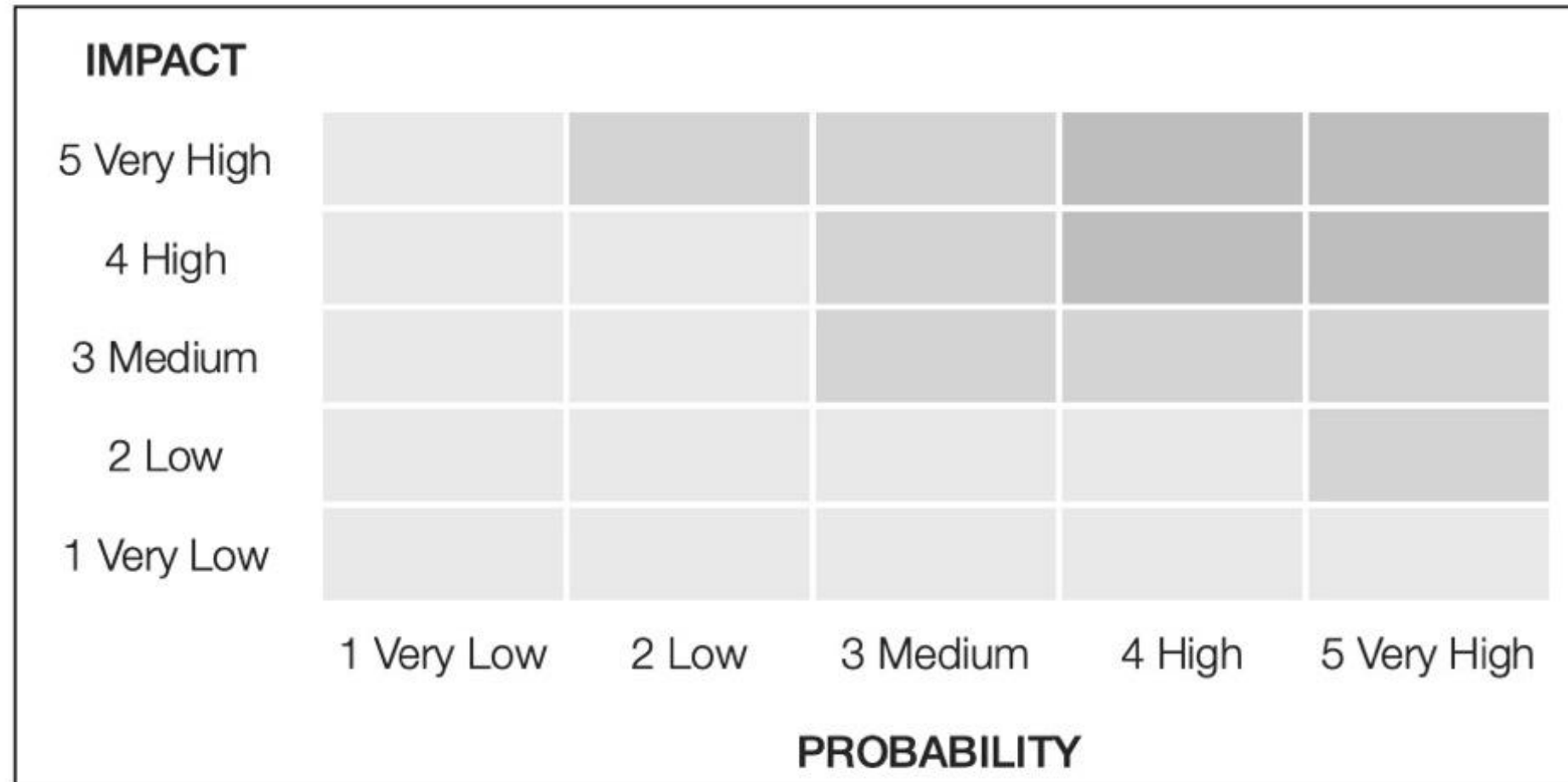
CAPACITY – any resource (including abilities and contacts) which improve security

VULNERABILITY – any factor which makes it more likely for harm to materialise or result in greater damage

ACTIVITY:

My Risk Matrix

Fig. 2.5: On the Risk Matrix below, plot each of your risks in terms of probability and impact. On the following page is an example of how Juan (featured in the story at the beginning of this Chapter) could have plotted his risks.



Personal Security Plan

Risk = Arrest in the context of police search of home and confiscation of papers / phone/ laptop

Probability of this happening: medium to high – other HRDs have been targeted in this way recently.

Impact if it happens: medium to high for myself, my family and my organisation

Threat assessment: Police usually raid homes in the early hours of the morning

Vulnerabilities:

- There is no due legal process - there will not be a search warrant or right to have a lawyer present
- We deal with sensitive information in my organisation
- My young children live at home

Capacities:

- Ability to plan (thinking through how you can best respond in advance reduces the losses you could incur)

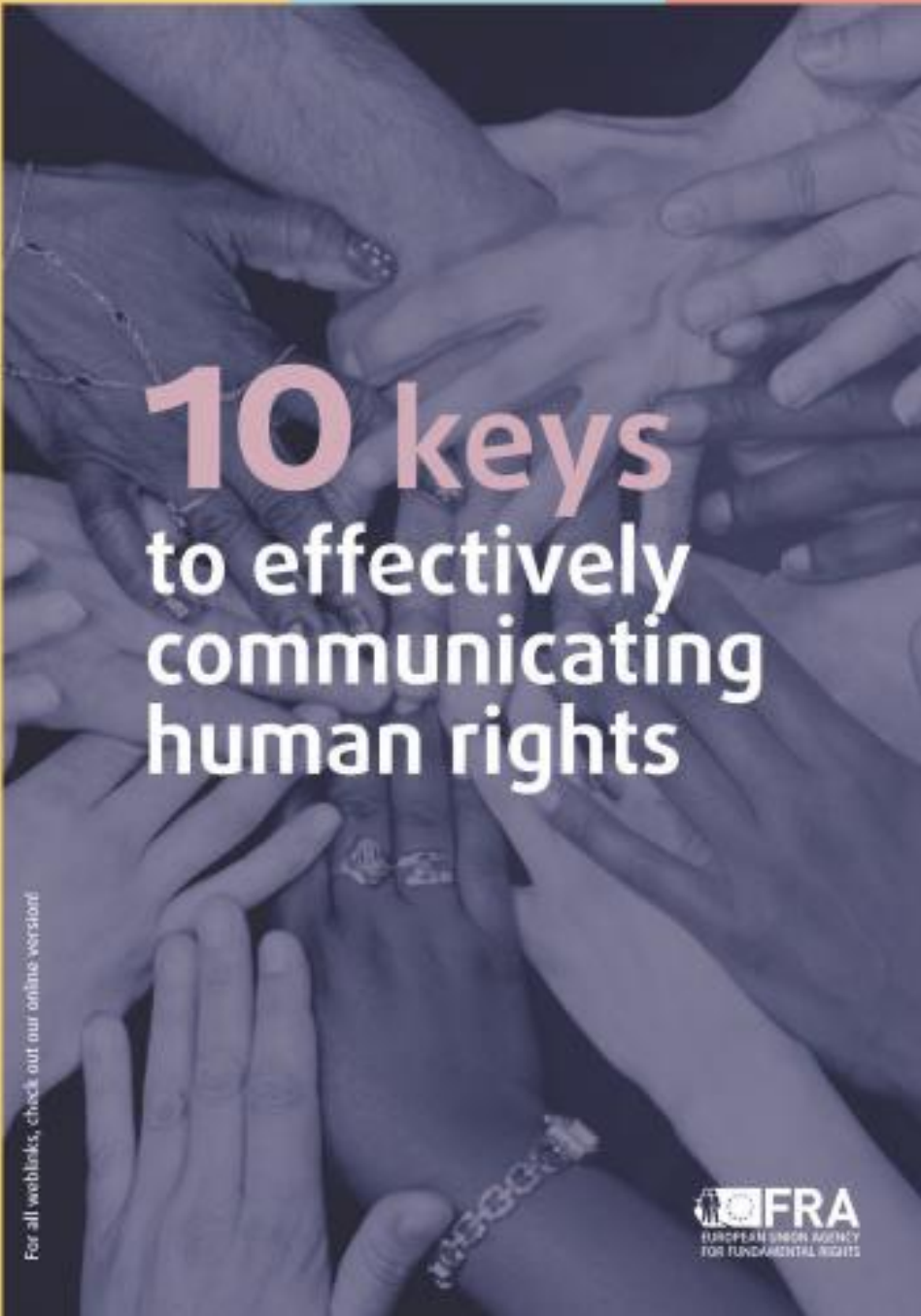
Action:

1. Discuss the risk with my spouse and tell him who to call if the police arrive. (possibly getting colleagues / friends to witness the search if their presence will not put them at risk of arrest too) and who to call afterwards (eg human rights organisations)
2. Arrange for the children to sleep at their Aunt's at times of heightened risk
3. Investigate possibility of CCTV in home to record event
4. Be aware of my rights in detention so I can request them authoritatively (even though they probably won't be granted)
5. Have a lawyer briefed in case I am allowed access to a lawyer
6. Do not store sensitive work information at home
7. Delete sensitive information from computer and phone
8. Ensure all my personal affairs (taxes etc) are in order so that they cannot become a pretext for a political prosecution)

VISIBILITY FOR PROTECTION

- Standing in solidarity
- Joint initiatives / events
- Echoing messages
- Human rights awards





10 keys to effectively communicating human rights

For all webinars, check out our online version!

EU FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AGENCY

1. Tell a human story
2. Identify issues of broader interest to the general public
3. Trigger people's core values
4. Cut a long story short
5. Get visual
6. Embrace positivity
7. Give your message an authentic voice
8. Strengthen communication with media
9. Diversify communication strategies to address different audiences
10. Ensure sufficient resources for your communication work

hope-based comms

[About](#)[Services](#)[Reading](#)[Contact](#)[People](#)

Hope is a strategy for change.

Five shifts for better narratives:

1

fear to
hope

2

against to
for

3

problem to
solution

4

threat to
opportunity

5

victims to
heroes

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION ARCHITECTURE

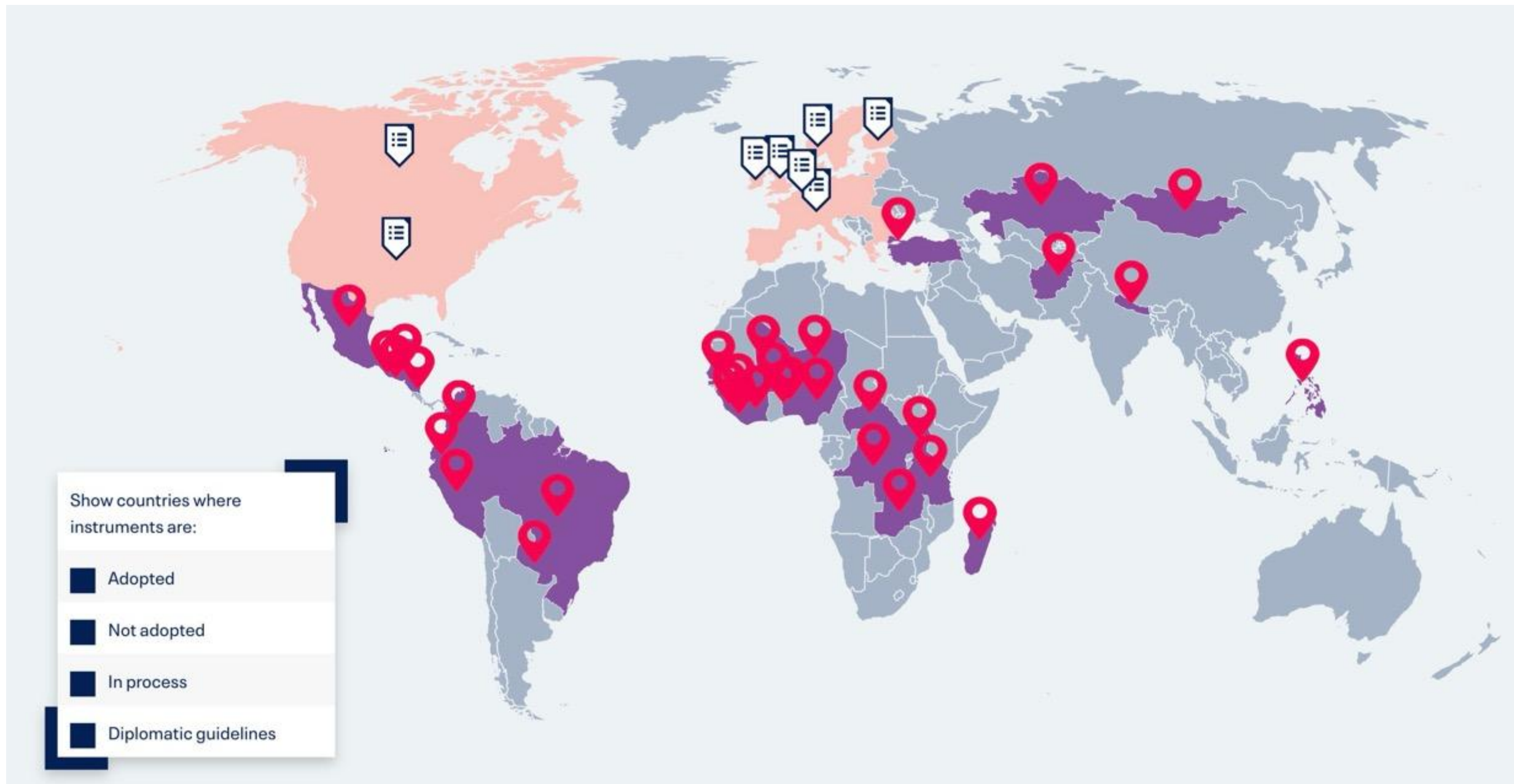


MODEL LAW

- The **rights of HRDs** and the responsibility to defend rights
- The **obligations of States** and public authorities to protect and enable the work of defenders and to prevent, investigate and remedy violations against them
- The establishment of a **Mechanism for the Protection** of Human Rights Defenders

MODEL LAW
FOR THE
RECOGNITION
AND
PROTECTION
OF
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS





UN ENTRY POINTS

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

- 3 sessions per year
- Special sessions
- Complaints procedure

Special Procedures

- Special Rapporteurs – thematic and country
- Working Groups e.g. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

Treaty Bodies

- Committees linked to each treaty e.g. Human Rights Committee (ICCPR), CEDAW Committee...
- Country reviews
- Individual complaints

UPR

- Cycle of country reviews



UN ENTRY POINTS



- **UNSR Human Rights Defenders – Mary Lawlor**

- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-human-rights-defenders>
- hrc-sr-defenders@un.org
- <https://srdefenders.org/>



- **UNSR Freedom Association and Assembly FOAA – Gina Romero**

- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-freedom-of-assembly-and-association>
- hrc-sr-freeassembly@un.org
- <https://freeassemblyandassociation.net/>



UN ENTRY POINTS



- **UNSR Free Expression – Irene Khan**

- hrc-sr-freedex@un.org
- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-freedom-of-opinion-and-expression>



- **UNSR Judges and Lawyers – Meg Satterthwaite**

- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-independence-of-judges-and-lawyers>
- hrc-sr-independencejl@un.org
- <https://independence-judges-lawyers.org/>



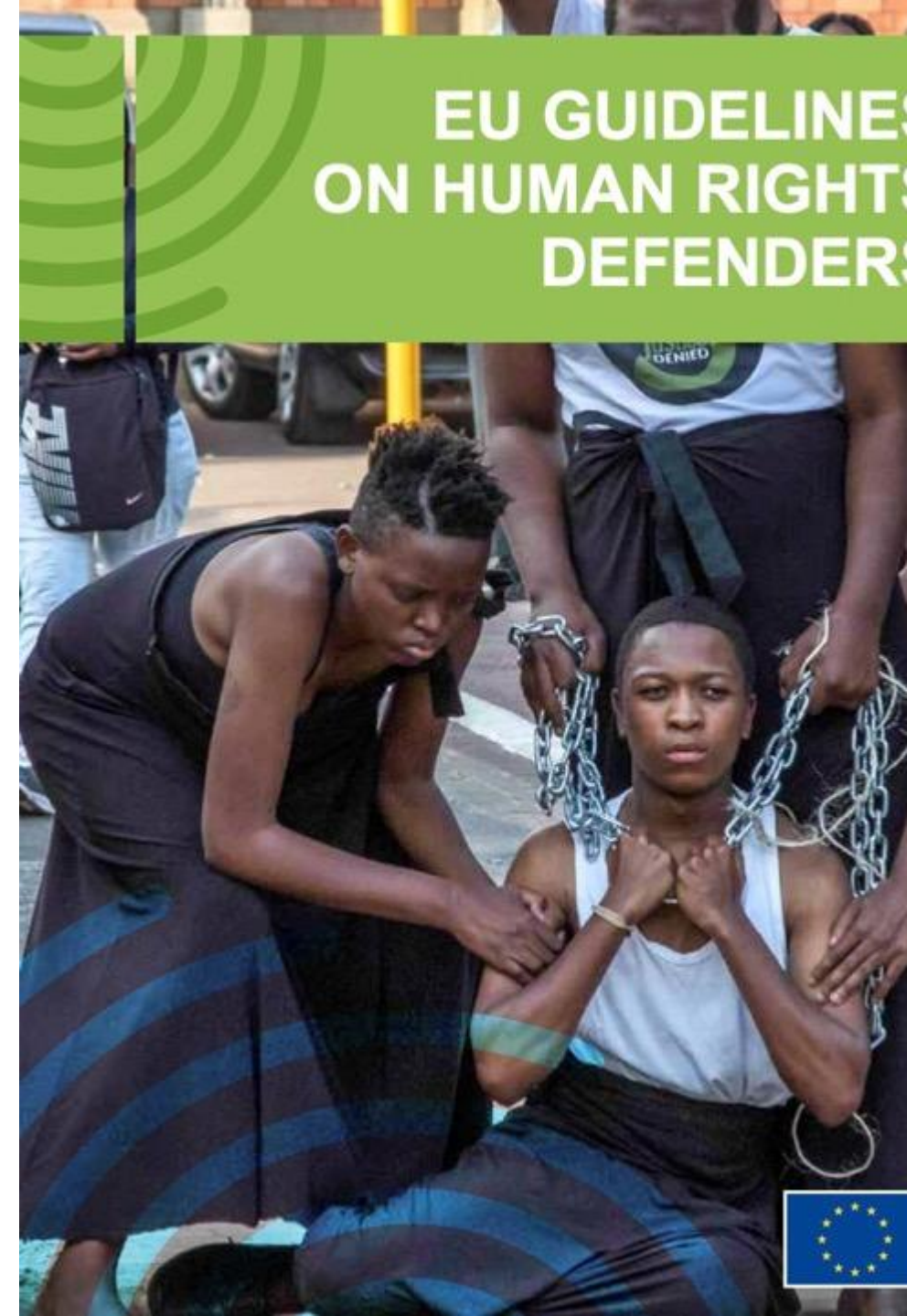
SPECIAL PROCEDURES



- **Country visits 2 per year**
- **Reports**
 - General Assembly NY (development)
 - Human Rights Council Geneva (human rights)
- **Complaints**
 - Urgent appeals
 - Allegation letters
 - Policy/legislative complaints
- **Statements and press releases**
- <https://academy.ishr.ch/learn/special-procedures/what-do-the-special-procedures-do-communications>

EU GUIDELINES ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

- Definitions
- Operational
 - Monitoring, reporting and assessment
 - Role of EU missions
 - Prepare local strategies
 - Organise at a minimum annual meeting with HRDs
 - Coordinate closely with those at risk
 - Maintain contacts
 - Provide, where appropriate visible recognition
 - Where appropriate visit in detention, house arrest and attend trials



EU GUIDELINES ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



- Promotion within multilateral fora
 - HRVP/Commissioners to visit HRDs during country visits
 - Raise during political dialogues
 - Raise concerns with third countries
 - Work with like-minded countries
- Support UN and Special Procedures
- Practical Support through development policy
 - Support activities, capacity building, awareness raising
 - Encourage the development of NHRIs
 - Help support networks
 - Facilitate access to resources
 - Provide swift support including access to visas and temporary shelter
- Council Working Parties – COHOM
 - Promote integration
 - Review guidelines
 - Report to the council

OTHER GUIDELINES

- Switzerland
- Canada
- Norway
- Ireland
- United Kingdom
- Finland
- United States

VOICES AT RISK

CANADA'S
GUIDELINES ON
SUPPORTING

**HUMAN
RIGHTS
DEFENDERS**

Minasyan and Others v. Armenia:

Violations of the right to private and family life (Article 8) and the prohibition of discrimination (Article 14) in a case involving human rights defenders and activists who were victims of homophobic and transphobic hate speech.

Ilgar Mammadov v. Azerbaijan:

The Court ruled that Azerbaijan had failed to comply with its obligations to execute a judgment related to the detention of a human rights defender.

Osman Kavala v. Turkey:

The ECtHR found violations of Kavala's rights, including freedom of expression and the right to a fair trial, and ordered his release from detention. Despite the judgment, Kavala was detained again on other charges, highlighting ongoing issues with implementation.



If you are a human rights defender at risk as a result of your work, ProtectDefenders.eu is to support you



Are you at risk or under threat? Our protection officers are available 24/7

CONTACT OUR HELPDESK



We support your organisation or community to advance your human rights work



We deliver grants for urgent protection measures. As each case is different, so are the grants

EMERGENCY GRANTS



We enhance shelters for the temporary relocation of defenders and coordinate the exchange of experiences among host entities



We enable temporary relocations away from risk, with the support of host entities from all over the world

TEMPORARY RELOCATION



And more: capacity-building, fieldwork, accompaniment, advocacy...

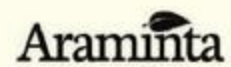
An illustration featuring two hands, one light-skinned and one dark-skinned, shaking in a firm grip. The hands are positioned over a stylized map of Europe, which is rendered in shades of teal and purple. The background is a vibrant blue with a textured, watercolor-like appearance. The text 'Mapping Paper' is written in white on a teal rectangular background.

Mapping Paper

**REALISING PROTECTION FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND
CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS
IN EUROPE**

#ProtectRightsDefenders

Supported by:



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GAPS IN THE PROTECTION LANDSCAPE

Different projects, expertise and resources but:

- **No regional protection mechanism for HRDs and CSOs**
- **No EU focused rapid response funding**
- **No hub or focal point for information**
- **No connection between reporting and action**

3 Rs OF A HOLISTIC PROTECTION ECOSYSTEM

REPORT

Officially report attacks triggering an investigation and response by states



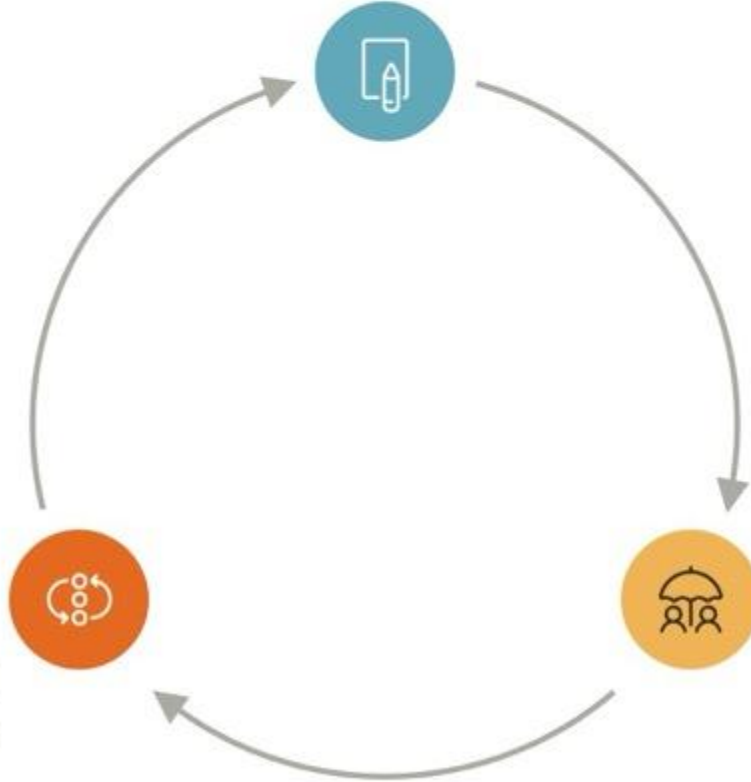
REFORM

Changes to prevent future attacks and build an enabling environment for civil society

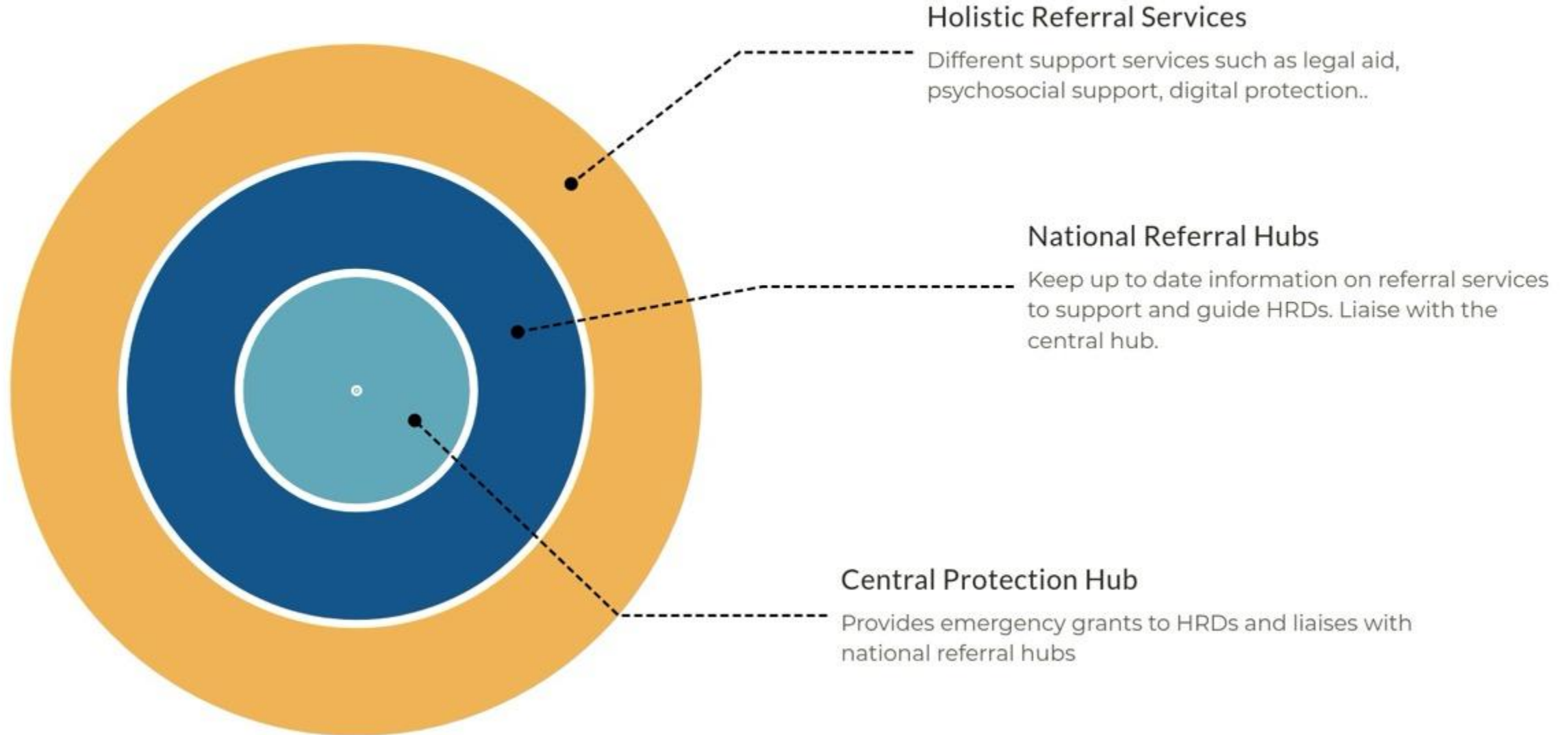


RAPID RESPONSE

Provide rapid holistic protection



Protection Ecosystem



Holistic Protection



A stylized illustration featuring several hands of different skin tones (orange, brown, purple) reaching out to hold a globe. The globe is depicted with green and purple segments and white grid lines. The background is a textured blue. The text is overlaid on the central part of the image.

Pathways Towards an Effective Protection Ecosystem

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CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS
IN EUROPE**

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