ACHIEVING ABOLITION:
FUNDING THE ANTI-DEATH PENALTY MOVEMENT

Arielle McHenry, Aurelie Placais, Giada Girelli
May 2023

HARM REDUCTION INTERNATIONAL
WORLD COALITION AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY

Achieving Abolition: Understanding the future of funding of the death penalty abolition movement

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HARM REDUCTION INTERNATIONAL

Harm Reduction International (HRI) envisions a world in which drug policies uphold dignity, health and rights. We use data and advocacy to promote harm reduction and drug policy reform. We show how rights-based, evidence-informed responses to drugs contribute to healthier, safer societies, and why investing in harm reduction makes sense.

The organisation is an NGO with Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

WORLD COALITION AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY

The World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, an alliance of more than 160 NGOs, bar associations, local bodies and unions, was created in Rome on 13 May 2002. It was founded as a result of the commitment made by the signatories of the Final Declaration of the 1st World Congress against the Death Penalty, which was organized by the French NGO Together Against the Death Penalty (ECPM) in Strasbourg in June 2001. The aim of the WCADP is to strengthen the international dimension of the fight against the death penalty. Its ultimate objective is to obtain the end of death sentences and executions in those countries where the death penalty is in force. The WCADP is striving to achieve these by lobbying international organizations and States, organizing international events, and facilitating the creation and development of national and regional coalitions against the death penalty. Since 2003, the WCADP has made 10 October the World Day against the Death Penalty.

May 2023

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1.

INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

There has been a global trend towards abolition of the death penalty over the last 20 years; with 33 countries abolishing the death penalty in law or practice between 2002 and 2022. This is a result of the tireless, methodical, innovative work from a worldwide movement for the abolition of the death penalty.

A brief summary of progress toward those key objectives: according to Amnesty International, at the end of 2022, 144 countries had abolished the death penalty in law or practice. Of those, 111 countries had legally abolished the death penalty for all crimes (up from 96 countries in 2012 and 78 countries in 2002), 90 had ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), aiming at the abolition of the death penalty (up from 74 in 2012 and 49 in 2002), and 125 had voted in favour of the 9th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty (up from 104 votes in favour of the first resolution, in 2007).[1]

Still, over 30,000 people are estimated to be on death row worldwide, and Amnesty International reported at least 579 executions in 18 countries in 2021.[2] While there are now fewer countries carrying out executions, 11 of the 55 countries that retain the death penalty are 'persistent executioners', meaning they have carried out executions every year in the previous five years. These 11 countries are among the most populous in the world, and hold significant geopolitical power —they include China, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the USA. The retention of the death penalty, whilst seemingly a concentrated struggle, is in reality, a litmus test for the state of human rights in a jurisdiction. The retention of the death penalty is correlated with poor access to justice and lack of fair trial rights, opaque criminal systems, racism and discrimination in law enforcement processes, shrinking civic space, and lack of safeguards for human rights defenders and the most vulnerable individuals in society.

Resistance by this small and resolute group of retentionist countries, together with the progress of recent years, means the death penalty abolitionist movement is at a critical juncture. To sustain the trend toward universal abolition, reliable and flexible civil society funding, together with political support, is critical. Yet, notwithstanding the impact of the abolitionist movement over the past 20 years, few institutions are providing adequate financial and political support for the abolition of the death penalty. This is made more complex by the fact that few human rights and development funders focus on the persistent executioner countries listed above. Death penalty abolition is often perceived as too political of an issue, despite its inherent focus on the most vulnerable and isolated people in society.

This report maps the funding situation for local, regional, and international abolitionist organisations; synthesises data and inputs from 46 organisations; and, articulates the need for additional funding to sustain progress toward universal abolition.

2.

BACKGROUND & ACHIEVEMENTS

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BACKGROUND

Over the last 20 years, the size of the death penalty abolitionist movement has expanded from 20 mostly American and European NGOs to over 160 organisations globally, with life-saving victories secured in line with this growth. Sustained funding for civil society undergirded these wins.

In parallel, the average budget of abolitionist organisations roughly doubled from 2012 to 2022, after accounting for inflation. However, in the last few years, institutional funding has faced a steep decline. The European Commission, the primary funder of the movement, appears to have reduced the total budget for abolition from €8 million over 3 years in 2018 to €6 million in 2022.[3] The Open Society Foundations (OSF) reportedly closed their global funding stream focused on the abolition of the death penalty at the end of 2021.[4] A previous project based on a mapping of publicly available information indicated that Oak Foundation has not dedicated funds to abolition since 2016. Many of the groups surveyed for this report describe a financial cliff for their abolition work.

ACHIEVEMENTS

At international level, the 2007 campaign for the adoption of the UNGA resolution on a "Moratorium on the use of the death penalty" coincided with the first grants on the death penalty awarded by the European Union.[5] Prior to that, policy change at the international level had remained largely out of reach. This was despite the movement's steady growth: the progress towards universal abolition had begun, with two-thirds of the world's countries abolishing the death penalty or ceasing to apply it and executions declining each year.

In 2007, the availability of significant funding allowed for unprecedented mobilisation, including by member organisations of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty (WCADP). That year, NGOs organised press conferences in all regions for World Day Against the Death Penalty in October, circulated a petition globally that garnered 160,000 signatures, lobbied 105 countries, and published written materials in multiple languages to garner support for the resolution.[6] The public conversation about a global moratorium on executions emphasised the global nature of the initiative. On 18 December 2007, 104 UN member states passed a resolution which called upon retentionist countries to progressively restrict the use of capital punishment and establish a moratorium, as a first step towards abolition.[7] Since 2007, civil society has continued this campaign, resulting in 125 UN Member States voting in favour of the 9th resolution in 2022.[8]

At country level, national civil society organisations have achieved significant progress through research, campaigns, and advocacy toward law and policy reform, often leading the movement towards abolition. In many cases, this work was funded by multi-laterals like the European Commission and bi-laterals like the Belgium Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the French Development Agency through international NGOs, rather than directly.

An example of a successful campaign, and of the effectiveness of strategic coordination between national and international actors, is the movement towards abolition of the death penalty in Madagascar. In 2012, Madagascar signed the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR with the intent to ratify it, but the government had stalled in follow-up action. In response, in October 2014, UN actors, together with local, regional, and international civil society organisations, convened National Assembly members, civil society leaders, and representatives from UN agencies around World Day Against the Death Penalty, with the objective of re-energising efforts. At the end of the workshop, participants vocalised their support for abolition, welcoming "the steps taken by the National Assembly for the

development of a bill to abolish the death penalty" and encouraging the President of the Assembly "to include it in the agenda of the October 2014 session."[9] Just a few weeks later, Madagascar's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) took place in Geneva. Local and international civil society organisations had submitted a report calling for abolition and advocated with Member States to recommend that the Madagascan authorities abolish capital punishment and ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR. The members of the National Assembly, under pressure at national and international level, adopted a bill abolishing the death penalty on 10 December 2014, on World Human Rights Day,[10] only two months after the workshop.

Another example of achievement by the movement is the abolition of the death penalty in Sierra Leone on 23 July 2021. The unanimous passing of the Abolition of the Death Penalty Act by the parliament of Sierra Leone[11] represents an outstanding win and unique political momentum. This advocacy success can be attributed to grassroots and national organisations, who led public campaigns about the need for abolition, bolstered by a consortium of supports and allies (including financial and campaign support from international NGOs). Lawyers working at the national level denounced the flaws of the criminal justice system and international and national organisations worked together on abolitionist diplomacy. Parallel efforts at the UN included reviews of Sierra Leone by different human rights mechanisms, such as the UPR: civil society had submitted reports to the UN prior to the UPR and contacted UN Member States to make recommendations for abolition in Sierra Leone during the review in Geneva. The President of Sierra Leone signed the bill into law on World Day Against the Death Penalty in October 2021.[12]

These short case studies show just the highlights of civil society advocacy efforts. Progress towards abolition tends to be achieved after years of work – first, supporting a political environment conducive to abolition; then, strategic legal and advocacy work to reduce the handing down of death sentences and slow executions. Multi-year advocacy initiatives need long-term, sustainable funding.

3.

METHODOLOGY

3. METHODOLOGY

An informal group began meeting in September 2021 to create space to discuss the funding constraints and experiences of civil society organisations in sustaining their abolitionist work. Focusing in on the broader challenge of resourcing the movement sustainably, the group commissioned a rapid scoping of funders in human rights, rule of law, criminal justice, and adjacent areas, with a focus on institutional and philanthropic donors. The scoping aimed at clarifying the existing funding landscape for research, advocacy, and activism against the death penalty, as well as identifying new potential funders. The mapping confirmed that the pool of donors was very limited. Current public funders included the European Union, French AFD - Agence Française de Développement (exclusively for organisations based in France), and the Norwegian, Australian, and Swiss Ministries of Foreign Affairs. The Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs had funded death penalty abolition in the past. David and Elaine Potter Foundation (in the UK) and Sigrid Rausing Trust (UK) were the primary private funders at the time of analysis.

Building on the findings of the mapping, the group invited member organisations of the World Coalition and partners to participate in an online survey to collate and share information on funding for the movement.

An online survey was disseminated between 18 October and 10 November 2022. The survey[13] was developed by a consultant with input from WCADP and HRI. It was disseminated in English and French and consisted of both quantitative and qualitative questions, with the aim of exploring:

- The focus and achievements of the organisations;
- The budget and staff dedicated to death penalty abolition;
- Notable changes in funding in the past ten years;
- Perceived funding needs and the financial sustainability of the organisations' death penalty work; and
- Challenges in accessing funding.

Follow-up interviews were conducted with select groups to ensure that findings were as representative as possible of the breadth of the movement.

The survey was sent to roughly 170 organisations, and 46 responded. Data were reviewed and analysed by the same consultant, with support from WCADP and HRI. They form the basis for the information provided in this report. Quotations from respondents have been edited to maintain anonymity and for grammar and spelling.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENT ORGANISATIONS

GEOGRAPHY

Survey respondents were from the following countries:

- **Africa** – Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Niger, Uganda
- **Asia Pacific** – Japan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan, Australia, Singapore, Taiwan
- **Europe** – Switzerland, Germany, UK, Norway, France, Italy
- **North America** – USA, Puerto Rico
- **MENA** – Morocco, Palestine

Of the 46 survey respondents, 18 were from representatives of organisations in the Global South.

YEAR FOUNDED

The death penalty abolition movement includes large, longstanding human rights organisations and newer, grassroots efforts. The oldest group was founded in 1952 and the newest in 2016. The median organisation was twenty-three years old.

MISSION

Some responding organisations focused solely on death penalty abolition, while others pursued abolition as one prong in a basket of related work (for example on criminal justice or detention reform). Still other groups worked on the full range of human rights (for example, torture or sustainable development), with death penalty abolition one part of their strategy.

4.

KEY FINDINGS

4. KEY FINDINGS

The movement has grown - both in terms of the absolute number of groups and organisational budgets

Over the last 20 years, the size of death penalty abolitionist movement has expanded from 20 mostly American and European NGOs to over 160 organisations working around the world.

The growing diversity of the movement is a direct contributor to its vibrancy and value, to the deep and broad expertise in the field, and to its credibility among key stakeholders. The movement has grown by recruiting new organisations and developing a strong evidence-base demonstrating that the death penalty is in inherent violation of human rights and dignity.

The average organisational budget among respondents in 2022 was roughly twice that in 2012 ($156,251 compared to $78,562 or a 98% increase, after adjusting for inflation). Groups attributed this to increased visibility of their organisations and the broadening of support for abolition in response to the advocacy of the worldwide movement. Also during this ten-year period, previously unfunded groups secured their first funds.

Put in the context of the broader field of human rights funding, the Human Rights Funders Network report an increase in funding of 242% between 2009 and 2019; and note this is a fraction of what is needed.[14] While a direct comparison between abolitionist organisational budgets and broader human rights funding goes beyond the purpose of this study, data on the growth of human rights funding provides a useful perspective on how the budgets of human rights organisations may have changed in the time period under review; and on prioritisation of death penalty abolition by funders.

Civil society has achieved significant progress towards abolition, using a diverse range of strategies

Civil society organisations have driven incredible progress toward abolition at all levels, from securing country-level abolition to promoting, at the UN level, ratifications of the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. Twenty-five survey respondents reported conducting abolition work primarily at the country level, six primarily at the regional level, and 13 primarily at the global level.

Among 46 respondents, and given the option to choose more than one option:

- 42 groups pursued abolition via advocacy;
- 31 conducted research;
- 24 conducted litigation;
- 4 provided support to death row prisoners and their families; and
- 16 pursued abolition using other methods (such as maintaining an archive, or responding to letters from people on death row).

When asked about the moments that make them proudest, respondents offered stirring examples that demonstrate their impact on both individuals and systems:

> *"Early intervention that identified a death row inmate who developed stage 4 cancer, in process of advocating and pushing towards clemency."*
>
> *"Our support for [a] death row family also led to information of suicide attempt by a death row inmate, giving us and local partners [the] opportunity to make intervention on his case."*
>
> *"A landmark supreme court ruling … set precedent and has helped many prisoners on death row to be resentenced and some released. To this day the number of death row inmates in Country D has [declined].., neighbouring countries have copied and tried to use [the same ruling] in their jurisdictions and with this, lawyers have a case to refer to while representing prisoners on death row."*
>
> *"Seeing the death penalty abolished through parliament."*

The pursuit of justice is what sustains the civil society groups and pushes the larger movement forward when the ultimate goal of universal abolition appears out of reach. Indeed, country-level abolition campaigns are often decades long. But the groups advocating for it understand that progress can be made even in the absence of de jure abolition:

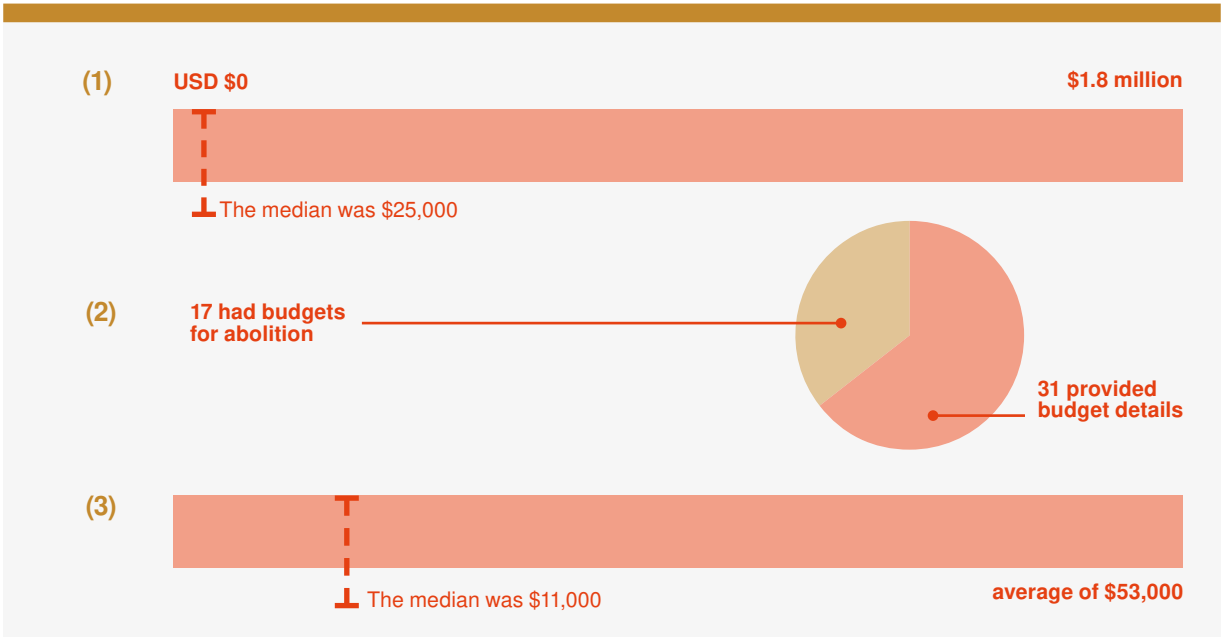
> *"Awareness raising and advocacy has contributed to having death sentences commuted to imprisonment for life in Country E. Some people on death row have been released."*
>
> *"Advocacy on Country F has resulted in a moratorium for drug-related executions and the complete overhaul of executions for minors, making it substantially more difficult to execute children in Country F. In Country G, our work on the [two] cases has kept [X and Y] alive for nearly a decade."*

These recent successes prove two things: that the movement is dynamic and robust—and that there is more work to do.

The average budget for abolition has increased significantly since 2012, and still the movement is under resourced

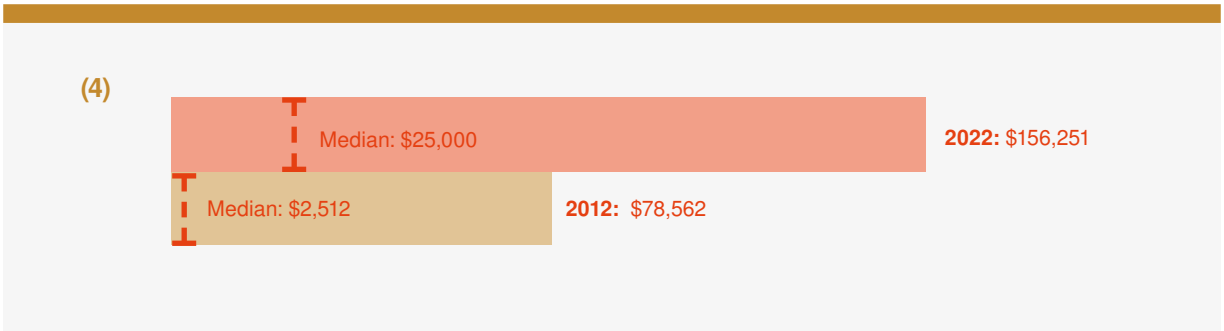
Many of the successes described above have been achieved by groups working on shoestring budgets:

- Among survey respondents, 2022 organisational budgets for abolition ranged from USD $0 to $1.8 million. The mean budget was $156,251. The median was $25,000, indicating that a few, very large organisations heavily skew the average upward. (1)
- In fact, of the 31 respondents that provided budget details, half (17) had budgets for abolition equal to or less than $30,000 in 2022. (2)
- Responding organisations had an average of $53,000 in reserves in 2021. The median was $11,000, again indicating that a few organisations with large reserves are skewing the average upward. (3)



With the median organisational budget for abolition as low as it is, it is surprising to learn that those numbers represent an increase from ten years ago: (4)

- In 2012, the mean budget was roughly half that of 2022: $78,562 after adjusting for inflation, compared to $156,251.
- The median budget in 2012 was $2,512, compared to $25,000 in 2022.



Several groups received their first funds for death penalty abolition after 2012, which contributed to the increase in organisational budgets from 2012 to 2022. Increased funds allowed groups to grow in important ways:

> *"We decided to go from a fully volunteer-based organisation to a funded one."*
>
> *"The change reflects our organisation's growth from an organisation run entirely by volunteers, to sourcing funding for initially administrative roles and eventually a CEO."*

Groups attributed these increases in their abolition budgets to the increased visibility of the movement and stronger connections across the network.

Growing abolition budgets were also associated with paid fundraising staff: respondents with paid fundraising staff had an average death penalty budget of $269,429 in 2022, compared to $72,238 for respondents without paid fundraising staff. Slightly less than half of respondents had paid staff supporting their fundraising for abolition. Of those, groups had an average of two people spending at least part of their time on death penalty abolition.

Even in the context of an under-resourced movement, the funding situation is deteriorating

In 2020, the mean abolition budget was similar to that in 2022: $163,304 after adjusting for inflation, compared to $156,251.

However, in open text responses, respondents stressed the precarity of the financial sustainability of abolition work in the short term—while exhibiting resilience and dedication to the cause:

> *"We [are] working on the death penalty whether or not there is funding."*
>
> *"We have a small amount of cash on hand, but overall we are in a difficult financial position."*
>
> *"…somehow we managed to survive 2022!"*

Other respondents were blunt about the dire state of funding for abolition work:

> *"At the end of 2022 we will no longer have funding for death penalty work. We will support some in-house/staff research and advocacy from our core budget but will not plan for activities"*
>
> *"We currently have one EU-funded grant which is due to end March 2023. We hope to apply for another grant to focus on our death penalty work after this ends."*
>
> *"Very difficult but possible [to carry out program activities] for a couple of months- our main funding agency has ended its death penalty program."*

These sentiments align with communications within the movement, which indicate that Open Society Foundations will not continue its focus on funding abolition of the death penalty at the global level, and that funding from the European Commission and bi-laterals has dried up in the face of austerity measures that have decimated foreign aid offices, shifting trends in development away from aid and toward other modes of financing, and diminishing public support.

A small number of respondents described financially stable budgets for their abolition work in the short-term but stressed the uncertainty of the funding environment for abolition in the next few years. Respondents spoke in sobering terms about the financial cliffs they were facing:

> *"Long-term sustainability is a serious concern in the current funding climate. I am currently not confident we will be funded in 2026 but rely on optimism and the commitment of our Board (volunteers) and wider networks to ensure the capacity of the organisation can continue."*
>
> *"Long term funding is unstable enough that we started a new organisation in an attempt to bring in more funding. We were told by funders that our affiliation with a university and our explicit focus on the death penalty … were factors that stopped them from supporting us."*
>
> *"The organisation is currently fundraising for its regional work and so far not sure if [it] will be funded. If not this means out of the many activities to be implemented only one might be done relying on the existing structures."*
>
> *"We are not expecting funding during the coming years for the death penalty because of lack of funds in general and lack of funds in that field in particular."*
>
> *"I have no confidence about our ability to fund our death penalty work after 2023 - there are strains on our core funding and limited options for specific death penalty funding."*
>
> *"No, we have no expectations that our work will be supported by funding from any sources due to the restrictive conditions imposed."*
>
> *"No hope."*

In addition to the bigger issue of securing sustainable medium-term funding, respondents described challenges accessing funding due to complicated and lengthy application processes, particularly from government and bilateral donors (this is associated with structural issues that are larger than the movement for death penalty abolition). Respondents also emphasised the challenges associated with a lack of core or flexible funding; working in countries or regions that are out of favour with donors; the decline of death penalty abolition as a priority for donors; and in-country political persecution.

When asked about the small wins they wished donors would acknowledge and fund, respondents shared the following:

> *"Have continued to provide information on death penalty to UN treaty bodies, and helped them to issue recommendations to Country A."*
>
> *"Working with government especially the Judiciary, prisons, and parliament. Working with the youth in institutions of higher learning, children whose parents are sentenced to death and media has been a win."*
>
> *"Improving the diet of prisoners in Country B." "On March 24, 2021, Virginia became the 23rd [US] state, and the first southern state, to abolish the death penalty. The availability of raw video footage allowed us to promptly respond to the needs of local allies in Virginia to create a video featuring Advocate A… The brief video targeted the Virginia audience to encourage them to question the use of capital punishment as it risks incarcerating and executing innocent people."*

NGOs' stretch available funds

Respondents described the measures they employ to make ends meet:

> *"We keep a small buffer of funds that can be drawn on for short-term financial sustainability - the margin is minimal."*
>
> *"The organisation has a home and it rents out some space, and this money helps support in costs once payments are late."*
>
> *"We have enough reserve funds to cover approximately 2 months. We expect a significant gap in funding from our major funder in 2023. We are preparing an emergency budget which could unfortunately result in staff cuts and program reduction. We hope this will not be needed as we do not want to lose momentum in our work, and are working on alternate sources of funding including asks for one-time increases from some major donors."*

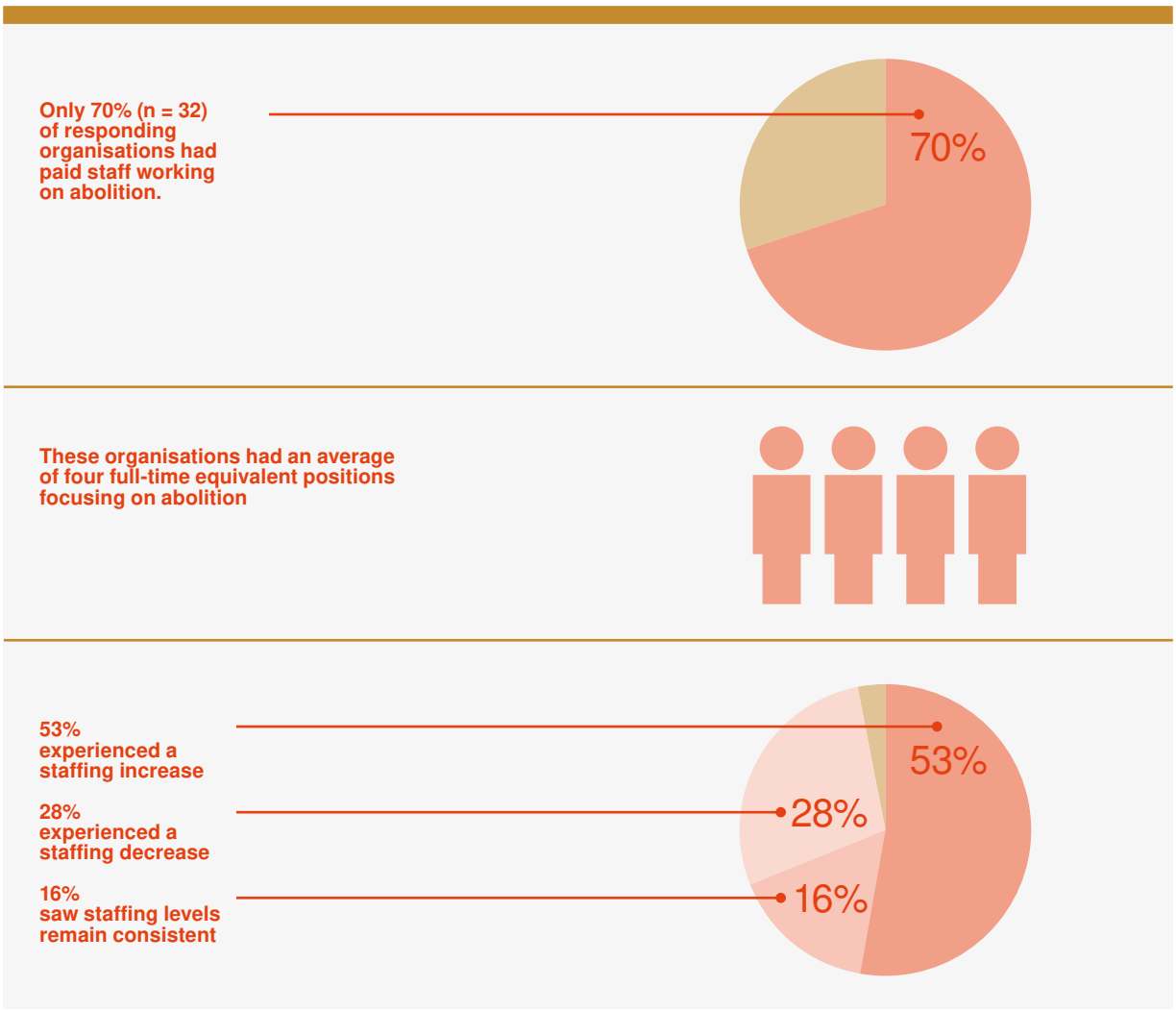
Donations from individuals and volunteer time also allowed groups to press on:

> *"The organisation worked on activating individual donations through awareness campaigns… And…we have a number of people who work with us intermittently as volunteers who can be counted on."*
>
> *"We receive some assistance from churches and volunteers who always keep our account open. The money will be used to keep the office running and to transport the volunteer workers.*

Surprisingly, survey data indicated that only 70% (n = 32) of responding organisations had paid staff working on abolition. These organisations had an average of four full-time equivalent positions focusing on abolition, ranging from one to 15. Around half (53%) of groups with paid staff experienced a staffing increase from 2012 to 2022, in line with the growth in abolition budgets over the same period; while 28% saw a decrease, and 16% saw staffing levels for abolition remain consistent. 30% of respondents (n = 14) did not have paid staff working on abolition—but they had support from volunteers. One group boasted 500 volunteers writing letters to people on death row. The other groups without paid staff averaged 16.5 volunteers providing around 15 hours of work per week. Even groups with paid staff leveraged significant volunteer support, averaging nine volunteers providing roughly 22 hours of work per week.

Donations from individuals also sustained respondents' organisational budgets when institutional funding was unattainable or when proposals were rejected: respondents most frequently counted individuals among groups funding their death penalty work (n = 21); more than NGOs and partner organisations (n = 17), foundations (n = 16), and the EU (n = 14).

Survey results indicate 13% of respondents receive government funding for death penalty work (n = 12). A small number of respondents reported receiving funding from multi-laterals, including the UN (n = 3), other bi-laterals (n = 2), and corporations (n = 1). Seven groups reported receiving funding from "other" sources, including bar associations, membership dues, country embassies, and their internal reserves.



Funding sources and flows must improve to sustain the movement

The death penalty abolition movement is facing many of the same challenges as other social justice organisations; including the critical need to shift power and resources away from longstanding centres of power in the Global North and toward in-country groups in the Global South.

Survey data shows that funders are predominantly based in the Global North. Europe was most frequently cited as the originating region for institutional funding (n = 27), followed by North America (n = 11), global sources like the UN (n = 4), and Australia (n = 3). Only two groups received funds from African institutions, and no funding came from institutions based in South America (where there are no retentionist countries) or Asia Pacific (where there are several retentionist countries).

Survey data also described a bifurcation in the groups' capacity to generate funding. Of respondents in the Global North, 11 had paid fundraising staff for death penalty abolition; eight did not. Of respondents in the Global South, four had paid fundraising staff for death penalty abolition; 10 did not. As abovementioned, paid fundraising staff was associated with higher organisational budgets for abolition.

Solidarity across the movement is strong, and joint funding applications have been an important means of generating funds for groups with less capacity for fundraising or for managing large sums of money: roughly half of responding organisations had received funding for death penalty abolition as a member of a consortium of applicants.

Indeed, the ability of international NGOs to re-grant small amounts quickly and efficiently at key moments has been instrumental to movement successes. Institutional donors often lack the capacity (or the willingness) to act quickly or provide small awards outside of the institutional procedures. Local and national organisations, in contrast, know when strategic action is timely and where a last push is needed—but often lack the funding to actualise plans. While functional, this re-granting model means international NGOs retain decision-making power; reinforcing some of the broader Global North-Global South power dynamics that the abolitionist (and broader human rights) movement have identified as needing to change.

The use of co-implementing international NGOs for advocacy transpiring in retentionist countries not only replicates colonialist relationships, but it sometimes limits the effectiveness of the advocacy. In negotiations with the EU, for example, retentionist countries in Southeast Asia have challenged the authority of the colonialist power by claiming their sovereign right to impose the death penalty. When local advocates are leading discussion about abolition, however, this argument is neutralised.

In short, much more needs to be done to redistribute power. Many of the (limited) current funding options support fund flows and partnerships where Global North or international organisations co-implement projects with local groups in retentionist countries. This has the potential to stifle the vibrancy of the movement, as creative strategies driven by advocates in retentionist countries are ignored in favour of the same old approaches. It also means that core and flexible funding, which allows organisations to grow, tends to sit with Global North or international NGOs. Local and national organisations need access to more than sub-grants and project funding in order to thrive. The death penalty abolition movement is diverse in terms of geography, size, and approaches; the current donor landscape does not match its needs.

Adequate funding would advance progress towards abolition

International funding for the movement has correlated with progress toward universal abolition, both at the UN and in country, but universal abolition of the death penalty requires consistent, long-term funding. Survey respondents made the following arguments for adequate funding for the movement, underscoring the high return on investment and the linked threats to human rights that abolition advocates address:

> *"Of course, there are many problems in our world to solve that need support. Death penalty is one of them - it's a barbaric form of punishment, often enough unfair. Human rights are clear: We must get rid of capital punishment. And it works: More and more countries abolish the death penalty. It's worth to support it."*
>
> *"It requires long-term political commitment to sustain a voice, no matter how small, especially in places where political control over the mainstream media and academia is heightened and sophisticated …and freedom of speech is curtailed through the use of laws."*
>
> *"There is a lot of work done without funding and a lot of momentum going on with funding. Imagine the work we can do with a little funding."*
>
> *"Persecution of human rights defenders including capital defence lawyers, journalists and activists on the grounds, is making advocacy increasingly difficult. Law[s] restricting publications, digital freedom, public protests and the lack of access to transparent information demonstrates that whilst the death penalty appears to be a narrow single issue, it is actually a lens to see how the shrinking of civil society spaces and lack of access to justice, undermines fair trial rights and discrimination of racial, ethnic and sexual minorities across the criminal justice system, and results in the most vulnerable individuals ending up on death row."*

Groups were invited to describe what they could do with additional funding, pitching incremental change as well as game-changing campaigns that indicate the passion and expertise across the movement. Requests for additional funding ran the gamut from $4,000 additional dollars to supplement a $1,000 budget, to upwards of $250,000 additional to supplement a $750,000 budget.

Requesting $5,000 (up from $1,000) to fully fund progress toward abolition:

> *"Once funded our organisation…will be able to accomplish the following activities: Organise radio broadcasts for the popularisation of the various national and international instruments fighting for the respect of human rights, by organising training sessions with the judiciary, magistrates, lawyers, parliamentarians, students, civil society organizations..."*

Requesting $35,000 (up from $20,000) to fully fund their dream agenda:

> *"The permanent vote in favour of the resolution on the moratorium, the OP2, the abolition of the death penalty in Country G."*

Requesting $100,000 (up from $50,000):

> 1. *"Conduct research on mental health and psychosocial well-being [of] children of a parent on death row and children of a parent on ordinary imprisonment."*
>
> 2. *"Conduct awareness raising and advocacy to demand abolition of death penalty in Country X."*
>
> 3. *"Provide legal assistance and psychosocial support to children and families of a parent or primary caregiver on death row."*

Requesting $125,000 (up from $30,000):

> *"The recent progress on the death penalty in Country H was only really possible because of the economic and political situation in which Country H found itself two years ago - ostracised as it was because of the [redacted] affair and with an extremely low price of oil, country H needed to attract outside investment, and so began changing its human rights policies. Our advocacy was prepped for that situation, we struck, and we achieved monumental success. Our advocacy is strong on Country I and Country H, but less so on other … countries. Imagine the good we could do if a similar situation ever hit countries X, Y, or Z. Our work needs to be similarly prepped and operating at the same level on these countries as it is in Country H and Country I, so that we can react when the opportunity presents itself, and accomplish major change in a short time."*

Requesting $1.2 million (up from $750,000):

> "*We would saturate states where abolition may be imminent and retentionist states with the presence of people who directly have suffered as a result of the death penalty, through public education programs and visibility actions, in media, and before legislative bodies. We would increase our services and support for those doing the hard work of sharing their stories – death row survivors, those incarcerated on death row, and their loved ones."*

5.

CONCLUSION

5. CONCLUSION

As the last twenty years attest, civil society has achieved concrete progress towards universal abolition of the death penalty, through high impact campaigns on limited budgets. The growth in funding for civil society over this period has been critical in securing gains; yet, changes in the funding landscape now hint at a financial cliff for abolition work. This is notwithstanding the fact that many groups pursuing abolition do so with modest budgets; even small grants have had a significant impact, particularly for national groups, rooted in the local contexts.

Countries that retain the death penalty perpetrate other human rights abuses. They provide uneven access to justice, fair trials, and opaque criminal systems; allow racism and discrimination in law enforcement processes; see shrinking civic space; and lack of safeguards for human rights defenders. It is disproportionally borne by the most vulnerable people in society, including racial, ethnic, or religious minority groups. Thus, funding for the abolition of the death penalty strengthens and reinforces broader human rights struggles and should be viewed as a deeply connected issue by funders.

Recommendations for funders:

a. Increase and sustain funding for the death penalty abolition movement.
b. Convene a meeting of current, former, and potential abolition funders and advocates.
c. Prioritise core, flexible, and long-term funding for civil society and tackle structural barriers and opacity in funding.
d. Support the decolonisation of the abolition movement. Meaningfully advance the redistribution of power and resources, including by exploring the potential of innovative, regionalised/localised pooled funding that puts decision making power and funding in the hands of local organisations.
e. Recognise the many ways the death penalty is a harbinger of other deep, intersecting issues in the human rights field and fund death penalty abolition work from broader human rights portfolios.
f. Explore funding work on the death penalty in countries considered to be ‘persistent executioners’ (such as Iran, China, and Vietnam) in which donors have been reluctant to invest.

6.

ANNEX: SURVEY QUESTIONS

INSTRUCTIONS

The World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, Harm Reduction International, and the South Asian – Middle East Network are conducting a mapping of the funding situation for local, regional, and international abolitionist organizations. This survey will provide critical data to make the case to donors: that while this movement has achieved significant gains, those gains are fragile without adequate and sustainable resourcing.

Please complete one survey per organization (or per branch office, if your organization has branch offices that may fundraise independently from headquarters). As best as you are able, answer the following questions regarding your organization's (or branch's) successes and funding situation. Data will be summarized, and any trends reported on will not be linked back to specific organizations.

We estimate this survey will take 20 minutes to complete.

Thank you in advance for participating. We hope this 20 minutes goes a long ways toward sustaining our movement.

BASICS

1. **What kind of work do you do? Check all that apply.**
   - Advocacy
   - Research
   - Litigation
   - Support to death row prisoners and families
   - Other (please specify):____
2. **At what level does your organization primarily work?**
   - Local
   - Country
   - Regional
   - Global
3. **Organization name:_____**
4. **Location of headquarters (city and country)**
5. **Does your organization have branch offices?**
   - Yes
   - No
6. **May branch offices fundraise for their own activities?**
   - Yes
   - No
7. **Year founded:____**
8. **What is your organization's programmatic focus?_____**
9. **How does death penalty abolition fit in your organization's mission? Put another way, does your organization consider itself a death penalty organization, or an organization that works on a different topic (women, mental health, etc.) with a segment of that work touching on death penalty abolition? _____**
10. **Does your organization currently have paid staff supporting death penalty work?**
    - Yes
    - No
11. **How many full-time equivalent (FTE) staff currently support your organization's death penalty work?_____**
12. **How has this number changed over the last ten years as a result of funding?**
    - Increased
    - Decreased
    - Has not changed much
13. **Do volunteers currently support your organization's death penalty work?**
14. **How many volunteers currently support your organization's death penalty work? In total, roughly how many hours do volunteers contribute per week?**
    Number of volunteers:_____
    Total hours contributed by volunteers per week:____

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

This important section will help us describe to donors the powerful work you are all doing. Please tell us your stories!

15. **Tell us a story about a recent achievement of your organization:_____**
16. **What has your organization accomplished that makes you most proud?_____**
17. **Tell us about one or two of the small wins you want donors to know about:_____**
18. **Tell us about one or two people (clients, families, government officials, or other) your organization has impacted in the last year. How have their lives changed because of your work?_____**
19. **If your death penalty work was fully funded (whatever that means to you), what could you accomplish in the next five years?_____**
20. **How much would it cost annually, in US dollars, to fully fund your dream death penalty abolition workplan?_____**
21. **What else do you want donors to know about the death penalty abolition movement?_____**

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

These questions will help us understand the current state and history of your organization's funding

22. **What was your annual budget in 2022 (estimated) in US dollars for death penalty work?____**
23. **What was your annual budget in 2021 in US dollars for death penalty work?_____**
24. **What was your annual budget in 2020 in US dollars for death penalty work?_____**
25. **What was your annual budget ten years ago, in 2012, in US dollars for death penalty work?_____**
26. **How does the annual budget for death penalty work in 2022 compare to 2020 (two years ago)?**
    - Higher in 2022 than in 2020
    - Lower in 2022 than in 2020
    - About the same
27. **In a couple sentences, please tell us what accounted for that change or stability. Acknowledging that they are connected, please address external factors (like the funding climate) and internal factors (like your strategic plan). Was one or the other the primary driver of budget changes (or stability)?_____**
28. **How does the annual budget for death penalty work in 2022 compare to 2012 (ten years ago)?**
    - Higher in 2022 than in 2012
    - Lower in 2022 than in 2012
    - About the same
29. **In a couple sentences, please tell us what accounted for that change or stability. Acknowledging that they are connected, please address external factors (like the funding climate) and internal factors (like your strategic plan). Was one or the other the primary driver of budget changes (or stability)?_____**
30. **From which institution types do you receive funding for death penalty work? Please check all that apply:**
    - Governments
    - Multi-laterals, including UN bodies
    - European Union
    - Other bi-laterals
    - Foundations
    - Individuals
    - Corporations
    - NGO/partner organizations (for example, via subgrants)
    - Other (please specify):_____
31. **Has your organization ever received funding as part of bigger grant application with a group of organizations (as partner, co applicant, lead-applicant,associate, member of a consortium, network, coalition...)?**
    - Yes
    - No
32. **In what form do you receive funds for death penalty work? Please check all that apply:**
    - Grants
    - Contracts or fee-for-service
    - Membership dues
    - Other (please specify)
33. **From which regions does your funding for death penalty work originate? Please check the top 3:**
    - Africa
    - Asia Pacific
    - Australia
    - Europe
    - Global sources (UN)
    - North America
    - South America
34. **What were your organization's general reserves in US dollars in 2021?_____**
35. **Thinking about your death penalty work, what percentage of the budget may be used for core costs?_____**
36. **Thinking about your death penalty work, what percentage of the budget is restricted to program costs?_____**
37. **What type of work receives the most support from donors? Please select 1 or 2 choices:**
    - Advocacy
    - Research
    - Litigation
    - Support to death row prisoners
    - Other (please specify):_____
38. **Do you have paid staff supporting fundraising and/ or grant-writing for death penalty work?**
    - Yes
    - No
39. **How many full-time equivalent (FTE) staff support fundraising and/or grantwriting? Maybe a percentage of 1 FTE or multiple FTEs:_____**
40. **Please write a couple sentences about the short term financial sustainability of your death penalty work. For example, do you have the cash on hand to fund program costs if a couple grant payments are late?____**

41. Please write a couple sentences about the long-term financial sustainability of your death penalty work. For example, are you confident that it will be funded in 2026?____

42. What challenges, if any, does your organization face in accessing in funding? For example, area of work or geography not a priority for donors, complicated application processes:_____

43. What is the average length of your grants in months?_____

44. What percentage of your budget for death penalty work is onward granted in an average year?_____

NEXT STEPS

45. Are you willing to talk more about your organization's experience accessing funding?

- Yes
- No

46. What is your contact information?

- Name:____
- Organization:_____
- City:_____
- Country:_____
- Email address:_____

7.

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13. Full text available in the Annex to this report.
14. Rachel Thomas and Kellea Miller (2022), 'Advancing Human Rights : Annual Review of Global Foundation Grantmaking. 2019 Key Findings' (US : Candid and Human Rights Funders Network), https://www.issuelab.org/resources/41141/41141.pdf.
15. The authors of this report recognise that the terms 'Global North' and 'Global South' are neither clearly defined nor perfect, and can represent an oversimplification of power dynamics. Nevertheless, they can be useful to depict geopolitical relations and power (im)balances at the global level. According to the Gender and Development Network, "Global North is used to describe countries that are relatively powerful, financially rich and majority white; many were formerly the centres of colonial empires, but all tend to benefit from the global capitalist systems built on those colonial legacies. On the other hand, the Global South – also sometimes described as the Global Majority – describes countries and peoples that have been and continue to be exploited by colonisation and neocapitalist global systems, and which are therefore relatively financially poor." See GADN (2022), 'What is the role of Northern organisations in global justice advocacy?' (London: Gender and Development Network), https://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/northern-organisations-global-justice-advocacy.

HARM REDUCTION INTERNATIONAL

WORLD COALITION AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY