



Fact sheet: Support to Freedom of Religion or Belief under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)

- June 2014 -

The European Union (EU) has different geographic and thematic financial instruments that can be used to promote an environment conducive to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in the EU's external action. These include the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) with its thematic programme on support to civil society organisations and local authorities and the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP). The most specific instrument to promote this is, however, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)¹. The promotion of freedom of religion or belief as a fundamental freedom, the protection of persons belonging to minorities and the fight against discrimination are and remain funding priorities under the instrument.

1. Legal basis

The current legal basis for the EU's financial support for FoRB can be found in article 2.1 b) (v) of the new EIDHR Regulation 2014-20, which explicitly mentions that the EU's assistance shall focus on "freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, including by means of measures to eliminate all forms of hatred, intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief and by fostering tolerance and respect for religious and cultural diversity within and among societies".² Objective 2 of the Regulation's Annex also states that support will be given to EU human rights priorities, such as those covered by EU human rights Guidelines. With the adoption of the *EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief* on 24 June 2013³, this topic is clearly covered by EIDHR objective 2 as well.

For the period of 2014-20, the EIDHR has a total amount of 1.3 billion EUR. There are no ear-marked allocations for specific themes as such. However – and as mentioned above, FoRB has been identified as one EIDHR priority and is likely to be funded through different modalities in the period 2014-20.

2. EIDHR modalities

During the past years, FoRB has been promoted through different EIDHR modalities, including global calls for proposals, local Country Based Support Scheme (CBSS) calls managed by EU Delegations, and support to human rights defenders (HRDs) through small grants. FoRB has also featured in events funded by the EIDHR.

2.1 Global Calls for Proposals

In 2013, a global call for proposal on combating discrimination was launched with a total allocation of 20 million euros, 5 million specifically to support projects on promoting FoRB and combating discrimination on religious or belief grounds. This is the first time a global EIDHR call has explicitly focused on FoRB, coinciding with the adoption of the EU Guidelines in June 2013. For this call, the final evaluation and short-listing of selected projects are about to be concluded. In theory between five to 16 projects – depending on the proposed grants ranging between min. 300.000 up to 1 million EUR – will be funded as of 2014 for a period of 18 months to three years.⁴

While the 2013 call represents the first explicit call to address FoRB, it is important to stress that the promotion of non-discrimination on grounds of religion or belief has been an eligible area of action since the beginning of

¹ www.eidhr.eu

² REGULATION (EU) No 235/2014 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 March 2014 establishing a financing instrument for democracy and human rights worldwide, Official Journal, vol. 57, 15 March 2014, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2014:077:FULL:EN:PDF>.

³ *EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief*, 24 June 2013, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137585.pdf.

⁴ Guidelines for applicants for the call combating discrimination are available here: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/europeaid/online-services/index.cfm?ADSSChck=1401894588716&do=publi.detPUB&searchtype=AS&Pgm=7573843&zgeo=38220&aopt=36537&ccnt=7573876&debpub=01%2F04%2F2013&finpub=31%2F07%2F2013&orderby=sta&orderbyad=Asc&nbPubliList=15&page=2&aoref=134379>.



EIDHR and its predecessor, the European Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights. Prior to 2013, FoRB has been considered in the context of promotion of fundamental freedoms and interrelated rights, support to HRDs, promotion of minority rights, and combating discrimination. It has previously fallen under these broader calls and been classified and contracted as such.

2.2 Local Calls for Proposals – the Country Based Support Scheme (CBSS)

In the period of 2008-12, at least 13 projects with FoRB as a major objective were funded under the EIDHR CBSS scheme in at least seven countries, amounting to more than 1.84 million EUR in support. These projects were spread across different regions, including accession/enlargement countries, the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, Central Asia, Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. On the top of this, several projects had elements targeting religiously motivated discrimination or closely related themes, in at least three regions, including the Middle East and North Africa.

The EU Delegations will be able to address FoRB through their 2013-14 CBSS allocations as well, depending on their country specific human rights priorities. As this factsheet is written, CBSS calls addressing FoRB as one of the priority areas have been launched in Armenia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, and Sri Lanka. In other countries like Egypt, the call addresses "the rights of vulnerable/marginalised groups", which could address FoRB while not being explicitly mentioned.⁵

Lastly, it is also worth mentioning that the DEVCO's standard evaluation grids for project proposals, whether global or local, have a section on cross-cutting issues, including the topic of rights of minorities. In this context, the situation of FoRB minorities would fall into the wider topic of minority rights that would need to be considered when evaluating project proposals.

2.3 Small grants

A modality limited in amount, yet potentially very helpful for its beneficiaries due to its flexible and rapid nature, is the EIDHR small emergency grant scheme which provides grants up to 10.000 EUR to human rights defenders at risk. So far, a total of 1 million EUR has been provided for more than 400 HRDs in more than 30 countries. FoRB defenders are eligible for this support. Due to strict confidentiality as to ensuring the protection of these individuals, the exact number and location of FoRB defenders cannot be communicated.

2.4 Events

In the past, EIDHR has funded events, in which FoRB has featured on the agenda. For instance, during the 2013 EIDHR Forum – the European Commission's (DEVCO) annual event focusing on the concrete implementation of the instrument – FoRB was one of the key thematic issues discussed in the parallel sessions. This event brought together civil society organisations (CSOs) that are beneficiaries or potential beneficiaries of the instrument, allowing exchanges on lessons learnt and best practices for improved operational support to CSOs and HRDs in this field of action. EIDHR also financed the 2012 EU-NGO Forum, organised by the EEAS, with a workshop on FoRB and UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Heiner Bielefeldt as one of the panellists.

Finally, EIDHR finances civil society seminars organised in the framework of formal EU human rights dialogues with third countries or organisations. For instance in 2011, the EU delegation in Indonesia organised an event entitled "Human Rights and Faith in Focus", with the two-fold aim of forging links between European and Indonesian civil society on the one hand, and feeding input into the EU-Indonesia human rights dialogue on the other. FoRB will remain an eligible topic for these seminars in future as well.

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⁵ <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/europaaid/online-services/index.cfm?ADSSChck=1384344353793&do=publi.welcome&userlanguage=en>. Select "advanced search"- programme: "Human Rights" – Grants: tick "closed" and "open" – Published after/before: choose the dates of search.