

The Impact of Open Society
Foundation's Funding Withdrawal on
the Sex Worker Rights Movement, and
Recommendations for a Path Forward

SWDC
SEX WORK DONOR COLLABORATIVE



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Notice

While OSF shared data related to the grants and provided funding for this project, the contents of the report are independent and not necessarily the view of OSF.

Introduction

The Sex Work Donor Collaborative (SWDC) is a network of funders that have come together to increase the amount and quality of funding to support sex worker rights. This is achieved through strategic coordination of grant-making, research, and advocacy in partnership with sex worker-led organizations and networks. SWDC acts in response to the unacceptably low rates of sex worker rights movement resourcing, which constitutes less than 1% of all global human rights funding. In doing so, SWDC works to challenge the widespread stigma and discrimination against sex workers and sex work that permeate philanthropic systems and structures.

Globally, we are witnessing a determined, well-funded pattern of rollbacks to bodily autonomy and human rights in the form of reproductive restrictions and increasing hostility towards LGBTQ people and migrants. Central to defending these basic freedoms are sex workers, who have organized against coercive control, state violence, discrimination, surveillance, censorship, and criminalization for decades. As a deeply intersectional community, sex workers are more likely to face multiple forms of economic, political, and social oppression. Yet the accomplishments of their movements are impressive. As we witness the rise of a religious authoritarian right world-wide, the need to incorporate sex worker advocates into our movements for liberation has never been so apparent.

SWDC commissioned this report in order to evaluate the impact of Open Society Foundations' (OSF) withdrawal from the sex worker rights funding landscape. OSF was one of the most important funders of sex worker rights movements in the world and was a founding member of SWDC. In 2006, OSF published a report¹ interviewing key funders, highlighting the relative dearth of funding for the sex worker rights movement. An internal OSF report² noted that the Open Society Foundations' Sexual Health and Rights Project (SHARP), a part of its Public Health Program, was the leader of philanthropic efforts in the field of sex worker rights and in support of other communities marginalized in healthcare settings. SHARP funded strategies including the decriminalization of sex work, the depathologization and the right to gender recognition for trans and intersex people and ending nonconsensual and medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex children (*The Open Society Quest for Sexual Health and Rights*, p. 1). In 2019, Human Rights Funders Network reported that OSF, through its various foundations, was the top funder of sex worker rights.³ However, due to a broad reorganization of the foundations in the early 2020s, OSF closed its Public Health Program, including its global giving to sex worker rights movements. Given its prominence in the sex worker rights movement space, OSF's withdrawal raised significant challenges for those engaged in the movement.

1 Dorf, J. (2006). *Sex Worker Health and Rights: Where is the Funding?* Sexual Health and Rights Project (SHARP).

2 *The Open Society Quest for Sexual Health and Rights: Sex worker, trans, and intersex health and rights from 2005-2021.*

3 (2019) *Advancing Human Rights: The State of Global Foundation Grantmaking*, Human Rights Funders Network, available at <https://humanrightsfunding.org/populations/sex-workers/>

This report was commissioned to assess the funding landscape for sex worker rights, the impact OSF's Public Health Program's closure is having on sex worker rights organizations and movements, and to learn how sex worker-led organizations are finding possible ways forward. OSF's Reassigned Grants Unit provided financial support for this research. Strength in Numbers Consulting Group, a research and evaluation group with expertise in quantitative and qualitative research related to funding for historically excluded groups, was contracted by SWDC to conduct the research and draft the report.

Methods

This evaluation aims to address the following research questions:

1. Looking back over the past two decades, what does the sex worker rights movement funding landscape look like? How have funding sources and amounts changed over time?
2. What was the history of OSF's involvement in the sex worker rights movement? How did OSF support organizations in the sex worker rights field and what was its impact on the movement?
3. What was the impact of OSF's withdrawal from the funding landscape with regard to both OSF's grantee organizations and the movement(s) of which they were a part?
4. How are OSF grantees responding to OSF's withdrawal from the funding landscape?

In order to address the above questions, data were gathered from three sources:

1. Seminal reports on funding for sex worker rights organizations (henceforth "seminal funding reports")
2. OSF's internal records of funding provided to sex worker rights organizations (henceforth "OSF data")
3. Interviews with OSF grantee organizations (henceforth "interviews" or "grantees")

The collection and review of seminal funding reports were intended to generate a picture of the sex worker rights funding landscape over the past two decades, tracking sources of funding for sex worker rights organizations as well as their amounts. Sources of relevant reports were selected in consultation with the SWDC Coordinator. Additional information on the seminal reports themselves is available in the funding landscape background section.

Data on OSF funding to sex worker rights organizations was provided by the Reassigned Grants Unit (RGU) at Open Society Foundations (OSF). The original dataset was pulled from OSF's main grantmaking system, but this list was later supplemented with information from prior program officers who were deeply familiar with the sexual health and rights portfolio, and worked in other internal systems. All information about OSF's grantmaking was verified by the RGU staff.

Lastly, interviews with OSF grantees were conducted in order to hear directly from grantees and gain insight into the impacts of OSF's withdrawal. Interviews were conducted through Zoom and lasted between 60 and 75 minutes. Interviewees were asked questions relating to the four research areas mentioned above. Interviewees were executive leaders in their respective organizations. Nine interviewees were selected from the 97 organizations who received funding from OSF for sex worker rights work in the past five years, in consultation with SWDC staff. These organizations were selected to reflect the regional concentration of OSF's sex worker rights funding in Africa (three organizations), Eastern Europe (two organizations) and Western Europe (two organizations), as well its funding of global organizations (two organizations). OSF program staff also recommended organizations that had deep, longstanding funding relationships with the foundation. Interview recordings were transcribed and coded using a mix of deductive and inductive coding to identify common themes of responses across interviews.

Background: The Sex Worker Rights Funding Landscape

Getting a clear picture of the sex worker rights funding landscape is fraught with challenges, as we have noted in a prior report on fund tracking in this field.⁴ Candid (formerly the Foundation Center) is the best-resourced and most comprehensive fund tracker, making it one of the default resources for research on philanthropic funding. However, Candid receives the majority of their data through US tax form 990s, which are a challenging source when intermediaries and public foundations are involved, and lack grant descriptions. Moreover, Candid data is released significantly after the grant year has passed, and analyzes this data using staff-applied codes based on the grant description only when grants are larger than \$250,000—smaller grants are analyzed using an AI-algorithm. As a result of these challenges, funders' networks began to collect data directly from aligned funders about their giving to particular populations or on specific topics. In short, the availability of comprehensive reporting on sex worker rights funding is limited, motivating the measurement of sex worker rights funding through other lenses, such as reporting of HIV-related funding or LGBTQ funding. In such instances, sex worker rights groups are an identified subpopulation among funding recipients.

In the sections below, we discuss, first, the broadest coverage of sex worker rights funding data available through the Human Rights Funders Network 2019 Report⁵ (HRFN 2019 Report) and a 2014 Mama Cash/Red Umbrella Fund report⁶ which is followed by a discussion of HIV-focused funding provided in

⁴ Strength in Numbers Consulting Group. (2013). *Describing Fund Tracking for Sex Worker Rights: A report by Strength in Numbers Consulting Group for the Sex Work Donor Collaborative*. Internal SWDC report: unpublished.

⁵ Thomas, R. K. Miller. (2022). *Advancing Human Rights: Annual review of global foundation grantmaking*. Candid.

⁶ (2014). *Funding for Sex Worker Rights: Opportunities for foundations to fund more and better*. Mama Cash/Red Umbrella Fund.

the annual reports published by Funders Concerned About AIDS ⁷ and LGBTQ-focused funding found in reports published by Funders for LGBTQ Issues and Global Philanthropy Project. ⁸

Findings from the Human Rights Funders Network 2019 Report

The Human Rights Funders Network’s 2019 report *Advancing Human Rights: Annual Review of Global Foundation Grantmaking* claims to collect the most comprehensive data available for global human rights philanthropy. They “collect data from three networks of global human rights donors and review individual grants housed by Candid,” identifying “761 foundations in 51 countries that gave \$4.1 billion for human rights” (Thomas & Miller, 2022, p. 3). Grants were coded on the basis of mentions of nine populations that are most often the focus of human rights movements and funders. Overlap between populations could be identified when two or more of these populations were identified in the coding process.

HRFN’s reporting on sex worker funding is significant because each grant to this population is vetted by HRFN staff for its human rights focus, making the data more accurate than Candid. Of the nine human rights movement groups listed, sex workers in 2019 received \$7 million or 0.2% of overall human rights funding that year with a total of 163 grants, by far the smallest amount of funding of any human rights group. Of this amount, OSF contributed \$2.25 million through its “Foundation to Promote Open Society” and its “Open Society Policy Center.” In contrast, the next smallest group, human rights defenders, received \$24 million across 884 grants. Moreover, of the nine populations, sex workers and human rights defenders were identified as having the highest overlap with other populations, with sex workers exhibiting a 72% overlap with two or more populations. This suggests that although a grant could be coded as directed towards a sex worker rights movement organization, sex worker rights were unlikely to be the main focus of said grants. Combined with the small pool of funding, we are left with a picture of scarce funding in the sex worker rights landscape.

Findings from the 2014 Mama Cash/Red Umbrella Fund report

Admittedly dated, the 2014 publication *Funding for Sex Worker Rights: Opportunities for foundations to fund more and better* can provide more detailed information on the top funders of sex worker rights organizations. The report gathered data in 2012 and 2013 and was collected from the U.S. Foundation Center’s (now Candid) global grants database. It was updated and corrected using data provided by funders through surveys distributed to sex worker organizations. One of their key findings is that only a small number of funders constitute the majority of non-governmental funding (\$5.85 million by the largest five funders out of a total of \$10.4 million by fifty-six funders). Of all funders in 2013,

⁷ These included the *Philanthropic Support to Address HIV/AIDS in 2013* and its subsequent annual publication until the most recent 2020 report.

⁸ This includes the annual tracking reports for the years 2003 to 2021 (e.g., *2021 Resource Tracking Report: LGBTQ grantmaking by U.S. Foundations*) published by Funders for LGBTQ Issues and the biennial global resources report published for the years between 2015 and 2020 (e.g., *2019-2020 Global Resources Report: Government & philanthropic support for LGBTI communities*) published by Global Philanthropy Project.

OSF provided far more in both total amount (\$3.38 million compared to Ford Foundation's \$741,000) and number of grants (fifty-one grants as compared to twenty-seven grants by American Jewish World Service).

Findings from HIV/AIDS-related funding reports

FCAA publishes annual tracking reports of philanthropic support to address HIV and AIDS⁹ of which we draw upon Philanthropic Support to Address HIV/AIDS which is annually published to provide yearly coverage each year from 2013 to 2021.¹⁰ Their reports demonstrate that since 2017, funding for sex worker rights groups has been the lowest among all key population groups, which include general LGBTQ communities, transgender people, gay men/men who have sex with men, and people who inject drugs¹¹. This is despite the fact that if a grant supported two groups, such as transgender people and sex workers, then it would be counted in full for both groups. Funding for sex worker rights groups between 2013 and 2021 ranged widely between \$5.65 million in 2013 and \$21.45 million in 2015. However, since the 2015 peak funding, there has been a trend of a general decrease in funding to \$18.4, \$13.9, \$14.7, \$13.5, and \$13.2 million dollars in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020, respectively. HIV/AIDS funding to sex worker groups did increase to \$15 million for 202, an increase 8.1%. In this year, funding to key population groups went up in general: showing a 11.4% increase for people who inject/use drugs and a 18.9% increase for men who have sex with men. Finally, it is important to note that while HIV funding is being received by sex worker rights groups it is not primarily funding for the purpose of supporting sex worker rights as a movement. It is programmatic funding intended to support HIV care and prevention programs.

Findings from LGBTQ-related funding reports

Funders for LGBTQ Issues releases annual tracking reports of LGBTQ grantmaking by U.S. foundations (available from 2003 to 2021) and Global Philanthropy Project releases bi-annual tracking reports of LGBTQ grantmaking globally between 2015 and 2020. The annual tracking reports gather data through foundation self-reporting to Funders for LGBTQ Issues, IRS Form 990 data from the Candid database, and through published annual reports. If there is sufficient evidence that a majority of the support provided by a grant was for LGBTQ issues and/or people then the grant is included. The global reports

⁹ To provide an example of their data collection methods, their methodology section of their 2020 report is quoted as follows: "Data is included for 323 grantmaking entities, which Funders Concerned About AIDS (FCAA) gathered from a variety of sources: (1) grants lists sent from funders and direct communications with funders; (2) funder websites, grants databases, annual reports and Internal Revenue Service Form 990 returns; (3) the grant database maintained by Candid; and (4) grants received by the Funders for LGBTQ Issues that were flagged as HIV-related. FCAA believes that this multifaceted approach arrives at a more comprehensive dataset of HIV-related funders than could be accomplished using any single data source or any single method of calculation" (Citation: Gironde, C. (2022). *Philanthropic Support to Address HIV and AIDS in 2020*. Funders Concerned About Aids., p. 78-79.)

¹⁰ Additional annual reports for the years prior to 2013 are available beginning in 2002 but vary in scope and reporting in ways that limit cross-year comparison.

¹¹ Transgender funding was roughly \$2 million lower than sex worker funding in the 2016 report and was consistently lower in previous annual reports.

(*Global Resources Report*) gather data from two main streams: 1) grant data from foundations based in the US collected by Funders for LGBTQ issues, 2) Global Philanthropy Project's direct collection of grant data from foundations based outside the U.S. and government and multilateral agencies.

Global grantmaking drawn from the bi-annual *Global Resources Reports* of philanthropic support for LGBTQ communities shows that between 2015 and 2020, funding for LGBTQ sex worker rights groups was never more than 1% of overall LGBTQ funding. Funding across the three two-years periods showed \$511,342 in 2015-2016, a peak in 2017-2018 at \$543,686, and \$403,957 in 2019-2020, the lowest of the three periods. Total global LGBTQ funding during these same periods was \$238.1 million in 2015-2016, \$261.3 million in 2017-2018, and \$248.2 million in 2019-2020. Converted to percentage changes over time, between the 2015-2016 and the 2017-2018 data, total global funding saw an increase of 9.7% over the previous year and between 2017-2018 and 2019-2020 saw a 5% decrease. For comparison, sex worker rights funding saw a 6.3% increase (2015-2016 to 2017-2018) and a staggering 25.7% decrease (2017-2018 to 2019-2020) during the same periods.

In the years 2003 to 2011, funding to US-based LGBTQ sex worker rights groups in the annual reports on U.S. foundations' grantmaking never rose above \$250,000, and peaked at a total of nine grants in a single year. In 2012, grant amounts increased to slightly over \$1,000,000 and ranged roughly between one and one and a half million dollars between 2012 and 2018 (with an exceptional low of \$393,000 in 2013). In 2019, grant amounts again increased to 3.6, stayed high at 3.1 in 2020, and then dropped to 2.3 million dollars for 2021. Despite these increases, funding to LGBTQ sex worker rights groups never constituted more than 2% of the total funding to LGBTQ populations.

Highlights of the sex worker rights funding landscape

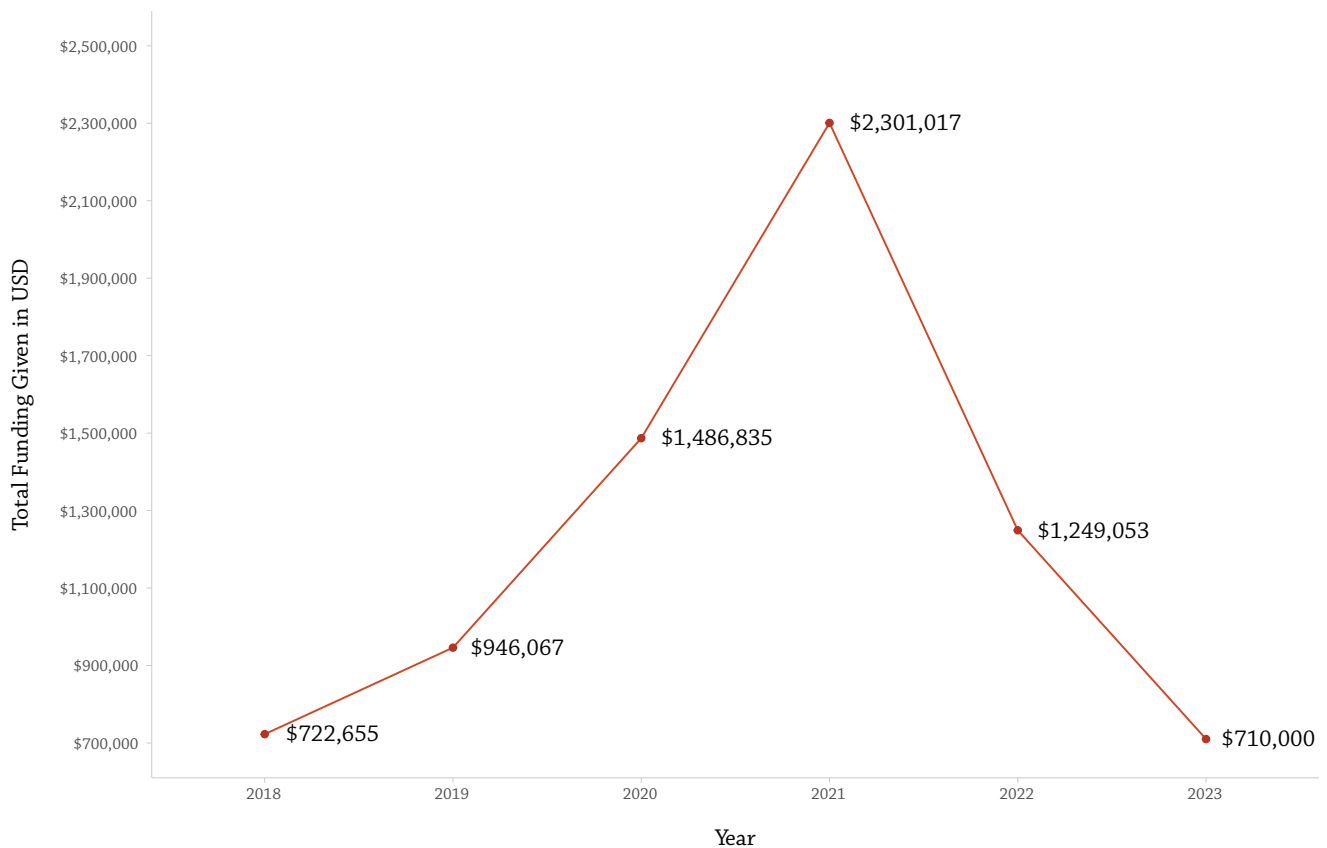
There is a dearth of funding for sex worker rights groups. This is supported by evidence from human rights funding reports, HIV/AIDS funding reports, and LGBTQ funding reports. Sex worker rights groups received the lowest amount of funding of all human rights groups, a mere 0.2% of total human rights funding, despite being one of the most commonly overlapping (intersectional) human rights movement groups. From the HIV/AIDS funding reports, sex worker rights received the lowest of all key population groups (general LGBTQ communities, transgender people, gay men/men who have sex with men, and people who inject drugs) starting in 2017. From the LGBTQ funding reports on U.S. foundations, sex worker rights groups have never received more than 2% of total funding since 2003. From the bi-annual *Global Resources Reports* on global LGBTQ funding, sex worker rights were never more than 1% of total funding (2015-2020). Within this funding landscape of sparse funding, OSF has been one of if not the largest source of funding. Overall, funding for sex worker rights groups is low relative to other adjacent recipients of similar funding sources. Moreover, funding has not seen proportionate increases over time. When there are fluctuations in funding that appear sizable for sex worker rights groups, this is largely due to how small the current pool of funding is: the changing behavior of a few top funders can make a sizable difference. Therefore, the loss of such a player in the funding landscape as OSF could be significant for sex worker organizations.

OSF's Grantmaking to Support Sex Worker Rights, 2018–2023

This section focuses on OSF's financial support to sex worker rights organizations and movements. The purpose of quantifying investments over the past five years is to evaluate what their withdrawal from funding sex worker rights organizations and movements will mean for organizations on the ground. This section includes data on OSF's total investments, giving by geographic area, median grant size, type of support and grant term.

OSF made 97 grants to support sex worker rights between 2018 and 2023.¹² The total amount of investment in sex workers rights was just under \$9 million (\$8,932,537). The grant amounts ranged from \$6,000 to \$1 million USD. The total funding amount grew between 2018 and 2021, from just over \$700,000 to \$2.3 million, then decreased rapidly in 2022 and 2023 as their sex worker rights

Total Funding Given from 2018–2023 (n = 97)

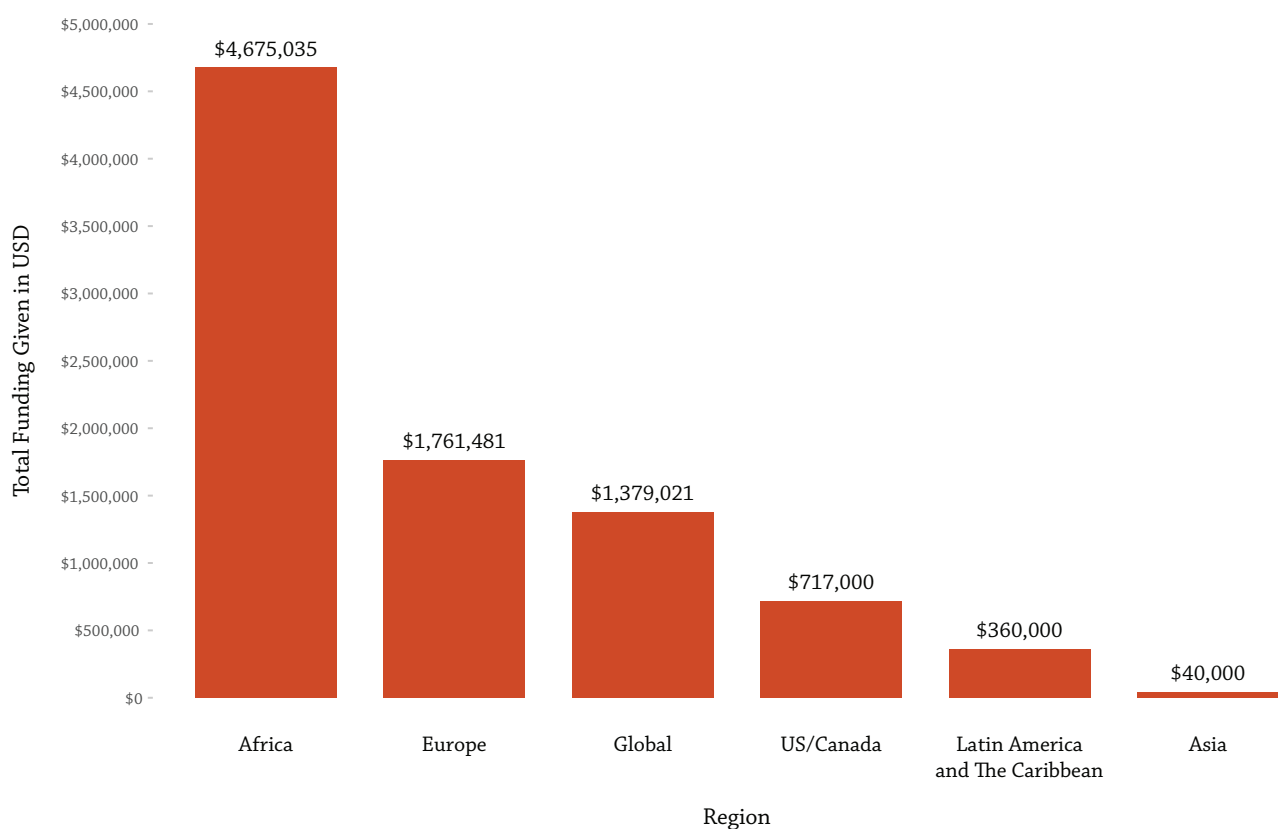


¹² OSF's reassigned grant unit (RGU) made every effort to ensure complete data for this project, but acknowledge that due to the structure of OSF's grantmaking through national and regional foundations, some grants may not be captured in this dataset. Underrepresented regions may include, but are not limited to East and Southern Africa and Eastern Europe. Former program officers generously reviewed grant lists and helped us fill identified gaps in grant support, some of which, the RGU was able to fill. This report is the most complete picture available of OSF's investments in sex worker rights between 2018 and 2023. However, these data may underrepresent OSF's investment in sex worker rights globally.

grantmaking scaled down. The peak of high funding in 2021 is due to the dispersal of tie-off grants during this time.¹³

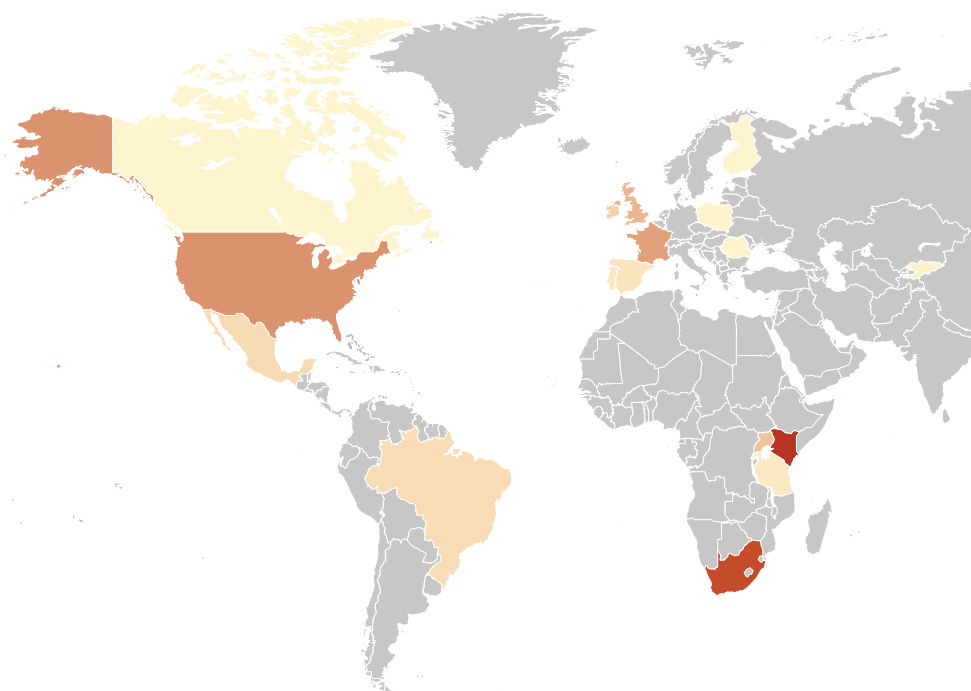
More than half (52.3%) of OSF’s support to sex worker rights between 2018 and 2023 went to organizations in and/or working to benefit regions in Africa, with significant investments in Kenya (\$2,951,542) and South Africa (\$1,237,435). OSF also made investments in organizations based in and/or benefitting sex worker rights in Europe (19.7%), the United States and Canada (8.0%), and Latin America and the Caribbean (4.0%). About fifteen percent (15.4%) of OSF’s support went to support global sex worker rights groups’ work. Specific funding amounts are shown in the graph below.

Amount of Funding Given by Region (n = 97)



¹³ Two large tie-off grants (greater than U.S. \$1 million) went to organizations that do not focus exclusively on sex worker rights, but also focus on other marginalized and criminalized groups, such as transgender people. OSF identified both of these grants as fully benefitting sex worker rights and they are included in this analysis. However, it is possible that some portion of this funding went to other key populations. As a result, tie-off grants may over-represent support to sex worker rights.

OSF Grant Amounts by Country, 2018–2023



Countries	Total Funding
Brazil	\$170,000
Canada	\$6,000
France	\$620,000
Germany	\$17,000
Ireland	\$259,591
Kenya	\$2,951,542
Kyrgyzstan	\$40,000
Mexico	\$190,000
Portugal	\$100,000
Romania	\$19,890
Rwanda	\$41,667
South Africa	\$1,237,435
Spain	\$119,000
Sweden	\$6,000
Tanzania	\$82,000
USA	\$711,000
Uganda	\$362,392
UK	\$460,000

Median grant sizes were consistent at \$20,000 for 2018-2020, but increased to \$30,000 in 2022 and \$36,667 in 2023. Increases in median grant size were largely due to tie-off grants.¹⁴

Year	Median Funding Given	Total Funding Given ¹⁵
2018	\$20,000.00	\$722,655
2019	\$20,000.00	\$946,067
2020	\$20,000.00	\$1,486,835
2021	\$22,500.00	\$2,301,017
2022	\$30,000.00	\$1,249,053
2023	\$36,666.67	\$710,000

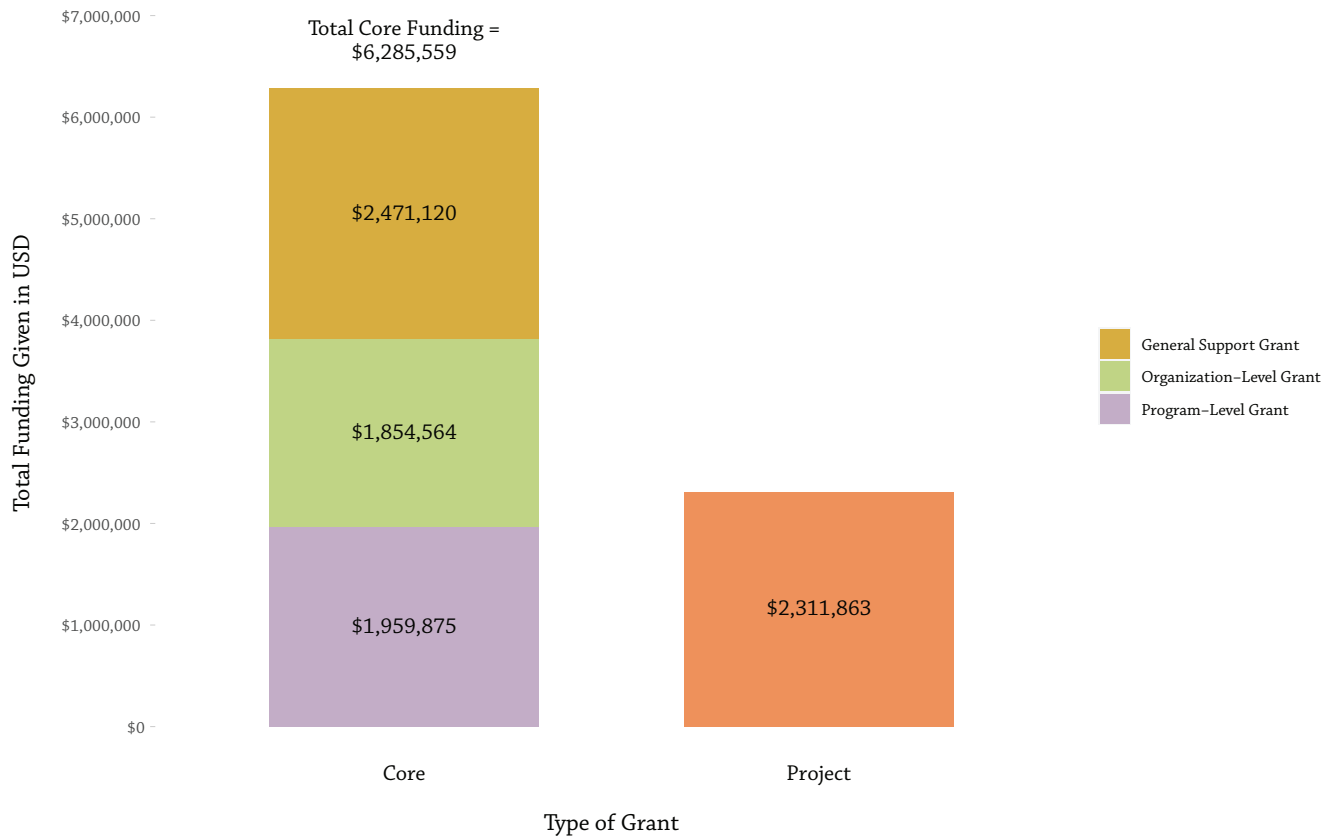
Nearly three quarters of OSF’s investments (73.1%) in sex worker rights came in the form of flexible funding (general support grants, organization-level grants, program-level grants).¹⁶ About a quarter (26.9%) of OSF’s support was for project-specific grants.

¹⁴ Tie-off grants were designated by OSF in the grant type or in the proposal name. Tie-off grants were intended to support organizations for a period of time before OSF’s support officially ends so the organization can adjust their activities and/or raise additional funds to support their work.

¹⁵ Note that multi-year grants have been divided across years, so totals may not match total investment.

¹⁶ A small number of tie-off grants without a specific grant type were included in the general operating support category. Tie-off grants that had grant types were included in the category specified. All tie off grants were either general operating support grants or project grants.

Amount of Funding Given by Type of Grant (n = 93)



OSF gave eighteen tie-off grants between 2021 and 2023, for a total investment of \$3.4 million USD. Funding awarded for tie-off grants ranged from \$20,000 to \$1 million USD. Over a third of the total funding (38.31%) provided by OSF between 2018 and 2023 was for tie-off grants. Eighty percent (79.8%) of the funding provided by OSF between 2021 and 2023 went to tie-off grants.

Just over nine million dollars over five years is a significant investment in sex worker rights organizations and movements. For context, HRFN measured the total of human rights funding for sex workers in a five year period of 2015-2019 at \$30.5 million. The impact of the withdrawal of this funding is particularly acute in East and Southern Africa. Interviews described in the next section reveal the importance of OSF’s general operating and organizational-level support to sex worker rights organizations.

Findings from OSF grantee interviews

The following sections organize findings from grantee interviews into three general areas: how grantees spoke about OSF support, the impacts of OSF's withdrawal from the funding landscape, and how grantees are responding to this change and planning for the future. Whereas the previous section demonstrated the significant percentage of core flexible funding supplied by OSF, this section shows the multifaceted role OSF played in supporting their grantees, from capacity development to networking and close advice. The pairing of flexible funding with OSF's informed understanding of the sex worker rights movement and the challenges their grantees face meant that OSF was particularly effective in helping its grantees to develop anywhere between their initial founding and up to the formation of well-connected movement groups.

The sections below act as an opportunity to give voice to the experiences of sex worker rights movement leaders themselves. Interviewees (henceforth "grantees") were executive leaders within OSF grantee organizations, the majority of which are sex worker-led. All grantee organizations are primarily engaged in the sex worker rights movement, with many placing a clear priority on advocacy work. The distribution of grantees largely reflects OSF's regional funding priorities, with three African, two Eastern European, two Western European, and two global grantees included. Several of the grantees are regional organizations that support in-country sex worker rights groups through re-granting and/or regional convening and capacity building while still others are intermediaries that re-grant to sex worker rights organizations. To give a sense of scale, grantees tended to mention small staffs of five or fewer full time employees and, while mentions of specific grant amounts received were rare, one grantee mentioned [non-OSF] grants of \$4,000 and \$6,000, two of the three grants they had received in the previous year.

How grantees spoke about OSF support

While this report focuses on some of the collateral harms from OSF's reorganization, it is important to note that these harms were so deeply felt because of OSF's exceptional work as a funder of these movements prior to that reorganization. Grantees spoke of OSF with gratitude, noting they played important roles beyond the role of funder: the role of co-founder, of movement builder, and of trusted confidant and advisor. As a co-founder, OSF was often given credit for motivating informal organizations to become formally registered or by being important in the early development of the organization. As a movement builder, OSF funded numerous sex worker rights and adjacent social justice organizations in the same region while also building networks between organizations. Finally, as a trusted confidant and advisor, OSF staff maintained close, long-term relationships with grantees such that grantees felt comfortable soliciting advice from staff. These factors together meant both that OSF was a lynchpin in the development of many sex worker rights movements and its withdrawal of funds was felt as a significant loss.

HOW GRANTEES SPOKE ABOUT OSF SUPPORT: OSF AS CO-FOUNDER

The framing of OSF as a co-founder comes from grantees' accounts of OSF's involvement in the founding of their organization. These accounts highlighted the role of OSF in encouraging informal groups to transition to formally registered organizations in order to be able to receive grants as well as the direct role OSF often had in helping to develop fledgling organizations. One grantee from Eastern Europe describes the impact of OSF's support in earliest stages of their organization's founding,

If OSF didn't exist at that time and if they didn't, somehow, push and motivated us, I don't think that maybe we'll get registered on a later stage, I would say. I don't think that we'll have the capacities, the management capacities, we have today. It was really one great investment of OSF, they were, I think. With the very first grant they awarded to [us], we had a nine-month training on community mobilization, on project management, on administrative and financial work, on strategy planning.

As is apparent in the excerpt above, OSF not only motivated the grantee organization to register, but in the immediate period following, provided the resources to develop and expand that organization. The grantee follows this statement on OSF's capacity building support by saying,

The OSF office here, the local office here, they managed the money. They engaged consultants. They paid the consultants. They paid meeting room for the group for all nine months. **Actually, our capacity strengthening, at that time, was 100 percent covered, supported, by OSF.**

This sense of OSF as a co-founder is also consistent with OSF's long history in this funding space and as a funder of particular grantees. The majority of grantees recognize the longevity of OSF as a sex worker rights funder and as a direct funder of their work. One grantee, which spun off from another organization, recognizes how this support continued from their founding through their transition to being an independent organization, "Our history with OSF, they have been funding us for a very long time... When we are still at [organization name], even when we are out of [organization name], they were still funding us."

Sadly, the loss of such a foundational funder can even be experienced as the loss of a parent, as communicated by one grantee,

OSF withdrawal kill us at the end. It was like they born us, they born [us] because we—I feel like that [organization name] is the daughter organization of OSF. They born us, and they kill us at the end.

The above excerpts show the crucial involvement of OSF at the start of many sex worker rights organizations, their long history as funders, and these organizations' sense of a close connection to OSF. These factors therefore made OSF's withdrawal both surprising and emotionally challenging for many grantees.

HOW GRANTEES SPOKE ABOUT OSF SUPPORT: OSF AS MOVEMENT BUILDER

Not only did OSF provide individual organizations with funding, but they also supported the building of the sex worker rights movement within networks of allied organizations. This was most frequently acknowledged through grantees' accounts of how OSF contributed to the growth of local movement networks by providing funding to many sex worker rights organizations and other allied organizations in the local environment, through its various foundations and investments. One grantee working on decriminalization in their country, illustrates this nicely,

They weren't just an organization who were approached for funding and funded all these organizations separately. They were very involved in developing the [name of sex worker program] and **funding a series of organizations who were all doing different kinds of work around sex work.** It was very much a partnership in the real sense of the word, not the way that funders often say partnership 'cause they're just going to try to hide the power relations. This really was, quite fundamentally, a partnership, which is partly why the withdrawal, when it happened so suddenly, was a bit of a shock to us because it felt like such a strange way to abandon such a long-term investment.

This excerpt is also consistent with the sense of OSF as a co-founder, although in this case its deep investment in the movements is recognized. Much like the long relationship with individual grantees, this movement-wide support was equally long-term, as described by one grantee,

[Our] history with OSF goes back well beyond me. I think it was—it must be a good 10 years ago now. OSF was very involved in setting up a lot of the sex worker advocacy work in [country], and in order to do so, **funded a series of organizations who were all working on this issue.**

Support from OSF, however, went beyond the simultaneous funding of organizations to include their role as a network builder through conferences or convenings and facilitating introductions between fellow sex worker rights organizations. One grantee explains how OSF support enabled the formation of movement networks,

During the OSF fundings of all of us, we had the chance to meet each other, to meet in new activities, to meet an old one, somehow to strengthen our movement. We had chances to meet each other on a regular basis for type of events that we have organized together as members of a certain network, et cetera. **I think that support really played an essential role in strengthening the sex worker movement, not only in my region but in the entire Europe and even Central Asia.**

OSF also brought with it ties to the broader, international platforms and a great deal of legitimacy when grantees were seeking out other funders. As one grantee notes,

Other types of support included supporting our visits to the World AIDS Conference so that we could also be able to reach out and network with global sex workers. They have been good in providing that kind of a platform, a platform for the U.N. rapporteur where policies of sex workers are discussed at high-level meetings.

Finally, one grantee recalls how OSF's demonstration of support for sex worker rights legitimized the field in the eyes of other powerful organizations,

[OSF staff] have written papers as well, so at critical times **they wrote that article about 10 reasons to decriminalize sex work, for example. Yeah, and that was really important because now we've got growing levels of supports. We've got U.N. agencies and [organization name], Amnesty International advocating—supporting decriminalization.** That's all happened more recently, so prior to—even going back 5, 10 years—it's really very recent like 5 years, probably 5 years, didn't even have that level of support.

From the above excerpts, it is clear that OSF was more than a source of funding for these organizations. OSF was a true partner for both local and global sex worker rights movements. At the local level, OSF funded multiple organizations in direct alignment with or adjacent to the sex worker rights movement while also helping grantees to build networks at the local level and with global supporters of the movement. OSF's vocalization of its support of sex worker rights also lent legitimacy to those organizations and the movement as a whole in the eyes of other key institutions.

HOW GRANTEES SPOKE ABOUT OSF SUPPORT: OSF AS TRUSTED CONFIDANT AND ADVISOR

As has been noted in the previous sections, OSF maintained close relationships with grantees over the course of their long relationships in the sex worker rights field. Many grantees described OSF as a trusted confidant and advisor, describing the ease with which they felt they could contact OSF staff asking for advice or for assistance with strategic planning. One grantee connects the longevity of their relationship to their perception of OSF staff as confidants and advisors,

It was more conversation and dialog-based in the exchange of ideas, information, and so forth. It was an unusual donor because there's not a similar one that I know of.... **You could've sat down with the OSF staff member and be like, "What do you think? What's your opinion in the larger scheme of things?"** to just have conversations that are not so specific to—not even just explicit about sex work or what we use the money for, but what are the influences on us? What are the regional context that impacts us? What are the other forces around us that have an impact on us. Then to hear back from them around well, here's what impacts this thinking, or our thinking. **The conversations were more like an open dialog rather than reporting back.**

As the grantee above notes, this trust-based relationship clearly distinguished OSF from most funders. Whereas grant funding often comes with strict reporting requirements with an emphasis on measurable outcomes, OSF staff conveyed a deep understanding and empathy with grantees, to the extent that their conversations could address strategic planning questions. As demonstrated by the following grantee, this close relationship also meant that informational resources and opportunities could be shared informally,

She would send things, like information, constantly. She would say, “Have you heard of this, this workshop, this conference, this—what have you?” That was really good for us to be in the know. We couldn’t take advantage of a lot of things, but it was good to be in the know.

Finally, most crucially, OSF staff consistently demonstrated their deep understanding of the work in this field—its challenges and the needs of their grantees. One grantee describes this close understanding, “We had very good relationships with the OSF staff. They would often come to activities, events, were very knowledgeable and up to date on sex work politics, would often forefront the work of [organization name] and [organization name] and [organization name] in OSF activities.” Another grantee briefly describes how these understandings translated to their funding support, “They also understood that for advocacy work, the main input is the salaries of the people who do the advocacy work.... They got it. They got that—the work was the salaries.” This somewhat obvious fact may have struck this grantee as unusual because most of the funding available to sex worker groups is tied to programmatic outputs and restricted from use on salaries.

The duration of these relationships and the trust generated as a result meant OSF had a uniquely close relationship with their grantees in the sex worker rights movement. The benefits of these relationships of close trust have been the freedom for grantees to reach out to OSF staff for advice and strategic planning, the transmission of information, the flow of OSF staff members’ contacts and resources to grantees, and the intimate understanding OSF staff had of the needs of grantees and the nature of sex worker rights advocacy. This close partnership between grantees and OSF meant that the organizations could rapidly develop their capacities and the movement(s) as a whole could be well-networked, advised, and coordinated.

Impacts of OSF withdrawal

Given OSF’s depth, breadth, and longevity of support of sex worker rights movements, OSF’s withdrawal has been both surprising to grantees and has left many local movements and their members in shock as they scramble to adjust to the loss of funding. In the sub-sections below, the confusion surrounding OSF’s withdrawal and the various ways grantees are responding to this change are described in greater detail.

IMPACTS OF OSF WITHDRAWAL: **CONFUSING TRANSITION**

The confusing nature of OSF’s withdrawal was a theme that arose organically from interview questions relating to the history of grantees’ relationships with OSF. While grantees voiced a strong appreciation for the close relationship and support OSF provided, the transitional period as OSF was announcing its plans for withdrawal were marked by confusion over their grantees’ contacts with OSF staff, conflicting messages regarding future funding, and a lack of collaboration with other funders to fill the gap left by OSF. One grantee’s testimony of their relationship with OSF staff during this period strongly contrasts with the intimate relationship mentioned in the section above,

...so now I don’t feel like I have any contact at OSF. I have contacts for very programmatic things because when they closed their grants, they gave an extra grant to [us] that we can spend when we want. **If I had a question on this, I know who to contact, but I don’t know who to contact to influence anymore, nor does the people at regional level, as far as I know.**

Whereas grantees in the prior period described the close, trusting relationship with OSF staff, in the transition period, this grantee is uncertain who they could contact to influence OSF, much less seek feedback and strategic advice. Several grantees also described how they had received mixed or conflicting messages regarding their future funding from OSF, such as one Africa-based grantee,

First, they had said they are going to have East Africa and then West Africa, and then said, “No, it’s going to be Africa. It’s going to be regional.” It’s going to be—then later on, it’s going to be focused on issues. The last time I heard that it’s not going to have sex workers at all, I heard from NSWP. I was like, “Oh, why wasn’t this indicated?”

Another grantee also explains how many grantees in their area reported receiving conflicting messages about funding,

There was a lot of chaos around this tie off grant. I don’t know if other people have spoken about it, but it seemed a bit random. Some people were never offered it. Some people were offered it and told that if they took it, they couldn’t apply to this round of OSF Africa funding applications. Some people were given it and told there was no barrier to applying for the next—for this round of OSF Africa. It was just to tide you over because it might take several months to process those applications. **Everyone was given a slightly different explanation.**

Such conflicting messages were reported to cause issues for many grantees, often simply due to the fact that accurate information about the loss of funding was not communicated earlier. To add to the complexity of the situation, several grantees bemoaned OSF’s failure to reach out and collaborate with alternative funders in order to fill the gap left by OSF’s withdrawal. One grantee explains their disappointment that OSF did not pursue this strategy,

They put us in contact with old—they did give contacts for people who had left, but the point was to have OSF as an institution calling out, saying, “We’re leaving, and we need others to jump in.” **I don’t understand why they would refuse to do this.** That doesn’t prevent them from developing their new strategy from stopping to fund such. **That’s an example of how remote things became, of the distance that was created.**

The lack of collaboration among funders was recognized by one grantee as one of the most serious issues with the transition as well as the area in need of greatest attention in the future,

The lack of communication between donors in the larger scheme in a particular country is devastating...We invested six years of funding and human resources... **Six years of people being trained, money being sent to those countries, and what? There’s no communication between donors around what this does and what the program ends, and then the other donors won’t fund the work to continue. Where have those people gone? Where has the money gone? We get burdened with answering the question of sustainability, whereas the funders—what?** They just sit around and expect us to provide the answers to the problems that they contribute positively.

Given the close support OSF had provided in the past and its investment in the various regional sex worker rights movements, their withdrawal came as a shock to most grantees. To compound the problems of their withdrawal, grantee’s testimonies suggest that it was a confusing affair in which many lost their key contacts at OSF or received mixed messages about future funding. Finally, some grantees expressed the impression that OSF did not collaborate with other potential funders to fill in the gap left by their departure, although this experience was not universal.¹⁷

IMPACTS OF OSF WITHDRAWAL: INDIVIDUAL ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACTS

The most immediate impact of OSF’s withdrawal is upon their former grantees’ funding streams. Not only was OSF a significant percentage of most grantees’ funding, but for many it was the vast majority of their flexible funding . As noted earlier, almost three quarters (73.1%) of the grants OSF gave to sex worker organizations was flexible support (general support, organizational funding, and program funding). OSF funding was also concentrated in low-income countries and, as such, went a long way for grantees in those regions. Although some grantees recognized HIV funding as a larger percentage of overall funding, these sources of funding contributed far less to the running of their organizations and far less to the advocacy side of grantees’ work. Perhaps this grantee stated it best,

One of the real issues with the OSF withdrawal is that for many people, **OSF was the money they used to cover the gaps.** OSF was the money they used to pay the bits

¹⁷ OSF staff were not formally interviewed for this report and, as such, the extent of OSF’s collaboration with other funders in the period of transition cannot be conclusively evaluated.

and pieces of salaries that could not be covered: your HR officer, your rent, your bank fees, that kind of thing.

The importance of core funding which can be flexibly applied cannot be overstated. One grantee noted in the same response that although OSF made up only 30-40% of their funding, they were “keeping our organization alive day by day.” Another grantee explains that, although OSF was not their largest funder, it was their main source of funding for advocacy,

Okay, I would say it was not our top. As I have said, our top donors is Global Fund and CDC, **but their funding is restricted to HIV. When it comes to human rights or to advocacy, OSF is our biggest donor.** We had two lawyers. Now we don't.

This hole left in many grantees' flexible funding is also strongly attested to by one organization engaged in re-granting work. They note that the sources of funding remaining are mainly highly restrictive funding. As an intermediary funder, these restrictions get passed down to their grantees, unfortunately,

We're an intermediary funder, and because it was core funding as well, so without restrictions. Which means that **now OSF is gone, most of our other funders are funders with restrictions. Most of the funding is funding with restrictions. There's less and less funding that's core flexible.**

To put the limited funding for sex worker rights organizations into perspective, this same intermediary funder also notes that they are the third largest funder of sex worker rights globally, yet they have only one full-time staff and four part-time staff. In addition to losing one of their sources of funding, as an important funder in the sex worker rights space, this intermediary funder feels the pressure to try to fill the gap left by OSF. However, they are not in a position to due to the limited number of grants that they are able to provide,

I don't think there's enough time to have seen them recover, and in terms of number, **the number of grants that [our organization] makes, 28 to 30 to 35 a year is nowhere near the number of grants from OSF,** and so I don't know if they'll be able to recover.

The impacts of this funding crunch are elaborated upon further in the sections on shrinkage and grantees' concerns that they will have to close their doors. From this section, we get a glimpse into both the significant portion of budgets which OSF grants constituted for most grantees and the fact that this funding was often the majority of their flexible funding, without which much of their advocacy activities come to a halt.

IMPACTS OF OSF WITHDRAWAL: MOVEMENT LEVEL IMPACTS

In addition to the loss of funding for individual organizations, OSF's withdrawal had significant impacts on regional sex worker rights movements, a fact which should come as no surprise given their history as a movement builder. OSF's withdrawal meant that suddenly organizational allies were all

simultaneously facing a funding crisis, but also that many lost their contacts with more powerful, global institutions, and many found that they could no longer hold meetings or movement-wide conferences as OSF's financial support of such meetings and networking events was no longer available. One grantee sums up the impression OSF's withdrawal had on them and the impact it had on their local movement's campaign to pass a decriminalization bill,

It's also disappointing though, because as I say, **OSF's commitment wasn't just financial.** It was like we were all on this journey together, and now we've reached the most exciting moment, possibly in [country name] history around decrim, and this organization who played such an important role in that and who laid such a big contribution to that are just gone [laughs], so—yeah.

For this interviewee, at the time of OSF's withdrawal, a decriminalization bill was reaching Parliament and thus the movement was at a critical stage. To understand why this was so impactful for the movement, one also has to understand how OSF's restructuring meant closure not just of the Public Health Program and SHARP, but of many programs across the foundations, impacting other social justice movements. This broad withdrawal resulted in a shock for all of the adjacent social justice organizations which the grantee identified as their closest allies¹⁸,

What it's meant is that the whole sector which is our natural home and where most of the allies of decrim exist, **the more radical social justice organizations as opposed to just the charity-type NGO sector are all now struggling for survival.** The impact has been enormous, like I can't even tell you. There's nothing—there's really nothing else we talk about at sector meetings and stuff.

Another grantee in this space emphasized how OSF's withdrawal impacted the individual people working at these organizations which are facing funding and salary crises,

All the people who might have been our natural allies, and the people who would have been out on the streets helping us are all scrambling to figure out how they can pay their salaries next month. In that way, the decimation of the broader social justice sector has been particularly also devastating for us. 'Cause not only have we lost our own money, but the natural home of our work and where we would look to for support are too busy trying to save themselves. I say too busy, they're still helping where they can. They're still there in spirit, but their resource base is not there. It's gone.

These grantees were (and still are) a part of a densely woven network of overlapping social justice movements. Although this proved highly effective in building support for decriminalization across a wide base, OSF's withdrawal affected not only individual grantees' funding but meant that their

¹⁸ Elsewhere in the interview, this grantee identified these allies as including but not limited to LGBTI organizations, refugee rights organizations, and key public health organizations, which OSF was also funding.

allies could also no longer provide support as they were simultaneously affected. Another grantee, an intermediary funder of sex worker rights organizations, helps to explain also how OSF's withdrawal has had ripple effects on re-granting efforts,

Organizations have disappeared because of OSF pulling out, which was felt in the number of applications received at [our organization], which was felt in the number of members of regional networks, which makes them weaker, or which makes the global network weaker, et cetera, and no other funder has jumped in to take on that space.

Just as OSF was a key player in the development of the sex worker rights movement as a whole—the funding of allies, the building of connections, and the legitimacy it leant—its withdrawal from this space has been destabilizing not just in terms of the loss of any individual organization's funding but also through its effects on adjacent allies in grantees' support networks. As such, the broader capacity to organize at a higher level and to work closely with allies has been seriously diminished by OSF's withdrawal from the funding landscape.

Goals and Adjustment

The subsections that follow detail four responses former OSF grantees have adopted or are contemplating. These are: 1) finding new mission-aligned funding, 2) shrinking the organization, 3) finding new funding that requires adjustment and/or mission drift, and 4) closing down. While many of OSF's grantees have contemplated or tried many of these strategies, interviewees spoke at greatest length about the ways that their organizations have shrunk in response and how they are thinking about how to adjust to new sources of funding.

GOALS AND ADJUSTMENT: FINDING NEW MISSION-ALIGNED FUNDING

Finding new funding, either by pursuing new sources of funding or greatly increasing one's submission of applications for funding, seems to have been a common first response to the news of OSF's withdrawal. Those grantees that reported strenuous efforts to apply to a wide range of sources also expressed the emotional toll it has had upon them and their efforts to support their organizations. These included burnout with an intention to leave the field, exasperation with funders, and one grantee moved to tears in their wish to support their staff. In the following excerpt, this grantee describes both the number of proposals they have submitted in the past year, their relative lack of success, and the small amounts they have been able to secure,

It's sad. It's an everyday effort... I would say that this year [...] we developed and submitted 13 project proposals to different donors. **From 13 submitted, we got only three projects.** Two of them are really small projects. **One is only \$4,000.** Horrible. Horrible. **The next one is \$6,000.** For now, we have only one sustainable

grant, which is institutional support we have received, also, in the past by the [organization name].

Executive leaders in these organizations are under significant strain to keep the lights on and support their staff. As another grantee describes, grant writing has taken up the vast majority of their time, which understandably leaves less time for pursuing their organizational mission of advocacy,

I spend, probably, 90 percent of my energy writing grants or reporting for grants or looking for funding. My work hours are expanded beyond—I probably work 50 hours a week, sometimes 60, depending. I had some issues with having an ops person. The ability to respond to vacancies or staff changes has been—it really sets you back.

As we will see in the following section on organizational shrinkage, most grantees have been unable to secure new mission-aligned funding despite their significant efforts to apply. This is largely a product of the scarcity of specifically sex worker rights directed funding, as noted earlier, and evidenced by the fact that sex worker groups received a mere 0.2% of all human rights funding in 2019 (HRFN 2019 Report). These efforts to find new mission-aligned funding where none exists place a strain on the executive leaders themselves and divert them away from their core missions.

GOALS AND ADJUSTMENT: SHRINKING THE ORGANIZATION

As mentioned earlier, OSF was a significant percentage of all grantees' funding and for many it was the vast majority of their core or flexible funding. As a direct result, many grantees have had no other choice but to shrink or learn new ways to make do with far less funding. Given that advocacy work relies almost exclusively on core or flexible funding, advocacy work is often the first to go. One grantee explains how this manifested as the loss of staff, particularly those staff members that were part of and worked closely with the sex worker community,

While OSF funded our organization, we were a team of 12 people. Now, a year later, after the OSF withdrawal from the country, we are only five people left, which means that we lost 50 percent of our team. We don't have money for salaries, for social benefits, for health insurance. That's one of the biggest impact because by losing those people, **we also lose part of our community.**

Another grantee explains how they have had to lose their advocacy team as a result of cost cutting and, still, are faring better than most in their region,

The advocacy team, essentially, we haven't replaced people when they've left in order to try and cut costs, but the core of the team is still there. As long as they're still there, we can still be fighting for decrim, but our resilience levels, our capacity to take shocks or to navigate one more funder, say, pulling out is just—it's very much in a tenuous situation. I don't say that easily because I do understand that

there are some organizations out there who—for whom OSF might have been 90 percent of their funding, who are in a much worse situation. Nonetheless, it’s not great [laughs].

The cutting of advocacy programs was a common response expressed through other grantee interviews. Another grantee explains the current state of their community outreach and campaign work,

We don’t have so much activities, for example, for this. **We don’t have meetings, regular meetings, with our communities. We don’t have public campaigns ’cause we don’t have money for doing public campaigns. We cannot continue our work in changing the public perspective on sex work ’cause we are not visible anymore.** We don’t have public campaigns. We don’t have money for this.

With the loss of advocacy programs, these grantees are losing the ability to pursue their core mission of furthering sex worker rights. Now relying on restrictive services project funding from funders who do not support advocacy, grantees are increasingly frustrated with their inability to change the circumstances in which their communities live. As we will see in the section below, grantees are thinking about the ways they can retain pursuit of their movement mission while also fulfilling the restrictive usage and reporting requirements of new funders.

GOALS AND ADJUSTMENT: FINDING NEW FUNDING THAT REQUIRES ADJUSTMENT AND/OR MISSION DRIFT

As mentioned above, the withdrawal of OSF funding often means the loss of these grantees’ core or flexible funding. Left with project-based funders, many grantees feel that they have to adjust what their organization does or conceive of new ways to frame their movement work in ways that satisfy the interests of these restrictive funders. Of these funders, HIV funders are easily the largest source of funding and frequently spoken of as among the strictest in their reporting and funding usage requirements. One grantee explains their frustration with HIV funding,

The reason why flexible funding is critical is that HIV funding is so restrictive, and **HIV is not the priority issue number one if you ask any sex worker in any country.** That’s not the priority issue. The priority issues will be either the context and the country changes and all of a sudden there are fewer clients. If the legal environment changed, for example. We have fewer clients. You’re gonna be thinking about how to make a living and not about joining HIV prevention training. **The critical issues have always been around violence, human rights abuses.** Now, again, that’s shifting in the political context that we’re in right now to cost of living, houselessness, social protections, being left out of all the systems in a country. **HIV donors don’t want to address those issues. That’s a very, very big problem.**

From the above excerpt, we see that, in their experience, HIV funders’ aims, while important, do not align with the priorities of the communities that organizations are serving. Other grantees have

bemoaned the fact that HIV funders do not perceive human rights as a necessary prerequisite for effective HIV treatment and prevention, as they do. Nevertheless, many of these organizations have benefited from HIV funding. Another grantee explains how they have had to reevaluate their mission and organizational identity as they have pursued HIV funding as a greater source of their funding,

It's about money of course, but it's also about where politically we think—we might have chased the money a little bit too much in a certain direction and want to reestablish a sense of what our core identity is. **Is our core identity as an HIV organization, or is it as a human rights organization that takes HIV money because it allows us to do work and access people we otherwise couldn't?**

In this way, adjustment in the face of scarce funding to pursue HIV funding can lead to mission drift. Grantees were clearly frustrated with the fact that HIV funding was so often restrictive and unwilling to address sex workers' human rights as a key part of support. Perhaps what is so frustrating about this treatment is that it flies in the face of established public health literature demonstrating the connection between decriminalization of sex work and HIV prevention (and conversely between criminalization and stigma and HIV spread). Nonetheless, HIV funders' approach to funding seems largely unaffected.¹⁹ In the section below entitled "Glimmers of Hope" we discuss in greater detail how some grantees are seeking to move beyond HIV funding or work with HIV funding in a way that addresses some of these issues.

GOALS AND ADJUSTMENT: CLOSING DOWN

Grantees spoke frankly about the possibility of having to shut down their organizations with some mentioning that neighboring sex worker rights organizations had already closed their doors.²⁰ These decisions are based on a combination of the lack of funding and their unwillingness to step too far outside the scope of their mission. One grantee in Eastern Europe, whose funding situation was among the most dire of all grantees, mentioned how their partner organizations in-country had already closed,

This is how the [organization name] grow up now, as I would say, one organization that have already established two regional branches, one in eastern part and another one in the western part of [country]. We call them [organization name 1] and [organization name 2], both technically operated by [organization name], the mother. **Unfortunately, with the withdrawal of the Open Society Foundation from [country], those branches are now getting closed. They're not closed officially, but with no funds, it's really difficult to operate both of them.**

¹⁹ Shannon, K., Crago, A. L., Baral, S. D., Bekker, L. G., Kerrigan, D., Decker, M. R., ... & Beyrer, C. (2018). The global response and unmet actions for HIV and sex workers. *The Lancet*, 392(10148), 698-710. This report demonstrates that sustained coverage of HIV/AIDS treatment for sex workers is challenged by a lack of progress on stigma and criminalization and sustained human rights violations. The authors argue that sustained investment in the sex worker community and structural interventions are required if HIV treatment and interventions are to be effective.

²⁰ This report did not attempt to determine the number of OSF grantees that have closed their doors due to the funding withdrawal, as these effects will play out over time.

In addition to the closure of their branch offices, this grantee explains how their organization is surviving with no long-term assurances of funding,

We are now trying—especially last year and this year, 2022 and 2023, I think are the most terrible years since the establishment of our organization. **We were keeping our organization alive day by day, actually day by day.**

The funding loss is so severe for this organization that they noted that **“If we don’t find any additional sources of funding for the activities of the organization, probably 31st of December 2024 is gonna be the last day of [grantee organization].”** Similarly, a grantee in Western Europe mentions the instability of their funding and their uncertainty of financial independence in the future,

I am not sure that next year our cash flow will be guaranteed. Our working capital also. It’s **a question of our financial independence will be also raised, I think now, in a few months**—I mean, it’s complicated to answer right now to this question, but for sure, I think it will be problematic in a few months.

While these grantees are the minority of cases, they still represent a significant number of the nine interviewees. The possibility of closure is very real for many grantees. Future sources of core institutional funding will be necessary to prevent the possibility of further closures.

Glimmers of Hope: Grantees’ thoughts on a way forward

This section identifies some of the ways grantees have adopted innovative strategies beyond the four types of responses listed above. Faced with the loss of their primary source of core institutional funding, grantees have voiced an array of ideas about how to move forward. The most common strategy emphasized the importance of building strong networks. One grantee discusses the importance of strong networks with other activists in social justice movements,

We are really going to need strong networks with the larger activists who are able to push issues of human rights, but also with even the government itself to be able to understand things because we are having an intolerant government. We are so scared about the laws that are coming up.

Looking at the behavior of other organizations in their networks, grantees are also considering ways in which they can emulate the success other organizations have had with HIV funding in ways that are still aligned with their core mission. In the excerpt below, a grantee explains how they seek to replicate what organizations in an adjacent movement were able to do with HIV funding,

We saw the LGBTI sector in [country] really flourish when HIV money came into the sector. It did require that organizations rebrand themselves a little into the language of HIV programming, but in doing so, most of them didn’t lose their political core.

You had a sector that was largely funded by HIV money, but still a powerful political voice.

Another grantee in Africa explains how they ensure they will be able to use HIV funding in such a way that it is in line with their movement goal of decriminalization of sex work from the very start of the application process,

What we try, as an organization, even if it's the funding for the HIV, we are very strategic in making sure that it is in line. Well, when you put the application in, it is in line with what funding require, or the funder require. **Also, too, we put the importance of the decrim—because whatever requirements that the funders are funding, if then we are still criminalized, then we are not going to be able to, or the funders also are not going to be able to achieve what they want to achieve with the funding that they invest in the countries while we are still criminalized.** It is important that when funders, or a source of funding comes, it **should highlight the component of the human rights because that's where the challenge is**, which is why in Africa—and in other countries, I am sure—there are sex-work-led movements so that they can be able to push other advocacy work that impacts negatively on the lives of sex workers.

Grantees also see hope in emphasizing the intersectionality of their work and developing contacts with new donors as other organizations in their networks,

Second is to fund everything that lies outside of very stringent HIV funding. Funding organizations to try and find ways to develop new relationships. This can take years sometimes...

Funding intersectional work. Supporting organizations to make those new partnerships with whoever they have as donors. Reaching out. Growing the tentacles to reach out to more non-traditional partners. Expanding the way we think around this work.

Another grantee also emphasized the importance of investing in long-term shepherding of potential funders. This requires that sex worker rights organizations work towards building funders' understanding of sex worker rights issues,

I think in order for somebody to be willing to fund in the way they (OSF) did, they would need to have that deep understanding of the issue. That takes time and work to do that, and that's what we're trying to do with this tie-off funding is to bring donors into the conversation and get them invested into this. It's a work in progress.

Considering the dearth of funding for sex worker rights, and the urgency of the issues sex workers face, such a strategy of developing greater support by educating donors makes sense and may be fruitful.

To reiterate, then, in order to address the gap left by OSF, grantees are strategizing around developing their networks with other movements, organizations and governments, figuring out how to work within HIV funding while retaining their core mission, and stewarding long-term relationships of understanding with possible future funders.

Conclusion

Our review of the sex worker rights funding landscape reveals a dearth of sex worker rights-focused funders. Measured through various funding lenses such as human rights funding, HIV funding, and LGBTQ funding reports, sex worker rights groups are routinely one of if not the smallest subpopulation of funding recipients. Despite being one of the most intersectional human rights movement groups, sex worker rights groups received 0.2% of overall human rights funding in 2019 (HRFN 2019 Report). Within this funding landscape, OSF was a key player, acting as one of if not the largest single funding source for sex worker rights groups. Whereas sex workers rights funding is often restricted to programs with restrictive reporting requirements, nearly three-quarters of OSF grants (73.1%) provided flexible funding which allowed for greater advocacy work on the part of their grantees. With these facts in mind, OSF's withdrawal from the funding landscape presents major funding challenges for the sex worker rights movement(s) going forward.

Interviews with OSF grantees support the centrality of OSF as a leader in the sex worker rights movement field. OSF was described by grantees as not only a funder, but a co-founder of sex worker rights organizations, a movement builder through its pattern of simultaneous funding of adjacent organizations and support of networking between them, and as a confidant and advisor to grantees, providing them with strategic planning and support. The withdrawal of OSF from this space has had significant impacts on both individual organizations and the movement as a whole, especially in the affected regions. For organizations, OSF constituted the majority of most grantees' core and flexible funding, and was a source of strategic guidance and support, leaving a gap which they have been hard pressed to fill. For movements, OSF's withdrawal has led to the collapse of both the capacity for those movements to maintain their network by supporting conferences and individual networking as well as the loss of many allies in adjacent movements that had been formerly funded by OSF and are now scrambling to ensure the survival of their organizations.

Grantees are responding in four overlapping ways; by searching for new funding sources that can support their core mission, shrinking their organizations, adjusting their mission to fit the goals of project-based funders (primarily HIV/AIDS funders), and facing the possibility of closing their doors. Finding new funding has met with little success and executive leaders report the emotional strain their often unsuccessful efforts have placed on them as well as the resultant diversion of energies from their advocacy work. Shrinking the organization has been the most common, albeit unfortunate, response. Faced with the prospect of a loss of core institutional funding and available funding being largely project-based, some grantees have had to cut advocacy-oriented activities and staff while reorienting

towards service activities. Adjusting their mission has largely taken the form of adapting to the reality that the majority of their remaining funding comes from HIV funders who are both restrictive in the use of funding and levy heavy reporting requirements. In this regard, some grantees are rethinking their strategy for how they can communicate the utility of serving sex worker rights to HIV funders as a means of enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of HIV care and prevention. Finally, some grantees are faced with the very real prospect of closing their doors as future funding is not assured. In the recommendations section below, some of the findings on grantees' thoughts on the way forward are rearticulated as possible strategies for the future.

Recommendations for Funders

The following are recommendations for funders on how to support sex worker rights organizations in the wake of OSF's withdrawal:

Give sex worker rights organizations, especially in the affected regions, new core or flexible funding.

This is essential to keep their doors open and allow them to pursue their core mission of advocacy, and not lose ground on campaigns or human capacity and skills.

Support sex worker rights organizations to build networks with parallel social justice groups in their local and regional civil society environment—through convening support, introductions, and lending credibility.

Grantees poised to best weather the storm were those that reported extensive networks of support to other organizations and governments in their local environment.

Support sex worker rights organizations to frame their issues as inherent to human rights, LGBTQ rights, feminism, and other adjacent social justice movements.

If you are a donor that funds sex worker rights issues, speak publicly about these connections and the importance of this funding to realizing human rights.

For HIV/AIDS Funders: recognize and fund sex worker rights advocacy and movement-building for the production of sustainable and effective HIV care and prevention outcomes.

The current reality in many of the regions in which OSF was active is that HIV funding is the main remaining source of funding for grantees working with sex workers, and sex worker rights organizations hope to educate HIV funders as to the necessity of their advocacy work.

Educate and inform other funders on the importance of sex workers issues in order to develop understanding and support for the sex worker rights movement(s).

Funders can partner with sex worker rights organizations to build relationships of trust and understanding with other social-justice oriented funders