

**URGENT
ACTION
FUND**

FOR WOMEN'S
HUMAN RIGHTS

ANNUAL REPORT

20

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2020 OVERVIEW

In 2020, UAF stood by thousands of activists across the globe, deploying over \$1.25 million to frontline human rights defenders through 300 grants – more than double the number of grants we made in 2019.

UAF rapidly expanded our grantmaking criteria and responded to multiple crises:

COVID-19: 119 grants

Black-led racial justice movements: 14 grants

LGBTQI-led movements: 65 grants

Beijing +25 advocacy: 23 grants

Beirut Port Explosion: 7 grants

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

The events of 2020 and the ensuing global health crisis presented a unique threat and unique opportunity in equal measure to women, girls, and trans and gender non-conforming human rights defenders around the world. The pandemic exposed the source of challenges that these groups faced from governments, schools, and other institutions. Class, race, and disability also complicated those pandemic-induced challenges, but defenders rose to the occasion. COVID-19 brought about a heightened need, but also complicated delivery, for mutual aid and community assistance in many areas – safe and affordable housing; health management, specifically for incarcerated persons and those living with HIV/AIDS; survivors of domestic violence; and culturally competent sexual and reproductive care.

Throughout 2020 and across our regions, UAF's aim wasn't just to provide this support due to emergency needs, but because we understood that these communities face discrimination and marginalization regardless of any pandemic. COVID-19 put defenders' activism and survival into question. For UAF, it was political to step in and support their activism when others left their calls unanswered.



MIDDLE EAST, WESTERN EUROPE, EASTERN EUROPE & TURKEY

2020 exposed the ways systems and structures were failing feminist activists in Eastern and Western Europe, the Middle East, and Turkey. Our grants in these regions supported:

- Gender justice and sexual rights activists facing threats and increased mental health issues;
- Women with disabilities who were affected by an increase in domestic violence during lockdown; and
- Trans rights groups' advocating against forced sterilization as a prerequisite to gender recognition in Slovakia, and so many more.

With the launch of the Beirut Crisis Fund, UAF aimed to support women, LGBTQI+, and disabled communities in Lebanon to heal and organize in the aftermath of the Beirut explosion of August 4th 2020. Through the Beirut Crisis Fund, UAF provided assistance to:

- Support a leading feminist journal to move operations from Lebanon to France after the explosion; and
- Create a collaborative that works on food security and addressing aid dependency during the COVID pandemic.



The Association of Women With Disabilities in Turkey stood by and supported the disability rights community by hosting a series of webinars on gender-based violence, accessibility, and accountability during the COVID-19 pandemic. These webinars were aimed at educating the community around the unique ways women with disabilities are affected by an increase in domestic violence during social distancing and the lack of access to social support. The webinars also put a spotlight on the effect of ableism and other forms of structural discrimination affect women with disabilities during public health crises.

BALKANS, CENTRAL ASIA, AND THE CAUCASUS

2020 magnified discrimination and inequalities experienced across gender identity, race, class, immigration status, and geography in ways we have never seen. COVID-19 undermined the safety and well-being of people already living in precarious conditions. In the Balkans, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, the pandemic emphasized class and gender disparities for women, migrants, and LGBTQI+ people. Feminist activists used their deep ties in the community to ensure immediate support reached those who had been overlooked and excluded by their governments and other community groups.

UAF supported activists in this region when poor response to the public health crisis led to a lack of social and medical assistance for marginalized communities, the closure of borders delayed evacuations and relocations of persecuted WHRDs and transgender activists and when women's rights activists and transgender people across the regions reported an increase of domestic violence during lockdown.

In Georgia, UAF supported an LGBTQI+ rights group to raise awareness around the increase in gender-based violence and an overall decrease in the quality of life for lesbians during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gender-based violence and the stigma of sexual orientation was further exacerbated by the economic downturn and forced quarantine with abusers. The group sought to document these human rights violations and bring forward a legal case to advance LGBTQI+ rights in Georgia while also offering psycho-social support to those who have experienced trauma.

THE UNITED STATES

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on BIPOC, disabled persons, women, and the LGBTQI+ community. UAF has supported defenders on the ground doing critical work to ensure that the vulnerabilities unique to these communities are met with compassionate, effective care. Feminist activists in the US have met these challenges head-on, using the pandemic as a unique opportunity for laying down the foundations for much-needed care networks that can survive the pandemic and will sustain themselves for in a post-COVID-19 world.

UAF grantee Black Women's BluePrint has organized, protected and distributed emergency supplies to survivors of gender-based violence quarantined at home and provided reproductive health, sexual health and maternal care by mobilizing doulas, midwives and birth workers when access was very limited. Black Women's BluePrint supports Black and Afro-descent community members, including women, girls, the homeless, survivors of violence, elderly and LGBTQI+ folks who are most vulnerable during crises.



CLIMATE JUSTICE & INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

The COVID-19 pandemic placed unexpected and considerable pressure on climate defenders and Indigenous rights activists who have gone the distance to protect ancestral land from the encroachment of fossil fuel industries. Gas and oil pipelines threaten not only Indigenous sovereignty, but introduce pollution to the environment and expose Indigenous women and children to sexual violence from construction crew. Climate defenders and Indigenous rights activists battled both pandemic-related restrictions and fuel industries.

In 2020, UAF's grants focused on resourcing Indigenous-led movements, specifically, their leadership on fossil fuel industry opposition and security needs related to their frontline actions. UAF supported land defenders and Indigenous communities when they needed it most. With our support:

- Activists gained access to better food, safety and security tools so they could stay in the camp to continue their resistance on the frontlines;
- Land defenders were able to distribute PPE kits and set up Wi-Fi infrastructure so they could communicate public health information across great distances.



UAF's grantee Indigenous Climate Action (ICA), the only Indigenous-led climate justice organization in Canada, had to continue their activism online as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns. After experiencing increased digital attacks and threats due to their vocal opposition to the colonial extractive culture and their efforts to highlight Indigenous leadership in addressing the current climate crisis, ICA addressed some of the attacks by strengthening and securing their online presence despite the digital intimidation and trolling they were facing from white nationalist and pro-oil groups. Through digital security training that includes secure communication and data storage, and personal data scrubbing for staff at heightened risk for online harassment, they were able to protect their staff and continue their advocacy work.

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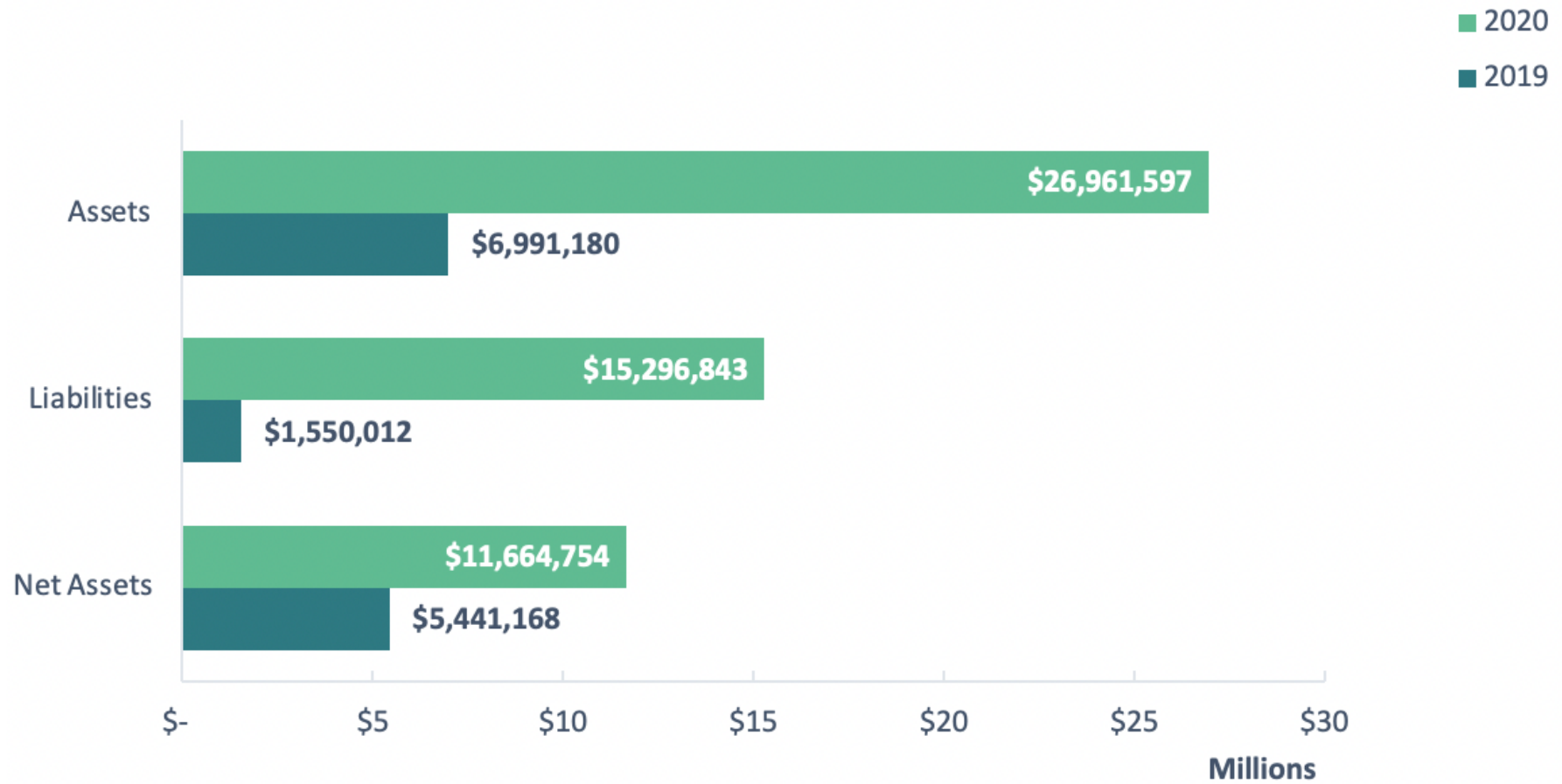
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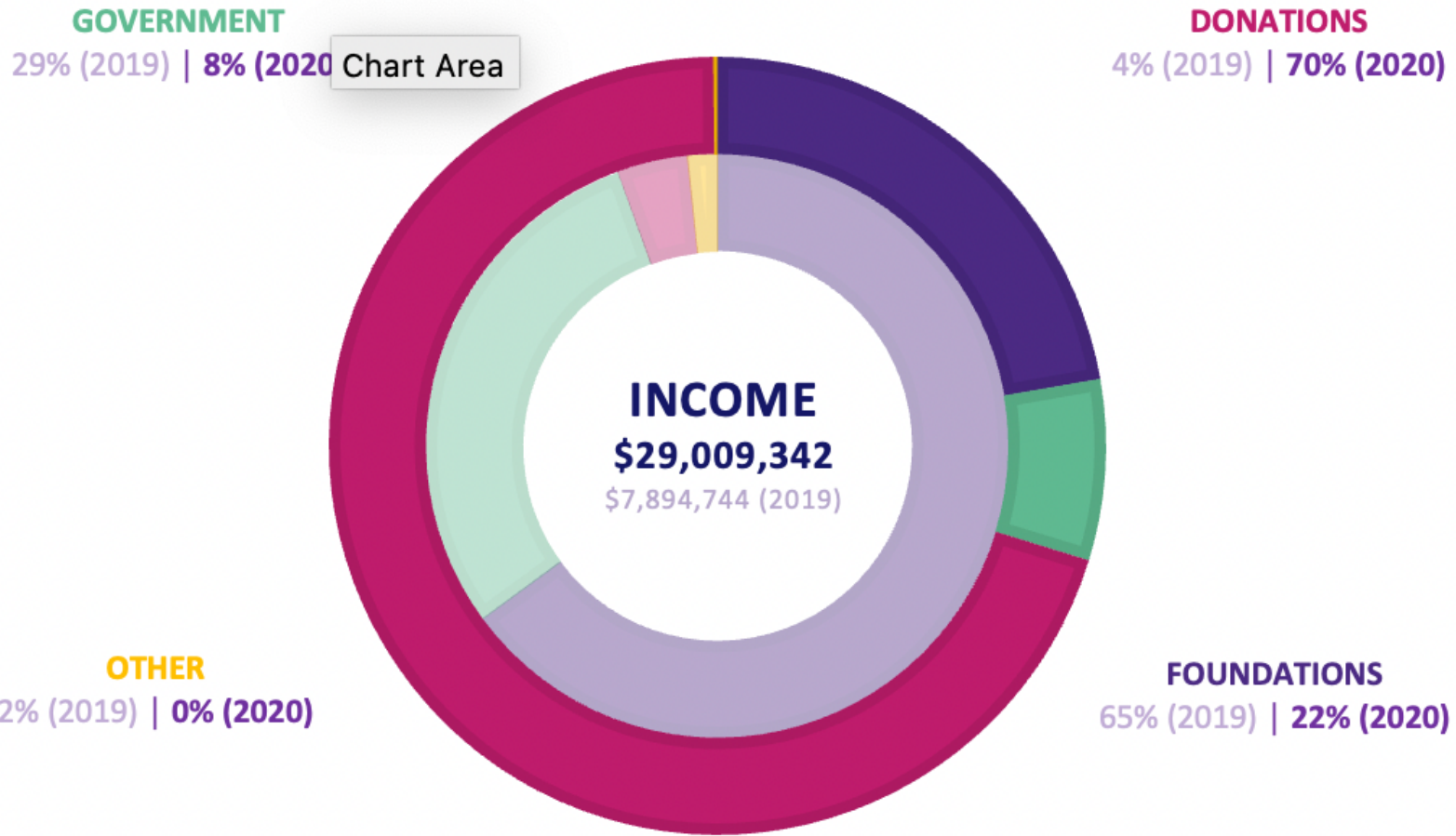
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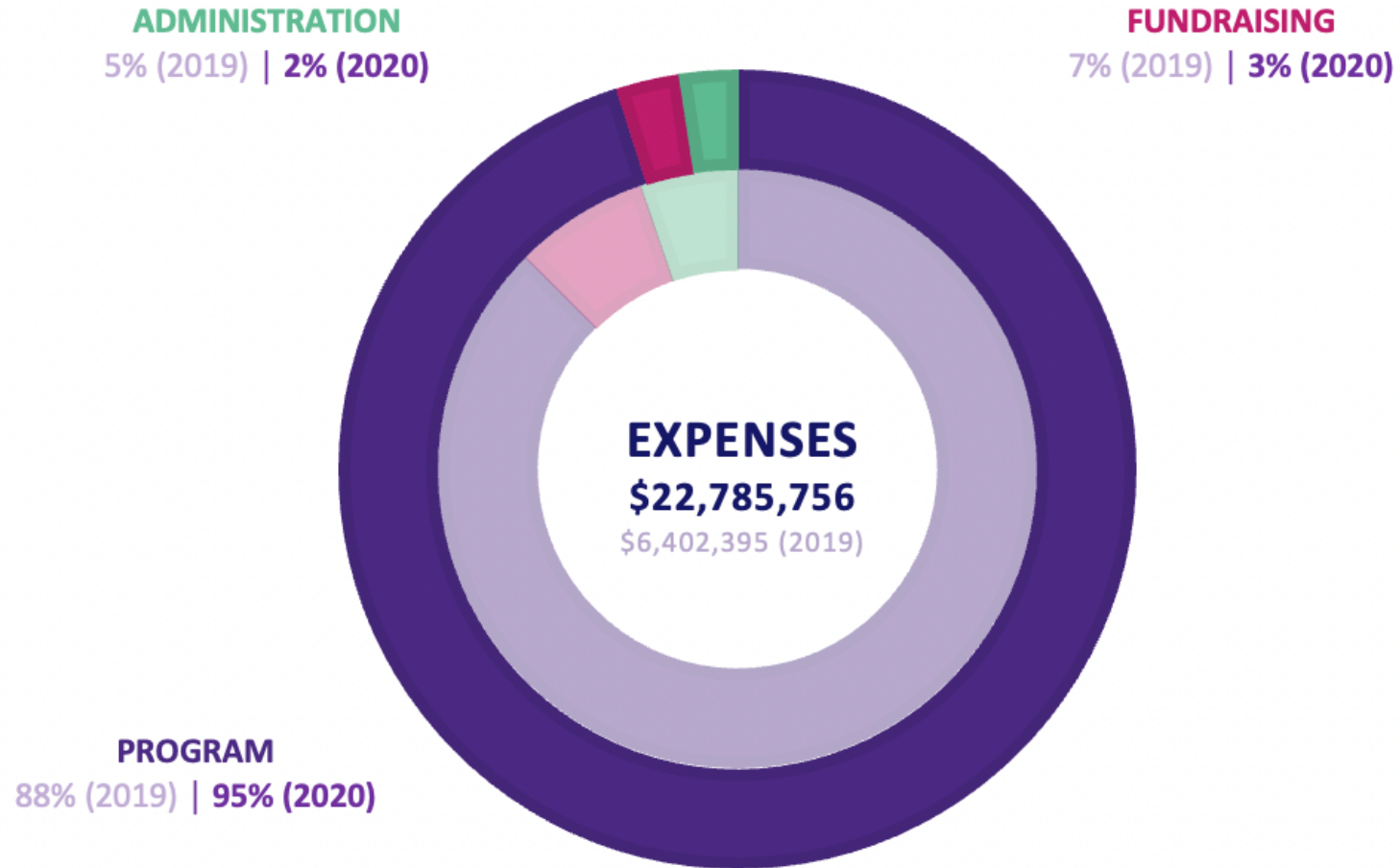
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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