

University philanthropy: Foundation to Promote Open Society

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Key findings

The Open Society Foundations, the network of foundations established by US financier George Soros, is thought to be the world's third largest philanthropic fund, after the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the United Kingdom's Wellcome Trust.

The Open Society network is the largest private funder of initiatives relating to justice, good governance, democracy and human rights, operating in over 120 countries. Higher education is a significant beneficiary. According to our study of university funding by George Soros' main grantmaking *Foundation to Promote Open Society*:

- Open Society has disbursed over \$184m in funding to 171 universities and higher education institutions in 51 countries over the past 5 years. 8% of all Foundation for Open Society giving in the past five years (\$2.2bn) has gone to universities and higher education institutions.
- Funding to universities has almost doubled from \$32m in 2014, to \$62m in 2018. The number of beneficiaries has jumped 46% from 65 in 2014 to 95 in 2018.
- While US universities are the biggest beneficiaries receiving 72% of giving over the past five years, the number of non-US recipients has rocketed over the past 5 years.
- In 2014, 31 non-US universities received Open Society funding. By 2018 that number had leapt to 64.
- In terms of grant amounts, US universities are the biggest beneficiaries (72%).
- European universities are the second biggest group of recipients after North America, receiving around 9% of university giving between 2014-18. 47 universities received over \$17m.
- Asian universities are the third biggest regional beneficiaries, receiving \$11m in the past five years. The American University of Central Asia in Bishkek received \$8.5m making Kyrgyzstan the biggest Asian beneficiary country.
- 20 Latin American universities received \$7.6m in funding making them the fourth biggest regional beneficiaries.

About UniversityPhilanthropy.com

UniversityPhilanthropy.com is the dedicated research arm of The Cape Partnership, a London-based public affairs and policy advisory firm. Our research looks at trends in philanthropy and giving to universities.

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Key facts

George Soros began his philanthropic career in 1979 by supporting scholarships for black students at the University of Cape Town in South Africa and for Eastern European dissidents to study abroad. A snapshot of university philanthropy channeled through his *Foundation to Promote Open Society* reveals:

	Recipients	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
North America	69	\$23.3m	\$20.2m	\$25.3m	\$24.0m	\$44.9m	\$137.7m
Europe	47	\$3.3m	\$1.3m	\$2.9m	\$4.3m	\$5.5m	\$17.3m
Asia	11	\$2.3m	\$252k	\$1.1m	\$556k	\$6.6m	\$10.8m
Latin America	20	\$1.1m	\$1.5m	\$1.5m	\$2.2m	\$1.5m	\$7.6m
MENA	5	\$1.1m	\$312k	\$1.3m	\$1.5m	\$1.7m	\$5.9m

Top 10 non-US recipients of giving by *Foundation to Promote Open Society*:

University	Country	2014-18
Central European University	Hungary	\$14.4m
American University Central Asia	Kyrgyzstan	\$8.5m
Oxford	UK	\$4.5m
Toronto	Canada	\$2.8m
Birzeit	Palestine	\$2.4m
London School of Economics	UK	\$2.3m
Graduate Institute, Geneva	Switzerland	\$2.2m
Universidad de los Andes	Colombia	\$1.9m
Universidad Catolica Andres Bello	Venezuela	\$1.9m
American University of Beirut	Lebanon	\$1.7m

Analysis

George Soros' network of Open Society foundations is a complex organisation, said to be operating in over 120 countries. Our analysis of university funding by the *Foundation to Promote Open Society*, the main grant-making vehicle for Soros, provides a significant but not necessarily complete picture of his funding to universities.

Universities funded by Soros' network of foundations can find themselves in the midst of political crossfire. At the end of 2018, the Central European University, founded by Soros in 1994, announced it would relocate to Austria, citing the Hungarian government's decision to strip it of the ability to issue US degrees. Hungary's PM Viktor Orban is a critic of George Soros.

In January 2020, Soros announced he was establishing the Open Society University Network, pledging \$1bn. He described it the "most important and enduring project of my life", saying it was important to fund institutions that would help resist the drift towards authoritarianism. George Soros' funding for universities, then, looks set to increase significantly.

About our research

The purpose of this research was to identify giving by the *Foundation to Promote Open Society* between 2014-18. Our study drew on information filed in the Foundation's US tax returns. For more information, contact: office@capepartnership.com

