



20
24

HRLP IMPACT REPORT

 HUMAN
RIGHTS

 LEGAL
PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

IN 2024, AMIDST A RISE IN FAR-RIGHT POLITICS, ANTI-MIGRANT NARRATIVES AND STRICTER MIGRATION POLICIES, BORDERS BECAME FURTHER MILITARIZED ACROSS THE EU. PEOPLE ON THE MOVE FACED SYSTEMATIC AND WIDESPREAD VIOLATIONS OF THEIR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AT THE HANDS OF MEMBER STATES, WITH GREECE AT THE FOREFRONT OF MANY OF THESE TROUBLING DEVELOPMENTS —WITH THE TACIT SUPPORT OF THE EU.

Against this backdrop, the Human Rights Legal project continues to address the violent EU border regime and to seek accountability for the alarming erosion of displaced people's fundamental rights in Greece. While we focus our work on Samos, we were also present in high-profile court cases in Kalamata and Thessaloniki in 2024, and our work regularly has an impact in Greece and at EU level.

2024 IN SHORT



We assisted a total of **161 people**, spanning cases such as the criminalisation of boat drivers, police brutality, pushbacks, unlawful detention and medical negligence.



We provided emergency legal assistance on **43 occasions** to ensure that individuals landing on Samos were guaranteed their right to seek international protection.



We filed **applications to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)**, made submissions to the **UN Human Rights Committee and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**, submitted reports to the **Greek Ombudsman**, and advocated in many more ways for the respect of the rights of displaced people in Greece.

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CONTEXT OF OUR ACTION

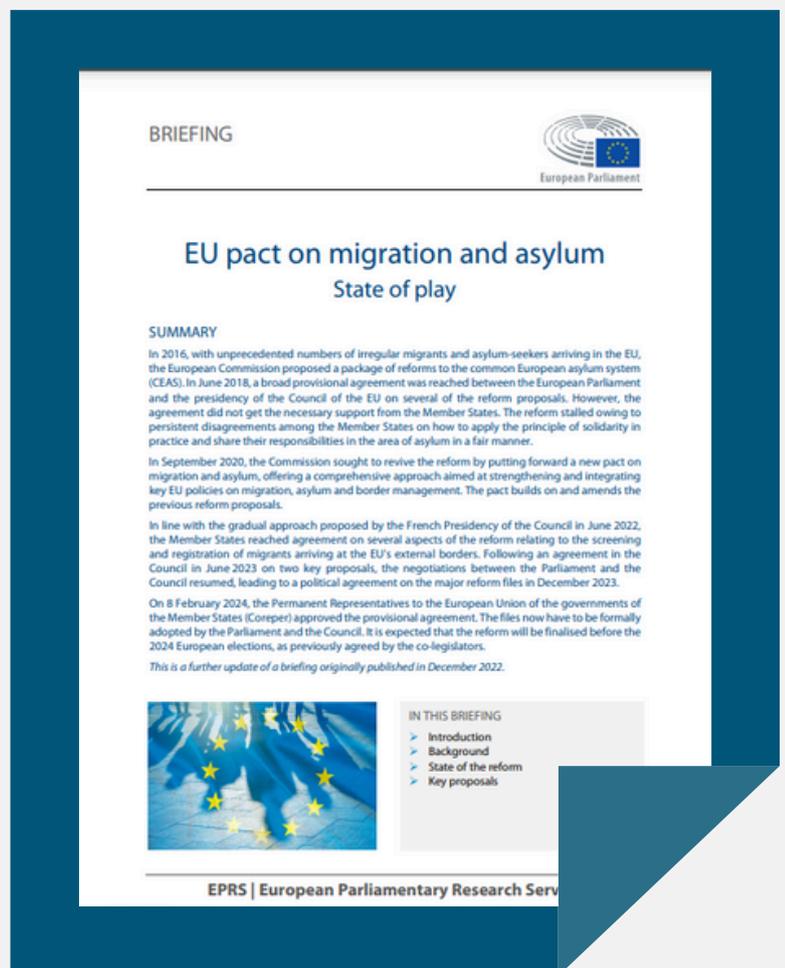
OVER THE PAST YEAR, AS THE EU PIVOTED TOWARDS A STRICTER ANTI-MIGRATION STANCE, DISPLACED PEOPLE REACHING EUROPE THROUGH GREECE HAVE BEEN FACING AN INCREASINGLY HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT.

EU PACT, BORDER REGIME & HUMAN RIGHTS EROSION

In 2024, the adoption of the New EU Pact on Migration & Asylum is the most note-worthy materialization of this shift as it implies further militarization of EU borders and signals a clear regression of international protection standards.

Against this backdrop, 2024 in Greece was marked by a **continued erosion of the rule of law** and the fundamental rights of asylum seekers & refugees in the EU. Greek authorities continued illegal pushbacks to Turkey, escalated the criminalization of

boat drivers, and unlawfully detained displaced people, including children, in substandard conditions across the country's camps. Additionally, violations of the right to a fair trial and incidents of police violence & impunity further underscored the deteriorating treatment of migrants and asylum seekers.





CLOSED CONTROLLED ACCESS CENTER (CCAC)

In 2024, 9,980 displaced people arrived on Samos, the highest number of arrivals since 2016. The CCAC in Samos, a space initially designed to accommodate 2,020 people, has been consistently overcrowded, reaching a maximum of 4,600 the past year.

Similarly, overcrowding was a chronic issue in the camp's Safe Area, where unaccompanied children reside, with the maximum capacity of 200 frequently being breached, with over 500 children being accommodated at times. Overcrowding, lack of access to medical care, substandard living conditions, arbitrary detention, and authorities violence are some of the most pressing and consistent issues in the CCAC.



PUSHBACKS

While pushbacks from land were halted in mid-2023, Greek authorities continue to implement a policy of systematic pushbacks at sea in the Aegean.



29%

OF THE 508 REGISTERED PUSHBACK INCIDENTS IN THE AEGEAN IN 2024, TOOK PLACE OFF THE COASTS OF SAMOS.

CRIMINALIZATION

The criminalization of boat drivers remained one of the key concerns of Civil Society actors in the field of migration in 2024. For several years now, Greek authorities in Samos have been targeting the drivers of boats carrying migrants, prosecuting them on the charges of 'smuggling' and using them as scapegoats to claim effective action is being taken to protect the EU borders.

As a result, the criminalization of migration has become an integral part of an established deterrence strategy aimed to prevent people on the move from seeking international protection in the EU. The number of boat drivers arrested and accused of being "smugglers" increased again this year in Samos compared to 2023.



© ILLUSTRATION BY: PATRICK MUCZCZEK

WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THAT BOAT OF YOURS?

OUR IMPACT

→ CRIMINALIZATION

In 2024, HRLP provided free legal representation to 23 asylum seekers falsely accused of "smuggling". Most faced charges simply for driving - or allegedly driving - the boat. Our core legal argument holds that prosecuting asylum seekers for acts of self-transfer during their journey, including steering boats or assisting fellow passengers, constitutes a violation of the fundamental principle of non penalization for irregular entry, as enshrined in Article 31 of the 1951 Refugee Convention.

20 of these clients were fully acquitted, and 3 received significantly reduced sentences. This 87% success rate exposes both the injustice of these prosecutions and the vital need for proper legal support & representation. It goes to show that the structural inequalities of European legal systems disempower displaced people in search of safety or opportunity.

Despite these victories, each person spent months in pre-trial detention (6-10 months on average) and there are lifelong consequences for those convicted, including barred access to refugee status and precarious futures. Yet through rigorous representation and precedent-setting case law, HRLP is challenging this criminalization regime, as will be demonstrated in two landmark 2024.

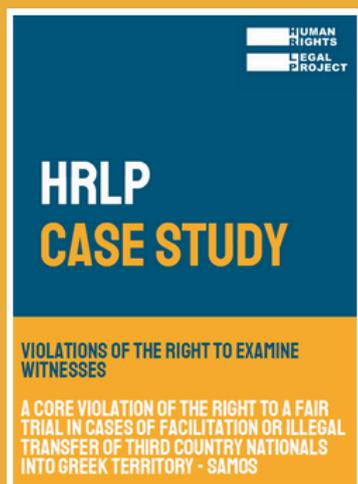
→ LIVING CONDITIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE SAMOS CCAC

The conditions in the CCAC Samos remain dire. Overcrowding and a lack of the most fundamental services like decent accommodation, clothes, food, water, and medical care, continue to be the normality of all residents of the Samos CCAC on a daily basis.

Through both legal and advocacy work, HRLP denounced inhumane and degrading living conditions of people residing in the CCAC. HRLP cooperated with other civil society organisations to call for upholding of human rights in the CCAC, and in particular in the Safe Area for unaccompanied children and contributed to the research briefing released by Amnesty International.

In 2024, HRLP took action against police violence by alerting camp authorities to two documented cases of excessive police force and arbitrary conduct, while formally reporting one incident to the Greek Ombudsperson.

→ FAIR TRIAL VIOLATIONS: A LEGAL CASE STUDY



Marking International Fair Trial Day (June 14), HRLP drew on its extensive expertise in Samos court proceedings to publish a [legal analysis](#) documenting how Greek courts **systematically violate displaced people's right to examine witnesses** - a fundamental due process guarantee. The study revealed how migration-related trials at EU borders routinely deny this basic protection, leaving defendants unable to challenge evidence against them.

→ SEEKING JUSTICE FOR PUSHBACK SURVIVORS

Pushbacks and the consistent failure to properly investigate prove to be systematic violations occurring at Greece's borders. In two cases involving pushbacks from Samos, dating back to 2020 and 2021, HRLP exhausted domestic remedies. By 2024, after years of flawed proceedings, Greek courts shelved the casefiles, failing to address these violations and to identify those responsible, leaving survivors without meaningful redress. Both cases were brought before the European Court of Human Rights, seeking justice for our clients.



[IN PURSUIT OF JUSTICE FOR PUSHBACK VICTIMS, HRLP FILED TWO NEW CASES IN GREEK COURTS IN 2024](#)

HRLP used the aforementioned cases to contribute to the case of Muhammad v. Greece (App. 34331/22), by filing a Third Party Intervention before the ECtHR, highlighting the different aspects of the ineffective investigation of alleged pushbacks and related border crimes in Greece and advocating for the reversal of the burden of proof in such cases.

Different forms of border violence were also reported to national and international human rights bodies, in particular the Greek Ombudsperson, the Hellenic National Commission for Human Rights, the United Nations Human Rights Committee and the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

SPOTLIGHT

IN 2024, HRLP COMMITTED TO SUPPORT AND EMPOWER DISPLACED INDIVIDUALS IN GREECE WHO FACE A DYSFUNCTIONAL LEGAL SYSTEM THAT CONSISTENTLY FAILS THEM. BELOW, WE PRESENT SOME SPOTLIGHT STORIES WHICH HAVE SERVED AS A VALUABLE REWARD, MOTIVATION AND FUEL FOR OUR ACTION.



I. SAMOS CCAC, 'SAFE ZONE' - REQUEST FOR INTERIM MEASURES TO THE ECTHR

Since October 2024, HRLP has been making consistent efforts to raise the alarm on the increasingly deteriorating living conditions in the Samos CCAC's Safe Zone, where unaccompanied children (UACs) reside.

INITIATIVE FOR INTERVENTION / NOV 2024

As the Greek authorities failed to address the situation, thereby jeopardizing the health and safety of hundreds of children, HRLP decided to seek accountability and apply pressure on the Greek government through strategic litigation.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION / JAN 2025

After a long and diligent process of information gathering, HRLP submitted a request for Interim Measures (Rule 39) on behalf of 4 UACs to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), providing the Court with the details and legal documents proving that the 4 applicants faced an imminent risk of ill-treatment as they were unlawfully detained inside the CCAC's Safe Area.

ECTHR DECISION / FEB 2025

On February 5, the Court granted the interim measures, acknowledging that the 4 children are at imminent risk of irreparable harm, and indicated to the Greek government to provide them with adequate food, water, clothing and medical care, to ensure their protection from ill-treatment and ensure their speedy relocation to a shelter for children.

IN ADDITION TO THE UNLAWFUL, DE-FACTO DETENTION OF THE APPLICANTS, HRLP SUBSTANTIATED THAT THEIR LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE SAMOS CCAC'S SAFE ZONE AMOUNTED TO INHUMANE AND DEGRADING TREATMENT, CONSIDERING THE:



**LACK OF ACCESS TO
MEDICAL &
PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE**



**LACK OF
APPOINTED
GUARDIANS**



**UNSANITARY
CONDITIONS,
LACK OF HYGIENE
PRODUCTS**



**VIOLENT & ABUSIVE
BEHAVIOUR OF POLICE
OFFICERS WORKING
INSIDE THE SAFE ZONE**



**LACK OF FOOD,
ADEQUATE CLOTHING &
PROPER BEDDING**



**FAILURE TO PROTECT
THE APPLICANTS FROM
VIOLENCE INFLICTED
BY OTHER CHILDREN**

Citing all of the above, HRLP stressed that the deplorable living conditions at the Samos CCAC's Safe Zone pose a grave threat to the health, safety and dignity of all unaccompanied children residing in the camp's premises, arguing that the ill-treatment they are subjected to exposes all of them to imminent risk of irreparable harm.



2. LANDMARK LEGAL PRECEDENTS

In two groundbreaking decisions, the one Member Court of Appeals of Syros First Instance, seated in Samos, **acquitted three defendants of all charges**, on the grounds of their **asylum seeker status**.

M.S. F.F. and E.A. were accused of illegal transfer of third-country nationals and assisting the illegal transfer of third country nationals. The first two men were accused because they were driving the boat, while the latter was accused of helping the driver by using his phone and the map. Each of them **faced 15 years of incarceration for each transferred person**.

In a groundbreaking decision, on October 21st, E.A. F.F. and M.S. were declared innocent after 7 months of pre-trial detention.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, A GREEK COURT FOUND THAT ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE EXCLUDED FROM THE SCOPE OF LAW 5038/2023 ON MIGRATION CODE, AND THEREFORE CANNOT BE ACCUSED OF COMMITTING THE OFFENSE OF ILLEGAL TRANSFER OF THIRD NATIONALS AND OF FACILITATION OF ILLEGAL ENTRY OF THIRD NATIONALS.

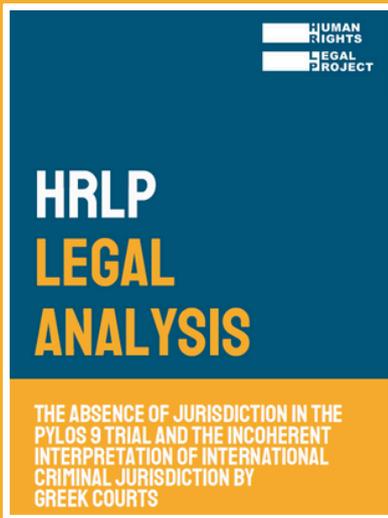
! IMPORTANT LEGAL PRECEDENTS !

WHILE THE LAW IS VERY CLEAR AND THE LAWYERS OF HRLP SYSTEMATICALLY RAISE THIS ARGUMENT, IT IS THE FIRST TIME THAT A GREEK COURT REFERS TO THIS ARTICLE OF THE LAW TO ACQUIT DEFENDANTS WHO ARE ACCUSED OF ILLEGAL TRANSFER OF THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS, ON THE GROUNDS OF THEIR ASYLUM SEEKER STATUS.



3. PYLOS 9

In May 2024, HRLP joined the defense team of the 9 survivors wrongfully prosecuted for the Pylos shipwreck. Our legal team focused on a fundamental flaw in the prosecution: Greece's lack of jurisdiction, as the shipwreck occurred in international waters.



IN PREPARATION FOR THE TRIAL, HRLP PUBLISHED A COMPREHENSIVE LEGAL ANALYSIS EXPLAINING THAT GREECE LACKED CRIMINAL JURISDICTION IN THE PYLOS 9 CASE. AS DEMONSTRATED IN OUR STUDY, INTERNATIONAL AND GREEK LAW CLEARLY INDICATE THAT THE TRANSFER OF MIGRANTS OUTSIDE GREEK TERRITORIAL WATERS IS NOT SUBJECT TO NATIONAL CRIMINAL JURISDICTION. THE ANALYSIS ALSO REVIEWED 6 PRIOR HRLP CASES ADDRESSING THE SAME JURISDICTIONAL LIMITS IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS.

Following our arguments, **the court's decision to acquit all defendants marked an important restraint on the overextension of criminalization of migration.** However, this legal victory stands in stark contrast to the ongoing impunity for those truly responsible. With credible evidence pointing to the Hellenic Coast Guard's responsibility of causing the shipwreck, together with other activist and legal organizations HRLP continues to support the survivors of the shipwreck to press legal action against the HCG and to fight for justice.



MEDIA FEATURES 2024

WORKING ON THE FRONTLINES OF EUROPE, WE CONSIDER IT OUR DUTY TO SHED LIGHT ON THE GROSS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS THAT WE WITNESS EVERY DAY. TO EXPOSE THE EU'S VIOLENT BORDER REGIME, CHALLENGE THE DOMINANT NARRATIVES AND MOTIVATE EUROPEAN CITIZENS TO JOIN OUR FIGHT FOR JUSTICE.

Over the past year, communicating our actions and amplifying the stories of the people we work with has been a key priority for HRLP, resulting in:

16

FEATURES IN GREEK MEDIA

12

FEATURES IN FOREIGN OUTLETS (AL JAZEERA, LE MONDE, THE GUARDIAN)

3

3 PODCAST FEATURES (INCL. BBC 'CAUGHT AT THE HELM')

2

FEATURES ON GREEK TV

2

DOCUMENTARY FEATURES (BBC, ARTE)

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

OUR TEAM ON SAMOS IN 2024



STEFAN
PROJECT MANAGER



IOANNA & DIMITRIS
LAWYERS



QUITTERIE
LEGAL COORDINATOR



JOANNA
COMMUNICATIONS
MANAGER

The board is made up of 5 members, all co-founders. HRLP is supported by a consultant human rights lawyer, with extensive experience with the ECtHR and other Council of Europe human rights-monitoring mechanisms. As ever, our work would not have been possible in 2024 without the expertise of our interpreters.

Important developments during 2024 **strengthened the organisational structure** and its operational reach, and laid foundations for increased financial stability.

The recruitment of a **Project Manager (80%)** with a focus on fundraising, networking, advocacy, HR management and supervision of the legal work, and a **Communications Manager (60%)** were key to these developments.

The Communications Manager started in April 2024 and was instrumental in boosting the external communication of HRLP.

ONLINE PRESENCE

AN HRLP INSTAGRAM CHANNEL AND A BLUESKY ACCOUNT WERE LAUNCHED, THE PRESENCE ON X CONSISTENTLY INCREASED AND THE WEBSITE IS KEPT UP TO DATE WITH ARTICLES ON HRLP'S WORK.

THE PRESENCE OF THE COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER ALSO ALLOWED HRLP TO PARTICIPATE IN AN ONLINE FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN WITH OTHER LEGAL AID ORGANIZATIONS IN GREECE AND TO STRENGTHEN THE PARTNERSHIP WITH LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND, BASED LARGELY ON SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT.

FINANCES

FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

Over the past year, civil society across the world has been going through a poignant financial crisis, which has significantly **aggravated** the already adverse **funding environment** for organizations working in **the migration field**.

The sudden **suspension of U.S. funding** (which previously accounted for 42% of global humanitarian financing) has taken a **heavy toll on European civil society**, with major refugee-hosting countries like Greece feeling the impact imminently. Greek NGOs supporting people on the move have already been affected either by direct funding cuts, or because intermediary donors or partners, such as the UNHCR, have ended or **reduced their support**.

As a result, at a time of increased need due to rising displacement, front line organizations located at the EU's external border are **overexerting ourselves**, to prevent a deepening crisis of inclusion, reception and protection of displaced people arriving in Europe.

Amidst this stressful period of **funding suspension, insecurity and existential threat** for grassroots human rights organizations, **small donor contributions are more pivotal and impactful than ever**.

FINANCIAL REPORT

The figures in this report reflect the total transactions of HRLP between January - December 2024. All calculations are based on Euro amounts.

	2024	2023	% CHANGE
INCOME	€133,222	€154,615	-14%
EXPENDITURE	€143,048**	€160,577	-11%
SURPLUS	-9 825 €	-5 961 €	

TABLE I. INCOME VS EXPENDITURE 2023 AND 2024

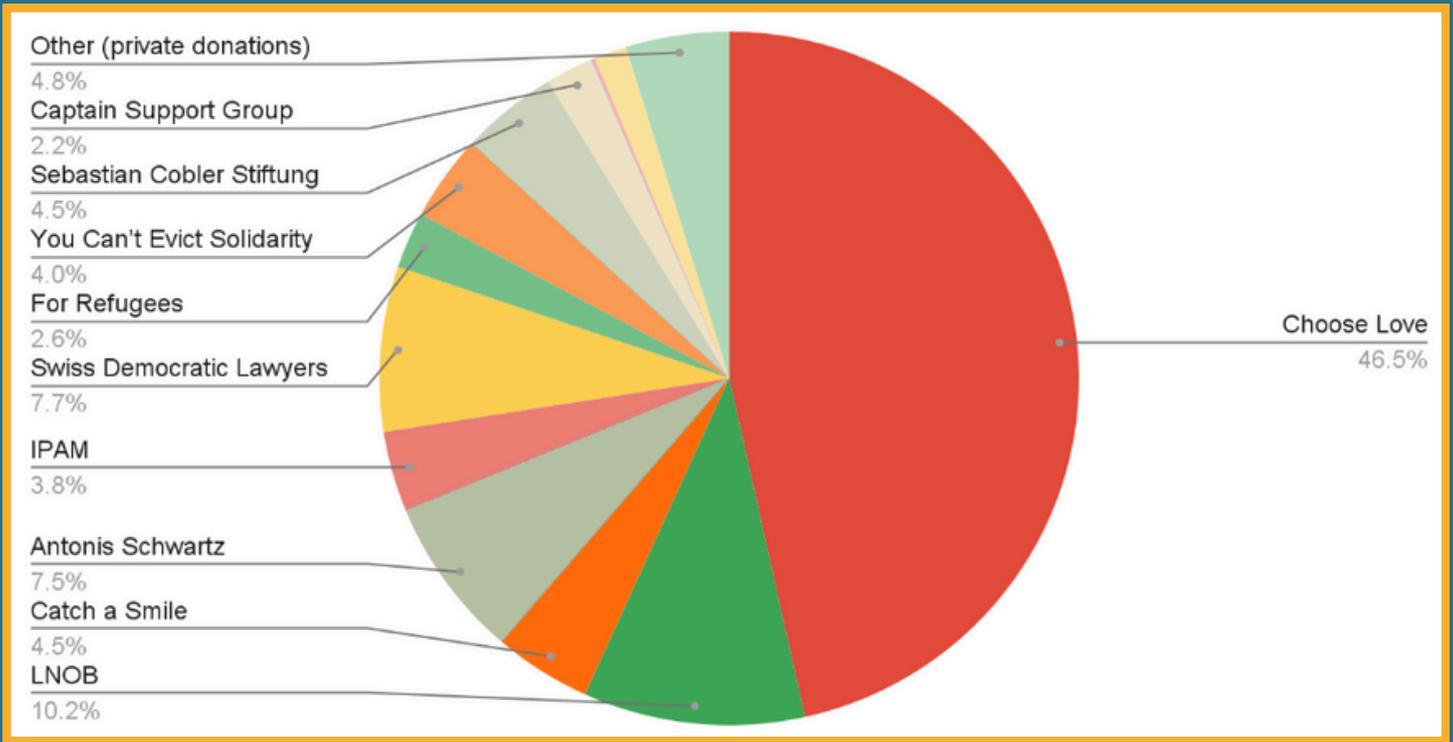
* ALL PERCENTAGES ROUNDED TO NEAREST WHOLE NUMBER

** WE HAD €10,019 SURPLUS TO SPEND FROM 2023

INCOME 2024

	2024	2023	% CHANGE
DONATIONS/GRANTS	2024	2023	% CHANGE
SEA WATCH LEGAL AID	€0	€49,490	-100%
CHOOSE LOVE	€61,986	€54,771	+13%
MARLOW REFUGEE ACTION	€0	€3,403	-100%
LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND	€13,635	€0	+100%
CATCH A SMILE	€6,000	€6,000	0%
ANTONIS SCHWARTZ	€10,000	€0	+100%
AIDHOC	€0	€12,200	-100%
IPAM	€5,000	€0	+100%
SWISS DEMOCRATIC LAWYERS FUND	€10,240	€4,270	+140%
FOR REFUGEES	€3,501	€4,755	-26%
YOU CAN'T EVICT SOLIDARITY	€5,333	€0	+100%
SEBASTIAN COBLER STIFTUNG	€6,000	€0	+100%
CAPTAIN SUPPORT GROUP	€2,913	€0	+100%
GLOBAL SOLIDARITY FUND	€250	€0	+100%
FUNDACTION	€2,000	€0	+100%
OTHER (INDIVIDUAL PRIVATE DONATIONS)	€6,365	€19,727	-68%
TOTAL	€133,222	€154,615	-14%

TABLE 2. INCOME BREAKDOWN BY DONOR, 2023 AND 2024



GRAPH I. TOTAL DONOR INCOME 2024

INCOME ANALYSIS

HRLP is an independent, non-profit organisation that **is politically and financially independent** of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion. All of our income has come via donations from individuals and grant makers without exception. We monitor our income to ensure it's in line with our ethics and principals.

In 2024 we saw a **14% decrease in total income revenue**. This was largely anticipated due to the loss of AidHoc and Sea Watch Legal aid funding streams in 2023/2024. Sea Watch Legal Aid had previously exclusively covered all court costs, including court fees and travel costs for our clients. The loss of this funding meant we needed to secure new funding to cover these costs whilst also diversifying donors to mitigate future risk of fund loss.

Through hard work our team managed to secure **8 new donors** to cover the costs left by the loss of Aid Hoc and Sea Watch Legal Aid. This was a tremendous feat as we achieved cost coverage and diversification equally. Our new funders consisted of Leave Noone Behind, Antonis Schwartz, You Cannot Evict Solidarity, Sebastian Cobler Stiftung, Captain Support Network, Global Solidarity Fund and Fundation.

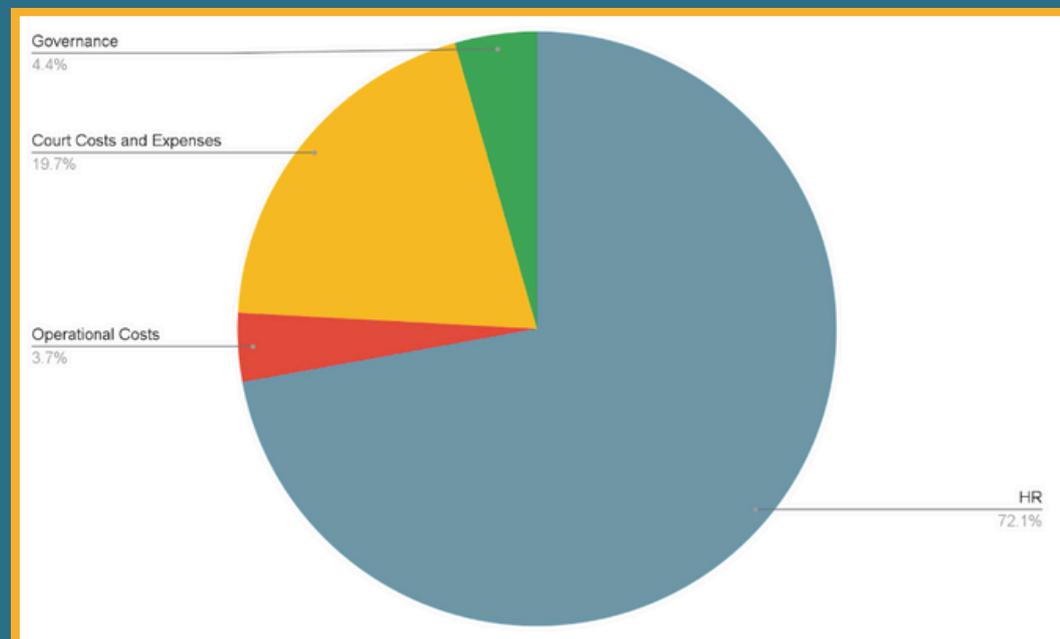
We also saw **donation increases from recurrent grant makers** Choose Love and Swiss Democratic Lawyers Fund. Choose Love kindly provided additional income to assist with coverage of our HR costs whilst we strategized our communications and fundraising planning. Swiss Democratic Lawyers Fund, however, supported directly with costs related to court related needs.

Finally, we saw a **significant drop in revenue under individual private donations**. This was mostly due to a very successful individual campaign in 2023 compared to a different campaigning strategy in 2024. In 2024 we opted to run a joint campaign with a collective of grassroots organisations including Legal Centre Lesvos, Equal Legal Aid, Mobile Info Team and ASF Samos. Although doing well this campaign resulted in less direct funding to our organisation.

EXPENDITURE 2024

TYPES OF EXPENDITURE	2024	2023	% CHANGE
HR	€103,168	€81,176	+27%
OPERATIONAL COSTS	€5,352	€17,164	-69%
COURT COSTS AND EXPENSES	€28,190	€61,160	-54%
GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION	€6,338	€1,486	+326%
TOTAL	€143,048	€160,577	-11%

TABLE 4. EXPENDITURE BREAKDOWN BY COST CATEGORY, 2023 AND 2024



GRAPH 2.
TOTAL
EXPENDITURE
2024

EXPENDITURE ANALYSIS

In close correlation to our income we also saw that **expenditure decreased in 2024 by 11%** from 2023. Our expenditure and income were within a few % of each other with a lesser number of funds being rolled into 2025 than in previous years. This was partially related to tighter budget control and more accurate projections. Equally this was an outcome of reduced funding resources weighed against essential operational outgoings.

Operational costs dropped by 69% mostly due to our internal budget recategorization of staff accommodation costs. In 2023 we opted to dissolve accommodation provision and instead increase total gross salaries for each applicable team member. This meant that the vast majority of the operational cost decrease was transferred to the HR sub-budget. However, we also reduced overheads by moving to a less expensive office to reduce non-essential costs.

Despite this recategorization, HR was only increased by 27% in 2024. There were a number of factors within the HR expenditure that resulted in this increased total. We had larger recruitment gaps in 2024 due to **lack of hiring capacity and need for restructuring**, which reduced outgoing expenditure. Post-recruitment we also saw savings due to reduced working hours with some contracts. However, we **recruited a Communications Manager**, an entirely new position into the team. Beginning mid-year on a part-time basis, the role established a more visible presence for the organisation, and assisted with our fundraising and advocacy strategies.

Internally merged sub-budget categories for clarity and simplicity, namely *Staff Training* with *Administration* to form the **new category Governance and Administration**. This justifies the increase in this subsection. Due to constant scrutiny from the state we further opted to employ professional support to ensure accounting transparency and accuracy.

Partly due to the dissolution of Sea Watch Legal Aid, we took a **more cautious and conservative approach to new case onboarding in 2024**. We reduced the number of new cases and **strategically took cases** that we estimated would be **less costly**, unless when confident we could secure funds in a timely manner. We took cases within the Samos/Syros jurisdiction and declined most cases outside of this geographical remit, which reduced total court travel expenses. To maintain our impact, we took this opportunity to **enhance our advocacy strategy** and focus on strengthening our legal networks.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL OUR DONORS FOR THEIR CONTINUED SUPPORT

Choose Love, Catch a Smile, Swiss Democratic Lawyers, ForRefugees, IPAM, Leave No One Behind, Antonis Schwarz, Captain Support, Sebastian Cobler Foundation, Global Solidarity Fund, Fundaction, and all individual donors.

**TOGETHER WE PROTECT AND DEFEND THE
FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF PEOPLE ON THE MOVE.**

MAKE A DONATION

TO SUPPORT OUR WORK

JOIN OUR COMMUNITY

TO FOLLOW OUR WORK