

ECRE Strategic Plan 2023 to 2025

Introduction

This Strategic Plan sets out ECRE's objectives for the period 2023 to 2025. It includes activity objectives for the three areas of ECRE's work, Legal Support/Litigation, Advocacy and Communications, plus strategic priorities and organisational objectives. Annual reports, comparing results against the objectives, and annual plans setting out activities for the year ahead, are published in January of each year.

Process of Strategic Planning

The process of developing the Strategic Plan 2023 to 2025 began in September 2021 when the ECRE Board of Directors met the team leaders for the three areas of ECRE's work. The Board reviewed the progress against objectives and agreed that these three areas of work should continue for the three years of 2023 to 2025 inclusive. The Board further agreed on the process for preparation of the plan. In the first half of 2022, the draft objectives for the Strategic Plan were developed and consultation took place with the ECRE Board and the wider membership to refine and adapt the objectives based on members' input.

ECRE's mission, approximate size and location remain the same; the objectives set out what it seeks to achieve with each activity within the parameters of its overall mission.

ECRE's mission:

- The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) is a pan-European alliance protecting and advancing the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons in Europe and in Europe's foreign policies. Our mission is to promote the establishment of fair and humane European asylum policies and practices in accordance with international human rights law.

Purpose of Plan

As with previous Strategic Plans from 2017 to 2019 and 2020 to 2022, the Plan is intended to be functional, with objectives that the ECRE Secretariat can use to report to the Board, membership and donors as part of ensuring accountability to its stakeholders. The plan shows ECRE's priorities and objectives and is intended for internal and external audiences alike.

ECRE at a glance, 2022:

- Staff: 14.5
- Three areas of work: 1) Legal Support/litigation; 2) Advocacy; and 3) Communications
- Annual income: EUR 1.2 million
- Reserves : EUR 362.000
- Office : Mundo Madou, Brussels

Political Context

The political context is dominated by the displacement crisis caused by the war in Ukraine following the invasion of February 2022, with 7 million people displaced from Ukraine of which around 4 million are registered for international protection in the EU; another 7 million IDPs are present within the country. Consequently, an ongoing humanitarian emergency is taking place across Europe – in Ukraine and also in the countries that have accepted the largest number of people.

Notwithstanding the immense practical challenges, especially given the unpredictability of the course of the war, ECRE has welcomed the EU's strategy in response to displacement from Ukraine, including the political decisions taken. In particular, the decision to activate the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) is welcome. In fact, the response has been the opposite of the usual response to displacement, and demonstrates that when the decision is taken to manage, the EU is able to manage the arrivals of refugees seeking protection, even when such large numbers of people are involved. The response has been based on ensuring rapid –

indeed automatic – access to protection whereas the usual response is to limit access to protection and access to territory, including through the use of violence. Onward movement is not just allowed, it is encouraged, and family reunification is supported. The guarantee of socio-economic rights combined with security of protection status, means that the principle of integration from day one can be applied. Above all, the open and welcoming approach stands in stark contrast to the approach to other refugees arriving in Europe.

The difference in approach is due to a number of factors: it is well-established that asylum policies are characterised by racial and religious biases and it would be naïve to deny that such factors are at play, intersecting with sex, as over 90% of the adults leaving Ukraine are women. The geographic proximity and contiguity of Ukraine are also relevant factors, as is possibly the fact that the TPD was developed in the context of displacement due to war in Europe. Military considerations also play a role, since the usual disunity, panic and paralysis would have significantly undermined security efforts.

Whatever the reasons, ECRE has argued that the more open and protection-focused response should be applied to the asylum system as a whole, and to all who seek protection in Europe. Forced displacement was at record levels even before the Ukraine crisis, with many displaced people in countries that are poorer and less able to manage than is Europe. For example, in 2021, the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan forced many people to flee, mainly to neighbouring countries which already hosted millions of Afghans, and has provoked a dire humanitarian crisis in the country. Beyond the evacuation programmes, which have had mixed results, Europe's response has been to make every effort to limit the number of Afghans arriving. Another crisis in 2021 involved the efforts by Belarus to use refugees to stimulate a crisis in Europe. The response of European states was to deny access to territory through physical barriers and legislative changes, with people dying at Europe's borders as a result. Proposals on "instrumentalisation" from the EU attempt to use that crisis to further reduce protection.

In fact, more widely, the proposals for reform of EU asylum law that are under consideration go in the opposite direction of the response used in the Ukraine crisis. ECRE has urged a re-think, identifying lessons for the Ukraine response which should be more widely applied. In addition, a major focus for ECRE remains the ongoing lack of implementation and compliance with the law that exists, resulting in problems ranging from reception crises to border violence. There is a risk that a two-tier system develops, with the response to Ukraine considered a one-off, and an ever more restrictive approach applied in the wider asylum system. For this reason, ECRE's focus is on protection and asylum in Europe more widely – that includes in the EU and in non-EU European countries where ECRE with and through its membership is also active. In its own work, ECRE attempts to avoid double standards by – as a matter of principle – adding work on Ukraine to its ongoing work, so that resources are not redeployed from the ongoing efforts to ensure functioning of asylum systems.

Priorities 2023 to 2025

In this context, the overall priorities for asylum in Europe, to which ECRE will seek to contribute are as follows:

1. Maintain political and public support for people displaced from Ukraine. Implementation of the TPD decision and equivalent national protection regimes, with the focus switching to access to the socio-economic rights that form the content of protection in the TPD decision and defensive efforts to ensure that premature forcible return and/or cessation of protection does not occur.
2. Support to functioning asylum systems in Europe and respect for the fundamental rights of all displaced people through compliance with EU and international law, and applying lessons from the political decision on the response to Ukraine. Flanking measures such as safe and legal routes, inclusion through access to rights and global efforts to prevent displacement are as relevant as ever.
3. Defensive advocacy work on EU asylum reforms, to amend proposals to limit damage to rights and to incorporate learning from the Ukraine response. There is new momentum in the asylum reform process as time is running out to have reforms concluded before the end of the mandates of the European Parliament and European Commission in spring 2024. On the one hand there is a risk that some of the worst proposals are accepted, on the other, there is a small opening for positive reforms on responsibility-sharing and solidarity, the stickiest issue. It is also important to conclude the reform process that has been running since 2016 and focus on enforcement.

ECRE contributes to these priorities through its three areas of work which will seek to meet the following objectives from 2023 to 2025.

Activity 1: Legal Support and Litigation

Legal Support and Litigation: Overall Objectives

- *To ensure effective access to rights of forcibly displaced people through proactive, coordinated and needs-based litigation in Europe.*
- *To strengthen the community of asylum lawyers across Europe through legal support and knowledge sharing.*

Overall objectives inform all areas of ECRE's Legal Support and Litigation (LSL) work and resemble objectives set out in ECRE's previous strategic plan. They aim at drawing attention to challenges faced by asylum systems and rule of law across Europe and at the same time highlighting how these could be best addressed by ECRE through legal support and litigation work. The objectives and litigation priorities for the next strategic planning cycle are formulated through the prism of fundamental rights of forcibly displaced people and underline the role that the judiciary and legal professionals play in ensuring their access to rights. This slight shift in the objectives is necessary for the reasons set out below.

Firstly, fair and humane European asylum policies become an illusion if forcibly displaced people cannot effectively access and enjoy their rights. Secondly, forcibly displaced people are rights-holders under international, EU and national law in all European countries. The concept and understanding of forcibly displaced persons as right-holders are increasingly lacking in the ongoing legislative debates and implementation of asylum-related legislation across Europe, as evidenced by multiple unlawful practices ECRE denounces, and by a gradual shift in focus from individual rights towards the interests of states in European decision-making. As a result, litigation often becomes the only way for forcibly displaced persons to access their rights and seek accountability for their rights violations. Thirdly, high quality, accessible and timely legal assistance provided by competent asylum lawyers is key to successful human rights litigation. A strong pan-European community of lawyers is indispensable in order to ensure its efficiency, given rapidly changing legal aid actors and national legal aid systems.

It is precisely for these reasons that the overall objectives stress the need to ensure ECRE's beneficiaries' rights in judicial proceedings and to maintain a vibrant and knowledgeable community of legal professionals defending these rights. All areas of ECRE's LSL work contribute to these objectives and have specific sub-objectives and priorities for the next three years. The latter will be regularly discussed with the ELENA network and adjusted according to its advice.

Impact litigation and legal support work in 2023-2025 will focus on the following aspects:

- Ensuring **accountability for violations of rights** of forcibly displaced people to improve the respect for fundamental rights and contribute to preventing new violations;
- Strengthening the **respect for rule of law** through engagement in individual cases focusing on the correct application of law, the implementation of judgments and the subjection of public authorities to established rules and procedures;
- Achieving **changes with lasting and far-reaching effects** in asylum laws and policies through litigation.

The three main strands of LSL work and the specific objectives are set out below.

The European Legal Network on Asylum (ELENA): Objective

- *To strengthen and expand the ELENA network in order to ensure high quality legal advice and representation of forcibly displaced people.*

The ELENA network, the largest existing forum for asylum lawyers in Europe, comprises of national networks in 34 countries and will be expanded to reach 40 countries in the next three years. In addition, we aim at increasing the number of lawyers listed in the ELENA Index by at least 10 percent by the end of 2025. The ELENA network is one part of the wider community of legal professionals working on asylum in Europe.

The ELENA network will be strengthened through increased collaboration and knowledge sharing with the national bar associations in countries where no formal or stable national ELENA network has been established. These efforts to engage new legal professionals will address the gaps in the network's presence and efficiency

in the countries where the legal aid systems recently changed. Importantly, ECRE will continue facilitating knowledge sharing among the ELENA lawyers and will respond to their needs relating to legal training, capacity and legal support. This objective will be achieved through:

- Managing and further expanding the ELENA Forum (by at least 10 percent);
- Efficiently coordinating the ELENA network with the national coordinators;
- Providing relevant legal training upon request of the ELENA coordinators and ensuring relevant knowledge sharing within the network and beyond;
- Providing legal support to ELENA lawyers and maintaining an efficient referral system for cross-border and urgent legal cases.
- All these measures will contribute to our overall aim of maintaining strong network of asylum law professionals capable of assisting forcibly displaced people in gaining access to their rights.

Impact Litigation: Objectives

- *To remain the key actor in asylum-related impact litigation across Europe;*
- *To increase ECRE's involvement in key national cases in European countries where ELENA is present;*

In this new strategic planning cycle, we will adjust the way we communicate about litigation and its impact and will substitute the term “strategic” litigation by the term “impact” litigation. Impact litigation is understood by ECRE as a long-term activity ensuring accountability for systemic and systematic fundamental rights violations of the displaced people and achieving legal changes ensuring their rights at European and national level through proactive, coordinated and needs-based litigation.

To achieve our objectives, ECRE will continue assisting our members and partners in the ELENA network in formulating litigation strategies and support their litigation efforts in addressing legal challenges identified in their national, regional or European context. This support will be both content-related and financial.

In addition, while previously we largely focused on pan-European courts and subsequent implementation of their judgments, in the next three years we will increasingly focus on litigation before the national courts as the national judiciary has a prominent role in upholding the rule of law and control the use of governmental power. The national judges in EU Member States also play a key role in implementing EU law and ensuring compatibility with international refugee law. Successful litigation at a national level can also be less time consuming and can have an impact going beyond the national context.

When selecting among multiple cases that reach us, ECRE will choose to be directly involved in cases or provide litigation support prioritising them in line with the following litigation priorities:

- **Right to Asylum** with a focus on access to fair and effective procedures;
- **Right to Dignity** with a focus on reception and detention conditions;
- **Right to Liberty and Security** with a focus on alternatives to detention and prohibition of detention of children;
- **Right to Effective Remedies** with a focus on access to justice and equality before the law;
- **Economic and Social Rights** with a focus on the right to an adequate standard of living.

These priorities were identified through internal discussions, ongoing discussions within the ELENA network, and the monitoring of asylum developments through AIDA. They are also based on the most common litigation support requests we receive directly from the ELENA network and the online ELENA forum. These revised priorities cover fundamental rights of forcibly displaced persons under various legal instruments including international human rights law, EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and all EU asylum law instruments. Priorities will be refined on a yearly basis during the annual consultations with the ELENA network but their broad focus allows ECRE to remain flexible in the rapidly changing legal and political environment.

There will be no geographic priorities when selecting cases suitable for litigation as accountability for human rights violations and access to rights is vitally important in every country across Europe.

European Database of Asylum Law (EDAL): Objective

- *To expand and improve the EDAL database making it more user-friendly and diverse.*

In 2023, ECRE will launch an updated and a more user-friendly EDAL database with improved search functions and other characteristics. The content of the database will include new caselaw by the UN Treaty Bodies.

Our objective for EDAL in 2023-2025 will be achieved through:

- Adding jurisprudence from two new countries to EDAL
- Adding case law by UN Treaty Bodies
- Systematically revising the existing summaries providing information on when cases have been overruled or any other information relating to case life
- Uploading new summaries more efficiently to make sure that the relevant case summaries feature on EDAL not long after the relevant judgments have been published
- Continuing to develop a pool of volunteers working on EDAL.

Activity 2: Advocacy

Advocacy: Overall objective

- *To influence EU policy and practice on protection of asylum seekers, refugees and displaced people through development of targeted recommendations and tailored advocacy*

Advocacy Objective 1: Support a functioning asylum system in Europe

Sub-objectives	How will we achieve this?
<p>The legal framework for the Common European Asylum System (EU Directives and Regulations) reflects the highest standards in line with International Human Rights Law, including International Refugee Law.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECRE will argue for compliance and not reform for most of CEAS. The exception is Dublin, where reform is needed • In the short-term, ECRE supports rights-based compliance with Dublin III and the creation of a predictable solidarity mechanism and puts forward concrete alternative proposals 	<p>Continued advocacy with co-legislators on Pact and Instrumentalisation proposals</p> <p>Contribution to evidence base of non-compliance through AIDA reports; comparative reports and other documents detailing non-compliant legislation and practices in Member States</p> <p>Highlight the shortcomings and risk of an approach based on derogations from asylum law, limiting access to asylum, and detention</p> <p>Demonstrating short-comings of Dublin system, including through annual Dublin statistics and on how to improve responsibility sharing</p> <p>Putting forward suggestions for priorities on asylum for next European Commission (2024-2029)</p> <p>Ensure debate on solidarity is informed by needs of BIP, including on freedom of movement?</p>
<p>The implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive for people fleeing Ukraine is based on respect for fundamental rights and contributes to strengthened asylum systems in Europe</p>	<p>Monitoring implementation across Europe to identify and address challenges with and gaps in implementation</p> <p>Mapping of new actors that might come into play in the context of TPD implementation</p> <p>Identify best practice and lessons to inform wider EU asylum law, policy and practice, and reform processes</p> <p>Highlight the need to retain the TPD as an instrument within CEAS</p> <p>Collect evidence on TPD implementation, national TP status and relations to other CEAS instruments by adding a dedicated TPD section to AIDA country reports</p> <p>Work together with the legal team on the underdevelopment on the TPD framework, addressing possible shortcomings especially in terms of freedom of movement and access to asylum</p>
<p>National practice and national legal frameworks provide a high level of protection in line with IHRL including IRL</p>	<p>AIDA Fact finding missions to specific Member States</p> <p>Legal Notes on situation in specific Member States</p>

	<p>Monitor and advocate against asylum externalisation trends at national level in cooperation with members to contain the spread of harmful ideas, policy and practice</p> <p>Analyse EU spending in support of asylum in different Member States</p> <p>Direct engagement with national asylum authorities, with a specific focus on asylum statistics and methods for collecting them</p> <p>In addition to the above, closer cooperation with ECRE members at national level where needed to achieve specific objectives</p>
<p>EUAA supports improved asylum systems in Europe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECRE will focus in particular on monitoring EUAA actions, advocating for a clear human rights approach to the agency's activities, transparency and accountability 	<p>Monitoring role of EUAA in different Member States; realisation of an updated report on operations</p> <p>Publication of a Policy Note on the implementation of the EUAA Regulation</p> <p>Following developments after the entry into force of the Monitoring Mechanism in December 2023; potential advocacy policy note on reinforced mandate and its constraints</p> <p>Following developments related to EUAA's deployment outside the EU</p> <p>Ensuring high standards through review of training modules (via framework contract) which also includes input from members</p> <p>Participation to the Consultative Forum (exact role TBC)</p> <p>Submission to EUAA Annual Report</p>
<p>AIDA – Asylum Information Database</p> <p>AIDA provides all relevant actors with independent practice-based information to support advocacy and litigation efforts, at national and European levels</p>	<p>Annual updating cycle</p> <p>Comparative reports/legal briefs analysing emerging issues in AIDA reporting countries</p> <p>Increased distribution efforts to relevant national authorities, civil society, courts and experts.</p> <p>Potential expansion of the AIDA database to additional EU Member States</p>

Advocacy Objective 2: European external policies advance rights of displaced people and reduce forced displacement

Sub-objectives	How will we achieve this?
EU external policies promote the rights of displaced persons and not migration control objectives, to be reflected in EU foreign, security, development and trade policy as well as external funding. EU action outside	Map out the leading actor and monitor impact of EU policies and external funding in specific country contexts

<p>the EU should tackle the causes of forced displacement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific focus on Afghanistan, Syria and EU-Africa relations. • Specific focus on attempts to prevent movement of people and outsourcing of protection responsibilities 	<p>Work with civil society in third countries and Diaspora in the EU to collect and highlight their analysis and recommendations on impact of EU action</p> <p>Cooperate with third country governments and UNHCR where appropriate</p> <p>Engaging national members in the bilateral relations/Team Europe initiatives</p>
<p>Safe and legal channels for asylum migration to Europe are increased and expanded</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on asylum migration with support for initiatives that increase broader migration pathways to Europe 	<p>Work with members to ensure all relevant opportunities are seized</p> <p>Monitor usage of EU funding for safe and legal channels</p> <p>Counter attempts to restrict pathways to Europe (e.g. via visa restrictions)</p> <p>Influence the URF negotiations</p>

Objective 3: Counter the disproportionate focus on return

Sub-objectives	How will we achieve this?
<p>ECRE promote the highest human rights standards in EU return policies</p>	<p>Work with co-legislators during trilogue negotiations to ensure the recast of the EU Return Directive incorporates ECRE's recommendations.</p> <p>Engage on additional efforts to reform the RD (e.g. as part of amended Schengen Borders Code)</p> <p>Explore and advocate for solutions for people who cannot be returned</p>
<p>Counter the overemphasis on return within asylum policy-making, as shown in EU funding, human resources allocated to return and prominence of return-related objectives in EU external affairs.</p>	<p>Confront the European institutions and policy makers with the evidence base of return and where it is lacking, as well as the negative impacts of return policies.</p> <p>Illustrate the disproportionate focus by mapping all efforts (policy, funding, mechanism, actors) on return and monitoring implementation where practicable, including through exploring cooperation with civil society in third countries.</p>

Objective 4: Preventing measures which restrict access to asylum, use of non-entrée policies and human rights violations at EU borders

Sub-objectives	How will we achieve this?
<p>Legislative reform of the Screening Regulation and the Schengen Borders Code reflect the highest standards in line with international refugee and human rights law and strengthens compliance with fundamental rights at EU borders.</p> <p>Ideally, the Instrumentalisation Regulation is withdrawn.</p>	<p>Engage with co-legislators on relevant reform proposals (Pact, Instrumentalisation and Schengen)</p> <p>Combat the codification of instrumentalisation in EU law and fight the related narrative that portrays people as threat</p> <p>Mobilise resistance to harmful proposals at Member State level</p>

<p>EU Agencies including FRA, EUAA and EBCG (Frontex) are held to account for human rights violations during operations and their deployment supports protection-sensitive border management and access to asylum at the EU's borders.</p> <p>The European Commission is held to account for its role re upholding EU law at borders</p>	<p>Support EP in its efforts to hold EU agencies, particularly EBCG accountable</p> <p>Monitor role of EUAA and FRA in relation to border management</p> <p>Regularly liaise with EBCG Fundamental Rights Officer and team of monitors</p> <p>Expose violations and bad practices leading to rights violations</p> <p>Work with MEPs and national policy-makers to call on the EC to step up its role in face of violations</p>
<p>EU funding supports access to asylum and human rights compliance including at the EU's external border.</p>	<p>Monitor EU spending in support of border management (particularly BMVI) to track the amount that is supporting fundamental rights and identify human rights risks</p>

Objective 5: Inclusion through rights, respect and regularisation

Sub-objectives	How will we achieve this?
<p>EU funding is used to support inclusion of all asylum seekers and refugees.</p>	<p>Work with members to ensure the achievements in terms of funding amounts and modalities for inclusion are realised</p> <p>Monitor the implementation of the partnership principle</p> <p>Policy Note(s) on key issues related to the implementation phase of AMIF, ESF+ and other relevant funds or funding instruments such as the European Child Guarantee</p>
<p>The principles of the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027), and a rights-based approach to inclusion guide the EU's action.</p>	<p>Monitor implementations of the recommendations of the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion in MS</p> <p>Identify the impact of CEAS on the inclusion of people seeking asylum</p> <p>Assess the relation between access to inclusion and return decisions</p> <p>Work with members in line of their expertise on e.g. specific groups of vulnerabilities to follow the good practices and identify challenges</p> <p>Following the developments and implementations of the other EU tools which can be used to advance inclusion policy and practice</p> <p>Policy Note(s) based on AIDA country reports and the inputs of members (collaboration with members)</p>

<p>Inclusion for those benefiting from the TPD is achieved through access to the socio-economic rights that are part of the TPD decision. Medium and long-term needs are addressed.</p>	<p>Following EU, national and local level developments and monitoring implementations</p> <p>Work with members to follow the good practices and identify challenges, especially for specific groups (children, women, unaccompanied children, marginalized groups, elder, vulnerable applicants), by building on their expertise</p> <p>Use the experiences and good practices from the implementation of TPD to advocate for inclusion for all asylum seekers and refugees</p> <p>Policy Note(s) based on AIDA country reports, information sheet, and the inputs of members</p>
---	---

Overall objective: Advocacy team

- *To strengthen ECRE’s advocacy team and support influential and effective advocacy (to support delivery of the above objective)*

Sub-objectives	How will we achieve this?
<p>Refugee advocates and refugee-led organisations are systematically included in ECRE’s advocacy work</p>	<p>Refugee advocates and refugee-led organisations are part of all policy meetings (e.g. round-tables, conferences, AGC)</p> <p>Regular communication in the form of email updates and online exchanges continue</p> <p>Cooperation with refugee-led organisations is further strengthened</p> <p>Openness to support and engage with refugee led advocacy initiatives</p> <p>Trainings on EU advocacy support refugee advocates in their work</p> <p>Tools and resources (e.g. advocacy toolkit; inclusion shadow report) are contributing to refugee led EU advocacy</p>
<p>Member organisations are well informed and involved in ECRE’s advocacy work</p>	<p>Regular working group meetings (5 per year per WG); in addition, meetings with Brussels based members</p> <p>Advocacy Briefings and specific instructions on what advocacy actions should be supported</p> <p>Consultation of positions and publications with members; where possible, longer period for comments on papers & advance notification will be given</p> <p>Increased participation of ECRE staff in advocacy meetings at the national level</p> <p>Contribution of ECRE to meetings organised by members</p>
<p>Relations with key decision-makers are developed and strengthened</p>	<p>Continued efforts in maintaining and expanding contacts to Permanent Representations (ideally with link to capitals via members)</p> <p>Convening of policy round-tables in Brussels and MS level in cooperation with members</p> <p>Concerted advocacy and campaign effort in the run up to EP elections in 2024 and approach of MEPs and new Commissioners afterwards</p>
<p>An effective advocacy team is built and maintained</p>	<p>Continue weekly advocacy team meetings</p> <p>Annual advocacy plans for different work areas</p> <p>Identify opportunities for skill share across different teams and training needs</p>

Activity 3: Communications

The objectives for ECRE's communications work 2023 to 2025 are extracted from the more detailed ECRE Communications Strategy 2022-2026, see Annex.

Following significant progress in ECRE's communications work as documented in previous Strategic Plans and annual reports, ECRE decided to take advantage of its stronger position and expand its communications work from 2022 onwards, in particular, expanding work with its members and adding a strengthened campaigning component. In 2022, ECRE also decided to upgrade its staffing on communications, which had previously been run by a Senior Communications Coordinator and a Communications Assistant. The latter position was a paid internship with the staff member changing every six months. In 2022, the main position was upgraded to Head of Communications and a second position of Communications Officer was added. A summary of ECRE's progress appears in the statistics here.

Outreach digital newsletters, social media, press (as of June 2022):

- **ECRE Press Review:** increase in subscribers to 4,000 (1/1/2017 baseline: 390) opening rate 37%
- **Weekly Bulletin:** Increase in subscribers to 14,300 (1/1/2017 baseline: 11,500); opening rate 36%
- **Twitter:** Increase of followers to 31,900 (1/1/2017 baseline: 12,400)
- **Facebook:** Increase of subscribers to 29,100 (1/1/2017 baseline: 19,800)
- **Linkedin:** 18,200 followers (current increase rate 1000 a month).
- **Instagram:** Strategy and content ready (launch in early 2022).
- **Press:** roughly 200 interviews and background talks in 2021 (similar number likely in 2022, up from 100 in 2020 and around 10 in 2015 and 2016).
- **ECRE website:** first six months of 2022: users: 106,600; sessions: 144,000; page views: 290,600

The ECRE Communication Strategy 2022-2026 is informed by and contributing to the mandate outlined in the organisational [Mission Statement](#) with strategic communication as one of the pillars of work under the organisations [Strategic Plans](#).

"Our mission is to promote the establishment of fair and humane European asylum policies and practices in accordance with international human rights law".

The Strategy is based on the following guiding principles which in turn inform the three objectives:

- GUIDING PRINCIPLE 1: *While ECRE adapts its communication according to key external developments the organisation should not lose track of the fundamental and lasting challenges.*
- GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2: *ECRE should be an authoritative source of legal and policy analysis and at the same time an efficient messenger towards segments of the public.*
- GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3: *ECRE should base its strategic communication on a clear analysis of potential and challenges in the changing discourse on asylum and displacement.*
- GUIDING PRINCIPLE 4: *The Communication Team will work to ensure that ECRE key-messages are defining the communication across platforms and outlets under its portfolio.*
- GUIDING PRINCIPLE 5: *The Communication Team will work to ensure that ECREs tone of voice and vocabulary reflects the criteria of being balanced, based on realities, respectful of the people we aim to protect and relevant to an external audience!*

The following objectives of the ECRE's Communications work:

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** *The Communication Team will work to implement joint strategic workshops, campaign development, trainings and visits with relevant ECRE members and RLOs/RAs and the funding needed to do so.*
- **OBJECTIVE 2:** *The Communication Team will work to ensure that ECRE continues to be a key reference for its current audience and increases its outreach in new target audiences defined as 'Future Experts' and 'Potential Counter Voices'.*
- **OBJECTIVE 3:** *The Communication Team will work to ensure that the content flow across ECREs portfolio of platforms and outlets reflects the aim of providing breaking news and inspiring campaign material.*

Communications Activities

The objectives will be achieved through the following activities:

ECREs Platforms and Outlets

ECRE communication operates on a weekly cycle with two main clusters of outlets and platforms addressing our respective audiences: the News Cluster and the Campaigning Cluster. While some content may overlap where there are obvious synergies for operational overview and strategic coherence they function as two independent simultaneously running preparing and production cycles.

The News Cluster – What’s Breaking:

The aim is to provide a full overview and ECRE commentary on key-developments related to EU/MS asylum policies in member states, within the EU, along and beyond EU borders. **The platforms and outlets include:** [ECRE Website](#) //// [Press Review](#) //// [Weekly Bulletin](#) //// [Twitter](#) //// [LinkedIn](#) //// Press

ECRE WEBSITE: While a website cannot be considered a strategic platform for direct outreach the main organisational website hosts the ECRE newsfeed, newsletters and publications which are an integral part of the news portfolio and thus constitute a reference point for ECREs communication work.

THE PRESS REVIEW: provides a daily overview of European and international media, academic research, EU, UN and organisational reports and outlets related to asylum and migration. The review covers an average of 60-90 sources.

THE ECRE WEEKLY BULLETIN: provides a weekly overview of the most important developments at EU and national level across Europe related to the rights and protection of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in the form of editorials, interviews, Op-ed’s and articles.

TWITTER: as described in the ECRE Social Media Strategy and Content Plan the platform is linked to the newsletters the ECRE Press Review and the ECRE Weekly Bulletin and designed to provide a more or less total overview of EU and member states policies related to asylum and migration. It follows the news cycle offering breaking news and coverage according to key news values of impact, conflict and timeliness (more under Press). Critical commentary and analysis by ECRE and other relevant human rights actors and institutions as well as activist networks.

The ECRE Twitter account places the organisation as a reference point in the ongoing day to day debate about violations of the rights of people on the move, as a voice critical of current policies and solidarity with its victims.

Content Examples

Non-ECRE sources used to distribute ECRE material:

- [Breaking news stories](#) (as they happen)
- [Commentary on articles, analysis or opinions](#) (e.g. academics, NGOs, Ombudsman, Council of Europe, [UN](#))
- [Commentary on information obtained by external sources](#) (e.g. [State Watch](#), [media](#), organisations)
- [Quote tweets](#) (commentary on other tweets) and [retweets](#) (e.g. [legal experts](#), [MEPs](#), Commission)
- [Replies to tweets](#) (engaging in conversation)

ECRE’s own content:

- [Weekly Bulletin articles](#) (sharing headlines and key take-aways)
- [Editorials](#) (quotes & analysis)
- [ECRE Interviews](#) (TV/Web/Youtube)
- [Press Review](#) (summarising key headlines)
- [Publications](#) and [joint statements](#) (ECRE and members)
- [Campaigns](#) (e.g. [HardlyRocketScience](#))

LINKEDIN: While the LinkedIn account is also included in the campaign portfolio, it has a particular function in the ECRE news cycle as well. As described in the ECRE Social Media Strategy and Content Planⁱ the

platform provides an overview of and promote events, publications and vacancies within ECRE and the broader asylum/human rights sector relevant to our audience.

Content examples:

- [Weekly job selection](#) (compiled from the Bulletin)
- [ECRE vacancies](#) (we are hiring)
- [ECRE events](#) (e.g. ELENA trainings, AGC, UNHCR/ECRE round tables)
- [ECRE publications](#) (e.g. [5 regular formats](#) + AIDA, ELENA, EDAL)

PRESS: As described in the guidelines on Bridging Back to Facts and ECRE Positions, media requests are an opportunity for ECRE to contribute to journalists taking better angles and producing higher quality outputs. We do not engage with media as a branding exercise – we aim for impact and the relevance of the story is more important than a reference to ECRE. Accordingly, beyond presenting ECRE positions we also aim to deflect potentially damaging angles and/or offer alternatives to alter/qualify the output and when relevant offer sources better placed to effect-fully present the argument.

News Values: Journalists operate according to news criteria/values rated differently across different outlets and platforms – tabloids, news agencies, mainstream – radio, TV, print, web but are universally relevant:

- **Impact:** 1 billion Chinese cannot be wrong - are many people affected?
- **Conflict:** If it bleeds it leads – are there opposing views?
- **Timeliness:** yesterday’s newspaper is today’s wrapping paper – is it happening NOW?
- **Unexpected:** surprise me – is this controversial, unexpected, intriguing, original?
- **Prominent:** VIP treatment – are politicians, celebs involved?
- **Close to home:** East/West home is best – are people close to me affected?
- **Human interest:** mirror mirror on the wall – can I identify with this story?

Examples: Examples of ECRE communication with a particular appeal would be:

- **Global Trends/proportions** (impact)
- **Weekly Editorials** (conflict)
- **Breaking feature** (timeliness)
- **Asylum lottery** (unexpected)
- **#HardlyRocketScience campaign** (prominent)
- **Hunger strike Brussels** (close to home)
- **#YourVoteOurFuture video** (human interest)

We tend to avoid the ‘traditional’ tools applied and updates offered by NGOs to media. The fact that 20 NGOs are having a meeting, urge world leaders to solve the displacement crisis, or implements a project is not breaking news or even often relevant for media. Broad press releases or NGO statements send out according to internal deadlines are not often relevant for key-journalists and media out for solo angles and often working on a defined frame of urgent developments, ongoing researches or particular hot topics.

A Position of Strength: ECRE is an established source for leading national, European and international media because of our ability to deliver efficient quotes and targeted background information on short deadlines and work with the journalists to develop their stories. From this position, we now have the luxury of reducing the majority of the work to reactive response – we accept cooperation when relevant for us but do not need to compromise or reach out ‘begging’ attention. We do occasionally target selected journalists with background information of specific interest to them - mainly organisational knowledge such as comparative statistics, case law or policy analysis. But given the outreach and relevance of ECRE the entry point for journalists is generally network in terms of referrals or returning journalists, social media or google searches where ECRE work or statements are published or referenced across a verity of topics related to our mandate.

The Campaign Cluster – Running and Joint Initiatives:

As described in the ECRE Social Media Strategy and Content Plan The platforms should reflect the broadness and diversity of the ‘ECRE community’ including membership, activists, RLOs and advocates united in the fight

to change Europe. We will actively mobilise members, campaign partners and other relevant organisations and activists to contribute content and share ours under joint initiatives. The weekly production cycle includes:

Running work: ongoing campaigning **Monday:** Campaign meeting to establish graphic design and writing needs for the upcoming week and plan the work in correspondence with the running news cycle.

Joint Campaigning:

- **Long-term:** Larger joint initiatives require substantial resources and involves developing strategy, concept (with member involvement), mobilising partners and contributors (e.g. artists, videographers), consent forms, campaign coordination infrastructure (in-person or online workshops, communication platform (e.g. Teams, FB group, Skype, mailing lists), graphic design/visual identity, development landing site, content, distribution and evaluation. Therefore, such must be considered as separate and defined communication projects outside the regular running communication.

The platforms and outlets include: [Campaign Landing Sites](#) /// [Facebook](#) /// [Instagram](#) /// [Linkedin](#) ///

CAMPAIGN LANDING SITES: For larger joint campaigns we establish external landing sites. This ensures that the coherence and structure of the main organisational site is not jeopardized and that it does not grow more complicated to navigate when new initiatives accumulate. At the same time it allows us to develop designs and content specific to the campaign but not necessarily aligned with regular ECRE visual identity. Further, it ensures the flexibility to run non-branded campaigns (when relevant) or ensure a shared ownership of joint initiatives – it is vital that engagement is not reduced to simple distribution of ECRE material but entails real cooperation across the membership and beyond.

On the practical side we design and structure campaign sites to make it as easy and simple for organisations joining or others to get a quick overview of key-messages, calls for action and available background material as well as to download and share content.

FACEBOOK/INSTAGRAM/LINKEDIN: The platforms aim to promote the ECRE variation of 'hope based comms'. It is about mobilising for and celebrating the fight for a socially just and inclusive Europe. It's about defiance NOT defeatism – it's about change NOT apathy – it's about reality NOT utopia. The tools are creativity, ideas, boldness, engagement, integrity, openness countering narrow mindedness, cynicism, fear, hate, repression, division. We show a progressive Europe and new Europeans as capable, proud, exciting and engaged with an emphasis on inclusiveness – a community/movement of diverse but equal Europeans.

Content Examples:

- [Campaign videos](#) (#HardlyRocketScience)
- [Campaign sharepics](#) (#HardlyRocketScience)
- [Interviews](#) (#VoicesofECRE)
- [Examples of Inclusive Europe](#) (#ShareOurEurope)
- [Graphic design](#): (#YourVoteOurFuture)
- [Video](#) (ECRE behind the scenes)
- [Reportage pics](#): (public protests/support events)

ECREs Visual Identity: How do we Look?

While a graphic identity has already been implemented for the organisational [ECRE website](#) and five regular [publication formats](#) under the previous strategy, a new graphic identity has been developed for social media platforms and [newsfeed](#). The communication team now has acquired software and graphic design for communication needs is done in-house with an extensive ECRE Graphic Design Guide.

ECREs Evaluation: Are we Heard and Seen?

The Quarterly Evaluation Report provides a narrative update as well as statistics outlining developments related to ECREs strategic communication work. The report is based on key-objectives of the ECRE Communication Strategy 2022-2026 and benchmarks against a baseline established in January 2022 as well as comparatively against Brussels based networks and organisations with a mandate and potential audience similar to ECRE.

Organisational Objectives

ECRE's organisational objectives are in place to ensure that ECRE:

1. performs effectively, meeting objectives in each of the three areas of its activity
2. is efficient and provides value for money, including compared to other organisations
3. applies its strategic priorities in all areas of its work.

In 2022, ECRE reviewed its organisational support structures, following staff changes and the changing needs of the organisation. It has recruited additional organisational support staff for 2023 and will continue to work with specialists on a consultancy basis, including legal, HR, finance and IT specialists.

ECRE's strategic priorities which should be applied in all its work remain useful and will be transferred to its 2023 to 2025 Strategic Plan.

Strategic Priorities:

1. To promote visions of an inclusive Europe where people seeking protection are welcome and their rights protected, including proposing legal and policy alternatives.
2. To mobilise ECRE as an alliance to advocate collectively for change.
3. To empower refugees, channel their views into the policy and practice that affects them, and promote their inclusion in ECRE's work and across the sector.

The organisational objectives are divided into general objectives and financial objectives

Area	General objectives
Strategic Partnerships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Renew UNHCR Strategic Partnership every year for 2023 – 2025. 2. Maintain partnership in the form of framework contract with the EUAA 3. Develop strategic partnerships with other EU agencies and institutions.
Organisational structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain a clear organisational structure capable of being expressed in an organigram with teams and line management.
Membership	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reach and retain at least 110 members. 2. Confirm that a majority of members demonstrate a high level of satisfaction with ECRE's work as per membership surveys or other consultation.
Partnership	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work in cooperation other networks working on asylum and migration issues, including PICUM and refugee-led networks. 2. Cooperate with European think-tanks working on asylum and migration with at least 4 invitations to present at think-tank events per year. 3. Cooperate with academic networks, including participation in one research project per year and invitations to at least 2 academic conference per year.
Board	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain diversity of the Board to reflect ECRE's membership, taking into account geographic diversity, sex, ethnicity, refugee background, sexuality, and any other factor that may be relevant. 2. At least 3 Board members should be female. 3. Ensure the Board plays a consistently active role in ECRE's governance as per ECRE's statutes, and effectively represents the interests of membership in its decision-making.

Financial objectives

Since 2016, ECRE has had detailed financial objectives in place to ensure sound financial management, including exiting from insolvency and maintaining a positive financial asset position. In 2022, ECRE reviewed the objectives that had been in place since 2016 (with some small adjustment). The review was discussed with

the Finance Committee of the Board and then with the full Board of Directors. It was the basis for developing new objectives which were agreed for the 2023 to 2025 period.

1. Set an annual budget of at least EUR 1.3 million.

ECRE's budget has been reduced following cost-saving measures, including restructuring and moving to a cheaper office. The ECRE Board has set the overall strategic objective of ECRE maintaining the quantity and quality of its activities. This means maintaining an annual budget at this level.

NB The response to displacement from Ukraine may necessitate an increase in staffing and thus a growth in budget, given the new demands that have arisen, combined with the principle that ECRE seeks to apply that it will add work on the Ukraine-related displacement rather than transferring resources from other work, which is also needed.

2. Maintain a positive asset position with reserves of at least EUR 250,000.

ECRE will continue to maintain a positive asset position, including cutting costs to avoid returning to a situation of technical insolvency. Its reserves target is set at EUR 250,000 which assumes staff of around four people working for a year without office space or expenses in order to keep the organisation working and to fundraise to rebuild.

3. Ensure diversification of funding sources, with at least 40% of funding to be in the form of core grants.

While ECRE would ideally prefer more unrestricted funding, the target of 40% is realistic. Its other sources of income are project funding, membership fees, and a small amount of income from events and provision of expertise. These are likely to remain the sources of ECRE income as other types of funding – such as from individual donors or the corporate sector – have been reviewed and are not feasible for ECRE.

4. Ensure grants from at least four core donors.

For security of income streams, ECRE tries to ensure that it has at least four core donors.

5. Ensure 60% of the following year's budget is covered by end of June when preliminary budget is approved in the General Assembly and 80% by the end of November.

The targets are set based on the security that ECRE needs in order to plan for the following year and also based on previous experience as to what is realistic.
