

ECRE Annual Report on 2023

Summary

ECRE at a glance, 2023:

- Staff: 16.2
- Members: 122
- Three areas of work: 1) Legal Support/ Litigation; 2) Advocacy; and 3) Communications
- Annual expenditure: EUR 1.73 million
- Reserves : EUR 265,000
- Office : Mundo Madou, Brussels

The year 2023 was dominated by the continued negotiations and deal-making on reform of EU asylum law and by displacement from Ukraine. ECRE implemented the first year of its Strategic Plan, 2023-2025, with the new objectives agreed by its members guiding its work, which continued in its three activity areas: 1) Legal Support/ Litigation, 2) Advocacy and 3) Communications. ECRE's membership continued to grow with 13 new members joining during the year (and one leaving), taking its membership to 122. ECRE increased its staffing and expenditure for the year in response to the continued high demand for its work. Nonetheless, to ensure financial stability, it will reduce its size in 2024, given changes in the donor landscape.

ECRE engaged with its members through the organisation of 7 policy events and its two-day Annual General Conference in Turin, Italy, 5 training events on legal and advocacy matters, 22 meetings of ECRE working groups / networks of members, and over 20 visits by ECRE staff to ECRE members' offices and events. ECRE had over 100 meetings with policy-makers, ECRE staff presented at 50 external events and gave 130 interviews to the media to promote its analysis and recommendations on the right to asylum in Europe.

Legal Support and Litigation

In 2023, ECRE's Legal Support / Litigation team began implementation of new objectives set out in the 2023-2025 Strategic Plan, prioritising reception and detention-related litigation and following up on new issues concerning temporary protection beneficiaries. The team significantly increased engagement in both training and emergency litigation support in response to demand. They also started ECRE's work on the Long-term Residence Directive (LTRD) and encouraged its use in advocacy and litigation.

Activities included the following:

- **Publications:** 2 issues of an extensive information sheet on measures adopted in response to displacement from Ukraine; 2 legal notes on the right to suitable accommodation and the rights of refugees and asylum applicants with disabilities; 2 x internal legal notes on identification documents for temporary protection beneficiaries and detention pending removal in Russia;
- **Legal queries:** responses to 60+ legal requests from lawyers in the ELENA network (of asylum lawyers), with another 70+ requests referred to the ELENA coordinators;
- **Direct intervention:** interventions in 9 cases before domestic courts and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR); supporting implementation of judgments in 2 key cases (*Safi and others v Greece* and *Kebe v Ukraine*) before the Council of Europe (CoE) Committee of Ministers;
- **Litigation support:** provision of emergency litigation support in 10 impact cases;
- **Legal training:** organisation of the Advanced ELENA Course in Spain and 4 trainings for lawyers and civil society from across Europe; contributions to 16 trainings and seminars, as well as multiple workshops on asylum in Europe. ECRE's legal training activities this year reached around 450 legal professionals across Europe.
- **Case summaries:** management of the European Database of Asylum Law (EDAL), with 63 case summaries added. 89,000 users in 2023; publication of 36 issues of the ELENA Weekly Legal Update with the latest developments in asylum law, reaching over 7000 legal professionals.
- **Legal support:** management of the ELENA network, bringing together over 500 asylum lawyers from across Europe, including organisation of an annual consultation for ELENA coordinators and maintaining the online forum for ELENA lawyers.

Advocacy

In 2023, the focus of ECRE's advocacy work was to:

- *Provide analysis and recommendations on the reforms of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS):* ECRE engaged extensively with EU policymakers to improve the outcome of the negotiations on the Pact and wider reform of EU asylum law, 100s of ECRE's recommendations were integrated into the final legal texts;
- *Monitor EU response to displacement from Ukraine, including the implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD):* ECRE regularly updated advocacy recommendations on the EU's response to displacement, published a policy note on pendular movement to and from Ukraine, analysed access to socio-economic rights under the TPD and led the reflection on the situation of refugees from Ukraine post-TPD;
- *Promote displaced persons' rights in EU external policies:* ECRE partnered with Afghan civil society, to ensure Afghanistan remains on the agenda, and advocated for safe pathways to Europe; it expanded its work with civil society in North Africa;
- *Provide comprehensive and up-to-date information on asylum in Europe via the Asylum Information Database (AIDA):* The 23 AIDA reports were cited in 2,150 national court cases (for the 20% of jurisdictions where cases are published), over 160 policy/academic reports, and 82 external media articles and the AIDA website registered 875,347 views.
- *Support and involve refugee advocates in EU advocacy:* ECRE organised a two-day training seminar on EU advocacy in cooperation with UNHCR, which brought together 25 refugee advocates (selected from 430 applications).
- *Promote inclusion through rights, respect and regularisation:* ECRE published several policy papers and organised events with relevant stakeholders.
- *Ensure continuous involvement of member organisations in ECRE's work:* ECRE held 16 working group meetings, including of the new working group on refugee women and girls' rights. There were also 5 Brussels-based member meetings. Member participation was consistently high, with 40+ members participating in all meetings, and with updates from ECRE member organisations.

Communications

The implementation of ECRE's Communication Strategy 2023-2025 continued in 2023. The Strategy includes three objectives and five guiding principles for ECRE's communications activities, and provides a framework against which the Communications Team reports on a quarterly basis.

ECRE's outreach grew throughout 2023. As shown below, there have been increases from the already high numbers of followers on its social media platforms and subscribers to its newsletters, and it continued to receive numerous requests for interviews and briefings from leading European and international media organisations.

As part of the Communication Strategy 2023-2025, ECRE introduced two separate clusters with a view to better informing and engaging different target audiences. There have been increases in the numbers of people that have been reached through ECRE's communications activities under both clusters:

1. News Cluster: What's Breaking?

- **Press Review:** 4600 subscribers at end of 2023 (4200 in 2022) and 40% open rate (no change)
- **Weekly Bulletin:** 15,500 subscribers (14,200 in 2022) and 35% open rate (34% in 2022)
- **X (formerly Twitter):** 39,800 followers (33,400 in 2022)
- **Press:** 130 media requests in 2023 (146 in 2022)

2. Campaign Cluster: Running Work and Joint Initiatives

- **Facebook:** 29,400 followers (29,000 in 2022)
- **Instagram:** 2500 followers (800 in 2022)
- **Campaigns:** 2023-2024 campaign on the 2024 European Parliament elections (Targets: 1.3 million views/impressions of all published content and 130,000 engagements)

3. Supporting both clusters

- **LinkedIn:** 42,500 followers (24,600 in 2022)
- **Website:** 688,000 page views, 231,000 users, and 245,000 sessions.

Activity 1: 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.

1. Legal Support / Litigation

In 2023 ECRE's Legal Support / Litigation team continued supporting asylum lawyers who were at the forefront of providing legal counselling and mounting legal challenges, particularly relating to unlawful detention, access to asylum and reception conditions.

The ELENA network of asylum lawyers from across Europe is coordinated by ECRE. In 2023, ECRE directly responded to 60+ legal queries from ELENA asylum lawyers and separately ELENA lawyers replied to 70+ legal queries, including on detention, returns to unsafe conditions, country policies and practices, and safe third country concepts. In these cases, ECRE efficiently facilitated contacts between lawyers and provided them with relevant legal arguments including on sensitive issues or countries on which access to information is limited. ECRE provided information and argumentation related to reception, unlawful detention, strategies on access to asylum and legal aid, temporary protection, and compensation for violation of rights.

ECRE engaged with legal partners from across Europe to decide on the best legal strategies and on division of labour when challenging violence and lack of access to protection at the borders, unlawful detention, cessation of international protection, national security cases, lack of administrative decisions under the TPD, the use of the safe third country concepts and reception.

ECRE provided lawyers working on 10 cases in Lithuania, Latvia, Greece and Malta with emergency litigation support, a relatively new tool used by ECRE to enable rapid action by lawyers. Emergency litigation support covers legal and judicial fees to enable legal challenges before the ECtHR, UN Treaty Bodies, the CJEU and domestic courts. The challenges related to detention of asylum applicants, SAR / disembarkation, access to international protection at the border, ill-treatment and safe third country concepts.

ECRE actively pursued interventions before ECtHR, domestic courts and UN mechanisms, submitting 7 interventions before the ECtHR together with the Litigation Task Force. These included:

- *B.T. and others v Greece* concerning the arrest at the land border of Evros of a Turkish citizen of Kurdish origin, member of the PKK party, his access to asylum and deprivation of liberty in Greece.
- *K.A. and others v Lithuania* regarding unlawful deprivation of his liberty of an asylum applicant from Syria, lack of speedy judicial review of that decision and free legal assistance.
- *Z.H.R and other v Poland* concerning detention of an Iraqi mother and her two minor children, in a guarded centre for foreigners. Detention was ordered without prior assessment of alternative measures and its impact on the mother, who was suffering from depression, and two small children.

ECRE also submitted a successful intervention in a case before the Supreme Administrative Court of Poland (SAC) concerning detention of a single mother with a baby for 1.5 years. The Court [found](#) that detaining a mother with a young child threatens the child's development and an individualised assessment is required considering physical, psychological, and developmental aspects in line with the ECtHR jurisprudence.

ECRE also prepared a submission to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on implementation of impact judgments in the cases of *Safi and others v Greece* with the Greek Refugee Council (the GCR) and *Kebe and others v Ukraine* with ECRE's members in Ukraine. ECRE assessed the impact of its interventions, where judgments were delivered, and improved intervention strategies accordingly. The team also held a meeting with the Litigation Task Force in order to discuss cooperation and to adjust litigation guidelines following new practices by the ECtHR and the information provided by the Court during its bi-annual meeting with the litigators that ECRE attended.

Finally, ECRE prepared the following publications:

- 2 issues of an [Information Sheet](#): measures in response to the arrival of displaced people fleeing the war in Ukraine;

- 2 [Legal Notes](#) on the right to suitable accommodation and on the [rights of refugees and asylum applicants with disabilities](#), focusing on Article 26 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights;
- A [Policy Paper](#) on the potential of EU's Long-Term Residence Directive;
- Internal legal notes on requests from the ELENA network on identification documents for temporary protection beneficiaries and detention pending removal in Russia.
- Review and contribution to a legal note by ECRE member, Right to Protection (Ukraine), on compatibility of Ukraine's asylum law with EU law;
- Review of a CoE study on compatibility of Moldovan asylum law with EU and international standards.

2. The development of the ELENA network

ECRE continued to manage and improve the ELENA Forum, an online tool for legal practitioners where they can exchange information and seek litigation advice. 259 legal practitioners, academics and UNHCR staff from across 41 European countries had access to legal support through the ELENA Forum with 2000+ posts on 563 topics answered. In December 2023, ECRE commissioned work on improving security of the Forum, which will be finalised in March 2024.

The ELENA network sees positive dynamics in national coordination. New coordinators joined in Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Switzerland and Ukraine. In addition to responding to 70+ legal requests, the ELENA coordinators took on numerous individual cases upon request of their counterparts in other countries, provided testimonies in the domestic context, and referred cases to other national lawyers.

In November 2023, the network held the annual coordinators meeting in Spain, organised by ECRE and attended by 35 people. The meeting included discussions on litigation against unlawful detention, litigation before the ECtHR, the impact of the rule of law crisis in Europe on litigation, an update on important CJEU jurisprudence, and consultation on ELENA needs, priorities and activities in 2024.

Finally, through the ELENA Weekly Legal Update (EWLU), ECRE regularly provided information on legal developments across Europe. 36 issues were published in 2023 and the EWLU readership reached an audience of over 7,000 subscribers, with an increase of 415 subscribers compared to 2022.

3. Legal training

In response to demand, ECRE increased training activities, organising four legal trainings in 2023, including a training for the judiciary in Cyprus supported by UNHCR, and two EU-funded trainings on using the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in litigating the rights of the displaced. ECRE also contributed to 14 other training events across Europe and organised a highly successful [Advanced ELENA Course](#) for over 100 practitioners and decision-makers. The course covered disability rights of refugees, universal jurisdiction, the interplay between climate change displacement and asylum, and recent asylum-related jurisprudence from the ECtHR and CJEU.

4. EDAL database

ECRE maintained the European Database of Asylum Law (EDAL), an online database containing +1,500 case law summaries from 22 European states and from the ECtHR and CJEU. EDAL is currently undergoing a transition period focusing on the development of a new website and the identification of new content.

- 89,000 users benefitted from EDAL in 2023;
- 63 summaries were drafted and edited with the legal clinics that support EDAL (Gent Law Clinic with 44 summaries and Cologne Law Clinic with 19 summaries, provided by law students trained by ECRE);
- 23 volunteers were trained on EDAL summaries and/or jurisprudence research;
- Content from the EDAL website was referenced in 18 publications, which included civil society reports, research papers, academic articles in international journals, and dissertations.

Activity 2: Advocacy

Overall objective 1: To influence EU policy and practice on protecting asylum seekers, refugees and displaced people by developing targeted recommendations and tailored advocacy.

1. A functioning asylum system in Europe

ECRE advocated for maintaining the highest standards possible in line with international refugee and human rights law in EU migration and asylum reform proposals. ECRE produced new analyses and recommendations, such as a [policy paper](#) analysing and providing recommendations on solidarity in EU asylum policies and a [policy paper](#) on the reform of EU asylum law which was extensively used by the EU's co-legislators during the negotiations. ECRE also commissioned a [working paper](#) on Eurodac, the EU-wide information system that primarily processes the fingerprints of asylum seekers and specific categories of irregular migrants. Using its different materials, ECRE worked to influence the co-legislators to ensure the right to asylum in Europe – the negotiations have now concluded. Although overall the results are negative, with the reforms entailing a restriction on the right to asylum in Europe, there are hundreds of examples of ECRE's recommendations and proposed amendments being integrated into the legal texts.

Aside from influencing EU asylum reforms, ECRE continued arguing for compliance with the existing EU asylum *acquis*. ECRE provided comprehensive and up-to-date information on asylum in Europe in the [Asylum Information Database](#) (AIDA), which it manages.

- The 23 AIDA [country reports](#) have been widely cited in reports and publications, including by the EUAA, EP, Council of Europe, UNHCR, academic researchers and think tanks.
- In 2023, the AIDA website registered a total of 875,347 views
- AIDA outputs increased their outreach, being cited in +2,150 national court cases (only counting the cases in countries that publish decisions – the figure is likely to be at least four times this), +160 policy/academic reports, and 82 external media articles throughout the year.
- AIDA reports are used to provide information to the EU Asylum Agency (EUAA), with 19 of 23 reports cited by the EUAA in its 2023 Asylum Report. The reports were also used to inform stakeholders about the situation of Afghans and Ukrainians in Europe for use in advocacy.

In April, ECRE published a [report](#) on the AIDA fact-finding mission to Poland. ECRE published a [briefing](#) in July, providing an overview of key trends in asylum and illustrating that significant gaps in national asylum systems continue to be reported. In November 2023, ECRE highlighted the flaws in the current Dublin system with a [statistical update](#) focusing on developments in legislation, policy and practice relating to the application of the Dublin III Regulation in 2022. Moreover, ECRE has continued its work on drawing the attention of the EU and its Member States to the existence of gaps in compliance with existing rules on asylum, as testified by ECRE's preparation of [a study](#) on implementation of the Reception Conditions Directive (RCD) across the EU, commissioned by the European Parliament.

Two years after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), ECRE continued to follow EU and national developments and monitor the implementation of the TPD across Europe, identifying gaps and good practices in co-operation with its members who both provided and used Ukraine-related updates. Many of ECRE's recommendations are reflected in EU decisions.

- ECRE regularly updated recommendations to the EU's response to displacement from Ukraine in [March](#) and [October](#).
- ECRE published a [Policy Note](#) on pendular movement to and from Ukraine under the TPD;
- ECRE developed a new TP addition to AIDA country reports and analysed the situation regarding access to socio-economic rights under TP in AIDA countries reflected in a dedicated [comparative report](#) published in August.
- In May, ECRE published [a joint statement](#) calling for extending the current Temporary Protection regime for displacement from Ukraine until 2025.

As the TPD entered its final year, ECRE took the lead on the situation of refugees from Ukraine post-TPD. As a follow-up to the high-level closed-door round-table on post-TPD options organised by ECRE in April 2023, ECRE prepared a paper with analysis of a range of post-TPD options, along with key considerations for decision-makers for transitioning out of the TPD regime, which is used in advocacy in 2024.

2. European external policies advance the rights of displaced people and reduce forced displacement

In 2023, ECRE continued its work on promoting the rights of displaced persons in EU external policies, notably through continued partnership with African civil society.

In response to the EU's signature of the Memorandum of Understanding with Tunisia in July, ECRE organised a policy discussion on the topic and commissioned a [working paper](#) from a Tunisian academic and civil society activist whom ECRE also hosted in November 2023 to discuss his analysis with Member States representatives and EU policy-makers.

Throughout 2023, ECRE worked to ensure Afghanistan remained on the agenda by publishing a [working paper](#) and organising tailored advocacy activities in Belgium and Denmark, which brought together various organisations, authorities (national and UN), and members of the Afghan diaspora in Europe. In July, ECRE was invited to speak to a hearing in the European Parliament's LIBE committee about the evacuations from Afghanistan, a hearing originally proposed by ECRE.

In 2023, ECRE also continued its advocacy work for safe and regular pathways in Europe. Together with a group of other NGOs, ECRE issued a [joint statement](#) ahead of EU Member States submitting their pledges for the EU resettlement scheme. ECRE also wrote an [op-ed](#) in the run-up to the Global Refugee Forum urging increased numbers on resettlement and complementary pathways. Furthermore, ECRE was also invited to moderate a breakout session on resettlement in the Consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (CRCP). A study on safe routes for people in need of international protection will be published in early 2024.

3. Countering the disproportionate focus on return and deportation

ECRE followed and [commented](#) on developments on return, such as the EU's return operational strategy and its recommendation on the mutual recognition of return decisions.

ECRE also analysed other legislative proposals that sought to include derogations from the Return Directive and/or reduce safeguards in return procedures.

Finally, ECRE continued its work on monitoring and influencing the negotiation of the recast Return Directive through regular exchanges and meetings, notably with the European Parliament's rapporteur. However, since then, the negotiation between the EU legislators has stalled, and the process is very likely to be postponed to the second half of 2024, given the EU elections in June 2024.

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

In 2023, ECRE continued its engagement with co-legislators on relevant reform proposals (Pact, Instrumentalisation and Schengen).

ECRE followed the Screening Regulation negotiations closely throughout 2023, and the European Parliament's positions included many of ECRE's recommendations.

On instrumentalisation, ECRE engaged with EU co-legislators to ensure that it does not get included using its published materials on the topic from [2022](#) and its 2023 [policy paper](#) on the reforms of EU asylum laws. ECRE also led the publication of a [joint statement](#) on merged Instrumentalisation/ Crisis Regulation.

On Schengen, ECRE has similarly engaged with co-legislators and continues its work in 2024 to ensure that the ongoing negotiations do not result in more hostile borders and less space for human rights.

Finally, ECRE has continued its monitoring of EU spending in support of border management to track the amount that is supporting fundamental rights and identify human rights risks. A policy paper focusing on the EU's Border Management and Visa Instrument (BMVI) will be published during the first half of 2024.

5. Inclusion through rights, respect and regularisation

In 2023, ECRE continued promoting inclusion through rights, respect and regularisation with the publications of various policy papers and the organisation of events :

- A [policy note](#) on the right to education for asylum seekers in the EU, analysing their challenges to accessing their right to education and providing recommendations.

- A [policy paper](#) analysing the recast of the Long-Term Residence Directive. The paper highlighted challenges in the existing legal framework, positions of the EU bodies, potential amendments, and unresolved issues.
- In November, as part of a joint project with several member organisations, ECRE published a [shadow report toolkit](#) for refugee and migrant advocates, equipping them with the resources to prepare reports focusing on integration and inclusion policies and strategies. The publication followed a two-day event organised by ECRE, which drew over 140 participants, including over 40 people with refugee backgrounds. The toolkit has already been used by NGOs.

As part of its collaboration with PICUM, ECRE worked to increase the amount of EU funding available to support the inclusion of refugees and migrants in the EU and improve the inclusiveness and effectiveness of the funding provided:

- In January, ECRE and PICUM, in cooperation with Forum Réfugiés, organised a policy roundtable in Paris to discuss issues related to the implementation of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the European Social Fund Plus in France and the EU. The meeting drew over 25 participants, including attendants from national civil society organisations, the European Commission and relevant French ministries.
- In March, ECRE and PICUM published a [joint policy note](#) on fundamental rights compliance of EU funding for actions in the areas of migration, asylum, inclusion, and border and security in the EU.
- In April, ECRE and PICUM organised a roundtable in Brussels on funding for migration in the EU. Over 60 attendants from national and European civil society organisations, national and EU institutions, and academia participated. The event was followed by a workshop for 35 ECRE and PICUM members on practical avenues for addressing fundamental rights abuses in EU-funded activities inside the EU.
- In September, in the context of the revision of the EU long-term budget for 2021-2027, ECRE and PICUM published a [joint policy note](#) with key recommendations to improve safeguards and ensure that available resources contribute to the objective of building sustainable asylum and migration systems in the EU.

Overall objective 2: To strengthen ECRE's advocacy team and support influential and effective advocacy

Throughout 2023, ECRE continued to ensure refugee advocates and refugee-led organisations were included in its advocacy work. In July, ECRE organised its two-day training seminar on EU advocacy in cooperation with UNHCR, which brought together 25 refugee advocates, and its success was confirmed through a positive evaluation.

Similarly, ECRE has increased its exchanges with ECRE members to ensure they are well-informed and involved in ECRE's advocacy work. There were 16 working group meetings, including some in-person in Brussels, and 5 meetings of Brussels-based members. A new working group focused on refugee women and girls' rights was also created. All meeting formats had high and stable member participation (40+ participants in all meetings) and included updates from ECRE member organisations.

In 2023, ECRE has maintained good access to policy-makers. Over 75 advocacy meetings with EU institution and Member State policy-makers were held by advocacy team members (with other meetings attended by the ECRE Director or other staff). Additionally, ECRE's advocacy staff received over 30 requests to speak at conferences, policy meetings, workshops, and trainings. They also responded to over 30 information requests, primarily seeking advocacy advice or updates on statistical data, CEAS, or any of the work areas that ECRE focuses on. Finally, ECRE has also been proactive in publishing five cross-European civil society statements that have received over 250 signatories and have been translated into 15 languages (examples: [1](#), [2](#), [3](#)).

Activity 3: Communications

The implementation of ECRE's Communication Strategy 2023-2025 continued in 2023. The Strategy includes three objectives and five guiding principles for ECRE's communications activities, and provides a framework against which the Communications Team reports on a quarterly basis.

- **OBJECTIVE 1: Implement joint strategic workshops, campaign development, trainings and visits with relevant ECRE members and Refugee Led-Organisations and refugee advocates and the funding needed to do so.**

The implementation of the EU-funded #EUisU campaign on the 2024 European Parliament elections started in January 2023 and continued throughout the year. It involved various activities, including the development of a campaign website, the recording of a campaign song and music video, the production of 10 short videos and the creation of 19 sharepics. It also involved a meeting with the members of the Media Officers Network (EMON), a presentation to all member organisations at the 2023 Annual General Conference, a pre-launch workshop and strategic support visits to member organisations in Greece, Germany and Hungary.

- **OBJECTIVE 2: 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'.**

In 2023, ECRE maintained its status as a key reference point in the ongoing debates over EU and EU Member States' (MS) (and other countries') policies in the areas of asylum and migration. ECRE's published content continued to be shared with and quoted by a wide range of actors from both the existing and new target audiences. Recipients and sharers of ECRE's published content in 2023 included refugee advocates and other activists, grassroots, local, national and international non-governmental organisations; academics, human rights and legal experts, and politicians and officials from governments and both EU and international organisations.

- **OBJECTIVE 3: Ensure that the content flow across ECRE's portfolio of platforms and outlets reflects the aim of providing breaking news and inspiring campaign material.**

ECRE's 'News Cluster' (i.e. Press Review, Weekly Bulletin, Newsfeed and X (formerly Twitter)) continued to feature breaking news on a wide range of topics at both the EU and country levels throughout 2023. Regarding ECRE's 'Campaign Cluster' (i.e. Facebook page, Instagram feed and campaign websites / landing pages), the published content for the #EUisU campaign has been well received by both member organisations and the donor (European Parliament) and is ready for a public launch in early 2024. A number of smaller ad hoc campaigns have also been launched on the occasions of international days or important milestones.

- **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.**

In 2023, ECRE continued to maintain a strong focus on long-term areas of concern (e.g. EU Pact on Migration and Asylum) whilst devoting efforts to highlighting other issues at specific moments (e.g. proposed Albania-Italy migration agreement).

- **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.**

ECRE continued to publish high-quality legal and policy analysis throughout 2023. It also adapted many of its publications into more digestible formats in order to make them more appealing to a wider audience. In addition, it used its various social media platforms to highlight its long-form publications and to bring them to the attention of non-expert audiences.

- **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.**

As stated above, ECRE remained a key reference point in the ongoing debates over EU and EU MS' (and other countries') policies in the areas of asylum and migration in 2023. Its published content continued to be shared with and quoted by a wide range of actors, including some with different or evening fundamentally opposing views. ECRE continued to use its communications tools to draw attention to problematic policies and/or rhetoric, and to acknowledge positive developments insofar as they could be identified.

- ***GUIDING PRINCIPLE 4: ECRE's key messages should define the communication across platforms and outlets under its portfolio.***

ECRE's key messages continued to provide the basis for its communication activities throughout 2023. For example, ECRE consistently tried to use its communications tools to challenge some of the false narratives about EU and national asylum and migration policies that are promoted by certain policy-makers. The consistency of ECRE's messaging has been achieved in part due to the continued close co-operation between the Communications Team, the other teams and the membership.

- ***GUIDING PRINCIPLE 5: ECRE's tone of voice and vocabulary should reflect the criteria of being balanced, based on realities, respectful of the people we aim to protect and relevant to an external audience!***

In 2023, ECRE continued to pay special attention to the importance of appropriate language in its work. It also continued to remind the targets of its advocacy about their responsibilities in this area. Furthermore, it continued its approach of trying to focus on substance and providing positive recommendations for improvements rather than overtly criticising individual policy-makers or the institutions that they represent, even when their positions' may have been fundamentally at odds with the organisation's own. ECRE also tried to highlight both the agency and value of people with refugee or migrant backgrounds in the ongoing debates on asylum and migration, and to highlight the shared humanity that is common to everyone who consumes ECRE's content.

Outreach

ECRE's outreach has continued to grow throughout 2023. As shown below, there have been increases in the numbers of followers on all of the alliance's social media platforms and subscribers to its newsletters, and it has continued to receive numerous requests for interviews and briefings from leading European and international media organisations.

As part of the Communication Strategy 2023-2025, ECRE introduced two separate clusters of work with a view to better informing and engaging different target audiences. There have been increases in the numbers of people reached through ECRE's communications activities under both clusters:

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- **Press:** 130 media requests (146 in 2022)

2. Campaign Cluster: Ongoing Work and Joint Initiatives

- **Facebook:** 29,400 followers (29,000 in 2022)
- **Instagram:** 2538 followers (800 in 2022)
- **Campaigns:** 2023-2024 campaign on the 2024 European Parliament elections (Targets: 1.3 million views/impressions of all published content and 130,000 engagements)

3. Both clusters

- **LinkedIn:** 42,500 followers (24,600 in 2022).
- **Website:** 688,000 page views, 231,000 users, and 245,000 sessions.

Organisational Objectives

Organisational support aims at ensuring that ECRE is able to function effectively across the three substantive areas of its work, and that it meets the appropriate and legally stipulated standards of governance and accountability. The underlying objective is to ensure that ECRE:

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

ECRE has made some progress towards its strategic priorities which have rolled over into its new Strategic Plan 2023 – 2025:

Strategic Priority 1 To promote visions of an inclusive Europe where people seeking protection are welcome and their rights protected, including proposing legal and policy alternatives.

ECRE presented alternative policies, legal frameworks and practices in all its publications and presentations, rather than simply criticising the situation or proposals.

Strategic Priority 2 To mobilise ECRE as an alliance to advocate collectively for change.

ECRE maintains a high level of member involvement in its work. In 2023, it organised 22 meetings of ECRE working groups /networks for members, in order to gather input and discuss joint advocacy work; three joint statements that members and other NGOs signed up to; 5 board meetings and the ECRE General Assembly took place to get member input and decisions; members were frequently contacted for communications purposes. The ELENA network, which includes members as well as independent asylum lawyers, had training events and coordination meetings on line and in-person. The highest ever number of ELENA coordinators participated in the annual coordination meeting and the participation in the annual ELENA advanced legal training returned to pre-COVID levels.

Strategic Priority 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 results are mixed:

There are areas where more progress is needed:

- ECRE's board includes one person with a refugee background.
- Within ECRE's membership, there are 15 refugee-led organisations.

Progress has been better in other areas:

- ECRE has included people with a refugee background as experts in all its events.
- ECRE provides annual EU advocacy training, ongoing advocacy support and small grants to refugee-led organisations. In 2023, it received 430 applications for the 25 places at the advocacy training.
- ECRE has maintained the level of at least 25% of its staff being people with a refugee background or from situation of displacement since 2017. Currently, 37% of staff have a refugee background or are otherwise from forced displacement situations.

The specific organisational objectives in the Strategic Plan 2020-2022 were met to varying degrees as described below.

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.
	Unfortunately, UNHCR decided to end the Strategic Partnership with ECRE after 6 years due to a lack of funding and the cuts taking place across the agency. ECRE was informed in November, necessitating a review of its plans for 2024.

	<p>The contract with the EUAA continued in 2023, with extensive cooperation taking place. ECRE will apply for a renewal in 2024.</p> <p>ECRE will seek partnership with other agencies and institutions, including FRA following a change in leadership. ECRE maintained close working links with the Fundamental Rights Officers at both Frontex and the EUAA.</p>
Organisational structure	<p>1. Maintain a clear organisational structure capable of being expressed in an organigram with teams and line management.</p>
	See annex.
Membership	<p>1. Reach and retain at least 110 members.</p> <p>2. Confirm that a majority of members demonstrate a high level of satisfaction with ECRE's work as per membership surveys or other consultation.</p>
	<p>ECRE ended 2023 with 122 members in 40 European countries, with 13 members joining and 1 leaving during the year.</p> <p>ECRE's Board, representing the membership, has confirmed a high level of satisfaction with ECRE's work.</p>
Partnership	<p>1. Work in cooperation other networks working on asylum and migration issues, including PICUM and refugee-led networks.</p> <p>2. Cooperate with European think-tanks working on asylum and migration with at least 4 invitations to present at think-tank events per year.</p> <p>3. Cooperate with academic networks, including participation in 1 research project per year and invitations to at least 2 academic conference per year.</p>
	<p>ECRE continued to cooperate closer with PICUM and with refugee-led networks, including Voicify which ECRE hosted in its office at no-cost for 2 months.</p> <p>ECRE received at least 10 invitations to present its work at think-tanks (it is difficult to track all the speaking requests received and delivered).</p> <p>ECRE joined a research project to be funded under the EU's H2020 programme. 5 invitations to academic conferences were received by ECRE staff.</p>
Board	<p>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.</p> <p>2. At least 3 Board members should be female.</p> <p>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.</p>
	<p>ECRE's Board operated with 6 members, 5 women and 1 man, with representatives with a refugee background and good levels of diversity in terms of racial, religious and geographic factors.</p> <p>The Board met 5 times and contributed effectively to ECRE's governance. The Board members organised regional meetings and consulted ECRE members.</p> <p>ECRE completed its transition to a new chair, with Sonja Tošković taking on the role of Chair of the Board from 1 January 2023. Two vice-chairs were appointed: Eva Singer and Yagoub Kibeda. Dorine Manson served as Treasurer during 2023 and ECRE is currently seeking a new Treasurer as her time on the Board has ended.</p>

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 expenditure increased in 2022 and again in 2023, which was part of ECRE's response to displacement from Ukraine. New demands 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.

In 2023, ECRE's budget was set at EUR 1.26 million in June 2022. Its expenditure for the year was EUR 1.73 million, covered by higher than predicted income (ECRE broke even in 2023).

The increase in expenditure was also due to an increase in staffing as follows:
2021 – 12.2 FTE; 2022 – 14.8 FTE; end 2023 – 16.2 FTE.

The cost of living crisis is also a significant factor. In Belgium, employers have to apply obligatory cost of living increases in staff salaries, these amount to 20% over 2 years.

The increase in expenditure and small expansion was funded by new funding and by the strategic decision, approved by the Board of Directors, to use some of the reserves that ECRE had accumulated (see below). Following analysis of its financial position and of the donor landscape, the Board approved the decisions to reduce ECRE's size in 2024 in order to maintain financial stability.

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

ECRE has used nearly half of its reserves, which stood at EUR 482,000 at the end of 2020, with reserves spent in 2021, 2022 and 2023 respectively. The 2023 accounts are being closed, but ECRE will at least break even, meaning that it maintains its positive asset position and its reserves of EUR 265,000. ECRE will reduce expenditure in 2024 given that other financial objectives are not being met.

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.

In 2024, 31% of income was received in the form of core grants. Other unrestricted funding, including membership fees, made up 12% of ECRE's income.

4. Ensure grants from at least four core donors.

For security of income streams, ECRE tries to ensure that it has at least 4 core donors. In 2023, ECRE had funds from 5 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.

When the budget was approved in June 2023, 58% was covered. By the end of November, 70% was covered. Due to the loss of key donors and the changing funding environment, ECRE is planning to reduce staffing in 2024. The issue was discussed in detail at the Board meeting of November 2023.

ECRE Publications in 2023

ECRE Policy Notes

- ECRE, Policy Note 44: [the Right to Education for Asylum Seekers in the EU](#), March 2023
- ECRE, Policy Note 43: [Movement to and From Ukraine Under the Temporary Protection Directive](#), January 2023

ECRE Policy Papers

- ECRE, Policy Paper 11: [The Potential of the EU's Long-Term Residency Directive](#), October 2023
- ECRE, Policy Paper 10: [Reforming EU Asylum Law: the Final Stage](#), August 2023
- PICUM/ECRE Policy Note: [Fundamental Rights Compliance of Funding Supporting Migrants, Asylum Applicants and Refugees inside the European Union](#), March 2023
- ECRE, Policy Paper 9: [Solidarity: The Eternal Problem – Recent Developments on Solidarity in EU Asylum Policies](#), January 2023

ECRE Legal Notes and interventions

- ECRE Legal Note 14: [The right to suitable accommodation under the Temporary Protection Directive](#), March 2023
- ECRE Legal Note 15: [The rights of refugees and asylum applicants with disabilities](#), December 2023

ECRE intervened in following cases:

- [Z.H.R. v. Poland](#), Application No. 55558/22, Communicated on 16 May 2023
- [S.M.H. v. Lithuania](#), Application No. 27915/22, Communicated on 17 May 2023
- [K.A. and Others v. Greece and Türkiye](#), Application Nos 35090/22 and 38444/22, Communicated on 31 March 2023
- [V.M. and Others v. Poland](#), Application No. 40002/22, Communicated on 10 January 2023
- [K.A. v. Lithuania](#), Application No. 39943/22, Communicated on 2 December 2022
- [B.T. v. Greece](#), Application No. 16089/20, Communicated on 30 December 2022
- [B.C. v. Greece](#), Application No. 16186/20, Communicated on 30 December 2022

ECRE Working Papers

- Khaled Tabbabi, published by ECRE, Working Paper 20, [Le Mémorandum entre la Tunisie et l'Union Européenne : vers un renforcement de la dépendance, de l'autoritarisme et l'Europe forteresse ?](#), December 2023
- ECRE Working Paper 19, [Focus on Eurodac: Disentangled from the 'Package Approach' bit is it Fit to Fly?](#), April 2023
- ECRE Working Paper 18: [Assessing legal grounds for protecting Afghan asylum seekers in Europe](#), March 2023

ECRE statements

- Joint Statement: [Seven Priorities to Expand Resettlement and Safe Pathways to Europe](#), September 2023
- Joint Statement: [NGOs call on Member States and European Parliament: Go no Lower: Reject the Use of Legal Loopholes in EU Asylum Law Reforms](#), July 2023

- Joint Statement: [Extend the Current Temporary Protection Regime for Displacement from Ukraine until 2025](#), May 2023

Other publications

- ECRE, [Reception Conditions across the EU](#), Study requested by the LIBE Committee of the European Parliament, November 2023
- ECRE’s Recommendations: [EU’s response to the Displacement from Ukraine](#), October 2023
- PICUM/ECRE, [Revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework: Key Recommendations on Migration and Asylum](#), September 2023
- ECRE, Information Sheet: [Measures in response to the arrival of displaced people fleeing the war in Ukraine](#), February 2023
- ECRE’s Recommendations: [The EU’s Response to Displacement from Ukraine](#), January 2023

AIDA Country reports

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Austria, May 2023 • Belgium, April 2023 • Bulgaria, March 2023 • Cyprus, April 2023 • Germany, April 2023 • Spain, April 2023 • France, May 2023 • Greece, June 2023 • Croatia, June 2023 • Hungary, April 2023 • Ireland, May 2023 • Italy, May 2023 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malta, April 2023 • Netherlands, May 2023 • Poland, May 2023 • Portugal, May 2023 • Romania, May 2023 • Sweden, April 2023 • Slovenia, May 2023 • United Kingdom, May 2023 • Switzerland, June 2023 • Serbia, May 2023 • Turkiye, July 2023
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AIDA reports

- AIDA Statistical Update: [The Implementation of the Dublin III Regulation in 2022](#), November 2023
- AIDA Comparative Report: [Access to Socio-economic Rights for Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection](#), August 2023
- AIDA [Overview: Asylum in Europe: the Situation of Applicants for International Protection in 2022](#), July 2023
- AIDA Fact-Finding Visit: [Seeking refuge in Poland: a fact-finding report on access to asylum and reception conditions for asylum seekers](#), April 2023
- AIDA Comparative Report: [Not there yet: Family Reunification for Beneficiaries of International Protection](#), February 2023