

ECRE Strategic Plan 2026-2028

Introduction

This strategic plan sets out ECRE's objectives for the period 2026-2028. It includes activity objectives for the three areas of ECRE's work: (1) Legal Support and Litigation, (2) Advocacy and (3) Communications; as well as organisational objectives. It should be read in conjunction with annual reports (comparing results in the previous 12 months against objectives) which the ECRE Secretariat will publish in January of each year of the implementation period.

The objectives included in this strategic plan set out what ECRE seeks to achieve with each activity within the parameters of its overall mission (i.e. 'To promote the establishment of fair and humane European asylum policies and practices in accordance with international human rights law') and its three strategic priorities:

1. To promote visions of an inclusive Europe where people seeking protection are welcome and their rights protected, including by 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.

Purpose of Strategic Plan

As with previous strategic plans (2017-2019, 2020-2022 and 2023-2025), this strategic 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. It sets out ECRE's priorities and objectives and is intended for internal and external audiences alike.

Process of Strategic Planning

The process of developing this strategic plan began in November 2024 when the ECRE Board of Directors ('the Board') met the heads of the teams that lead the three areas of ECRE's work. The Board reviewed the progress against the objectives set out in the Strategic Plan 2023-2025 and agreed that the three areas of work should continue for the implementation period of the current plan (2026-2028). They also agreed on the process for the preparation of the plan. The draft objectives were developed in the first half of 2025 and consultation took place with the Board and the wider membership to refine and adapt them based on members' inputs.

ECRE at a glance (Autumn 2025)

- Staff: 14
- Areas of work: (1) Legal Support and Litigation, (2) Advocacy and (3) Communications
- Annual income: EUR 1.6 million
- Reserves : EUR 253,000
- Office: Mundo Madou, Brussels

Political Context

The adoption of the Pact on Asylum and Migration ('the Pact') in 2024 marked the end of almost a decade of tense and divisive negotiations on the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). This strategic plan was prepared during the initial implementation phase of the Pact where much is at stake regarding the future of CEAS and its impact across Europe. Nominally, all but one EU member states (MS) are engaging in the process of implementation. However, whether their tacit support for the Pact will hold in the long run remains to be seen. The piloting of the solidarity mechanism which governs the mandatory solidarity that the CEAS reform entailed will be a crucial test for the Pact as a whole. The extent to which it can deliver a balance

between responsibility and solidarity will be the basis for continued support by several MS. It will also reveal the impact of the mechanism on the individuals concerned.

While ECRE continues to be critical of the Pact and the reduction of standards it entails, it maintains a focus on ensuring that the safeguards included in the Pact are applied in order to reduce the risks to fundamental rights. In ECRE's assessment, the alternative, namely a collapse of the CEAS as a whole, would bear even greater risks for individuals concerned and the EU as a political project. What can be discerned from analysing implementation so far is that there is limited evidence that national governments are taking this opportunity to strengthen their asylum systems. Rather, implementation efforts appear to be focused on meeting minimum compliance requirements, are often selective and do not seem to be aimed at tackling existing gaps in national reception and asylum systems. Ensuring that the implementation and application of the Pact is coherent, balanced, and rights-based will continue to be a priority for ECRE. Given the complexity of the proposals and the questions that arise regarding the compatibility of the legislation with EU primary law, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and international law, Pact-related litigation will be pursued.

Compliance with existing EU legislation on asylum continues to be a significant challenge across Europe and there is no indication that the Pact will bring about a change in the way MS respect EU law. The period since the entry into force of the Pact legislation in June 2024 has been marked by repeated violations of international law and EU standards on asylum with little or no reaction from the European Commission (EC). Whether the EC changes its stance on this once the Pact comes into force remains to be seen. Across Europe, countries are also facing ongoing structural challenges to human rights, as well as a deterioration in the rule of law (e.g. legislation undermining judicial independence, attacks on legal professionals and civil society, security measures restricting individual rights and freedoms disproportionately). Failure to comply with national, Court of Justice of the EU and European Court of Human Rights rulings is a growing concern across Europe, including in several EU MS, undermining the protection of the displaced and the credibility of the rule of law within the EU. This situation negatively affects the prospect of the Pact being implemented in a way that complies with human rights, and of there being real and effective accountability for human rights violations. ECRE's aim is emphasise the need for compliance in the field of asylum and its wider impact for the rule of law as a whole.

European countries are also pursuing ways to restrict access to Europe and externalise responsibility for asylum and return through arrangements with third countries. While not actively championing these initiatives, the EC tacitly supports them by integrating elements into legislative proposals or joining EU MS' discussions on these issues. The EC also stands explicitly behind the increasing use of technologies, in particular around border management, as part of an integrated approach to addressing a broad cluster of issues that merges the circulation of people, goods and services with terrorism, cross-border criminality and illegal activities. This takes place while persistent and systematic violations of the human rights of displaced people at borders remain a core issue in Europe. ECRE will prioritise and support efforts to enhance digital literacy (including new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), biometric identification, and predictive analytics) and to mainstream it across all areas of work. At the same time, ECRE will monitor the impact of technologies on asylum and reception. ECRE will also litigate and possibly advocate to ensure that where technologies are employed in decision-making, their use is compliant with human rights. Beyond that, recent developments on asylum and migration in the USA and early hints to develop and formalise changes to the international refugee protection and asylum systems might also find an echo in Europe. This would require mobilisation by ECRE.

Amid these developments, the success story that is Europe's collective response to displacement from Ukraine and the fact that the EU plus Norway and Switzerland are hosting approximately 4.4 million people risks being forgotten. Despite the ongoing practical challenges, particularly in some countries, ECRE has welcomed the EU's strategy in response to displacement from Ukraine and continues to highlight the fact that when a political decision is taken, the EU is able to manage the arrivals of refugees seeking protection, even when such large numbers of people are involved. Unfortunately, calls by ECRE and other civil society actors to maintain a collective European response throughout the transitioning out of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) have not been followed. The EC has signalled that following the latest extension of the TPD until March 2027, it will be up to EU MS to decide whether and how they will treat people who currently benefit from TP. As a result, it is likely that there will be a multitude of different statuses and options available to TP beneficiaries depending on where they find themselves in Europe and what their specific personal situation is. This could lead to asylum systems across Europe becoming overburdened and obliterate the lessons learned from Europe's successful response to displacement in the region. ECRE will continue to promote the key learnings of the TPD implementation, particularly (1) that refugee and migrant inclusion is most effectively achieved through access to fundamental rights such as employment, education and healthcare from the outset; and (2) that immediate access to these socio-economic rights fosters the agency and self-sufficiency of displaced people, ultimately benefitting both the displaced people and the host societies.

The influencing environment in which ECRE and its members operate has changed since the Strategic Plan 2023-2025. The overall narrative regarding people on the move has continued to harden to the extent that they are regularly represented as various types of risk and the people and organisations who support them as provocateurs who are seeking to defy the “will” of EU citizens. Across Europe, bar a limited number of exceptions, far-right political parties have achieved electoral success. The European Council is increasingly dominated by heads of state and government who are opposed to the work of ECRE and its members, and who want to restrict access to asylum in Europe. The European Parliament (EP) elections in June 2024 resulted in the most right-wing EP ever with at least three of the eight political groups being clearly opposed to the right to asylum in Europe. The hostility that ECRE and its members are faced with is part of a broader trend that vilifies and targets civil society, and which is exacerbated by the significant changes to the media landscape and the way in which people consume media. In the EU policy arena, this translates to shrinking space for civil society to be part of policy-making processes, direct attacks on it and attempts to restrict EU funding for it. The issue of funding is likely to play out during the negotiations for the next EU long-term budget (Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)). As a result, anyone actively committed to advancing the rights of refugees and displaced people in Europe is increasingly exposed to socio-political pressure and, in some cases, outright hostility or violence. ECRE believes that the individual and collective emotional impact of this hostility on staff, volunteers, members, partners and stakeholders, and legal professionals should be acknowledged. It aims to contribute to individual and collective well-being, security and safety by developing and sharing trauma-informed resources and building a community of practice across Europe.

Priorities 2026-2028

1. Follow and influence the implementation of the Pact on Asylum and Migration in order to ensure that it is comprehensive, rights-based and leads to a functioning asylum system and pursue proactive and coordinated litigation to address human rights violations stemming from non-human rights-compliant implementation.
2. Undertake reactive and proactive advocacy work in relation to upcoming proposals on asylum and return from the European Commission and counter attacks on asylum in Europe, including efforts to externalise responsibilities for asylum and return or to reform or question international law.
3. Monitor post-Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) developments and access to rights by TPD beneficiaries following the end of the TPD protection, and ensure that the key lessons are taken into account.
4. Promote trauma-informed resources and maintain ECRE’s organisational capacity to advocate, litigate, communicate and advance the rights of displaced people.

Activity 1: Legal Support and Litigation

Overall Objective 1: To ensure effective access to rights of forcibly displaced people through proactive, coordinated and needs-based litigation in Europe

An essential role of asylum-related litigation is to protect and advance the rights of forcibly displaced people and ensure they are seen as rights holders under international, EU and national law. ECRE aims to achieve this by:

- Developing and contributing to litigation strategies that focus on ensuring that forcibly displaced people could exercise their rights in practice;
- Anticipating challenges linked to new asylum-related legislative standards across Europe, including under the Pact on Migration and Asylum, ('the Pact') and bring impactful cases that can prevent and/or remedy rights violations and set protective legal standards;
- Working with lawyers across Europe to ensure consistent litigation, share expertise and avoid duplication, thereby strengthening and broadening the impact;
- Ensuring that litigation is relevant, impactful and grounded in the lived experience of the displaced.

Overall Objective 2: To strengthen the community of asylum lawyers across Europe through knowledge sharing and resilience building

High-quality, accessible and timely legal assistance provided by competent asylum lawyers is essential for successful asylum-related litigation. In order to ensure its efficiency, a strong pan-European community of lawyers is indispensable. Asylum lawyers increasingly work under intense pressure, facing heavy caseloads and, in some contexts, political hostility. Building resilience involves providing them with professional support, peer solidarity and resources to enable them to sustain their work in the long term.

The three main strands of ECRE's legal support and litigation work, and their accompanying specific objectives are set out below.

European Legal Network on Asylum (ELENA)

Objective 1: 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, consists of national networks in 35 countries. It will be strengthened through increased collaboration and knowledge sharing with the national and pan-European bar associations.

ECRE will continue to facilitate knowledge sharing among the ELENA lawyers and will respond to their needs relating to legal training, capacity and legal support by:

- Managing and further expanding the ELENA Forum;
- Efficiently coordinating the ELENA network with the national coordinators;
- Providing relevant legal training upon request from 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.

Impact Litigation

Objective 1: To increase ECRE's involvement in key national cases in European countries where ELENA is present

With the entry into force of the Pact in June 2026, litigation and training for legal professionals will be indispensable to clarify its provisions and litigate its consistency with EU primary and international law. Increasingly, lawyers cannot afford to pursue litigation or harmonise the sets of legal argumentations used.

However, recent experience has shown that only mass litigation grounded in harmonised EU law arguments could bring about the change needed. ECRE will assist with such argumentation and provide emergency litigation support to pursue cases where no legal aid is available.

Objective 2: Remain a key actor in asylum-related impact litigation at the regional and international levels

When selecting among the multiple cases that reach it, 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.

As technology and digital rights are increasingly central to how asylum systems function in Europe, ECRE will also prioritise cases focusing on surveillance technologies, automated decision-making, use of technology at borders and in detention centres, the use of AI during screening and digital exclusion.

These priorities were identified through internal discussions, discussions with ECRE and ELENA members and the monitoring of asylum developments through AIDA. They are also based on the litigation requests that ECRE receives from the ELENA network, and will be refined during the annual consultations with ELENA members.

European Database of Asylum Law (EDAL)

Objective 1: To expand and improve the EDAL database, making it more user-friendly and diverse

In 2026, ECRE will launch an updated and more user-friendly EDAL database with improved search functions and other characteristics.

This objective will be achieved by:

- Adding jurisprudence from two new countries;
- Adding case law by United Nations Treaty Bodies;
- Systematically revising existing case law summaries;
- Continuing to develop a pool of volunteers working on EDAL;
- Promoting the visibility of EDAL.

Activity 2: Advocacy

Overall Objective: To influence EU policy and practice on protection of asylum seekers, refugees and displaced people through the development of targeted recommendations and tailored advocacy that is both inclusive and effective

Objective 1: A functioning asylum system in Europe

Sub-objective A	How will it be achieved?
<p>The legal framework for the Common European Asylum System (EU directives and regulations) remains aligned with international refugee and human rights law.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECRE will monitor the implementation of the Pact and the effects of the new legislation once applicable, advocating for a comprehensive approach that prioritises respect for fundamental rights, strengthens reception and asylum capacities, ensures a functional solidarity mechanism centred on individual needs, and actively involves civil society at all stages. • Rather than pushing for further reforms, ECRE will emphasise the need for full compliance with existing legal standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued advocacy on the asylum reform • Monitoring of the activation and functioning of the Asylum and Migration Management Regulation solidarity mechanism • Contributing to evidence on non-compliance through Asylum Information Database (AIDA) reports and mapping enforcement actions; potential comparative report detailing non-compliant legislation and practices in several EU member states (MS) • Highlighting the shortcomings and risk of an approach based on derogations from asylum law, limiting access to asylum, and the widespread use of detention • Demonstrating shortcomings of the responsibility determination system, including through annual analysis of relevant statistics • Monitoring the implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) and post-TPD solutions through AIDA
Sub-objective B	How will it be achieved?
<p>National practice and national legal frameworks provide a high level of protection, in line with international refugee and human rights law.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishing AIDA country reports and undertaking fact-finding visits to specific EU MS • Organising advocacy meetings with relevant stakeholders (e.g. European Commission (EC), European Parliament (EP), EU MS' permanent representations (Perm Reps), EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA) etc.) • Monitoring and advocating against asylum externalisation trends at national level in co-operation with ECRE members to contain the spread of harmful ideas, policy and practice, in particular looking at the review of the safe third country (STC) concept from the perspective of EU asylum law • Analysing EU spending in support of asylum in different MS, with a specific focus on funding for Pact implementation • Directly engaging with national asylum authorities, with a specific focus on asylum statistics and methods for collecting them • Following developments regarding the EUAA Monitoring Mechanism and facilitating contact with ECRE members on occasion of country visits • Co-operating with ECRE members at national level where needed to achieve specific objectives
Sub-objective C	How will it be achieved?
<p>The EUAA supports improved asylum systems in Europe: ECRE will focus in particular on monitoring EUAA actions, advocating for a clear human rights</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring the EUAA's role in different MS through AIDA • Publishing an output on the EUAA's role in the reformed asylum system and its expanded operational presence

approach to the agency's activities, transparency and accountability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following developments regarding the EUAA Monitoring Mechanism and facilitating contact with ECRE members on occasion of country visits Ensuring high standards through review of training modules (via framework contract) which also includes input from ECRE members Participating in the Consultative Forum Providing a submission to the EUAA Annual Report
Sub-objective D The Asylum Information Database (AIDA) provides all relevant actors with independent practice-based information to support advocacy and litigation efforts at both national and European levels.	How will it be achieved? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updating reports annually Publishing comparative reports analysing emerging issues in AIDA reporting countries Increasing distribution efforts to relevant national authorities, civil society, courts and experts (If funding allows) Expanding the AIDA database to additional MS

Objective 2: European external policies advance the rights of displaced people

Sub-objective A EU external policies (EU foreign, security, development, trade and enlargement policy as well as external funding) promote the rights of displaced people rather than migration control or externalisation of asylum.	How will it be achieved? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with civil society in third countries to collect and highlight their analysis and recommendations on the impacts of EU action Co-operating with third country governments and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) where appropriate Co-operating with academics and using research insights in advocacy efforts
Sub-objective B Existing safe and legal channels for asylum migration to Europe are strengthened.	How will it be achieved? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with ECRE members to ensure all relevant opportunities are seized Counteracting attempts to restrict pathways to Europe (e.g. via visa restrictions) Following the Union Resettlement Framework implementation via the resettlement coalition group

Objective 3: EU return policy respects fundamental rights and the disproportionate focus on return is challenged

Sub-objective A The Return Regulation is substantially improved compared to the EC proposal, with provisions posing risks to fundamental rights removed or fundamentally revised (applicable to negotiation and implementation phase).	How will it be achieved? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with co-legislators during trilogue negotiations to ensure the Return Regulation proposal incorporates ECRE's recommendations Monitoring implementation of the Return Regulation Exploring and advocating for solutions for people who cannot be returned
Sub-objective B Return agreements are transparent and human-rights compliant.	How will it be achieved? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocating against forced returns to unsafe countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine etc Contributing to growing awareness at the EP, EC and European External Action Service (EEAS) that informal readmission agreements and arrangements are undesirable from the perspective of transparency, parliamentary scrutiny and, ultimately, protection of human rights, by organising hearings and parliamentary questions (Through ECRE members) Monitoring possible bilateral agreements on return hubs with third countries and supporting national-level advocacy where relevant

Sub-objective C	How will it be achieved?
<p>The overemphasis on return in the form of EU funding, actors working on return and prominence of return-related objectives in EU external affairs continues to be challenged.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confronting the European institutions and policymakers with the evidence base of return and where it is lacking, negative impacts of return policies and cost-effectiveness arguments (e.g. regarding detention) Illustrating the disproportionate focus by mapping all efforts (policy, funding, mechanism, actors) on return and monitoring implementation where practicable, including through exploring co-operation with civil society in third countries Highlighting alternatives to return such as regularisation and inclusion

Objective 4: Advancing the rights of refugee women and girls

Sub-objective A	How will it be achieved?
<p>The implementation of key EU legislative frameworks on asylum, migration and gender-based violence integrates a gender-sensitive approach that upholds the rights of refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls at both national and EU levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring the transposition and implementation of relevant EU directives in MS and conducting policy analysis on their gendered impact on refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls Developing and disseminating policy recommendations to ensure the effective and gender-sensitive implementation of these legal frameworks at both national and EU levels Engaging with EU institutions, national governments, and civil society organisations to advocate for gender-sensitive implementation and monitoring of these policies Organising advocacy events to discuss challenges and best practices in integrating gender perspectives into asylum and migration policies Organising workshops or training seminars on advocacy and legal frameworks for refugee women and women's rights groups Facilitating networking opportunities between refugee women-led organisations, women's rights organisations, and key stakeholders at both national and EU levels Supporting refugee women's participation in policy discussions and decision-making processes at both national and EU levels
Sub-objective B	How will it be achieved?
<p>Monitoring mechanisms for EU asylum and migration policies effectively integrate gender-sensitive perspectives and address the specific needs of refugee women and girls.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessing existing monitoring mechanisms to identify gaps in addressing gender-specific needs Developing policy recommendations to improve gender-sensitive monitoring mechanisms Engaging with EU and national agencies to advocate for stronger gender-sensitive oversight
Sub-objective C	How will it be achieved?
<p>Gender-responsive budgeting is integrated into EU financial frameworks to ensure dedicated funding for refugee women and girls.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocating for gender-responsive budgeting in the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) Developing policy recommendations on integrating gender considerations in EU asylum and migration funding Engaging with EU institutions and national governments to secure dedicated funding for refugee women and girls Monitoring and evaluating EU funding allocation to ensure gender-sensitive implementation

Objective 5: ECRE's advocacy is both inclusive and effective

Sub-objective A	How will it be achieved?
ECRE members are well informed and involved in ECRE's advocacy work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organising regular working group meetings (five per year per working group) and meetings with Brussels-based ECRE members Preparing advocacy briefings and providing specific instructions on what advocacy actions should be supported Consulting ECRE members about positions and publications, and, where possible, providing advance notification and longer periods for comments ECRE staff members participating in advocacy meetings in MS where requested ECRE staff members contributing to meetings organised by ECRE members Undertaking joint and coordinated advocacy initiatives with ECRE members (e.g. meetings, statements etc.)
Sub-objective B	How will it be achieved?
Refugee advocates and refugee led organisations are systematically and meaningfully included in ECRE's advocacy work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring that refugee advocates and refugee-led organisations are part of all policy meetings (e.g. round-tables, conferences, ECRE Annual General Conference etc.) Maintaining regular communication in the form of email updates and bilateral exchanges Strengthening co-operation with refugee advocates, refugee academics and refugee-led organisations (e.g. specific meetings, targeted outreach or thematic collaboration) Being open to supporting and engaging with refugee-led advocacy initiatives and encouraging their co-operation with ECRE Ensuring that training on EU advocacy supports refugee advocates in their work Ensuring that tools and resources (e.g. advocacy toolkit, inclusion shadow report etc.) contribute to refugee-led EU advocacy (If funding allows) Supporting refugee-led organisations through the provision of small grants
Sub-objective C	How will it be achieved?
Relations with key decision-makers are developed and strengthened.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing efforts to maintain and expand contacts to Perm Reps (ideally with link to capitals via ECRE members) Convening policy round-table meetings in Brussels and in MS in co-operation with ECRE members Continuing to identify potential allies in the EP and establishing contact with them
Sub-objective D	How will it be achieved?
An effective advocacy team is maintained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing weekly advocacy team meetings Preparing annual advocacy plans for different work areas Identifying opportunities for sharing skills across different teams and training needs

Activity 3: Communications

1. Objectives

- Why are we talking?
- What are we saying?
- Who are we talking to?

1. Continue to highlight the work of ECRE's Advocacy Team and Legal Support and Litigation Team

ECRE's communication work is intended to contribute to the realisation of ECRE's overall mission (i.e. 'To promote the establishment of fair and humane European asylum policies and practices in accordance with international human rights law'). The ECRE Communications Team will endeavour to achieve this by highlighting the work that is undertaken by ECRE's other teams (Advocacy and Legal Support and Litigation). In practice, this will involve the use of the various communications tools that it has at its disposal (see section on 'Activities' below) in order to highlight ECRE publications and Asylum Information Database (AIDA) publications as well as activities that are organised in the framework of the European Legal Network on Asylum (ELENA) and ECRE and ECRE members' involvement in impact litigation.

In addition to highlighting the work of ECRE's Advocacy Team and Legal Support and Litigation Team, the ECRE Communications Team will also highlight elements of the work that is undertaken by ECRE members and other allies.

2. Grow ECRE's audiences in all areas

The ECRE Communications Team will actively seek to increase the number of followers/subscribers/users on its website, publications (i.e. Press Review and Weekly Bulletin) and social media accounts. It will also seek to increase the level of engagement that its audiences have with ECRE communications material (e.g. social media posts). Ongoing analysis of newsletter mailing lists, lists of social media followers/subscribers etc. has revealed that ECRE's communications material is consumed by a wide range of audiences (e.g. NGOs working on asylum and migration, NGOs working in other areas, national-, EU- and international-level policymakers, academics, journalists and the wider public) and this is expected to continue during the implementation period of this strategic plan. In addition, the opening of ECRE's Instagram account in 2022 has enabled ECRE to increase its outreach to audiences that would not subscribe to e-mail newsletters etc. or use the other social media platforms (i.e. Facebook, LinkedIn and X) that it had been using until that point. It is possible that the number of people who consume ECRE's communications material via Instagram will increase significantly during the implementation period of this strategic plan.

3. Maintain ECRE's position as a reliable source of information for media organisations

ECRE receives a significant number of requests for interviews from international, EU and national media organisations. The ECRE Communications Team has concluded that media organisations approach ECRE due to the expertise that exists both within the ECRE Secretariat and in the wider membership. ECRE's expertise is demonstrated to external audiences through ECRE publications, AIDA publications, the European Database of Asylum Law (EDAL) and ELENA plus the editorials and op-eds that are drafted by ECRE staff members and representatives of ECRE members. The ECRE Communications Team has also worked with members of ECRE's Advocacy Team and Legal Support and Litigation Team to develop key messages that can be shared with media organisations who contact ECRE, particularly when there are important developments related to asylum and migration in Europe (e.g. EU policy proposals or court judgments). In addition, the ECRE Communications Team is always willing to direct requests from media organisations to ECRE members, particularly when the requests are related to a specific country or region.

4. Continue to design and implement campaigns

The ECRE Communications Team has designed and implemented a number of campaigns in recent years and it is envisaged that it will continue to do so during the implementation period of this strategic plan. In this context, it will continue to try to identify issues on which campaigns can be developed whilst also considering how best to involve ECRE members and other refugee-led organisations and refugee rights advocates in them. Depending on the scale of the campaigns (see section on 'Activities' below) and the funding that is available for their implementation, the ECRE Communications Team may also develop specific communications

materials (e.g. campaign websites, sharepics, videos etc.). Whereas most of ECRE's communications work is undertaken on a regular basis (e.g. social media posting (daily), Press Review and Weekly Bulletin (weekly), statistical analysis (quarterly) etc.), the design and implementation of campaigns is sporadic and time limited.

2. Guiding Principles

- Who is talking?
- How are we going to express ourselves?

1. Ensure that ECRE continues to be an authoritative source of legal and policy analysis but also deliver messages that are understood by non-experts

As explained above (see section on 'Objectives'), ECRE is widely regarded as a source of expertise on issues related to asylum and migration in Europe. While it is clearly very important that ECRE's reputation is maintained (i.e. thorough the continued production of high-quality legal and policy analysis), it is also important that its messages are accessible to as wide an audience as possible, including non-experts. The ECRE Communications Team will therefore try to ensure that the complex and often sensitive analysis and recommendations that are developed by ECRE's Advocacy Team and Legal and Litigation Support Team are delivered in the simplest possible form without losing their nuance. This is especially true in relation to posts on ECRE's social media accounts.

2. Ensure that the key messages that ECRE delivers in its external communications are consistent with the analysis and recommendations that are developed by ECRE's Advocacy Team and Legal Support and Litigation Team

ECRE's credibility as an advocacy- and litigation-focused organisation is highly dependent on both the quality and consistency of its analysis and recommendations. The ECRE Communications Team will therefore continue to ensure that this is reflected in the messages that it delivers in Weekly Bulletin articles, social media posts etc. It will endeavour to achieve this by continuing to hold regular exchanges with representatives of ECRE's Advocacy Team and Legal and Litigation Support Team (e.g. weekly editorial meeting to prepare the Weekly Bulletin).

3. Ensure that the language that ECRE uses in its external communications is respectful of both the people it aims to support and those whose actions it criticises

The ECRE Communications Team is very aware of the frequent use of dehumanising language in political discourse on and media coverage of issues related to asylum and migration. It will continue to highlight this problematic language and call for an end to its use (e.g. through targeted social media posts) whilst also ensuring that its own language is respectful and avoids any false representation (i.e. heroes or victims) of people on the move. At the same time, although the ECRE Communications Team will continue to criticise actions that it considers to be contrary to ECRE's mission (see section on 'Objectives' above), it will avoid ad hominem attacks and endeavour to ensure that it presents fact-based arguments and avoids any mis/disinformation.

3. Activities

- Which tools will we use to deliver our message?

The ECRE Communications Team will continue to use the following tools that it used successfully during the implementation period of the ECRE Strategic Plan 2023-2025:

- **Website:** The ECRE website is where all ECRE publications (i.e. comments papers, legal notes, policy notes, (joint) statements and working papers) are published. It is also where all of the articles that are included in the Weekly Bulletin, including articles about ECRE publications and AIDA publications, are posted (Newsfeed). It includes an archive of all editions of the Press Review and the Weekly Bulletin.
- **Press Review:** The ECRE Press Review is a weekly digest of media articles about issues related to asylum and migration in Europe and in the EU's partner countries. It features articles from media organisations with an international focus (e.g. Al Jazeera, AP and Reuters), European focus (e.g. EUobserver, Euractiv and POLITICO (EU)) and national focus (e.g. ANSA, DW and Guardian).

- **Weekly Bulletin:** The ECRE Weekly Bulletin includes articles about the most important developments related to asylum and migration in Europe and in the EU's partner countries. It also includes editorials written by the ECRE director, op-eds written by ECRE staff members or representatives of ECRE members and useful information (e.g. new publications, upcoming events, job vacancies etc.) from ECRE members and elsewhere.
- **Social media accounts:**
 - **Instagram:** ECRE uses its Instagram account to highlight AIDA publications, the ECRE Press Review and ongoing (joint) campaigns. It also uses it to amplify ECRE's advocacy messages through commenting on relevant issues (e.g. recent developments relating to asylum and migration in Europe and in the EU's partner countries) (see also sections on 'Bluesky' and 'LinkedIn').
 - **Facebook:** ECRE uses its Facebook account for the specific purpose of highlighting its long-term (joint) campaigns. It is envisaged that it will use it for a campaign on the 2029 European Parliament elections and possibly before.
 - **LinkedIn:** ECRE uses its LinkedIn account to highlight ECRE publications, AIDA publications, the ECRE Press Review and ongoing (joint) campaigns. It also uses it to amplify ECRE's advocacy messages through commenting on relevant issues (see also sections on 'Bluesky' and 'Instagram').
- **Media engagement:** ECRE does not generally issue press releases or actively reach out to journalists. Instead, the ECRE Communications Team receives requests from international, European and national journalists (representing all types of media) and directs them to the relevant member of the ECRE Secretariat (Director, Advocacy Team or Legal Support and Litigation Team), ECRE members (particularly for country-specific issues) or other organisations. It is expected that this will continue during the implementation period of the current strategy.
- **Campaigns:** The ECRE Communications Team designs and implements long-term, medium-term and small-scale/ad hoc (joint) campaigns. The scope of each campaign is determined by the focus (e.g. World Refugee Day (one day) versus European Parliament elections (several months) as well as the availability (or not) of dedicated funding. All campaigns are highlighted via the ECRE website and ECRE's social media accounts, while dedicated campaign websites / landing pages on the ECRE website are created for large-scale campaigns.

In addition to the above-mentioned tools, in early 2025, the ECRE Communications Team started publishing a version of the ECRE Weekly Bulletin as a LinkedIn newsletter (19,000 subscribers as of June 2025).

Following a consultation with communications-focused representatives of ECRE members (ECRE Media Officers Network (EMON)) (see below) in 2024, the ECRE Communications Team decided to informally suspend ECRE's account on the X social media platform in February 2025. At the same time, it opened an account on the Bluesky platform:

- **Bluesky:** ECRE uses its Bluesky account to highlight ECRE publications, AIDA publications, the ECRE Press Review, the ECRE Weekly Bulletin and ongoing (joint) campaigns. It also uses it to amplify ECRE's advocacy messages by commenting on relevant issues (see also sections on 'Instagram' and 'LinkedIn').

The ECRE Communications Team will continue to engage with communications-focused representatives of ECRE members via the EMON. It is envisaged that this engagement will help to increase both the size of ECRE's audiences and the effectiveness of its campaigns. EMON will also serve as a platform for the ECRE Communications Team and communications-focused representatives of ECRE members to discuss ongoing challenges and best practices.

4. Evaluation

- Are people hearing/listening to what we say?
- How are we going to measure success?

The ECRE Communications Team will gauge the effectiveness of ECRE's communications work as part of its regular engagement with the EMON. It will measure specific progress towards the achievement of Objective 1 ('Continue to highlight the work of ECRE's legal support and litigation team and advocacy team') and Objective 2 ('Grow ECRE's audiences in all areas') via a quarterly analysis of the following statistics:

- **Website:** Numbers of users, sessions and page views
- **Weekly Bulletin:** Number of subscribers and open rate
- **Press Review:** Number of subscribers and open rate
- **Social media:**
 - **Bluesky:** Numbers of followers, posts, engagements and (if possible) impressions
 - **Instagram:** Numbers of followers, posts, impressions and interactions
 - **Facebook:** Numbers of followers, posts, reach and engagement
 - **LinkedIn:** Numbers of followers, posts, impressions and engagements

In addition to measuring the numbers of users/followers/subscribers etc., it will also explore ways of analysing the composition of ECRE's audiences (i.e. NGOs working on asylum and migration, NGOs working in other areas, national-, EU- and international-level policymakers, academics, journalists, etc.).

The ECRE Communications Team will measure specific progress towards the achievement of Objective 3 ('Maintain ECRE's position as a reliable source of information for media organisations') via a quarterly analysis of the following statistics:

- **Media engagement:** Number of requests received from media organisations

And finally, it will measure specific progress towards the achievement of Objective 4 ('Continue to design and implement campaigns') via a quarterly analysis of the following statistics:

- **Campaigns:** Number of views of campaign-related social media posts and (possibly) numbers of members involved and/or users, sessions and page views on campaign websites

Organisational Objectives

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

1. performs effectively, meeting the objectives in each of its three activity areas
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's organisational tasks are undertaken by the Administration and Finance Manager, the Director and the Head of Alliance Support and Communications. ECRE will continue to continue to work with external consultants who specialise in areas such legal affairs, human resources, accounting and auditing, and IT.

General Objectives

1. Institutional co-operation

- Maintain partnership in the form of a framework contract with the European Union Agency for Asylum
- Develop partnerships with other EU agencies and institutions, as well as other European bodies (e.g. Council of Europe)

2. Organisational structure

- Maintain the existing organisational structure with well-functioning teams and clear line management as set out in the 'ECRE Staff Organisational Chart' that is publicly available on the ECRE website
- Work with 'Associates' (long-term collaborators who work for ECRE on a consultancy basis or in an advisory capacity) in order to add to breadth of expertise, geographic knowledge, technical skills and representativeness

3. Membership

- Retain at least 110 members
- Confirm that a majority of members demonstrate a high level of satisfaction with ECRE's work as per membership surveys or other consultation

4. Partnership

- Work in co-operation other networks working on asylum and migration issues, including refugee-led networks, as well as networks working on other issues
- Co-operate with European think tanks working on asylum and migration, and receive at least four invitations to present at think tank events per year
- Co-operate with academic networks, including by participating in one research project per year and receiving invitations to at least two academic conference per year

5. Board of Directors

- Maintain diversity of the Board of Directors ('the Board') to reflect ECRE's membership, taking into account geographic diversity, sex, ethnicity, refugee background, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), and any other factor that may be relevant
- Ensure that at least three Board members are female
- Ensure that the Board plays a consistently active role in ECRE's governance as per ECRE's statutes, and effectively represents the interests of the membership in its decision-making

Financial Objectives

Since 2016, ECRE has had detailed financial objectives in place in order to ensure sound financial management, including exiting from insolvency and maintaining a positive financial asset position. The objectives were reviewed in 2025 and minor adjustments were made. Following a second review in 2025, it

was agreed that the financial objectives that had been included in the Strategic Plan 2023-2025 would be maintained in the current strategic plan.

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

The Board has set the overall strategic objective of ECRE maintaining the quantity and quality of its activities. As such, ECRE will maintain an annual budget at this level.

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 approximately four people working for a year without office space or expenses in order to keep the organisation functioning and to fundraise for rebuilding.

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. In 2025, ECRE decided to try to secure donations from individual donors. It is possible that ECRE may also receive a small amount of income from this source during the period 2026-2028. Funding from the corporate sector has been reviewed and remains unfeasible for ECRE.

4. Ensure grants from at least four core donors

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

5. Ensure that 60% of the following year's budget is covered by the end of June when the preliminary budget is approved by the ECRE 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.